

V

BOHEMIA



Lee Miller, *Le Déjeuner sur L'Herbe*, 1937. A group of Surrealist friends on a picnic in Mougins, France: on the left, Nusch and Paul Eluard; on the right, from top, Roland Penrose, Man Ray and Ady Fidelin.

1.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a new group of people started to attract notice in western Europe and the United States. They often dressed simply; they lived in the cheaper parts of town; they read a lot; they seemed not to care much about money; they were frequently of melancholic temperament; their allegiances were to art and emotion rather than to business and material success; they sometimes had unconventional sexual lives and some of the women wore their hair short before it was the fashion. They came to be collectively described as "bohemian." Traditionally used to refer to Gypsies (because they were mistakenly thought to have originated in central Europe), the word evolved—especially following the success of *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* (1851), Henri Murger's account of life in the garrets and cafés of Paris—to encompass a wider range of people who did not, for one reason or another, fit into the bourgeois conception of respectability.

From the outset, bohemia was a democratic church. Early reporters suggested that bohemians could be found in every social class, age group and profession: they were men and women, rich and poor, poets and lawyers, scientists and the unemployed. Arthur Ransome, in *Bohemia in London* (1907), observed, "Bohemia can be anywhere: it is not a place but an attitude of mind." There have been bohemian enclaves in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Venice Beach, California; bohemians living in grand houses with servants and in huts on the shores of quiet lakes; outwardly conventional bohemians and ones with a taste for bathing naked by moonlight. One can wind the label around a number of different artistic and social phenomena of the last two hundred years, from romanticism to surrealism, from the Beatniks to the Punks, from the Situationists to the Kibbutzniks, and still not break a thread that binds together something important.

In London in 1929, the bohemian poet Brian Howard invited his

friends to a party. The invitation card bore a list of his likes and dislikes—which, for all their peculiarly early-twentieth-century Englishness, impart some flavour of the characteristic inclinations and fears that bohemians have manifested throughout their history.

What Brian Howard and his fellow bohemians disliked might more succinctly have been summed up in a single term: “the bourgeoisie.” Having come to prominence during the same historical period—in France, after the fall of Napoleon, in 1815—bohemians

J'Accuse

J'Adore

Ladies and Gentlemen	Men and Women
Public Schools	Nietzsche
Debutantes	Picasso
Sadist devotees of blood-sports	Kokoschka
“Eligible bachelors”	Jazz
Missionaries	Acrobats
People who worry they can't meet so-and-so because they've got “a bad reputation”	The Mediterranean
The young men one meets at boring parties in stuck-up moronic country houses	D. H. Lawrence Havelock Ellis
	The sort of people who know they haven't got immortal souls; and are not anticipating—after death—any rubbishy reunion, apotheosis or ANYTHING

nursed a ferocious disdain for almost everything the bourgeois stood for, and took particular pride in heaping extravagant insults on them.

“Hatred of the bourgeois is the beginning of wisdom,” wrote Gustave Flaubert. It was a standard utterance for any self-respecting mid-nineteenth-century French writer, such contempt being as much a matter of professional honour as having an affair with an actress or taking a trip to the Orient. Flaubert accused the bourgeois of extreme prudery and materialism, of being at once cynical and sentimental, of immersing themselves in trivia—so that they might spend an age, for example, debating whether melon was a vegetable or a fruit and whether it should be eaten as a starter (in the French manner) or a dessert (the English way). Stendhal, no fonder of this class, complained, “The conversation of the true bourgeois about men and life, which is no more than a collection of ugly details, brings on a profound attack of spleen when I am obliged to listen to it for any length of time.”

What ultimately separated bohemia from the bourgeoisie, however, was not the choice of conversational topics or desserts, but the answer to the questions of who deserved high status and why. From the outset, real bohemians were those who, whether they owned a mansion or squatted in a garret, set themselves up as saboteurs of the economic meritocracy to which the early nineteenth century gave birth.

