

## *A New Harmony between the Body and the Sea*

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### THE SHIFT OF ANXIETIES AND DESIRES

Cure-takers began rushing toward the sea-shore around 1750 in order to relieve an old anxiety: this was one of the tactical weapons used to combat melancholy and spleen. It also served, however, to assuage the new anxieties that were looming up one after another throughout the eighteenth century among the ruling classes. This, in fact, is what determines the richness of medical language describing the virtues of cold sea water and especially the indications for bathing in the waves and taking holidays at the seaside. Physicians and hygienists speak of alarm and desire at the same time as they discuss scientific knowledge. Their discourse generated, handled, or codified practices that would gradually escape from their control.

Before examining the background of these behaviour patterns, it will be useful to review the forms of melancholy, no doubt the most complete chapter in the modern history of mind-sets.<sup>1</sup> Medieval *acedia*, a diabolical gangrene of the soul that drove its victims to despair of attaining salvation, had provided fuel for the diatribes of ecclesiastical authorities long before physicians began to strengthen the theologians' position as they revived the ancient theory of humours.<sup>2</sup> During the sixteenth century and into the beginning of the seventeenth, melancholy was fashionable. Later, in the France of Louis XIV, this morbid delight began to wane. The gentleness of St Francis de Sales's spirituality, the vigour with which the Jesuits fought against *acedia*, the fascination

with the Ciceronian art of living, and the 'therapeutic sociability' displayed at Court combined to offer effective means to combat the sundering of body and soul that characterized this insidious disease. French classicism devalued the melancholy temperament, and Molière's audiences laughed at the misanthropist.

Across the Channel, however, the ruling classes remained under the sway of what all of Europe would soon describe as 'spleen'. In 1621, Robert Burton published his *Anatomy of Melancholy*,<sup>3</sup> which was to exert an enormous influence on the behaviour of British aristocrats. To combat the disease, the author lays out a complex strategy combining concern with the environment, hygienic precepts, and body care with a subtle therapy for the soul, or rather the mind. Burton begins by inviting the melancholic person to choose judiciously the place where he is to stay. He is pleased to note in this respect that the gentry are very preoccupied with the quality of the environment in which they decide to dwell.<sup>4</sup> In keeping with Hippocratic tradition, the melancholic person knows that 'such is the air, such are the inhabitants'.<sup>5</sup> He should opt for a dry soil and an area that is 'uneven and scattered with hills'<sup>6</sup> and free from sources of putrefaction. He should choose to settle on 'rising ground overlooking an extensive horizon'.<sup>7</sup> To support his hypothesis, Burton points to the excellent health and surprising longevity of the inhabitants of the Orkneys, 'due to the sharp, purifying air that blows from the sea'.<sup>8</sup> That said, the author, who was himself of a melancholy temperament, did not advise Englishmen to follow the Neapolitan example and build their abodes on the strands of their damp shores. It would therefore be an exaggeration to regard him as the 'inventor of the sea'.

Like Celsus in times past, Burton stressed the advantages of diversity; he recommended travelling, alternating between stays in town and country, and striking a balance between bodily and intellectual exercise. 'A good prospect alone', he wrote, 'will relieve melancholy.'<sup>9</sup> A varied landscape was therefore part of the remedy he prescribes. The inhabitants of Genoa, Naples, or Barcelona, for instance, like those of Aegina and Salamis in olden days, had before them a prospect that delighted their souls, as the Mediterranean introduced variety into the landscape. On the slopes of the natural amphitheatres that overlooked a bay, dwellings were built from which the inhabitants could enjoy a beautiful sea view. There the sight of the islands and the motion of ships would add to the pleasure of glimpsing the bustle in the streets or contemplating restful green gardens.

Burton's book, a huge catalogue of topoi, rehashes a number of ancient precepts. Like all things in the world, man needs movement. This is why exercise is beneficial to him. The author advocates rural sports, recommending horseback riding, fishing, swimming, football, bowling, and a range of other activities that were part of the leisure pursuits in which the common people indulged. Learning to emulate their gaiety and vigour was part of a therapy that relied on the circulation of practices among different social levels. On the subject at hand, it is important to point out that until that time, river or sea bathing was considered to be an immoral pastime better left to the ill-mannered lower classes. In Burton's time, it became an acceptable activity. In 1622, Henry Peacham even considered that a true gentleman should know how to swim. The *Anatomy of Melancholy* is packed with references to ancient hydrotherapy, and thus it fostered the rise of the fashion for therapeutic bathing and the prosperity of the spas that spread throughout the inland regions.

Even if a hunter kills no game and a fisherman catches no fish, they both none the less enjoy the pure air, the sweet scent of flowers, and the song of birds, all of which cure melancholic individuals. Burton actually returns to a tactic developed earlier by St Bernard, encouraging walks between the woods and the river in 'pleasant places'. The list of pleasant places that he draws up complies with the classical code of landscape appreciation, and it is widely recognized that the so-called English garden was to become part of the struggle against spleen. Burton focuses on rural settings, and neglects the sea-shore. He acknowledges that the seaside offers healthy air and a pleasing view, but he does not yet think of choosing it as a place for excursions or holidays.<sup>10</sup>

Following the book's publication, new anxieties stimulated the longing for refuge. Remember that, between 1645 and 1660, the English aristocracy, experiencing a radical threat to its political and social power, rushed to the countryside in order to enjoy the compensatory pleasures of retreat. At the same time there was a revival of the old diatribe against city life that had formerly ensured the success of Isaac Walton's *Compleat Angler*.<sup>11</sup> In fact, since the thirteenth century voices had been heard complaining about London's bad air. In 1578, so it was said, the environment had become so unhealthy that Queen Elizabeth had been induced to leave the capital for this sole reason. In the seventeenth century, collective complaints against sulphur and carbon fumes became more numerous, in Sheffield and Newcastle,

as well as on the banks of the Thames. John Evelyn led the war waged by public opinion against this scourge. In short, the theme of urban blight took hold long before its counterpart which spread across France at the end of the *ancien régime*.<sup>12</sup> Significant in this respect is the work of Tobias Smollett,<sup>13</sup> which was contemporaneous with the creation of the fashion for sea bathing. The author of *Roderick Random* brings together all the elements of this criticism, loudly proclaiming his indignation at the pollution of the capital's air and of the water of the Thames by dust, smoke, and refuse. He was revolted by the spectacle of stinking crowds crammed together in the ballrooms and bathing establishments of Bath. The theme of excrement, omnipresent in his work, supports his denunciation of the degradation of city-dwellers' tastes. His writing displays a classical drift from hygiene to morality: in the city, criteria for appreciation are reversed; a perverse taste for viscous and adulterated foods triumphs, and a deliberate stench is allowed to spread, because it is too easily tolerated. Social mobility and ostentatious luxury were merely so many signs of the form of collective suicide that was devastating the city.

Smollett was fascinated by the purity of water. He was an untiring apostle of hydrotherapy, devoting his first book to it as early as 1742.<sup>14</sup> An adept of cold bathes, he would swim in the sea, and made long stays on the French and Italian coasts. In short, his behaviour demonstrates the connection that was emerging between disgust with sticky city life and the longing for the shore.

The fact remains that the emergence of this diatribe, like the taste for retreats and, later, the longing for relaxation and rest, came long before the Brighton vogue. It is interesting to examine the reasons for this delay. For a long time, the attraction aroused by nature was purely literary. This appeal was focused on the countryside and on gardens, 'the synthesis of the tame and the wild'.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, it was impossible to subdue the ocean, which could not be tamed in any way. Man could find no genuine shelter there, nor build for himself a secondary residence. Because it was irremediably wild, the liquid element represented the primitive state of the world. The seaside itself was beyond man's control; it did not easily lend itself to the carefully constructed apparent disorder of the English garden. Above all, a site that cannot be altered by force preserves no trace of human history: sand and water erase any sign, just as they frustrate any design. With the exception of ports and dikes, which were themselves often precarious, and the vision of moving sails, the seaside

offered no image that could demonstrate mankind's mastery of nature. Before the sea-shore could enter the range of attractive places, the desire had to arise for visions of the sublime, and the therapeutic necessity had to make itself felt.

In fact, in eighteenth-century France and England, anxiety was taking on new forms. These were in keeping with the rise of the sensitive soul. Physicians tended, *contra* the Hippocratic tradition, to consider the diaphragm as the regulator of sensitivity and the 'centre of internal turmoil';<sup>16</sup> with the brain, it exercised an unstable diarchy. As the seat of anxiety and the trip-wire that triggers spasms, this organ expresses 'the essential deterioration of vital equilibrium'.<sup>17</sup> This explains the importance attributed to it at a time of growing interest in the nerves and the various disorders of the soul, which were gradually to develop into a range of disturbing forms. Vapours, hysteria, nymphomania, and menstrual problems all fuelled a proliferating literature which stressed the specificity of both female nature and woman's social status.<sup>18</sup> Doctors dwelled complacently on the risks of puberty, maternity, and menopause; they emphasized clear-cut stages of life that were replicated across the social spectrum. This prolix literature also secretly informs us about the troubles afflicting man's psyche: as a fascinated spectator of the disorders caused by mysterious telluric forces that overwhelmed the nymphomaniac,<sup>19</sup> the individual himself became increasingly threatened by hypochondria, a modern extension of classical melancholy.

Spleen drives its sufferers to travel; it stimulated the mobility of individuals that accompanied the growing circulation of goods in the eighteenth century. Anxiety fosters curiosity and a sense of adventure. It haunts travellers on the grand tour, such as young Breton aristocrats eager to perform great deeds, whose mobility is stressed by Jean Meyer.<sup>20</sup> In accordance with the theory of climatic influence, these new anxieties exerted a stronger influence in the north, and this was precisely where a new type of recourse took shape, fanned by the temptation to return sincerely to nature.

In fact, people were frightened by excessive frailness and pallor. The ruling classes, believing that they did not have the vigour which the working classes enjoyed thanks to their labour, felt that they were being consumed from within. The elite of society feared their artificial desires, their listlessness, and their neuroses. They felt threatened by social death from their own particular types of fevers and passions, because they were unable to participate in the rhythms of nature.<sup>21</sup> This is the perspective within

which the sea-shore began to develop its appeal in the middle of the eighteenth century. Remember that, even more than the countryside, the ocean represented indisputable nature which was more than just scenery, and which remained unaffected by falsehood. This explains how the paradox developed on which the fashion for the beach is based: the sea became a refuge and a source of hope because it inspired fear. The new strategy for seaside holidays was to enjoy the sea and experience the terror it inspired, while overcoming one's personal perils. Henceforth, the sea was expected to soothe the elite's anxieties, re-establish harmony between body and soul, and stem the loss of *vital energy* of a social class that felt particularly vulnerable through its sons, its daughters, its wives, and its thinkers.<sup>22</sup> The sea was expected to cure the evils of urban civilization and correct the ill effects of easy living, while respecting the demands of privacy.

