

Regrets for My Old Dressing Gown

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Why didn't I keep it? It was used to me and I was used to it. It molded all the folds of my body without inhibiting it; I was picturesque and handsome. The other one is stiff, and starchy, makes me look stodgy. There was no need to which its kindness didn't loan itself, for indigence is almost always officious. If a book was covered in dust, one of its panels was there to wipe it off. If thickened ink refused to flow in my quill, it presented its flank. Traced in long black lines, one could see the services it had rendered me. These long lines announce the litterateur, the writer, the man who works. I now have the air of a rich good for nothing. No one knows who I am.

In its shelter I feared neither the clumsiness of a valet, nor my own, neither the explosion of fire nor the spilling of water. I was the absolute master of my old robe. I have become the slave of the new one.

The dragon that guarded the golden fleece was no more worried than I am. Care envelopes me.

The infatuated old man who turns himself over to the whims, to the mercies of a young girl says, from morning to night; where is my good, my old housekeeper? What demon obsessed me the day I chased her away for this one! And then he cries, he sighs.

I don't cry, I don't sigh, but every moment I say: Cursed be he who invented the art of putting a price on common material by tinting it scarlet. Cursed be the precious garment that I revere. Where is my old, my humble, my comfortable rag of common cloth?

My friends, keep your old friends. My friends, fear the touch of wealth. Let my example teach you a lesson. Poverty has its freedoms; opulence has its obstacles.

O Diogenes! How you would laugh if you saw your disciple beneath Aristipius' luxurious mantle! O Aristipius, this luxurious mantle was paid for by many low acts. What a difference between your soft, crawling, effeminate life and the free and firm life of the rag-wearing cynic. I left behind the barrel in which I ruled in order to serve a tyrant.

But that's not all, my friend. Lend an ear to the ravages of luxury, the results of a consistent luxury.

My old robe was one with the other rags that surrounded me. A straw chair, a wooden table, a rug from Bergamo, a wood plank that held up a few books, a few smoky prints without frames, hung by its corners on that tapestry. Between these prints three or four suspended plasters formed, along with my old robe, the most harmonious indigence.

All is now discordant. No more coordination, no more unity, no more beauty.

A new, sterile housekeeper who succeeds to a presbytery, the wife who enters the house of a widower, the minister who replaces a disgraced minister, the Molinist prelate who takes over the diocese of a Jansenist prelate cause no more trouble than the scarlet intruder has caused in my household.

I can bear the sight of a peasant woman without disgust. That piece of simple cloth that covers her head, the hair that sparsely falls across her cheeks, those tattered rags that half cover her, that poor short petticoat that doesn't cover half her legs, her naked feet covered with muck cannot wound me. It is the image of a state I respect; its the ensemble of the of the lack of grace of a necessary and unfortunate condition for which I have pity. But my stomach turns and, despite the perfumed atmosphere that follows her, I distance myself, I turn my gaze away from that courtesan whose coiffure a points d'angleterre, torn sleeves, filthy silk stockings and worn shoes show me the poverty of the day combined with the opulence of the previous evening.

Such would have been my domicile, if the imperious scarlet hadn't set everything to march in unison with it.

I saw the Bergamo cede the wall to which it had so long been attached to the damascene hanging.

Two prints not without merit: The Chute de la Manne dans le Desert by Poussin and Esther devant Assuerus of the same painter; the one shamefully chased away by an old man by Rubens was the sad Esther; The falling manna was dissipated by a Tempest by Vernet.

The straw chair was relegated to the antechamber by a leather chair.

Homer, Virgil, Horace, and Cicero relieved the weak fir bending under their mass and have been closed in in an inlaid armoire, an asylum more worthy of them than of me.

A large mirror took over the mantle of my fireplace.

Those two lovely molds that I owed to Falconet's friendship, and which he repaired himself, were moved away by a crouching Venus. Modern clay broken by antique bronze.