2.

At the heart of the conflict lay a contrasting assessment of the value of worldly achievement, on the one hand, and sensitivity, on the other. Whereas the bourgeoisie accorded status on the basis of commercial success and public reputation, for bohemians what mattered above all else, and certainly above the ability to pay for an elegant

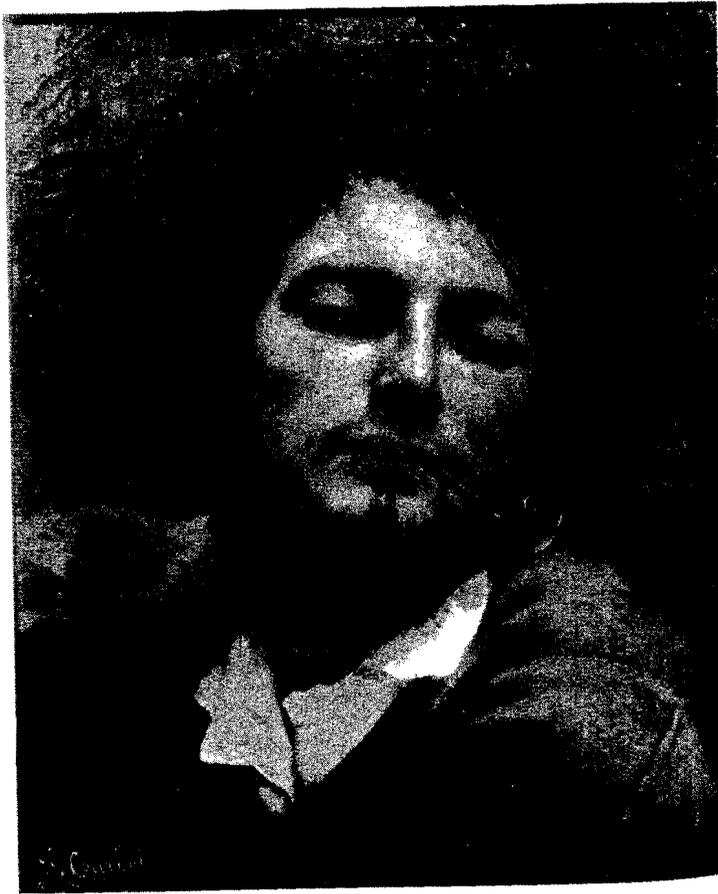
home or chic clothes, was openness to the wider world and devotion, whether on the creative or the appreciative end, to the primary repository of feeling that was art. The martyrs of the bohemian value system were those who sacrificed the security of a regular job and the esteem of society for the opportunity to write, paint or make music, to dedicate themselves to travel or to spend time with their friends and families. They might, because of their commitments, lack the accoutrements, and perhaps even the manners, of outward decency, yet they were still, the bohemians themselves averred, deserving of the highest honour for their ethical good sense and their powers of receptivity and expression.

Many bohemians were prepared to suffer or even starve for their impractical beliefs. Nineteenth-century portraits often depicted them slouched on chairs in the dirty attic rooms of apartment blocks, their countenance gaunt and exhausted. There might be a faraway glint in their eyes and a skull on their bookshelves, and the look on their face might be such as to frighten a factory foreman or office manager—a sign that the bohemian soul was not taken up by the shallow, utilitarian concerns that so obsessed the bourgeoisie.

Such destitution was, for a bohemian, vastly to be preferred to the horror of wasting his life on a job he despised. Charles Baudelaire declared that all occupations were soul-destroying, save for writing poetry and—even less plausibly—being a “warrior.” When Marcel Duchamp visited New York in 1915, he described Greenwich Village as a “true Bohemia” because the place was, he said, “full of people doing *nothing*.” Half a century later, Jack Kerouac, addressing an audience in a West Coast piano bar, would rail against “the commuters with their tight collars obliged to catch the 5:48 a.m. train at Millbrae or San Carlos to get to work in San Francisco,” and praise in their stead the free spirits, bums, poets, beats and artists who slept



Formerly attributed to Théodore Géricault, now unknown,
Portrait of an Artist in His Studio, circa 1820



Gustave Courbet, Portrait of the Artist (Man with a Pipe), circa 1848–1849

late and burned their work clothes so as to become “sons of the road and watch the freight trains pass, take in the immensity of the sky and feel the weight of ancestral America.”