Physicians began to favour fortifying prescriptions. They set about restoring energy and tonicity in human fibre; they overwhelmingly adopted the vigorous therapeutics advocated by Sydenham at the end of the previous century. The untameable and infinitely fruitful sea (especially in northern realms) could sustain vital energy, provided that mankind knew how to handle the terror it inspired. On its shores, people found renewed appetites, slept, and forgot their worries. The cold, the salt, and the shock to the diaphragm from plunging abruptly into the water, along with the view of a healthy, vigorous people, including many centenarians, and a varied landscape were to cure chronic invalids. In addition, patients taking a cure could enjoy themselves amid the brilliant society that quickly began to frequent the fashionable resorts. In 1804, after seventeen years' practice, Dr Buchan published a book which took the form of a retrospective<sup>23</sup> in which he theorized about the connection that was developing between a horror of the city and the pleasures of seaside holidays. He heavily praises the Thanet peninsula, which cures the listlessness that is due to excessive 'originally feeble and delicate stamina'; it ensures the serenity of young girls during puberty, holds sexual passions in check, and prevents men of little virility from becoming effeminate. It is a cure for an excessive use of the mind; it is also a means of avoiding sunlight, whose action 'is augmented by the infinitely multiplied reflections from brick walls, and burning pavements'<sup>24</sup> in the city. The beach toughens those who are slaves of comfort and who can only walk on carpets. Above all, the taxonomy of the seaside's virtues in Buchan's book becomes the reflection of a hymn to the longevity of hard-working

fishermen<sup>25</sup> and the productive sailors and Nordic peoples. Englishmen enjoyed bathing in the frothing waves because they still vaguely shared the Greenlanders' instincts.

For a scientist of that time reading *De liquidorum usu* from the Hippocratic collection, bathing could not be considered a casual experience. As Maret clearly explained in 1751 in the *Encyclopédie*, physicians expected a good deal from immersion in water, whether cold, cool, or warm; the liquid was believed to have a mechanical effect on the tissues. It either tightened or loosened fibres, according to its temperature. It modified the consistency of the humours and the rhythm of blood circulation, and had an influence on the working of the nerves.

This element of the therapeutic arsenal took on a different significance in the eighteenth century with the rise of cold bathing. In this respect, the vogue for sea bathing was merely a final step; bathing in salty water at between 12 and 14 degrees often appeared to be an attenuated means of resorting to cold which was reserved for faint hearts,<sup>26</sup> children, women, and old people. Of course, this new fashion was deeply rooted in ancient beliefs: 'Bathing the body in cold water fosters long life,'<sup>27</sup> asserted Francis Bacon in 1638; while Hermond Van der Heyden, a leading medical authority of Ghent, published a well-received book on the subject. It was, however, Floyer's *History of Cold Bathing*,<sup>28</sup> written in 1701 and 1702, that was to establish the new fashion. Before then, Englishmen did not appreciate cold water. The author, who compiled an impressive panoply of ancient references, reminded his readers that Antonius Musa prescribed cold baths to the Emperor Augustus, and that Pliny and Seneca recorded the spread of this practice, which had been strongly recommended by Hippocrates, Celsus, Coelius Aurelianus, and Galen, to mention only the best-known figures.

The benefits of this rediscovered treatment were firmly established in a book called *Contraria Medicina*. 'Heat succeeds cold and cold succeeds heat in a natural way,' stated Floyer.<sup>29</sup> Cold water closes the pores and refreshes, compresses, and condenses the air contained in the humours. Thus confined, this air increases in quantity, and becomes more elastic. This creates a sensation of heat, and even of burning. Moreover, cold bathing is among the toughening processes that are particular to northern peoples, and it ensures their exceptional longevity. 'A cold regimen suits cold countries':<sup>30</sup> individuals must build up their bodies so that they function in harmony with the surrounding air. This therapeutic injunction took on a moralizing tone: cold bathing,

declares Floyer, corrects depraved living habits. It abates the vehemence of the passions, and must therefore be part of young people's education. Above all, the British physician relies on the terror and shock caused by sudden immersion in cold water to cure disorders of the soul. And he takes on a virtually religious tone when he praises the virtues of this substance:

Cold bathes cause a sense of chilness, and that, as well as the Terror and Surprize, very much contracts the Nervous membrane and tubes, in which the aerial spirits are contained, and they being kept tense and compressed, do most easily communicate, all external expressions to the Sensitive soul. Not only the external senses are more lively in cold water, but all our animal actions and reasonings are then more vigourous by the external compressure of cold air.<sup>31</sup>

By purifying man's animal spirit and compressing its excessively irregular fluctuations, baptism by immersion once prepared the soul to receive the divine mark. Floyer deeply regretted that the Church had abandoned this beneficial practice, though it had long been maintained by northern peoples, especially the Picts, the Scots, and the Welsh. The book concludes with a chorus of praise for the energy and morality of northern people. Floyer, like Burton before him, contributed to the establishing of a myth concerning the longevity of the inhabitants of the Orkneys. Hardened to the cold, surrounded by a sea whose abundance was inexhaustible and from which savages sometimes emerged, engendered by the icy waves,<sup>32</sup> the Nordic aboriginal was thought to show better resistance to death than townsfolk weakened by comfortable living. This was why Englishmen were advised to avoid tobacco, coffee, tea, wine, spices, and all such southern inventions which could only jeopardize their ability to adapt to the climate in which they were meant to live.

Floyer then sets forth a series of precautions, and draws up a catalogue of indications that outline, as early as 1702, the features of what was to become a medical attitude toward sea bathing. He advocates, for example, that immersion in water at a temperature of less than 10 degrees be accompanied by exercise in cold air. He recommends walking and horseback riding. Eager to test the virtues of each type of immersion in cold water for himself, he tried sea bathing, and recommended it for paralytics. It was therefore something of an exaggeration for Michelet to claim that Dr Richard Russell was 'the inventor of the sea'.<sup>33</sup> Sea bathing was part of a logical evolution in experience. The

fashion for cold bathes actually became widespread after 1732.<sup>34</sup> On the Continent, Maret explained twenty years later how this practice increased animal warmth, and in 1763, Dr Pomme believed that cold bathes would soothe vapours and lessen nervous irritation. The practice of bathing in the cold water of rivers and streams then began to develop in France. But this is enough about a subject that digresses from the theme at hand.

In fact, the therapeutic values of sea water were being re-discovered at the time, and physicians were recalling that Cribasius had already advocated it in cases of scrofula. One of John Speed's aphorisms clearly explained the approach of medical practitioners: 'To bathe in the sea is to have not only a cold bathe, but a medicinal cold bathe.'<sup>35</sup> The therapeutic use of the sea also had its own prehistory. In a form of medicine based on contradiction, it was traditional to plunge sufferers from hydrophobia into the waves, and the shores periodically resounded with the cries of raging victims supported by the vigorous arms of volunteer bathers.<sup>36</sup> In 1667, Dr Robert Wittie also advised gout-sufferers to bathe at Scarborough.<sup>37</sup> This resort was able to make a gradual transition from traditional hydrotherapy to a recourse to the virtues of sea bathing. It so happened that from the side of a cliff overlooking the beach, there flowed a mineral spring that had attracted patients to take the waters since at least 1627. Because of the infiltration of sea water, the source at this spa had a salty taste. It was considered to have purgative virtues that were emphasized by Celia Fiennes in 1697.<sup>38</sup> Already at that time, those taking the cure at Scarborough combined drinking this salty water with excursions along the beach and the strand at low tide. In this way they pioneered what was to become one of the major experiences of seaside holidays.

In 1748, more than forty years after Floyer's isolated experiments, Dr Richard Frewin sent one of his young patients to drink sea water and bathe at Southampton. On 17 November the patient began taking daily dips in the sea. As of the fourth day, his condition started to improve. On 30 November his appetite returned, and on 12 December the patient had recovered his vigour and liveliness. He continued to bathe every day until 14 January, however, by which time his health was completely restored. He then began spacing out his bathes, and finally went home on 8 February. This first report of a sea cure<sup>39</sup> reads like an account of a miracle, a tone that would soon become commonplace in this type of literature. The experiment took place between late autumn and the middle of winter, and so was in keeping

with the fashion for cold bathes. This therapy combined drinking sea water with immersion.

Frewin strengthened Dr Richard Russell's convictions. Russell had already noticed that coastal fishermen frequently used sea water as a remedy and that sailors took it as a cost-free purgative. All that remained was to translate these virtues into theory. In 1750 Russell revealed the results of his reflection and experiments conducted over almost twenty years in a book in Latin that was translated in Oxford three years later.<sup>40</sup> The author was a student of Boerhaave, and it was from the teaching of the Leyden master, and especially from informal conversations with him, that Russell drew most of his convictions. He was visibly influenced by physico-theology, and proclaimed his allegiance to a natural medicine that is worth attempting to define here. At a time when increasing amounts of research were being done on antiseptics, this contemporary of Pringle, Lind, and MacBride believed that the Creator had provided natural means of defence against decay and putrefaction. The sea, for instance, accomplished this great design of Providence in many ways. First, it contained salt, which prevented its own putrefaction<sup>41</sup> and checked the decay of the body. In addition, the Creator had endowed sea water with the power of dispersing vitiated humours in the glands. On this point, Russell based his ideas on the concept of 'the natural alliance' of secretions:

For as the author of the human Nature foresaw that some of these would be obstructed by various Accidents, and less fit for the laws of circulation, he formed the Body with plenty of Secretions for the Purpose of mutual Assistance; that when one of these are impeded, the Body might be relieved by the help of the others. And indeed Nature cures many diseases by her own Power after this Manner, and for this Reason she is properly stiled the *Healer of Diseases*.<sup>42</sup>

By thus ensuring spontaneous regulation, Nature played the role of healer. All the physician had to do was to copy the methods he observed nature using when left to its own devices.<sup>43</sup> Russell, whose approach was in keeping with the interest displayed by several eighteenth-century doctors<sup>44</sup> in glandular secretions, thought that sea water could check an excessively rapid process of putrefaction inside the body, dissolve 'indurated humours', and 'cleanse and protect the glandular system as a whole against impure viscosities',<sup>45</sup> and perhaps do all these things simultaneously. In short, it allowed physicians to control secretions. Sea water also

possessed the virtues attributed to cold water: it 'invigorates all parts and gives strength and vigour to the body as a whole'.<sup>46</sup>

The therapeutic strategy was a logical extension of these convictions. Patients were to bathe once a day and drink half a pint of sea water in the morning and a glass on coming out of the water; if necessary, they were to be massaged with freshly collected seaweed from the rocks and to shower (fomentation) with cold sea water that had been heated.

