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I

THE BASIS OF SHAKESPEARIAN COMEDY

(The substance of a lecture delivered in 1949 at Stratford-upon-Avon at the invitation of Mr. John Garrett, to whom it is affectionately dedicated.)

by NEVILL COGHILL

I

THE Comedies of Ben Jonson are clearly no laughing matter if we compare them with those of Shakespeare. A harsh ethic in them yokes punishment with derision: foibles are persecuted and vices flayed; the very simpletons are savaged for being what they are, and it is seldom that any but a minor character, if that, gives proof of a nobility or grace of nature. The population of his Comedies in part accounts for this; they are a congeries of cits, parvenus, mountebanks, cozeners, dupes, braggarts, bullies and bitches. If we are shown virtue in distress, it is the distress and not the virtue that matters. All this is done with an incredible, stupendous force of style.

In Shakespeare things are different. Princes and dukes, lords and ladies jostle with merchants, weavers, joiners, country sluts, friendly rogues, schoolmasters and village policemen, hardly one of whom is lacking in, or incapable of, a generous impulse. The very butts can think nobly of the soul and have everything handsome about them. Shakespeare will not punish even a Barnadine.

In all this it is easy to discern the promptings of two opposed temperaments in the use of comic form by these writers; so much so that it hardly makes sense to speak of "comic form" as if it were a single thing of which both had the same theoretical conception, to the discipline of which both were in voluntary and agreed subjection. And because it does not seem to make sense, it is often supposed that Shakespeare wrote under no discipline of form, that he followed no particular and definable tradition of Comedy, but was simply fancy's child; for what definable form could include *The Comedy of Errors, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Measure for Measure* and *The Winter's Tale?*

It is the purpose of this essay to show that Shakespeare was not simply following the chances of temperament in designing his Comedies, but that he was following a tradition that evolved during the middle ages

from the same parent-stock of thought as that from which evolved the contrary tradition followed by Ben Jonson. That parent-stock is to be found in the writings of the Latin grammarians of the fourth century A.D., namely Evanthius, Diomedes and Donatus.

These have left us a handful of dry and cursory generalizations derived by an inductive, Aristotelian, method from such Comedies as they knew or had heard of. They noted what comedy had been, rather than what it ought to be, and we may be grateful to them for that. But it must be said that they lacked the large lucidity and comprehensiveness of Aristotle in his analysis of the opposite form of Tragedy.

From their barely co-ordinated jottings I have taken the following paragraphs, omitting nothing that seemed to further the present inquiry.[1]

Evanthius

. . . As between Tragedy and Comedy, while there are many distinguishing marks, the first is this: in Comedy the characters are men of middle fortune, the dangers they run are neither serious nor pressing, their actions lead to happy conclusions; but in Tragedy things are just the opposite. Then again (be it noted) that in Tragedy is expressed the idea that life is to be fled from, in Comedy, that it is to be grasped. Lastly that all Comedy is made up of feigned actions, but Tragedy is more often fetched from historical belief. Comedy is divided into four parts, a Prologue, a Protasis, an Epitasis and a Catastrophe; the Prologue is so to speak the preface to a certain story . . . the Protasis is the first act and beginning of the drama, the Epitasis is the growth and progress of the confusions and as I might say of the knot of the whole misunderstanding, and the Discovery is the turning round of things to happy issues, made clear to all by a full knowledge of the actions. . . .[2]

Diomedes

. . . Comedy differs from Tragedy in that in Tragedy heroes, generals and kings are introduced, in comedy humble and private people. In the former, grief, exile and slaughter; in the latter, love-

[1] *Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* edidit Georgius Kaibel, Vol. I, Fasc. Prior, Berlin 1899.

[2] . . . Inter tragoediam autem et comoediam cum multa tum inprimis hoc distat, quod in comoedia mediocres fortunae hominum, parui impetus periculorum laetique sunt exitus actionum, at in tragoedia contrario ordine res aguntur; tum quod in tragoedia fugienda vita, in comoedia capessanda exprimitur; postremo quod omnis comoedia de fictis est argumentis, tragoedia saepe de historica fide petitur. Comoedia per quattuor partes diuiditur, prologum, protasin, epitasin, catastrophen: est prologus uelut praefatio quaedam fabulae . . . protasis primus actus initiumque est dramatis, epitasis incrementum processusque turbarum ac totius ut ita dixerim nodus erroris, catastrophe conuersio rerum est ad iucundos exitus patefacta cunctis cognitione gestorum . . .

affairs and the abduction of maidens. Then in the former there are often and almost invariably sad endings to happy circumstances, and a Discovery of former fortune and family taking an ill turn . . . for sad things are the property of Tragedy. . . . The first comic poets were Susarion, Myllus and Magnes; these offered plots of the old kind, with less skill than charm . . . in the second age were Aristophanes, Eupolis and Cratinus, who pursuing the vices of the principal characters composed very bitter Comedies. The third age was that of Menander, Diphilus and Philemon, who palliated all the bitterness of Comedy and followed all sorts of plots about agreeable mistakes . . .[1]

Donatus

. . . Comedy is a tale containing various elements of the dispositions of town-dwelling and private people, to whom it is made known what is useful in life and what contrary and to be avoided . . .[2]

It is convenient at this point to rearrange these platitudes (in the light of later developments) into two groups that will be found to correspond with the Jonsonian and Shakespearian forms of Comedy, and that may be named the Satiric and the Romantic. The evolution that justifies this rearrangement will later appear.

The Satiric

concerns a middle way of life, town-dwellers, humble and private people. It pursues the principal characters with some bitterness for their vices and teaches what is useful and expedient in life, and what is to be avoided.

The Romantic

expresses the idea that life is to be grasped. It is the opposite of Tragedy in that the catastrophe solves all confusion and misunderstanding, by some happy turn to an agreeable issue. It has great variety of plot which may include a light touch of danger from which there is

[1] . . . Comoedia a tragoedia differt, quod in tragoedia introducuntur heroes, duces, reges, in comoedia humiles atque privatae (personae), in illa luctus exilia caedes, in hac amores, virginum raptus; deinde quod in illa frequenter et paene semper laetis rebus exitus tristes et liberorum fortunarumque priorum in peius adgnitio . . . tristia namque tragoediae proprium . . . poetae primi comici fuerunt Susarion, Mullus et Magnes. hi veteris disciplinae iocularia quaedam minus scite ac venuste pronuntiabunt . . . secunda aetate fuerunt Aristophanes, Eupolis et Cratinus, qui et principium vitia sectati acerbissimas comoedias composuerunt. tertia aetas fuit Menandri, Diphili et Philemonis, qui omnem acerbitatem comoediae mitigaverunt atque argumenta multiplicia gratis erroribus secuti sunt . . .

[2] . . . Comoedia est fabula diuersa instituta continens affectuum ciuilium ac priuatorum, quibus discitur quid sit in uita utile quid contra euitandum . . .

a happy issue. It commonly includes love-making and the abduction of virgins.

Common to both kinds

The plots are not historical but imaginary.

I do not know of any account or even mention of comic form between the fourth and twelfth centuries. Boethius defined Tragedy but not Comedy; after him there yawned the Dark Ages. Unless I am mistaken the next allusion to either form occurs in the *Ars Versificatoria* of Matthieu de Vendôme (*c.* 1150). In true Boethian style he describes a vision of Philosophy accompanied by Satire and Comedy (different beings it would seem), and this is all he says of the latter:

Tertia surrepit Commoedia, cotidiano hiatu (*habitu* in a preferable reading), *humiliato capite, nullius festivitatis praetendens delicias.*[1]

This appears to be an allegorical way of saying that the start of a Comedy lacks the lofty style of Tragedy and seems beset with dangers that promise no happy outcome. If this be the meaning it fits well enough with what Vincent de Beauvais and Dante have to say of Comedy, to whose accounts we may now turn.

Vincent de Beauvais flourished a century later than Matthieu de Vendôme and his aphorism on the nature of Comedy is quoted by Sir Edmund Chambers in the second volume of his work *The Medieval Stage* (p. 209n.):

> *Commoedia poesis exordium triste laeto fine commutans.*
> Comedy is a poem changing a sad beginning into a happy ending.

Evanthius and Diomedes, as we have seen, contrasted Comedy and Tragedy in a general way. It was left to the logical and systematic mind of the middle ages to sharpen the point of this opposition. If Boethius was right in defining Tragedy as a story in which a flourishing prosperity was cast down by the deeds of fortune to a miserable end,[2] then (they thought) Comedy must be precisely the reverse, a story that started in sorrow and danger and, by a happy turn of fortune, ended in felicity. It was a tale of trouble that turned to joy.

This simple formula is the true basis of Shakespearian Comedy. It is not, however, so simple as it looks. It was claimed to be not merely the shape of comic form but also the shape of ultimate reality. That,

[1] Edmond Faral *Les Arts Poetiques du XIIeme et du XIIIeme Siecle*, p. 153. Paris, 1923—Thirdly, there stole along Comedy, with daily grin (in work-a-day dress?) and humbled head, bringing the allurements of no gaiety.

[2] Boethuis *De Consolatione*, Book II, Prose 2.

at least, was the claim that Dante made for it and in virtue of which was fashioned the greatest of all imaginative and philosophical structures in poetry, *The Divine Comedy*. The story of the Universe was to be a Comedy as defined.

As well as a lofty poet, Dante was a lofty lecturer, and in dedicating the *Paradiso* to Can Grande he set forth a lengthy and explicit account of how his Comedy was to be understood. It contains two passages of special interest to this inquiry, one dealing with comic form itself and its supposed origins, the other with the various planes of meaning upon which it may be proper to interpret a Comedy. I shall later attempt to apply both passages to the understanding of Shakespeare. In setting them forth I have reversed the order in which they occur in Dante's epistle, so that I may deal with the question of form, which is the easier, first. The more difficult question of allegory will be considered later.

Dante: Epistle to Can Grande

10. The title of the book is: "Here begins the Comedy of Dante Alighiere a Florentine by nation, not by manners." As a note to which it should be known that the word Comedy derives from *comos*, a village, and *oda*, a song, whence Comedy, a sort of rustic song. Comedy is moreover a kind of poetical narrative, differing from all others. It differs therefore from Tragedy in its matter thus, that Tragedy is calm and noble to start with, but in its ending or outcome stinking and terrifying (*foetida et horribilis*); and it is named for that reason after *tragos*, that is, a goat, and *oda*, a goatish song, so to speak; that is, it stinks like a goat, as appears by Seneca in his Tragedies. Comedy on the other hand begins with the harshness of some affair (*asperitatem alicuius rei*) but its matter ends happily (*prospere*) as appears by Terence and his Comedies . . . similarly it differs in its manner of speech; Tragedy, lofty and sublime; Comedy negligent and humble . . . and hence it appears that the present work is called a Comedy. For if we look at the matter, it stinks and is terrifying to begin with, being *Infernus*; in the end it is happy, pleasing and to be desired (*prospera, desiderabilis et grata*), being *Paradisus*.

This shows what the vision of genius can make of a truism, even when it is expressed in lecturer's language. It transforms the simple formula of Vincent de Beauvais into a true and total picture of ultimate reality. Dante, however, did more than this for our comprehension. He laid it down how his Comedy was to be *understood*; here he was only explaining for the benefit of Can Grande principles also laid down in the first Chapter of the Second Treatise of the *Convivio*; and there these principles are stated to be valid for all poetry, not merely for his own. These are the terms in which he expounds them to Can Grande:

7. . . . Be it known that the meaning of this work is not single (*simplex*), indeed it can be called *polysemos*, that is of several meanings; for there is first the meaning to be had from the letter; another is to be had from what is signified by the letter. And the first is called the literal (meaning); the second, however, is called the allegorical, or the moral, or the anagogical. This method of analysis, that it may seem the clearer, may be considered in these verses: "*In exitu Israel de Aegypto, domus Iacob de populo barbaro, facta est Iudaea sanctificatio eius, Israel potestas eius.*" Now if we only look at the letter, the meaning to us is the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, at the time of Moses; if to the allegory, the meaning to us is our redemption made through Christ; if to the moral meaning, there is signified the conversion of the soul from the grief and misery of sin into a state of grace; if to the anagogical, the departure of the holy soul from this servitude of corruption into the liberation (*libertatem*) of eternal glory. And although these mystical senses are called by various names, they can all be generally called allegorical, since they differ from the literal or historical. In view of these things it is clear that the subject should be double (*duplex*) round which should flow alternate meanings.[1]

Dante has thus taken over and expanded (but with what enlargement!) the hints of the fourth-century grammarians, including the hint that love is a theme in Comedy. In the *Divine Comedy* it is the theme of themes, though it is no longer merely human love but love absolute, the power and the glory of God, seen by created souls as the Beatific Vision, for which indeed they were created.

Chaucer knew and quoted from the *Divina Commedia*, but, allegorist though he was, there is nothing to show he knew, or anyhow cared, about anagogy. Except for the problems of predestination he had few metaphysical interests. I should suppose it impossible to illuminate any passage in Chaucer by using a Dantesque technique of interpretation, though it is easy and even necessary to illuminate Langland so. Whether such a technique can in any way be usefully applied to Shakespearian Comedy has still to be argued; meanwhile we have reached the point at which Chaucer's grasp of the nature of comic form has to be considered.

He only uses the word "comedye" once:

> Go, litel book, go, litel myn tragedye,
> Ther god thi makere yit, or that he dye,
> So sende myght to make in som comedye!
> (*Troilus & Criseyde*, Bk. V, 1786–88).

[1] Moore e Toynbee *Opere di Dante Alighieri*, quarta edizione. Oxford, 1924, pp. 415–6.

In this passage the word is manifestly used in antithesis to Tragedy, and we know what Tragedy signified to him, for we know what Boethius had said of it. Would that he had said something of Comedy! We can at least infer what Chaucer thought of it from a few sentences he placed in the mouth of his Knight. The occasion is when the Knight has interrupted the Monk's long spate of Tragedies, all fitting the Boethian formula more or less. The Knight objects that such stories are painful to him; he would prefer to hear the opposite kind of story. And then he gives what amounts to a definition of comedy. It is in line with what we have seen so far of the medieval tradition:

> I seye for me, it is a greet disese
> Whcr-as men han ben in greet welthe and ese,
> To heren of hir sodeyn fal, allas!
> *And the contrarie is Ioye and greet solas,*
> *As whan a man hath been in povre estaat*
> *And clymbeth up, and wexeth fortunat,*
> *And there abydeth in prosperitee,*
> Swich thing is gladsom, as it thinketh me.

Chaucer's follower and admirer Lydgate returned to the Vincentian definition, *tout court*. It was the standard medieval view:

> A Comedy hath in his gynnynge, A pryme face a maner complaynynge, and afterwarde endeth in gladnesse.
> (*Chron. Troy*, II, xi).

II

The Renaissance view of Comedy was entirely different. Its only concern is ridicule. It offers no antithesis to Tragedy as such, and indeed the ends of either form are often alike, namely ethical, both in theory and practice. There may be calamity at the end of *Sejanus* and laughter at the end of *Volpone*, but both laughter and calamity are punitive and deterrent. Note that the theory does not suggest a narrative line, as did the medieval theory.

That punishment is the proper object of Comedy is the almost unanimous opinion of English Renaissance critics. Here is a selection of their opinions:

George Whetstone: *Dedication to Promos and Cassandra*, 1578.

> . . . I deuided the whole history into two Commedies, for that, *Decorum* vsed, it would not be conuayed in one. The effects of both are good and bad: vertue intermyxt with vice, vnlawfull desyres (yf it were possible) queancht with chaste denyals: al needeful

actions (I thinke) for public vewe. For by the rewarde of the good the good are encouraged in wel doinge: and with the scowrge of the lewde the lewde are feared from euill attempts . . .

Thomas Lodge: *Defence of Poetry*, 1579.

. . . their matter was more plesaunt (i.e. than that of tragedies) for they were suche as did reprehend, yet *quodam lepore* . . . (i.e. with a certain charm).

Sir Philip Sidney: *An Apologie for Poetrie* (*c.* 1583, printed 1593).

. . . Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he representeth in the most ridiculous and scornefull sort that may be; so that it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one.

Now, as in Geometry the oblique must bee knowne as wel as the right, and in Arithmetick the odde as well as the euen, so in the actions of our life who seeth not the filthines of euil wanteth a great foile to perceiue the beauty of vertue. This doth the Comedy handle so in our priuate and domestical matters, as with hearing it we get as it were an experience, what is to be looked for. . . .

George Puttenham: *The Arte of English Poesie*, Ch. XIV, 1589.

. . . but commonly of marchants, souldiers, artificers, good honest housholders, and also of vnthrifty youthes, yong damsels, old nurses, bawds, brokers, ruffians, and parasites, with such like, in whose behauiors lyeth in effect the whole course and trade of mans life, and therefore tended altogither to the good amendment of man by discipline and example. It was also much for the solace and recreation of the common people by reason of the pageants and shewes. And this kind of poeme was called *Comedy*. . . .

Sir John Harrington: Preface to the Translation of *Orlando Furioso*, 1591.

. . . The Comicall, whatsoeuer foolish play-makers make it (poetry) offend in this kind (i.e. by lewdness) yet being rightly vsed, it represents them so as to make the vice scorned and not embraced . . .

Against this chorus of Renaissance moralizing one voice at least proclaimed the more generous but vulnerable view of the Middle Ages that Comedy was there to please and give us joy:

William Webbe: *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, 1586.

. . . The Comedies, on the other side (i.e. as opposed to Tragedies), were directed to a contrary ende, which, beginning doubtfully, drewe to some trouble or turmoyle, and by some lucky chaunce alwayes ended to the ioy and appeasement of all parties.

* * * * *

Such, then, are the two theories of Comedy, the Romantic and the Satirical, twinned out of the late Latin grammarians to attain their different dramatic maturities in the Elizabethan age. The older tradition was for Romance, the new world was all for Punishment. For the new world had to face the onslaught of Puritanism. If the right of poetry to exist at all was to be successfully defended, ethical weapons had to be used. "*Ioye and greet solas*" had nothing to do with it. Faced by a choice in such matters, a writer is wise if he follows his temperament. Ben Jonson knotted his cat-o'-nine-tails. Shakespeare reached for his Chaucer.

III

It is true that he did not do so immediately. His first thoughts in Comedy were for Plautus. Yet anyone caring for poetical forms who compares *The Comedy of Errors* (1592–3) with the *Menoechmi* will find significant differences in the shapes of the two plays. It is not simply a matter of the doubling of the pairs of twins by the exuberant Elizabethan. It is a matter of a change of *venue*, of quality, and of catastrophe. He *medievalized* the story; he invented a beginning and an end for it, starting in trouble and ending in joy.

Few comedies, one might suppose, could reach a prosperous conclusion that started with a man being seriously led out to execution. Yet this is what happens to the Merchant *Egeon* in the first scene of *The Comedy of Errors*; and *Egeon* is the father of the Antipholus twins, a major character in fact. This gambit is not in Plautus, and the style in which it is introduced is as high as tragedy could wish it to be. Execution on *Egeon* is deferred; but it is not remitted. He remains (albeit off-stage) in anticipation of immediate death until the last scene. That death is then about to be inflicted on him when from an improbable Abbey (in Ephesus) an even more improbable Abbess appears and is most improbably discovered to be *Egeon's* long-lost wife, and the means of his deliverance. She also is Shakespeare's invention, and turns the catastrophe to general joy.

These modifications in Plautine structure can hardly have come about by accident or whim. And if by whim, how is it that the new shape should correspond so exactly with the medieval view of what is proper to comic form?

This new shape brings with it an incidental feature in play-construction, in the conventions rather than in the form of English Comedy. It

fills the stage with the whole happy cast at the catastrophe. In the *Menoechmi* the play closes with the twins and their servant only on stage. Shakespearian and almost all subsequent comic drama in England closes with a stage cram full of happy people; the whole world of the play has been led into delight, and with it the whole audience.

The changes in venue and structure go with a change in quality. It is not simply that there is a general coarseness and selfishness in Plautine's personal relations that is not to be found in Shakespeare. There is a specific and medieval delicacy injected into *The Comedy of Errors* by the invention of a romantic sub-plot—the love-affair between Antipholus of Syracuse and Luciana. Save for the greater lyrical fluency of Shakespeare it is Chaucerian, and its sentiments are those of *amour courtois*:

> Teach me deere creature how to thinke and speake:
> Lay open to my earthie grosse conceit:
> Smothred in errors, feeble, shallow, weake,
> The foulded meaning of your words deceit:
> Against my soules pure truth, why labour you,
> To make it wander in an vnknowne field?
> Are you a god? would you create me new?
> Transforme me then, and to your powre Ile yeeld. . . .

Love as the centre and solvent of all troubles could not absolutely govern this Comedy of mistaken identity, but it thrust its way into it and coloured the conclusion.

The Taming of the Shrew was Shakespeare's next and indeed last venture[1] into a kind of Comedy not mainly romantic. In this play the dangers are not so sharp at the beginning, the joy not so general at the end. The characters are all from the middle and lower ranks of society and the love-element seems at first nearer to the *raptus virginum* of Diomedes then to the exalted professions of courtly love and medieval tradition.

And yet the theme has a Shakespearian softness of treatment very far removed from the harsh correction of vice and folly recommended by the Renaissance critics and practised by Ben Jonson. *The Taming of the Shrew* has often been read and acted as a wife-humiliating farce in which a brute fortune-hunter carries all, including his wife's spirit, before him, to the general but vicarious joy of hen-pecked husbands. Yet it is not so at all. True, it is based on the medieval conception of the

[1] Save for that hurried and exceptional affair *The Merry Wives of Windsor.*

obedience owed by a wife to her wedded lord, a conception generously and charmingly asserted by Katerina at the end. But it is a total misconception to suppose she has been bludgeoned into it. Indeed if either of them has triumphed in the art and practice of matrimony it is she.

Let us in the first place consider *why* she is a shrew; Shakespeare has made perfect preparation for this aspect of her character. She is a girl of spirit, yet has to endure a father who has openly made a favourite of her sly younger sister, and who is willing, even more openly, to sell his daughters to the highest bidder. We can see the sort of man he is from the marriage-market scene (II.1.). We see, too, what sort of girl her petted sister is, with her pretended submissions and *minauderies* which culminate first in a clandestine and double-faced elopement, then in a contempt of her husband's authority and prestige. Thus environed, what choice has Katerina but to show her disdainful temper if she is to keep her self-respect?

Petruchio is a self-admitted fortune-hunter, but he is also a good-natured, vigorous, candid and likeable chap. No doubt whatever is left that he admires Katerina for herself on sight. Though he is loud-mouthed and given to swaggering, he is not contemptible; the companions of Beowulf would have approved of him. *Beot he gelæste.* To Katerina he must moreover seem her one hope of escaping from that horrible family. The defensive technique of shrewishness was no final solution to her troubles. It was too negative. Yet she had adopted it so long that it seemed to have become second nature to her.

It is this which Petruchio is determined to break in her, not her spirit. And he chooses a technique of practical jokes to do so.

At first she does not see the point, for his Hotspur manners are too violent. Still she senses, while resenting, his claim to love her, oddly though it conflicts with his boisterous and not very kindly behaviour:

> And that which spights me more than all these wants,
> He does it under name of perfect loue.

It is not until he positively declares that the sun is the moon that the joke breaks upon her in its full fantasy, and it is then that she wins her first and final victory by showing she has a sense of fun as extravagant as his own, and is able to go beyond him; so, entering the joke, she addresses the ancient Vincentio as if he were a

> Yong budding Virgin, faire, and fresh, & sweet

and when Petruchio whirls about once more with a

> Why how now *Kate*, I hope thou are not mad,
> This is a man old, wrinckled, faded, withered,
> And not a Maiden as thou saist he is.

she reaches her top triumph of wit, proving herself more than his match in spirit with this disclaimer, and blaming the sun (or should it have been the moon?):

> Pardon old father my mistaking eies,
> That haue bin so bedazzled with the sunne. . . .

After that, victory is all hers, and like most human wives that are the superiors of their husbands she can afford to allow him mastery in public. She has secured what her sister Bianca can never have, a happy marriage; and her solution is not far from that imagined by Chaucer for Dorigen and Arveragus in the *Franklin's Tale*. She will certainly run him in private, though her honour in public must of course depend on his:

> Save that the name of soveraynetee,
> That wolde he have for shame of his degree.

I have touched on these two early plays because neither of them, at first sight, seems to fall into the "Romantic" class. Shakespeare's instinct for romance can nevertheless be seen at work not only on a Plautine plot, but also on a Comedy of middle life, enlarging both towards a conformity with that view of Comedy held by Vincent and Dante and Chaucer; he may have taken it from the last of these if he needed any source more specific than a general, anonymous medieval tradition. His debt to Chaucer cannot, I think, be certain until the great year of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595–6).

IV

Dante, as I have said, saw the formula for Comedy as the pattern or picture of ultimate reality, and applied it to the state of the soul after death. That application may be extended to include life on earth; there was trouble in Eden, the knot was untied on Calvary, there is bliss in Heaven. The course of human life well-lived is a Comedy as defined. These realities, then unquestioned, could be figured in an earthly tale that followed the same pattern. Any human harmony achieved out of distress can awaken overtones of joy on higher planes. At least they imply an assertion that the harmonious is the normal, the attainable,

that heaviness may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning. Life is a union in love, not a battle of self-interest waged by the rules of an expedient ethic. Its greatest and characteristic triumph is positive joy, not a negative correction of vice and folly. The medieval formula for Comedy leads to the Beatific Vision, the Renaissance formula leads no further than the Day of Judgment, and is principally preoccupied with punishing the goats. The Christian vision sees love the cause and crown of life, the classical sees a useful morality, which will do to go on with. The best pagan faith offers Justice; Christianity, Mercy and Forgiveness.

In a spirit of conformity with these opposites stand the Comedies of Jonson and Shakespeare respectively. Almost all in Shakespeare are built up on a love-story, often indeed on a group of love-stories; lovers are united, faults are pardoned, enmities are reconciled. All this might be thought intolerably sentimental if it were merely a question of sentiment, not a whole and serious view of the real nature of life. Shakespeare's comic vision is not a sickly indulgence or "an escape from reality", but the firm assertion of basic harmony.

Out of this settled and traditional view he began early to create his "Comedy of the golden world" as it has been called. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is its first full expression, and perhaps the most delicate. It is a picture of a world with no ill-will. If his comedies had never enlarged this picture to include the melancholy and the sinful, he might well be indicted of leading an escape from unpleasant facts into some Tudor Garden of the Rose. It is a proof how strongly he held to a view of life as harmony that he learnt later how to stretch Comedy to contain sorrow and evil, and yet to show them capable of resolution in love and joy. *Measure for Measure* and *The Winter's Tale* are the extreme examples of this vision and power.

If we follow the chronology of his plays worked out by Sir Edmund Chambers, *Love's Labour's Lost* preceded *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by at least a year. *Love's Labour's Lost* does not follow the medieval pattern of comic form, though it is "romantic" rather than "satirical" in quality, being the story of five or six love-affairs (if we may include the passions of Don Adriano and of Costard). Yet in its very refusal of the pattern it admits the pattern:

> Our woing doth not end like an old Play:
> Iacke hath not Gill: these Ladies courtesie
> Might wel haue made our sport a Comedie.

In its exuberance of language, lordliness and buffoonery, it seems

the work of a young *Avant-gardiste*, newly confident of and revelling in his powers. He will show the world what wit and rhetoric can do, he will defy convention, bring death into the last Act of a Comedy and separate his lovers for a year. His confidence was justified; quality could make a Comedy though form was standing on its head. He did not, however, repeat the experiment, and Puck is allowed the reassertion of orthodoxy:

> *Iacke* shall haue *Iill*, nought shall goe ill,
> The man shall haue his Mare againe, and all shall bee well.

V

I have tried so far to show Shakespeare's dependence on, or agreement with, a medieval conception of Comedy as a story starting in trouble, ending in joy, and centred in love; and I have suggested some of the philosophical implications of this picture of life and their conformity with a medieval and Christian understanding of reality. I have exampled the opposed "corrective" view of Comedy favoured by Renaissance critics, a view which owes nothing in form to the Middle Ages but goes back to Donatus and his fellows directly. This was the classical Jonson's style, in whom there are no memorable love-stories, if any that could be dignified by the name at all. The only thing he seems to have taken from the Middle Ages was the doctrine of the Humours.

I would like now to consider two of the consequences that follow from what I have advanced and concern the opposite techniques followed by Shakespeare and Jonson in the imagining and writing of a play. To do this I must go back to Chaucer.

When Chaucer prayed for the strength to write a Comedy before he died, he was not asking for the strength to write a play, but a *story*, or a collection of stories. The definition *Commoedia poesis exordium triste laeto fine commutans* indicates the shape of a *narrative*. There is nothing (as I have already noted) in the Renaissance definitions of Comedy to suggest that a strictly narrative interest is of noteworthy importance in writing a comedy.

Here again Shakespeare's affinity to the medieval tradition can readily be seen, for we can trace his ceaseless search for stories that could be told on a stage. He gutted chronicles, novels, legends and romances; he went to Gower and Plutarch, to Chaucer and Lydgate, to Cinthio and

the *Gesta Romanorum*. Like Chaucer he never troubled to invent a plot if he could find one invented by somebody else. A good story was the first necessity in imagining his plays.

Ben Jonson worked differently. Satire was his object and he therefore had to begin with a *character* (or a group of characters) fitted to his lash. He then placed them in a certain situation calculated to show them at their worst, and by a prodigious intellectual mastery contrived the complete series of their logical developments into successive scenes, working from his data to his Q.E.D. with the stunning ingenuity of a master in algebra. By doing so he almost in some cases achieved a story. *Volpone* and *Epicoene*, by dint of the unanswerable logic he shows in the deployment of his data, very nearly achieve a narrative interest separable (in a sense) from the humours they were written to flay. The same is but barely true of *The Alchemist*, but not at all of *Bartholomew Fair*, which has nothing in it that could be fairly dignified by the title of a tale.

The effect of this, as has been often noted, is that none of the characters show development. They were not meant to; they were complete at the start. x and y do not change their values in an equation. To write thus is to forfeit every element in dramatic surprise except that which Jonson's unforeseeable ingenuity of logical manipulation could contrive. No one could foresee the *dénouement* of *Epicoene*, because no one but Jonson would remember that one of the data to be manipulated was the convention that gave him a boy to act the part of a girl. The stunning surprise that results from this brilliant conjuring trick is only damped by the sense that we have been fooled as much as poor Morose was. Ben Jonson has withdrawn his confidence from us; Shakespeare always lets us into his secret and shows us the disguiser assuming his (or her) disguise.

If we now consider the Shakespearian method of first seeking a *story*, we shall gain some insight into his craft in delineating character. It is a truism that his characters are "round" where Jonson's are "flat", that they have changes of mood and motive, that they develop and surprise us. And the surprise is always such that in the very moment of surprise we feel we should not have been surprised. For these reasons his people seem "natural" to us, like people that we know, like ourselves. This is never so in Jonson.

It will in no way diminish the marvel of Shakespeare's psychological insight if it can be partly explained by his habit of first finding a *story*. Stories, as can be seen from folk-tale, exist largely in their own right as

narrative shapes and hardly depend at all (save in a rudimentary way) on "character". Their interest is "What happened then?" Thus the episodes in a continuous tale, being told for their own sake, may often lead the protagonists into moods, situations and activities in which if their "characters" were defined and fixed they could not behave in the way demanded by the story. Shakespeare, starting with a story, had to imagine people to fit it, variable, fluid and many-sided natures containing cross-currents and inner contradictions. If Hamlet is to have an opportunity of killing Claudius at his prayers, then even the villain Claudius must be capable of trying to pray. No one could imagine Volpone praying, but then his nature does not emerge from the story, but the story from his nature.

Or consider Anthonio in *The Merchant of Venice*. Why is he pictured as a melancholy man? Because every aspect of the story that concerns him demands that he should be one. The story demands that he shall lose a friend he loves to a lady he has never seen, and that he shall pay for the wooing. Such a man with such a friend is commonly more loving than beloved, and that is a melancholy thought. Moreover, love him as he may, he can see that he has a bad influence on Bassanio and makes a high-falutin sponge of him, a kind of liar; for which he rebukes him:

> You know me well, and herein spend but time
> To winde about my loue with circumstance

Bassanio's bombast is again called forth by the presence of Anthonio at the trial scene

> Good cheere *Anthonio*, What man, corage yet:
> The Iew shall haue my flesh, blood, bones, and all,
> Ere thou shalt loose for me one drop of blood.

It is a lie. Had he meant what he said he had only to draw his rapier on Shylock and hang for murder. Anthonio answers with the melancholy submission of a man who knows his love is misdirected:

> I am a tainted Weather of the flocke,
> Meetest for death

The nature of the story demands it. So, too, the nature of the story demands his resigned attitude towards Shylock when the bond falls due. If he had shown more fight at the trial, if he had been a Gratiano, it would have robbed Portia of her full triumph in snatching victory

from an accepted defeat. The story demands it shall be Portia's scene, and Portia's scene it is. The narrative line determines the psychological line, and narrative is of the romantic and not the satirical tradition.

VI

I now come, with diffidence, to the most conjectural part of this essay, namely the development of a theme which of its nature can only be treated with the dangerous help of subjective intuition; but I will cling to such facts as I can. The first is the fact of the medieval tradition of allegory, an account of the nature of which I have quoted from Dante. I will not pretend that Shakespeare read either the *Epistle* to *Can Grande* or the *Convivio*. But I think it reasonable to suppose that an age that had produced *The Faerie Queene* felt more at home in allegory than we do. It was an age that found no difficulty in accepting *The Song of Songs* as a figure of the love of Christ for His Church, and the act of holy matrimony as a signification of that same love. Thinking in allegory is to us an unaccustomed habit of mind, but to those in a medieval tradition, second nature. It only means a habit of power to draw simultaneous meanings on parallel planes of experience. In proportion as materialist ways of life encroach upon us, other more spiritual planes withdraw and are lost to view. Ceasing to think of them, we lose the faculty to do so and at last deny that such a faculty can have had genuine part in a poetry which we think can be well enough understood without it.

Yet in recent years much has been done to enlarge our apprehensions of imagery in poetry, especially in the poetry of Shakespeare. For the most part this new study of imagery has been devoted to the study of the *detail* of poetry; that *a narrative itself, taken as a whole, may be an image* is an idea that has received too little attention.

Let us, however, begin with a detail, taken from *Cymbeline*. It is from the speech of Posthumus (V.3) describing a panic flight in battle; he interjects this parenthesis about panic:

> . . . (Oh a sinne in Warre
> Damn'd in the first beginners) . . .

How easily familiar with Christian thought an audience must have been to catch this fugitive allusion to Adam and Eve, those "first beginners" in the sin that brought damnation in its train! Yet it is there,

and can allude to nothing else. It is to be caught as an overtone in an exciting battlepiece, packed with other imagery. Indeed there is hardly a speech in all Shakespeare that contains such a mass of unexpected images, continued through nearly forty lines. Every listener was expected to listen on many planes of allusion, that is, of meaning.

What is true of the detail of this poetry I hold to be often true of the narrative as a whole. If we apply Dante's injunctions we shall many times get a result. It may be objected that such results are so highly subjective, so far-fetched, so liable to contrary interpretations, that we can never be sure; and it is an objection that has much validity. But it is also to be answered that no effort to interpret (let us say) *Volpone* on a figurative or allegorical plane will have any success whatever. It means no more than it says directly, it alludes to nothing. There are, of course, some Shakespearian Comedies that may resemble *Volpone* in this, *The Taming of the Shrew* or *Much Ado About Nothing* for example. Yet there are others which seem to invite a figurative as well as a naturalistic understanding; among them I would list *The Merchant of Venice, Measure for Measure, The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest.* To analyse all these *à la* Dante would take this essay on too wide a course, and I hesitate which to choose for a demonstration.