If bohemians did not argue that there was any *theoretical* incompatibility between having an intense life of the mind and owning a profitable law firm or factory, most implied that there might be a *practical* conflict. In the preface to *On Love* (1822), Stendhal explained that while he had attempted to write clearly and for a broad audience, he could not supply “hearing to the deaf nor sight to the blind.” “So people with money and coarse pursuits, who have made a 100,000 francs in the year before they open this book, had better close it again quickly, particularly if they are bankers, manufacturers, or respectable industrialists . . . The active, hardworking, eminently respectable and positive life of a privy councillor, a textile manufacturer or a clever banker reaps its reward in wealth but not in tender sensations. Little by little the hearts of these gentlemen ossify. People who pay 2,000 workmen at the end of every week do not *waste their time* like this; their minds are always bent on useful and positive things.” Stendhal felt his book would be best appreciated by that rare reader who had a taste for indolence, liked daydreaming, welcomed the emotions sparked by a performance of one of Mozart’s operas and could be catapulted into hours of bittersweet musing after catching just one glimpse of a beautiful face in a crowded street.

The idea that money and workaday occupations must corrupt the soul—or destroy the capacity for, in Stendhal’s words, “tender sensations”—has reverberated down the history of bohemia. It can, for example, be heard no less clearly, nearly a century and a half after Stendhal’s lament, in Charles Bukowski’s poem “Something for the Touts, the Nuns, the Grocery Clerks and You” (1965), which evokes the lives of wealthy businessmen:

with bad breath and big feet, men
 who look like frogs, hyenas, men who walk
 as if melody had never been invented, men
 who think it is intelligent to hire and fire and
 profit, men with expensive wives they possess
 like sixty acres of ground to be drilled
 or shown-off or to be walled away from
 the incompetent . . .
 . . . men who stand in front of
 windows thirty feet wide and see nothing,
 men with luxury yachts who can sail around
 the world and yet never get out of their vest
 pockets, men like snails, men like eels, men
 like slugs, and not as good.

Just as money cannot purchase honour within the bohemian
 value system, neither can possessions command it: seen through
 bohemian eyes, yachts and mansions are merely symbols of arro-
 gance and frivolity. Bohemian status is more likely to be earned
 through an inspired conversational style or authorship of an intelli-
 gent, heartfelt volume of verse.

In July 1845, Henry Thoreau, one of the most renowned bohe-
 mians of nineteenth-century America, moved into a cabin he had
 built with his own hands on the northern shore of Walden Pond,
 near the town of Concord, Massachusetts. It was his ambition to em-
 bark on an outwardly simple but inwardly rich existence, and in the
 process demonstrate to the bourgeoisie that it was possible to com-
 bine a life of material scarcity with one of psychological fulfilment.
 Proving just how inexpensive subsistence could be once one ceased
 to worry about impressing others, Thoreau provided a break-
 down of the minimal costs he had incurred in building his new
 home:

Boards	\$8.03 1/2 (mostly shanty boards)
Refuse shingles for roof and sides	4.00
Laths	1.25
Two second-hand windows with glass	2.43
One thousand old bricks	4.00
Two casks of lime	2.40 (That was high.)
Hair	0.31 (More than I needed.)
Mantle-tree iron	0.15
Nails	3.90
Hinges and screws	0.14
Latch	0.10
Chalk	0.01
Transportation	1.40 (I carried a good part on my back.)
In all	\$28.12 1/2

“Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life,
 are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the eleva-
 tion of mankind,” wrote Thoreau. Then, in a bid to break, or upend,
 society’s link between owning things and being honourable, he
 added, “Man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can do
 without.”