A whole series of indications could be deduced from the catalogue of virtues. 'The sea washes away and cleanses every human stain':<sup>47</sup> these words from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* summed up Russell's certainties. They appear as an epigraph in his book, and he had them engraved on his tombstone. The healthy gums of fishermen demonstrated the antiseptic qualities of salty sea water, which was the best of toothpastes. It was to be prescribed in all cases related to ancient 'putrid fevers'. It was also advised for all glandular illnesses. And lastly, it proved to be beneficial to sufferers from asthenia, who could be trusted to choose a beach adapted to their temperament and observe strict hygiene in their way of life.

Russell's message met a widespread demand. Within a few years, Boerhaave's student had developed an enormous practice. Brighton, where he lived in a sumptuous residence, soon became a fashionable resort. Fifty years later, some high-ranking noble families were still faithfully carrying out the prescriptions given by the prophet of the sea. Admittedly, his book gave rise to endless controversy. But his critics were more concerned with advising caution, modulating the prescriptions of their colleague, and debating some of his instructions than with radically contradicting him. His opponents endeavoured to develop a normative approach rather than to deny the benefits of the sea.<sup>48</sup>

In 1766, the Académie of Bordeaux organized a competition on the subject. Dr Maret received the first prize for his *Mémoire sur la manière d'agir des bains d'eau douce et d'eau de mer et sur leur usage* [Memoir on the Workings of Fresh-water and Sea-water Bathing and on their Use].<sup>49</sup> According to the author, sea bathing had all the virtues of cold bathes (12 to 14 degrees). By reducing the humoral mass, it increased the secretions already stimulated by the salt. Maret consequently attributed a great diuretic virtue to sea water; it effectively removed obstructions from glands and viscera. But the sea had other virtues as well. More than Russell, Maret stressed the beneficial effects of the shock caused to the nervous system by immersion. To do so,

he adopted a tone that harmonized with the rise of the aesthetics of the sublime.

The depth of the sea can only be imagined together with the horror engendered by the fear of being engulfed in it. However, the sight of the sea has little effect on men when they do not think they have cause to fear that they will be thrown into it; but if they are *hurled down into it*, before they can prepare or prevent their immersion, a prodigious upheaval occurs throughout the whole body; the *soul*, surprised by such an unexpected event, startled by the fear of disunion from the body that it thinks is close at hand, lets the reins of government of the body over which it presides drop from its hands, so to speak. This results in irregular irradiations of the nervous fluid and a new modification in the organs of thought and the whole nervous system. The disorder is all the greater, and the modification all the more varied, the more cowardly the man is who has been thrown into the sea, or the more convinced that his life is being threatened.<sup>50</sup>

It is easy to understand why Maret advocates sea bathing for those who suffer from 'phrenzy', nymphomania, and hypochondria. In addition, he refines Russell's injunctions, and outlines the model of therapeutic sea bathing as it was to be used until the middle of the nineteenth century. Patients were to rest before facing the waves. They should choose to bathe shortly before sunset,<sup>51</sup> if possible in a shady spot. They should throw themselves energetically into the sea. They should come out of the water as soon as they felt shiverish for the second time, and at most, after half an hour. A bather should have ensured that as soon as he emerged, there would be 'people ready to assist him as required'.<sup>52</sup> A comfortable bed was to have been prepared so that he could rest after his exertions. Faithful to the old Hippocratic and Galenic injunctions, Maret prohibited bathing when in a sweat or on a full stomach; women were to avoid swimming in the sea during their periods, and Maret advised against bathing during epidemics. He envisaged series of thirty to forty bathing sessions for patients, and autumn seemed to him to be the best season for going to the beach.

One year after the Bordeaux competition, Dr Awsiter<sup>53</sup> called for caution, and strongly stressed the dangers of the open sea. This English doctor, a rival of Russell's, advocated installing hot baths at seaside resorts. This would enable patients of fragile health to receive treatment all year long. Moreover, Awsiter stated that it would be a pity to deprive patients of the beneficial effects of

hot baths. These caused the pores to open, thereby allowing an active cleansing of the organism. This thesis heralded the decline of the fashion for cold treatments that had set in at the end of the eighteenth century. On the other hand, Awsiter, like Montesquieu<sup>54</sup> before him, praised the sea's surprising life-giving powers. The mythical body of Venus, born out of the spermatic foam of the waves, began to haunt the language of thalassotherapy. Sterility became yet another indication for sea bathing, and soon doctors were advising impotent men to swim in the waves and make a regular habit of eating fresh fish, which made sailors so 'essentially procreative'.<sup>55</sup>

Consequently, shortly after the middle of the eighteenth century, the sea bathing fashion developed out of a therapeutic objective. Doctors prescribed veritable cures modelled on those offered by spas, which were then very much in vogue. Sea bathing quickly emerged as a strictly regulated experience, and in every resort, a municipal establishment was soon constructed so that water temperature could be adjusted and all the services made available that were required for carrying out the medical prescriptions.<sup>56</sup>

Doctors at the beginning of the nineteenth century did not radically alter the therapeutic sea bathing model. This new treatment found several justifications: the focus on diseases related to lymphatic temperament and disorders of the neuro-vegetative system, the importance then attached to the concept of scrofulous diathesis which was invading diagnostic science, and the somewhat phantasmic fear of congestion of the glandular system. The beaches became covered with scrofula-sufferers.<sup>57</sup> Where the vitalist trend exerted its influence, it encouraged this recourse to the sea's reinvigorating faculties, while belief in the water's pharmaco-dynamic powers also progressed.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, there was a rising sense of the dangers of etiolation. Urbanization was increasing, and this together with the importance that the ruling classes attached to the value of their genes, rendered pre-existing anxieties more acute. More than ever before, the sea was expected to make rickety children straight and vigorous, to put colour back into chlorotic girls, and to restore hope to barren women. Sea bathing, which cured so-called white flowers, was also thought to make the menstrual cycle more regular. Above all, it was considered one of the only effective treatments for cases of neurosis.

The understanding of how the body heats itself was also growing. In 1797, Dr James Currie carried out some remarkably precise experiments:<sup>59</sup> he plunged men and women into the sea,

measured their reactions, and concluded that after an initial drop in temperature, the organism warms up again, before finally cooling once more. Physicians were therefore right to set a limit to the duration of bathes. The pharmacological qualities of sea water were in turn confirmed by Dr Balard, who analysed their substance and detected the presence of iodine and bromine.

Very soon, the discovery of the virtues of sea water led to the invention of the beach. Doctors were inspired by neo-Hippocratic climatology for the same reasons as they were by balneotherapy, and the image of the salubrious beach came to comprise a voluminous chapter in the medical landscape that was developing in the West. Russell himself outlined its initial features. In a letter to his friend Dr Frewin,<sup>60</sup> he described the model seaside resort. First of all, it should be 'neat and tidy'. Moreover, it was to be far away from any river mouth, so as to ensure that the waves would be high and the water sufficiently saline. A good beach was 'sandy and flat', making it easier to cross in a Bath chair. The shore should be bordered by cliffs and dunes suitable for walking and horseback riding. For Russell, it was important to associate a marine cure with exercise of the type advocated long ago by the physicians of antiquity and more recently by Sydenham. Oddly enough, however, he failed to mention swimming.

His fellow doctors continued to refine the definition of the salubrious beach. More than Russell, they stressed the qualities that were necessary in the soil and especially the air. Significant in this respect is the 1761 book by Dr Anthony Relhan<sup>61</sup> devoted to the advantages of Brightelmstone. Thanks to its chalky soil and the absence of swamps or forests, emanations there were reduced to a minimum. The cliffs sheltered the resort from northerly winds, while preserving for it the advantages of beneficial sea-breezes that drove away mists and fog. Demography seemed to confirm the salubrity of the spot: according to Dr Relhan, who personally calculated the birth and death rates, people who lived in the vapour of the sea and continually paddled in the water had exceptional life spans. An increasing number of medical studies were devoted to coastal areas. An inexhaustible literature drew comparisons among the merits of each fragment of the shore, and offered an analysis of microclimates that claimed to be thoroughly scientific. Having the corresponding medical publications seemed to be indispensable to creating or promoting any resort established along the British coasts. This procedure aroused Jane Austen's irony and the derisive laughter

of the American Wilbur Fisk at the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>62</sup>

It would be most interesting to undertake a specific analysis of the extreme precision of physicians' vocabulary: the sharp coenaesthetic attention that it reveals corresponds to the increasing precision of clinical language devoted to bathers' reactions. Over the years, pretentious divisions became established. The superiority of the southern coasts of England, especially those of Sussex, gradually became generally accepted. They were sheltered from northerly winds, but exposed to sea-breezes; they were more luminous and enjoyed a better exposure, which helped the morning mists to dissipate quickly. The eudiometer also determined this classification of resorts.<sup>63</sup> Some sites, such as Brighton, Eastbourne, Newquay, Scarborough, and Yarmouth, were said to enjoy particularly bracing air. The weather there encouraged exercise. Most bathers preferred these beaches. Other resorts offered soothing air and were conducive to rest; Bournemouth, Falmouth, and Torquay were recommended to convalescents and more generally to all those suffering from symptoms of debility.

Within a given resort, scientists delighted in practising their art of classification and division. A delectable literature compares the merits of the different parts of the Brighton area. Similar, and perhaps even more lively, debates took place in Germany after 1793, during the founding of the first resorts there, as specialists weighed the merits of the Baltic and the North Sea, of Doberan or Norderney.<sup>64</sup> Twenty years later, in Restoration France, physicians who preferred Dieppe were still arguing, though less energetically, with the partisans of Boulogne.<sup>65</sup>

Over the years, growing attention was paid to air quality, while the merits of the waters came to be less highly valued. The triumph of Lavoisier's theories created a privileged position for oxygen after 1783, and anxiety over pulmonary consumption increased. Suddenly, what counted most was to breathe well. All these factors favoured the beach. Long before Dumas and Bous-singault, Ingenhousz's learned calculations demonstrated that sea air was the purest and most heavily oxygenated, and henceforth physicians were unanimous in advocating boat rides and stays on the islands. The therapeutic virtues of an island sojourn were exalted in terms that coincided with one of the most pressing longings of the Romantic generation. Indeed, the landmark book on the Thanet peninsula published by Buchan in 1804 is permeated with this atmosphere. Patients taking the waters came first of all to enjoy the well-being associated with breathing good



air. There, in contact with the elements, they expected to be cured primarily by the qualities of the air, and secondarily, by those of the sea. As for the sun, its only function was to purify the atmosphere and foster evaporation; after ten o'clock in the morning, patients feared it would cause congestion and fled its beams. Shadiness also made its way into the catalogue of a resort's advantages.<sup>66</sup> The land, however, was rife with dangers; none of its exhalations were beneficial. In fact, chalk seemed to be the most salubrious parent rock precisely because it gave off very few emanations.