It has been my fortune, at one time or another, to produce all these plays, and in doing so I have been made aware of the presence of other planes of meaning than those immediately manifested in the "story". Spiritual parallels suggest themselves. When this happens to a producer the newly-discerned "meaning" must be rigorously tested against the manifest meaning as a whole, for fear someone may say with Horatio "'Tis but our fantasy". But when the new meaning is confirmed by such a test it will be found to make practical demands on the technique of production, if no part of it is to escape unexpressed.

Of the four plays I have mentioned I choose the easiest (*The Merchant of Venice*) and the most difficult (*The Tempest*) to illustrate what I mean by Shakespeare's use of narrative imagery, and how he can give simultaneous meaning on other than naturalistic planes of interpretation. We will find ourselves led back into medieval tradition and a Christian concept of the universe.

In the case of *The Merchant of Venice* we are first confronted with a producer's problem. Is he to understand the play as pro-Jew or anti-Jew? Can he please his own prejudices in the matter? When he looks at the facts, this is what he finds.

The title-page of the second quarto of *The Merchant of Venice,* dated

1600, reads: "The most excellent Historie of *The Merchant of Venice.* With the extreame crueltie of *Shylocke* the Iewe towards the said Merchant, in cutting a iust pound of his flesh" *etcetera.*

This announcement seems to justify a producer in supposing that the play was intended to be sold as a piece of anti-Semitism, and the almost contemporary Lopez scandal is generally quoted in support of this view. Yet even this title-page, by the use of the word "just" (intended no doubt to mean "exact") may raise thoughts about justice in the producer's mind. Should he, however, stifle such thoughts and proceed to a full-blooded Jew-baiting production (*à la Jew of Malta*) he may at a pinch be able to bring it off by ruthless distortion and insensitiveness to detail. In the trial scene he will have to disregard the noble dignity and unimpeachable logic of the supposed "villian" and on several other occasions during the action he will find himself forced to underplay a sympathy for Shylock which is manifestly in the text:

Shylock: Faire sir, you spet on me on Wednesday last;
You spurn'd me such a day; another time
You cald me dog: and for these curtesies
Ile lend you thus much moneyes.
Ant: I am as like to call thee so againe,
To spet on thee againe, to spurne thee too.

Or,

> Hath not a *Iew* eyes? hath not a *Iew* hands, organs, dementions, sences, affections, passions, fed with the same foode, hurt with the same weapons, subiect to the same diseases, healed by the same meanes, warmed and cooled by the same Winter and Sommer as a Christian is: if you pricke vs doe we not bleede? if you tickle vs doe we not laugh? if you poison vs doe we not die?

These passages cannot be harmonized with a governing idea of anti-Semitic feeling. They would rend the unity of such a production.

On the other hand to regard Shylock as the wronged hero of an oppressed race, falling with final grandeur through a wily woman versed in legal trickery makes nonsense of the last Act of the play: for how can a Comedy of rings and nuptials be clapped on to so tragic an event without laying the producer, not to say the author, open to the charge of heartless levity, and a gross breach in the unity of design?

If then the production of *The Merchant of Venice* is attended by certain incompatibilities of meaning whether we produce it on pro-Jew or anti-Jew prejudices, should we not think it possible that neither kind of production was intended by Shakespeare? Might it even be that the

fundamental notion of the play was to be found in a region far above and beyond race feeling?

Is there any other notion that can give the play a genuine unity? What is it really *about*?

I believe that to answer these questions we must return to the Middle Ages and to one of its traditional themes. The best expression of the theme I have in mind is to be found in *Piers Plowman*. In that poem, Truth (God) sends Piers a Pardon, in two lines:

Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam eternam
Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum.

In the first version of the poem (the "A Text") this "pardon" remains an unexplained enigma. In what sense can it be a "pardon"? It states a proportionate requital, an eye for an eye. It shows *Justice* in God, but not *Mercy*.

The second version of the poem (the "B Text") was written to elaborate and explain the seeming paradox of the "pardon". It does so by adding the whole story of the Incarnation, Passion and Descent into Hell, the picture of God's love to man. For in demanding an exact payment for all sin, He paid it Himself, and His payment is available to all who are willing to acknowledge their debt ("*redde quod debes*") in confession and obedience to His Church.

Now God's right thus to despoil the Fiend of his prey (sinful man) is very closely argued by four characters in the poem (*Passus* B XVIII). They are the four daughters of God, Mercy and Truth, Righteousness and Peace. Briefly their argument is this: under the Old Law God ordained punishment for sin, eye for eye and tooth for tooth in Hell. But under the New Law, God underwent and paid that punishment Himself on Calvary, and He has therefore bought back and redeemed "those that he loved" with a perfect *Justice* that is also a perfect *Mercy*. God is Truth, but He is also Love. The New Law does not contradict but complements the Old.

Almost exactly the same argument is conducted by the same four daughters of God at the end of *The Castle of Perseverance*, a morality play written in the early fifteenth century. In this the protagonist, *Humanum Genus* has died in sin and so his soul comes up for judgment. Righteousness and Truth demand his damnation, which the play would show to be just. Mercy and Peace plead the Incarnation, and *Humanum Genus* is saved. The play ends with *Te Deum Laudamus*.

Now if we follow this Christian tradition of a former age as a pathway into Shakespeare it will lead us to an understanding of *The Merchant*

of Venice that will solve the dilemma I have stated. It is a presentation of the theme of justice and mercy, the Old Law and the New. Seen thus it puts an entirely different complexion upon the opposition of Jew and Gentile. The two principles for which, in Shakespeare's play, respectively they stand are both *inherently right*, and they are only in conflict because, whereas God is absolutely just as He is absolutely merciful, mortal and finite man can only be relatively so, and must arrive at a compromise. In human affairs either justice must yield a little to mercy or mercy to justice, and the former solution is the more Christian. The conflict between Shylock and Anthonio is thus an *exemplum* (to use medieval terminology) of this traditional theme.

As I am here considering what Dante would have called the allegorical meaning of the play, let me stress that I am not saying it is the "only" meaning. The play will stand on the natural plane well enough (if we allow impossibilities such as choice-by-caskets and young women disguised as lawyers to be "natural"). All the characters can be shown to have a determinable human psychology consistent with themselves and with the story, as I have tried to show in the case of Anthonio. If I use the word "allegory" in connection with Shakespeare I do not mean that the characters are abstractions representing this or that vice or virtue (as they do in some allegories, say *The Roman de la Rose* or *The Castle of Perseverance* itself). I mean that they contain and adumbrate certain principles, not in a crude or neat form, but mixed with other human qualities; but that these principles taken as operating in human life, do in fact give shape and direction to the course, and therefore to the meaning, of the play.

Let us return to the Trial scene. The principle here mainly adumbrated in Shylock is justice, in Portia, mercy. He stands, and says he stands, for the Law, for the notion that a man must be as good as his bond. It is the Old Law. As *Piers Plowman* has it:

> . . . the olde lawe graunteth
> That gylours be bigiled . and that is gode resoun.
> *Dentem pro dente, & oculum pro oculo.*

Before Shylock's uncompromising demand for justice, mercy is in the posture of a suppliant refused. Thrice his money is offered him and rejected. He is begged to supply a surgeon at his own cost. But no, it is not in the bond.

From the technical point of view the scene is constructed on a sudden reversal of situation, a traditional dramatic dodge to create surprise and *dénouement*. The verbal trick played by Portia is not a part of her

"character", but a device to turn the tables and show justice in the posture of a suppliant before mercy. The reversal is instantaneous and complete, as it is also unexpected for those who do not know the story in advance. Portia plants the point firmly:

> Downe, therefore, and beg mercy of the Duke.

And, in a twinkling, mercy shows her quality:

> *Duke:* That thou shalt see the difference of our spirit,
> I pardon thee thy life before thou aske it:
> For halfe thy wealth, it is *Anthonio's*,
> The other halfe comes to the generall state,
> Which humblenesse may driue vnto a fine.

Out of this there comes the second reversal. Shylock, till then pursuing Anthonio's life, now has to turn to him for favour; and this is Anthonio's response:

> So please my Lord the Duke, and all the Court
> To quit the fine for one halfe of his goods,
> I am content; so he will let me haue
> The other halfe in vse, to render it
> Vpon his death, vnto the Gentleman
> That lately stole his daughter.
> Two things prouided more, that for this fauour
> He presently become a Christian:
> The other, that he doe record a gift
> Heere in the Court of all he dies possest
> Vnto his sonne *Lorenzo*, and his daughter.

Evidently Anthonio recognizes the validity of legal deeds as much as Shylock does, and his opinion on Jessica's relationship with Lorenzo is in agreement with Shakespeare's, namely that the bond between husband and wife overrides the bond between father and daughter. Cordelia and Desdemona would have assented. Nor is it wholly alien to Shylock who is himself a family man. For him to provide for Jessica and Lorenzo is not unnaturally harsh or vindictive.

It is Anthonio's second condition that seems to modern ears so harshly vindictive. In these days all good humanitarians incline to the view that a man's religion is his own affair, that a religion imposed is a tyranny, and that one religion is as good as another, if sincerely followed.

But the Elizabethans were not humanitarians in this sense. Only in Utopia, where it was one of "the auncientest lawes among them that no man shall be blamed for reasonynge in the mayntenaunce of his owne religion" (and Utopia was not in Christendom) would such views have seemed acceptable. Whether we dislike it or not, Shylock had no hope, by Elizabethan standards, of entering a Christian eternity of blessedness;

he had not been baptized. It would not have been his cruelty that would have excluded him (for cruelty, like other sin, can be repented) but the simple fact that he had no wedding-garment. No man cometh to the Father but by me.

Shylock had spent the play pursuing the mortal life of Anthonio (albeit for private motives) in the name of justice. Now, at this reversal, in the name of mercy, Anthonio offers him the chance of eternal life, his own best jewel.

It will, of course, be argued that it is painful for Shylock to swallow his pride, abjure his racial faith, and receive baptism. But then Christianity is painful. Its centre is crucifixion, nor has it ever been held to be equally easy for all natures to embrace. If we allow our thoughts to pursue Shylock after he left the Court we may well wonder whether his compulsory submission to baptism in the end induced him to take up his cross and follow Christ. But from Anthonio's point of view, Shylock has at least been given his chance of eternal joy, and it is he, Anthonio, that has given it to him. Mercy has triumphed over justice, even if the way of mercy is a hard way.

Once this aspect of the Trial scene is perceived, the Fifth Act becomes an intelligible extension of the allegory (in the sense defined); for we return to Belmont to find Lorenzo and Jessica in each other's arms. Christian and Jew, New Law and Old, are visibly united in love. And their talk is of music, Shakespeare's recurrent symbol of harmony.

It is not necessary for a single member of a modern audience to grasp this study in justice and mercy by any conscious process of cerebration during a performance, or even afterwards in meditation. *Seeing one may see and not perceive.* But a producer who wishes to avoid his private prejudices in favour of Shakespeare's meanings, in order that he may achieve the real unity that binds a poetical play, should try to see them and to imagine the technical expedients of production by which that unity will be experienced. If he bases his conception on the resolution of the principles of justice and mercy, he will then, on the natural plane, be left the freer to show Christians and Jews as men and women, equally containing such faults and virtues as human beings commonly have.

I now come to *The Tempest* in which almost all critics have seen adumbrations of mystical meaning. I would first like to seize on what little there is in the way of fact to guide an inquiry that must be mainly subjective. What can we *know* that an Elizabethan audience understood in it? Oddly enough two points of first importance that would have been clear to them are least often expressed in modern productions.

The first is that it is, at the start and at the end, a *Ship-play.* To an Elizabethan audience the stage imaginatively, and as I think to some extent visibly, changed into a ship, both in the first scene and during Prospero's Epilogue. The great bare apron was the main deck, the "inner stage" the cabin, the gallery above it the forecastle and the second gallery above that the masthead, rigging or crow's nest. In the cabin were the royal party; above were the Master, the Boatswain and his men. All this can be seen at once from the text of the dialogue in Act I, Sc. 1 by those who ask themselves "How was this contrived on an Elizabethan stage?" It is just possible that the "inner stage" was not used for the royal party, but that they came up from below the main-stage to parley with the Boatswain through the trap-door commonly called the "grave-trap". But I prefer to think that for this play at least there was a companion-way or ladder at the back of the inner stage leading up to the gallery, for the colloquy between Gonzalo and the Boatswain. Be that as it may the dialogue makes it quite clear that the audience is looking at a stage representing *a ship that is going away from them.* I think it reasonable to suppose that this effect was visibly enhanced by the spreading of sails, ropes and rigging above in the gallery, all of which at "We split! We split!" would collapse and disappear, together with the crew. Gonzalo says his last say and also disappears, either down the trap, or into the inner stage, drawing the curtains behind him to close upon the King and his party at their prayers.

At the end of the play, when Prospero comes forth from his cell to speak the Epilogue, the sails are hoisted again; up goes the rigging with the mariners in attendance, and the curtains of the inner stage part to show the whole and happy company as a background to Prospero's speech

> *Gentle breath of yours my sailes*
> *Must fill, or else my project failes,*
> *Which was to please . . .*

If, with whatever scenic additions, the stage at the start and finish of the play represents a ship going away from the audience, we only now have to ask "where was it going?" and the answer must be, at the end of the play, "*Home.*" It is a play about going home. Once this simple fact is apprehended it will be seen that all the action leads to it. "Home" in this case is called *Millaine* and it is associated in the mind of Prospero with the idea of being ready to die:

> Euery third thought shall be my graue.

In between these two ship scenes, we learn that Prospero has been

expelled from his natural inheritance (together with his daughter), for having devoted himself too closely to a kind of knowledge that is itself forbidden, that is, to magical knowledge. And he has to abjure it before he can go home with auspicious gales. He has also to reconcile himself with the enemies he has made.

Now if we take such a story on the natural plane of meaning only it is impossible to account for the deep impression made upon us by the play. Compared with any other play of Shakespeare the sequence of action from scene to scene is tenuously spun; the succession of incidents in the loves of Ferdinand and Miranda, the bewildering of the royal party and the debauch of Caliban is even less integrated into a firm and purposive narrative-line than the actions in *Love's Labour's Lost*. The characters are less sharply observed; villains are merely villainous, comics are merely comic. The story makes no demands on the psychology of Miranda, who is not only simple when compared to an Ophelia, but even when compared to a Viola. As a "character", Gonzalo is nothing to Polonius. Prospero himself is not psychologically recognizable in the sense that can be claimed for other male protagonists in Shakespeare. The natural plane of interpretation is insufficient to explain the effect the play produces.

In turning to the plane called allegorical by Dante we are in danger from its inherent chartlessness. We must find a discipline for subjective fancy. I propose the discipline of narrative-imagery.

What story then, familiar to Shakespeare and to his audience, does this *Tempest* story of a man and woman exiled from their natural inheritance for the acquisition of a forbidden knowledge resemble? An answer leaps readily to mind; it resembles the story of Adam and Eve, type-story of our troubles. *The Tempest* also contains the story of Prospero and his brother Anthonio, that has something of the primal, eldest curse upon it, something near a brother's murder. There is in *Genesis*, as well as the story of Adam and Eve, the story of Cain and Abel. But in *The Tempest* there is also a turn in both stories by which there is a repentance and a forgiveness, and a home-coming in harmony. This is the shape of the promise of the New Testament and of the Second Adam. There is the hope of a return to Paradise when we come to die. Trouble will turn to joy.

These simplest and most obvious elements in the Christian story, upon which (but literally and without allegory) the great medieval mystery cycles were built, are, at a distance, mirrored in the story of *The Tempest* well enough at least to be worth investigating.

Let us then turn to the second point on which an Elizabethan audience would be more instinctively understanding than we are, namely the natures of Ariell and Caliban. Can these be fitted into the suggestion I have put forward?

Medieval science believed and Marlowe in his poetry reiterated that the physical body of man is composed of the four elements. Air and fire, earth and water were the constituents of the human frame; everybody knew that. It would have been no great leap of recognition to see in Ariell the elements of air and fire, and in Caliban (at once addressed by Prospero as "Thou earth, thou!" and constantly mistaken for a fish) the elements of earth and water. These two, Ariell and Caliban, are the only occupants of Prospero's island at his coming thither. Their functions in the play are for Ariell obedience to the will of Prospero in his spiritual designs upon the royal party, for Caliban rebellion against Prospero and a drunken and murderous association with the lower louts, Stefano and Trinculo. They are the images of what is higher and lower in man, the occupants of his body, the servants (both subject to momentary rebellions) of his intellect.

By this account Prospero himself stands for the intellect and Miranda for his soul. The island, which he is shortly to leave, is the form of his body. Caliban is to be left behind and Ariell to be freed; the elements are to return to the elements from which they came.

Miranda is pure where Eve was not; but if she be taken on this plane of meaning to figure the soul of Prospero, it can be seen why she is so. Prospero has not used his forbidden knowledge in sinful ways. He is a magician, but a white one. Yet by being so he has alienated elements in his own nature, and has been cut off from them, particularly from the most royal. His faults have begotten theirs. These are seen in the persons of Alonzo, Gonzalo, Sebastian, Antonio and Ferdinand, variously disposed towards him. Separated from him by the gulf of the seas, nothing but a tempest can bring them together, and at the moment determined by Destiny (the moment of preparation for death) Prospero commands the tempest to arise, that he may reassemble and set in harmony all the wrongs and enmities that stand between him and wholeness of being. The psychologist Jung would agree.

This harmony is not too facile; its achievement is as grave as the airy texture of the play permits. Prospero has to abjure as well as to rebuke before he can forgive and reunite. These more painful things must not be out-run by the image of happy love. It was a part of Prospero's design that Ferdinand should wed Miranda, that the image of marriage

no less than that of music and the blessing of the Gods should celebrate the reconcilement of his soul. But this easier image had to be delayed, threatening as it did to accomplish itself too quickly; there were things more intractable to settle first. A wound must heal from the bottom, otherwise there is only a skinning and a filming of the ulcerous place.

It is not until Prospero, in summoning an invisible music, has for the last time exercised his forbidden knowledge and until he has confronted and rebuked the enemy that he can forgive them and show them the image of that forgiveness in the love of Ferdinand and Miranda at their game of chess. Then Stephano and Trinculo can return, chastened, to their proper service, and Caliban, come to his senses, can acknowledge his master and be accepted into grace. In this way the story completes its image of the Old Adam made whole by the New and of a reconcilement before the return to a lost Paradise.

Shakespeare is too subtle an entertainer to preach openly. I do not even think it was his purpose to do so under a veil. I suppose he took the basis of his vision for granted, what everyone in Christendom knew to be true of life. It was a natural, time-honoured shape for a story re-told in contemporary terms. His purpose was (he says) "to please" and how please better than by comfortable words and a new fable to body forth the old beliefs in an harmonious world where trouble was an intrusion and joy the goal? He left to Ben Jonson the preaching of a morality that fundamentally presupposes the opposite, namely a world of discordant self-interest in which the most we can hope for is a sort of social prudence, kept in being by the continual castigation of unethical excesses.

Dr. Johnson blamed Shakespeare for having in his plays too little regard for "morality". But if the kind of happiness to which all his Comedies travel is at all communicated to his readers and audiences, their imaginations, filled by that positive good, are themselves touched through happiness to goodness.

In his earlier Comedies such griefs as there were came from cross-purposes, separations, misunderstanding and the lighter conflicts of temperament. These were sorted out and sealed up with songs, masques and dances, marriages and friendly feelings. Katerina is left at one with Petruchio, Sebastian finds Viola, Benedick and Beatrice change their minds and are happy. The wicked Bastard is eliminated. A Duke and a Countess can stoop to sue to a wronged Steward and entreat him to a peace. One might say that anyone can write some sort of Comedy on these terms. It is easy to solve misunderstandings and turn them into

joy. It is only with the existence of evil as a real presence in the world that a Comedy on the medieval pattern becomes difficult; it is not so easy to solve in joy the problem of sin. But medieval ways of thinking had an answer for that too, a Christian answer, like Shakespeare's. If there were a breach in nature there was also the power of charity and repentance, of mercy and forgiveness, with laughter on the way. *The Winter's Tale* follows a like pattern; so does *Measure for Measure.*

In recent years Shakespeare has been shown to have many affinities with medieval ways of apprehending human life and the values involved in it. For instance *Troilus and Cressida* cannot be properly understood in terms of Homeric Troy. It stems from the medieval tradition (available to Shakespeare in Lydgate and elsewhere) that we British are Trojans, descendants of Brutus of Troy, and that the Greeks are the enemy. Troilus stands for truth in love, Hector for chivalry in battle. It is a Chaucerian and Malorian piece and the tragedy is that these noble hearts should perish in contention with the scum of the earth, the Macchiavel Ulysses, the braggart Ajax, the gangster Achilles, the bastardly Thersites, and the inconstant Cressida who goes over (in every sense) to the Greeks. Knowledge of the medieval tradition behind Shakespeare has made rubbish of the recent sentimental view of his supposed disgust and disillusion with life, and particularly with sex. However Shakespeare is the mirror to nature and the first thing a critic sees in a mirror is too often his own wise face. He is thoroughly disillusioned. So Shakespeare must have been.

The English Histories, too, as Dr. Tillyard has shown, are steeped and saturated in medieval ways of political and religious thought, and Mr. Danby's recent book on *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature* takes us back to the same harmonious world into which Shakespeare perceived the entry of that uncovenanted character, the Black Macchiavel, in whom force and fraud are the cardinal virtues, for whom nature is not a harmony but a war.

It cannot, then, be wholly improbable that Shakespearian Comedy comes to us out of a like region and is to be understood in a like manner. Medieval principles of form and interpretation cannot be stretched to account for the works of Ben Jonson (save in respect of the Humours); if, however, they be found to fit the Comedies of Shakespeare, it can hardly be deemed a coincidence.

II

SHAKESPEARE'S CONCEPTION OF POETRY

by E. C. PETTET

WITH our proud native contempt for theory and speculation, it is not altogether surprising that we are inclined to represent our chief poet as pre-eminently the practical writer, the enterprising, spontaneous individualist who went sturdily and efficiently about his job without fuss or bother, independent of schools and theories. He regularly turned out his two or three plays a year; he easily adapted himself to all sections of his very diverse audience; he rarely blotted a line; and, when he had made his impressive fortune, he retired to a gentleman's fine house in Stratford. So—in another field—the great Victorian engineers constructed their roads, bridges, railways, and harbours all over the world.

There is much truth in this traditional image of Shakespeare, and certainly more truth than falsity. What is questionable about it, however, is its representation of Shakespeare as a writer totally uninterested in matters of literary theory. Is it even conceivable that a poet of Shakespeare's awareness and imagination never reflected, and deeply, upon the nature of his art? Further, we must remember the time in which Shakespeare lived as well as his genius, for the Elizabethan age was one of vigorous critical controversy in which the nature and function of poetry was a major item of discussion. No one wishes to add to Shakespeare's already overburdened reading-list by suggesting that he was a diligent, note-taking student of all the Elizabethan treatises on poetry; nor is there any need to do this. The problems with which critics like Sidney, Webbe, and Puttenham concerned themselves arose directly from the literary conditions of the time, and they must have been endlessly debated at the Mermaid and other meeting-places of poets and dramatists. In this way Shakespeare would have assimilated contemporary ideas about the nature of literature without any laborious course of reading, just as, in all probability, he assimilated the current political ideas that he wove into his history plays.

However, the correction of the popular image of Shakespeare is not to be based on *a priori* references to the nature of poetic genius or to

the heated literary controversies of his day. Its refutation lies in his plays and poems, which contain a number of scattered clues, some of them quite large and explicit, from which we may construct in rough outline a picture of his conception of poetry.

Before examining the evidence of the text, however, it is necessary to enter two general caveats. In the first place we must always remember (as in deducing Shakespeare's personal attitude to most things) that his writing is *dramatic* and also belongs to a tradition in which literature was much more social than personal, objective than subjective. It is the crudest sort of error in interpretation to take every thing Shakespeare writes as evidence of his personal beliefs and attitudes; and when Hotspur speaks contemptuously of "mincing poetry"[1] we have no reason for thinking that Shakespeare was momentarily letting slip some secret and usually well-repressed opinion about his own art. On the other hand, in contrast with such subjects as politics and religion, literature was a safe topic[2] in which Shakespeare was quite at liberty to express his personal opinions whenever he felt inclined.

In the second place we must be careful about the denotation of such words as "poet" and "poetry" when we encounter them in Shakespeare's work. It is evident from such a remark as Holofernes' "I will prove those verses to be very unlearned, neither savouring of poetry, wit, nor invention"[3] that Shakespeare was capable of using "poetry" in a specialized sort of way. In particular we must remember that his reference may be primarily or even entirely to traditional lyric and narrative poetry and not to dramatic poetry, which was, after all, a comparatively new form of the art. Such references as we find in most of the dialogue between Apemantus and the Poet[4] or in the conversation between Touchstone and Audrey[5] have plainly little to do with dramatic poetry. Yet while it is difficult to assess exactly the extent to which Shakespeare, or any Elizabethan, identified the writer of a play in verse with the traditional kind of poet, there are occasions when Shakespeare's "poet" is clearly the dramatist. Thus when Rosencrantz is discussing the

[1] *I Henry IV*, III. i. 134. It is interesting to note the use of this same epithet in William Vaughan's *From the Golden Grove:* "Sundry times have I been conversant with such as blasphemed Poetry, by calling it mincing and lying Poetry" (*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith, Vol. II, p. 326).

[2] So far as literary theory was concerned. But it would not have done to discuss the government censorship of drama.

[3] *Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, ii, 164–166.

[4] *Timon*, I, i, 220–234.

[5] *As You Like It*, III, iii, 12–27.

controversy over the child-actors he remarks: "There was, for a while, no money bid for argument, unless the *poet* and the player went to cuffs in the question."[1]

§

One of the chief clichés of Elizabethan theorists about poetry was that it was divinely inspired: Puttenham for instance writes, "This science in his perfection cannot grow but by some divine instinct."[2] The doctrine was a popular one because it gave the lie direct to those traducers of poetry, the *Mysomousoi* as Sidney branded them, who, with a breastplate of citations from the patristic writers, condemned poetry on moral and religious grounds. But there is little trace of it in Shakespeare. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* has a brief reference to 'heaven-bred poesy"[3]; the *Passionate Pilgrim*, alluding to both poetry and music, contains the line

One god is god of both as poets feign:

and, in a more humorous context, we may read Audrey's question to Touchstone: "Do you wish then that the gods had made me poetical?"[4]

However, this fiction about the divine origin of poetry was commonly combined with another traditional notion that ran close to the actual roots of poetry, or at least to poetry of a certain kind. Because poetry was divinely inspired it sprang, in the poet, from possession, rapture, frenzy; it was the product of a powerful, irrational activity that lay quite outside comprehensible and familiar human experience. This was the concept of "furor", the source of which is to be found in Plato's *Ion*:

> "All good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. And as the Corybantian revellers when they dance are not in their right mind, so the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains; but when falling under the power of music and metre they are inspired and possessed. . . . The poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind

[1] *Hamlet*, II, ii, 371–374.

[2] *The Art of English Poesie* (*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. II, p. 3). Puttenham gives this theory a special twist: it is not merely that the poets are divinely inspired but that in a sense they are gods: "It is therefore of Poets thus to be conceived, that if they be able to devise and make all these things of themselves, without any subject of verity, that they be (by manner of speech) as creating gods." (*Ibid.*, p. 4.)

[3] III, ii, 72.

[4] *As You Like It*, III, iii, 24–25.

is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and unable to utter his oracles."[1]

Sidney, though he appears to have had moments of scepticism,[2] transplants this theory of the origin of poetry into his *Apology*, where we read that the poets "are so beloved of the Gods that whatsoever they write proceeds of a divine fury"[3]; and from this part of Sidney's seed-bed of criticism a score of later writers took cuttings. Puttenham adds to the already quoted sentence about "divine instinct" the revealing phrase "the Platonics call it *furor*"[4]; Chapman proclaims that "Homer's poems were written from a free fury"[5]; while Drayton in some lines on Marlowe (*Epistle to Reynolds*) versifies the theory in a couplet:

> And that fine madness still he did retain
> Which rightly should possess the poet's brain.

It is hardly necessary to quote chapter and verse for Shakespeare's acquaintance with this theory since even those who play him up to the height as the practical poet are familiar with the line

> The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling[6]

and with the rest of the speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (one of Shakespeare's most important pronouncements on the nature of poetry), which describes the states of possession common to the lover, the poet, and the madman. There are also several explicit references in the *Sonnets*, as for instance in the lines:

> So should my papers yellow'd with their age
> Be scorn'd like old men of less truth than tongue,
> And your true rights be termed *a poet's rage*
> And stretched metre of an antique song;[7]

and again in:

> Where art thou, Muse, that thou forget'st so long
> To speak of that which gives thee all thy might?
> Spend'st thou *thy fury* on some worthless song,
> Darkening thy power to lend base subjects light?[8]

[1] Jowett's translation.
[2] See *Astrophel and Stella*, LXXIV, 5–6:

> Some do I hear of Poet's fury tell,
> But (God wot) wot not what they mean by it.

[3] *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I, p. 206.
[4] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 3.
[5] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 298.
[6] *Midsummer Night's Dream*, V, i, 12.
[7] XVII, 9–12.
[8] C, 1–4.

But, granted that Shakespeare was familiar with this theory of "rage" and "fury", did he subscribe to it? The answer is that in general he probably did—and not mistakenly, for it is only the platonic way of describing what, as we shall see later, was his own process of creation and what can be described in less mystical terms. But, remembering our second caveat over Shakespeare's use of the word "poet" and also noting how these references are taken from early and lyrical work, from the *Sonnets* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we have reason to think that this theory would have appealed most of all to Shakespeare in his younger days when he was as much a lyric poet as a dramatist, the author of the *Sonnets, Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece,* as well as of plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet.* Later, when he was primarily a dramatist, and one hard-pressed by a company constantly clamouring for new plays, he could have had little sympathy for the "furor" theory in its extreme form, in its representation of the poet as a winged and holy thing in whom there is no invention "until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him". There must have been innumerable occasions when he sat down to his desk as deliberately and prosaically as Trollope ever did, even if, once the first words were on paper to stimulate him, he soared into regions far beyond the parish-boundaries of Trollope's sturdy pedestrian pacings.

Alongside this classical theory of poetic inspiration we may also observe in Shakespeare's work another that derived from the contemporary romantic attitude to love. As this attitude was developed in its late sixteenth-century post-Petrarchan form, by poets like Sidney and Spenser, love was no longer regarded merely as the source of moral virtue but as the primary stimulus to all forms of æsthetic sensibility, including the composition of poetry. Moreover, now that it was becoming difficult for the devoted lover to prove his prowess in the tilt-yard it was a convenient substitute for him to be able to affirm his submission to his lady in poetry. Without such a medium the new lachrymose lover's ritual of tears and sighs, fasting and vigils, might pass unnoticed. So it came about that in conventional romantic courtship the pennoned lance was replaced by the well-turned sonnet. Even Benedick was forced to follow the fashion, though in the end he came to the conclusion that he "was not born under a rhyming planet".[1]

Berowne's famous speech in *Love's Labour's Lost* is one of the most impassioned and audacious expositions of this doctrine in the whole

[1] *Much Ado,* V, ii, 40–41.

range of late sixteenth-century poetry. In particular there are the lines:

> Never durst poet touch a pen to write
> Until his ink were temper'd with Love's sighs;
> O, then his lines would ravish savage ears
> And plant in tyrants mild humility.[1]

On the surface these words seem explicit enough; and when (stretching the meaning of "love" a little) we set beside them the monotonous insistence of the *Sonnets* that Shakespeare's love of his patron is the source of his poetic creation and also allow something for the presence of the Dark Lady in the *Sonnets* and perhaps in the study of Cleopatra, we should be rash to deny that Shakespeare's poetry was never inspired by love or that Shakespeare himself was not conscious of this. Yet we cannot attach much importance to this particular theory of poetic inspiration, for Shakespeare was not primarily a love-lyrist, nor is love more than an incidental theme in the bulk of his work. Hence it is safer to take the effusions of the King, Longaville and Dumaine, of Orlando, and of the other lovers in the comedies purely as dramatic utterances: they are Shakespeare's dramatic reflection of the fashionable romantic attitude to love and do not express any serious personal comment on the nature of poetic inspiration.

Much more revealing of Shakespeare's mature theory is a passage that occurs in *Timon of Athens*. In the opening scene the Poet, Painter, Jeweller and Merchant are all in conversation. Suddenly the Painter focuses the limelight on the Poet:

> You are rapt, sir, in some work, some dedication
> To the great lord.[2]

The Poet at once seizes the opportunity of confession:

> A thing slipped idly from me.
> Our poesy is as a gum, which oozes
> From whence 'tis nourish'd: the fire i' the flint
> Shows not till it be struck; our gentle flame
> Provokes itself and like the current flies
> Each bound it chafes.[2]

At first reading this passage may seem very close to the "furor" theory that has already been discussed. The Painter uses the characteristic word "rapt" to describe the Poet's apparent state of mind; the verb "slipped" and the image of poetry "oozing" from some internal

[1] *Love's Labour's Lost*, IV, iii, 346–349.

[2] I, i, 19–25.

source suggests a slow process beyond the poet's volition and the reach of the conscious mind; while the denial that poetry can be struck out by some vigorous action like striking fire from flint is in keeping with Plato's thought in the *Ion*. There is in truth a general similarity. Yet this analysis is not quite the same as the usual "rapture" theory that we find in Sidney and the other Elizabethan critics. For one thing the words "slipped", "gum which oozes", and "gentle flame" suggest a much easier sort of process than is usually associated with platonic "furor" or "The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling". Above all, there is no mystical implication of divine (or daemoniac) possession; what the Poet is describing is some natural psychological (and perhaps to some extent physical) process, while it is a process that is observed much more closely and vividly than anything in the critics: it reads like the self-analysis of a practitioner, one would say. Shakespeare admits the subconscious nature of poetic composition; but in the place of divine *inflatus* he advances a theory of spontaneous generation and internal stimulus—

> our gentle flame
> *Provokes itself*—

which can only mean that word and image beget word and image, that rhythm suggests phrase and further rhythm, and that the melodic value of vowel and consonant call up chiming or contrasting sounds. Moreover, poetry written like this is a "current", an impulsive, urgent, and perhaps at times wayward flow, which, if it is brought to a stand in one direction, swiftly moves off into another:

> and like the current flies
> Each bound it chafes.

This theory of poetic inspiration, though nominally advanced to explain what most of us would regard as a particularly mechanical type of verse-writing, a dedication, is a convincing account of how a great deal of poetry is composed and could be supported by the testimony of many poets and critics. Hilaire Belloc, for instance, in his essay *Of An Unknown Country*, has written:

> "Verse is a slow thing to create; nay, it is not really created: it is a secretion of the mind, it is a pearl that gathers round some irritant and slowly expresses the very essence of beauty and desire that has long lain, potential and unexpressed, in the mind of the man who secretes it".[1]

This is not quite Shakespeare's analysis, to be sure: there is a particular

[1] From the volume of essays *On Nothing*.

emphasis on the slowness of composition which conflicts with the Shakespearean notion of easeful facility, and there is nothing in Shakespeare that explicitly defines poetry as a realization of the dormant and potential, though, as we shall see shortly, this part of Belloc's analysis does apply to Shakespeare's way of writing. But the central idea of secretion, of an internal, spontaneous generation, is there, as it is also in A. E. Housman's self-analysis of the poetic process:

> "I think that the production of poetry, in its first stage, is less an active than a passive and involuntary process; and if I were obliged, not to define poetry, but to name the class of things to which it belongs, I should call it a secretion; whether a natural secretion, like turpentine in the fir, or a morbid secretion, like the pearl in the oyster. I think that my own case, though I may not deal with the material so cleverly as the oyster does, is the latter."[1]

This description again has its individual note, for Housman's "morbid" secretion is intended quite seriously as he goes on to confess: "I have seldom written poetry unless I was rather out of health".[2] Yet, allowing for these differences, the general similarity between the descriptions is remarkable; and it will be noticed that Housman both repeats Belloc's metaphor of the oyster and, with his analogy of turpentine in the fir, echoes Shakespeare's

> Our poesy is as a gum, which oozes
> From whence 'tis nourish'd.