With *Walden*, Thoreau tried to reconfigure our sense of what a
 lack of means might indicate about a person. It was not, as the bour-
 geois perspective tended more or less subtly to suggest, always a sign
 that one was a loser at the game of life; instead, it might simply sig-
 nify that one had opted to focus one’s energies on activities other
 than making money, thereby enriching one’s life in other ways. Dis-
 satisfied with the word *poverty* as a descriptor for his own condition,
 Thoreau preferred *simplicity*, which he felt conveyed a consciously

WALDEN;
OR,
LIFE IN THE WOODS.

By HENRY D. THOREAU,
AUTHOR OF "A WEEK ON THE CONCORD AND MERRIMACK RIVERS."



I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up. — Page 22.

BOSTON:
TICKNOR AND FIELDS.
M DCCC LIII.

Title page of the first edition of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*, 1854

chosen, rather than an imposed, material situation. After all, he reminded the merchants of Boston, people no less noble than the "Chinese, Hindoo, Persian and Greek philosophers" had once pursued, of their own accord, a simple way of life. The tenor of the message that Thoreau took away from his stay on the shores of Walden Pond, and later delivered to the burgeoning industrialised society of the United States, would have been familiar to almost every bohemian who came before and after him. As he put it, "Money is not required to buy one necessary of the soul."

3.

One acute insight that may be attributed to bohemia is that one's ability to maintain confidence in a way of life at odds with the mainstream culture will be greatly dependent on the operative value system of one's immediate environment, on the kinds of people one mixes with socially and on what one reads and listens to.

Most bohemians recognise that their peace of mind may be only too easily shattered, and their commitments brazenly challenged, by conversing for a few minutes with an acquaintance who feels, even if he or she does not say so explicitly, that money and a public profile are ultimately estimable. The same disruption may result from reading a newspaper or magazine that, by reporting exclusively on the feats of bourgeois success stories, insidiously undermines the worth of any alternative ambitions.

Bohemians in consequence tend to take particular care in choosing their companions. Some attempt, like Thoreau, to escape the corrupting influence of society altogether. Others assiduously create communities of congenial spirits, refusing to indulge in the kind of socialising that the rest of us so readily fall into with whoever happens to be on hand—usually an assortment of characters with whom we are thrown together at school, in our families or at work.



The photographer Lee Miller and her friend the model Tanja Ramm, in Miller's studio in Montparnasse, Paris, 1931

In the world's large cities, bohemians are apt to cluster in the same districts to ensure that their daily contacts will be with genuine friends rather than with status-concerned acquaintances. The history of bohemia is punctuated by the names of places rendered famous by the friendships formed there: Montparnasse, Bloomsbury, Chelsea, Greenwich Village, Venice Beach.

4.

Bohemia has also carefully redefined its understanding of the word *failure*.

In the bourgeois lexicon, any financial or critical failure in business or the arts rises to the level of a significant indictment of an individual's character, given the bourgeoisie's ideological assumption that society is essentially fair in distributing its rewards. Bohemians, however, refute this punitive interpretation of outward failure by pointing out how often the world is governed by idiocy and prejudice. Human nature being what it is, they reason, those who succeed in society will rarely be the wisest or the best; rather, they will be the ones who are able to pander most effectively to the flawed values of their audiences. There may indeed, bohemians hint, be no more damning marker of a person's ethical and imaginative limitations than a capacity for commercial success.

Such a perspective explains the interest and respect accorded by many nineteenth-century bohemians to political, artistic and literary figures whose lives could only have been described as failures according to the bourgeois scale of values. The most celebrated of these was the minor English poet Thomas Chatterton, who committed suicide in 1770, at the age of eighteen, worn down by poverty and the rejection of his work by his patrons. Alfred de Vigny's play *Chatterton*, first performed in Paris in 1835, turned the young poet into a mouthpiece for all the values that bohemia held dear. The play

championed personal inspiration over tradition, kindness over financial advantage, intensity and madness over rationality and utilitarianism. De Vigny's message was that talented, delicate men of letters were all but fated to be driven to despair and even suicide by the crass tastes of their bourgeois public.