Gradually, the portrait of the ideal beach became more detailed and its coloration changed. With the rise of picturesque values, doctors were driven to praise the virtues of 'splendid seascapes'. Sensibility to marine aesthetics increased. In this respect, the ambitions of the founders of the Bournemouth resort are significant. Eighteen years later, when James Atherton started New Brighton, he was very careful to build houses offering a view of the sea.<sup>67</sup>

At the same time, the moralizing aims also become more intense. A patient who takes the waters far away from the miasmata of the city and breathes the purest air, enjoys the sight of the immense ocean daily, experiences the shock of repeated immersion, and takes tonic exercise will easily give up illicit pleasures and forswear his disorderly life-style without regret. The beach, noted Dr Le Coeur, was the site of a 'return to innocent inclinations'.<sup>68</sup> Grand ladies and even serious gentlemen are not ashamed to gather little pebbles, blades of marine grass, and seaweed. At the seaside, the conscience awakens, and scepticism collapses. Then, on the wet or dry sand, the naïve wonder of the theologians converges with the longing for regression detected by Ferenczi.

When in the early 1840s railroads throughout Europe began to reach the coast, and a new profit-making system started to alter the character of resorts, Brighton was already the world's leading *sanitorium*.<sup>69</sup> At that time, the image of the beach started to blur, the myths became confused, and the stereotypes piled up in disorderly rivalry. The attribution of merits came to be determined by a shifting assessment of the qualities of the respective elements, the characteristics of the topography, the efficiency of hospital installations, the scope of the social network, and the wealth of cultural life. In order to help the would-be seaside holiday-maker, Dr James Currie published a directory in 1829 which was also a guide to all the western shores and the various tropical climates.<sup>70</sup>

It is difficult for modern readers to understand this abundant and confusing literature. Since then, the ways of appreciating the sea, the earth, the air, and the sun have changed, as have the thresholds for enjoying heat or cold, and even the sense of well-being. Above all, a revolution has occurred in the very means of coenaesthetic perception.

#### BATHING, THE BEACH, AND SELF-EXPERIENCE, OR THE AMBIVALENT PLEASURE OF SUFFOCATION

Bathers and physicians both agreed that the sea should offer three major qualities: it should be cold, or at least cool, salty, and turbulent. Pleasure came from the whipping of the waves.<sup>71</sup> The bather delighted in feeling the powerful forces of the immense ocean. Bathing among the waves was part of the aesthetics of the sublime: it involved facing the violent water, but without risk, enjoying the pretence that one could be swept under, and being struck by the full force of the waves, but without losing one's footing. This explains the preoccupation with safety. Everything – the detailed medical prescription, the services of expert bathers, the attendants,<sup>72</sup> and a hard sandy soil whose slope had been carefully assessed – contributed to removing any peril, leaving only the emotion.

On the other hand, the patient had little freedom of choice: the physician prescribed the season, the time, the duration, and where exercises were to be carried out; he also set the number of times the patient must bathe during the season.

That said, there were two opposing models that reinforced the sexual dichotomy which medical discourse was striving to cultivate. For women, young girls, children, chronic invalids, convalescents, or those of faint heart, the emotion of sea bathing arose from sudden immersion, which was repeated until the patient shivered for the second time. The 'bathers' would plunge female patients into the water just as the wave broke, taking care to hold their heads down so as to increase the impression of suffocation. This custom aroused the anger of several practitioners,<sup>73</sup> though it prevailed at Dieppe, Doberan, and on the English beaches. The bathing attendants were very keen on it because it justified their presence. In fact, their role was to carry out a prescription that could even detail the number of immersions the patient was to undergo. With time, the medical prescriptions became more refined, and by the same token, the duties of the professional

helpers became more complex. At Boulogne, Dr Bertrand indicated the manner in which 'the wave must be received' on various parts of the body. In the 870 pages of the manual published by Dr Le Coeur in 1846, readers entered into all the finer points of marine therapeutics. Yet it should be noted that, at that time, many patients were shaking off medical authority, and practices were becoming more dispersed, even as bathing itself was becoming more strictly codified.

Brutal immersion head first in water at a temperature of 12 to 14 degrees brings about an intense shock. This practice was part of the technique for toughening the patient, as Michel Foucault once described it. It is reminiscent of tempering steel. The process acts on the diaphragm, considered the seat of sensibility. The patient, with her breath taken away, suffocates while the bathing attendant tries to revive her with vigorous massages, until her reaction makes the feeling of cold disappear. This was the same goal pursued by dumping cold water on the head of a patient as he prepared to enter the sea. Servants or the expert 'bather' would fill about ten buckets and proceed to drench the patient on the strand.<sup>74</sup> When the bathing guide felt that his patient was sufficiently hardened, he would let her jump, splash about, and rub herself down in the water.

Such exercise usually lasted from five to fifteen minutes, occasionally twenty, and never more than half an hour. Bathing provided an opportunity to experience 'a multitude of sensations'.<sup>75</sup> The description of women and, even more so, that of young girls bathing became surreptitiously transformed into a depiction of voluptuous episodes. The female bathers held in the arms of powerful men and awaiting penetration into the liquid element, the feeling of suffocation, and the little cries that accompanied it all so obviously suggested copulation that Dr Le Coeur was afraid that the similarity would render sea bathing indecent.<sup>76</sup> At any rate, this was a means of toughening young girls who suffered from dangerously pale complexions; it got them accustomed to being exposed to the elements, and prepared them for the emotions and pains of puberty, as well as the sufferings of childbirth. At Dieppe during the Empire, even before the municipal facilities were built, several ladies acquired the habit of 'taking their young daughters to bathe in the sea'.<sup>77</sup> Some physicians also hoped that the rhythm of the tides would restore that of the menstrual flow. Well before Michelet, Dr Viel relied on the power of the waters to regulate periods.<sup>78</sup>

For both children and young women, the thought of being abruptly plunged 'under the crest of the wave' caused anxiety and sometimes even terror. The first bathe in the waves took on an initiatory character. Sometimes physicians would forbid sea bathing to faint-hearted children, for fear of provoking convulsions.<sup>79</sup> Another option was to resort to ruse. For example, at Boulogne in 1826, Dr Bertrand had to attend to a young girl who trembled at the mere thought of the waves: 'we took her on the river, it was the harbour; we led her imperceptibly to the sea view.'<sup>80</sup> Fictional literature enriched the catalogue of medical cases. One of the young heroines in Jane Austen's *Sanditon* is terrified at the thought of having to bathe in the sea; she loudly calls for the moral support of her friends. Léopoldine Hugo, for her part, provides a minutely detailed description in her correspondence of the intense shock experienced by her younger sister, who bathed with her for the first time at Le Havre in September 1839. 'Dédé was terribly moved, she cried, shouted, trembled, scratched, and asked to go back so strongly that she was immediately taken back to her cabin, where she got dressed again.'<sup>81</sup> A letter from Pierre Foucher indicates that the child finally managed in 1843 to overcome what her uncle considered to be faint-heartedness.

It must be admitted that this hardening of young girls proved effective. Frances ('Fanny') Burney did not merely immerse herself in Brighton's brilliant society in 1782; early in the morning, she would go to the seaside with her hosts. Thus, on Wednesday, 20 November: 'Mrs and the three Miss Thrales and myself all arose at six o'clock in the morning and "by the pale blink of the moon" we went to the sea-side, where we had bespoke the bathing-women to be ready for us, and into the ocean we plunged. It was cold, but pleasant. I have bathed so often as to lose my dread of the operation, which now gives me nothing but animation and vigour.'<sup>82</sup>

Hardened men, on the other hand, had a different way of bathing. Those who made use of an expert bather did so as a mere precaution, yielding to snobbery.<sup>83</sup> In any case, the relationship that was established between the two men remained distant; the patient behaved independently, and the 'guide's' main function was to give advice and ensure safety. When necessary, he could fulfil his mission with authority. The 'bather' assigned to the Prince of Wales, fearing that King George III might reproach him with failing to perform his duty, decided to haul the future Regent back to shore by the ears because he found the

boy's way of swimming too reckless.<sup>84</sup> In fact, male patients remained free to pit themselves against the waves and to test their energy against that of the ocean. The thrill of being whipped by the rollers<sup>85</sup> and of pretending to be crushed as one dived under a wave transformed bathing into a make-believe drowning and a victory over the elements. Some young Romantics enjoyed facing the sea in complete solitude: Friedrich von Stolberg on his Danish island and Byron on the shores of Aberdeen both appreciated this joust that left the bather exhausted on the shore.

This means of pleasure coincided with the way people swam. In fact, for the theorists of that time, swimming did not consist in merely being able to loll, play about, and slip between two waves in a feeling of dynamic communion with the liquid element. Swimming then was a total effort, a fight against being engulfed, and a display of energy. This 'violent, active practice'<sup>86</sup> which Gaston Bachelard perceives as a cosmic challenge to the liquid element was primarily justified by the conviction that the swimmer must above all remain on the water's surface. This activity corresponds to the state of general motion that physicians found so useful in bathing. The way people swam was dictated by an incessant fear of drowning heightened by the firm belief that man could neither float nor swim naturally. The theorists were obsessed above all by avoiding submerging the breathing organs and by maintaining the regular rhythm of the lungs. In their view, swimmers could support the weight of their heads only through violent, learned motions, modelled on the repeated jumping of a frog. The kind of swimming they advocated demanded that the bather strain and exert himself; it outlines a virile image of aquatic copulation that finds its counterpart in the feminine emotion at being abruptly submerged.