However, the most significant thing about Shakespeare's analysis of the poetic process in *Timon* is not that it can be abundantly corroborated by the testimony of other poets but that it entirely corresponds with the nature of his own poetry. Everything in his work goes to illustrate the passage's general point of ease and facility: this is exactly the impression that his verse makes on us; and our subjective impression is supported by all kinds of external evidence—the speed with which he must have composed his plays, the remarks of the players[3] and of Heminge and Condell on the unblotted (i.e. uncorrected) state of his papers, and Ben Jonson's famous comment, "[He] had an excellent phantasy, brave notions and gentle expressions; wherein he flowed with that facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped".[4] Even where his poetry imposes a strain on the reader, either because of the richly clotted nature of its imagery or because, as in the last plays particularly, the rapidity of

[1] *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, pp. 48–49.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 49.
[3] Quoted by Jonson in *Timber*.
[4] Jonson, *Ibid.*

thought so outruns the expression that syntax is twisted, tangled, and even fractured, this strain does not arise from any laboured quality of his writing but from the tumbling profusion of his ideas and images, the rapid, flexible, sensitive movement of his mind. He is not furiously, perplexedly, hammering something out, "striking fire i' the flint." Rather it is the case of the current flying "each bound it chafes"; or as Lamb, changing the metaphor, puts it, "before one idea has burst its shell, another is hatched and clamours for disclosure".[1]

In particular, everything in his poetry goes to suggest that it was created, just as he indicates, by a largely spontaneous, and often subconscious, process of self-generation—"our gentle flame Provokes itself". We can observe this process in at least three forms. First, there is the rich and effortless proliferation of some basic metaphor through a number of lines, as in this speech of Polonius:

> I do know,
> When the blood *burns*, how prodigal the soul
> Lends the tongue vows: these *blazes*, daughter,
> Giving more *light* than *heat*, *extinct* in both,
> Even in their promise, as it is a-making,
> You must not take for *fire*.[2]

These lines may have been generated in two distinct ways: the development might have been started by the first metaphor "burns", or, alternatively, the fundamental image of fire might have been latent in Shakespeare's mind from the start. In the absence of any evidence from the writer himself, we cannot easily decide between these alternatives, though the locking alliteration of "burns" with "blood", echoed by the later "blazes", perhaps tips the balance in favour of the first. But the distinction itself is not particularly important: whichever way Shakespeare's mind worked there is the same spontaneous sort of growth, producing an effect of ease and fluidity.

Secondly, and perhaps more notably, there is in Shakespeare's poetry a continuous process of association in which word begets word and image image, either through correspondences of sound or meaning or through the effect of some sustaining, and perhaps unconscious, emotion. This type of development differs from the first in that its last stages may be far removed from the first: there is unity and organization certainly, for one word or phrase or image leads connectedly into another; but there is not the homogeneity that we get from the elaboration of one

[1] *Notes on the Elizabethan and other Dramatists.*

[2] *Hamlet*, I, iii, 115–120.

germinal metaphor. An excellent example of this sort of writing is to be found at the beginning of *2 Henry IV*, where Morton is describing the effects of Hotspur's death:

> In few, his death, whose spirit lent a fire
> Even to the dullest peasant in his camp,
> Being bruited once, took fire and heat away
> From the best-tempered courage in his troops.
> For from his mettle was his party steeled,
> Which once in him abated, all the rest
> Turned on themselves, like dull and heavy lead.
> And as the thing that's heavy in itself,
> Upon enforcement flies with greatest speed,
> So did our men, heavy in Hotspur's loss,
> Lend to his weight such lightness with their fear,
> That arrows fled not swifter toward their aim
> Than did our soldiers, aiming at their safety
> Fly from the field.[1]

Here the ultimate images of "arrows" and "aiming" are far remote from the initial metaphor of "fire". Yet the whole passage is a capital instance of spontaneous organic growth, of the gentle flame that provokes itself, since apart from the pervading antithesis of weight and lightness, there is a continuous and complex chain of association. The first image of fire and heat suggests to Shakespeare one of the applications of fire, the tempering of metal; hence "best-tempered", "steeled", and probably "mettle", for although Shakespeare employs the latter word in his usual sense of spirit and courage, there is the sound-correspondence with "metal" as well as the fact that "mettle" was originally a variant of "metal". "Abated" may have been prompted by the previous use of "fire" since it is a verb commonly applied to the extinguishing or dying-down of fire; but the next main link in the complex of associations is the simile "like dull and heavy lead", which arises partly as an antithesis to "best-tempered" and "steeled" (it is certainly in the "metal" context), and is partly a delayed elaboration of "dullest peasant". The following connection is to some extent concealed: "dull and heavy lead" suggests a leaden bullet, and though the bullet is not directly named, it must be the allusion of the lines

> And as the thing that's heavy in itself,
> Upon enforcement flies with greatest speed. . . .

This new association is entirely in keeping with the logic of the ideas, that what is heavy may be propelled to move with speed. In turn the

[1] I, i, 112–125. The striking image-associations of this passage were noted by W. Clemen in *Shakespeares Bilder*, p. 95.

bullet image, modified by the paradox of weight and lightness in line 122, evokes a different sort of missile, the arrow, and this culminates in the audacious figure of the soldiers as arrows aiming themselves at a target of safety.

In this second type of spontaneous creation where one word or phrase generates another in a sustained sequence the association is comparatively free, except where it is controlled by some strong emotion either in the scene or in Shakespeare himself. But there is a third type of expression, brilliantly analysed by E. A. Armstrong in his book *Shakespeare's Imagination*, in which the associations are to a large extent pre-determined. Some of these associations, for which Armstrong uses the term "image-clusters", have been recognized for some time: for instance, there is the well-known dogs-candy-flattery linkage, noted by Whiter[1] a hundred and fifty years ago, which is to be found in *I Henry IV*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Timon* and *Antony and Cleopatra* But no one before has demonstrated the number and recurrent nature of these clusters, whose genesis and evolution Armstrong describes with subtlety and sensitiveness—one or two strained interpretations apart. What appears to happen is this: through various causes—free associations of the sort we have already discussed, some experience or emotion of Shakespeare—certain words and images cohere into a nucleus, which remains latent in Shakespeare's subconscious mind. Once the nucleus has been established it may emerge again on half a dozen occasions: it may be released by the employment of one of its constituent words or images, which attracts the others after it, or it may be evoked by the revival of the situation or emotion with which it was originally associated. The second chapter of Armstrong's book where he is discussing the beetle-crow-mice image-cluster affords examples of all these types of recollection: there are passages where the cluster seems to emerge primarily through the attractive power of one of its constituents;[2] there are two passages where the cluster appears as a response to the same sort of situation;[3] and most of the passages have a common emotive tone, which, as Armstrong convincingly demonstrates, arises from the context of death.

All this does not mean that there is a mechanical monotony, a compulsive repetitiveness, about Shakespeare's poetry. These image-clusters expand and contract, appropriate new elements to themselves and

[1] *A Specimen of a Commentary on Shakespeare*, pp. 138–141 (1794).

[2] As in *Cymbeline*, III, iii, 10–21.

[3] The dizzy height of a cliff: *Hamlet*, I, iv, 69–78; *Lear*, IV, vi, 11–24.

discard others. They are, as Armstrong admirably expresses it on one occasion, groups of partners in an ever-changing pattern of dance. But if this process of Shakespeare's imagination was not one of mechanical reproduction, it was certainly a subconscious and automatic one, and must, therefore, have contributed strongly to his sense of poesy as

> a gum, which oozes
> From whence 'tis nourish'd.

§

Another striking, if somewhat baffling, clue to Shakespeare's conception of poetry is the fact that time after time we find him using the word in conjunction with the term "feigning". About half of the references to "feigning" in Bartlett's *Concordance* show this word linked with "poetry" or with some derivative of "poetry". What did Shakespeare mean by "feigning" and why this conjunction?

To begin with, we may distinguish between two separate denotations in his employment of the word. In a number of instances it is simply a synonym for "lying". So in the following passage from *Timon*:

> *Apemantus:* Art not a Poet?
> *Poet:* Yes.
> *Apemantus:* Then thou liest: look in thy last work, where thou hast feigned him a worthy fellow.
> *Poet:* That's not feigned; he is so.[1]

Again in one of the snatches of dialogue between Touchstone and Audrey poetry is feigning and feigning is lying:

> *Touchstone:* I would the gods had made thee poetical.
> *Audrey:* I do not know what "poetical" is: is it honest in deed and word? is it a true thing?
> *Touchstone:* No, truly; for the truest poetry is the most feigning; and lovers are given to poetry, and what they swear in poetry may be said as lovers they do feign.
> *Audrey:* Do you wish then that the gods had made me poetical?
> *Touchstone:* I do truly; for thou swearest to me thou art honest: now, if thou wert a poet, I might have some hope thou didst feign.[2]

On the other hand, there are occasions when the word appears to be used in a much more neutral way, in the sense of "pretend" or "imagine", as in these lines from 3 *Henry VI*:

[1] *Timon*, I, i, 226–230.
[2] *As You Like It*, III, iii, 16–27.

How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown;
Within whose circuit is Elysium
And all that poets feign of bliss and joy.[1]

There is a similar usage of the word in *The Merchant of Venice:*

Therefore the poet
Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones and floods.[2]

Sometimes the significance of the word seems to lie somewhat between these extremes, as when, in retort to Viola's defence of her love-address, "Alas, I took great pains to study it, and 'tis poetical", Olivia replies, "It is the more like to be feigned".[3]

To appreciate Shakespeare's frequent use of "feigning" as an epithet for poetry, the variety of his meanings, and the significance of such a paradox as Touchstone's remark "the truest poetry is the most feigning", we must know something of Elizabethan and Renaissance literary criticism. In the first place his fondness for the term is to be explained by the fact that "feigning"[4] was a key-word in the criticism of the time, as "Nature" and "wit" were in the criticism of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. Sidney, for instance, in his *Apology*, uses the word continually. Secondly, one of the most hard-pressed charges of the *Mysomousoi* was that poets were a bad moral influence because they told lies.[5] Moralists and preachers who went in for poet-baiting appropriated the word "feigning", which accordingly took on its colouring of moral reprobation. But as most commonly used, and certainly as used by the more responsible writers, "feigning" meant a certain kind of imagination and was closely linked with the Aristotelian doctrine of *mimesis*. The poets feign because they describe landscapes that are more beautiful than those of nature: "Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done, neither with pleasant rivers, fruitful trees, sweet-smelling flowers, nor whatsoever else may make the too-much loved earth more lovely".[6] They feign because they bring the dead to life or present to us men and women who have

[1] I, ii, 29–31.
[2] V, i, 79–80.
[3] *Twelfth Night*, I, v, 207–209.
[4] The concept was principally derived from Minturno: "aut vitia aut virtutes effingunt," *De Poeta.*
[5] Lodge in *A Defence of Poetry* traces this charge to Aristotle and Cato: "*Poetae* (saith he) *multa mentiuntur;* and to further his opinion severe Cato putteth in his censure, *Admiranda canunt, sed non credenda, Poetae*" (*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I, p. 73). See also the already quoted remark of William Vaughan.
[6] *Apology for Poetry* (*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I, p. 156).

never lived; because they give us speeches they have never heard or speeches more eloquent than their characters could ever have uttered. So Sidney asserts that Herodotus and the historians usurped the function of poets in "their passionate describing of passions, the many particularities of battles, which no man could affirm, or, if that be denied me, long orations put into the mouths of great kings and captains, which it is certain they never pronounced".[1] Sidney also speaks of the "feigned image of poetry"[2] and declares that "it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by".[3] "Feigning" in the form of "counterfeiting" appears in one of his central definitions: "Poesy, therefore, is an art of imitation, for so Aristotle deemeth it in his word *mimesis,* that is to say, a representing, *counterfeiting,* or figuring forth: to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture"[4]. Admittedly there is some confusion in Sidney, for while he argues that poetry is a "feigning" in its invention, its idealization and heightening, at times he praises the poets for their realistic truth, as when he finds in them "all virtues, vices, and passions so in their natural seats laid to the view, that we seem not to hear of them, but clearly to see through them".[5] On the other hand, he is at pains not to confuse feigning with lying, and his distinction, which became a popular one, is that poets do not lie because they never represent their fictions as truth. One of his sayings under this head comes close to Touchstone's paradox: "To the second [imputation against poets], therefore I answer paradoxically, but, truly, I think truly, that of all writers under the sun the poet is the least liar".[6]

One can hardly doubt that behind Shakespeare's use of "feigning" in its more neutral sense of "pretending" and "imagining" there was a conception of poetry much like Sidney's, for his own drama was filled with free invention and with heightening and idealization of every kind. In story, "psychology", setting, and, above all, in its medium of poetry, his work was in every important respect the antithesis of what we to-day have come to accept and admire as "realism". He makes great and continuous demands on the make-believe, fancy and imagination of his audience, and what Sidney says of Herodotus and the historians in their usurpation of the poet's art would match with Shakespeare's comedies

[1] *Apology for Poetry,* p. 153.
[2] *Ibid.,* p. 166.
[3] *Ibid.,* p. 160.
[4] *Ibid.,* p. 158.
[5] *Ibid.,* p. 166.
[6] *Ibid.,* p. 184.

and tragedies no less than with his histories. All his drama is a work of imagination, "the feigned image of poetry"; it is not, as in most of our modern drama, an analysis and a transcript of real, familiar life. Like all the other Elizabethan poet-dramatists he enchants us into a world of make-believe; his art is never directed, as it is by most modern dramatists, towards persuading us that what we see on the stage is merely an extension of the real world.

And this brings us to Duke Theseus' famous speech on poetry in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for "fantasy" was but another name for "feigning":

> I never may believe
> These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
> Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
> Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
> More than cool reason ever comprehends.
> The lunatic, the lover and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact:
> One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
> That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.[1]

It would be wrong to read Shakespeare's own conception of poetry into every syllable of this speech. These lines bear the unmistakable accent of the Duke himself, the mature man among youngsters, the cool, sceptical rationalist among dreamers and fantastics, poets and lovers. He is expressing one commentary, the plain man's, on the incredible fairy-tale adventures of a midsummer night. In particular the first part of the speech, with its good-humoured mocking, is conditioned by the nature and function of the Duke. On the other hand, his conception of poetry as the product of some feverish, abnormal state of mind similar to the madman's and, therefore, not to be appreciated or measured by "cool reason" is the pure popular doctrine of poetic "furor". In the same way his description of the poetic imagination as something that

> bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown

belongs to the contemporary theory of "feigning". What are these

[1] V, i, 2–17.

words but a poetic version of Sidney's, "Only the poet, disdaining to be tied to any such subjection, lifted up with the vigour of his own invention, doth grow in effect another nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature."[1] However, having given to the Duke—and with perfect dramatic appropriateness—two common notions about poetry that he himself shared to some extent, Shakespeare seizes on the last part of the speech for some personal comment and qualification. With all the affinities that the poetic state of mind has to the lover's and the lunatic's, it is not the same thing. For two reasons: first, because the poet's "fantasy" glancing

> from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven

has an altogether exceptional range; and secondly, and most importantly, because the poet's play of imagination is to a large degree controlled. Whatever the imagination bodies forth

> the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes, *and gives to airy nothing*
> *A local habitation and a name.*

In a word the poet's fantasy is creative: creative because it produces poetry. So in his *Art of English Poesie* Puttenham retorted on those who abused the poets as fantasticals: "Even so is the fantastical part of man (if it be not disordered) a representer of the best, most comely, and beautiful images or appearances of things to the soul and according to their very truth".[2]

But the Sidneys and the Puttenhams pushed their defence of poetic "feigning" and fantasy further than this: the images of this feigning were *utile* as well as *dulce*; poetry taught as well as delighted: "it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by".[3] Hence the heavy emphasis of the critics (and many of the writers) on the moral and didactic function of poetry; hence the recurrent metaphor of the pill and the sugar coating.

[1] *Apology for Poetry* (*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I, p. 156).

[2] *Art of English Poesie* (*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. II, p. 20). In this context it is interesting to read Puttenham's statement of the charge against poets: "As well Poets as Poesie are despised, and the name become of honourable infamous, subject to scorn and derision, and rather a reproach than a praise to any that useth it: for commonly whoso is studious in the art or shows himself excellent in it, they call him in disdain a *fantastical*; and a light-headed or fantastical man (by conversion) they call a Poet." (*Ibid.*, p. 19).

[3] *Apology for Poetry*, Vol. I, p. 160.

Twice at least Shakespeare touches lightly on this part of contemporary theory, when he repeats the hackneyed Orpheus myth of the civilizing quality of poetry (and music) that we find in Sidney, Webbe, Puttenham, and many other writers:[1]

> For Orpheus' lute was strung with poets' sinews,
> Whose golden touch could soften steel and stones,
> Make tigers tame and huge leviathans
> Forsake unsounded deeps to dance on sands.[2]

But references like these are trifles. The remarkable thing about Shakespeare's conception of poetry (so far as it is reflected in his plays and poems) is that it ignores the moral and didactic emphasis of contemporary theory.

There are various explanations of this. The advocate of the "practical" Shakespeare, allied on this occasion with the art-for-art's-saker, says simply that Shakespeare was not a preacher or a moralist but a poet and playwright; and Grierson[3] has given this view the weight of historical support by arguing that the a-moral nature of Shakespearean and much other Elizabethan drama was the dramatist's answer to the Church for its opposition to the stage.

Now it is certainly true that Shakespeare's work is seldom moral[4] in any emphatic, explicit, or argumentative way: he never makes drama out of the debate of moral ideas. We have only to read his version of the Antony and Cleopatra story by the side of *All For Love*, in which Dryden is always the deliberate moralist preoccupied with the "crimes of love", to appreciate this. But it is impossible to deny that his histories and tragedies are filled with moral implications, simple though these may be and even, from the standpoint of his own time, commonplace. What is more moral, for instance, than that fundamental impression of the tragedies that where individualism is anarchic and unbridled, where men and women throw off all moral and social restraints to realize themselves to the uttermost, the result is chaos and destruction?

> It will come,
> Humanity must perforce prey upon itself,
> Like monsters of the deep.[5]

What is apparent to us must have been apparent to Shakespeare; and

[1] The source of this is Horace, *De Arte Poetica*, 391–3:

> Silvestres homines sacer interpresque deorum
> Caedibus et victu foedo deterruit Orpheus:
> Dictus ob hoc lenire tigres, rabidosque leones.

[2] *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, III, ii, 78–81.

[3] *Cross Currents in English Literature of the Seventeenth Century.*

[4] *Timon* is an important exception to this generalization.

[5] *Lear*, IV, ii, 47–49.

though he usually preferred to let the moral speak for itself in his work, though he always insisted on a thicker coating to the pill than theoreticians like Sidney prescribed, it is unlikely, in spite of the lack of overt affirmation in his plays, that he would have denied their Renaissance belief in the moral end of poetry and of all literature.

§

There are one or two other aspects of Shakespeare's conception of poetry that remain to be briefly noted. In his *Sonnets*, in lines like

> Not marble, nor the gilded monuments
> Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
> But you shall shine more bright in these contents
> Than unswept stone besmear'd with sluttish time[1]

he insists to tediousness on the memorizing, and therefore immortalizing, power of poetry; his consciousness of exercising this power is indeed one of his chief solaces in depression and humiliation. There is nothing exceptional in this lofty claim (or device of poetic blackmail), for it belongs to the centre of Renaissance literary doctrine. So too, in his intimate associating of music and poetry (as when, in his treatment of the Orpheus myth, he makes Orpheus alternatively the master of poetry and music), he is both reflecting the actual conditions of his time when a large part of lyric poetry was still written to be sung and echoing such theorists as Sidney: "he [the poet] cometh to you with words set in delightful proportion, either accompanied with, or prepared for, the well-enchanting skill of music."[2]

But these are comparative details, and our survey has covered the chief points in Shakespeare's conception of poetry as it is revealed in his plays and poems. That this conception is, after all, fragmentary and—apart from one or two shrewd observations like the Poet's self-analysis in *Timon*—lacking in any marked originality should surprise no one. Most of Shakespeare's "ideas" (in the strict sense of the word), whether political, historical, social, economic, moral or philosophical, are unsystematized and belong to the common thought of his age; and though we cannot appreciate Shakespeare fully if we ignore these ideas, the plain and unscholarly reader holds fast to an incontrovertible conviction: that Shakespeare was an entertainer and a poet-dramatist, not a moralist or a philosopher, not a Shaw or an Ibsen, not even a Jonson or a Molière. Further, if Shakespeare is for all time, he is also deeply rooted in his own age; in many respects, conservatively rooted.

[1] LV, 1–4.

[2] *Apology for Poetry* (*Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. I, p. 172).

III

ARNOLD AND PATER:
Critics Historical, Aesthetic and Otherwise

by GEOFFREY TILLOTSON

I

AT the end of his second lecture on translating Homer, Matthew Arnold declared that

> the main effort [of the intellect of the continent], for now many years, has been a *critical* effort; the endeavour, in all branches of knowledge—theology, philosophy, history, art, science—to see the object as in itself it really is.

And he noted the laggardliness of English writers who continued to exhibit that obsolete and insular thing, a

> strong tendency . . . to bring to the consideration of their object some individual fancy.[1]

Arnold felt himself enough convinced of the rightness of his view to make this passage the starting point of an essay written four years later, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time", an essay discussing this English failing as an introduction to his own widely ranging *Essays in Criticism*.

That phrase "the object as in itself it really is" shows Arnold on one of the occasions when he advertised what he called the disinterested critic. This kind of critic, of course, was, and is, impossible in practice. In Arnold's day, so he thought, too many critics were wearing their

[1] *On Translating Homer*, 1861, pp. 63f. Cf. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A. C. Fraser, 1894, ii, 227: "It matters not what men's fancies are, it is the knowledge of things that is only to be prized: it is this alone gives a value to our reasonings, and preference to one man's knowledge over another's, that it is of things as they really are, and not of dreams and fancies." Wordsworth may have had this passage in mind when he defined as an elementary requisite of the poetic mind the power "to observe with accuracy things as they are in themselves, and with fidelity to describe them, unmodified by any passion or feeling existing in the mind of the describer . . ." (*Poetical Works*, ed E. de Selincourt, ii (1944), 431f).

interestedness on their sleeves—the sectarian, political, and jingoistic, for instance. Arnold's own interestedness, nevertheless, was clear, even to himself. It was exhibited in the very vivacity of his writing. His bouquet of sweetness and light was discharged, as Newman said of an olive-branch of Pusey's, "as if from a catapult".[1] And it was discharged with a fillip because it was designed to produce an effect, and to produce it quickly. If Arnold's first concern was with the object as it really is, his second and last was with the object as it really *did*. He wanted his objects to produce a certain effect on the members of the British middle class as he saw them ranged, crude and stiff-necked, round about him.

There was evidence of his interestedness in the wording of the phrase in which he renounced it; the present tense showed his concern to be limited to himself and his living fellows. In so far as he was aware of the claims on the present made by an object surviving from the past, Arnold dismissed them from primary consideration. In that late essay, "The Study of Poetry", he was at pains to protect what he called the "real" estimate of poetry from two other estimates, the former of which was the "historic":

> A poet or a poem may count to us historically . . . The course of development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry, is profoundly interesting; and by regarding a poet's work as a stage in this course of development we may easily bring ourselves to make it of more importance as poetry than in itself it really is, we may come to use a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticizing it; in short, to over-rate it.[2]

Arnold was not concerned so much with the object as it originally was as with what it amounted to in the present. That phrase, ignoring time and its changes, sucked everything into the present moment when, for the moment, time obligingly seemed still. "To see the object as in itself it really is" brought all objects on to the same mid-nineteenth-century footing whether they were old objects or new, whether they were poems of Milton or poems of Browning. Arnold did not see that to survive at all was to survive in a perpetual state of being modified. When the object was a poem of Browning, well and good: then Arnold met an object which had not "had time", as we say, to change: he met an object, which like himself was a contemporary object. But when the object was a poem of Milton, there was the complication of a choice,

[1] *A Letter to the Rev. E. B. Pusey, D.D., on his recent Eirenicon*, 1866, p. 9.

[2] *Essays in Criticism, Second Series*, 1888, pp. 6f.

since, broadly speaking, there were then two objects: the object as in itself it really *was* at first (*Paradise Lost* as it appeared to Milton and to the seventeenth-century reader) and the object as in itself it really is (*Paradise Lost* as it lay helpless after the latest of the modifications, the object as it appeared to the gaily unlearned[1] Arnold and the mid-nineteenth-century reader).

Arnold's criticism of the literature that was produced before the nineteenth century was criticism of objects as they appeared to a mind unaware that the date of a mind mattered. So that the amount of Arnold included in criticism of old objects is disproportionate to the amount included of the objects. But of course even when we recognize that this is so, we go on reading Arnold's criticism, and for two reasons in the main. It is, in the first place, that of its author: whatever Matthew Arnold touched he adorned. Our impatience—if in the increased fullness of time we see his shortcomings as an interpreter of past literature—dissolves away in the general gratitude for a context as lively as a novel of Peacock's. Moreover, Arnold's writings now reap the supererogatory benefit of having belonged so vividly to their own age. His criticism of the past is saved for us the more completely for the paradoxical reason that it was so much of its own time. Nevertheless, being originally so modern in intention, it is a pity it drew as much as it did on the past. It was, and is, at its best when in frank dependence on the present. A novelist like Scott can take the past and make a brave new world of it for the entertainment of men and boys. But the critic should only touch the past in order to explain it. No critic who is concerned first of all with his own times will care to do this. Let such a critic, therefore, write essays like those making up *Culture and Anarchy* rather than essays on Marcus Aurelius, Milton, pagan and medieval religious sentiment.

Arnold was for dismissing the "historic estimate". Yes, by all means let the literary historian keep in his place. Let him give us correct dates and ample bibliographies, and let him point out good texts. And, further, let him do all this as if his materials were all of equal value. But do not let us confuse his place with that of the historical critic, the writer, that is, who to his critical sense and skill adds a close knowledge of the literature of the past, a knowledge complete with all the findings of the literary historian. Arnold's ideal critic who estimates the object in itself as it really is stands in some danger even from the literary historian,

[1] In *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867, p. 28), Arnold described himself as an "unlearned bellettristic trifler."

who by pointing out an inconvenient date or a correct reading can make him look foolish. But he stands in great danger from the historical critic who, as capable as any of dealing with a new poem, can add to that capacity a capacity to explain what in objects belonging originally to the past has become puzzling merely through the inevitable, accidental, and mindless distortions of time.

II

Pater followed Arnold in honouring "the object as in itself it really is".

He quoted the phrase in the preface to the book we have come to call *The Renaissance*, his first book, and that which had more effect on his contemporaries than any later book of his:

> "To see the object as in itself it really is," has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever . . .[1]

And the sentence proceeds to include in the category of "all true criticism whatever"—is it a wide or a narrow category?—that sort of criticism of which Pater himself, to take him at his word, is a practitioner: the category of "aesthetic" criticism.

We might well have expected from Pater a preference for the object as it *was*. Since 1877 when his book attained its second edition, it has borne the title *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Literature*, but when first published in 1873 its title was more historical: *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. Pater, then, began by offering himself as an historian, and several passages in the works repeat the offer. Moreover, in the course of the first essay in his book, "Aucassin and Nicolette",[2] he produced the following:

> To say of an ancient literary composition that it has an antiquarian interest, often means that it has no distinct æsthetic interest for the reader of to-day. Antiquarianism, by a purely historical effort, by putting its object in perspective and setting the reader in a certain point of view from which what gave pleasure to the past is pleasurable for him also, may often add greatly to the charm we receive from ancient literature. But the first condition of such aid must be a real, direct, æsthetic charm in the thing itself; unless it has that charm, unless some purely artistic quality went to its original making, no

[1] *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, 1873, p. viii. All further quotations from this book are taken from this edition and, unless otherwise stated, from this page.

[2] In the second edition, 1877, this essay was expanded into "Two Early French Stories."

> merely antiquarian effort can ever give it an æsthetic value or make it a proper object of æsthetic criticism. These qualities, when they exist, it is always pleasant to define, and discriminate from the sort of borrowed interest which an old play, or an old story, may very likely acquire through a true antiquarianism.[1]

Here Pater offered a certain encouragement to the historian. Provided the historian chose his object well, he could "add greatly to the charm we receive from ancient literature." He could not restore "charm" where none of that "one thing needful" seemed to exist already, but where it did, he could add more. There is no reason to quarrel with this. Pater was speaking as Arnold was to,[2] of the critic, not of the historian, and no critic, however well versed in history, is going to work on an object that looks unpromising when there exist so many that, before he begins, look "charming" and that promise to prove so more and more as he comes to see them as belonging more intimately to their time. Here there was encouragement to the historian. And elsewhere. For instance

> every intellectual product must be judged from the point of view of the age and the people in which it was produced.[3]

Or this smile at the "scholars of the fifteenth century":

> They lacked the very rudiments of the historic sense, which by an imaginative act throws itself back into a world unlike one's own, and judges each intellectual product in connection with the age which produced it.[4]

All such remarks were encouraging to the scholar-critic. But, alas, they were not backed up by Pater's practice. In the paragraph immediately following the last quotation Pater twice used the word "strange" and twice the word "quaint", words, that is, which no one uses who has made an effort to throw himself back into a former age. One recalls the opening of Kittredge's book on Chaucer with its good-humoured pillorying of "quaint" and other terms of patronage and antipathy.[5]

[1] *The Renaissance*, pp. 9f.

[2] Arnold's dismissal of the "historic estimate" came eight years later.

[3] *The Renaissance*, p. 22.

[4] *ibid.*

[5] "There is no great harm in the air of patronage with which our times, in their self-satisfied enlightenment, address the great who were of old; but we do use droll adjectives! If these great ancients show the simplicity of perfect art, we call them *naïf*, particularly when their irony eludes us; if they tickle our fancy, they are *quaint*; if we find them altogether satisfactory, both in form and substance, we adorn them with the epithet *modern*, which we somehow think is a superlative of eminence . . ." (*Chaucer and his Poetry*, Cambridge, Mass., ed. 1933, p. 3).

In practice, more often than not, the past is served up by Pater as if it were the present. Far from going back to the Renaissance through the crooked corridors of time, he preferred to see it as it had wound its way through them into his beloved present.

III

Take his remarks on pictures. Pater liked them not as they were left by the artist, but as they had survived. He liked them, that is, "embrowned". His taste, therefore, defeated what we can go so far as to call his adequate knowledge of the facts.

The only source of the embrownment of Renaissance pictures is varnish and the changes worked on it by time.[1] To begin with, no doubt, varnish was applied as we apply it to modern pictures, as a preservative that is seen as both necessary and defiling. But at some time we conveniently think of as the eighteenth century, it was applied for its own sake, as an enrichment, and applied generously as basting to a duck. In other words, it was applied by some painters to their new pictures, and by dealers and by owners to old pictures. By the eighteenth century, varnish had become a prime pigment. And the poets promoted it to a grade still higher. They saw the autumnal effect it had on paintings as an effect unconnected with chemicals and the hand of man, as an effect that time had produced unaided on the picture as the painter left it. This is what Dryden told Kneller to expect from a beneficent future:

> More cannot be by Mortal Art exprest;
> But venerable Age shall add the rest.
> For Time shall with his ready Pencil stand;
> Retouch your Figures with his ripening Hand,
> Mellow your Colours, and imbrown the Teint,
> Add every Grace, which Time alone can grant;
> To future Ages shall your Fame convey;
> And give more Beauties, than he takes away.[2]

As well as from the varnish pot, embrownment came to be asked of the palette. Even so late as the close of the eighteenth century, Sir

[1] Like most other non-specialists, I am indebted for my knowledge of the varnishing of old pictures to the feats recently accomplished at the National Gallery. For information concerning Botticelli's pictures I am indebted more specifically to the kindness of Mr. Cecil Gould.

[2] "To Sir Godfrey Kneller, Principal Painter to His Majesty," ll. 174ff.

George Beaumont was busy advising Constable to give his landscapes the glow of "an old Cremona fiddle".[1] In 1873, Pater was still admiring the fictions of varnish. It does not seem to have crossed his mind that his love for the "minor tones"[2] of Renaissance pictures was a love for the tricks of dealers who were administering to a particular taste active well after the close of the period the "history" of which he was making his "study". If it had, he might have been more eager to seek the object of the historian, the object as it *was* at first. If not, he could only have stuck to his love for the minor tones of Renaissance pictures as a man sticks to a woman who has deceived him, that is cynically and with what strong-minded pleasures come from the complexities of lost innocence. Certainly, Pater loved complexities. Even though he did not know about varnish, he contrived as much complexity as he could for the aesthetic benefit of his Renaissance pictures. For though ignorant of the last and sobering deception, he knew that time had worked changes. And he made the most of them—when he cared to, and for his particular purposes. He saw to it that he had enough knowledge to flirt with.

[1] "Sir George thought Constable too daring in the modes he adopted to obtain the [quality of freshness]; while Constable saw that Sir George often allowed himself to be deceived by the effects of time, of accident, and by the tricks that are, far oftener than is generally supposed, played by dealers, to give mellowness to pictures . . . Sir George had placed a small landscape by Gaspar Poussin on his easel close to a picture he was painting, and said, 'Now, if I can match these tints I am sure to be right.' 'But suppose, Sir George,' replied Constable, 'Gaspar could rise from his grave, do you think he would know his own picture in its present state? or if he did, should we not find it difficult to persuade him that somebody had not smeared tar or cart-grease over its surface, and then wiped it imperfectly off?' At another time, Sir George recommended the colour of an old Cremona fiddle for the prevailing tone of everything, and this Constable answered by laying an old fiddle on the green lawn before the house. Again, Sir George, who seemed to consider the autumnal tints necessary, at least to some part of a landscape, said, 'Do you not find it very difficult to determine where to place your brown tree?' And the reply was, 'Not in the least, for I never put such a thing into a picture.'"

(C. R. Leslie, *Life and Letters of John Constable*, ed. 1896, pp. 140f.)

I am indebted for the reference to this passage to E. W. Manwaring's *Italian Landscape in Eighteenth Century England*, 1925, p.16. Though Constable was rebelling against this age-old provision of brown colours, he retained a certain love for them himself.

[2] *The Renaissance*, p. 49. Pater's love of minor tones, while not exclusive, was stronger than A. C. Benson could understand: "He was fond . . . of insisting upon some altogether unimportant detail . . . he used to pretend that he shut his eyes in crossing Switzerland, on his journeys to and from Italy, so as not to see the 'horrid pots of blue paint', as he called the Swiss lakes." (*Walter Pater*, 1906, p. 191). In approving shades of blue, Pater went as far as he could when he furnished his rooms with blue and white china.