The myth of the misunderstood artist—the outsider who is nevertheless, despite critical failure, superior to the insider—reflected or shaped the lives of many of the greatest heroes of bohemia. Gérard de Nerval; a poet more talented than Chatterton but no happier, hanged himself in 1855, destitute and mad at forty-seven. Summing up the history of his generation of sensitive brethren, whose talents and temperaments had made them ill suited to the rigours of the bourgeois world, de Nerval wrote: "Ambition was not of our age . . . and the greedy race for position and honours drove us away from spheres of political activity. There remained to us only the poet's ivory tower where we mounted ever higher to isolate ourselves from the crowd. In those high altitudes we breathed at last the pure air of solitude; we drank forgetfulness in the golden cup of legend; we were drunk with poetry and love."

After his death in 1849, at the age of forty, Edgar Allan Poe was likewise absorbed into the bohemian legend of noble failure. In an essay on Poe's life and works, Charles Baudelaire characterised his fate as typical of that awaiting any gifted man compelled to dwell among brutes. Baudelaire cursed the tenor of public opinion in democratic societies such as the United States, warning that no charity or indulgence could be expected from that quarter. Indeed, he asserted, poets "cannot hope to fit in, either in a democratic or an aristocratic society, in a republic or an absolute monarchy. . . . Illustrious unfortunates, [they are] born to suffer the harsh apprenticeship of genius amidst the crowd of mediocre souls."

The moral that Baudelaire drew from Poe's life would become a

recurring theme in his poetry, finding its most crystalline expression in the sad flappings of his famous seabird:

The Albatross

Often, to pass the time, sailors
Will catch albatrosses, those great seabirds
Which nonchalantly chaperone ships
Across bitter gulfs.

Hardly have they set them down on the deck
Than these monarchs of the sky, awkward and ashamed,
Piteously let their great white wings
Drag at their sides like pairs of unshipped oars.

How gauche and weak becomes this winged traveller!
How weak and awkward, even comical
He who was but lately so adroit!
One deckhand teases his beak with a branding iron,
Another mimics, by limping, the cripple that once flew!

The Poet is like this sovereign of the clouds,
Riding the storm above the marksman's range;
In exile on earth, hooted and jeered at,
He cannot walk because of his great wings.

In emphasising the dignity and superiority of the rejected ones, bohemia offered a secular counterpart to the Christian account of Jesus' ostracism and crucifixion. Like the Christian pilgrim, the bohemian poet must endure torture at the hands of the uncomprehending masses, but here, just as in the Christian story, such neglect

is in itself evidence of the righteousness of the neglected party. Not being understood may be taken as a sign that there is much in one to understand. It is because of his massive wings that the poet cannot walk.

5.

The bohemian belief in the inferiority of the group and its traditions had its corollary in a conviction as to the superiority of the individual and the virtue of splitting off from convention.

In 1850, Gérard de Nerval ceased conforming to existing ideas of suitable pets and bought himself a live lobster, which he led around the Jardin du Luxembourg at the end of a blue ribbon. "Why should a lobster be any more ridiculous than a dog," he wondered, "or any other animal that one chooses to take for a walk? I have a liking for lobsters. They are peaceful, serious creatures. They know the secrets of the sea, they don't bark, and they don't gnaw upon one's monadic privacy the way dogs do. Goethe had an aversion to dogs, and he wasn't mad."

Being a great and original artist became synonymous with surprising or, even better, offending the bourgeoisie. On completing *Salammbô* (1862), Flaubert declared that he had written his Carthaginian novel in order to "(1) annoy the bourgeois, (2) unnerve and shock sensitive people, (3) irritate the archaeologists, (4) seem unintelligible to the ladies and (5) earn myself a reputation as a ped-erast and a cannibal."