This masculine model of sea bathing, known as 'bathe and swim', coincided with the nascent practice of exercises whose aim was to make the individual feel dynamic; it viewed the body as a network of forces,<sup>87</sup> and it also reflected the impact that pneumatic chemistry and the physiology of breathing then exerted on the minds of scientists. It procured a particular delight that Bachelard calls 'the coenaesthetic joy of violence'.<sup>88</sup>

In this prehistory of sea bathing, two distinct roles are played out on the sea-shore under the eyes of spectators equipped with lorgnettes. Women were tremblingly confined to the shallow water, ready to retreat as if they feared they would be attacked, and only pretending to face the breaker; they stood close to their

Bath chairs, or sometimes under the canvas of their tents in the company of their 'bathers'. The fact remained that tent flaps, or in some cases palanquins, along with the danger of prying eyes and the fear of indiscreet lorgnettes all raised the stakes in this game. The strict code of decency that was beginning to prevail<sup>89</sup> foreshadowed the intensity of a sensation that could be either painful or titillating. It was something incredible for a middle-class woman to leave the realm of privacy, even if this were only in a Bath chair, and to find herself in a public place with her hair down, barefoot, showing the shape of her hips – in short, in the attire generally reserved for the man with whom she shared her intimate life. In order fully to appreciate this, it is necessary to bear in mind the intense erotic power of women's ankles and hair. The mere contact of a bare foot on the sand was already a sensual invitation and a barely conscious substitute for masturbation. Even more than aristocratic ladies accustomed to the social circuit, bourgeois women trapped in their homes found in the medical prescription an unexpected freedom that offered undreamt-of pleasures.

Men, on the other hand, acted out a scene of bravery: they hoped to emerge as heroes for having faced the staggering blows from the sea, felt the scourging of the salty water, and overcome it victoriously. The virile exaltation that a man experienced just before jumping into the water was like that of an erection, and it was quickened by the proximity of women, a potential audience for his boldness and one that he could see, exceptionally, in a semi-nude state. That the women were gathered together and confined to one area of the beach in a new version of the harem, in order to prevent mixed bathing, did not make any difference. Or rather, this abundance of young women bathing was made even more provocative by the presence of young virgins all in a flutter. All this justified the game of leering through lorgnettes, which everyone agreed was the favourite male pastime on the beaches of the day. At Brighton, according to a 1796 guide, indiscreet men were always on the look-out for women bathers, 'not only as they confusedly ascend from the sea, but as they kick and sprawl and flounder about its muddy margins, like so many mad Naiads in flannel smocks'.<sup>90</sup>

The fact that some virile bathers managed in this way to escape partially from the therapeutic code raises a question: was it not possible that among the ruling classes an autonomous experience of sea bathing founded in a quest for pleasure preceded the fashion created by medical prescription? Are historians

victims of their sources when they decree, in accordance with Michelet, that the 'invention of the sea' dates from 1750? A certain amount of evidence suggests that this is the case, while at the same time it delineates the limits of this premonitory behaviour.

In England, swimming in rivers belonged to the range of rural sports practised by the seventeenth-century gentry, and was soon accompanied by a similar activity on the sea-shores. People were already using bathing-machines on the Scarborough beach in 1735. The following year, in a fundamental document, the Reverend William Clarke discussed the pleasures of his summer in Brighton: 'We are now sunning ourselves', he wrote to a correspondent on 22 July 'upon the beach at Brighthelmstone ... My morning business is bathing in the sea, and then buying fish; the evening is horse riding, viewing the remains of old Saxon camps, and counting the ships in the road, and the boats that are trawling.'<sup>91</sup> This clergyman, a solitary pioneer who could be assumed to be a follower of the physico-theologians, brought rural sports to the sandy beach, and in so doing, invented the seaside holiday. In 1795, Cambry enjoyed 'delightful bathing' on the golden sand with his hosts at the end of a journey in the Finistère region.<sup>92</sup> But clearly these spontaneous, sporadic actions would soon be overshadowed by a global system, and, by the same token, become codified. The fashion for therapeutic bathing was intended to prevent the mingling of the sexes, and considerations of social status overpowered this anarchic individual behaviour. The common people were left with customs that were already strictly limited.<sup>93</sup>

The primacy of therapeutic bathing determined the range of ways in which the beach could be used. People did not come to the beach in order to expose themselves to the sun's rays, which were known to cause congestion, dry out the bodily fibre, give the skin a working-class coloration; and in any case, these rays caused distress. People did not lie down on the sand; they walked across it, or sat upon it. The beach was a place for strolling and for conversation; it was an extension of the excursion circuit that began on the dunes or along the paths above the cliffs. On the sand, the primordial family circle could be formed once again. For men fond of horseback riding, the strand offered a smooth surface on which they could let their mounts run free. Fashionable beaches were criss-crossed with galloping riders, and for many, the daily ride was the greatest attraction of the stay.<sup>94</sup>

This explains the great attention paid to the quality of the sand, which patients taking the waters could discover with their bare feet as they headed toward the water, if they were not carried down in a Bath chair.<sup>95</sup> Describing a beach necessarily implied evaluating the consistency of the sand. It should be firm, allowing riders to gallop without danger and giving an impression of safety to bathers as they prepared to jump into the waves. The ideal was the 'fine hard sand' described by Thomas Pennant at Scarborough.<sup>96</sup> The sand should be comfortable, which is to say free from 'the muddy element', that unpleasant silt on which bathers' feet could slip and get dirty.<sup>97</sup> In this respect, more importance was given to the nature of the strand and the evenness of its slope than to the quality of the beach itself.

All the same, tourists did not like sand that was too loose; for this reason, Ireland hated the beach at Scheveningen because it tired the walker. At this stage, bathers were not bothered by pebbles. Sometimes they even seemed to appreciate bits of gravel mingled with sea shells, as this was an easy surface on which to walk. The ideal beach, however, remained one of the proper consistency, whose compact sand did not conceal any sharp stones.

If a bather happened to be far from one of the beaches whose area had been marked off by the authorities, on which customs were clearly codified, he was advised to seek out his own bathing spot – that is to say, one that corresponded best to his temperament. Smollett's behaviour when he came to the coasts of Boulogne in 1763 to take care of his health is a good illustration of the importance that Britons attached to selecting an individualized site.<sup>98</sup> Physicians, obsessed with the notion of idiosyncrasy, encouraged this quest for affinity. Dr Le Coeur, for instance, advised bathers to visit the area they had chosen at low tide before taking a dip when the tide came in.<sup>99</sup>

On the beach, the behaviour of an individual who had decided to go for a swim revolved around anxiety about facing the waves. There was a distinct difference between the walker and the bather. At the appointed hour, once the bather had donned his attire, he did not linger, but marched resolutely towards the sea. This was a moment for concentration, and the bather took all sorts of precautions. He feared the cold and the sun's rays; he wanted to be comfortable. The model of therapeutic bathing was designed for members of the leisured class who were accustomed to being attended by servants. These people were often frail, and they came to find vigour in nature; but their desire

for contact with the sea had to be in keeping with the luxurious living to which they were accustomed. Physicians codified a series of practices for their benefit by carefully taking into account the sociology of sensibilities. Scientists at the time were convinced that social status, along with sex, age, and temperament, determined the reaction of the person plunged into the water, and they endeavoured to adapt their prescriptions accordingly.<sup>100</sup>

Respect for privacy and the imperative of maintaining social distance were preserved on the sea-shore, as is demonstrated by the way people dressed and by the use of bathing-machines. The bathing-machine appeared as early as 1735 in an engraving of the Scarborough beach.<sup>101</sup> The model designed by the Quaker Benjamin Beale for the Margate beach soon carried the day in England. The spread of the bathing-machine was rapid; in 1768, it was introduced at Lowestoft. At Weymouth, Margate, and Scarborough, and later on at Ostend, the machines were covered so as to protect the privacy of lady bathers; this was not the case at Brighton, where, as was seen above, the telescope was an important piece of beach equipment.

On very crowded beaches, bathers had to wait for their bathing-machines in an uncomfortable hut.<sup>102</sup> This heightened the anxiety of timid souls who were afraid of going into the sea. The comfort of bathing-machines varied with the models. All of them featured a bench, often covered with velvet. Once the bather had hoisted himself inside with the help of a small ladder at the back of the vehicle, he would find towels, a dry bathing costume, and sometimes a cloak or burnous that he would slip on as he left. A scrub brush for the skin, a bootjack, and a mirror completed the equipment.<sup>103</sup> The vehicle went into the water to reach a depth of about twenty centimetres. The 'bathers' would sometimes spread a drill tent in order to protect their lady customers from the excessive heat of the sun or from indiscreet lorgnettes.<sup>104</sup> They would then help her down the few rungs of the ladder before seizing her. On the way back, there was much fussing about in the jolting vehicle, what with drying off, rubbing down, and quickly tidying up.

Decency and the fear of being dishonoured by prying eyes determined appropriate bathing dress.<sup>105</sup> The first women to swim in the sea slipped on thick woollen dresses that preserved body heat. In France during the Restoration, this is what women wore to bathe. At Royan<sup>106</sup> in the early 1820s, men and women wore frieze gowns over a pair of wide trousers. For a long time, a range of individual apparels could be found. Then the bathing-

costume gradually became standardized and uniform on the basis of three imperatives: morality, therapy, and exercise. The history of the bathing-costume follows the reinforcement of standards of decency which, according to Norbert Elias, is part of the process of civilization.

In the early 1840s, wearing trousers became a necessity for women bathers; as waves could lift up their garments, the dress alone had become indecent. The most common bathing-costume then consisted of a shirt and a pair of trousers meeting at the waist and kept together by a single belt, so as to comprise a single garment that could be opened in front by a series of buttons. The sleeves were quite short, usually stopping at the elbow. In order to facilitate the swimmers' movements, an opening was sometimes made under the armpit. To this ensemble, young ladies added a little petticoat that was fitted to the belt; its purpose was to conceal the fulness of their hips. It was considered inappropriate to place too much emphasis on this promising element of a young woman's charm. The outline of feminine curves could only be revealed once they had been made decent by the full bloom of motherhood. There was another combination for women that was also fairly widespread: the bather would wear a separate pair of trousers and, instead of a shirt, would slip on a blouse or tunic that was cut full around the chest. At the beginning of the 1840s,<sup>107</sup> singlet bathing trunks appeared, made of a knitted woollen fabric which was generally brown, since white was too transparent. 'These', Le Coeur pointed out, 'are real swimsuits or jerkins in one piece. They are very light and comfortable for swimmers ...'. Unfortunately, they also emphasized the figure too much, and the good doctor had his doubts as to whether 'they will ever be adopted as bathing costumes for women'.