The embrownment of "time's varnish"—Dryden's phrase is wise as to both sources of change—was hugged by Dryden as a warmth. Pater, in one sentence and part of a footnote, felt it as a chill. Or so he said. At the beginning of his meditation on the Mona Lisa he remarked that

> Perhaps of all ancient pictures time has chilled it least.[1]

Apart from "perhaps" (which is no great fault, if we consider the difficulty of certitude in the matter) that sentence is worthy of the historian Pater had given himself out to be. "Ancient" and "time" show him taking the first step necessary for the historian, the step backwards; while "chills" shows him going still further and acknowledging time's changes; and further still, and acknowledging that the changes time works on a material object are changes to be deplored—acknowledging it apparently as a move towards remedying the damage by an exercise of the historical imagination. And there is another touch of the historical imagination in the footnote to this same sentence. Pater added the footnote at some point during the preparation of his manuscript—it is there in the article as first published, in the *Fortnightly Review*:[2]

> Yet for Vasari there was some further magic of crimson in the lips and cheeks, lost for us.[3]

I find this note disingenuous. Pater speaks as if he would like to have seen what Vasari saw. But if that crimson had survived till his day, what would have become of the minor tones of his description? Would the Mona Lisa have kept as much fallen day about her, would the eyelids have had the same weariness, if the cheeks had retained the merriness of those of Hogarth's Shrimp Girl? "Perhaps of all ancient pictures time has chilled it least." But time had chilled it enough, fortunately for Pater, to allow him to write a poem on *la femme fatale*, as it also had chilled the roses of Botticelli's Birth of Venus to the exquisite point at which Pater could describe them as "embrowned a little, as Botticelli's flowers always are."[4] He banished from the body of his paragraph the crimson he knew of as the original, the Renaissance, colour. It was not, how-

[1] *The Renaissance*, p. 116.

[2] 1869, p. 506.

[3] Pater does not say "some crimson" but "some further magic of crimson." Mr. Empson has noted the Elizabethan fondness for such a construction:

> What means [the warning of] this trumpet's sound?

(*Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 1930, p. 112.) Pater's uses of it would call for subtle analysis.

[4] *The Renaissance*, p. 49.

ever, banished from his book. It was made to peep up into the minor tones which, if Pater had been an historian, it would have been made to banish as the usurpers they were. Pater knew history, that is, for his own ambiguous ends.

Pater quoted Vasari and made some use of him. Vasari's account of the picture takes us as near as we can get to knowing how Leonardo's picture was first received. Vasari considered it a most remarkable instance of a painter's fidelity to the appearance of a certain beautiful woman, whom he himself knew, or whom he knew by repute, and as a picture affording an intellectual satisfaction—the satisfaction of confirming the Aristotelian account of art as *mimesis*. And when Vasari did use his imagination, it was merely to imagine that the painting was real flesh with the pulse of blood in it:

> This head is an extraordinary example of how art can imitate Nature, because here we have all the details painted with great subtlety. The eyes possess that moist lustre which is constantly seen in life, and about them are those livid reds and hair which cannot be rendered without the utmost delicacy. The lids could not be more natural, for the way in which the hairs issue from the skin, here thick and there scanty, and following the pores of the skin. The nose possesses the fine delicate reddish apertures seen in life. The opening of the mouth, with its red ends, and the scarlet cheeks seem not colour but living flesh. To look closely at her throat you might imagine that the pulse was beating.[1]

No doubt this account, even at the time, was an inadequate one. Even from the start any observer must have been taken by the picture as a record of character and personality. But here was a contemporary criticism, and one would have expected a *soi-disant* historian to have schooled himself to approach his picture in accordance with its principles: Browning, one recalls, knew better: for the nonce he made himself a Vasari:

> That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
> Looking as if she were alive. I call
> That piece a wonder, now . . .

Vasari's criticism of the Mona Lisa amounted to the means of unvarnishing it. Pater saw that this was so, but through eyes deliberately kept half-shut. In his own account all things needful for a right historical judgment existed: he knew that the Mona Lisa was old and that it had changed. All things needful existed, but to be perverted. Pater confused them all together in the interests of an ambiguous material lying

[1] *Leonardo de Vinci*, Phaidon Press, 1943, p. 11.

half-way between history and the last exciting moment of the present. Speaking of his morality, Henry James was to say that he hunted with the hounds and ran with the hare.[1] The same was true of his historical criticism.

Pater, then, was not much more of an historian than Arnold was. We read him as we read Arnold, for his own sake rather than for the sake of understanding his object. Take away the object and there remain all the splendours of Pater. He is, for instance, a writer making constant use of similes. The major term to which they are tied may have been wrongly conceived, but the life in the minor term is unforgettable:

> The white light on [the face of Botticelli's Madonnas] is cast up hard and cheerless from below, as when snow lies upon the ground, and the children look up with surprise at the strange whiteness of the ceiling.[2]

The same life is in his metaphors. His imagery usually leaves art for external nature. In that field time has had nothing to say—or rather, nothing to say to poets. And so to Pater. Men, and what they have made, confuse him, but his eye for what comes issued from the hand of nature, as it is nature external to man, is a clear one. He is, therefore, more a painter-like poet than a critic. His claim to be an historian is mainly that time has thrust history upon him, as on any writer. His account of the Mona Lisa witnesses not so much to Leonardo but to the nineteenth-century idea of the fatal woman, and to the thorough poetizing of works of art which Gautier seems to have been the first to practise, and, falling between him and Pater, Swinburne.[3]

IV

Pater quoted Arnold's phrase, but he did not apply it to aesthetic criticism without stating it with a difference:

> in æsthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly.

The difference lay in that epistemological term "impression". It had not occurred to Arnold to use the term. As a critic, if not always as a

[1] I have failed to trace this quotation.

[2] *The Renaissance*, p. 46.

[3] See George Boas, "The Mona Lisa in the History of Taste," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, New York, I (1940), 207ff.

poet, Arnold's business was with the world of every-day. And so with the common reader. "The great art of criticism," he said on one occasion, "is to get oneself out of the way and to let humanity decide"[1] The words came oddly from one who was always fighting his fellows, but not oddly in that to fight them was to honour them as worth fighting. In a later essay, that excellent piece introducing his edition of six of *The Lives of the Poets*, Arnold paid delighted homage to Johnson, to whose criticism he found himself coming back repeatedly as to a *point de repère*. There is nothing surprising in this homage. Johnson was a critic who "rejoice[d] to concur with the common reader".[2] If on occasions he could not get himself out of the way and let humanity decide, the occasions, important as some of them were, were exceptions. Usually Johnson stood with the common reader, whom he defined as using "common sense", as being "uncorrupted with literary prejudices" and as holding opinions which remained firm "after all the refinements of subtlety and the dogmatism of learning."[3] This was a good description of Johnson himself. And a fair one of Arnold. When Arnold spoke of the object as in itself it really is he meant the object as it is seen by the common reader, who by definition has no more party and sectarian prejudice than he has refinements and dogmatism. In the eighteenth century, the number of such readers was as high as it ever was, and in the nineteenth century—such were the divisions of the time—as low. Nevertheless, the count of common readers was only low comparatively. In standing among them, Arnold had a cheering sense of numbers. Like Johnson, he expressed his own distrust of the "personal" estimate. I have quoted his dismissal of the "historic estimate", and on the heels of that follows his dismissal of the "personal":

> a poet or a poem may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, likings, and circumstances, have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance. Here also we over-rate the object of our interest, and apply to it a language of praise which is quite exaggerated.[4]

In preferring what he called the "real estimate", he was preferring the estimate of the common reader who, again by definition, knows nothing

[1] *Essays in Criticism*, 1865, p. 208.

[2] *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. G. B. Hill, 1905, iii, 441.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Essays in Criticism*, Second Series, p. 7.

of the associations which, falling to a single reader, fall to one who is un-common. Arnold's dismissal of the personal estimate was his dismissal—perhaps a conscious one—of the theories of Pater.

Pater's use of the word "impression" indicated that, for his part, he was moving away from Arnold and the common reader. That, at bottom, is why he invoked epistemology. By profession he was a purveyor of philosophy: his book on Plato was a printed version of lectures given at Oxford. And he was interested in philosophy more generally than a profession always guarantees: witness the use made of it in *Marius* and in his essay on Coleridge. Not that he needed such qualifications—those epistemological matters were by that time common knowledge. In choosing to speak of impression along with object he was appealing to Locke and the rest. And as Locke did he thought of impression and object as both being real. For Locke the object existed to be known, and so on several occasions for Pater. It was in this domain of external fact that Pater saw the scientist as employed—the artist and writer of literature being employed in another domain, their "sense of fact".[1] For Pater this domain of fact had even a vigorous life of its own: even colour—that favourite quality of things for Pater—has such a life:

> the more you come to understand what imaginative colouring really is, that all colour is no mere delightful quality of natural things, but a spirit upon them by which they become expressive to the spirit, the better you will like this peculiar quality of colour [in Botticelli's "Venus rising from the sea"].[2]

The external world, then, had its own existence, and for their knowledge of that existence men were indebted in the first place to their senses. Pater remembered the "impression" that Locke and the other psychologists had spoken of, and added it to the "object" spoken of by Arnold. He would have forgotten epistemology as completely as Arnold had done unless it had suited his purpose to remember it. He sought the impression because, if one chose to insist, no one could deny that it existed in a private sanctum. When Locke spoke of impressions he was not concerned with the privacy of one man's as against another's. He was, like any philosopher, generalizing; he was trying to show how all human beings enter into their knowledge. Pater, on the other hand, was insisting on the uniqueness of the impressions to every individual man. He spoke not of impressions but of "one's own impressions". And in the

[1] *Appreciations*, 1889, pp. 3f.

[2] *The Renaissance*, p. 48.

same paragraph of the Preface to *The Renaissance* from which I have been quoting, he even allowed himself one of his rare italics in asking

> What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me?* What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure?

And further, he went on to invoke a concept invoked only by those who see mankind as divided up, the concept of "temperament": he concluded his brief argument with

> What is important, then, is . . . that the critic should possess . . . a certain kind of temperament.

Pater could rest content now that impression and temperament were enthroned.

The word "temperament" indicated how far and how quickly Pater had left Arnold behind. Arnold's phrase "the object as in itself it really is" was for rescuing the object from the clutches of the individual. Pater was for clutching it closer. Arnold had sought to disencumber the object of any "individual fancy", but here was Pater exalting temperament, the very hive of such fancies; we cannot see him as trying to get himself out of the way and let humanity decide. For Arnold the object lay in the external world sharply clear for anybody who had not blinded himself with some insular or provincial zeal or other. For Pater the object as it really is lay in the privacy of the individual impression of it. Obviously, the way to see an object more for what it is in itself is not to centre attention in the impression it makes so much as to go on collecting impressions of it till they cease to show enough new differences to make further collection worth while. Then you may feel satisfied that you are being fair to the object, as fair as in you lies. But it seems that Pater had little interest in this sort of fairness. We can see him as one who got an impression quickly enough to get it more as he wanted it, to get it while it was still fluid enough to be workable and transformable. He wished it to be Paterine as much as possible, more Paterine than objective. We are left wondering why he quoted Arnold's phrase at all. And the explanation may well be more to his credit as a man than as a critic—he liked Arnold's criticism and liked it too indiscriminately, and liked also to show his liking.

We can see how disproportionate was the contribution that Pater's encouraged temperament made to his criticism if we contrast Ruskin's

way of describing a picture with Pater's. Here is Ruskin's description of Botticelli's *Crowning of the Madonna*:

> [The Madonna] is surrounded by a choir of twelve angels, not dancing, nor flying, but carried literally in a whorl, or vortex, whirlwind of the breath of heaven; their wings lie level, interwoven among the clouds, pale sky of intense light, yet darker than the white clouds they pass through, their arms stretched to each other, their hands clasped—it is as if the morning sky had all been changed into marble, and they into living creatures; they are led in their swift wheel by Gabriel, who is opposite to you, between the Christ and the Madonna; a close rain of golden rays falls from the hand of Christ, He placing the crown on the Virgin's head; and Gabriel is seen through it as a white bird through rain, looking up, seeing the fulfilment of his message.[1]

As well as to indicate his own evaluation of the object, Ruskin intended his description to serve as a second-best for those who lacked opportunity to see the object itself: and his editors in 1906 noted how much more satisfactory is his description than the excellent photographic reproduction which even by that date they had by them. Ruskin's description is humbly tendering us the means of seeing an object as in itself it really is. Ruskin suppressed his own rich originality—his originality, that is, at the degree at which the originality of anybody becomes noticeable—in the interests of our seeing the picture for what it really is.

V

There was still another limitation recommended by Pater. Not a limitation, however, taking him further into himself, but one operating on the object. The impression fondled by the temperament was to be an impression of an object that was beautiful. The "certain kind of temperament" which he postulated for the critic was "the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects", and it took some authority from "the words of a recent critic of Sainte-Beuve"[2]:

> De se borner à connaître de près les belles choses, et à s'en nourrir en exquis amateurs, en humanistes accomplis.[3]

Pater's sanctum might be a private one but it was not without its window. And of necessity. Only through an inlet-outlet would the

[1] *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, xxiii. (1906) p. 273f.

[2] I have made no attempt to discover his identity.

[3] *The Renaissance*, p. ix.

objects get at Pater to produce their impressions on him. Pater had perforce to be accessible. But if so, only to beautiful things.

"Objects" . . . "choses". Though Pater was speaking of limitation he was also speaking of the concrete. For all this interest in philosophy he distrusted the abstract. So to some extent did Arnold who, on one occasion, even went so far as to recommend that poetry should be tested touchstone-wise by means of supreme single lines. As the opening paragraph of his Preface to *The Renaissance*, Pater placed this persuasive argument against abstraction:

> Many attempts have been made by writers on art and poetry to define beauty in the abstract, to express it in the most general terms, to find a universal formula for it. The value of such attempts has most often been in the suggestive and penetrating things said by the way. Such discussions help us very little to enjoy what has been well done in art or poetry, to discriminate between what is more and what is less excellent in them, or to use words like beauty, excellence, art, poetry, with more meaning than they would otherwise have. Beauty, like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative; and the definition of it becomes unmeaning and useless in proportion to its abstractness. To define beauty not in the most abstract, but in the most concrete terms possible, not to find a universal formula for it, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of æsthetics.[1]

Many years later he was to ask:

> Who would change the colour or curve of a rose-leaf for that οὐσία ἀχρώματος, ἀσχημάτιστος, ἀναφὴς—that colourless, formless, intangible, being—Plato put so high?[2]

And though "beauty" remained one of Pater's favourite words, it was often given some sort of a footing in the concrete when he provided it with "this or that special manifestation" in his favourite adjectives: *blithe, delicate, strange, comely, fresh, sweet, quaint, grave*, and so on.

VI

When once Pater had withdrawn into the private sanctum of the impression and the temperament, a sanctum giving on to beautiful objects, he was no less busy than Arnold. He differed, therefore, from

[1] *The Renaissance*, pp. viif. The wording was slightly revised in 1877 and again in 1888.

[2] *Appreciations*, 1889, p. 67.

the popular idea of the "aesthete". This, a century earlier, had been Burke's account of how men are affected in body and mind when beholding a thing sufficiently beautiful:

> When we have before us such objects as excite love [i.e. "love in the mind"] and complacency; the body is affected, so far as I could observe, much in the following manner: the head reclines something on one side; the eye-lids are more closed than usual, and the eyes roll gently with an inclination to the object; the mouth is a little opened, and the breath drawn slowly, with now and then a low sigh; the whole body is composed, and the hands fall idly to the sides. All this is accompanied with an inward sense of melting and languor. These appearances are always proportioned to the degree of beauty in the object, and of sensibility in the observer. And this gradation from the highest pitch of beauty and sensibility even to the lowest of mediocrity and indifference, and their correspondent effects, ought to be kept in view, else this description will seem exaggerated, which it certainly is not... a relaxation somewhat below the natural tone seems to me to be the cause of all positive pleasure.[1]

And, in mockery of Pater's "Conclusion", there soon came Mr. Rose in Mallock's *New Republic*:

> ". . . the aim of culture . . . is indeed to make the soul a musical instrument, which may yield music either to itself or to others, at any appulse from without; and the more elaborate a man's culture is, the richer and more composite can this music be. The minds of some men are like a simple pastoral reed. Only single [*sic*] melodies, and these unaccompanied, can be played upon them—glad or sad; whilst the minds of others, who look at things from countless points of view, and realise, as Shakespeare did, their composite nature—their minds become, as Shakespeare's was, like a great orchestra. Or sometimes," said Mr. Rose dreamily, as if his talk was lapsing into a soliloquy, "when he is a mere passive observer of things, letting impressions from without move him as they will, I would compare a man of culture to an Æolian harp, which the winds at will play through . . . wandering in like a breath of air amongst the chords of his soul, touching note [*sic*] after note into soft music, and at last gently dying away into silence"

—a reverie which is broken into, "in a very matter-of-fact tone," by one of the company who

> saw that Mr. Rose's dreamy manner always tended to confuse Lady Ambrose.[2]

[1] *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (*Works*, 1845, i. 182f).

[2] *The New Republic*, 1877, ii. 23f. I have marked what may be mistaken references to music. If indeed they are such, they may be intended to sharpen the mockery of Pater, whose own references to music trespass beyond his knowledge.

But though Pater's aesthetic critic might look supremely and even morbidly idle, incapacitated, decadent, Pater saw him as intensely occupied. The imagery in which Pater described him is kinetic.

An interest in power was strong during the nineteenth century, and in claiming power for his temperament Pater stood among the many disciples of Wordsworth.[1] In the "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface [of 1815]," Wordsworth thundered against those who gave the word "taste" (when used in the sense of a refined liking for the arts) a denotation that was passive:

> It is a metaphor, taken from a *passive* sense of the human body, and transferred to things which are in their essence *not* passive,—to intellectual *acts* and *operations*.

And he concluded:

> without the exertion of a co-operating *power* in the mind of the Reader, there can be no adequate sympathy with [great poetry].[2]

In his turn, therefore, Pater came to unite passive and active in that remarkable phrase, the "power of being deeply moved". He also described the aesthetic critic as one

> who experiences these impressions *strongly*, and *drives directly at* the discrimination of them.[3]

This is the sort of masculine temperament that overtook the tender impression. And when for one moment Pater represented the mind as harbouring an impression passively, the impression being the active force—"How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?"—on that occasion, instead of thinking of Mr. Rose, we retort with "Yes, but how is its nature modified by yours?" For Pater's power of modifying impressions was a power like that of lust.

VII

It was perhaps because there was all this power available that the critic who proclaimed his limitation to the impression of objects that are beautiful made so many predatory raids on objects whose prime

[1] "Power" and "might", and words formed from them, are among those most characteristic of Wordsworth. Keats learned Wordsworth's usage. On occasions the debt is a subtle one: Keats' "taste the sadness of her might" (*Ode on Melancholy*, l. 29) is derived from such expressions as "the might of joy" (*Resolution and Independence*, ll. 22f.).

[2] *Poetical Works*, ed. cit., ii, 427.

[3] My italics G. T.

quality is not aesthetic. If Pater did not insist that "beauty was truth", he was inclined to insist that truth—or goodness or wisdom or thinking —was beauty. In his Preface he listed the following as objects giving pleasure to the aesthetic critic:

> the picture, the landscape, the engaging personality in life or in a book, La Gioconda, the hills of Carrara, Pico of Mirandula [*sic*], are valuable for their virtues,[1] as we say in speaking of a herb, a wine, a gem; for the property each has of affecting one with a special, unique impression of pleasure.[2]

These predatory instincts of the aesthetic critic were to be made clearer still in a hoveringly daring sentence given to Mr. Rose:

> To the eye of true taste, an Aquinas in his cell before a crucifix, or a Narcissus gazing at himself in a still fountain, are—in their own ways, you know—equally beautiful.[3]

On many other occasions Mallock quietly copied Pater's way of listing incompatibles as if they were all on the same footing—it had been Pope's satiric way in such a line as

> Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux;

one such list I reserved on transcribing the dreamy disquisition of Mr. Rose:

> a beautiful face, a rainbow, a ruined temple, a death-bed, or a line of poetry.

An "Appreciation" by Pater was sometimes another name for an attempt to claim territory for the aesthetic critic which belongs rightfully, or belongs in the first place, to literary criticism in general. On this head Pater's worst offence, so far as English literature goes, was the Appreciation entitled "Wordsworth". That Appreciation begins by announcing a concern with "the true aesthetic value" of Wordsworth's poetry. Any one, however, who brings such a concern to Wordsworth's poetry is doomed to an early disappointment or to an early conversion; if he continues in his reading it will be to discover other things. Wordsworth was not Keats. His sense of beauty was merely a minor function, cowed by his sense of the sublime. His poetry concerned things which, even if they are beautiful, are valued first of all because they interest, interpret, console or ennoble mankind; or if not always mankind, Worsdworth. The Wordsworth that Pater built up is not the Wordsworth as (in his life and works) he really was in his own time,

[1] That is, their "powers and forces."
[2] p. ix.
[3] *The New Republic*, ed. cit. ii, 129.

was in Pater's, or is in ours. He is made out as too exquisite, too tremulously sensitive, too freely passionate. Pater spoke of his "life of much quiet delicacy," and described his imagery also as "delicate". Then the fellowship Wordsworth discovered between man and such a thing as a lichened stone is called "weird", many of his effects called "strange", and the "mysticism" of "Daffodils" and "Two April Mornings" "half playful". These qualities of delicacy, weirdness, strangeness, are not cardinal qualities of Wordsworth's poetry, even if they exist there at all. And Pater found them because he was looking for beauty. It may be noted that the Wordsworth presented here and there in the Appreciation of Coleridge is much truer both as to life and as to poems: e.g. Pater forgot himself enough to perceive Wordsworth's "fine mountain atmosphere of mind".[1] Truer also is the Wordsworth occupying a page of the Preface to *The Renaissance*. The Wordsworth of the Appreciation bearing his name is a scented Wordsworth. In making him an aesthete, Pater was as far astray as when he compared "Resolution and Independence" with "The Eve of St. Agnes" in respect of "fullness of imagery".[2] And he was far astray because he was near home: he applied to Wordsworth the epithets denoting the qualities that delighted himself, and that delighted himself in things that were beautiful. His Wordsworth was too much like Pater. He strikes one as a mixture of "Henry Ryecroft" and Mr. Walter de la Mare. Here the temperament got the better of the object. After perverting it into the beautiful, it annexed it.

VIII

Pater, then, extended the bounds of the aesthetic critic illegitimately. But he did at least extend them. The limitation as to object, therefore, was not so drastic as he had advertised. But sometimes there was, fortunately, a cleaner emancipation. Sometimes Pater took over objects not mainly, or in the first place, beautiful, and did not mutilate them. On these occasions he went out into the object, shedding his aesthetics as he went. When he forgot that the aesthetic bounds existed, his criticism was not aesthetic criticism at all, except as any and every sort of criticism is so. Pater rightly saw that beauty was a constant in literature, classical literature exhibiting beauty with order, and romantic, beauty with strangeness.[3] And surely every critic is aware of this beauty, however

[1] *Appreciations*, p. 87.
[2] op. cit., p. 43. Pater calls Keats's poem "Saint Agnes' Eve."
[3] *Appreciations*, ed. cit., p. 248.

vaguely, and whatever other qualities he attends to mainly or in the first place. Pater, therefore, is sometimes no more an aesthetic critic than other critics are.

To some extent, Pater's confusions may have been due to the uncertain meaning of the very term he paraded on his banner. The term "aesthetic" has been a hard one to pin down to one meaning—witness its history as given in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Pater, who was not concerned with its use by the epistemologists, considered it as pertaining to "taste". But he did not restrict its application to the beautiful objects on which "taste" is properly exercised—that is, to aspects of external nature and to the "fine" arts. He allowed it to stray into literature. And to leave plains and mountains, pictures and statues, for literature is to leave objects in which beauty may be allowed on occasions and for most men to be supreme for objects in which beauty is almost always submerged or outfaced by admixture with the human, and so with the moral, social, political and what not. Literature deals with man, and though it is beautiful, beauty is seldom its prime characteristic.

Pater saw this. He saw from the start that his objects had to include man. When he represented the aesthetic critic as asking "Does [this object] give me pleasure?" he included among the possible givers of that pleasure objects other than objects of "taste". "The objects with which aesthetic criticism deals" were made to include from the start, "artistic and accomplished forms of human life", and "engaging personalit[ies] presented in life or in a book"—those as well as "music", "poetry", "song" and "picture". Of course he claimed all these things and persons as aesthetic. But his interest did not stop at the aesthetic if his human objects had other claims on him. When he spoke of men "artistic", "accomplished" and "engaging", he was not so much limiting the interest these objects provided *qua* men, as ruling out certain sorts of men altogether—we cannot see him writing on the Borgias, Machiavelli or Henry VIII. When he put certain Renaissance figures in "the *House Beautiful*", they included "saints" as well as the painters of certain beautiful pictures, but not men who were wicked or worldly. In the second edition of *The Renaissance*, among other passages, this was added:

> For in the *House Beautiful* the saints too have their place; and the student of the Renaissance has this advantage over the student of the emancipation of the human mind in the Reformation, or the French Revolution, that, in tracing the footsteps of humanity to higher levels, he is not beset at every turn by the inflexibilities and

> antagonisms of some well-recognized controversy, with rigidly defined opposites, exhausting the intelligence and limiting one's sympathies. That opposition of the professional defenders of a mere system to the more sincere and generous play of the forces of human mind and character, which I noted as the secret of Abelard's struggle, is indeed always powerful. But the incompatibility of souls really "fair" is not essential; and within the enchanted region of the Renaissance, one needs not be for ever on one's guard; here there are no fixed parties, no exclusions; all breathes of that unity of culture in which whatsoever things are comely are reconciled, for the elevation and adornment of our spirits. And just in proportion as those who took part in the Renaissance become centrally representative of it, just so much the more is this condition realised in them. The wicked popes, and the loveless tyrants, who from time to time become its patrons, or mere speculators in its fortunes, lend themselves easily to disputations, and, from this side or that, the spirit of controversy lays just hands on them. But the painter of the *Last Supper*, with his kindred, live in a land where controversy has no breathing-place, and refuse to be classified.[1]

But though he excluded from consideration certain sorts of men, he did not exclude men. And though he might often speak of such human matters as "self-restraint", "austerity", and "human feeling"[2] as if they were flowers, he did not always do so. His total response was other than the aesthetic, and being other was deeper—deeper, that is, as depth is measured by mankind as a whole. Some of the works he singled out for aesthetic criticism were works that had little to offer such criticism. In so far as English literature went, they included Shakespeare's histories (which though they have no wicked popes, have loveless tyrants in plenty and in addition have Falstaff, Doll Tearsheet and Pistol) and *Measure for Measure* (a play which is squarely based on the matter and morals of sexual relationships); and he wrote on Sir Thomas Browne who wrote on vulgar errors. As Pater well knew, a critic cannot live by cake alone. And the non-aesthetic exists so plentifully in Pater's objects that we should be ready to overlook his self-elected title, and read his writings as unlabelled criticism, taking whatever they give. It was seldom that he allowed his title to restrict him. In his essay on Botticelli, he threw it over and spoke of himself as providing "general criticism", and what was more, general criticism on "a secondary painter". And towards the end of his essay on Winckelmann, there was an unaesthetic blast that might have come straight from Arnold:

[1] ed. 1877, pp. 28f.

[2] *Appreciations*, ed. cit., pp. 14, 32, 103.

> The aim of a right criticism is to place Winckelmann in an intellectual perspective, of which Goethe is the foreground. For, after all, he is infinitely less than Goethe; it is chiefly because at certain points he comes in contact with Goethe that criticism entertains consideration of him.[1]

Here aesthetic criticism was conveniently forgotten in a larger if less manageable interest. In that late essay on style he was to write that

> the chief stimulus of good style is to possess a full, rich, complex matter to grapple with.[2]

Here was the kinetic imagery which Pater first enlisted for the aesthetic critic, but serving now other ends. Even from the start, however, Pater had had the good sense not to deny himself his share of interest in those ends. And to call those ends aesthetic would be to slight them.

[1] *The Renaissance*, p. 200.

[2] *Appreciations*, ed. cit., p. 12.

IV

GREEK THOUGHT IN ENGLISH WORDS

by OWEN BARFIELD

THERE is so much of it, that I had better begin by defining the limited scope of this essay. I am not, then, concerned with words like *drama, episode, paragraph, climax, hysteria*, all of which may be considered as pointers to history in general, rather than to the history of thought in particular. Nor again with little etymological poems like the "nut-leaved" (καρυόφυλλον) *gillyflower* or the "swallow-wort" (χελιδόνιον) called *celandine*, nor with the dubious divinity latent in *panic*, nor the snug immortality (ἀθανασία) that nods to us in the familiar *tansy*. All these words are derived from Greek, and so are many of those with which I shall attempt to deal; but not all. I am concerned with Greek thought, still traceable in an English word, whether or not the word itself is a Greek derivative.

On the other hand the history of Western thought is so complex and interpenetrating, that there may well be few abstract words of any sort in which omniscience, or even erudition, would fail to detect a Greek influence at some point in the historical processes which produced their present-day meaning. The vocabulary of the English New Testament is an obvious example. I shall limit myself to cases in which the Greek influence is *directly* traceable.

The facility with which the English language goes on creating imaginary Latin and Greek words to meet the expanding needs of science and philosophy seems to me to bring with it one disadvantage. Indispensable as such comparatively recent labels as *centralization, positivism, cleptomania, anaesthetic*, etc., undoubtedly are, it is a pity that their increasing plethora should tend to mask the historical strength and dignity of genuine Latin and Greek formations—of old words like *essence, intelligence, hypothesis, mechanics, analogy*. Many educated people would be surprised at the antiquity of some of these modern-sounding terms; they would be surprised to learn that *hypotenuse* and *isosceles* date back to the misty origins of Pythagorean philosophy, while *astronomy, grammatical, phenomenon, economic, cosmogony, physical, theory,*

hypothesis, eclipse, and many others—that is to say the Greek compounds of which they are anglicized forms—were all in use before Plato began to teach. I propose to notice more particularly a handful of English words which owe either their origin or some essential part of their meaning to the Greek philosophers.

The first of all is, of course, *philosopher* itself—a word believed, according to Liddell and Scott, to have been coined by Pythagoras as a label for himself and his followers—"lovers of wisdom." *Cosmos* is another example of a word which goes back to the Pythagorean school, carrying our minds along with it to the "shapeliness" and harmony which these early philosophers perceived reigning in the universe. Among the words for which Liddell and Scott give no earlier quotation than Plato, and which may possibly, therefore, have been created by him, are *antipodes* (*Timaeus*), *criterion, enthusiasm, dialectic, theology, mathematical, synthesis,* and *analogy,* while we seem to owe to Aristotle *energy, ethics, physiology, fantasy* and *fancy, synonym, entelechy* and, of course, *metaphysics*—which is a mere catalogue title for the treatise written next after the *Physics.*

Now many of these words are extremely important landmarks in the history of consciousness, denoting as they do either new modes of intellection or a more exact and conscious application of modes already in force before their appearance. Thus, the interest is not merely philological. Examining these common English words, we are reminded, for instance, of the rapidity with which the intricacies of Greek philosophy grew up out of the old mythological outlook that preceded it; we find them indicating with some precision the gradual evolution of intellectual faculties whose enjoyment we are apt to take for granted, faculties which anthropologists will sometimes even project back into the minds of the most primitive peoples. The naturalistic theory of myth, for example, is based on the assumption that "pithecanthropus erectus" confronted a sunrise with the same sort of curiosity that the apple aroused in Newton. It is a useful imaginative exercise, therefore, to try and strip our mental apparatus of all that part of it which is due to the employment of such words by generations of intellectual forebears, and then to see what is left. We may find it difficult to conceive of a time when the logical process of observing *phenomena* (things "appearing" or "seen") and forming *theories* to account for their relationship was unknown; yet the semantic development of the word θεωρία from its original meaning of mere contemplation or onlooking seems to confirm that this is so; while the two words *analogous* and *analytic,* the one invented, as we may

believe, by Plato and the other by Aristotle, make an excellent starting-point for an imaginative reconstruction of the whole evolution of the logical faculty.

Plato and Socrates, like most of the philosophers before them, dealt with feelings and thoughts, and even words, to some extent as though they were living beings. They related them to one another in accordance with what they conceived to be their own intrinsic natures, proving their points by *analogy*, and by *etymology* (i.e. the relation between words and things); it was only later, when men began to have a different feeling of the nature of thought, and of their own relation to the thoughts which passed through their minds, that this kind of reasoning came to be criticized as mere verbal quibbling. Thus, there is really no way of translating words like λόγος, λογικός, λογίζεσθαι, as they are used by Plato. *Reason* is quite inadequate to convey to a twentieth-century imagination the cosmic process which Plato must have felt to be taking place—as much out in the world and among the stars as "within" his own mind—when he spoke of τὸ λογιστικόν or contrasted νοῦς and ἐπιστήμη with δόξα. It was not until the "analytic" method of thought arose with Aristotle that such a word as *logic* could begin to take on its modern meaning. Indeed its strictly technical sense cannot be traced further back than a passage in which Cicero uses the Greek phrase λογικὴ τέχνη in reference to the syllogistic method. *Syllogism* itself is first found with that meaning in Aristotle's works, and so "logic," that exclusively subjective process, is revealed to us as something which the mind only discovered when it began to turn outward to "matter." In analysing its environment, it seems, and submitting itself humbly to the results of observation, the mind first began to feel its own shape and parts, much as the fingers discover their relation to one another when they are trying to fit themselves into a glove.

The rich legacy bequeathed by Greek philosophy to the English language is further masked by the fact that many of its terms have come to us in the form of Latin translations. For example, the simple *quality* and *quantity*, obvious as they seem and absolutely indispensable as they are to our thinking, are Latin translations[1] of two Greek words invented by Plato and Aristotle or one of their respective contemporaries. These

[1] Qualitates igitur appellavi, quas ποιότητας Graeci appellant, quod ipsum apud Graecos non est vulgi verbum, sed philosophorum; atque id in multis. Dialecticorum vero verba nulla sunt publica, suis utuntur. Et id quidem commune omnium fere est artium; aut enim nova sunt rerum novarum facienda nomina aut ex aliis transferenda. Cicero: *Academicae Quaestiones*, i, 25.

are ποιότης, which it looks as if Plato himself coined[1] to express the notion of "of-what-sortness" or "quiddity", and ποσότης ("how-much-ness"), which was used by Aristotle. Among the Latin words which appear to be conscious translations of terms in special use among the Greek philosophers down to and including Plato are *qualitas*, *aer* [air], *essentia* (οὐσία) *idealis* (ἐπ' ἰδέᾳ or ἐπ' εἴδει). *individuum* (ἄτομον), *vacuum* (τὸ κενόν), and *equivocalis* (ὁμώνυμος). When we come to Aristotle, we find a much greater number. *Quantitas* has already been mentioned, and there are in addition *subjectum* (ὑποκείμενον), *actualis* (ἐνεργείᾳ), *potentialis* (δυνάμει), *substantia* (ὑπόστασις), *quintessentia* (πέμπτη οὐσία), *proprietas* [*property*] (ἴδίωμα), *accidens* (συμβεβηκός), *praedicamentum* (κατηγορία), *deductio* (ἀπαγωγή), *inductio* (ἐπαγωγή), *moralis* (ἠθικός), and almost certainly *definitio* (ὁρισμός).

For about two thirds of these extremely useful expressions Cicero is responsible. He tells us more than once how he had deliberately set himself to render this service to his country, and it is often possible to find the exact passage in which, usually with some comment or half-humorous apology, he converts the Greek into Latin. Thus, we owe to his efforts *quality*, *individual* (for it was formed by the Schoolmen from his *individuum*), *vacuum*, *moral*,[2] *property*, *induction*, *element*, and probably *definition* and *difference*, though only in two cases—*individual* and *moral*—have we made the best possible use of his services, by retaining the Greek originals, *atom* and *ethical*, and adopting Cicero's words alongside of them as doublets with a different shade of meaning. Cicero also enriched his native vocabulary with many translations of Greek words in use among later Greek philosophers but not found in Plato or Aristotle —particularly the Stoics, whose ethical doctrines were soon to take such a firm hold on the intellectual life of imperial Rome, and whose metaphysic remains even to-day deeply imbedded in our thought. Such are *notio*[3] (ἔννοια or πρόληψις), *comprehensio* (κατάληψις), *infinitio*[4] (ἀπειρία), and *appetitio* (ὁρμή).