In the 1850s, a group of bohemian students in Paris organized a club that they hoped would "offend judges and pharmacists." Having settled on what seemed to them the most effective way of achieving that end, they named themselves the Suicide Club and issued a manifesto avowing that all members would be dead by their own hand by

the age of thirty—or before they went bald, whichever came first. Only one actual suicide was reported among the membership, but the club was deemed a success nevertheless after an outraged politician in the Chamber of Deputies delivered a speech branding it an "immoral and illegal monstrosity."

Flaubert's prime ambition for *Salammbô* was scarcely unique: bohemians have always seen it as their special duty to irritate the respectable classes. In New York in 1917, a group of artists who had decided to secede from bourgeois life called for the creation of a "free and independent republic of Greenwich Village," dedicated to art, love, beauty and cigarettes. To mark the birth of their breakaway state, the artists climbed to the top of the Washington Square Arch, drank whiskey, fired cap pistols and read out their own declaration of independence, which consisted simply of the word *whereas*, uttered countless times in rapid succession. Recalling the event many years later, one citizen of the new republic (which lasted until dawn) remarked, "We were radicals devoted to anything—so long as it was taboo in the Mid-West."

Unfortunately for bohemians, the more they have shocked the bourgeoisie, the less willing or able has been the bourgeoisie to be shocked—which has led to an escalating cycle of increasingly extreme antics, as the history of twentieth-century bohemian movements testifies.

"Intelligent man is now a standard type," proposed Dada's founder, Tristan Tzara, in Zurich in 1915, "but the thing we are short of is the *idiotic*. Dada is using all its strength to establish the idiotic everywhere." Thus inspired, Dadaists took to entering smart Zurich restaurants and shouting "Dada" at bourgeois diners. The Dada artist Marcel Duchamp painted a moustache on a copy of the *Mona Lisa* and entitled his work *L.H.O.O.Q.* (*Elle a chaud au cul*, or "She has a hot arse").



BOHEMIA

For his part, the Dada poet Hugo Ball pioneered a meaningless, multilingual poetry and recited the first example, "Karawane," in a Zurich nightclub, dressed in a suit made out of shiny blue cardboard, with a witch's hat on his head.

Looking back at Dada's goals, the onetime Dadaist painter Hans

KARAWANE

jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla

grossiga m'pfa habla horem

égiga goramen

higo bloiko russula huju

hollaka hollala

anlogo bung

blago bung

blago bung

bosso fataka

u u u

schampa wulla wussa ólobo

hej tatta gôrem

eschige zunbada

wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu

tumba ba- umf

kusagauma

ba - umf

Richter remembered, "We wanted to bring forward a new kind of human being, free from the tyranny of rationality, of banality, of generals, fatherlands, nations, art-dealers, microbes, residence permits and the past. To outrage public opinion was our basic principle."

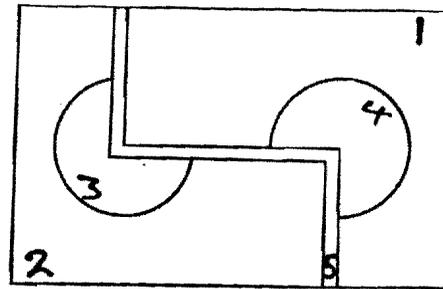
Other groups followed in Dada's footsteps. In 1924, the Surrealists opened the Bureau of Surrealist Enquiries in the rue de Grenelle in Paris. A dress-shop dummy was hung in the window, and members of the public were invited to bring in stories of coincidences and dreams and any new ideas they might have about politics, art or fashion. These were then typed up and tacked on the walls. Antonin Artaud, the director of the bureau, proclaimed, "We need *disturbed* followers far more than we need active followers."