Many English women bathed bare-headed; they plaited their hair, rolled it up around their heads, or wrapped it up in a scarf with combs and pins. As she came out of the water, a woman would sometimes make a gesture of great freedom and let her hair down to dry its wavy locks in the sun. More prudish bathers, or those who were more afraid of the sun's rays, would protect themselves with a waterproof oil-cloth bonnet or cap, always white. On the Continent, this habit spread fairly quickly. Women who were particularly afraid of the sun would deck themselves out with broad-brimmed hats made of rough straw, inspired by the 'cottage hats' or 'cottage bonnets' that became widespread in France during the reign of Louis-Philippe. Le Coeur once

observed a woman entering the water with a silk mask covering her face.<sup>108</sup>

Caution required bathers to put a piece of cotton wool in each ear and to prepare beforehand a fur-lined coat in order to protect themselves from biting air or excessively bright sunlight. If necessary, bathers also wore wooden shoes or ankle boots, especially if they had to go on foot across a thin fringe of gravel and shells or a slippery band of seaweed.

Many working-class women could not care less about such insistent modesty, and the profuse literature devoted to sea bathing may actually camouflage the existence of deeply rooted vulgar behaviour. In fact, along the coasts of the Baltic, the North Sea, the English Channel, and the Atlantic, traces of popular bathing are to be found, sometimes in confrontation with the rigorous therapeutic practices that aroused so much emotion in the ruling classes. It also becomes quickly apparent that between the two systems, there was an insidious sharing of practices. The model of popular bathing, which could be characterized as northern, corresponds to altogether different aims from those of strictly codified 'sea bathing'. It was an extension of the free splashing of childhood and adolescence; sometimes it was part of the range of exercises or contests that formerly served as models for the gentry's rural sports. It occurred within the framework of collective activities, festive or playful, and always noisy, of which coast-dwelling people are fond.<sup>109</sup> As its participants were less worried about prying eyes and less imbued with a sense of privacy, popular bathing allowed the sexes to mingle. Unfortunately, it is difficult to follow the trace of a practice that was so quickly adulterated by the dominant model, when it was not prohibited by authorities hostile to anything that might impede the fulfilment of patterns set by the leisured class. Luckily, this social stratum occasionally approved of collective customs that enable us better to understand popular sensibilities.

Inhabitants of the English shore bathed well before 1750, so it was said, at Deal, Eastbourne, Portsmouth, Exmouth, and Brighton.<sup>110</sup> Dr Le François confirmed in 1812 that the children of coastal people got into the habit of swimming in the Channel ports when they were as young as 6 or 7.<sup>111</sup> Every year on the last Sunday in September, whole villages of Basques living in the mountains would come down to paddle in the sea at Biarritz.<sup>112</sup> Bathing had been a common custom on that coast for a long time. Early in the seventeenth century, Pierre de Lancre, president of the Bordeaux Parlement, described the surprise expressed by

travellers at the sight of 'grown girls and young fishermen' who 'mingle in the water', then go and 'dry off in the Chamber of Love that Venus has put there on purpose, on the sea-shore'.<sup>113</sup> The way these beaches were used was in no way inspired by the British model. Descriptions often give a hedonistic, playful image of bathing, with less sharp divisions. In the confused mingling of the sexes, bathers yielded more willingly to the tossing of the waves. Travellers confessed that the exercise was marked by latent eroticism. A good deal of familiarity was possible in the *cacorettes*<sup>114</sup> that carried bathers down from Bayonne. The legend of lovers tragically drowned in the 'chamber of love' contributed to the erotic atmosphere. For town-dwellers, collective bathing was nothing more than the culmination of a country outing.

Sometimes different models coexist together: on the shores of Boulogne at the end of the eighteenth century, the locals would bathe in the summer in order to cool off; a few Englishmen, accustomed to taking the waves, would join them. Dr Bertrand, who related the occurrence,<sup>115</sup> clearly detected dissimilarities in behaviour. There, an occasional practice, stimulated by the weather and driven by a spontaneous desire, found itself joined by circumstance to the strictly codified prescription bathing followed by patients used to taking a dip in the sea in all seasons. By the same token, the pleasures of bathing enjoyed by the inhabitants of Le Havre in the early years of the Restoration, amidst a mingling of the sexes and the social classes on the beaches of the area,<sup>116</sup> stand in contrast to the more ritualized habits that were beginning to take shape at Dieppe. Southwestern physicians and surgeons, accustomed to recommending Barèges and Caunterets, soon began to prescribe sea bathing at Biarritz. In August 1765, the sub-delegate encouraged the city authorities to facilitate access to the resort for foreign patients.<sup>117</sup>

This social juxtaposition of customs sometimes made it necessary for the authorities to intervene. Male nudity, for instance, raised a problem. In the eighteenth century, it continued to be accepted for some time, until it was gradually displaced by the requirements of therapeutic bathing. As late as 1778, tourists from The Hague came and bathed nude at Scheveningen,<sup>118</sup> while the young women of the area held their clothes, gave them a rub down as they came out of the water, and helped them to get dressed. According to Pilati, the nauseating smell of these young people made social differences so keenly obvious that nobody ever tried to seduce these fishermen's daughters. A similar

custom aroused criticism from visitors at Biarritz and misgivings on the part of the authorities, who were anxious to preserve morality.<sup>119</sup> By the end of the reign of Louis-Philippe in France, a clear division had been established: male nudity was forbidden on beaches frequented by bathers, though it was allowed elsewhere within the limits set by the municipal authorities.<sup>120</sup> The same came to be true at Ostend in 1859.<sup>121</sup>

It occasionally happened that without going so far as to permit nudity, the authorities allowed the sexes to mingle inside or outside the official bathing area. Paquet-Syphorien, who was hardly accustomed to such liberties, rushed into the water without a moment's hesitation in 1811 in order to strike up conversation as quickly as possible with the young ladies of Ostend.<sup>122</sup>

The common folk also bathed on the often repulsive shores of the Mediterranean; but this was an entirely different exercise that found few adepts for the time being among members of the ruling classes. Mediterranean bathers, who were often divers as well, were not trying to recover lost vigour; nor were they seeking to provoke or fight with the sea. They simply splashed about in the clear, cooling waters. This practice, seldom a solitary one, always took on a playful air. Groups of bathers would spend long moments paddling about in the sea like bands of dolphins. This is how Joseph Hager described the summer hours devoted by the Palermitans to dozens of aquatic games.<sup>123</sup> In 1783, Bérenger described children bathing on the beaches of Marseilles to his correspondent: 'Groups of naked children dive into the sea, swim on their backs, or busy themselves on the rocks pulling off shellfish. The groups become more numerous, and the hollows of these caves serve as shelters for these merry bands standing half-covered by the water as they give themselves over to a thousand frisky games.'<sup>124</sup> These activities sometimes became a part of festivities. On gala days, Abbé Coyer remarked in 1764, the people of Marseilles headed off in different directions: some 'go and seek purer air on the high sea, and more lively entertainment',<sup>125</sup> and others bathed while revelling took place on the shore.

As a rule, bathing along the Mediterranean was reserved for males. At Saint-Tropez, only little boys played about in the sea.<sup>126</sup> Observers failed to mention the sensuous groups of naked bathing women to whom Vernet was then devoting so many successful paintings. Here, the pictorial stereotypes do not seem to be based on reality. A sense of modesty prevented such antique or picturesque scenes from being staged, as Bernardin de

Saint-Pierre was well aware: the young Paul dug a hole in which the pubescent Virginia could swim, so that her nudity would no longer be exposed to his gaze; in so doing, he put an end to the fraternal bathing that had been a delight in their unforgettable childhood, and somewhat unconsciously took the first steps toward their inevitable separation.

During the last third of the eighteenth century, travellers from the North marvelled as they discovered this model of bathing that was so attuned to neoclassical aesthetics. Tourists regarded the behaviour of these bathers and divers as a form of art. They praised the beauty of the naked ephebes, who were for them like so many sea gods or dolphins in ancient seascapes. The memory of Tiberius and an aesthetic exaltation tinged with latent homosexuality even encouraged some observers to view them as obliging 'mercenaries' whose pleasing appearance fitted well into the Virgilian landscape. In July 1787, Goethe stayed at Posilippo in the country home of Hamilton, the scholarly knight. 'After dinner', he wrote, 'a dozen young boys swam in the sea, and it was a handsome sight. How many different groups they formed, and all the poses they struck in their games! He [Hamilton] pays them for this in order to have this pleasure every afternoon.'<sup>127</sup>

Some tourists who were adepts at bathing in the waves were tempted to imitate them. Jean Houel, fascinated by the transparency of the Tyrrhenian Sea, was fond of sleeping on the Sicilian shore and walking across the seaweed and the glittering sand. His voyage around the Mediterranean was punctuated with solitary bathing sessions. Others bathed out at sea, jumping from their boats, and mingled with the frolicking of new sea gods. 'We find everyday proof', wrote Brydone in May 1770 during a stay in Naples,

that bathing in the sea is the best remedy against the effects of the sirocco wind, and we enjoy this advantage with all the pleasure it is possible to wish. Lord Fortrose has provided himself with a very comfortable large boat for this purpose. We gather every morning at eight o'clock, and after having sailed for about half a mile, we undress in order to bathe ... Milord has hired ten sailors who are really some kind of amphibious animals, since they live in the sea for half the summer.<sup>128</sup>

These sailors looked after the bathers, and would dive forty or fifty feet under water to gather shellfish. 'In order to accustom ourselves to swimming on all occasions', Brydone added, 'Milord has bought a garment that we each wear in turn ... We have

learnt to undress in the water,' something that could prove useful if the ship sank. When he reached the Syracuse area, the traveller confided: 'We have discovered a very comfortable spot for bathing; it is always one of the first things we seek because this exercise constitutes one of the chief pleasures of our expedition.'<sup>129</sup> Nor was the therapeutic excuse totally absent, since the author remarked that but for bathing, 'We would all be in as sorry a state as the French marquis.'

The fact remains that it is difficult to assess just how widespread these practices were among such elite travellers. Certainly they were indicative of a wish not only to commune with the clear water, but also to recreate scenes from antiquity and to imitate commoners' behaviour. The spread of such forms of behaviour was in any case restricted by the threat of pirates and robbers and the torpor that prevailed on the unhealthy Mediterranean shores. While the northern sea-shores were already teeming with energetic bathers, mass visits of patients taking the waters were still unknown on the Mediterranean beaches. In France, the Sète coast played a pioneering role in this respect. It is important to remember that the vitalist physicians of Montpellier and the physicians of Bayonne were the first in that country to recognize the virtues of the sea. Already during the First Empire, Professor Delpech relied on it to cure consumption. Not without some disappointment, he sent his patients to swim among the waves.<sup>130</sup> Despite the fact that the amenities on this beach remained rudimentary for some time, scrofula-sufferers flocked to Sète in large numbers during the following decades. This was when<sup>131</sup> Dr Viel began to sing the praises of the beneficial effects of solar radiation, which he claimed strengthened the organs and invigorated the whole body. The nascent vogue for the first great seaside resort on the French Riviera accompanied a growing fashion in medical literature for lukewarm and hot baths. At the same time, on northern beaches the qualities of the air were beginning to replace the advantages of cold water in the minds of theorists.