It is not easy to determine the date of the others. Some were

[1] . . . τὸ μὲν πάσχον αἰσθητὴν ἀλλ' οὐκ αἴσθησιν ἔτι γίγνεσθαι, τὸ δὲ ποιοῦν ποιόν τι ἀλλ' οὐ ποιότητα; ἴσως οὖν ἡ ποιότης ἅμα ἀλλόκοτόν τε φαίνεται ὄνομα καὶ οὐ μανθάνεις ἀθρόον λεγόμενον.

Plato: *Theaetetus*, 182A.

[2] Eam partem philosophiae "de moribus" appellare solemus; sed decet augentem linguam Latinam nominare "moralem". *De Fato* I.

[3] Notionem appello, quod Graeci tum ἔννοιαν tum πρόληψιν dicunt (*Topica* 7, 31).

[4] Infinitio ipsa, quam ἀπειρίαν vocant (*De Finibus* i, 21).

probably translated by obscure Greek schoolmasters in Rome, and others by medieval Schoolmen whom it would be a long labour to identify. For the rest, *accidens* is found in Seneca, *essentia* and *substantia* in Quintilian, *idealis* in Martianus Capella (A.D. 425), and it seems possible that *praedicamentum* was the work of St. Augustine.

But more interesting in a great many ways than the appearance of new words is the penetration of new meanings into the old ones. When we are dealing with ancient literatures of which only a fragment is still extant, we can often date these elusive phenomena and trace them to their sources more exactly than the words themselves. If, for example, we can never be quite sure that such a word as ἀνάλογος was not used until Plato used it, we need have no doubt about the new *meanings* which his writings, and no others, have injected into words like θεωρία, μέθοδος, μουσικός, and ἰδέα—or into φιλεῖν and καλός and, through them, into the English *love* and *beautiful*. Of the words subsequently borrowed into English, which were re-baptized in the same way by Aristotle, *syllogism* has already been mentioned, and one could add *category, poetic, politic, axiom, problem, synthesis, mathematical, dynamic,* and others.

Some knowledge of the semantic history of such words is practically essential to an historical understanding of our Western outlook. Certainly we no longer feel, with the earlier etymologists, that by finding out what a word once meant we can learn what it means or "ought to mean" now. Yet, for this very reason, it is of great interest to trace out the way in which the modern meanings of such important instruments of thought have been arrived at; to try and see what our ancestors made them signify before us and what we have done with the legacy they bequeathed. What, for instance, of *ideas*—those curious abstractions which, in spite of their spaceless quality, we can scarcely avoid thinking of now as flitting about somewhere "inside" our heads? Once again the history of the word seems to carry us back to a time when the human mind could have no such experience, when it could not think of its own thoughts, or "apperceive", as the psychologists used to say; and once again Plato and Aristotle appear to have played an important part in the development of that faculty.

Until Plato's time the word *idea* (from ἰδεῖν, to see) meant the form or appearance of a thing. Most people are familiar enough with the later Platonic doctrine of Ideas to know that they were understood by Plato, not as something which existed solely in his own mind, but as eternal Beings which stood behind the ever-changing forms of material

nature. Distrusting the information gained from the senses because of the obvious transience of all sense-phenomena, the Academics would only give the name of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) to the contemplation by the human soul of these underlying and undying Ideas. Aristotle, who was Plato's pupil, took over from him this doctrine of Ideas and proceeded to refashion it more in accordance with his own metaphysical outlook. He insisted that the ἰδέαι or εἴδη,[1] as he preferred to call them, were, as we should say, immanent, that they existed *in* the objects and could have no being apart from them. In order to get at them, it was necessary not so much to be initiated into the Mysteries and to sink yourself in philosophic contemplation of the eternal, as to investigate nature herself with all the means of accuracy at your disposal.

It is convenient here, to say a word or two concerning the word *theory*. Both to Plato and to Aristotle the Greek θεωρεῖν meant, not hypothesis but contemplation. It expressed the act, not of a speculator, but of a spectator. It meant, not the result of the investigation of nature but the investigating, or rather, the beholding itself. In his *Psychology*, Aristotle makes a special use of the verb θεωρεῖν. The word which Plato used for knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) he seems to relegate to an unconscious or sleeping phase of the soul. The "knowledge" which the soul possesses ὡς ἐπιστήμη is potential only. But in the process of contemplating particulars this is changed into knowledge ὡς τὸ θεωρεῖν, and it is this which is the soul's entelechy. It is in this process that she may truly be said to awaken. It will be seen that such a meaning, although nearer to the modern meaning than Plato's, is still a very long way from it. The word appears to have come into English through medieval Latin translations of Aristotle. But the earliest example the Oxford Dictionary records of its use in the commonest modern sense of a *particular* hypothesis or speculation is at the end of the eighteenth century. It would involve too long a digression to do more than suggest that Goethe was endeavouring, in his scientific writings, to restore a less superficial meaning to this ancient and honourable term; particularly when he said, speaking of Nature: "Her phenomenon *is* theory, if only we can find it."

To revert now to the word *idea*, this does not seem to have been borrowed by English writers until the dawn of the Renaissance, when Lydgate used *Idee* with a definite Platonic allusion; and the earliest uses in English are all literary and allusive. Thus, it is often spelt with a capital letter, as by Spenser in his *Hymns* to *Love* and *Beauty*, or by

[1] Plato had also used εἶδος as a synonym for ἰδέα, but less frequently.

Drayton who used *Idea* as the title for a sequence of love-sonnets. But by the end of the sixteenth century the word had gained a firmer footing in the English language. For example:

> Xenophon in his Ciropaedia . . . having . . . under the person of Cirus, framed an idaea or perfect patterne of an excellent prince . . .

In such a sentence as the above, which is quoted from the Oxford Dictionary, it is noticeable that the word is used—probably metaphorically—to describe a pattern *existing in the mind of the writer*. Soon it acquired also the sense of a standard or principle to be aimed at, and the word *ideal* was adopted at about the same time. Meanwhile we find Shakespeare, and others, using it to express an image or picture retained by the memory:

> Th' Idea of her life shal sweetly creepe
> Into his study of imagination. . . .
>
> *Much Ado* IV, i, 226.

while for Milton it has already weakened so much that it implies little more than a conception of something that ought to be done:

> That voluntary Idea, which hath long in silence presented itself to me, of a better education . . . than hath yet been in practice.

But now the philosophers were to take hold of the word again. In 1690 John Locke wrote in the introduction to his *Essay on the Human Understanding*:

> I must here in the entrance beg pardon of my reader for the frequent use of the word *idea*, which he will find in the following treatise. It being that term, which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is of the understanding when a man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by *phantasm, notion, species,* or *whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking;* and I could not avoid frequently using it.

He certainly could not; and after reading a few chapters of the *Essay*, we have no difficulty in realizing the part played by seventeenth-century philosophy in giving to the word that wide and colourless meaning of "any concept", which it has retained since the eighteenth century.

Yet the doctrine which these philosophers were actually combating was no longer that of the objective reality of ideas, but that of innate ideas (κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι) or, to use Cicero's word, *notions*. These were held to be present, subjectively, in every individual mind, from the date of birth; for without them, it was thought, the human mind would never have been able to apprehend abstract principles. As to the

Platonic, and objective, or semi-objective, meaning, perhaps the most striking thing about the biography of the word in English is the rapidity with which this was discarded. What was the cause? We must look for it in the outlook of the age in which this word was borrowed, and this we can examine most easily by penetrating behind it.

Like the Greek philosophers themselves, Cicero, and others who translated their terminology, would commonly, instead of creating a new word, employ a Latin one already in existence. In so doing, they often drastically altered its meaning. We can, for example, trace the influence of Greek philosophy in our word *universal*, adopted from the Latin *universalis*, which was used by Quintilian to translate the Aristotelian καθολικός.[1] *Matter*, which reached us through French from the old Latin *materia*, plainly embodies the new meaning given to that word by Lucretius and other Roman writers who employed it to translate the Greek ὕλη, and its older, purely Roman, and severely practical meaning is preserved in the later French *matérial*, and of course, our English derivative, *material*. Among the Latin words, subsequently adopted into English, which Cicero renewed with draughts of Greek thought, are *elementa* (found constantly in Lucretius, but used by Cicero to translate Aristotle's στοιχεῖα), *definire* (ὁρίζειν), *differre* (διαφέρειν) (old meaning "to put off" or "delay"), *instantia* (ἔνστασις), and *scientia* (ἐπιστήμη). *Scientia* in Latin had been used to express the knowledge or consciousness of some particular fact, never absolutely for *knowledge* or *science*. In the same way Cicero employed *imago*—a bust or statue (generally of an ancestor)—to translate the Greek εἴδωλον,[2] which was popular among the Stoics in the sense of a mental image. No doubt it

[1] Praecepta, quae καθολικὰ vocant; id est (ut dicamus quomodo possumus) universalia, vel perpetualia. Quintilian II, 13, 14.

[2] . . . imagines, quae εἴδωλα nominant, quorum incursione non solum videamus sed etiam cogitemus. *De Finibus* I, 21.

Cicero is referring to the peculiar Democritan theory of perception, which explained sight as caused by the impact on the eye of films or husks thrown off in endless procession from the surfaces of objects. These "images" were also supposed to penetrate through the pores of the body to the mind, thus causing mental impressions.

εἴδωλον had been used by Homer for "phantom," by Plato and Aristotle for images reflected in the water, etc., and so for unreal mental fancies. The technical sense which Cicero translated into *imago* is due to its use by the Stoics; the theological, which we have adopted with the word, to its use in the Septuagint. Bacon's attempt, in the *Advancement of Learning*, to revive a psychological reference (*idols of the cave, idols of the market-place, idols of the theatre,* and *idols of the tribe*) was never taken up.

is partly due to this that we find Virgil and Horace using *imago* for "phantom" or "ghost", and we may suppose a sort of fusion of both meanings in the new verb *imaginor*, with its derivative *imaginatio*, which occur in Pliny and Tacitus.

But perhaps the most interesting of all these words is *species*. Derived, like ἰδέα, from a verb meaning "to see," and possessing accordingly the meaning of "form" or "appearance" (in late Latin a pretty girl was *virgo speciosa*), it was seized on by Cicero to translate the Platonic idea. In his *Academicae Quaestiones* (I. viii. 30) we find him writing:

> Quamquam oreretur a sensibus, tamen non esse iudicium veritatis in sensibus. Mentem volebant (sc. Academici et Peripatetici) rerum esse iudicem: solam censebant idoneam cui crederetur, quia sola cerneret id, quod semper esset simplex, et unius modi et tale quale esset. Hanc illi ἰδέαν appellant, iam a Platone ita nominatam, nos recte *speciem* possumus dicere.

Cicero does not seem to have stressed the difference between the Academic and Peripatetic schools, and so, in the natural course of events, *species* came to be regarded as the received translation of the Aristotelian εἶδος. But what is especially curious is that Aristotle's third century commentator, Porphyry, and after him the early Schoolmen, apparently transplanted this term out of his Metaphysics into his Logic. At any rate, according to the Oxford Dictionary, the Latin *species* first appears in Scholastic philosophy as the second of Aristotle's predicables (κατηγορικά). Aristotle himself in his *Topics* only recognizes four: γένος (*genus*), ὅρος (*definitio*), ἴδιον (*proprietas*) [property], and συμβεβηκός (*accidens*). This system was modified by Porphyry, who omitted ὅρος and inserted εἶδος (*species*) with διαφορά (*differentia*).

A new term had accordingly to be found to convey the wider metaphysical meaning of ἰδέα or εἶδος, and the Schoolmen fixed upon *universale*. For years the contest raged between the three rival schools of thought, Platonic Realism, with its doctrine of "Universalia ante rem", Aristotelian Realism ("Universalia in re"); and Nominalism ("Universalia post rem"). But we are the less surprised to see Nominalism carrying the day at last in the majority of minds, when we know that in the third century of the Christian era, a commentator like Porphyry had already unconsciously indicated that he could not help taking a more subjective view of "species". And this fact does suggest that, with all the exceptions,[1] anticipations, and throwbacks, besides a sort of general

[1] Parmenides, for instance, one of Socrates's dialectical opponents, displayed decided Nominalistic tendencies.

recapitulation in the Middle Ages, there has been a more or less regular historical progression in the metaphysical outlook, the *Weltanschauung*, of the Western world.

In Aristotle's system—after Plato's death—the Ideas are dragged down from heaven into nature; then, in the Middle Ages, they move, as abstractions, out of nature into the classifying and "naming" mind of man, where they are soon firmly entrenched by the increased subjectivism of Descartes, Berkeley, and Kant. When the natural science of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries began to question the dogma of a "special" creation, it was, of course, carrying the matter a stage further. For, after first evolving a subtle but useful distinction between physiological and morphological "species", it announced that to those who took long enough views, there were really no such things as species at all. "All", in Empedocles's phrase, "was one"; and the species were only "categories" invented by the mind of man for its own convenience. Now it is true that metaphysically this ground had already been worked over by the Schoolmen, but by concentrating on the biological issue and thus giving a particular meaning to "species", the nineteenth-century Monistic philosophers and scientists cleared the air and narrowed the arena. At the beginning of Plato's career, and afterwards again in the Middle Ages, your opinion of "universals", of which *species* was only one, was expected to be consistent with itself. If you wished to believe that the species Lion existed before or with individual lions, you also believed that the species Triangle existed before or with individual triangles, and that the same was true of Chair and chairs. Plato himself, however, by the time he wrote *Timaeus*, had apparently ceased to consider the existence of any Ideas, other than those of ζῷα (animal or vegetable creatures) and of the four elements. Philosophy had thus achieved, by the end of his life, an *implicit* distinction, at any rate between logic and ontology. It remained for the Dark and Middle Ages to entangle once more, by misinterpreting Aristotle, the twin threads which the Greeks had almost succeeded in unpicking. By endeavouring to prove empirically that the difference between a lion and a lamb was of the same artificial and "nominal" nature as the difference between a chair and a table, the nineteenth-century biologists raised the old question once more in a form which made it seem a burning issue; and, for a time, at all events, few educated men could remain wholly indifferent to the problem of the "origin of species."

It was, I suppose, at about the time when the ἰδέα of Plato and the εἶδος of Aristotle were finally disappearing into the Darwinian *species*,

that the Latin word which Cicero had used to translate their ἐπιστήμη finished its metamorphosis into our hard-worked present-day "*Science*". Here is another of those interesting parallels between the native term and the classically borrowed equivalent, or near-equivalent, in which the English language is so rich: *science* and *knowledge*. I have already indicated that there are other and more refined parallels to be observed between the Greek word and its Latin equivalent, both of which have often been anglicized with more or less divergent meanings. We may compare *individual* and *atom*, *moral* and *ethical*, *potential* and *dynamic*, *universal* and *catholic*, *predicament* and *category*. And I have been speaking at some length of *idea* and *species*.

Perhaps the English word *kind* bears much the same relation to *species* as *knowledge* does to *science*. It is a simple word, not very precise but much richer in suggestion than its parallel. It has not been bullied and argued about in the way that so many of the classical borrowings have been and therefore seems out of place when we want to suggest anything systematic. The "origin of kinds" would not do at all. On the other hand how much poorer the language would have been if, in welcoming Cicero's *species* with both hands, we had altogether abandoned its Greek prototype *idea*!

With this reflection I find myself already over the borders of the pleasant, if dangerous, realm of might-have-been, and I cannot quite forbear some further speculations—speculations which take their rise in linguistics, but lead beyond it. I have mentioned Cicero's use of *scientia*—a word with a more limited meaning—to translate ἐπιστήμη. The particularity of the Latin term seems to have continued in two different ways to attach to its English derivative. We reflect a pragmatical and Roman attitude to "knowledge", when we speak of such things as "domestic science" or the "science of boxing"; meaning thereby a systematic study of some skill or calling intended to lead to its practical mastery. On the other hand, when *Science* is used to-day to signify purely theoretical knowledge, its meaning is limited in another and, I suggest, a confusing way. For it signifies not merely systematic knowledge (which would in itself be a limitation) but knowledge acquired in a particular way. It implies for most people—and strongly suggests for all—knowledge acquired by the same method as that by which our knowledge of physics and mechanics is acquired, the exactness of which depends on measurement. Yet such a connotation is in fact quite inappropriate to many of its most characteristic references; for the viability of this method varies enormously, I might almost say grotesquely,

between one so-called "science" and another. There is indeed a sort of graduated scale of fitness.

It is well adapted to the science of mechanics, slightly less so to physics, less still to biology, much less to medicine or sociology, and to psychology hardly at all. I believe much harm has resulted from the long and desperate struggle to jockey all these realms of inquiry into the straight-waistcoat of *science*. To the extent that inquiries cover the morphology or behaviour of living beings, above all when the beings concerned are human (and therefore include the inquirer himself), both their effectiveness and their exactness depend less on tabulation and more on such things as imagination, insight and self-knowledge. We need a word to distinguish, for instance, the equipment of a successful psychologist from the unsystematic "knowledge" of human nature which endues many people whom no one would dream of calling psychologists. Most of us number such people among our acquaintance. Shakespeare, Goethe, Sir Walter Scott and many other writers have left monumental records of the sort of wisdom I have in mind. Yet—however often we may find in some casual sentence from (let us say) the Waverley Novels, a penetration into human motivation and human self-deception, about which practising psychologists often appear to be more ponderous rather than more exact—the distinction still remains between a systematic and an unsystematic study of such matters. I have pointed out that the English language had been using *species* for a long time before it went back to the source and borrowed its prototype, *idea*. Is it very fanciful to imagine a more enlightened age in which medicine and psychology and the like would be recognized for what they are, neither *sciences* at the one extreme, nor vague *knowledges* at the other, but—*epistemies*?

I sometimes wish the well of English would not go on being quite so undefiled. Nowadays, when writers make a raid of this sort on the treasure-house of Greek thought, they will insist on remaining macaronic and italic. Otherwise a borrowing of the very kind I have just been suggesting—but this time from Hellenistic Greek—would actually have been effected, I believe, within the last decade. Between the all too systematic associations of the Latin *charity*—trailing clouds of poor-law and blankets—on the one side and the all too ambivalent *love*—meaning anything from Hollywood to the Bhagavad Gita—on the other, certain theological writers have shown an increasing tendency to introduce the Pauline *agapé*. Any thoughtful Christian must, I think, agree that this is all to the good, for here is a depth and body of essential

meaning unblurred as yet by irrelevancies; this is all to the good; but why not *agapy*?

Quo Musa tendis? And yet speculations of this kind are not perhaps quite as idle as they may appear at first sight. It is not necessary, and it is probably fallacious, to attribute much causal significance to the limitations of a nation's vocabulary. *Causa sine qua non* perhaps, but hardly *causa causans*. But forms of expression, whether or no they help to shape the forms of thought, are facts. And if you are inclined to wonder and reflect, it is better to reflect on facts than to reflect only on other people's reflections. It is well on a summer day to climb a high hill and take an extensive view of the varied face of nature; but it is also well to kneel on the grass and look long and closely at the growing point of a flowering plant—buttercup, stitchwort or even *tansy*, it does not matter which. A wide prospect is good, but so also is a certain depth of insight into particular goings on. Indeed the one is needed to give life and substance to the other. So it is with nature; and so it is, I believe, with the mind of man.

V

THREE NOVELISTS AND THE DRAWING OF CHARACTER: C. P. Snow, Joyce Cary and Ivy Compton-Burnett

by PAMELA HANSFORD JOHNSON

I

THE three novelists whose study of character I have chosen to examine could scarcely be more disparate, not merely in temperament and primary intention, but also in their method of presenting human beings. The great novelist elucidates for man not only his neighbour but himself; by increasing the self-knowledge of the reader he changes him on the surface perhaps imperceptibly, but inwardly with a completeness which can only be brought about by the therapy of art. Some books become part of us; we receive their experience into our own, transubstantiated, the wine and the bread made flesh and blood. *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, for the reader who can allow his mind to be enclosed by it, is such a book. *The Brothers Karamazov* is another. From Jane Austen we learn to be quick on the uptake, to perceive the significance of gesture or throw-away line; from Dickens we learn how to see man in the grandeur of the preposterous, how to recognize Smallweeds as immortal trolls, and Micawbers as lords of life; yet neither Jane Austen nor Dickens (similar only in this one negation) was a novelist of character-revelation in the deepest sense.

I am, however, proposing to analyse character as it appears in the works of three contemporary novelists: C. P. Snow, Joyce Cary and Ivy Compton-Burnett.

Despite his great histrionic sense (that is, he *plays* the characters as he sets them down) Joyce Cary depends most strongly upon external vision, helping us less than either Mr. Snow or Miss Compton-Burnett to know ourselves, and to recognize the motives of our own hearts. Mr. Cary is a "visionary writer" as they are not; Blake is his poet, and for him the sun sits in heaven, personified, regnant, with golden hair. He is as interested in the natural world as the man within it, sometimes blurring the one into the other. His characters are perfectly seen, and *thought*

into; but they are never profoundly *thought about.* The revealing quality that Mr. Snow achieves by empathy and intuition, Miss Compton-Burnett by microscopic observation, Mr. Cary occasionally touches by sheer accident—his range of sight is so great that one is surprised at him missing anything at all: but the fact remains that his novels have not the power to change us, except through the enrichment of our own visual capacity.

Miss Compton-Burnett limits her range by a predilection for the worst side. All her peculiar, uncontemporaneous novels, consisting almost entirely of conversation, are devoted to a single end: the dissection of motive. She has no visual sense. She may describe her people as she will; we never see them.

But by depriving us of one sense, she sharpens another. She has the most astonishing effect upon our hearing. When we become used to her speech-rhythms (which are on the whole monotonous: for her, content is all) we never fail to catch the slightest nuance in the speaker's voice. We become like the "Hearer" in the fairy tale; if we put our ear to the ground we shall hear the army advancing a thousand miles away. More than this, we learn to listen beneath the words that are actually spoken for the words that were hastily snatched back. Miss Compton-Burnett swats at the normal hypocrisies of social intercourse as if they were so many flies; and makes her kill every time. Her "bad" characters are inevitably her best, and almost inevitably, they triumph. It is true that they leave behind them, upon their remorseless passing, a few sweet and virtuous souls; but how weak these are, and how easily they will fall prey to the next pride of demons descending upon them! In these novels,

> The good lack all conviction, while the worst
> Are full of passionate intensity.

Full of it. That is what gives Miss Compton-Burnett's male and female devils so much life, and impresses on us that there, but by the grace of God, go we—if we have not (and it is always painfully easy to identify their motives with our own) gone there already.

Mr. C. P. Snow is a neo-realist: or so I should describe him if I had not a distaste for schools and labels. He augments the traditional realism of the English novel—realism in the line of Trollope, Thackeray, George Eliot, Galsworthy and Bennett—with the technical enrichments this century has brought to the novel; that is, a greater emphasis upon visual presentation and upon the analysis of character from within. His

style is pure, but unremarkable in itself; it is not, like Mr. Cary's, uproarious, dazzling, or both together; unlike Miss Compton-Burnett's, it is not in any way bizarre, and it presents no difficulties to the common reader. It is, however, entirely right for his own manner of presenting character. Character, in Mr. Snow's novels, is by far the most important element, and he allows nothing to obscure this. He never over-elaborates his backgrounds, as Mr. Cary often does, to such an extent that the figures are obscured; on the other hand he does not, like Miss Compton-Burnett, sweep away background altogether, and leave his persons to walk and talk forever against a clouded backcloth.

In his series of novels, planned to cover nearly thirty years of the English scene, he is creating the most remarkable series of portraits of our time; and it is with an analysis of his character-drawing that I shall begin my three studies.

II

In his book, *The Mind of Proust*, Professor F. C. Green writes: "It is a pity that the word humanism, originally coined by the men of the Renaissance to express their profound interest in human nature should have acquired its present restricted and academic zone of currency." One must agree; if it were not so, it is not as a neo-realist but as a Humanist that I would describe Mr. Snow. He is not merely interested in men and women; he really likes them, unless finally compelled to do otherwise. And indeed, the compulsion has to be strong. He is supremely charitable; if he cannot like or admire for good qualities, he will usually make a great effort to understand the bad ones, turning them, if he can, into reasons for pity or for sympathetic fun. In the three novels of his series already published, *Strangers & Brothers*, *The Light and the Dark*, and *Time of Hope*, there are at least thirty characters which are fully realized and distinct from the admirable minor sketches; but only to one, the clergyman Udal, in *The Light and the Dark*, does Mr. Snow seem incapable of offering affection or charity of any kind, even the charity of the joke.

Now each of these novels is meant to be read as an independent unit; yet each has its place in the general theme, and all are connected by the one narrator, Lewis Eliot. They are also linked by the appearance and reappearance of certain characters most intimately bound up with the life of Lewis himself; but these are seen at different angles and have their varying degrees of importance in the different books. In *Strangers*

& Brothers Roy Calvert, for instance, has an important but minor rôle to play; he sets the action of the story in train, then virtually disappears. *The Light and the Dark*, however, is his story. In *The Light and the Dark* we are told that Lewis is unhappily married and that his wife's name is Sheila; no more. *Time of Hope* tells the full story of that marriage, up to the point where it should have broken down, but did not. *Strangers & Brothers* is devoted to the story of George Passant; in *Time of Hope* George appears in a rôle of considerable importance, but this time he is only important to Lewis, whose history it is, and is not studied for his own sake.

In any novel the actual introduction of a character is of high significance. It is significant either because it gives the key to *superficial* understanding of the man concerned, telling us what to expect, or (this is Proust's method) it is significant because it is a deliberate misdirection.

The Baron de Charlus is seen for the first time by Marcel as an intimidating gentleman, supposedly involved in a liaison with his friend's wife; then as a shady individual who looks like a detective on holiday. It is only gradually that we learn how utterly wrong both these impressions are. Proust stressed the gap between the imagination and the reality and thus deliberately used the misdirecting device to make his point. Mr. Snow never misdirects; he gives the true outline, and then proceeds to fill it in to the last and most subtle detail. We do not know *all* from the beginning (as we might from the work of a shrewd but shallow creator of character) but what we do know from the beginning is accurate. In this respect he resembles Balzac rather than Proust.

The three characters in his novels most completely realized, and most complex, are George Passant, Sheila Knight and Lewis Eliot himself. I should be reluctant to rank Roy Calvert with them, admirable though he is; because his rôle is, in one sense, a symbolic one. In his person he incorporates the perpetual running fight between the Light and the Dark, the glory of man and his frailty. We are never allowed too near Roy, or to know him intimately. He is always in the company of others, glimpsed by us across a busy street or through the haze of a crowded room. He dominates the book completely; in neither of Mr. Snow's other novels is any one person allowed so complete a control, but Roy is a creature at whom to marvel and about whom to speculate, rather than a human being with whom it is possible to make self-identification. We feel, perhaps, that we could always have helped Marcel, Albertine, Charlus, Rastignac, Aloysha Karamazov, had we known them; we do not feel this about the positive hero figures, such as Heathcliffe, or even

Julian Sorel. We cannot ourselves, by intuition, augment our knowledge of Roy Calvert; all we can know is what we are told. He is a radiant and splendid creation, but unapproachable.

George Passant is different. He is a young lawyer of great intellectual gifts but dangerous emotional instability. He is passionate in friendship, loyal, devoted, selfless; he is also passionately idealistic, but in this quality there is a ruinous degree of self-deception. He may understand his own immediate motives; but these motives he regards as constants, invulnerable to change. He does not realize that a motive, like a stick in a jar of salt water, may gather about it so many crystals that it will become different in aspect and even in kind. In this sense the Stendhalian analogy of crystallization may be applied equally to the reasons of the intellect as to the reasons of the heart, of which reason itself comprehends nothing.

Mr. Snow's introduction to George Passant, like all his introductions, is direct and unequivocal. Lewis Eliot's friend, Jack Cotery, is in trouble. Instinctively, all young men in trouble seek the help of George, so these two at once go to his lodgings. George receives them instantly, offering tea, beer, whatever they want . . .

> His voice was loud and emphatic. He stood just over middle height, an inch or two taller than Jack; his shoulders were heavy, he was becoming a little fat, though he was only twenty-six. But it was his head that captured one's attention, his massive forehead and the powerful structure of chin and cheekbone under his full flesh.

His invitation is "affable and diffident". Having offered refreshment, he has considerable trouble in finding any, blundering around the room, opening cupboards, astonished to find them bare. At last, however, he discovers three bottles of beer, puts them on the table and says, with a characteristic impulse to get on with things, "Now we can get down to it. What is this problem?" Here is a man at anyone's disposal at any time, a provincial oracle not only sure he can solve any problem, but expecting to be called upon to do so. And he does solve the problems of others; what he cannot solve or check is his own tragedy. Yet George is not wholly a tragic figure, any more than Roy Calvert is; both achieve some sort of triumph, Roy through the acceptance of death, and George through his indomitable hope. At the end of the book George has been acquitted after an unsavoury trial for fraud, a trial in which all the weakness and corruption of his private life has been dragged into the bitter daylight. He has seen himself at last, has understood the transformation of his motives by the nuances of time and of changing

desire. But, he says, he has to go on. He must show his enemies that the disgrace has not affected him. "I've got to show them for certain that I'm keeping on."

It is not Mr. Snow's way to allow his characters to speak purely for themselves. The method of narration, in the first person, through Lewis, is a method designed for commentary: and Lewis brings the affirmative conclusion to George's story by commenting: "After this last remark, both he and I were eager for what life would bring him. He could still warm himself and everyone round him with his own hope."

Though comment is essential to Mr. Snow's method of character-drawing (it is used neither by Mr. Cary nor Miss Ivy Compton-Burnett) he uses it less with Roy Calvert or Sheila Knight than with George Passant. Roy he views subjectively; he has not the impulse towards a deep and destructive analysis—and analysis inevitably is destructive, in the first of its stages. (Lewis Eliot is presented by auto-analysis, which, of course, has its drawbacks as well as its great advantages.) Sheila, certainly, is presented with a certain amount of commentary; but this is the subjective commentary of anxiety and bewilderment.

The difference between Lewis' respective attitudes towards George Passant and Sheila Knight is precisely the same as the difference between Marcel's attitudes towards Charlus and Albertine. Where the women are concerned, both narrators are too deeply involved for the judgment that is tempered by pure, objective interest and amusement. Sheila is a beautiful, accomplished woman with one disastrous craving: she wants to be able to love, and she cannot. She is basically honest and generous and she has a good deal of wisdom, but she will not stop at any cruelty in order to "save herself" from her own nemesis.

She does not love Lewis, but she trusts him. She does not, on the other hand, consider it necessary to give him any reason to trust her. She will not be "possessed"; the moment she feels he is in the least degree sure of her, she deliberately exposes him to the most frightful jealousy, just to teach him not to be so sure next time. She is at ease only with her social inferiors and with people who, like herself, are emotional derelicts. Obsessive love makes Lewis marry her, though he is not deluded into thinking that the marriage is likely to be a success. It is even more atrocious a failure than he has anticipated. Sheila's utter concentration upon her own miseries makes their home life an appalling one; she loses him friends, she has already begun to wreck his career. At last he tries to break free of her; but fails. Passion is dead, love is dead, but habit is too strong—the habit of responsibility.

The introduction to Sheila is a gradual one, beautifully and uniquely contrived. First, Lewis hears a name and it catches his imagination. Then he sees a girl waving from a passing car. His first meeting with her is lost from his memory; but he recalls how, later, when they were sitting together in a café she insisted, with her usual mocking rejection of delicacy, on paying her share. From that moment, the essential note is struck; she will not be "possessed", will not be indebted, or "bought", even to the extent of one and six for two cups of coffee and a plate of cakes.

Lewis, who is wretchedly poor, does not misunderstand the gesture altogether; but he is relieved by it, and so attributes to Sheila more generosity than she does, in fact, possess. It is only later in the book that these half-comprehensions cease. Then, either he understands her absolutely, or is absolutely bewildered.

This presentation of Sheila, so closely interwoven with the presentation of Lewis himself, is extraordinarily successful, when we consider that Lewis is writing, out of the memory of a profound passion, about a woman whose egocentricity and cruelty he does not attempt to gloss. There appears to be no reason why the reader, whose emotions are involved only at second-hand, should feel any sympathy for Sheila at all; yet at times she wrings the heart. The fact that she does so is the finest tribute to the art of C. P. Snow. The "worst" character of Proust, Charles Morel, is saved for our sympathy because we are sometimes permitted to see him in the light of the universal comedy; we are never allowed to see Sheila except as the torturer of a man "worth six of her". But our sympathies are retained because we know that she is lost, as we hope never to be, or, more subtly, as we fear we might be, but for the grace of God. We want to *help* Sheila. We have no impulse to help Roy Calvert. He is too far above us, and we cannot venture the mental impertinence.

Lewis Eliot is, of course, the analyst of himself, and there is much of himself that is missed. We understand his arrogance and humility, his ruinous conviction that, just as Sheila can take love but not give it, he must give it and refuse always to receive it—to be "invaded" by it. We understand how he has resisted love from his mother, and from his admirable but "ordinary" friend Marion; we can credit him with the intellect and ruthless determination which has brought him out of poverty to the borders of worldly success. What we cannot see, however, is the charm which holds to him such friends as George Passant and Roy Calvert, which even holds Sheila—for she is, in fact, as vulnerable to it

as the others. A man writing about himself must use artistic devices of the utmost skill and tact if he is to convince the reader that he is, in fact, charming. Proust does it by exposing Marcel's childish dependency, intense power of affection, and above all, his wit. The wit of others is evoked by Lewis; but he himself is never remotely *funny*. It may be argued that he is not meant to be. The answer to that is that Sheila, a woman of wit, must in the way of normal companionship have struck a response from this one man whom she can always torture, but never leave alone.

Lewis, then, though finely drawn, is not quite complete. The portrait is, in fact, too modest; but the modesty is something the reader can only discover by external deduction, and not draw from contemplation of the character itself. We must content ourselves, therefore, with seeing the man only as he sees himself and not as others see him.

This is Lewis' *apologia* for the behaviour pattern of his life:

> . . . I already knew that my bondage to Sheila was no chance. Somehow I was so made that I had to reject my mother's love and all its successors. Some secret caution born of a kind of vanity made me bar my heart to any who forced their way within. I could only lose caution and vanity, bar and heart, the whole of everything I was, in the torment of loving someone like Sheila, who invaded me not at all and made me crave for a spark of feeling, who was so wrapped up in herself that only the violence and suffering of such a love as mine brought the slightest glow.

This is terrible because, at this point in Lewis' life, it is perfectly true; it seems to offer him, for the future, only the black pleasures of the pursuit of suffering. It is terrible; but such terror is not the whole picture. We have seen George wholly, Sheila wholly, but Lewis only in part. The reticence so ingrained in his character has, in this self-study, operated only in one direction; to minimize the lighter side, the side of normal human contact, the aspect of the personality displayed in the lighter intimacies; which is an aspect not to be dismissed as negligible, because it is the aspect from which the world, in the long run, makes its casual and enduring judgments.