In 1932, no less keen to offend the bourgeoisie, the Italian Futurist Filippo Marinetti published *The Futurist Cookbook*, whose stated purpose was to revolutionise the way Italians ate by weaning them from their nineteenth-century tastes—in particular, their fondness for pasta (the author identified *maccheroni al ragù* and *tagliatelle alla bolognese* as the very epitomes of bourgeois anachronism). But anyone who bought the cookbook hoping for culinary guidance must soon realise that Marinetti was—no less than Gérard de Nerval or Antonin Artaud before him—out to confound expectations. Among the recipes included were

Strawberry Breasts: "A pink plate with two erect feminine breasts made of ricotta dyed pink with Campari and nipples of candied strawberry. Further fresh strawberries under the covering of ricotta make it possible to bite into an ideal multiplication of imaginary breasts."

Aerofood: "Composed of a slice of fennel, an olive and a kumquat, together with a strip of cardboard, on which should be glued, one next to the other, a piece of velvet, a piece of silk, and a piece of sandpaper. The sandpaper is not to be eaten. It is there to be fingered with the right hand while one sucks on the kumquat."

Cubist Vegetable Patch: "1. Little cubes of celery from Verona fried and sprinkled with paprika. 2. Little cubes of fried carrot sprinkled with grated horseradish. 3. Boiled peas. 4. Little pickled onions from Ivrea sprinkled with chopped parsley. 5. Little bars of Fontina cheese. N.B. The cubes must not be larger than one cubic centimetre."



6.

The excesses of bohemia are hardly difficult to discern. It is only a short step from valuing originality and emphasising the nonmaterial aspects of life to feeling that almost anything that could surprise a judge or a pharmacist—from crustacean-walking to strawberry-breast-cooking—must be important.

To cite only one example of excess: so keen have many bohemians been to place spiritual concerns at the forefront of their lives that their indifference to practical affairs has become nearly obsessional. This has on occasion had the paradoxical effect of reducing their existence to an all-consuming struggle merely to survive—leaving them with less time to contemplate matters of the spirit and a greater need to consider problems of the body than even the busiest or most materialistic judge or pharmacist.

In rural Massachusetts, in 1844, a confederacy of utopian-

bohemian artists established a communal farm that they named Fruitlands. They flatly stated that they had no interest in money or in work as an end in itself; they wanted only to grow enough to feed themselves so they could turn their energies to more important pursuits—namely, poetry, painting, nature and romantic love. The founder of the community, Bronson Alcott, announced that the mission of the new farmers was “to *be*, not to *do*.” He and his fellow members subscribed to a set of ambitious ideals characteristic of bohemian communities both before and after theirs: they wore no cotton clothes (for cotton supported the institution of slavery), consumed no animals or dairy products and kept to a peculiarly strict vegetarian diet, eating only those things that grew high up in the air and shunning carrots and potatoes because they pointed down into the ground, rather than aspiring to Heaven in the manner of apples and pears.

Predictably, the community did not last long. The farmers’ reluctance to engage with practicalities forced them, after their first summer at Fruitlands, to wage an urgent battle merely to keep body and soul together—which did not afford them much leisure to read Homer and Petrarch, as they had planned. Emerson, who had met Alcott in Boston a few years before the founding of the farm, recalled of the commune’s members, “Their whole doctrine was spiritual, but they always ended up saying, ‘Could you please send us some more money?’” Just six months after Fruitlands’s high-minded inauguration, the community dispersed in acrimony and despair, adding a new chapter to the familiar bohemian tale of idealism gone sour thanks to an unbending refusal to submit to even minimal bourgeois disciplines.

It would be both senseless and very unusual for anyone to feel anxious over the bourgeois conception of status if this class were truly as misguided and as unimpressive as bohemia is wont to make out. Even granted that many good ideas may be shocking to Mid-

westerners, it by no means follows that everything that shocks them will be outstanding. It is only because judges and pharmacists do most things extremely well that certain other aspects of their behaviour and mentality come to seem, by contrast, so troublesome—and so tempting to dissent from.