#### CARING FOR ONESELF AND SEASIDE HOLIDAY- MAKING, OR A LIFE-STYLE RICH IN OBSCURE JOYS

A whole life-style was taking shape on the sea-shores, and the aspects related to sociability will be considered later. While on one level collective customs were being codified and strategies

for establishing distance and distinction were organizing the social scene, at a deeper level individual ways of caring for oneself were developing; these revealed new frameworks for assessment and engendered unprecedented models of behaviour.

The rise of the figure of the invalid, someone who suffers or thinks he suffers from chronic disease, fits into the process of specification of the ages of life that had been taking place since the middle of the eighteenth century; it bears modest witness to the impact of narcissism, whose various manifestations within the social body I have attempted to identify elsewhere. This trend goes hand in hand with the growing confidence of the medical profession. Improvements in clinical observation, the increased concern for hygiene, and the normative ambitions that this increase implies all combined to shape the invalid's existence, like that of children, young girls, or women. With one voice, physicians, poets, and philosophers all urged greater preoccupation with and attention to self. The figure of the invalid that emerges from this convergence reveals the intensity with which coenaesthetic preoccupations were to obsess the leisured class in the nineteenth century. At the seaside holiday, even more than in the humidity of the spas, detailed behavioural patterns were codified as part of the quest for well-being. Invalids learn to savour the pleasant sensations provided by the smooth functioning of their bodies: good circulation, refreshing sleep, and renewed appetite. Coenaesthetic attention to oneself stimulated individuals to write about themselves, and this practice took over from examination of one's conscience or spiritual diary keeping. The history of diarists would be incomprehensible without reference to these countless accounts of therapeutic sojourns<sup>132</sup> and to travels undertaken to combat spleen, and without taking into account the prolific literature of medical case-studies that reiterate this material. This twofold record was in keeping with both medical topography, then paradoxically in its heyday, and the proliferation of voluminous hygiene manuals obsessed by concern for normative behaviour. Proust and his saga were to emerge as the epitome of this point of view.

A handful of major beliefs determined this means of constructing – or destroying – the self. In keeping with the thoughts of the ideologues, especially Cabanis,<sup>133</sup> a bather who was already an invalid or who was guided by a preoccupation with not becoming one, would endeavour to take 'organic sympathies' into account: he would devote careful attention to the slightest sign from his organs. The importance attached by the physicians



of the day to the idiosyncrasy or irritability<sup>134</sup> peculiar to each individual fostered an evident hyperaesthesia,<sup>135</sup> especially among the ruling classes. This phenomenon, particularly in women, was encouraged by practitioners who were often at a loss therapeutically and so devoted themselves to assembling a forbearing medicine for the soul. This explains the importance of the figure of the young girl, presented as the archetype of a sensitive, frail individual.

By the same token, paying attention to oneself and elaborating individual (and always somewhat neurotic) rituals were suddenly promoted to the level of medical indications. Because of his idiosyncrasy, each individual, asserted Dr Viel (who is but one example), has his own way of responding to the demands of sea bathing and to breathing sea air.<sup>136</sup> Each individual, decreed Dr Le Coeur, must discover his own way of bathing.<sup>137</sup> Each individual must develop his own style and network of walks.

As a result of this careful, continuous attention, which corresponds to the sharpness of the clinician's gaze, a collaboration developed between the invalid and the practitioner. The frequent practice of questioning the patient was one of the high points in this indispensable alliance: this oral examination determined the first prescriptions, and launched a continuous back-and-forth movement between confession, description, and the progressive refinement of the treatment. The precision with which Dr Bertrand prescribed walks<sup>138</sup> and Dr Le Coeur's invention of 'fractional bathing'<sup>139</sup> with strictly timed rhythms constitute striking examples of the growing complexity of individual practices.

This strategy results in an obsessional self-centred arithmetic not unlike that aroused by close attention to sensual pleasure. Just as others count their orgasms, the invalid notes the number of bathing sessions and even the successive immersions in order to ascertain that he is effectively carrying out the prescription. Female bathers vie with one another and compare their scores, just as Flaubert<sup>140</sup> and his friends do their exploits in brothels. The seaside holiday was evolving into a contest, a form of competition.

Stays at the seaside have engendered an inexhaustible literature of medical case-studies, a genre inaugurated by Frewin and Russell and pursued in Germany by the indefatigable Vogel. In Roman Catholic France, this genre was modelled on the recounting of a miracle; there, bathing sessions were counted with the same exactitude as rosaries and novenas. In July 1826, for example,

Dr Bertrand observed that the condition of a 13-year-old child suffering from 'mesenteritis' improved upon his forty-eighth sea bathe. The following year, he was cured after the hundred-and-eighth session.<sup>141</sup> 'In general', wrote Dr Viel, 'bathers are proud and happy when they can present a great number of bathing sessions to their account, and when they can say, my season numbered thirty, forty sessions.' 'People forget about differences in temperament and states of health and have but one aim, that of being the first to reach such-and-such a number of bathing sessions.' This could prove dangerous, especially in young girls, whom it was necessary to 'tone up' without making them irritable.<sup>142</sup>

It would take too long to follow the series of invalids presented in the literature through their cures, as they are so numerous. For seventeen years at Margate, Dr Buchan divided his attention between his own internal organs and the clinical observation of his patients. Richard Smollett, another physician, devoted the account of his travels<sup>143</sup> to describing the vicissitudes of his organism and to detailing the tactics he used to cure his ailing lungs. For Boulogne, where he bathed every day in 1763, he described his favourite bathing spots. When he settled in Nice, he drew up a climatic table for the place, and analysed the concomitant variations in his condition. At the end of his stay, he made a conscientious assessment, endeavouring to calculate the improvement in his health, as the authors of spiritual diaries used to do regarding the progress of their souls. Accounts of these health-oriented holidays weighed the effects of time, and accompanied the rising and waning of hope. They were the forerunners of the broader approach that would be used by Amiel and the great diarists of the following century, obsessed by the need to keep a statistical account of their withering away through anxious coenaesthetic attention. This kind of book seems to have found avid readers. Smollett, for instance, contributed largely to popularizing the seaside holiday at Nice among his countrymen. The English invalid was a close cousin of the traveller haunted by spleen, and he undertook an indefatigable, though somewhat disillusioned, quest for the miraculously salutary cure. Before putting various climates to the test himself, he would listen to the sententious advice of his friends, anxiously question travellers, and go over medical topographies again and again. The invalid knew he must analyse himself endlessly if he hoped to achieve his own recovery.

The frail invalid's cautious life-style stood in sharp contrast to the prodigal life of the gentleman hunter, passionately fond

of horseback riding and rural sports: his greatest pleasure was to plunge unrestrainedly into the virile, often brutal and hard-drinking sociability of the English aristocracy of that time. A tension sometimes developed between the two models. In this respect the discomfort of John Byng, Earl of Torrington, is revealing. In August 1782 he settled in with his family at the royal resort of Weymouth. The dashing baronet did try to adapt to the rhythm of the cure-taker's life; for a few days, he managed to establish a stable timetable, which he presented sketchily: 'My life now begins to be arranged in a regular way: I rise at six o'clock, buy fish, read newspapers, walk the beach, visit my horse; at nine o'clock return to breakfast; ride at ten, dine at four; in the evening walk beach again till the rooms begin, cards till ten o'clock; light supper, bed.'<sup>144</sup> But the main thing for him remained bodily exercise. He was very forthright about liking not the sun on the sand, but rather the sea air that whets the appetite, the salty contact of the sea-breeze on his skin, the feeling of tiredness early in the morning before breakfast, the rough horse rides on the strand, and the fresh fish he bought from fishermen on the beach after testing their viscous consistency. Torrington hated the social life of the resort, and avidly devoured all these sensations. Using a complex emotional strategy, he tried to adapt the landed aristocrat's joy of living and the pleasures of the antiquary and the aesthete to the beach. He enjoyed taking a solitary walk, riding to visit monuments in ruins, or contemplating the seascape; he drank thermal spring waters and compared their tastes. After a few days, aggravated by the feeble virility and snobbery of the resort, he left his family in order to broaden the range of his rides in the countryside. The kind of behaviour he adopted in 1782 differs both from the classical voyage and from philosophical travel. It was to become widespread when war with France once again disrupted the grand tour and compelled would-be travellers to discover thoroughly the wild beauty of their islands.

The most fascinating text I had occasion to read in the course of my research remains, however, the *Journal Kept on the Isle of Man Relating the Weather, the Winds and the Daily Happenings Occurring for over Eleven Months*,<sup>145</sup> the account of a visit made by Richard Townley, Esquire, in the first year of the French Revolution. The author, an invalid belonging to the leisured class, had a weak chest, and a spasmodic cough was spoiling his existence. Luckily, a long cure at Boulogne had virtually restored his health when he settled in Douglas on the

Isle of Man on 9 May 1789. In previous years, driven by the desire to improve his condition, he had stayed in the Netherlands, in French-speaking Flanders, and in Picardy. At Boulogne, he had kept a diary that he could compare with the one he undertook to write at Douglas. He stayed there with his 'good spouse', but his schedule, to which he was strictly faithful, compelled him to behave as though he were alone. Townley was of a religious disposition; he frequently attended the Anglican church, whose comfort and congregation he enjoyed, mingling there every week with 'decent, smart, well-dressed people'.<sup>146</sup> His only regret was the lack of fresh air during the services.

In the spirit of physico-theology, Townley referred to the psalms in order to sing the Creator's praises through the spectacle of nature. He was well acquainted with the English poets of the beginning of the century, especially Pope, Gray, and Thomson. He worshipped Virgil's work, which haunted him. These authors, and of course Shakespeare and Milton, shape the network of his references, and guide the view he takes of nature on the Isle of Man: he was moved alternately by its sublime beauty and its gay charm. Townley's way of life was that of a man who defined himself as 'a lover of exercise and rural sports'. His diary records both the variations in the weather and the vicissitudes of his condition, and he scrupulously relates the exercises that resulted from this twofold series of observations.