The wooden table was still fighting in the field, sheltered by a mass of pamphlets and papers piled up any which way, and which it appeared would protect it from the injuries that threatened it. One day it met its destiny, and despite my laziness the pamphlets and papers put themselves away in a precious bureau.

Evil instinct of the convenient! Delicate and ruinous tact, sublime taste that changes, moves, builds and overturns; that empties the coffers of the fathers; that leaves daughters without a dowry, the sons without an education; that makes so many beautiful things and great evils. You who substituted in my house the fatal and precious desk for the wooden table: it is you who ruins nations, it is you who will perhaps one day take my effects to the Pont Saint-Michel where will be heard the hoarse voice of a certified auctioneer saying: Twenty louis for a crouching Venus.

The space that remained between the tablet of this desk and the Tempest by Vernet, which is above it, made for a void disagreeable to the eye. This void was filled by a clock. And what a clock! A clock a la geoffrin; a clock whose the gold contrasts with the bronze.



There was a vacant corner next to my window. This corner asked for a writing desk, which it obtained.

Another unpleasant void between the tablet of the writing desk and the lovely head by Rubens was filled by two La Grenées.

Here is a Magdeleine by the same artist; there is a sketch either by Vien or Machy, for I also went in for sketches. And it was thus that the edifying repair of a philosopher transformed itself into the scandalous cabinet of a publican. In addition, I insult national poverty.



All that remains of my original mediocrity is a rug of selvage. I can feel that this pitiful rug doesn't go well with my newfound luxury. But I swore and I swear, like the peasant transferred from his hut to a palace who keeps his sabots, that Denis the philosopher will never walk upon a masterpiece of la Savonnier. When in the morning, covered in my sumptuous scarlet, I enter my office I lower my gaze and I see my old rug of selvage. It reminds me of my beginnings and pride is stopped at the entryway to my heart.

No my friend, no, I have not been corrupted. My door is always open to the needy who address themselves to me; they find me as affable as ever. I listen to them, I give them advice, I assist them, I feel for them. My soul has not been hardened, my head has not gotten too big. My back is good and round, just as before. There's the same honesty, the same sensitivity. My luxury is brand new and the poison has not yet acted. But who knows what will happen with time? What can be expected of he who has forgotten his wife and his daughter, who has run up debts, who has ceased to be a spouse and father and who, instead of depositing a useful sum deep in a faithful coffer...

Oh holy prophet! Raise you hands to the heavens and pray for a friend in peril. Say to God: If you see in your eternal decrees that riches are corrupting the heart of Denis, don't spare the masterpieces he idolizes. Destroy them and return him to his original poverty. And I, on my side, will say to the heavens: Oh God! I resign myself to the prayer of the holy prophet and to your will. I abandon everything to you. Take back everything, everything except the Vernet! It's not the artist, it is you who made it. Respect your own work and that of friendship.

See that lighthouse, see the adjacent tower that rises to the right. See the old tree that the winds have torn. How beautiful that masse is. Above that obscure masse, see the rocks covered in verdure. It is thus that your powerful hand formed them. It is thus that your beneficent hand has carpeted them. See that uneven terrace that descends from the foot of the rocks to the sea. It is the very image of the degradation you have permitted time to exercise on those things of the world that are the most solid. Would your sun have lighted it otherwise? God, if you annihilate that work of art it will be said that you are a jealous God. Have pity on the unfortunates spread out on these banks. Is it not enough for you to have shown them the depths of the abyss? Did you save them only to destroy them? Listen to the prayer of this man who thanks you. Aid in the efforts of he who gathers together the sad remains of his fortune. Close your ear to the imprecations of this madman. Alas, he promised himself such advantageous returns, he had contemplated rest and retirement. He was on his last voyage. A hundred times along the way he calculated on his fingers the size of his fortune and had arranged for its use. And now all of his hopes have vanished; he has barely enough to cover his naked limbs. Be touched by the tenderness of these two spouses. Look at the terror that you have inspired in that woman.