III

Joyce Cary's most striking characters talk out loud, sometimes about themselves, but more often of life in general; and we learn from them as we learn about garrulous strangers met at a party, piecing together a

rough impression of what they are from the clues they let fall. Mr. Cary's method of character-drawing is not, however, consistent; of the important books, *Mister Johnson* is told quite objectively, without comment, in the third person; in *A Fearful Joy* the same basic method is used, but the impression given is that the narrator himself is a marked personality, never in the centre of the scene and within the action, but certainly standing just within the proscenium arch. In the trilogy, *Herself Surprised*, *To Be a Pilgrim* and *The Horse's Mouth*, first person narration *in character* is employed; these are Mr. Cary's histrionic books, giving the effect of three sustained *bravura* performances by an actor of superb confidence. In *Herself Surprised* it is Sara who speaks, the bonny, roseate, amoral cook who will inspire the painter Gulley Jimson, live with him and haunt his old age; in *To Be a Pilgrim* it is Mr. Wilcher, the disreputable, rather mad old gentleman who cannot be trusted in Hyde Park, but has a genuine love for Sara and would have married her, had not his relations intervened; in *The Horse's Mouth*, Mr. Cary's masterpiece to date, it is Gulley Jimson, the rowdy, randy painter, with the vision of a Blake, and the social conscience of a Charley Peace. They are set to talk; talk themselves into ecstasies and the sympathetic reader into a kind of fuddled and rapturous half-comprehension. Yet elsewhere the reader is allowed to see each in a different and more objective light. Sara's idea of Gulley is not quite Gulley's idea of himself; and Mr. Wilcher's self-explanation softens our original impression, given in *Herself Surprised*, that he is simply a dirty old person who would be better off in a home.

Now Mr. Cary's great gift is his visual sense; he is constantly enraptured by physical beauty, by the radiance of the natural world and the astonishing harmony of unrelated objects brought into relation by accident. It was either M. André Breton or Mr. Salvador Dali who remarked upon the fortuitous loveliness of a sewing machine and an umbrella upon a dissecting table. Mr. Cary's joy is in the unexpected pattern; for him, life is a delightful jigsaw liable to rearrange itself in an infinite number of ways, and to startle his eye with an infinite number of shapes and colours. Therefore, his best characters are those that see the most; which explains the success of Sara and Jimson, both creatures of extraordinary visual capacity, and the relative failure of Mr. Wilcher, whose interest lies in the peculiar and always unexpected working of his own wits.

Mister Johnson, the negro clerk of the book named after him, and Rudbeck, his boss, are purely drawn characters, sympathetic and memor-

able; but they have not the impact of Jimson, who is allowed to *see* to his heart's content.

Consider the opening of *The Horse's Mouth*:

> I was walking by the Thames. Half-past morning on an autumn day. Seen in a mist. Like an orange in a fried-fish shop. All bright below. Low tide, dusty water and a crooked bar of straw, chicken-boxes, dirt and oil from mud to mud. Like a viper swimming in skim-milk. The old serpent, symbol of nature and love.
>
> 'Five windows light the caverned man; through one he breathes the air
> Through one hears music of the spheres; through one can look
> And see small portions of the eternal world.'
>
> Such as Thames mud turned into a bank of nine-carat gold rough from the fire. They say a chap just out of prison runs into the nearest cover; into some dark little room, like a rabbit put up by a stoat. The sky feels too big for him. But I liked it. I swam in it. I couldn't take my eyes off the clouds, the water, the mud. And I must have been hopping up and down Greenbank Hard for half an hour grinning like a gargoyle, until the wind began to get up my trousers and down my back, and to bring me to myself, as they say. Meaning my liver and lights.
>
> And I perceived that I hadn't time to waste on pleasure. A man of my age has to get on with the job."

Now it is probably not too much to maintain that everything essential about Jimson is told us here. We know first that he is an artist; he is composing pictures, one after the other, fixing shapes, discovering, by the use of eccentric simile, precisely the colours he needs. Next, we know that he is an eccentric; his speech-rhythms, and the very character of his imagination, tell us that. We know his temperament is volatile, and that he can be harsh and coarse: the selection of simile, "like a viper swimming in skim-milk", is significant. We know that he is a man of culture—he knows Blake so well that he can quote one of the more obscure passages with perfect accuracy. We know he is incurably optimistic, and that the natural world is a perpetual joy to him. We know he is ugly; a handsome man does not have visions of himself hopping up and down Greenbank Hard, grinning like a gargoyle. As for the actual facts, we know that he is no longer young and that he has just been released from prison.

Thus, though Jimson continues to astonish us by his vision and his wild humour, he never astonishes us *by anything he actually does*. We have been prepared for that in the first twenty lines of print devoted to

him. All our original impressions will be reinforced as time goes on, augmented, enriched, but we shall not be asked for any effort of imaginative sympathy. We are asked to enjoy Jimson, not to analyse him. This is the classic method of comic character drawing, superbly employed here. Compare with it the introduction to Uncle Toby, in *Tristram Shandy*, or to Dickens' great black comic, Quilp, and his great white comic, Micawber. Joyce Cary, more directly in the tradition of Fielding, Smollett, Sterne and Dickens than any other living writer, is, in this matter of introductions, a traditionalist. He is, of course, more consistent than Dickens, though his range is not nearly so vast. I have said that nothing Jimson can *do* surprises us, because we have been prepared for the best and the worst; Quilp and Micawber do, of course, surprise us on two occasions only, but this is through a failure in Dickens' craftsmanship. Quilp astonishes us by dying on a black, dramatic and utterly humourless plane (it is not sufficient to remark that persons cannot die humorously, for Jimson does so) and Micawber by becoming an accomplished colonial administrator. No mistakes of that order would ever be made by a modern humorist of Mr. Cary's class, not because we have gained a more profound respect for artistic truth—though there is something in that—but because such concessions to public sentiment are no longer demanded of the artist.

Sara, all radiance in her own story, though she gives off this radiant heat as naturally as a rose gives off its perfume, is utterly transformed in Gulley's narrative. This is not astonishing, firstly because she is now old, and secondly because her obsessive love for Gulley was always immeasurably greater than his for her.

Gulley, just for something to do, has gone to a political meeting:

> The people kept floating in. Like fish in an aquarium full of dirty brown water . . . old octopus in corner with a green dome and a blue beak, working his arms. Trying to take off his overcoat without losing his chair. Old female in black with a red nose creeping about in dark corners like a crawfish, shaking her bonnet feathers and prodding her old brown umbrella at the chairs.

Later, he recognizes the crawfish:

> And I said, "Sara."
> "Oh, Gulley," she said. "You did give me a start." And she went on panting and heaving and pushing herself about. "Oh dear, I do get so breathless."

This is the Sara who posed in her bath, washing her feet, drying her hair, for the series of Degas-Renoir paintings which made Gulley

famous. Jimson has reduced her to a ridiculous Sarey Gamp, a red-nosed old woman, half-drowned in the bottle; yet when he leaves her that night he says (and it is one of Mr. Cary's best strokes of surprise):

> What an evening. And I couldn't get the old girl out of my eye or my feelings. I kept on seeing her hand tilting the glass, and the turn of her body from the waist; stiff enough, but I could see the woman inside; the real old Sara that had made me work, especially with the brush.
>
> Yes, I thought, and that's what I've been missing in my Eve, something female, something that old Cranach had, yes, something from Sara. And not just the hips either, and the high waist; it's something in the movement; and as soon as I got back to Plantie's I opened one of his old encyclopaedias and began to draw what I wanted in the end-papers; the everlasting Eve, but all alive-oh. She came out strong like Sara, the Sara of twenty years ago.

Mr. Cary leaves none of his characters without glory, if glory they had in the first place; for him, the original fire is undying. His eyes do not merely see, but retain the vision in the first freshness. Nothing is lost. Nothing passes away or loses the rosy heat of the young flesh, however deeply time may cover it with its dusty and crumbled earth, its thickening glues of cobweb.

In *A Fearful Joy*, a third person narrative told for the greater part, and for no very apparent reason (except to increase the already excessive pace) in the historic present, Mr. Cary makes a slight essay in misdirection, though the very emphasis with which the finger points the wrong way assures the reader that the route to be followed will not be this one:

> They went away and said that Tabitha Baskett was, after all, a very ordinary child, and rather a plain one. They shook their heads over the future of a plain girl with a mother so ill and feeble, a father so erratic.

Now from this it is obvious that Tabitha will not turn out to be ordinary, plain, or doomed to a tedious future. The stage is set for surprise here, though it is rather belatedly that Mr. Cary presents the first one: that Tabitha's odd features qualify her, at the peak of *The Yellow Book* craze, to rank as a Beardsley Beauty.

The trouble with Tabitha as a character-study is twofold. Firstly, the pace of the story is too great for us to get a good look at her. She is always flying past, breathless, rushing—a domesticated and rather reluctant Madame Verdurin—from nursery to salon and back again, her skirts eluding our fingers as we try to clutch at them. Secondly, she

is not sufficiently like Mr. Cary. She has not a roaring wit, either of the naïve (Sara) or sophisticated (Jimson) variety, and she has not the gift of seeing. Joyce Cary's characters must see if they are to live wholly, which is one reason why Dick Bonser, the object of Tabitha's obsessive love, is infinitely less successful a creation than Jimson, the object of Sara's.

Unlike Mr. Snow, Mr. Cary is a highly idiosyncratic writer, most powerful when he is allowing full and joyful freedom to his own vision of life. In this he resembles Dickens, who touched his greatest magnificence in those characters who, temperamentally, most resembled himself.

IV

The characters of Miss Ivy Compton-Burnett do not talk to themselves or even, very often, about themselves; they converse incessantly with others. Their whole existence is a social act.

Of the vast number of her portraits, very few remain sharp and individual in the memory. She draws, in fact, not the character of the individual but of the type; and when she has finished with this type, stripped it, gutted it, and laid it neatly out in pieces, we recognize its appalling universality.

Character lies for her in the question and the response. She does not study the solitary and recluse; all her people have a tremendous appetite for the society of their fellows. They are all persons of a single class (the upper-middle) or attached, in servitude, to a single class. They live round about the turn of the century, in a world which appears, in its ordering, fixed and unchangeable.

Miss Compton-Burnett recognizes the violent passions as clearly as Sophocles or Aeschylus did. The plots of her novels are nearly always simple and violent, dealing with thefts, forgeries, betrayals and murders; but all these things are forced, as it were, to the bottom of the narrative, and covered up with layer upon layer of the bright tissue of her wit. To make an analogy; imagine that a comfortable modern house is built upon the foundations of an old prison. Above all is airy, ordered, warm. There are hot-water bottles in every bed, fresh towels in every bathroom, and a goose is cooking in the oven. But go down to the cellars to bring up the wine, and you will tread on the ancient stones hollowed by the pacings of captive misery.

Captive misery is, indeed, one of Miss Compton-Burnett's dominant

themes; the children are captive to the tyrannical father, the governess to the tyrant children, and the impoverished companion to the remorseless cripple rejoicing in power. It is hard, always to believe in the wretchedness of prisoner or captive; Miss Compton-Burnett has civilized pain, and taught it to moderate its voice to drawing-room intercourse. Also, she is not merely witty but often really funny; her devils are not merry ones, but they are often superb comics. To draw any sort of parallel between the monsters of Dickens and Proust and the monsters of Miss Compton-Burnett may well appear *tiré par les cheveux*; yet fundamentally, Dickens has treated Quilp, and Proust has treated Charlus, in precisely the same way as Miss Compton-Burnett has treated Aunt Matty, in *A Family & a Fortune*. Edmund Wilson emphasizes Chesterton's view of Dickens' bad characters: "The reader is sorry at the end when they are finally banished from the scene and hopes that the discredited scoundrel will still open the door and stick his head in and make one more atrocious remark." So it is with Aunt Matty, and so it is, when he is at his most appalling (as when insulting Madame de Saint-Euverte at the party given by the Prince de Guermantes) with the Baron de Charlus.

Miss Compton-Burnett leaves all her characters to tell us, at the first moment of speech, what they are. Here is Aunt Matty, arriving with her father, at the small, new, pleasant home made for them, out of the greatest kindness and charity, by her sister Blanche:

> "Is this a house or a hutch? It is meant, I suppose, for human habitation," said Blanche's father . . . "It is well that I shall soon be gone and leave you alone in it. For it is better for one than for two, as I cannot but see."
>
> "Come, Father, pluck up heart. You are an able-bodied man and not a crippled woman. I must not be given any more to bear. You must remember your poor invalid, though I never remind you that I am that."

We know at once that misfortune has descended on Blanche's household in the shape of these lively, self-pitying fiends. The house is delightful. They greet it with a sneer. Matty takes the opportunity to remind her father of her crippled state, while emphasizing that this is the kind of reminder she never gives him.

He is, however, his daughter's father: and ready to give her as good as he gets:

> "If that was not a reminder, I need not take it as one. I grieve that that fall made a poor thing of you; but you want a chair to sit

upon, all the more. And I don't see where we are to put one, on a first sight."

Let us examine our introduction to another monster whose sudden reformation, however, is the axis upon which *Manservant and Maidservant* turns:

"Is that fire smoking?" said Horace Lamb.

"Yes, it appears to be, my dear boy."

"I am not asking what it appears to be doing. I asked if it was smoking."

"Appearances are not held to be a clue to the truth," said his cousin. "But we seem to have no other."

Right away, we know two things: that Horace is a pompous ass and a bullying ass. The information will suffice for the moment and prepare us for the next phase of Horace's character—that he is a brute to his children:

"Fire piled right up the chimney! Who is responsible?" said Horace, opening the door on his children. "And on a day when many people would not have a fire at all."

"Some poor little children can't have one," said the youngest child, looking up in a tentative manner.

"And who has been spilling water?" said Horace, on a deeper note.

There was a pause.

"Answer me," said the father, striking the table.

This is character-drawing in the most cheese-paring economy; but the cheese is pared with such precision that nobody goes short.

The third monster, Lady Haslam, of *Men & Wives*, a domineering, super-possessive hypochondriac, reveals herself at once in three lines. Her husband asks her how she has slept:

"You know I do not sleep in these days, Godfrey. It is monotonous for you always to ask the question, and for me always to answer it."

We are instantly aware that Harriet is going to rub our nerves raw, every time she opens her mouth.

The agreeable characters, though powerless in face of the domesticated furies who are set among them, usually have a touch of acerbity which proclaims their kinship with their less agreeable relations. Even Miss Compton-Burnett's children, who are always treated with a sympathy beneath which there is a protective anger, are capable of

good, witty back-answers—these being a form of temporary self-defence. Of permanent, successful self-defence there can be no question; their elders are in authority over them, and will do with them as they please.

One factor, however, must be strongly emphasized when we are considering the characters of Miss Compton-Burnett. The conversations I have already quoted are realistic; they actually took place; but far more often, what we are hearing is not the word but the wish. We are hearing what the characters *would have said had they thought of it in time*; are listening, in fact, to an almost incessant demonstration of *l'esprit de l'escalier*.

The following is a rapid exchange of conversation (from *Parents & Children*) between Miss Mitford, a governess, and two young girls, Venice and Isabel. Miss Mitford has just told them of her coming retirement; her post with their family is to be her last:

"What will you do then?" said Isabel.

"I can live with my relatives, if I pay them."

"But you don't like being with them. You are always glad to come back."

"And yet I think I shall enjoy living with them. What an odd incalculable person I am!"

"You ought not to have to pay relations."

"Well, the English have no family feelings. That is, none of the kind you mean. They have them, and one of them is that relations must cause no expense."

"Perhaps they are poor," said Venice.

"Not as poor as you think, considering that I am a governess."

"Perhaps they are not near relations."

"Yes, they are. It is near relations who have family feelings."

"You might as well live with friends," said Venice.

"Well, there is the tie of blood."

"What difference does that make, if people forget it?"

"They know other people remember it. That is another family feeling."

"I shall not let Isabel work, when I am married. She will always live with me."

"I may be married myself," said Isabel. "I am not quite sure that I shall not."

"You will have enough money to pay your sister, without working," said Miss Mitford.

"I should not want her to pay," said Venice.

"People with families often need money the most," said Isabel. "You might be dependent on my contribution to the house."

"That is another set of family feelings," said Miss Mitford.

Now this is uncommonly like one of those conversations which we propose shall take place between ourselves and other people. We set the scene, we know what we intend to say, we decide the answers we shall be given. When we launch upon the reality, we find, to our irritation, that the dialogue is not going in the least as we planned it; we are not being offered the correct "feed" lines. The function of Venice and Isabel in the foregoing conversation is to provide "feed" lines for Miss Mitford's bitter wit, and permit her to analyse the easy phrase "family feelings". It would not, in life, have been possible for her to get so far or to deal with her subject so completely. One clue missed by Venice or Isabel, and she would have been defeated. Miss Compton-Burnett's conversational device is often, as in this case, a theatrical one; the dialogue does not ramble, as it would in reality, misdirected by the unexpected idea, the phrase accidentally dropped. It is planned. It has been predestined from the very moment that each character first said "Dad-dad" in the shadows of his perambulator, for as the first word of every one of Miss Compton-Burnett's novels is linked precisely with the last, so every incident in the life of every character and every word he lets fall, involves him inextricably with his fellows in the general comedy.

But while presenting, by her conversational method, the character of a group which exists within the character of a society, Miss Compton-Burnett also presents the salient points of the individual. Miss Mitford is one of her typical "Dependents", paid to endure, from one day's end to another, not merely dumb insolence but insolence of the most vocal order; yet nevertheless, endowed with sufficient wit to keep always one jump ahead of the persecutors. We never, in fact, see these companions and governesses in a wholly depressing light because they are never wholly submerged; they come up repeatedly for air.

Miss Compton-Burnett's outstanding contribution to the art of character-drawing is her analysis of type. No other writer has worked in this way, or produced so solid a general impression of *groups* of people, acting one against the other as opposing forces. Her weakness is her failure to stamp more than a handful of individuals upon the memory. It is hard for her to do this, for her background is unchanging, and we are not helped to memory by differing climates or atmospheres. We remember *together* Miss Flyte, fog, and Chancery; Albertine, sunshine and sea; Jane Eyre, Gateshead and the rain. When we do recall, as personalities distinct in themselves, Aunt Matty and the boy Aubrey (*A Family & a Fortune*), Anna Donne (*Elders & Betters*) and Lady

Haslam (*Men & Wives*), we see them only against the backcloth which serves for each and every one of Miss Compton-Burnett's tragi-comedies. Her very method precludes any analysis of individual personality in depth; and though her work is likely to endure for the pleasure of an acclimatized few, her inability to create enduring human beings places her at a disadvantage. When we think of the great novels of the world, it is people that we remember: the Baron de Charlus, Sarey Gamp, Jane Eyre, Mrs. Proudie, Dmitri Karamazov, Rastignac, Becky Sharp, Maggie Tulliver, Catherine Linton.

We remember face and figure and gesture before we remember words spoken. Miss Compton-Burnett, a writer of superb originality, makes her appeal to the ear alone, sending out into the future only the sound-waves of her witty and glittering and interminable conversations.

VI

DISRAELI, THE NOVELIST

by ERIC FORBES-BOYD

"FLAMBOYANT" is perhaps the word most frequently used in modern assessments of Disraeli's novels; and it is of course impossible to deny that this quality is present to a greater or lesser degree in all of them. It was partly an intrinsic characteristic of the man. He loved display, in his earlier years at least, beyond the measure of good taste—when he astonished and amused Society of the 1830's as the exotic young dandy, with his jewels and scent and curling love-locks. Nor did the tendency ever leave him. As the owner of Hughenden, anxious to establish himself as an English country gentleman, he must still depart from the standard pattern, and have his peacocks on the terrace. "My dear lady," he exclaimed to a guest, "you cannot have terraces without peacocks."

But his attitude was also partly, one fancies, a pose assumed for tactical purposes. In a letter to his father, written from Malta on one of his earlier travels, there is an anecdote that is indicative of this.

"Affectation here," he writes, "tells better than wit. Yesterday at the racket court, sitting in the gallery among strangers, the ball entered and lightly struck me and fell at my feet. I picked it up, and observing a young rifleman excessively stiff, I humbly requested him to forward its passage into the court, as I really had never thrown a ball in my life."

It was not only in Malta that he found affectation a telling method of drawing attention to young Mr. Disraeli as something unique. It was the technique alike of the young man and the young novelist; and it is true that in the earlier novels, in *Vivian Grey, The Young Duke, Contarini Fleming* and *Alroy*, one is apt at times to get the impression of an author deliberately posturing to secure our attention at all costs. In the later novels, with experience to draw upon and valid ideas to propagate, Disraeli had no need of such tricks; yet the flamboyance is always there to some extent, cropping up as a kind of operatic exaggeration of life, of sentiment and emotion. There is an operatic love of colour, of exotic and grandiose settings; his characters have a tendency to seem

larger than life, and to reveal themselves with something of the abandon and *bravura* of a tenor before the footlights.

Yet, as I have said, this approach cannot be written off as entirely an unhappy affectation. It was also a natural element in the outlook of a confirmed romantic. For that in fact was what Disraeli was: he saw life constantly in terms of a fervid and romantic imagination. In his political thinking as much as in his creative writing, for what was Young England but a romantic dream! When he declared himself on the side of the angels, one is tempted to believe that it was chiefly because angels are more romantic beings than monkeys, and hence to him much more credible factors in any philosophy seeking to explain the universe.

It is not of course a type of genius that needs any defence. The novelist is as free as the poet or painter to discover a strangeness in familiar things if, in doing so, he appeals effectively to the instinct, the imagination or the intellect; and, despite many failures and lapses, Disraeli, at his best and when approached with some understanding, will not be found wanting in this. But it is not so easy for the modern reader to approach him in a properly receptive mood. To begin with, romanticism is an attitude that runs rather counter to the prejudices of this age: an age that prefers precise and scientific observation of human data, and is apt to shy away from "a strangeness in familiar things", unless the strangeness can produce scientific credentials to guarantee its reality, unless it is attained by holding the microscope up to nature, or is supported by the pronouncements of a Freud.

Then again, Disraeli was a great English statesman, the only one of our Prime Ministers who was also an eminent novelist—and one does not expect romantic visions from a Premier. Rather does one come to him expecting his unique experience to furnish an uniquely comprehensive and exact picture of the world in which he moved, a substantial, authoritative and exceedingly well-informed reconstruction. And Disraeli himself does much to put us off his scent here. For he is outwardly conforming to the realistic convention; and he was a close observer who, in his political scenes especially, often presents a reasonably objective view. But sooner or later his imagination comes into exuberant play, to evoke a purely subjective vision—though not necessarily a false one—or to lay upon the appearance of reality the exaggerated emphasis of satire; and, unprepared for this shift, one is inclined to regard him merely as a realist who has ceased to be convincing and sincere, and has become meretricious and flashy.

But if there are these difficulties in the way of appreciating Disraeli,

he has on the other hand qualities as a novelist that make an immediate appeal to any reader who comes to him sympathetically, and without firm preconceptions. In the first place he can tell a story supremely well, and he usually has a good story to tell. He has the knack of interesting us in his characters, even when, as in the earlier novels, these are but puppets. In the first part of *Vivian Grey*, for example, and in *The Young Duke*, we are made to attend anxiously upon the fortunes of the hero. In these novels Disraeli leads us on expectantly, he can summon up a tense atmosphere, exploit suspense, surprise us with an unexpected twist, and by the sheer vivacity and skill of his narrative, he can for long periods hold at bay our disbelief. And even when we find ourselves frankly unconvinced, we are never bored by his fairy-tale, because of the wit that accompanies it.

He is certainly among the wittiest, possibly he is the wittiest, of English novelists. From his first to his last novel his wit is continuously in evidence, lightening the duller parts of the narrative, enlivening his dialogue with flashing repartee, pointing his comment, gleefully exposing his characters or lending a delightful aplomb to his recurring performances as a juggler with ideas. It is naturally in his dialogue that it shows to the best advantage; and his conversation pieces—his dinner tables, his ballrooms, his political salons—constitute some of his best scenes.

Here is an example from *Tancred*, in which the scene is a dinner party, given by the intelligent and cultured Jew, Sidonia. Incidentally, this is a reunion of earlier Disraelian heroes, for Sidonia and Coningsby reappear from *Coningsby* in which they play leading parts, and Charles Egremont, now Lord Marney, was the central figure of *Sybil*. Mr. Vavasour is a poet and an M.P.

> "And now," said Edith, as the ladies rose to return to the library —"and now we leave you to Maynooth."
>
> "By-the-bye, what do they say to it in your House, Lord Marney?" inquired Henry Sidney, filling his glass.
>
> "It will go down," said Lord Marney. "A strong dose for some, but they are used to potent potions."
>
> "The bishops, they say, have not made up their minds."
>
> "Fancy bishops not having made up their minds," exclaimed Tancred: "the only persons who ought never to doubt."
>
> "Except when they are offered a bishopric," said Lord Marney.
>
> "Why I like this Maynooth project," said Tancred, "though otherwise it little interests me, is, that all the shopkeepers are against it."
>
> "Don't tell that to the minister," said Coninsgby, "or he will give up the measure."

"Well, that is the very reason," said Vavasour, "why, though otherwise inclined to the grant, I hesitate as to my vote. I have the highest opinion of the shopkeepers; I sympathize even with their prejudices. They are the class of the age; they represent its order, its decency, its industry."

"And you represent them," said Coningsby. "Vavasour is the quintessence of order, decency, and industry."

"You may jest," said Vavasour, shaking his head with a spice of solemn drollery; "but public opinion must and ought to be respected, right or wrong."

"What do you mean by public opinion?" said Tancred.

"The opinion of the reflecting majority," said Vavasour.

"Those who don't read your poems," said Coningsby.

"Boy, boy!" said Vavasour, who could endure raillery from one he had been at college with, but who was not overpleased at Coningsby selecting the present occasion to claim his franchise, when a new man was present like Lord Montacute, on whom Vavasour naturally wished to produce an impression. . . .

"I don't see how there can be opinion without thought," said Tancred; "and I don't believe the public ever think. How can they? They have no time. Certainly we live at present under the empire of general ideas, which are extremely powerful. But the public have not invented those ideas. They have adopted them from convenience. No one has confidence in himself; on the contrary, every one has a mean idea of his own strength and has no reliance on his own judgment. Men obey a general impulse, they bow before an external necessity, whether for resistance or action. Individuality is dead; there is a want of inward and personal energy in man; and that is what people feel and mean when they go about complaining there is no faith."

"You would hold, then," said Henry Sidney, "that the progress of public liberty marches with the decay of personal greatness?"

"It would seem so."

"But the majority will always prefer public liberty to personal greatness," said Lord Marney.

"But, without personal greatness, you never would have had public liberty," said Coningsby.

"After all, it is civilization that you are kicking against," said Vavasour.

"I don't understand what you mean by civilization," said Tancred.

"The progressive development of the faculties of man," said Vavasour.

"Yes, but what is progressive development?" said Sidonia; "and what are the faculties of man? If development be progressive, how do you account for the state of Italy? One will tell you it is superstition, indulgences, and the Lady of Loretto; yet three centuries ago, when all these influences were much more powerful,

Italy was the soul of Europe. The less prejudiced—a Puseyite for example, like our friend Vavasour—will assure us that the state of Italy has nothing to do with the spirit of its religion, but that it is entirely an affair of commerce; a revolution of commerce has convulsed its destinies. I cannot forget that the world was once conquered by Italians who had no commerce."

Disraeli is not often credited with humour as distinct from wit. He is indeed almost always a failure when he attempts, which, fortunately, he rarely does, the uproariously funny—as at the outset of the second part of *Vivian Grey*, where the knockabout farce in the German castle falls deplorably flat. But though he is never apt at provoking a guffaw, and though on the whole his jesting tends much more to tickle the intellect than to touch the affections, to ridicule and irony than to jovial appreciation of human absurdity, he is nevertheless not deficient in a sense of fun. He can, when he wishes, exhibit the pure geniality of the humorist, who finds his characters as lovable as they are laughable. Take as an instance this delightful picture, from an earlier chapter of *Tancred*, of life below stairs.

The kitchen at Montacute was like the preparation for the famous wedding feast of Prince Riquet with the Tuft, when the kind earth opened, and revealed that genial spectacle of white-capped cooks, and endless stoves and stewpans. The steady blaze of two colossal fires was shrouded by vast screens. Everywhere, rich materials and silent artists; business without bustle, and the all-pervading magic of method. Philippon was preparing a sauce; Dumoreau, in another quarter of the spacious chamber, was arranging some truffles; the Englishman, Smit, was fashioning a cutlet. Between these three generals of division aides-de-camp perpetually passed, in the form of active and observant *marmitons*, more than one of whom, as he looked on the great masters around him, and with the prophetic faculty of genius surveyed the future, exclaimed to himself, like Corregio, "And I also will be a cook."

In this animated and interesting scene was only one unoccupied individual, or rather occupied only with his own sad thoughts. This was Papa Prevost, leaning against rather than sitting on a dresser, with his arms folded, his idle knife stuck in his girdle, and the tassel of his cap awry with vexation. His gloomy brow, however, lit up as Mr. Harris, for whom he was waiting with anxious expectation, entered, and summoned him to the presence of Lord Eskdale, who, with a shrewd, yet lounging air, which concealed his own foreboding perplexity, said, "Well, Prevost, what is the matter? The people here been impertinent?"

Prevost shook his head. "We never were in a house, my lord, where they were more obliging. It is something much worse."

"Nothing wrong about your fish, I hope? Well, what is it?"

"Leander, my lord, has been dressing dinners for a week—dinners, I will be bound to say, which were never equalled in the Imperial kitchen, and the duke has never made a single observation, or sent him a single message. Yesterday, determined to outdo even himself, he sent up some *escalopes de laitances de carpes á la Bellamont.* In my time I have seen nothing like it, my lord. Ask Philippon, ask Dumoreau, what they thought of it! Even the Englishman, Smit, who never says anything, opened his mouth and exclaimed; as for the *marmitons*, they were breathless, and I thought Achille, the youth of whom I spoke to you, my lord, and who appears to me to be born with the true feeling, would have been overcome with emotion. When it was finished, Leander retired to his room—I attended him—and covered his face with his hands. Would you believe it, my lord! Not a word—nor even a message. All this morning Leander has waited in the last hope. Nothing, absolutely nothing! How can he compose when he is not appreciated? Had he been appreciated, he would to-day not only have repeated the *escalopes á la Bellamont*, but perhaps even invented what might have outdone it. It is unheard of, my lord. The late Lord Monmouth would have sent for Leander the very evening, or have written to him a beautiful letter, which would have been preserved in his family; M. de Sidonia would have sent him a tankard from his table. These things in themselves are nothing; but they prove to a man of genius that he is understood. Had Leander been in the Imperial kitchen, or even with the Emperor of Russia, he would have been decorated!"

"Where is he?" said Lord Eskdale.

"He is alone in the cook's room."

"I will go and say a word to him!"

Alone, in the cook's room, gazing in listless vacancy on the fire—that fire which, under his influence, had often achieved so many master-works—was the great artist who was not appreciated. No longer suffering under mortification, but overwhelmed by that exhaustion which follows acute sensibility and the over-tension of the creative faculty, he looked round as Lord Eskdale entered, and when he perceived who was his visitor, he rose immediately, bowed very low, and then sighed.

"Prevost thinks we are not exactly appreciated here," said Lord Eskdale.

Leander bowed again, and still sighed.

"Prevost does not understand the affair," continued Lord Eskdale. "Why I wished you to come down here, Leander, was not to receive the applause of my cousin and his guests, but to form their taste."

Here was a great idea; exciting and ennobling. It threw quite a new light upon the position of Leander. He started; his brow seemed to clear.

It cannot be said that Disraeli has created any characters with a sufficient hold on the popular imagination to entitle them to a place in

the national mythology—though conceivably a case might be made out for Messrs. Tadpole and Taper, who appear in *Coningsby* and *Sybil*, and are perhaps still known to this generation as embodiments of the political wire-puller. One mentions this because the successes of Scott and Dickens and, in a lesser degree, Thackeray, in obtaining this *cachet* for their people has tended to set up the ability as the sure test of a "classic" novelist's creative power. But failure to pass it is by no means decisive: few would now deny the supreme merit of many actors in Trollope's large cast, but Mrs. Proudie is the only member of it who is undeniably a public figure. Similarly, although Disraeli's characters have failed to make a lasting impression on the popular mind, there are a number of them who remain magnificently amusing and rewarding company. Lady Bellair and Count Mirabel (*Henrietta Temple*), Lord Marney and Sir Vavasour Firebrace (*Sybil*), Rigby (*Coningsby*), St. Barbe (*Endymion*) —these are but a few of those who come to mind.

Almost all the novels are to a greater or lesser extent *romans-à-clef*, and no doubt Disraeli's contemporaries found it a piquant attraction that they were able to attach originals to many of the characters. But the point is lost, or at any rate means little, to us now. Except in a few instances; for one can appreciate that Lord Cadurcis in *Venetia* is a very good portrait of Byron; that Marmion Herbert in the same book is a feeble presentment of Shelley, and St. Barbe in *Endymion* a caricature of Thackeray. It is an approach that, by tempting an author with the easier won triumphs of caricature, is apt to distract him from the more important task of creating characters whose life is intrinsic in them. But Disraeli, if he thus allowed the sources of his inspiration to appear, rarely exploited the identification: usually fact and fiction were blended to produce an original character. But, of course, Cadurcis and Herbert are attempts at exact portraiture, and there are others.

Finally, to the storyteller, the wit, and the able creator of character, one must add the man of ideas—brimful of lively comment, always stimulating and provocative, often penetrating, and sometimes constructive, on politics, literature, art, the social system, on everything that came within his experience. Naturally he had to acquire the experience first, and it is only in the later novels that he appears impressively in this rôle. In fact his work exhibits his talents accumulating in the order in which I have placed them here. That is to say, roughly speaking, in *Vivian Grey* and *The Young Duke* it is the wit and the story that are the attractions; in *Henrietta Temple* and *Venetia* the characters have emerged from the puppet stage to become authentic human beings;

and from *Coningsby* onwards they are human beings whose intellectual stature is high, and whose talk carries our interest far beyond their personal concerns. They frequently, indeed, carry it too far; for unfortunately when the man of ideas did come upon the stage he was apt to turn it into a rostrum, and send the novelist packing. There are long interludes in *Coningsby* particularly, where the characters subside into obedient mouthpieces, and the action and human interest of the story go up the spout of Disraelian eloquence. *Coningsby* is the worst offender in this; but it was not until he came to write *Endymion* at the age of seventy-odd, when his crusading ardour had sobered down, that the novelist was able again to resume control of the proceedings. Thus although *Coningsby*, *Sybil*, *Tancred* and *Lothair* contain some of his best writing, their stories are never conducted with quite the concentration and harmony to be found in *Henrietta Temple* and, more doubtfully, in *Venetia*.

Among the many subjects that stimulated Disraeli's mind, one of the most influential was the East. It was an unfortunate influence so far as the novelist was concerned; and though, in *Tancred*, it was responsible for a moving exposition of the world's debt to the Jewish race; and though it gave rise there to floods of eloquence and some memorable aphorisms, it left the thinker eventually entranced to incoherence before a great "Asian mystery", from which the reader retreats hastily—not without misgivings that his leg has been pulled. The misgiving is really not justified; but one certainly cherishes a grudge against Disraeli's East, for the malevolent spell it throws over the later chapters of a book that has perhaps the finest and most promising opening of any of the novels. But *Tancred* is a book of Disraeli's maturity, and the effect of the East upon the young Disraeli was, as might be expected, even more shattering. *Alroy*, written after his first visit there, and the fourth of his novels, is an experiment in glamorous technicolour that is a quite unreadable curiosity. In this story of a twelfth-century "Prince of the Captivity" who heads a formidable rising to restore the departed glories of Israel and Judah, there are passages of the crudest melodrama, and "poetic prose" that falls not only into metre but into rhyme. This kind of thing:

> In the clear and rosy air, sparkling with a single star, the sharp and spiry cypress-tree rises like a gloomy thought, amid the flow of revelry. A singing bird, a single star, a solemn tree, an odorous flower, are dangerous in the tender hour, when maidens in their twilight bower, sigh softer than the eve!

A style that was parodied in the well-known lines: "Oh reader dear!

do pray look here, and you will spy the curly hair and forehead fair, and nose so high and gleaming eye of Benjamin Dis-ra-e-li . . ."