7.

Which is in no way to urge universal restraint in this area. Whatever the excesses of the outer wings of bohemia, the movement’s enduring contribution has been to pose a series of well-considered challenges to bourgeois ideology. The bourgeoisie has stood accused of failing to understand the role that wealth should play in a good life; of being too hasty to condemn worldly failure and too slavish in venerating signs of outward success; of placing too much faith in sham notions of propriety; of dogmatically confusing professional qualifications with talent; of neglecting the value of art, sensitivity, playfulness and creativity; and of being overconcerned with order, rules, bureaucracy and timekeeping.

To sum up its significance in the broadest, most comprehensive terms, one might simply suggest that bohemia has legitimised the pursuit of an alternative way of life. It has staked out and defined a subculture in which values that have been consistently underrated or overlooked by the bourgeois mainstream may finally be granted their due authority and prestige.

Like Christianity, for which it has in some sense functioned as an emotional substitute—having first emerged, after all, in the nineteenth century, around the very time when Christianity was beginning to lose its grip on the public imagination—bohemia has articulated a case for a spiritual, as opposed to a material, method of evaluating both oneself and others. Like Christianity’s monasteries and nunneries, bohemia’s garrets, cafés, low-rent districts and coop-

erative businesses have provided a refuge where that part of the population which is uninterested in pursuing the bourgeoisie's rewards—money, possessions, status—may find sustenance and fellowship.

Furthermore, the good standing of a number of bohemians past and present has helped to reassure those in doubt—that is, those made most anxious by the dominant status system—that such eccentricity has a long and occasionally distinguished history, stretching from the poets of nineteenth-century Paris to the light-hearted subversives of the Dada movement to the picnicking Surrealists.

A way of life that might in the wrong hands have seemed wayward and absurd has instead, thanks to the most gifted of the bohemians, come to seem serious and laudable. To the role-models of the lawyer, the entrepreneur and the scientist, bohemia has added those of the poet, the traveller and the essayist. It has proposed that these characters, too, whatever their personal oddities and material shortfalls, may be worthy of an elevated status of their own.

8.

A mature solution to status anxiety may be said to begin with the recognition that status is available from, and awarded by, a variety of different audiences—industrialists, bohemians, families, philosophers—and that our choice among them may be free and willed.

However unpleasant anxieties over status may be, it is difficult to imagine a good life entirely free of them, for the fear of failing and disgracing oneself in the eyes of others is an inevitable consequence of harbouring ambitions, of favouring one set of outcomes over another and of having regard for individuals besides oneself. Status anxiety is the price we pay for acknowledging that there is a public distinction between a successful and an unsuccessful life.

Yet if our need for status is a fixed thing, we nevertheless retain all say over where we will fulfil that need. We are at liberty to ensure that our worries about being disgraced will arise principally in relation to an audience whose methods of judgement we both understand and respect. Status anxiety may be defined as problematic only insofar as it is inspired by values that we uphold because we are terrified and preternaturally obedient; because we have been anaesthetized into believing that they are natural, perhaps even God-given; because those around us are in thrall to them; or because we have grown too imaginatively timid to conceive of alternatives.

Philosophy, art, politics, religion and bohemia have never sought to do away entirely with the status hierarchy; they have attempted, rather, to institute new kinds of hierarchies based on sets of values unrecognised by, and critical of, those of the majority. While maintaining a firm grip on the differences between success and failure, good and bad, shameful and honourable, these five entities have endeavoured to remould our sense of what may rightfully be said to belong under those weighty and dichotomous headings.

In so doing, they have helped to lend legitimacy to those who, in every generation, may be unable or unwilling to comply dutifully with the dominant notions of high status, but who may yet deserve to be categorised under something other than the brutal epithet of "loser" or "nobody." They have provided us with persuasive and consoling reminders that there is more than one way—and more than just the judge's and the pharmacist's way—of succeeding at life.