She offers you thanks for the evil you did not do her. Nevertheless, her child, too young to know to what peril you exposed it, he, his father and his mother, takes care of the faithful companion of his voyage: he is attaching the collar of his dog. Spare the innocent. Look at that mother freshly escaped from the waters with her spouse: it is not for herself that she is trembling, it is for her child. See how she squeezes it to her breast, how she kisses it. O God, recognize the waters you have created. Recognize them, both when your breath moves them and when your hand calms them. Recognize the black clouds that you gathered and that it pleased you to scatter. Already they are separating, they are moving away; already the light of the day star is reborn on the face of the waters. I foresee calm on that red horizon. How far it is, the horizon! It doesn't end with the sea. The sky descends beneath it and seems to turn around the globe. Finish lighting up the sky; finish rendering tranquility to the sea. Allow those seamen to put their shipwrecked boat back to sea. Assist in their labor, give them strength and leave me this painting. leave it to me, like the rod with which you will punish the vain. It is already the case that it is no longer I that people visit, that people come to listen to: it is Vernet they come to admire in my house. The painter has humiliated the philosopher.

Oh my friend, the beautiful Vernet I own! The subject is the end of a storm without a harmful catastrophe. The seas are still agitated, the sky covered in clouds; the sailors are busy on their sunken boat, the inhabitants come running from the nearby mountains. How much spirit this painter has! He needed but a small number of principal figures to render all the circumstances of the moment he chose. How true this scene is! With what lightness, ease and vigor it is all painted. I want to keep this testimony of his friendship. I want my son-in-law to transmit it to his children, his children to theirs, and these latter to those that will be born of them.

If only you saw the beauty of the whole of this piece, how everything there is harmonious, how the effects work together, how everything is brought out without effort or affectation. How those mountains on the right are wrapped in vapor. How beautiful those rocks and superimposed edifices are. How picturesque that tree is and the lighting on that terrace. How the light there fades away, how its figures are laid out: true, active, natural, living. How interesting they are, the force with which they are painted. The purity with which they are drawn, how they stand out from the background. The enormous breadth of that space, the verisimilitude of those waters. Those clouds, the sky, that horizon! Here the background is deprived of light, while the foreground is lit up, unlike the usual technique. Come see my Vernet, but don't take it from me!

With time all debts will be paid, remorse will be calmed and I will have pure joy. Don't fear that the mad desire to stock up beautiful things has taken control of me. The friends I had I still have, and their number hasn't grown. I have Lais but Lais doesn't have me. Happy in her arms, I am ready to cede her to she who I'll love and who she'll make happier than me. And I want to tell you a secret: that Lais, who it cost others so much to buy, cost me nothing.

"Regrets for My Old Dressing Gown" is an essay by Denis Diderot that reflects on the simple pleasures of life and the meaning of material possessions. In the essay, Diderot laments the loss of his old, worn-out dressing gown, which he cherished for its comfort and familiarity. Through this nostalgic reflection, Diderot meditates on the transience of material objects and the importance of cherishing the present moment and the small joys it brings. He argues that the pursuit of material wealth and status often leads people to neglect the things that truly matter in life, such as friendship, love, and contentment. "Regrets for My Old Dressing Gown" is a touching and thought-provoking essay that encourages readers to re-examine their own priorities and appreciate the simple, everyday pleasures of life.



Denis Diderot was a French philosopher, art critic, and writer who lived from 1713 to 1784. He was a central figure of the Enlightenment and is best known for serving as chief editor of the *Encyclopédie*, a comprehensive reference work that aimed to share knowledge and promote intellectual freedom. Diderot's writings covered a wide range of topics, including art, religion, science, and politics, and his views on these subjects helped shape the intellectual climate of 18th-century France. He was also a committed advocate for civil liberties and was one of the first thinkers to call for the abolition of slavery. Despite facing censorship and persecution from the French government, Diderot continued to write and publish, and his works continue to be widely read and studied today.