It is not to be supposed of course that Disraeli was merely writing carelessly, with his critical faculty swept away in a transport of emotion. It was a deliberate experiment—although whether or not this is to be regarded as an excuse is a matter of opinion. In his own words: "I never hesitate although I discard verse to have recourse to rhythm whenever I consider its introduction desirable, and occasionally to rhyme. There is no doubt that the style in which I have attempted to write this book is a delicate and difficult instrument for an artist to handle." Nor is there any doubt that in his hands it is an instrument to scare the most dauntless reader. It is true that the book had its admirers at the time, and one lady went so far as to declare that "reading it was like riding an Arab"; but to-day the Arab seems a very poor hack.

But if the writing was not directly due to emotion, that emotion was none the less there. Despite the tawdry and melodramatic disguise in which he apparelled his vision of the East, one cannot read the book and doubt that the East had genuinely quickened his pulses and heated his imagination; and had not merely appealed to the calculation of the rising novelist as a telling setting for his next yarn. The feeling was sincere enough, even if, in the absence of a wider experience, he was more or less driven to find in such feelings and daydreams the best material he had: as in *Contarini Fleming*, the book he wrote simultaneously with *Alroy*, where he gives us what amounts to the history of his mental progress up to that time. This "psychological romance" is extremely interesting in the light it throws on the young Disraeli; while as a book it is far better written than *Alroy*, and the first half of it is a good story. But he found that the material was more limited than he had expected: it failed to last out the novel, and he was reduced to completing it with what is no more than a travelogue.

At the end of 1836, three years after *Alroy* was published, and shortly before Disraeli entered Parliament, there appeared *Henrietta Temple*, which was followed a few months later by *Venetia*. They mark, as I have indicated, the close of a stage in the novelist's career, in which the former book is, I think, the highest achievement. In it Disraeli had temporarily shelved the "Asian mystery", and had not yet come to grips with the even more absorbing problem presented by the state of England: he had acquired some experience; he had no esoteric visions to embody as in *Alroy*; no political programme to enunciate as in *Coningsby* and *Sybil*; he was not distracted, as in *Venetia*, by the attempt to combine fiction

with biography, and the necessity that his characters should carry with adequate conviction the lions' skins in which he had dressed them—he was committed only to telling a good story. His powers in this respect were at their height; so that *Henrietta Temdle* is perhaps the best "story" he ever wrote. It is rich in entertaining characters, as witty as always, excellent in its style, and moves briskly without interruption. Moreover, perhaps because he was writing under the influence of an attachment that had stirred him deeply, Disraeli here succeeds, as he very rarely does, in touching us with a tale of love. The book has not the intellectual scope, and the intimate knowledge of men and affairs, to be found in its successors, nor is there anything to compare with the fascinating background that his political experience was later to supply; but it has more charm than any of his books, except possibly *Endymion*, and passages that are among his most brilliant. This, for instance, in which he describes the enchanting Lady Bellair:

> The Viscountess Dowager Bellair was the last remaining link between the two centuries. Herself born of a noble family, and distinguished both for her beauty and her wit, she had reigned for a quarter of a century the favourite subject of Sir Joshua; had flirted with Lord Carlisle, and chatted with Dr. Johnson. But the most remarkable quality of her ladyship's destiny was her preservation. Time, that had rolled on nearly a century since her birth, had spared alike her physical and mental powers. She was almost as active in body, and quite as lively in mind, as when seventy years before she skipped in Marylebone Gardens, or puzzled the gentlemen of the Tuesday Night Club at Mrs. Cornely's masquerades. Those wonderful seventy years indeed had passed to Lady Bellair like one of those very masked balls in which she had formerly sparkled; she had lived in a perpetual crowd of strange and brilliant characters. All that had been famous for beauty, rank, fashion, wit, genius, had been gathered round her throne; and at this very hour a fresh and admiring generation, distinguished for these qualities, cheerfully acknowledged her supremacy, and paid to her their homage. The heroes and heroines of her youth, her middle life, even of her old age, had vanished; brilliant orators, profound statesmen, inspired bards, ripe scholars, illustrious warriors; beauties whose dazzling charms had turned the world mad; choice spirits, whose flying words or whose fanciful manners made every saloon smile or wonder, all had disappeared. She had witnessed revolutions in every country in the world; she remembered Brighton a fishing-town, and Manchester a village; she had shared the pomp of nabobs and the profusion of loan-mongers; she had stimulated the early ambition of Charles Fox, and had sympathized with the last aspirations of George Canning; she had been the confidant of the loves alike of Byron and Alfieri;

had worn mourning for General Wolfe, and given a festival to the Duke of Wellington; had laughed with George Selwyn, and smiled at Lord Alvanley; had known the first macaroni and the last dandy; remembered the Gunnings, and introduced the Sheridans! But she herself was unchanged; still restless for novelty, still eager for amusement; still anxiously watching the entrance on the stage of some new stream of characters, and indefatigable in attracting the notice of everyone whose talents might contribute to her entertainment, or whose attention might gratify her vanity. And, really, when one recollected Lady Bellair's long career, and witnessed at the same time her diminutive form and her unrivalled vitality, he might almost be tempted to believe, that if not absolutely immortal, it was at least her strange destiny not so much vulgarly to die, as to grow like the heroine of the fairy tale, each year smaller and smaller,

"Fine by degrees, and beautifully less,"

until her ladyship might at length subside into airy nothingness, and so rather vanish than expire.

It was the fashion to say that her ladyship had no heart; in most instances an unmeaning phrase; in her case certainly an unjust one. Ninety years of experience had assuredly not been thrown away on a mind of remarkable acuteness; but Lady Bellair's feelings were still quick and warm, and could be even profound. Her fancy was so lively, that her attention was soon engaged; her taste so refined, that her affection was not so easily obtained. Hence she acquired a character for caprice, because she repented at leisure those first impressions, which with her were irresistible; for, in truth, Lady Bellair, though she had nearly completed her century and had passed her whole life in the most artificial circles, was the very creature of impulse. Her first homage she always declared was paid to talent, her second to beauty, her third to blood. The favoured individual who might combine these three splendid qualifications, was, with Lady Bellair, a nymph or a demi-god. As for mere wealth, she really despised it, though she liked her favourites to be rich.

Her knowledge of human nature, which was considerable, her acquaintance with human weaknesses, which was unrivalled, were not thrown away upon Lady Bellair. Her ladyship's perception of character was fine and quick, and nothing delighted her so much as making a person a tool. Capable, where her heart was touched, of the finest sympathy and the most generous actions, where her feelings were not engaged she experienced no compunction in turning her companions to account, or, indeed, sometimes in honouring them with her intimacy for that purpose. But if you had the skill to detect her plots, and the courage to make her aware of your consciousness of them, you never displeased her, and often gained her friendship. For Lady Bellair had a fine taste for humour, and when she chose to be candid, an indulgence which was not rare with her, she could dissect her own character and conduct with equal spirit

and impartiality. In her own instance it cannot be denied that she comprised the three great qualifications she so much prized: for she was very witty; had blood in her veins, to use her own expression; and was the prettiest woman in the world, for her years. For the rest, though no person was more highly bred, she could be very impertinent; but if you treated her with servility, she absolutely loathed you.

Seven years elapsed before the publication of Disraeli's next novel, *Coningsby*. In the meantime he had become absorbed in politics, had made his mark in Parliament, and was now the acknowledged leader of the group of young men known as the "Young England" party. It is difficult now to define exactly what this party stood for in fact, though comparatively easy to discover what Disraeli imagined it stood for in fiction. In fact it was a group of young Conservatives who, to begin with, had the usual touching belief of the young in the value of youth. On the one hand they detested the "Venetian constitution" as represented by the Whig oligarchy; and on the other, they mistrusted the Tories as men who had departed from the fundamental principles of their creed. These aversions served them well enough as an Opposition, but it was obvious that there was no future in a purely negative attitude. There had to be a constructive policy; and Disraeli set out in *Coningsby*, *Sybil* and *Tancred*, to supply it—to enumerate the principles from which Toryism had departed, and to expound his vision of a "Tory Democracy". It is not easy to say to what extent his views were shared by his followers, nor is one sure that he wholly believed in them himself; but neither point is of much interest to the modern reader, who will concern himself only with the intrinsic merit of the ideas and the quality of Disraeli's performance.

It has to be confessed that the political platform he erected in these books seems to-day largely a mirage. For what did it amount to? The restoration in full of the Royal prerogatives, for "Man is made to adore and to obey"; an alliance between a benevolent aristocracy and a peasantry happily content with its humble station—in short that ancient and splendid device known as the feudal system. With, of course, a few differences. The Church must be disestablished; the people represented by a "free and intellectual Press"—and then with youth, looking remarkably like Mr. Disraeli, at the prow, the ship of state would sail grandly on to Utopia. It is fantastic: it is laughable. But that is not one's final reaction; because the truth is that the political content of these books is not fairly represented by these astonishing "constructive" suggestions. There is much else, much that is sound, and provocative of thought; and it is provided by Disraeli as the critic and historian of the English

political scene. His dissertations upon English history, upon the relations of the political parties, and the theory of government, his diagnoses of institutions and of the political world of his day, are not only brilliantly expressed, they are shrewd and enlightening, and by no means devoid of significance now. In particular, Disraeli has a message, which comes to us with some force at present, in his insistence, directly and indirectly, on the virtue of imagination in statecraft. As Sidonia, who represents Disraeli's ideal in *Coningsby*, puts it:

> There has been an attempt to reconstruct society on a basis of material motives and calculations. It has failed. . . . How limited is human reason, the profoundest enquirers are most conscious. We are not indebted to the Reason of man for any of the great achievements which are the landmarks of human action and human progress. It was not reason that besieged Troy; it was not reason that sent forth the Saracen from the Desert to conquer the world; that inspired the Crusades; that instituted the Monastic orders; it was not Reason that produced the Jesuits; above all, it was not Reason that created the French Revolution.

And he concludes that "Man is . . . never irresistible but when he appeals to the Imagination". The belief that enlightened government must depend upon more than dogma, economic principles and the logic of materialism, that it must appeal to the spirit and heart of man, is the conviction that inspires all Disraeli's political philosophy—a conviction that remains none the less valid because he was apt to jump from it to extravagant and romantic conclusions.

These passages are brilliant pamphleteering, but after all Disraeli was writing a novel. Not only is the narrative held up by these interminable discussions; but the main characters, Coningsby, the hero, with his friend, Milbank, and Sidonia, never quite recover from their prolonged mishandling as animated opinions. Coningsby is the only one who comes near at times to acquiring vitality; but the political virus in his veins was never entirely neutralized by Disraeli's spasmodic attempts at blood transfusions. It is in the background and in the minor creations that move there, such as Tadpole and Taper and Mr. Rigby, that the novel, as such, scores a triumph. Tadpole and Taper are caricatures, but they have point and reality; and the atmosphere of political chicanery and intrigue, of backstage wire-pulling, and party manoeuvring, is admirably evoked. It is a zestful, witty and immensely entertaining satire, with exactly the right amount of verisimilitude.

One of the best scenes between Tadpole and Taper occurs when they discuss the situation brought about by the advent to office of their leader,

Sir Robert Peel, at the head of a Tory party that is hopelessly in the minority in the House of Commons. A dissolution seems inevitable; and here are the two wily old rogues laying their plans.

"Such a strength in debate was never before found on a Treasury bench," said Mr. Tadpole; "the other side will be dumbfounded."

"And what do you put our numbers at now?" inquired Mr. Taper.

"Would you take fifty-five for our majority?" rejoined Mr. Tadpole.

"It is not so much the tail they have, as the excuse their junction will be for the moderate, sensible men to come over," said Taper. "Our friend, Sir Everard, for example, it would settle him."

"He is a solemn impostor," rejoined Mr. Tadpole; "but he is a Baronet and a county member, and very much looked up to by the Wesleyans. The other men, I know, have refused him a peerage."

"And we might hold out judicious hopes," said Taper.

"No one can do that better than you," said Tadpole. "I am apt to say too much about those things."

"I make it a rule never to open my mouth on such subjects," said Taper. "A nod or a wink will speak volumes. An affectionate pressure of the hand will sometimes do a great deal; and I have promised many a peerage without committing myself by an ingenious habit of deference which cannot be mistaken by the future noble."

"I wonder what they will do with Rigby," said Tapdole.

"He wants a good deal," said Taper.

"I tell you what, Mr. Taper; the time is gone by when a Marquess of Monmouth was Letter A. No. 1."

"Very true, Mr. Tadpole. A wise man would do well now to look to the great middle class, as I said the other day to the electors of Shabbyton."

"I had sooner be supported by the Wesleyans," said Mr. Tadpole, "than by all the Marquesses in the peerage."

"At the same time," said Mr. Taper, "Rigby is a considerable man. If we want a slashing article——"

"Pooh!" said Mr. Tadpole. "He is quite gone by. He takes three months for his slashing articles. Give me a man who can write a leader. Rigby can't write a leader."

"Very few can," said Mr. Taper. "However, I don't think much of the Press. Its power is gone by. They overdid it."

"There is Tom Chudleigh," said Tadpole. "What is he to have?"

"Nothing, I hope," said Taper. "I hate him. A coxcomb! cracking his jokes and laughing at us."

"He has done a good deal for the party, though," said Tadpole. "That, to be sure, is only an additional reason for throwing him over, as he is too far committed to venture to oppose us. But I am afraid from something that dropped to-day, that Sir Robert think he has claims."

"We must stop them," said Taper, growing pale. "Fellows like Chudleigh when they once get in, are always in one's way. I have no objection to young noblemen being put forward, for they are preferred so rapidly, and then their fathers die, that in the long run they do not pratically interfere with us."

"Well, his name was mentioned," said Tadpole. "There is no concealing that."

"I will speak to Earwig," said Taper. "He shall just drop into Sir Robert's ear by chance, that Chudleigh used to quiz him in the smoking-room. Those little bits of information do a great deal of good."

"Well, I leave him to you," said Tadpole. "I am heartily with you in keeping out all fellows like Chudleigh. They are very well for opposition; but in office we don't want wits."

"And now for our cry?" said Mr. Taper.

"It is not a Cabinet for a good cry," said Tadpole; "but then on the other hand, it is a Cabinet that will sow dissension in the opposite ranks, and prevent them having a good cry."

"Ancient institutions and modern improvements, I suppose, Mr. Tadpole?"

"Ameliorations is the better word; ameliorations. Nobody knows exactly what it means."

"We go strong on the Church?" said Mr. Taper.

"And no Repeal of the Malt Tax; you were right, Taper. It can't be listened to for a moment."

"Something might be done with prerogative," said Mr. Taper; "the King's constitutional choice."

"Not too much," replied Mr. Tadpole. "It is a raw time yet for prerogative."

"Ah! Tadpole," said Mr. Taper, getting a little maudlin; "I often think, if the time should ever come, when you and I should be joint Secretaries of the Treasury!"

"We shall see, we shall see. All we have to do is to get into Parliament, work well together, and keep other men down."

"We will do our best," said Taper. "A dissolution will hold inevitable?"

"How are you and I to get into Parliament, if there be not one? We must make it inevitable. I tell you what, Taper, the lists must prove a dissolution inevitable. You understand me? If the present Parliament goes on, where shall we be? We shall have new men cropping up every session.

"True, terribly true," said Mr. Taper. "That we should ever live to see a Tory government again! We have reason to be very thankful."

"Hush!" said Mr. Tadpole. "The time has gone by for Tory governments; what the country requires is a sound Conservative government."

"A sound Conservative government," said Taper musingly. "I understand: Tory men and Whig measures."

Sybil, which came out the year after *Coningsby*, is held by many good judges to be Disraeli's best novel. It suffers far less than *Coningsby* from the "plugging" of political doctrine; it has, in Charles Egremont, a hero who, though much less vocal than Coningsby, is much more alive. He is in fact that rather rare phenomenon in nineteenth-century fiction, a hero who is neither a prig nor an anaemic personification of all the virtues, but a sound, intelligent and likeable human being, whose head and heart are both apparent, and who wins not only our sympathy but our respect. Tadpole and Taper reappear; Lord Marney and Sir Vavasour Firebrace are two comic creations that are a joy; and the scenes in the *salons* of the political hostesses, in country houses and at party cabals, are among the best that Disraeli wrote.

But as indicated by the sub-title of the book, "The Two Nations", Disraeli attempts here to contrast his picture of the aristocracy with one of "the people"; and his evocation of the latter is not so successful. His portrayal of conditions in the sweated industry of his time, of squalor and starvation, of the brutality of employers, the graft of the "tommy shops", and the hideous exploitation of child labour, is beyond question accurate enough in its essentials, for Disraeli took great pains to verify his facts; yet it is not entirely convincing. As always, when his feelings as distinct from his intellect were deeply stirred, he is prone to fall into melodrama. He labours so hard to darken the lurid shadows of his picture that, though the facts justify him, the artistic effect is an appearance of over-emphasis that leaves us shrinking from what seems a too crude attempt to make our flesh creep. And when, as he occasionally does, he endeavours to lighten the picture with a grotesque humour, though he is not altogether unsuccessful, he inevitably provokes a comparison with Dickens that he cannot sustain. It is clear he is not at home in his setting, that he does not fully understand the psychology of the class with which he is dealing, and is working outside his creative range. Two of his principal characters, Sybil and her father, come from the fringe of this class, and while they are certainly alive, neither has the substance of his aristocrats. Nevertheless, this part of the narrative has its dramatic and moving moments, and every page of it is readable; it holds our interest, and one need say no worse of it than that it is the less effective portion of a fine novel.

Tancred appeared two years after *Sybil*, and then, more than twenty years later, came *Lothair*. *Lothair* seems to me a somewhat patchy book, in which the many brilliant parts never quite cohere into an effective whole. Once again the political element is much to the fore, and here,

as in *Endymion*, it is all the better because Disraeli is no longer endeavouring to be constructive. There is an amusing, if somewhat libellous presentation of Cardinal Manning as Cardinal Grandison; and in Mr. Phoebus, Disraeli forecast with startling accuracy the Nazi outlook. The book is full of good talk, of sparkling exchanges across the dinner-table, and of the genuine clash of ideas; and there are several inimitable sketches of individuals. Mr. Ruby, the jeweller, for example, who enchants us with his tender care that the Duchess of Havant's pearls should not have their complexion ruined for want of "air and exercise"; and that very "smooth type", the Portuguese, Mr. Pinto, who "was not an intellectual Croesus, but his pockets were full of sixpences". But the main theme of the novel, the machinations of the Roman Catholic Church to secure the conversion of the hero, is both unbelievable and dull; and Lothair himself, though not wanting in charm, is too obviously subservient to the necessities of the plot, to be much more than a man of straw.

In 1872, at the age of sixty-eight, Disraeli began his last novel, *Endymion*; then, however, politics intervened, he abandoned it temporarily, and the greater part of it was not written until after his final retirement from office eight years later. To me it is the most satisfying of all the novels; the one in which the intellectual, the romantic, and the man of vast experience, combine most harmoniously under the dominion of the novelist. It lacks perhaps the immense verve of its predecessors, but then it has less of their extravagance; it is quieter and mellower. The wit and irony and satire are as polished as ever, but the glitter is softer, shot through with gleams of an amused tolerance reflected from a deeper and more sympathetic understanding of his people generally, and of his hero in particular. A result that owes much to the fact that Disraeli, who always saw himself in his heroes, has here made the identification as close as possible. For the book is largely an autobiography, and in telling the story of the young politician who eventually becomes Prime Minister, it is his own career that he had in mind, and his own youth that he was recalling with a wistful smile. In no other book has the novelist made such good use of his experience; and *Endymion* contains a more authentic and revealing representation of the social and political world of his early days than any of its predecessors. The characters are drawn in more subdued colours, if we except the cruel but highly diverting portrait of Thackeray as Mr. St. Barbe; but if they lose in theatrical effect they gain in humanity, and the power of conviction. The story is something of a fairy tale, though perhaps no more so than Disraeli's

actual career; but it proceeds among people in whom for the most part we have no difficulty in believing: people who are intelligent but no bloodless exponents of doctrines and theories. Almost all of them derive from famous personages of the time, from Napoleon III, Palmerston, Cobden and others, but the resemblance is really superficial; fact and fiction are inextricably mixed, and Disraeli's object is not to interpret but to create. It is the best balanced and most disciplined of his books—the wisest, and, except *Henrietta Temple*, the most charming.

Disraeli has never been ranked among the greatest English novelists, and there can be no dissent from that judgment. Yet although one thus relegates him instinctively to the second place when the question is put, it is not quite so easy to advance reasons. Where does he fail, by comparison with the great, in the novelist's function? A question that perhaps requires some definition of what one holds to be the chief function of a novelist. We may, of course, value a novelist highly for his performance as a social historian, as an expert in psychology, as a reformer, an artist in words or the discoverer of a new technique; but, strictly speaking, such accomplishments must be rated as secondary to his fulfilment of what is an essential obligation. For fiction is primarily a licence to create, and the writer of fiction must be judged, in the final analysis, on his powers as a creator: on his ability to transport us to a world of his imagining, and there to suspend our disbelief, and awaken our emotions. Provided he satisfies these conditions, the resemblance of his world to that which we know is of no importance artistically; though, on the technical side, he has always to reckon with the factor of our experience. Now, in this respect, Disraeli at his best is able to bear comparison with anyone. He takes us into his political world as surely as Scott carries us among his Jacobites, Dickens to his slums, or Thackeray into fast society at the outset of the nineteenth century. But he is not so great a novelist as they, because his world is not so rich in humanity, nor so various in its life. It does not stir the depth and range of emotion that we feel in theirs; and finally, the illusion is never, as in their case, fully sustained throughout the length of a book.

Yet it is a world that offers a unique experience; there is none quite like it in English literature; nor any that is wittier or more stimulating to the intellect. And these are surely sufficient reasons for venturing into it.

VII

STEVENSON IN SEARCH OF A MADONNA

by ROGER LANCELYN GREEN

(The Letters by Robert Louis Stevenson quoted here are nearly all unpublished. Quotation is made by the kind permission of Mr. Austin Strong, and the National Library of Scotland.)

EDINBURGH CASTLE on a chill January day, with a little group of tourists beating valiantly against the bitter wind and the sharp flurries of rain: the guide, his excursion into history being finished, spoke suddenly of "Edinburgh's great man of letters", Robert Louis Stevenson, how, as a boy, he had climbed that cold slippery rock to the castle wall, and in the last year of his life, writing far away in the South Seas, had sent the hero of his novel *St. Ives* down by the same path.

Left alone when the guide and his following had departed in search of further history, my thoughts turned back, like a magnet to the true north, to that strangely familiar figure, the haunting personality, the sound of a voice which I could never have heard, the quick flash of the eyes which I could never have seen—the reflection of all these in books that did not grow old, and a sudden nearness of the man himself in this his own "precipitous city". I could hear "the beaten bells winnow the soft sea wind" across that city as he had heard it even from the ends of the earth, whence he could "still behold her towers and chimneys, and the long trail of her smoke unfurled against the dawn and sunset". Dimly through the mist loomed the grey billows of the Pentlands—and faith, rather than the naked eye, told me that the grey roof of Swanston Cottage was visible above one folding bank.

Walking down the rain-lashed sweep of the Royal Mile, I came to St. Giles's, entered, and found myself before a great bronze plaque wherein dimly, as through the mist outside, Tusitala "The Writer of Tales" sat, pen in hand, writing *The Master of Ballantrae* in "the pleasant land of counterpane". Turning away, with the verses of "Requiem" still ringing in my head, I paused, in the course of time, under a lamp-post in Heriot Row. A newly-inscribed stone set in the wall testified to "The Home of Robert Louis Stevenson 1857 to 1880"—but without

that guide I could almost believe that I saw a pale-faced little boy looking for the lamp-lighter to break the long monotony of the sick-room.

Still farther down the hill, across the bridge at Canonmills, and I came to Number eight Howard Place which a large board declared to be the birthplace of Robert Louis Stevenson and the home of a museum collected to his memory. In the pleasant long room upstairs I wandered among cases of manuscripts and trophies and between multitudes of framed photographs, until I paused before bookcases filled to overflowing . . . Books, books, and more books—all of them telling wholly or in part of "Edinburgh's great man of letters". Surely few writers since Shakespeare could boast such a monument of biography and criticism: surely not one word more remained to be written about Robert Louis Stevenson!

But then I thought of the startling differences of opinion, varying interpretations of facts dimly seen, theories built up on prejudices and half-truths—all to be found amongst this monument of print and paper. And my thoughts turned to the old people who had spoken to me of Louis until even Vailima had seemed like a remembered home to me—old people, some already dead, whose living memories had annihilated the quarter of a century which severed me from any earthly meeting with the man whom I had grown to know so well. With their aid and with the aid of the long hours just spent in the kindly depths of the National Library of Scotland among letters wholly or in part unpublished, it seemed to me that there was still a word to be said about Stevenson, a shaft of light which I mught let in upon those early years of strife and uncertainty when the lonely child of Heriot Row was turning painfully and with much bewilderment into the grown man, the mature writer who was ready in 1879 to cross the Atlantic in search of a wife.

Very much has been said of Stevenson's childhood, both by himself and others. The long days in the tall, comfortable house in Heriot Row are conjured up very clearly for us: we see the child with his rather white face and large dark eyes busy among the many "ploys" of childhood; lying on the nursery floor drawing and scribbling over big sheets of paper; cutting out toy-theatres with their "tuppence coloured" characters and mounting them, colouring the "penny-plain" sheets in the rich glory of primary colours; kneeling at the window of an evening to look out on the grey world of stone and shadowy trees for the lamp-lighter at work on his nightly pilgrimage. And the long nights, too,

are as familiar: the sick child unable to sleep, beguiling the tedious hours with the aid of the never-failing stories which "Cummy" or his mother or father were always at hand to supply; and weaving his own stories, too, as time went on—stories that came to banish the over-wearied tricks of the imagination which so easily people the darkness with demons voicing their malignity in the creak of furniture and the howling of the wind.

There were the Sundays also—not too untasteful, even in the stern, uncompromising gloom so picturesquely described in *St. Ives*. Even the sermon cannot have been too cruel a penance for the child who returned home to build a pulpit in the nursery and edify his nurse and parents with pious words. The Shorter Catechism came and went (we too have known its Anglican cousin, even in this late, lax age), leaving at least the spirit of its incomparable style.

And the "child alone" did not pass all his days in solitude. Colinton Manse was within easy reach, and there a multitude of cousins might be collected. Bandits and smugglers took the place of minister or missionary, and a dark lantern went better under a cloak than a Bible.

It would be pleasant to linger over these early days, to repeople the old Manse and its gardens with the gay crowd of young Stevensons and Balfours; to follow Louis and his parents on more than one continental tour; to explore Swanston, their new country cottage, in his company; to climb the Castle Rock and seek for the history of saints and sinners down the old stone streets and wynds of "Auld Reekie", or by the "standing stones on the vacant, wine-red moor". It would be pleasant also to accompany Louis through his much-interrupted life as a schoolboy—first at Spring Grove, and later at the Academy; to see him writing lurid tales for *The Schoolboys' Magazine* in 1863—stories with oddly familiar titles, "The Wreckers", "The Ghost Story", "Adventures in the South Seas"; and *The Sunbeam Magazine* ("The Banker's Ward: A Modern Tale") in 1866: the manuscript magazines of schooldays so often to be found in progress wherever two or three young people are gathered together.

But it is with the ending of the schooldays that the present study must begin: Louis is no longer among the "small fry" at the Academy, he has passed beyond the stage of beating his "clacken" on the iron railings for the sheer joy of noise—indeed he is confidently declaring that "at sixteen one is a man" at the moment when his school-friend, H. Bellyse Baildon describes the youth with whom we are about to deal:

> Stevenson called himself "ugly" in his student days, but I think that is a term that never at any time fitted him . . . In body Stevenson was assuredly badly set-up, his limbs were long and lean and spidery, and his chest flat, so as almost to suggest some malnutrition, such sharp angles and corners did his joints make under his clothes. But in his face this was belied. His brow was oval and full, over soft brown eyes, that seemed already to have drunk the sunlight under southern vines. The whole face had a tendency to an oval Madonna-like type. But about the mouth, and in the mirthful, mocking light of the eyes, there lingered ever a mirthful Autolycus roguery, that rather suggested the shy god Hermes masquerading as a mortal. Yet the eyes were always genial, however gaily the lights danced in them; but about the mouth there was something tricksy and mocking. . . .

The period of Stevenson's life from the ages of eighteen to twenty-eight has been dealt with in various ways by various writers—many turning to it with preconceived ideas, most with a lack of reliable material —and also, one is forced to add, with a varying lack of insight and imagination. Graham Balfour, the "official" biographer, whose book as a whole has never been surpassed, has told, or has allowed Louis himself to tell, a full and very convincing tale. He had all the evidence before him, too—more than he was able to publish so soon after his cousin's death, and while so many of those most closely associated with him were still living—were still young or scarcely approaching middle-age. We are told fully of the absurd mad pranks played by Louis and his irresponsible cousin Bob; fully of the family difficulties, the break first with engineering and then with law; we are told of the agonizing time when Louis declared himself to be an atheist—and seemed by so doing to have wrecked his parents' lives; we are told of the long and rigorous self-training in authorship, and of how Louis found help and encouragement from Mrs. Sitwell and Sidney Colvin. But when the book appeared, Henley let fly in a stinging, insinuating article the crusty rancour of his ten-year-old rift with Stevenson. The attack was on the biography also—and on the biographer, though Henley had prepared his thunderbolt with Colvin rather than Balfour in view, over whose choice there had been sad, secret and unseemly strife, the possible candidates being Henry James (who ruled himself out immediately), Colvin, Gosse, Lloyd Osbourne, and Graham Balfour: Henley was not even considered. The attack was unfortunate, and should have been forgotten —in kindness to the tired and embittered Titan who launched it, rather than the "seraph in chocolate" whom Henley declared to be the only figure of Stevenson discernible in the book. But as far as Stevenson was

concerned, "in caverns under Lay fettered the thunder" for more than twenty years, until it broke out with redoubled violence in the early 'Twenties—the age of the iconoclasts. Then the tireless researchers of America discovered a bundle of early poems and early fragments of prose, and a certain Mr. Hellman set out to expose "the Stevenson myth"—to be ably followed in England by Mr. J. A. Steuart in a lengthy biography which is not lacking in anything but proportion. One cannot doubt Mr. Hellman's honesty of intention—but unfortunately some of his informants were not so reliable—and his own professed intention of iconoclasm seems open to censure.

Unfortunately the "revelations" made by Hellman and Steuart gained unexpected weight by the failure of either Colvin or Balfour to deny, confirm or explain them: the general opinion being, apparently, that silence betokened a tacit admission of truth indeed revealed.

But the truth of this silence is that Balfour investigated the evidence, found it to be, in part at least, unreliable, and held a council with those who remained of Stevenson's closest friends. They decided to ignore the whole matter, hoping that by treating it as unworthy of their notice it would stand condemned without the necessity of raking up old feuds which would hurt people still living. They are all dead now, and alas! no word was left—certainly none that has yet seen the light, for the final word is, we hope, to be spoken shortly by Mr. Austin Strong in a biography that is likely to supersede all others.

And what is all this pother and ill-feeling about? To a great extent it turns, or it is made to turn, on Stevenson's relations with women. A dark picture is drawn by Hellman and Steuart, with lists of illicit love-affairs in the Edinburgh days, dark doings in dubious haunts below the Carlton Hill and passionate passages in the woods by Swanston—followed by a wrecked life tyrannized over by a cold and calculating Fanny Stevenson, who banned or burnt her husband's best books—his realistic novels—and kept him firmly to the straight and profitable path.

"I was only happy once," wrote Louis in a moment of gloom, "and that was at Hyères!" This, Mr. Steuart accepts as a definite statement of fact, and works on to the bitter end.

My present purpose is not to write a defence of Stevenson's morals—nor to criticize the tendency towards what one may call "Hellmanism" in most books written about him during the last thirty years. But a few points may be settled on the way without turning aside specially to investigate or confute them. My aim is to deal rationally, and with

the aid of new material, with the troubled years that centre about Stevenson's meeting with Mrs. Sitwell in 1873: to her many of the best of his letters were written—but they have not been published in their entirety, and many quotations appear here for the first time in print.

Henley professed to find Graham Balfour's picture of Stevenson "that of an angel clean from heaven"—which is possibly true on the one moral count. That Stevenson was such an angel, nobody now would think of maintaining—but he was by no means as deeply fallen as others would lead us to believe. His closest friends knew that on occasions he would disappear for a few days from the restraint of conventional society—in London as well as in Edinburgh—but there is no need to suspect the worst on account of that: Will H. Low, the artist, noted that when Stevenson was among the artists in Paris he refused, despite their ridicule, to follow their example and "take a mistress".

That there was one unhappy love-affair before 1873 seems reasonably probable—even that a scandal of some kind was but narrowly averted: though the scandal need not necessarily have had any connection with the love-affair. Nor was it the famous affair of "Claire"—the mythical street-walker who is mentioned in many books.

The story of the real "Claire" is amusing: she was no more than the heroine of one of Stevenson's many early attempts at fiction which had not survived. I have been told, on authority which I see no reason to doubt, that Louis consulted Mrs. Sitwell on the best way of treating his heroine, complaining that he did not know how a girl would react to certain situations; and that Mrs. Sitwell told him to write to her as if to the character Claire, and she would do her best to reply in keeping with the part. I was told this over twelve years ago—before Stevenson's letters to Mrs. Sitwell were made available in the National Library of Scotland—and by one who was not likely to have read them: and, lacking all other proof, her word was doubted. In 1947 I went through all the letters: I did not discover the one actually addressed to "Claire", but I found two passages which seem to clinch the matter.

On September 24th, 1873, he is writing from Edinburgh: "Of course I have not been going on with Claire: I have been out of heart for that; and besides it is difficult to act before the reality. Footlights will not do with the sun; the stage moon and the real, lucid moon of one's dark life, look strangely on each other". The "real, lucid moon" will be explained later.

And a little while afterwards, in a letter with the first page missing: "I have done my quantum of history, and have just stopped to make my

first addition to Claire. I have added some few sentences out of this letter, making the meaning clearer of course and trying to better the loose expression one uses in *really* writing letters to dear friends—those sentences about the organ recalling the 'perfume' of my past life here, and how the thought of your letter came in upon me so strongly . . ."

The name "Claire", according to Mr. Hellman, is written at the side of one of the manuscript poems which he edits—but surely that need mean no more than that the poem was to be used in the novel!

To Mr. Hellman and his partners we owe a lasting debt of gratitude for rescuing and editing the *New Poems*. Stevenson certainly meant these for ultimate publication, though during the quarrel with Henley he tried to regain some manuscripts which were in his possession—fearing, apparently, that Henley would publish or use them forthwith in an attempt to blacken the character of the still struggling writer, whose very existence (and that of his adopted family) depended on retaining the maximum of acceptance from a rather straight-laced public.

The harm lies in using the *New Poems* as serious biographical material. Exuberantly Louis writes of an afternoon's skating on Duddingstone Loch:

> I swear had we been drowned that day
> We had been drowned in love!

But the girl was only Eve Blantyre Simpson, sister of his friend Walter Simpson who lived across the gardens from Heriot Row. His parents—though perhaps not hers—hoped that they would make a match of it: but such arrangements seldom come to anything—if parents make them!

The truth of it all lies in Louis's character. He was not merely a young man with a nervous and excitable temperament, with a passionate, over-active nature bitterly at odds with a frail body and a delicate health: he was also a poet (wrote he in prose or verse) suffering the continuous tortures of a furious imagination. These are not light words, but the outcome of a careful study of nearly all those works which fill the two large bookcases at 8 Howard Place: also of much thought and a little personal experience. Louis leapt from mood to mood with almost lightning rapidity—but into each mood he flung himself, or was flung by himself, to the very depths: in heart and soul and mind, until the next turn of the tides.