The weather is actually the main character in the book and the one that determines events. The author pays the foremost attention to the quality of the air and the wind, endeavouring every day to define them with the greatest possible accuracy through their effects on his senses and his soul. Townley, for whom the wind could be 'pleasant', 'soft', 'balmy', but also 'harsh' or 'unpleasant', constantly sought a cooling breeze. He was most fond of the delicate sea-breeze that came in with the tide. Mists and fog are described from a similar psychological perspective. By contrast, the author does not dwell on the precipitation or its quality; he merely reports whether it is raining or not. An 'awful' storm, which he renders in artistic terms showing Thomson's influence, does, however, manage to merit a few lines. Townley did not like the heat, and he feared the bright glare of the summer sun on the sand. He was apparently little bothered by it during the eleven months of his stay. On the other hand, he praised the vivifying, invigorating warmth of the winter and spring sun, which he called a fountain of beauty.

Townley also observed the state of the sea, whose calm was what he appreciated most. The rising tide 'with its soft murmur', often accompanied by a cool breeze from the high sea, was for him the most delightful moment of the day. He also loved the sea when it was covered with boats, a scene he enjoyed on the return of the herring fishing fleets. When writing about storms, he spoke essentially of their pathos and the imminence of shipwrecks which would darken his sleepless nights.

The invalid does not describe equally the different parts of the day. With the exception of a single hymn to the serenity of the evening, he speaks of little else besides the morning. This is when the observation of the weather leads him to define the day's forecast. A few scattered remarks about the noises that fill his sleepless nights may serve to start the outline of the day. Townley is particularly sensitive then to the distant echo of the sea and the hammering of rain on the roof.

Townley constructed a strictly regulated life-style for himself. Though he never bathed, he was glad to observe that the fashion for bathing was on the rise on the Isle of Man that year. On the other hand, he juggled lovingly with an extensive range of excursions, each of which had a distinct identity. His walks generally lasted two hours. 'I took a breath of morning air' or 'I went for a morning walk' are the words that often begin the account of his day. His aim on these outings was 'to meet the freshness of the morning breeze, brought to the sandy shore by the approaching tide'.<sup>147</sup> A satisfying walk was for him a feast for the senses. On the morning of 4 August 1789, for instance, after climbing up a hill, he noted, 'I very much enjoyed the freshness of the morning breeze, and the shining prospect of a peaceful sea. Afterwards varied the scene, by taking a walk of two or three miles, up into the country.'<sup>148</sup>

Sometimes, he would content himself with a short walk<sup>149</sup> on the gravel beach, very rarely in the streets of Douglas, or more often to the end of the pier, from which he could gaze at the sea. On occasion, when he was feeling sprightly, he would scramble up the rocks. In fine weather, he would set out on one of the long outings that made him completely happy. Three times during the year, he organized a party with some friends, but this did not seem to please him as much.

The invalid's personality can be defined by the network of his favourite walks, always carefully indicated in a few words. Their destinations, however, are diverse, as primary importance is attached to variety. In most cases, Townley would go to one of

the beaches whose appearance he described; he would specify whether it was sandy or gravelled, with a rocky or steep coast. He alternated among the various kinds of shores, but seems to have had a special penchant for walks 'across the sands' or 'pleasant strolls around the beach'. He noted one day that some of the grottoes on the shore offered comfortable hideaways to lovers on the island; the only note of eroticism he finds is suggested by the figures of Dido and Aeneas. In his writing, the Virgilian image of the grotto emerges as the archetype of privacy and seclusion.<sup>150</sup>

Townley also liked walking around the harbour and through the fish market. He enjoyed watching the mail-boat, the Liverpool packet-boat, the colliers, and the few sloops belonging to gentlemen. During the herring season, he marvelled at the return of the fishing fleet, despite the olfactory discomfort he suffered in the vicinity of the drying nets. When climbing up the hills, Townley would admire the broad seascape, and especially the ample panorama of the bay of Douglas. The infinite expanse of the waves was apparently still repugnant to him, but he liked to gaze at the 'horrible' or 'romantic rocks', and in this respect, he reflects the contemporary impact of picturesque values. Nevertheless, whenever he could, he returned home through the Arcadian scenery of a pleasant inland valley. He was attracted by 'Druidic' and Danish ruins, like any good antiquary in 1789. On 11 June he undertook a journey by land and by sea, to one of the little islands off the Isle of Man coast. Moreover, he refused to leave the main island before having made a complete visit of it. In short, his behaviour fits the classical pattern of a Robinson Crusoe-like adventure: the wish to become master of the land by meticulously exploring its entire circumference.

All that remains to be examined are the means by which he evaluates his country walks. In keeping with sensualist philosophy, what he seeks above all are things 'very pleasing to [his] senses' and those which stimulate his appetite. To this end, he focuses his attention on 'the impression granted by the atmosphere' and on the effects of the wind on his breathing. Early in the morning, his habit is to open his windows; he sniffs the scent of flowers, which he believes attests to the quality of the air. As was seen above, what he appreciates most in all things is freshness and the sensations by which it is implied. He likes to listen to the murmur of the incoming tide. In winter, he listens from his bed to 'the tide receding from the rough, pebbly shore, near the pier-head'.<sup>151</sup> He recalls 'the murmuring dying

away gradually, till the percussions became so very languid, that sound was scarcely distinguishable from silence'. Then he feels nostalgic for the pleasant sensations that had accompanied this soft murmuring in the previous summer.

Like most cultured tourists,<sup>152</sup> Townley took a great interest in marine plants and sea-birds. As winter approached, he would rise very early in the morning in order to go to the end of the pier to listen to the 'favourite' bird whose song he had identified. He even observed insects and reptiles occasionally. Only the cormorant was revolting to him, because Milton had made it a winged creature of Hell.

Once the cycle of the seasons is complete, the book concludes with an overall evaluation of the island's salubrity. This chapter is supported by a demographic study, considered indispensable in this kind of work. There, as at Boulogne, Townley insisted on carrying out his own investigation in the archives and in the small romantic cemeteries where he deciphered the epitaphs. This traveller concludes in the usual manner:

No place can afford better natural conveniences, for sea bathing, than this island; having so many charming bays, and where the water is so pure, so pellucid, and so free from every kind of sullage, and the shores so safe, so comfortable, and devoid of every entanglement; affording so many snug little recesses or creeks, for dipping in; where the water will be found in a quiescent state; even when there happens to be a pretty strong breeze at sea.<sup>153</sup>

It would be absurd to claim that the sea, unlike the mountains, was not appreciated in the West during the 1780s, were it not for the fact that such assertions were made only recently by specialists who were obsessed by a single type of text and whose focus was primarily visual. In actual fact, a prolific literature including medical case-studies, travel accounts, and descriptions of cure stays, abundant correspondence, and constant word-of-mouth publicity from the period all testify to the intense appeal of the seaside. Through the accumulation of such accounts, an emotional strategy is constructed, and an unprecedented manner of enjoying the sea and the beach emerges and begins to spread. Already at that time, this new interest was making its way discreetly at Boulogne, Ostend, Scheveningen, and Doberan along the Continental coasts.

This means of appreciating the sea-shore admittedly owes a great deal to Thomson, to a rereading of Virgil that his works inspire, and to Macpherson. It assumes a sensual commitment

of the diarist's entire being and close attention to emanations, to imperceptible sounds, and to the slightest whiff of breeze. This is something completely different from the wish to 'see the sea' that stirred members of the French aristocracy, assiduous viewers of salon seascapes.

Seventy years before Michelet's stay at Saint-Georges-de-Didonne, Townley, from his retreat at the water's edge, was attuned to the soft murmuring or the roaring of nocturnal waves; in the course of his innumerable walks on the sand, he, too, intently observed the colour of the seaweed, the sea-birds' songs, and the fish. Like Michelet later, he was anguished by the thought of the perils of the sea, and was moved by the occurrence of shipwrecks. Yet he did not have a Romantic appreciation of the beach. He remained faithful to providentialism, and sang the praises of the Creator, and he viewed nature with the eyes of a classical poet. His account is almost totally lacking in the scientific considerations that mark the maritime works of Michelet and Victor Hugo. Above all, his book respects the neo-Hippocratic correspondence that was developing between weather and health. From this point of view, Townley's real achievement consists in transforming medical injunctions into a life-style full of obscure joys.

On the sea-shore a model of self-care was developing that succeeded or coincided with that of the rustic retreat. The invalid, who could be compared with the Germanic walker or the traveller tormented by spleen, enjoys this life-style. The great rush towards the sea-shores proclaimed by Cowper<sup>154</sup> cannot be explained solely by the fascination of Brighton's dazzling pleasures. At the edge of the ocean, modern man comes to discover himself and to experience his own limits in the face of the ocean's emptiness and the availability of the shores. In this sublime place, the ego thrills as it confronts the waves or the salty whiff of the sea, or contemplates the solitary vision of the storm. Here, adults fond of horseback riding on the strand could also indulge in regressing, and might find themselves digging in the sand in search of shells, hiding in grottoes, or exploring the boundaries of an insular territory.

At the seaside, sheltered by the therapeutic alibi, a new world of sensations was growing out of the mixed pain and pleasure of sudden immersion. Here, for the benefit of the leisured classes, a new way of experiencing one's body was developing, based on rooting out the desires that disturb it. On the shores of the ocean, visitors try to allay the anxieties aroused by their loss

of vigour and the etiolation, pollution, and immorality typical of urban life. Yet this groping quest for harmony between nature and the body paradoxically leaves no place for hedonism. The sea makes it easier to renounce sensual pleasures; the life-style that emerges along the sea-shore is also part of a process of emphasis on health that accompanies the refining of the way individuals pay attention to themselves.

## 4

## *Penetrating the World's Enigmas*

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By the middle of the eighteenth century, the shore no longer appeared solely as something utilitarian, a remedy whereby users hoped to allay their anxiety. It also became reconnected with an ancient role, and once more became a focal point for the world's enigmas. People came there to wonder about the earth's past and the origins of life. There, more than anywhere else, it was possible to discover the multitude of temporal rhythms, to sense the duration of geological time, and to observe the indecisiveness of biological borderlines, the vagueness of different kingdoms, and the surprising transitions that linked them to one another. The proximity of zoophytes and fossils thousands of years old demonstrated the intense meaning that emanated from a long-abandoned place.

A series of ambulatory quests were encouraged by the *libido sciendi*. In their own way, they demonstrated the growing appeal of the shore. These experiences generally corresponded to a great number of ambitions, combining aesthetic enjoyment, the pleasure of scientific observation, and the satisfaction provided by physical effort. Along the beaches of Western Europe, various ways of appreciating the shore, forms of contemplation, and habits sprung up in this way, and formed a system. The shore took shape as the laboratory for a cluster of practices whose coherence has long since been forgotten.

### THE ARCHIVES OF THE EARTH

Even more than to mountain tops or hillsides, people came to the coasts to browse in the archives of the Earth. Several factors