Adolescent love poetry is, in itself, no phenomenon: it is indulged

in by a multitude whose works are never seen—and it is built up of many various parts, the least certain being actual experience. Only when the writer has, like Stevenson, the fortune or misfortune to be a real poet, do the poems run the risk of being taken seriously: and yet they should really be taken far less seriously than in any other case. The poet is in and out of love as the months go by; he lives on a tight rope stretched 'twixt heaven and hell—and the continuous motion of these mobile mansions oft-times sends him shooting, without warning, into one or the other.

> Say, birds and Sun and Spring, is Love
> A mere affair of weather?

sang Stevenson in one of the lighter moments of his quest, and (though it must not be spoken *virginibus puerisque*) there is much truth in the question—for love such as he knew it before the coming of Fanny Osborne to Grez. Did he skate on Duddingstone Loch on a blithe day of frosty sunshine when the spirit of spring was stirring behind winter's veil, skate arm in arm in thrilling proximity to Eve Simpson? The moment would come when distance lent the right haze of romance to that afternoon, and the poet was in love with his fair remembered companion—certainly until he had finished his poem!

There were the wild, uneasy days when "Velvet Coat" haunted the low places of the city, with his boon companion Charles Baxter (the original of Michael Finsbury in *The Wrong Box*): ". . . It is strange when you think what a couple of heartless drunken young dogs we were . . ." as he wrote to him in 1888: when the right moment of remorse came upon him, there was a new song rising to use and enshrine it:

> I have left all upon the shameful field,
> Honour and Hope, my God, and all but life . . .

But the next day he might come up out of the Pit, and carol gaily:

> My heart, when first the blackbird sings,
> My heart drinks in the song . . .

Out of the strange, uncertain haze which hides so much of that period of his life from us, there comes only one echo of a real remorse, unclouded by the dark glass of poetry—in a letter to Mrs. Sitwell of (apparently) 6 Oct. 1873: ". . . I too left letters unanswered until they ceased to come, from a person to whom the postage even must have been a matter of parsimony; left them unanswered on purpose that they

might cease. O God! a thing comes back that hurts the heart very much. For the first letter, she had bought a piece of paper with a suit of [*fleures arabesque?*] at the top of it. I wish you would write cruelly about this . . . I could not help writing this to you because it is in my mind, on my heart, and I hope you won't hate me for it. Only one thing gives me any little pleasure, I never showed the letters to anyone, and some months ago they became insupportable to me and I burnt them. . . ."

Poor Louis, reading the heartaches of another in his own! But this passage proves nothing, except that some girl was once in love with him—and he discouraged her advances.

But it is a distasteful business digging up another man's long-dead youthful love-affairs; and Graham Balfour was fortunate to be able to pass them over—as, indeed, he was quite justified in doing, for they did not amount to much, and had very little effect on the life and works of Robert Louis Stevenson. It is only Messrs. Hellman and Steuart who have forced us also to pry—that we might answer them plainly and simply.

Stevenson's main troubles during the debatable period round the early 'Seventies were in the mental rather than in the physical field. Passion there was, the passion of growth and of the urgent springtide of life: and in his case it may have been irritated and accentuated by his health—by the restless violence of the senses which seems to accompany an affection of the lungs, attacking Stevenson as it attacks the brilliant young doctor in Mr. Bridie's play *The Sleeping Clergyman*—which, written as it is by a very eminent doctor, may help us to gain a clearer understanding of Stevenson's case. But the greatest struggles were in the mind—the over-active mind with its extreme tendency to dramatize each passing incident, the burning imagination clamouring for expression and experience, however puerile and bizarre.

And above all, Stevenson was lonely—lonely as Hell, as he might himself have phrased it, with his behind-hand delight in slick slang which made him once describe Julius Caesar (in conversation) as "the howlingest cheese that ever was"! This loneliness he describes in the fragment of autobiography written in 1880 which Balfour quotes; or rather, he describes the difference made to him by the return of "Bob" (R. A. M. Stevenson, his cousin) about 1870:

> The mere return of Bob changed at once and for ever the course of my life; I can give you an idea of my relief only by saying that I was at last able to breathe. The miserable isolation in which I had languished was no more in season, and I began to be happy. To have

> no one to whom you can speak your thoughts is but a slight trial; for a month or two at a time, I can support it almost without regret; but to be young, to be daily making fresh discoveries and fabricating new theories of life, to be full of flimsy, whimsical, overpowering humours, that seem to leave you no alternative but to confide them or to die, and not only not to have, but never to have had a confidant, is an astounding misery.

The friendship with Bob resulted in many a wild escapade which made "the Stevenson cousins" notorious in Edinburgh for their amazingly laboured and humourless practical jokes. Louis has described one or two of these—admitting that the amusement rested entirely with the two perpetrators.

Part of the hectic struggle for independence and self-expression was exhibited by Louis's astonishing choice of clothes—the old velvet jacket, the dark-blue shirt (it was never black), the strange tie, and above all the long, fair hair darkening rapidly: these represented his contempt for the conventions, as also his delight in the *outré*—without which delight we should not have had two of his masterpieces, *The New Arabian Nights* and *The Wrong Box*: and also in the early days they betokened his strictly rationed pocket-money of five shillings a week.

But Bob did not bring peace into Louis's life: rather, he helped to fan the flames of unrest and finally of open strife with his parents.

The first crisis came on 8 April, 1871, when Louis told his father that he had no liking for the family profession of engineering, and wished to follow the career of letters. This was a cruel blow to Thomas Stevenson —who represented the third generation of the "Lighthouse Stevensons", and whose heart and soul were in the work; and it must have called for some courage on Louis's part to make the declaration. However, his father met it with resignation and with the deep concern for his son's happiness which always characterized him, even in his most short-sighted moments. Louis was not to be an engineer, but lest he should find himself one day in the destitute ranks of "failed authors", he was to read law at Edinburgh University, and in due course be called to the Scottish Bar. Sir Walter Scott had followed the same course, had trod the flags of Parliament House before him—and Louis was, for the time, content.

But the effect of Bob, though beneficial in so many ways, accentuated Louis's craze for novelty—for startling and unorthodox novelty if possible. Bob came like the whirling, blistering breath of the sirocco into the rather stereotyped and narrow life of the Edinburgh of eighty

years ago, and the current of it went to Louis's head like the fumes of a dry and well-stored southern wine. When an obsession came upon him, it dominated him wholly for the time, filling him and shaking him to his frail foundations—often to depart as suddenly and completely, leaving him the wretched prey of exhaustion and consequent depression.

Louis, who not long before had changed the spelling of his name (but never the pronunciation) from "Lewis", because a radical of that name had arisen in the city, now proclaimed himself "a red-hot Socialist". This the rigidly conservative Stevensons found hard enough to stomach; but when Louis declared next that he was an atheist, denouncing the Christian religion with more courage than good taste, their patience and their understanding broke beneath the strain—and they lacked the sense of proportion necessary to see this phase in its proper light.

But a little before the storm broke Louis had found a truer and more beneficial friend than ever Bob could be: a settling, steadying influence to balance and counteract the wild, almost alcoholic "Bobism" (to use Lloyd Osbourne's phrase) which went so near to wrecking his frail barque.

In July, 1873, he went to stay at "Cockfield Rectory, the pleasant Suffolk home of his cousin Mrs. Churchill Babington and her husband. Another guest was Mrs. Sitwell . . . an intimate friend and connection by marriage of the hostess".

Mrs. Sitwell, some ten years Louis's senior, was unhappily married, and seems to have been living apart from her clergyman husband—from whom she never obtained a legal separation, for it was not until after his death that she was able to marry Sidney Colvin in 1903—though as early as 1873 it seems that they were in love.

Stevenson, however, appears to have fallen in love with Mrs. Sitwell at first sight during his brief stay at Cockfield—though from the beginning there was never anything but the closest friendship on her side. And in the way of friendship, Louis had at length found the ideal being.

This beautiful woman, so genuinely interested in him, and so dispassionately too, was worth all the girls in Edinburgh (from which ever side of Princes Street) to him just then. She was sufficiently older (and it is significant to remember that Fanny Osbourne was also ten years his senior) for Louis to be able to pour out his innermost heart before her—and to know that her interest and concern were real and vital. Her very presence healed the latest phantasm of "lost love";

her own difficulties made her more broad-minded and sympathetic than his parents could ever have been; and best of all, she gave him confidence in himself—confidence in his art, which Colvin, who arrived on the scene a few days later, backed to the full extent of his already considerable critical reputation and ability. Few young authors are blessed with such friends as Colvin and Mrs. Sitwell proved themselves to be—and only they seem to have understood Louis from the first, and seen just how much was the real man and how much the unconscious histrionicism of youth and imagination. That Colvin showed no shadow of jealousy speaks fully for this understanding: he must have known perfectly well what Louis felt towards Mrs. Sitwell—and yet he was ever Louis's staunchest friend. It says much, too, for Mrs. Sitwell herself that Colvin's trust was so implicit.

Louis, flying at once into an extreme, must have confessed his adoration during those golden summer days at Cockfield and (to use the modern jargon) have been told at once and uncompromisingly where he "got off". But for a long time he could not keep his passion out of his letters (though Colvin, very understandably, erased most of it when he came to edit them in 1899, and again in 1923)—and certainly not out of his poems, many of which he even sent to her, keeping copies himself which went later to swell the volume of *New Poems* edited by Hellman and Trent in 1921.

But it was a Madonna rather than a mistress that he needed—and after a little while he began to address Mrs. Sitwell as "Madonna", turning to her for help and encouragement during the difficult years still before him.

Looking back now on those years it is heard to realize that Louis could ever have taken things as much to heart as he did, just as it is hard to place in just perspective Thomas Stevenson's reactions to his son's phase of atheism. The letters are sometimes rendered almost pathetic by the exaggerated passions that sweep through them: they are uncomfortable reading at times, and again one can not only pardon but praise most of Colvin's omissions. But they shed a light, nevertheless, on the growth of Robert Louis Stevenson's mind—and also upon the hard battle of youth which is so long and bitter a struggle for some of the sons of men.

From Cockfield Louis went back to Edinburgh, and the great series of letters began immediately. The greater part are published, the remainder, and the omitted fragments are not likely to remain unpublished for many years longer. Here, I can only use a few quotations—

mainly from those as yet unpublished—which will help in short space to give a clearer, fairer picture of Louis, and of his Madonna who was so much more of a guardian angel to him than she is generally given credit for.

First, there is the great breaking forth into a new world of light and freedom—the glory and the joy of unfettered confidences:

> I want to say so many things to you, (wrote Louis on 8 Sept. 1873), that I find it impossible to begin. I want to tell you how any little detail of your life makes absence a mere dream; but on that head, dear, you know already all that I feel. And I want to tell you of what I hope to do and of what I fear to fail in the accomplishment. And again, I want to tell you all manner of small things out of my own life, all sorts of infinitesimal joys and sorrows and disappointments and happy surprises that I desire to share with my dearest of all friends . . . You would require to know, what only I can ever know, many grim and many maudlin passages out of my past life to feel how great a change has been made for me by this past summer. I wish to God I could make you feel it. It is worth having lived for, to have thrown so much glory and gladness into another's thin existence, as you have thrown into mine. Mind what I say, and let no future doubt nor regret obliterate it—it is worth having lived for, by God. Let me be ever so poor and threadbare a soul, I am going to try for the best, and I hope more in the strong inspiration of your sympathy than ever Christian hoped out of his deity. I hope you do not think that I am phrasing; if I am phrasing it is because (as Dr. Watts says), "it is my nature to". I don't write to you, I just think, and conversationally blurt out my thoughts . . . Whenever I weary you by writing, please tell me; remember, it is not so cruel to say so—not by an infinity of difference—as to let a poor wretch go on warming his hands at the cold bars, telling his beads before an empty mercy-seat, laying himself bare in a way that is only not ridiculous because it is done with the grand belief in another's sympathy. So mind, tell me, I shall know to believe what you say, and no more . . . I want our friendship, my own dearest friend, to be the faithfullest and most candid that ever has been . . .

And very soon Louis had plenty of troubles to bring before the mercy-seat where his Madonna was waiting to dispense comfort and good counsel. For the storm that had been banking up in the matter of the Christian religion broke sharply when Thomas Stevenson received a posthumous letter from a cousin denouncing the apostacy of both Bob and Louis: "Bob, he said, was a 'blight' and a 'mildew'," wrote Louis on 9 Sept., 1873; "it was a matter of wonder to him 'how God should have made such a man'; I was the one depraved and hideous

one who could endure Bob's presence . . ." Bob had called that evening and had received the full blast of his uncle's pious wrath: "I was sitting up here working away at John Knox, when the door opened and Bob came in with his hands over his face and sank down on a chair and began to sob . . . There is now, at least, one person in the world who knows what I have had to face, and what a tempest of emotions my father can raise when he is really excited . . ." And next morning Louis adds details of the great schism: "The war began with my father accusing Bob of having ruined his house and his son. Bob answered that he didn't know where I had found out that the Christian religion was not true, but that he hadn't told me. And I think from that point the conversation went off into emotion and never touched shore again. There was not much said about me—my views according to my father are a childish imitation of Bob's, to cease the moment the *mildew* is removed . . . O dear, dear, I just hold on to your hand very tight and shut my eyes. I wonder why God made *me*, to be this curse to my father and mother . . ." A little later, Bob ". . . has had a private letter from my father, apologizing for anything he may have said, but adhering to the substance of the interview. There was more in this letter (which Bob, perhaps by rather a breach of confidence, allowed me at my earnest desire to see) of his wailings over a ruined life and hopes overthrown which are intolerable to think about. Moreover I learn that my mother had hysterics privately last night over it all. If I had not a very light heart and a great faculty of interest in what is under hand, I really think I should go mad under this wretched state of matters . . . Now, don't get bothered about this. It has been as bad before anytime this year, and then I had no one to talk the bitterness to. I have just had this cry on your shoulder (so to speak) and I feel better again . . ." Poor Louis, no wonder that in his overwrought condition he then goes on: "And now my darling, I may say just a word about *you* before I end, may I not. I have dreamed about you the last nights often, only I never see you properly. It is worth while to dream of you, though, even unhappily, because you come before me when I waken sometimes very vividly. . . ."

Mrs. Sitwell replied to letter after letter with something more important than mere sympathy. Again and again Louis flings himself into the depths of morbidity and despair: if a letter does not come when he expects it, he writes contrite pages, fearful that he has angered her or wearied her; and constantly he keeps up his own courage by his protestations: "You must feel that I shall still feel as I have felt and will work

as well *for* you and *towards* you, without any recognition, as I could work with all recognition. Remember always that you are my Faith." For it was by his work that he was to show his devotion: he was to write and yet again to write—while Mrs. Sitwell was to encourage, and Colvin was to advise, and to assist in placing the work when completed.

It was an uphill struggle at first, for his parents did not improve matters by the constant scenes over the religious difficulties. (Later Mrs. Sitwell and Thomas Stevenson met, and she seems to have made clear to him much that was before hidden from his oddly limited imagination.) But often Louis despaired even of his chances in literature. "If I could only think myself fit for anything," he wrote later in the same September, "but the stimulus of your approval and Colvin's has died a good deal off, and I find myself face to face with the weak, inefficacious personality that I knew before. I am unfit, I fear, for much; but don't be afraid—I have promised, and I *will*—I shall do something yet, if I have to tear myself in three to do it. And yet I don't know how it is to be managed. . . ."

Yet he was managing all the time—writing, or learning to write, still following the stringent stylistic self-discipline which was so soon to make the initials "R. L. S." in *The Cornhill* "a wonder, a world's delight" to the lovers of good literature. And only less than a month after the last quoted access of despair, Colvin was able to tell him that "Roads" had been accepted by P. G. Hammerton, editor of *The Portfolio*—his first essay to appear in print.

The clouds were lifting in other ways, too: Louis had long chafed over the lack of freedom which he suffered under at home—the wise restraint unwisely applied by his father. Now, in November, 1873, he came to London to explore the possibilities of reading for the English Bar: but Colvin and Mrs. Sitwell persuaded him to see a doctor—Sir Andrew Clark—and Louis was ordered to winter in the South of France if he would save his life.

"Clark is a trump," wrote Louis from London on Nov. 4th. "He said I must go abroad and that I was better alone." One feels that Colvin had had a few private words with Clark—for Mrs. Stevenson was already arranging to accompany Louis!

South went Louis the next day, writing to his Madonna from Dover, Paris and Avignon, and from Mentone as soon as he arrived there on the twelfth. Once settled for the winter on the Riviera, the fits of depression became fewer, though occasionally the letters reveal turns

in the passionate exaggeration which was always so typical of Stevenson. He was the first person, when looking back, to see each mood and miasma exactly for what it was—to smile at it indulgently, without forgetting the soul-searing importance it had held in its moment of sway: but when such a moment came it filled him utterly, leaving for the time being no cranny to admit his usual sense of proportion.

Colvin was coming soon to join him at Mentone, and in the meantime he made friends with a shipbuilder called Dowson, and spent much time amusing his child: "I have made myself indespensible to the Dowsons' little boy (aet. 6) a popularity that brings with it its own fatigues as you may fancy; and I have been fooling about with him all afternoon, playing dominoes, and learning geography with him, and carrying him on my back a little. *Very* little, because though he is not half the weight of Bertie [Mrs. Sitwell's little boy], I am not a quarter as strong.

"I have been wondering to myself as to the change that has come over me since I knew you," he goes on, the mood of introspection probably resulting from the recent fatigue. "Great as it is, it is not a change, rather a sudden development; not even that—it is more as if you had come to me with a sudden great light and, for the first time, I had seen what I am and what I always had been really. If I never saw you again, and lived all my days in Arabia, I should be reminded of you continually; you have gone all over the house of my mind and left everywhere sweet traces of your presence . . ."

He still is looking forward to Colvin's visit: "I am impatient for his arrival. I do so want to know him better, as you may fancy. I cannot tell you how much I want to know him thoroughly, and I look forward most eagerly to our time together . . ."

Other friends were two Russian or Eastern Polish ladies with the child of one of them, and Louis the impressionable was much taken by the whole trio, at one time even making wild plans to visit them in Poland, and at another writing them rather sentimental and ornate verses.

Then Colvin came, late in December, and their friendship grew firmer and more assured: a very deep and a fine friendship, for Louis seems to have learnt at this time that when Mrs. Sitwell was free, it was to Colvin and not to Louis that she would give her hand. The letters of those months and for a little while afterwards rather overdo the absence of jealousy towards Colvin: but the more ordinary passion for Mrs. Sitwell was already passing (with lapses) into the friendship which

at first was almost worship—and the friendship with Colvin grew deeper and more secure all the time.

Another gift that Colvin brought was a new friend for Louis: Andrew Lang, who was also at that time "ordered south" under the threat of lung trouble. The friendship was not immediate, each being put off by externals, but it grew very soon when Louis was at home again—particularly when his visits to London increased, and they found themselves among Henley's famous "young men"—of the first vintage, gathered during his brief editorship of *London*.

The essays, meanwhile, were absorbing more and more of Louis's energy—though still the lack of self-assurance remained. He is writing, for example, from Paris in April 1874 on his way home: "I have got 'Roads' sent out at last; it is worth about two hundred of 'Ordered South', or of this 'Victor Hugo' game that I am playing at present. I cannot write like that now; I am the only judge, I know what there was to say, and I find it said there so well that I am astonished and cannot believe that it was I who did it. And anyway, it was not I: that was conceived and written when my life was in flower, I look back upon it as an old man looks back to his youth, with admiration and love, but no rivalry. How full it is of Cockfield! I have been thinking of nothing else but Cockfield since I read it . . . O, if life were but simple, and one could faithfully follow impulse! but one cannot . . ."

So he returns to Edinburgh, very much the better for his five months of freedom and sunshine, to find life with his parents much easier than before—and to find himself far less inclined to the violent extremes of opinion which had wrecked the happiness of 17 Heriot Row so completely the previous year.

"Many of his troubles had vanished," wrote Graham Balfour. "He had not, of course, solved the riddle of the universe, nor adjusted all contending duties, nor mastered all his impulses and appetites. He had not learned to handle his pen with entire precision, or to say exactly the thing he wished in the manner perfectly befitting it; nor was his way of life open before him."

But none the less things *were* easier for him—though still he had much need of his Madonna to turn to whenever his old depression came upon him again—or whenever the Edinburgh life proved too much for his nerves: "I don't like Edinburgh", he confessed at this time, "and there are people with whom I can be so much happier than I can be with my parents".

But at times he was happy enough: "I am hard at work", he writes,

apparently in late May. "Last Friday a sudden spasm seized me and I sat down to 'Fontainebleau' and yesterday I had finished the [whole?]; to-day I have copied out the first three pages, print pages I mean. So that's a great improvement. I am just set on work, and yet I don't give up exercise, but keep at it like a man. As long as this fit lasts, life is easy enough. I shall have the whole paper ready for press by the end of the week . . . I wrote a review of Lord Taine for *Vanity Fair*—a few pages of scurrility that I wrote laughing in an hour or two—and I got—guess!—I got five pounds for it and the price of the book! That was jolly, wasn't it? Long live *Vanity Fair*!" And it seems almost with an effort that he adds: "It is quite true that there is no meaning in life, and no aim or end, no star or sign-post in the whole sordid maze. But I have had good times in the course of the pilgrimage from nothing to nowhere . . ."

In June he escaped south once more, and was staying at Hampstead with Colvin. But at first he was dogged by ill-health and writes in the old despondent vein: "Try to believe in me and I shall believe in myself. I can be led a far way by a little flattery. There is a home truth for you which you must not tell to anyone else . . ." But next day he has to admit: ". . . I did not know I was ill last night myself; but I was, and when I hid my eyes it was that I might not see your face grow great before me, as things do when one is feverish . . ." The attack wore off speedily, and a few days later he was writing: ". . . I am better a great deal; I slept well and am not blue about the eyes; I am informed I am not robustious yet however, and feel it my true vocation to lie on the sofa and be O so calm. Please don't suppose me unhappy—I am rather depressed because I can't finish my little girls, but that is all; I am reading Ruskin's *Stones of Venice* with great pleasure. He can *write* a few, can't he . . .?" The "little girls" are, of course, to be found in his essay "On the Movements of Small Children."

With that visit to London a wider life began to open for Stevenson. Before he ever reached Colvin's house he had been accepted as a member of the Savile Club—proposed by Colvin, Andrew Lang and Fleeming Jenkin being foremost among his seconders; and there he speedily made new friends, taking his place easily and naturally among the already accepted writers of the day. Life was rapidly growing fuller for him, leaving less and less time for long introspection and the morbid magnification of trifles. The letters of the period seem each to come from a different place, too, as he travels about the country visiting new friends and meeting new people. To Colvin he went most constantly—in

London, and once at least in Cambridge; he stayed a few days with Lang at Oxford in October 1874—and apparently drank a little too deeply of the Merton cellars, though Lang, with his usual reticence would not tell the tale. A little later Henley becomes his closest friend, and they both become contributors to the *London*—at first edited by Glasgow Brown, a college friend of Stevenson's; and now it is Louis who is introducing young authors to one another—Henley to Lang in this case: "The London poet is one Henley:" wrote Lang to Austin Dobson. "He has come to town, and I believe does not at all wish to hide his light under a bushel. R. L. Stevenson knows him . . ."

We cannot follow Louis much farther now, in the scope of this brief chapter of his life: but the influence of Mrs. Sitwell continued for some years to be strongly apparent. Already by the end of 1874 he was actually calling her his "Madonna": ". . . I wish to return you thanks for the life that you gave me; I may surely speak and think of you as of a parent, for you are the mother of my soul as surely as another was the mother of my body. I bless you now, and shall always bless you, for the great joy that you brought into my existence . . ." But nevertheless the old passion could be recalled into being at will: Mrs. Sitwell seems to have asked him to write her a poem, and the right moment calls up one of the best—perhaps because so much of the emotion could now be recollected in tranquillity. A later and elaborated version appears in *New Poems*, but the original is worth transcribing in full—including a verse which was omitted from the later version. Colvin dates the letter containing it "Edinburgh, late Nov. 1874": but Louis heads it simply "Saturday: I don't say this is anything worth, only it is done.

If I had wings, my lady, like a dove,
And knew the secrets of the air,
I should be gone, my lady, to my love,
To kiss the sweet division of her hair,
If I had wings, my lady, like a dove.

For all is sweet, my lady, in my love;
Sweet hair, sweet breasts and sweeter eyes
That draw my soul, my lady, like a dove
Drawn southward by the shining of the skies:
For all is sweet, my lady, in my love.

If I could die, my lady, with my love,
Die, mouth to mouth, a splendid death,
I should take wing, my lady, like a dove,
To spend upon her lips my all of breath,
If I could die, my lady, with my love.

You ask who then, my lady, is my love?
Who then is this I love so well?
When I have wings, my lady, like a dove,
I shall fly southward first to you and tell
This that you ask, my lady and my love."

This is still immature poetry, full of the charm and warm urgency of youth, but by now Louis could write thus and send it to her knowing that she would take it at its proper value, and that he did not need to fill his letter with the abject apologies which, a year before, had accompanied any hint of sentiment or sensuousness.

On Christmas Day, 1874, came perhaps the best and truest of his letters: the most balanced, too—and apparently the one prized most highly by Mrs. Sitwell herself, for on it she has written "keep this very safe for me". Colvin included much of it in the *Letters*, but the heart of it is in the conclusion, which he omitted: "This letter shall be to you as a son's Christmas kiss", wrote Louis.

> . . . You will see, dear Madonna, that I am very happy as I write; and that will make you happy as you read, will it not? You must be happy; I will not have a sad deity in my chapel, she must be all smiles, and peace must look eloquently out of her eyes, and she must not know what doubt is. Nor need she doubt just now on my account; for I do feel all that she could wish, happy and good and industrious. So—there's a hymn to myself by way of conclusion.
>
> And now let us put out the tapers for a while (for we must be thrifty in this chapel, and the priest needs some of them to study by, so that he may be a worthy priest); only the little red heart-shaped lamp let us leave burning, just before the shrine: it has not been extinguished since it was first lighted, eighteen months ago among the summer trees; and it is the rule of my order that it shall be kept ever trimmed and bright, so that the priest himself may warm his hands at it whenever he is sad, and others perhaps, seeing it through the window, may have the better courage for life.
>
> So, Madonna, I give you a son's kiss this Christmas morning, and my heart is in my mouth, dear, as I write the words. Ever your faithful friend and son and priest,
>
> ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

There is not much more to be said now: the quick transitions between enthusiasm and depression were a characteristic of Louis all his life through —and with them the tendency to dramatize a situation and let the mood of a moment seem as the basis of his whole life: but for all that, Louis had found himself—which was better even than finding a Madonna.

In the early spring of 1876, when winter in Edinburgh had drained the hope with the health from him for a while, he would still write wretchedly enough: ". . . I am always an old man in winter, as you know. And my old man's calculations frighten me. I have not much encouragement to write. I don't believe I ever shall love anyone else although I know the world's experience against me, and I don't know but that a good dull marriage with a good dull girl would be a good move. Marriage; or death; an entire social death . . . for ever and for ever I shall wish that one thing that is not for me to possess—rest".

But that same autumn he first met Fanny Osbourne—and the last traces of sentimentality went out of his relations with his Madonna as he fell deeply and maturely in love with the woman who was to become his wife. Mrs. Osbourne was a married woman with two children, and the chance that she could ever be free to marry Louis seemed remote: certainly, it meant some years of patient waiting upon uncertain hopes. Rather mistakenly, perhaps, Louis decided not to tell his parents anything about this new turn which his life was taking. But he confided at once in Mrs. Sitwell and Colvin, and they at least greeted what was to come with the fullest encouragement and understanding. "Look here", wrote Louis in one of the shortest of his letters, "you and Colvin are God's holy angels." And this brief epistle was signed by Fanny as well as by himself.

The new inspiration in his life served Louis even better than his Madonna had done, and it was after his meeting with Fanny that books and essays began to appear in real plenty. But he did not forget Mrs. Sitwell—indeed she was his Madonna until the end of his life, the friend and confidante whenever he needed such friendship and confidence as even Fanny could not give.

Shortly before Louis went to America came another rather dark period, for Fanny did not know if she could obtain her divorce, and his own lack of confidence in his parents had opposed them rather bitterly to the whole affair, which he does not seem to have explained to them. To Mrs. Sitwell, however, all had been made clear from the start: she could understand, for it was her own case with Colvin all over again, and there was no risk that she would think, as his parents seem to have thought, that it was nothing more than an undesirable entanglement with a married woman. At the lowest ebb of hope Louis was writing to her in the spring of 1879: ". . . You must know very well how great a place you have in my thoughts every day; there is only one person who knows better, and that is myself. And above all things, do not let me

lose my dear friend just now. Life is very hard to me day by day, although I do not usually admit it even to myself. I have had sad misfortune in almost every way; and if I were not an exceptionally light-hearted man, I do not think I could have survived all that has been concentrated on my head. And just now, when I know so well that I am making daily another tie about my heart only that it may be broken in its turn (or alas! not broken after all; for I find I have no talent for forgetfulness) for God's sake let me feel I have something to fall back on a little; and that, think how you may of me, you will not join all the world in thinking me an unfeeling and hard-hearted dog, when Christ knows I have enough on my heart to break it were it of steel, and scarce dare to be alone with all my ruined hopes and undying [*word illegible*]. Of course you will see I am broken-spirited to-day. It is not often I show myself thus . . ."

The rest of the story is well-known: when the moment of decision came, Louis went straight to Fanny, married her as soon as she was free, and brought her back to England. He had gone without explaining matters to his parents: but Colvin and Mrs. Sitwell seem to have done so during his absence, for Louis and his wife were welcomed home, and family misunderstandings become a thing of the past.

The danger besetting anyone who would write of Robert Louis Stevenson now is that of seeming to take sides in the unfortunate and rather unimportant controversy which may be said to have originated with Henley's vitriolic article against Balfour's *Life*. That article is one of the most unfortunate ever written—for it is hard to understand Henley, to realize into what insane hatred his friendship with Louis had been commuted, a hatred directed almost more towards Fanny whom Henley blamed for having taken away "his Lewis". The quarrel between Stevenson and Henley, which reads now like an exhibition of temper between two hysterical children (over, one must add, a third, and even more hysterical, child) was only the breaking of a storm which had long been gathering. Henley quarrelled with Andrew Lang not many years later, and exhibited the same furious abandon—which Lang, more level-headed than Louis, allowed to pass quite quietly, never losing his affection for Henley, though Henley would allow of no reconciliation. Louis too wrote once to Henley from the South Seas, striving to revive his friendship—but Henley not only ignored the letter, but proceeded to write the poem to "R. L. S." containing the sentiment:

We that were dear, we are far too near
With the press of the world between us!

When the iconoclastic method of biography came into vogue, Stevenson (who had certainly been over-idolized by some of his more frenzied and less scholarly devotees) presented a beautiful target—and Henley's remarks about the "barley-sugar effigy of a real man" brought Graham Balfour in for some of the liberal allowance of mud that was in hand.

Yet no biography of Stevenson has appeared which can even compare with Balfour's work—and it is hard to see now how one could (unless Mr. Austin Strong writes it). Stevenson has been dead for over half a century, and very few remain now who knew him even at the end of his life—none who knew him as Colvin and Balfour did. I have shown how little Colvin's reticence left untold of Louis's adolescent years—and that little Colvin did not intend to keep from publication, as his letter accompanying the collection in the Scottish National Library reveals. Balfour passed lightly over the passionate, frustrated years, but he did not hide what they contained—though he did not dwell on the youthful follies which were of so little importance in the study of Stevenson as man or as writer: he knew his cousin better than those biographers who would make the wood out of one tree.

There may have been a "scandal" round about 1870—Louis rather hints that there was, though he does not say of what kind; but the *New Poems* could have been written without the aid of it: most of them probably were so written. Henley possessed a few which Louis wished should be destroyed—but, if they are among the *New Poems*, as is probable, it was the possible presentation rather than anything in the poems themselves that Louis feared.

Henley's hatred of Fanny is also reflected in much that has been written about Stevenson—particularly in the works by Mr. Hellman and Mr. Steuart, one of whom describes the Vailima years as "that period when, not without moments of bitterness, a vanquished knight went down to death". But Fanny does not really need defending: as her son wrote of her: "Remember always that it was she who kept Stevenson alive; and in keeping him alive—guarding him, watching over him, subordinating her whole life to him, she necessarily offended many people"—most especially Henley! After the coming of Fanny, Louis was never the man to complain, or show more sign that was possible of his precarious health: so well did he hide it, indeed, that we find Mr. Hellman describing him as "a man who never underwent much

pain, and whose illness rather helped his career". Even Colvin hardly realized what Louis's daily life had been since his return from America, and he reproached Fanny once for trying to keep him in the South Seas. It was then that Louis turned once more to his faithful Madonna, and laid all before her; and one can easily forgive Colvin for omitting this letter—which may fittingly serve as epilogue to this little study.

Stevenson wrote to Mrs. Sitwell from the "Union Club, Sydney: 29 Sept., 1890" (the signature had been cut away for an autograph collection, causing gaps which are easily restored):

> My dear friend, I have a favour to beg of you. I cannot tell Colvin how much his letter has smashed Fanny up, for I know quite well how little he really meant of what he said—having had my head bashed before now—and I would rather do anything than increase the distress I have already inflicted. But I want *you* to understand. She was here yesterday, after nights of sleeplessness, to propose we should give all up and return home. (I should explain that I live here in the club, confined to my room and almost entirely to bed, and only see her on occasional visits). In the South Seas I have health, strength, I can walk and ride and be out of doors, and do my work without distress. These are great temptations. On the other hand, if I go home, I do not say it is to die—because I seem incapable of dying, but I know it is to go back to the old business. Even here in Sydney, it is the old story. And I beg you all to remember that, though I take my sicknesses with a decent face, they do represent suffering, and weakness, and painful disability; as well as the loss of all that makes animal life desirable. I am just now not very bad; but I am a hopeless prisoner; and if I am spared the tread-mill by day, I have the cough-mill to go through at night, and do not love it. And there is no doubt I should be worse in England.
>
> Now all this I declare has never excused me in my own eyes from what seems like a desertion, in his sorrow, of the best friend I have on earth; and I wrote and told him so when I first made up my mind, though he seems never to have received the letter. What did decide me was this: It seemed a poor kindness to go home, and be ill again, and perhaps die—for remember, the wonder is that I don't die in one of these pleurisy bouts—and I told myself it was a better kindness, even to Colvin, to stay away and live. To my wife, my mother, Lloyd, and three others who depend on me entirely for their daily bread, there was no doubt which way my duty pointed. As for inclination you know me [too] well to doubt that my fee[ling] for my friends at home pulled me hard; but ca[n] you wonder if the hope of health, and air, and exe[rcise] and some snatch of a ma[n's] life after all these years of the sick room, tempted [me] extremely? I declare t[o God] my only wonder is that I hesitated for a moment. I say it boldly, I think few would.

Now there is the whole thing pro and con. If you blame me, I shall be surprised. If you do not, try and get Colvin, without giving him an idea that he has hurt us, to write a kindlier letter to Fanny. I am sure, if you had been in Fanny's shoes, you would have made the choice she did. And she hesitated also, and was only nerved to it by what Colvin had told her: "If you find a place that suits Louis, keep him there". Remember we have now very few friends.

And understand this also. If you feel alarm about Colvin, telegraph for me and I'll come. I am not so fond of either life or health, but what I'll risk both gladly rather than not see him. Please answer at least this part with a promise to Apia, Samoa, whither I hope to make my escape in some ten days.

Your sincere friend,

[ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON].