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WRITERS OF TO-DAY

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Edited by Denys Val Baker

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NOTE

During recent years it has become a literary fashion to classify writing and writers into various schools or movements. While this has produced some provocative criticism it has often detracted from more detailed consideration of individual writers. There exists a real need for a series of critical studies of the work of these contemporaries whose achievements have already established them among the most significant writers of our time.

The object of *Writers of To-day* is to fulfil that need as far as possible; not, obviously, within the limits of a single book, but through a series. The first volume, published in 1946, presented essays on Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene, Andre Gide, James Joyce, Edith Sitwell, J. B. Priestley, Arthur Koestler, F. G. Lorca, Dorothy Sayers, John Steinbeck, T. S. Eliot and E. M. Forster. In this second volume the same policy is followed of presenting studies of writers whose work reflects differing aspects of contemporary literature. The subjects include British, Indian, French, Italian, German, Irish and American writers. Nine of these twelve studies were specially written for this volume. The studies of Virginia Woolf and Evelyn Waugh are reprinted from *Penguin New Writing* and *Horizon* respectively, and the study of Ignazio Silone is an extract from a forthcoming book of essays, *The Writer and Politics,* published by the Porcupine Press, Ltd.

WRITERS OF TO-DAY

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

*

MALCOLM COWLEY

GOING back to Hemingway's work after several years is like going back to a brook where you had often fished and finding the woods as deep and cool as they used to be. The trees are bigger, perhaps, but they are the same trees; the water comes down over the black stones as clear as ever, with the same dull roar where it plunges into the pool; and when the first trout takes hold of your line you can feel your heart beating against your fishing jacket. But something has changed, for this time there are shadows in the pool that you hadn't noticed before, and you have a sense that the woods are haunted. When Hemingway's stories first appeared, they seemed to be a transcription of the real world, new because they were accurate and because the world in those days was also new. With his insistence on "presenting things truly," he seemed to be a writer in the naturalistic tradition, for all his technical experiments; and the professors of American literature, when they got round to mentioning his books in their surveys, treated him as if he were a Dreiser of the lost generation, or perhaps the fruit of a misalliance between Dreiser and Jack London. Going back to his work after half a dozen years, you perceive his kinship with a wholly different group of novelists, let us say with Foe and Hawthorne and Melville: the haunted and nocturnal writers, the men who dealt in images that were compulsive symbols of an inner world.

On the face of it, his method is not in the least like theirs. He doesn't lead us into castles ready to collapse with age, or into very old New England houses, or embark with us on the search for a whale that is also the white spirit of evil; instead he tells the stories he has lived or heard, against the background of countries he has seen. But, you reflect on reading his books again, these are

curious stories that he has chosen from his wider experience, and these countries are presented in a strangely mortuary light. In no other writer of our time can you find such a profusion of corpses: dead women in the rain; dead soldiers bloated in their uniforms and surrounded by torn papers; sunken liners full of bodies that float past the closed portholes. In no other writer can you find so many suffering animals: mules with their forelegs broken drowning in shallow water *off* the quay at Smyrna; gored horses in the bullring; wounded hyenas first snapping at their own entrails and then eating them with relish. And morally wounded people who also devour themselves: punch-drunk boxers, soldiers with battle fatigue, veterans crazy with "the old rale," lesbians, nymphomaniacs, bullfighters who have lost their nerve, men who lie awake all night while their brains get to racing "like a flywheel with the weight gone"—here are visions as terrifying as those of *The Pit and the Pendulum,* even though most of them are copied from life; here are nightmares at noonday, accurately described, pictured without blur, but having the nature of obsessions or hypnagogic visions between sleep and waking.

And, going back to them, you find a waking-dreamlike quality even in the stories that deal with pleasant or commonplace aspects of the world. Take for example *Big Two-Hearted River,* where the plot—or foreground of the plot—is simply a fishing trip in the northern peninsula of Michigan. Nick Adams, who is Hemingway's earliest and most personal hero, gets off the train at an abandoned sawmill town; he crosses burned-over land, makes camp, eats his supper and goes to sleep; in the morning he looks for bait, finds grasshoppers under a log, hooks a big trout and loses it, catches two other trout, then sits in the shadow and eats his lunch very slowly while watching the stream; he decides to do no more fishing that day. There is nothing else in the story, apparently; nothing but a collection of sharp sensory details, so that you smell or hear or touch or see everything that exists near Big Two-Hearted River; and you even taste Nick Adams' supper of beans and spaghetti. "All good books are alike," Hemingway later said, "in that they are truer than if they had really happened and after you are finished reading one you will

feel that all that happened to you and afterwards it all belongs to you: the good and the bad, the ecstasy, the remorse and sorrow, the people and the places and how the weather was." This story belongs to the reader, but apparently it is lacking in ecstasy, remorse and sorrow; there are no people in it except Nick Adams; apparently there is nothing but "the places and how the weather was."

But Hemingway's stories are most of them continued, in the sense that he has a habit of returning to the same themes, each time making them a little clearer—to himself, I think, as well as to others. His work has an emotional consistency, as if all of it moved with the same current of experience. A few years after writing *Big Two-Hearted River,* he wrote another story that casts a retrospective light on his fishing trip—much as *A Farewell to Arms* helps to explain the background of Jake Barnes and Lady Brett, in *The Sun Also Rises,* (which was published in England as *Fiesta).* The second story, *Now I Lay Me,* deals with an American volunteer in the Italian army who isn't named but who might easily be Nick Adams. He is afraid to sleep at night because, so he says, "I had been living for a long time with the knowledge that if I ever shut my eyes in the dark and let myself go, my soul would go out of my body. I had been that way for a long time, ever since I had been blown up at night and felt it go out of me and go off and then come back." And the soldier continues:

> "I had different ways of occupying myself while I lay awake. I would think of a trout stream I had fished along when I was a boy and fish its whole length very carefully in my mind; fishing very carefully under all the logs, all the turns of the bank, the deep holes and the clear shallow stretches, sometimes catching trout and sometimes losing them. I would stop fishing at noon to eat my lunch; sometimes on a log over the stream; sometimes on a high bank under a tree, and I always ate my lunch very slowly and watched the stream below me while I ate. . . . Some nights too I made up streams, and some of them were very exciting, and it was like being awake and dreaming. Some of

those streams I still remember and think that I have fished in them, and they are confused with streams I really know."

After reading this passage, we have a somewhat different attitude towards the earlier story. The river described in it remains completely real for us; but also—like those other streams the soldier invented during the night—it has the quality of a waking dream. Although the events in the foreground are described with superb accuracy and for their own sake, we now perceive what we probably missed at a first reading: that there are shadows in the background and that part of the story takes place in an inner world. We notice that Nick Adams regards his fishing trip as an escape, either from nightmare or from realities that have become a nightmare. Sometimes his mind starts to work, even here in the wilderness; but "he knew he could choke it because he was tired enough," and he can safely fall asleep. "Nick felt happy," the author says more than once. "He felt he had left everything behind, the need for thinking, the need to write, other needs. It was all back of him." He lives as if in an enchanted country. There is a faint suggestion of old legends: all the stories of boys with cruel stepmothers who wandered off into the forest where the big trees sheltered them and the birds brought them food. There is even a condition laid on Nick's happiness, just as in many fairy tales where the hero must not wind a certain horn or open a certain door. Nick must not follow the river down into the swamp. "In the swamp the banks were bare, the big cedars came together overhead, the sun did not come through, except in patches; in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic. In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure. Nick did not want it. He did not want to go down the stream any further to-day."

But fishing is not the only activity of his heroes that Hemingway invests with a curious and almost supernatural value. They drink early and late; they consume enough beer, wine, anis, grappa and Fundador to put them all in alcoholic wards, if they were ordinary mortals; but drinking seems to have the effect on them of a magic potion. Robert Jordan, in *For Whom the Bell*

Tolls, is the soberest of Hemingway's heroes, the child, as it were, of middle age. Nevertheless he finds that a cup of absinthe takes the place "of the evening papers, of all the old evenings in cafes, of all the chestnut trees that would be in bloom now in this month . . . of all the things he had enjoyed and forgotten and that came back to him when he tasted that opaque, bitter, tongue-numbing, brain-warming, stomach-warming, idea-changing liquid alchemy." There is much that he wants to remember, but also the fear of death that he wants to forget, and he personifies liquor as "the giant killer." On one occasion he reflects that writing about his fears might help him even more than drowning them in absinthe. He says to himself, after worrying about all the lives that have been lost as a result of his activities behind the Fascist lines, "But my guess is you will get rid of all that by writing about it. … Once you write it down it is all gone." Hemingway himself sometimes seems to regard writing as a ceremony of exorcism or of public confession. And, as a young man after the First World War, he had many painful memories of which he wanted to rid himself by setting them all down.

II

He was born on July 21, 1898, in Oak Park, Illinois, where his father was a physician. He went to school there, too, but what he regarded as his real home was a house in Michigan near the tip of the southern peninsula. The house was full of children all summer, for there were two boys and four girls in the family. In those days, the first-growth hemlock woods came down almost to the shore of the lake; and back in the woods was a settlement of Ojibways who lived by cutting the hemlocks for tanbark. Then one year all the woods were gone, "and there were only stumps, dried tree-tops, branches and firewood where the woods had been." Ernest ran away from home when he was fifteen years old; that may have been the time he met the Battler beside the railway track near Mancelona. In 1917 he graduated from Oak Park

High School, where he had played football and had been chosen to write the class prophecy. He didn't go on to college, but instead got a job on the Kansas City *Star-,* a few months later he went to Europe as a volunteer ambulance driver. He was badly wounded on the Italian front; he was given a silver medal (besides the Croce di Guerra); and after being patched together in a Milan hospital he served for a time in the Italian shock troops, the Arditi. One of the sights he could not forget was of the Austrian dead lying on their faces with their pockets turned out and each body surrounded by postcards and letters from home, a surprising quantity of paper. Another memory that became a nightmare was the evacuation of Smyrna by the Greeks, who left their baggage animals to drown. But that was something he saw four years later, when he was sent to the Middle East as a correspondent for the Toronto *Star.*

In Paris, which would be his home for many years after the war, he set about learning to become a writer. He had met Sherwood Anderson, who sent him to Gertrude Stein with a letter of introduction. He also became a good friend of Ezra Pound's, and he sometimes helped Ford Madox Ford to edit the *Transatlantic Review,* although his name did not appear on the masthead. These four—but especially Pound and Miss Stein—seem to have been his principal teachers; and what they gave him (or rather, what they confirmed in him) was an ideal of complete objectivity. When he sent his early manuscripts to Pound, they came back to him blue-pencilled, with most of the adjectives gone. Miss Stein was content to make general comments, but they were usually followed. He afterwards said to John Peale Bishop, "Ezra was right half the time, and when he was wrong, he was so wrong you were never in any doubt about it. Gertrude was always right." As soon as he had saved a little money, Hemingway quit his job as a correspondent and devoted all his time to his stories. Once at a dinner in Paris with Dos Passos and the Lincoln Steffenses, he insisted that anybody could write. "You can," he said to Mrs. Steffens, making the gesture of giving her a left hook to the jaw; in those days he always gestured like a boxer. "It's hell. It takes it all out of you; it nearly kills you; but you can do

it. Anybody can. Even you can, Stef. … I haven't done it yet, but I will." And Steffens adds, in his autobiography, "I think he thought that writing was a matter of honesty and labour."

"I was trying to write then," Hemingway tells us at the beginning *of Death in the Afternoon,* "and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing truly what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel, was to put down what really happened in action; what the actual things were which produced the emotion that you experienced. In writing for a newspaper you told what happened and, with one trick and another, you communicated the emotion aided by the element of timeliness which gives a certain emotion to any account of something that has happened on that day; but the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or in ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always, was beyond me and I was working very hard to try to get it." In those days he seems to have regarded stories as, essentially, machines for arousing emotion. You didn't put the emotion itself into the story, any more than you would make a reaping machine out of wheat or a sewing machine out of cloth and thread; but you picked out the details from life that had aroused your own emotions and, if you described them accurately, in their proper sequence and without closing your eyes to violence and horror, you had something that would continue to arouse the emotions of your readers." That was the method Hemingway followed in his early sketches and, within its self-imposed limitations, it was extremely successful. It was even successful beyond those limitations, for his pictures proved to have a vast power of suggestion. Take for example two of the "chapters," or interchapters, from *In our Time.* Chapter III reads in full:

> "We were in a garden in Mons. Young Buckley came in with his patrol from across the river. The first German I saw climbed up over the garden wall. We waited till he got one leg over and then potted him. He had so much equipment on and looked awfully surprised and fell down into the garden. Then

three more came over further down the wall. We shot them. They all came just like that."

There is nothing more. There are no editorial reflections on the horrors of modern warfare. There is, in the story itself, no emotion whatever except the "awfully surprised" look of the first German who was shot. But the story has the power of arousing emotion in the reader, who tends to put himself either in the position of the English riflemen or, more likely, in that of the Germans climbing the wall to their deaths. And the wall itself is so vivid that, for the reader, it tends to become a sort of metaphor for all the impassable obstacles we see in nightmares: the swamps in which our feet are mired, the endless steps, the river that must, and cannot be crossed. Moreover, Hemingway returns to the same type of image in the following interchapter:

"It was a frightfully hot day. We'd jammed an absolutely perfect barricade across the bridge. It was simply priceless. A big old wrought-iron grating from the front of a house. Too heavy to lift and you could shoot through it and they would have to climb over it. It was absolutely topping. They tried to get over it, and we potted them from forty yards. They rushed it, and officers came out alone and worked on it. It was an absolutely perfect obstacle. Their officers were very fine. We were frightfully put out when we heard the flank had gone, and we had to fall back."

Here the sense of nightmare becomes more definite. The reader begins to feel that the "absolutely perfect obstacle" is a symbol for other obstacles recurring in Hemingway's novels: for the wound that divides Jake and Brett (in *The Sun Also Rises);* for the death in childbirth that separates Frederic from Catherine (in *A Farewell to Arms)*\ and even for the bridge that must be destroyed (in *For Whom the Bell Tolls)* at the cost of the hero's life. Moreover, the picture of a wall reappears in the two interchapters that follow. Chapter V begins: "They shot the six cabinet ministers at half-past six in the morning

against the wall of a hospital." Chapter VI begins: "Nick sat against the wall of the church where they had dragged him to be clear of machine-gun fire in the street." In Hemingway's unconscious mind, all these walls may have been the images of death, though I doubt that he was using them as conscious symbols. He was trying in those early days to state everything objectively, and it was not until later that he began to make a deliberate use of symbolism, together with other literary devices that he had avoided in the beginning, when he was teaching himself to write, "commencing with the simplest things."

Later, in *A Farewell to Arms,* the rain becomes a conscious symbol of disaster. "Things went very badly," the hero tells us in the first chapter. "At the start of the winter came the permanent rain and with the rain came the cholera." Catherine Barkley is afraid of the rain because, she says, "sometimes I see me dead in it." Rain falls all during the retreat from Caporetto; it falls while Catherine is trying to have her baby in a Swiss hospital; and it is still falling when she dies and when Frederic pushes the nurses out of the room to be alone with her. "It wasn't any good," he says. "It was like saying good-bye to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain." On the other hand, it is snow that is used as a symbol of death in *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (along with other death symbols, like vultures, hyenas and soaring in an imaginary aeroplane). And possibly snow has the same value in *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* where a spring snowfall adds to the danger of Robert Jordan's mission and indirectly causes his death.

Even in these later novels and stories, Hemingway almost never makes the error that weakens the effect of most symbolic fiction. Ordinarily we think of it as a type of a writing in which the events in the foreground tend to become misty because the author has his eyes fixed on something else. Hawthorne in his early stories was so preoccupied with inner meanings that he seemed to lose his sense of the real world; but that is almost never the case with Hemingway. It is true that Maria, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* is almost more of a dream than she is a woman. When Frederic Henry dives into the flooded Tagliamento, in *A Fare-*

wellto Arms, he is performing a rite of baptism that prepares us for the new life he is about to lead as a deserter from the Italian army; his act is emotionally significant, but it is a little unconvincing on the plane of action. These are perhaps the only two cases in which Hemingway seems to loosen his grip on reality. Elsewhere his eyes are fixed on the foreground, but he gives us a sense of other shadowy meanings that contribute to the force and complexity of his writing.

By the early I93o's Hemingway's technique, apparently simple in the beginning, was becoming more elaborate. He had begun to talk about the possibility of writing what he called fourth-dimensional prose. "The reason everyone now tries to avoid it," he says in *Green Hills of Africa,* "to deny that it is important, to make it seem vain to try to do it, is because it is so difficult. Too many factors must combine to make it possible."

"What is this now?" asks Kandisky, the Austrian in leather breeches who likes to lead the life of the mind. And the author tells him:

> "The kind of writing that can be done. How far prose can be carried if anyone is serious enough and has luck. There is a fourth and fifth dimension that can be gotten."
>
> "You believe it?"
>
> "I know it."
>
> "And if a writer can get this?"
>
> "Then nothing else matters. It is more important than anything else he can do. The chances are, of course, that he will fail. But there is a chance that he succeeds."
>
> "But that is poetry you are talking about."
>
> "No. It is much more difficult than poetry. It is a prose that has never been written. But it can be written, without tricks and without cheating. With nothing that will go bad afterwards."

Now, I don't know exactly what Hemingway means by prose with "a fourth and fifth dimension." It would seem to me that any good prose has four dimensions, in the sense of being a solid

object that moves through time; whereas the fifth dimension is here a mystical or meaningless figure of speech. But without understanding his choice of words, I do know that Hemingway's prose at its best gives a sense of depth and of moving forward on different levels that is lacking in even the best of his imitators, as it is in almost all the other novelists of our time. Moreover, I have at least a vague notion how this quality in his work can be explained.

III

Considering his laborious apprenticeship and the masters with whom he chose to study; considering his theories of writing, which he has often discussed, and how they have developed with the years; considering their subtle and highly conscious application, not to mention the complicated personality they serve to express, it is a little surprising to find that Hemingway is almost always described as a primitive. Yet the word really applies to him, if it is used in what might be called its anthropological sense. The anthropologists tell us that many of the so-called primitive peoples have an extremely elaborate system of beliefs, calling for the almost continual performance of rites and ceremonies; even their drunken orgies are ruled by tradition. Some of the forest-dwelling tribes believe that every rock or tree or animal has an indwelling spirit. When they kill an animal or chop down a tree, they must beg its forgiveness, repeating a formula of propitiation; otherwise its spirit would haunt them. Living briefly in a world of hostile forces, they preserve themselves—so they believe—only by the exercise of magic lore.

There is something of the same atmosphere in Hemingway's work. His heroes live in a world that is like a hostile forest, full of unseen dangers, not to mention the nightmares that haunt their sleep. Death spies on them from behind every tree. Their only chance of safety lies in the faithful observance of customs they invent for themselves. In an early story like *Big Two-Hearted River*, you notice that Nick Adams does everything very slowly, not wishing "to rush his sensations any;" and he pays so much

attention to the meaning and Tightness of each gesture that his life in the wilderness becomes a series of little ceremonies. "Another hopper poked his face out of the bottle. His antennae wavered. Nick took him by the head and held him while he threaded the hook under his chin, down through his thorax and into the last segments of his abdomen. The grasshopper took hold of the hook with his front feet, spitting tobacco juice on it." The grasshopper is playing its own part in a ritual; so too is the trout that swallows it, then bends the rod in jerks as it pumps against the current. The whole fishing trip, instead of being a mere escape, might be regarded as an incantation, a spell to banish evil spirits. And there are other rituals in Hemingway's work (besides drinking and writing, which I mentioned already). Without too much difficulty we can recognize rites of animal sacrifice (as in *Death in the Afternoon),* of sexual union (in *For Whom the Bell Tolls),* of self-immolation (in *The Snows of Kilimanjaro),* of conversion (in *To Have and Have Not)* and of symbolic death and rebirth (in the Caporetto passage of *A Farewell to Arms).* When one of Hemingway's characters violates his own standards or the just laws of the tribe (as Ole Andreson has done in *The Killers),* he waits for death as stolidly as an Indian.

Memories of the Indians he knew in his boyhood play an important part in Hemingway's work; they reappear in *The Torrents of Spring* and in several of his shorter stories. Robert Jordan, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls,* compares his own exploits to Indian warfare, and he strengthens himself during his last moments by thinking about his grandfather, an old Indian fighter. *In Our Time,* Hemingway's first book of stories, starts by telling how Nick Adams' father is called to attend an Indian woman who has been in labour for two days. The woman lies screaming in a bunkhouse, while her husband, with a badly injured foot, lies in the bunk above her smoking his pipe. Dr. Adams performs a Caesarean section without anaesthetic, then sews up the wound with fishing leaders. When the operation is finished, he looks at the husband in the upper bunk and finds that he is dead; unable to bear his wife's pain, he has turned his face to the wall and cut his throat. A story Nick Adams later tells is of Trudy Gilby, the

Indian girl with whom he used to go squirrel shooting and who, under the big hamlock trees, "did first what no one has ever done better." Most of Hemingway's heroines are in the image of Trudy; they have the obedience to their lovers and the sexual morals of Indian girls. His heroes suffer without complaining and, in one way or another, they destroy themselves like the Indian husband.

But Hemingway feels an even greater kinship with the Spaniards, because they retain a primitive dignity in giving and accepting death. Even when their dignity is transformed into a blind lust for killing, as sometimes happened during their civil war, they continue to hold his respect. Agustin, in *For Whom the Bell* TWA, sees four of Franco's cavalrymen and breaks out into a sweat that is not the sweat of fear. "When I saw those four there," he says, "and thought that we might kill them I was like a mare in the corral waiting for the stallion." And Robert Jordan thinks to himself: "We do it coldly but they do not, nor ever have. It is their extra sacrament. Their old one that they had before the new religion came from the far end of the Mediterranean, the one they have never abandoned but only suppressed and hidden to bring it out again in wars and inquisitions." Hemingway himself seems to have a feeling for half-forgotten sacraments; his cast of mind is pre-Christian and pre-logical.

Sometimes his stories come close to being adaptations of ancient myths. His first novel, for example, deals in different terms with the same legend that T. S. Eliot was not so much presenting as concealing in *The Waste Land.* When we turn to Eliot's explanatory notes, then read the book to which they refer as a principal source—*From Ritual to Romance,* by Jessie L. Weston—we learn that his poem is largely based on the legend of the Fisher King. The legend tells how the king was wounded in the loins and how he lay wasting in his bed while his whole kingdom became unfruitful; there was thunder but no rain; the rivers dried up, the flocks had no increase and the women bore no children. *The Sun Also Rises* presents the same situation in terms of Paris after the First World War. It is a less despairing book than critics like to think; at times it is gay, friendly, even exuberant;

but the hero has been wounded like the Fisher King, and he lives in a world that is absolutely sterile. I don't mean to imply that Hemingway owes a debt to *The Waste Land.* He had read the poem, which he liked at first, and the notes that followed it, which he didn't like at all; I doubt very much that he bothered to look at Jessie L. Weston's book. He said in 1924, when he was paying tribute to Joseph Conrad: "If I knew that by grinding Mr. Eliot into a fine dry powder and sprinkling that powder over Mr. Conrad's grave Mr. Conrad would shortly appear, looking very annoyed at the forced return, and commence writing, I would leave for London early to-morrow with a sausage grinder." And yet when he wrote his first novel, he dealt with the same legend that Eliot had discovered by scholarship; recovering it for himself, I think, by a sort of instinct for legendary situations.

And it is this instinct for legends, for sacraments, for rituals, for symbols appealing to buried hopes and fears, that helps to explain the power of Hemingway's work and his vast superiority over his imitators. The imitators have learned all his mannerisms as a writer, and in some cases they can tell a story even better than Hemingway himself; but they tell only the story; they communicate with the reader on only one level of experience. Hemingway does more than that. Most of us are also primitive in a sense, for all the machinery that surrounds our lives. We have our private rituals, our little superstitions, our symbols and fears and nightmares; and Hemingway reminds us unconsciously of the hidden worlds in which we live. Reading his best work, we are a little like Nick Adams looking down from the railroad bridge at the trout in Big Two-Hearted River: "many trout in deep, fast-moving water, slightly distorted as he watched far down through the glassy convex surface of the pool, its surface pushing and swelling smooth against the resistance of the log-driven piles of the bridge. At the bottom of the pool were the big trout. Nick did not see them at first. Then he saw them at the bottom of the pool, big trout looking to hold themselves on the gravel bottom in a varying mist of gravel and sand."

For many years it has been the fashion to reprimand Heming-

way and to point out how much better his work would be (with its undoubted power) if only he were a little more virtuous or reasonable or optimistic, or if he revealed the proper attitude towards progress and democracy. Critics like Maurice Coindreau (in French) and Bernard DeVoto have abused him without bothering to understand what he plainly says, much less what he suggests or implies. Even Maxwell Geismar, who is one of the few professors with a natural feeling for literary values, would like to make him completely over. "What a marvellous teacher Hemingway is," he exclaims, "with all the restrictions of temperament and environment which so far define his work! What could he not show us of living as well as dying, of the positives in our being as well as the destroying forces, of 'grace under pressure' and the grace we need with no pressures, of ordinary life-giving actions along with those superb last gestures of doomed exiles!" Or, to put the matter more plainly, what a great writer Hemingway would be, in Geismar's opinion, if he combined his own work with equal parts of Trollope and Emerson.

And the critics have some justice on their side. It is true that Hemingway has seldom been an affirmative writer; it is true that most of his work is narrow and violent and generally pre-occupied with death. But the critics, although they might conceivably change him for the worse, are quite unable to change him for the better. He is one of the novelists who write, not as they should or would, but as they must. Like Poe and Hawthorne and Melville, he listens to his personal demon, which might also be called his intuition or his sense of life. If he listened to the critics instead, he might indeed come to resemble Trollope or Emerson, but the resemblance would be only on the surface and, as he sometimes says of writing that tries hard to meet public requirements, it would all go bad afterwards. Some of his own writing has gone bad, but surprisingly little of it. By now he has earned the right to be taken for what he is, with his great faults and greater virtues; with his narrowness, his power, his always open eyes, his stubborn, chip-on-the-shoulder honesty, his nightmares, his rituals for escaping them and his sense of an inner and an outer world that year after year were moving together toward the same disaster.

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JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

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RAYNER HEPPENSTALL

THE IMPACT of Sartre seems disproportionate to his achievement as an artist or at any rate to the public understanding of it ("il *est vrai: nous sommes beaucoup plus connus que nos livres ne sont lus").* This has led some people to overestimate and other people to underestimate his gifts. On the whole, it is better to be taken in than to be guided by literary knowingness without goodwill. *Life* in the U.S. thinks it can turn Sartre into a funny man. *Picture Post* over here started off, I think, with a parallel assignment, but its reporter was impressed and ended up by seeing in this "dumpy little man with a twitching right arm", this "sandy-haired forceful little Frenchman who looks out on the world from behind pebble glasses", the definitive modern prophet who, perhaps, owes just a little to the past, since what he says "can be traced back to the philosophers Heidegger and Hegel"—a statement doubly monstrous. For, from the point of view of existential philosophy, Heidegger, still gagged by the French occupation authorities, will almost certainly prove to have remained a more important figure than Sartre. And if Hegel has played any part in the history of existentialism, it is that of an irritant. The whole of Kierkegaard's philosophy (not the whole of his writing) was a direct attack on the spirit of system in general and Hegel's jolly synthesis in particular. Heidegger, Jaspers, Scheler, Marcel and Sartre have pushed forward this attack and, the times being other, have also set their faces against the popular determinism propagated equally by Hegel's immediate heir, Karl Marx, and by the Freudians.

But indeed the whole subject has been so prejudiced that any essay on Sartre is bound to be largely an essay in contradiction of what other people have said, both about what existentialism is and

about Sartre's individual place in the movement. The *Picture Post* article, for instance, would need to be corrected almost sentence by sentence. In a talk by Étienne Gilson, which I had the pleasure of translating so that Prof. Gilson might have the pleasure of himself broadcasting it in English from Paris, it was stated that in such-and-such a century Sartre would have been a monk of this or that order. Obviously, speculations of this type can never be put to the test of verification, but it is certainly untrue that there is anything monkish (it might be thought to have something in common with the Society of Jesus) about existentialism now. Sartre's, especially, is a philosophy of hard living, a modern cure for "the monk's disease", *accidie,* which has at last got a firm hold on the laity. Sartre argues, as Heidegger does not and as Kierkegaard emphatically did not, that authentic existence demands political responsibility and a total engagement of oneself in the life of one's own time. It is in fact a weakness of his thought that he allows no sufficient place to the monkish virtues of contemplation. He offers instead a series of spiritual exercises whereby one may enter upon a life of action in the modern world comparatively free of "bad faith", of the visitations of one's own ghost and of dead abstractions.

But perhaps we could leave the declared enemies of existentialism to fight it out among themselves. The last to take *off* his coat is M. Julien Benda, who finds in Sartre's gospel of engagement a new *trahison des clercs.* In *La Tradition de l' existentialisme* (July, 1947) M. Benda argues that existentialism is merely the current phase in a perpetual struggle of life against thought. From the point of view of the philosophers, this is true enough. From the point of view of the general reading public the opposite is true, for they are now getting philosophy with their literature whether they like it or no. But dear, crotchety old M. Benda is seated firmly upon his hobby-horse and prepared to ride down everything in his path. All the younger writers are existentialists to him, and Bergson was the father of them all.

At a smarter level of taste than is represented by popular illustrated weeklies, the general reaction to Sartre in this country has been malevolent. Cambridge, in the person of Mr. A. J.

Ayer, informed the literary press in 1945 that L'*Etre et le Néant* had failed to pass the searching tests proposed by Carnap and Wittgenstein and that in fact "what is called existentialist philosophy has become very largely an exercise in the art of misusing the verb 'to be' ". In the literary press itself one is chiefly aware of a kind of grumbling uneasiness which is only too easy to understand. After all, if this thing once became really fashionable here, we should find ourselves having to take a course in philosophy. This is unheard-of. Paris fashions in the past have demanded little of us but that we should memorize two or three new phrases.

Perhaps all this is to the good. It is too early yet to attempt an authoritative placing of Sartre. He is not himself a young man, but it is in some ways a young talent. At the same time, there are no *juvenilia. La Nausée* and some of the stories in *Le Mur* I myself think superior to the two volumes so far published of the "Roads to Freedom" trilogy, *The Age of Reason*[1] and *Le Sursis,* while it seems to be generally agreed that *Men without Shadows* and *The Respectable Prostitute* lack something of the originality and force *of Huis Clos* and *The Flies.* A number of pre-war essays in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* exploited a critical vein which has not been re-opened in *Les Temps Modernes. Baudelaire* was originally the introduction to a critical selection which had to be withdrawn for reasons of copyright. These, with L'*Etre et le Néant,* its more popular tailpiece L'*Existentialisme est un humanisme,* three earlier works of philosophy and psychology and a number of general pronouncements, of which *Qu'est-ce que la littérature!?* and "Portrait of the Anti-Semite" are the chief, constitute Sartre's output to date (the date being September, 1947). Sartre is still milling actively and even angrily around, sincerely puzzled, I think, by the noise and smoke that he has caused and uncertain whether or no to assume the prophetic mantle which so many hands seem anxious to thrust upon him. He is alive. He will change. He will continue to surprise and with a bit of luck to delight us. The best service that we can render him is not to let him

[1] Where an English title exists, I have used it, except in the case of *Huis Clos,* of which two versions exist, both of them abandoned in favour of the original French title when the play was broadcast.

become the centre of our attention, not give him all the limelight. We, too, have our situations and our liberties, and what is inauthentic for M. Jean-Paul Sartre may not be so for us.

In what follows, little can be said about *L'Etre et le Néant,* although it is in many ways Sartre's most important single work, much less about the minor works of the same type which cluster about it in the form of preliminary studies or later exegesis. A compendious and highly compressed philosophical work of some four hundred thousand words cannot be reduced with advantage to a few pages. Mr. Ayer's ten-thousand-word summary barely broke the skin. The book's verbal difficulties alone are tremendous, as they must be in any attempt to transpose the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, than which no more perfect expression of the glorious, deformed genius of the German language exists. But never in the history of literature has any playwright, novelist or poet found it necessary to provide so massive a theoretical background to his work, and this in itself is a fact of cardinal importance about that work. One could write about Sartre in two ways. One could analyse the thought of *L'Etre et le Néant* and *show passim* how it was figuratively developed in his other work. It is easier and shorter to go through the other work and, where this is felt to be necessary, point to a thought in its philosophical underpinning. All that this latter course can hope to achieve is a kind of extended bibliography, with a few lines of critical approach indicated, but it is the course that I shall follow. First, however, it is necessary to take one verbal difficulty which extends beyond Sartre himself.

There are at least three distinct and unusual senses given to the word "exist" in the writings of existential writers. Kierkegaard, in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript,* which is the source and origin of all explicit existentialism, speaks of existential thought as of that which is carried out in action. In other words and quite simply, the existential thinker is the man who practises what he preaches. Existence here is the Marxian *Praxis,* the unity of theory and practice, which the medieval schoolmen called *tradere contemplata,* but of course in Kierkegaard the action takes place in a fundamentally alien and tragic world. The heirs of Kierkegaard, and especially Jaspers, dwelling upon the etymology of the

word *("ex-sistere")* to sit, stand or stick out), contrast *Existenz* with two words which are also translated "existence" in English, the words *"Dasein"* and *"Vorhandensein".* This verbal distinction, which involves one in endless complications in languages other than German, implies that a man truly "exists" only when he transcends his basic human condition and is altogether himself. In the sense *of"Dasein",* all men exist equally, but the *Existenz* of some is clouded with anonymity. This is not at all out of keeping with the thought of Kierkegaard, who wished to legislate for "the exception", a thankless task, and it is at this point that the personalism of Emmanuel Mounier and Nicolas Berdyaev tacks on to existentialism. But there is a third, a less emotionally coloured and wholly traditional sense of the word to which, although it occurs throughout the history of philosophy, the existentialists give a special emphasis. This is the sense in which existence is opposed to essence. In general, philosophers take existences to exemplify an essence which precedes them, as a human being is considered to partake of human nature or an individual bee of beehood. Existentialism reverses this (other philosophers in the past have more or less timidly done so, e.g. Schelling) and states quite firmly that existence precedes essence and that there is no human nature except insofar as individual human beings have up to the present established it, a point of view, incidentally, which is quite in keeping with Marxism. Whether it is also in keeping with Christianity, it is up to the churches to decide (we have long been witnesses to the great affirmative of Gabriel Marcel), but it seems to me that when Christians speak about the importance of the individual they are speaking tactically, for the grand strategy of Christian redemption permits only four alternative destinations to the individual soul which, be it never so perfectly itself, is bound to end up in Heaven, Hell, Purgatory or Limbo. And of course, if we take one step further, existentialism and Marxism diverge too, for to the Marxist individuals do not establish their own types freely, but production relations determine the collective types which they cannot but establish.

The true protagonist in all Sartre's work is Jean-Paul Sartre in search of authentic existence. Like *The Age of Reason* and *Le*

Sursis, his first novel, *La Nausée,* bears every semblance of autobiography. Sartre taught at the *lycée* in Le Havre before he went to Paris, and Le Havre is unmistakably the Bouville of *La Nausée.* In the later novels, the hero, Mathieu Delarue, is openly described as a teacher of philosophy. In *La Nausée,* Antoine Roquentin's source of income is obscure, but he is working on a piece of historical research. *The Age of Reason* and *Le Sursis* are ordinary third-person novels, though *Le Sursis* employs the Dos Passos trick of simultaneous presentation. *La Nausée* is a first-person novel with a framework in the shape of one of those prefatory notes in which the author pretends that the documents to follow came into his possession by such-and-such means. The hand of Heidegger may already be detected (it *was* detected at the time, if only by Marcel Arland). Indeed, it seems probable that, with the "nausea" of his title, Sartre meant to add a distinct mood-category to the *"Angst"* and *"Sorge"* of his master. Like Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis,* Roquentin looks into his mirror one day and discovers there a figure which sickens him. This state of nausea is clairvoyant. Not only he himself but the world in which he lives are suddenly revealed to him in all their automatic horror and meaninglessness. Antoine Roquentin in *La Nausée* does not reach the point at which by resolute decision he may transcend his mere *Dasein* and truly exist. He remains shipwrecked. *Alltäglichkeit* engulfs him. But at least he is aware of his condition. He maintains good faith with himself. What other people see in their mirrors is what they have read in the eyes of their friends. It is Roquentin's intense solitude, the fact that his world is not peopled by friends and acquaintances who create a false image of him, that enables him to be himself for himself. *La Nausee* has qualities which are found in none of the later work. Sartre's pristine intuitions are here working themselves out under a guidance which is only in part philosophical so that the book's thought is wholly integral to the writing, neither underlying it nor superimposed.

Two of the stories in *Le Mur* were translated for *Life and Letters To-day* and for an early issue of John Lehmann's *New Writing* where they bore the titles "The Wall" and "The

Room". They had previously appeared in the *N. R. F.* and *Mesures* respectively. A third, *"Intimité"* appeared in two parts in the *N. R. F.* for August and September, 1938. The other pieces in the volume are called *"Erostraté"* and "*L'Enfance d'un chef".* It would be scarcely possible to translate these unpurgated into English. In the lecture since published as L'*Existentialisme est un humanisme,* Sartre innocently pretends that he and his friends have been maligned, that there is no foundation for the belief that existentialist fiction dwells gratuitously on the sordid and painful aspects of life. He himself, he says, is not half so bad as Zola in this respect. It is not true. Sartre's early fiction has the naturalists licked. It places him with Celine and Louis Guilloux and at times seems a little quaint and old-fashioned, like the Edwardian interest in drains. Since then, Sartre has somewhat grown out of this *misérabilisme,* though he still displays a taste for gratuitous horror. At the same time, from a purely technical and aesthetic point of view, the stories in *Le Mur* all "come off" in a way in which *The Age of Reason* and *Le Sursis* do not, and this suggests that, despite all the evidences to the contrary, Sartre's natural trend is towards compression. His plays generally have more polish, more of an air of confident accomplishment, than his novels, and, with the exception *of The Flies,* they are short plays. The stories in *Le Mur* are without much plot. They are portraits of prisoners, madmen, perverts, the unhappily married, done in acid, clashing colours but without hatred. With the possible exception of the narrator of the title-piece, through whose eyes Sartre has obeyed Heidegger's injunction to stare resolutely at death and the utter solitude of a man in the face of his own death, there is no future for any of these people. They have denied their freedom and gone on repeating themselves like cracked gramophone records. *"L'Enfance d'un chef"* however, differs from the rest. It also differs from *La Nausée.* In length, it is almost a novel. Its outlines are bold. Elsewhere, Sartre has seemed to linger indulgently within the horror that he evokes. In *"L'Enfance d'un chef",* he stands clear of it, and his purpose is never in doubt. It is a political purpose. *"LEnfance d'un chef"* is a detailed study of the evolution of a Fascist. Coming upon it without any previous knowledge of its

author, one might have supposed him to be an orthodox Communist, though I cannot myself think of any particular Communist writer who could have handled the task with so much dispassionate insight. *"L'Enfance d'un chef"* stands quite apart from the rest of Sartre's work except his remarkable "Portrait of the Anti-Semite", which is not fiction, and perhaps *The Respectable Prostitute.* For the hero of this story there is no more hope than there has been for any of the others, but for its author at that moment the world lay wide open. I may perhaps note without irrelevance here that the one pupil of Sartre's I have come across myself had in fact turned out a Communist. Sartre's own views on Communism are made explicit in the discussion with M. Pierre Naville which forms the second part of L' *Existentialisme est un humanisme* and in a chapter of *The Age of Reason* in which Mathieu rejects the appeal of a friend who comes round to his flat in order to persuade him to become a Communist, and finally at great length in his recent editorials.

Leaving aside for the moment his pre-war critical essays, we come next to the two plays for which Sartre is still best known. *The Flies* was staged in Paris during the German occupation. Its political impact must have been startling, and Sartre's boldness should be remembered to his credit, to say nothing of M. Charles Dullin and the management of the Théâtre de la Cité and their credit. It is true that, in their existential significance, flies, spirits of the dead, avenging furies, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, are forces making for enslavement within the individual life. Yet this city of Argos sunk in remorse and hysterical self-reproach must also have seemed to represent the France of Pétain called by Orestes (who, like De Gaulle, returned from exile) to the difficult path of freedom, while the plague of flies itself was not at all unlike having Germans in the city.

Men without Shadows appears to have caused mass exhibitions of fainting in the auditorium when it was first produced in Paris in November, 1946. Even in cold print and primly bound, *The Flies* also has about it a quality of suffocation, as indeed have *La Nausée* and several of the stories in *Le Mur. Huts Clos* takes place in a hell represented by a Second Empire drawing-room

without egress, and the torture of its three occupants lies in the fact that they can never escape from each other's scrutiny, not even to the extent of closing their eyes or putting out the light, suffocation and uncleanliness are the physical sensations which sartre attaches to the diurnal banality and the anxious preoccupation of inauthentic human life. To the higher life of anguish in face of the void he seems to find his counterpart in a physical vertigo. Height and enclosure, the two commonest fears of childhood, are the poles of Sartre's drama of existence (or, as the band round the first volume of his collected plays now says, his '*théâtre de la liberté"),* and he plays upon them with great dexterity, if not always with logical point.

Sooner or later, the existential hero touches off an alarm by stumbling upon the trip-wires of moral law. Orestes murders Aegisthus and Clytemnestra in order to free the people of Argos from moral compulsion and the sense of guilt. He commits murder for a moral reason and thereby establishes a new law, with a possible sense of guilt attached to its non-fulfilment. The free existence may be enslaved by its fear of enslavement. Orestes exhibits a kind of ruthlessness, a decision to be hard like stone, which, in "Portrait of the Anti-Semite", Sartre condemns on the somewhat traditional ground that it is "inhuman". Similarly the artificial condition *of Huis Clos,* in which, so to say, life ended is nevertheless lived, finds no place in the existential world-picture, so that its implications are strictly meaningless.

However, what is to be found in these plays is not a completed structure of thought but the raw sensation of thinking. In our dead theatre, this alone is sufficient to produce giddiness. What are also to be found are beauties quite unconnected with the doctrine, such as the account of Agamemnon's death, put into the mouth of Zeus in the first act of *The Flies.*

It begins:

> "I was here on the great day of Agamemnon's homecoming, when the Greek fleet. . . anchored in the Nauplia roads. . . . Argos was only a small country town, basking in the sun, yawning the years away. … At sundown, on the second

day, Queen Clytemnestra came to the ramparts, and with her was Aegisthus, the present king. The people of Argos saw their faces dyed red by the sunset, and they saw them leaning over the battlements, gazing for a long while seawards. And the people thought: 'There's evil brewing'. . . . They still kept silent when they saw their king entering by the city gates. And when Clytemnestra stretched forth her graceful arms, fragrant and white as lilies, they said nothing. . . . Each was gloating in imagination over the picture of a huge corpse with a shattered face. ..."

The debt *of The Flies* to Aeschylus himself will not be missed. A debt which seems to me to have been incurred, and which I have not seen mentioned by Sartre's French critics, is one to Paul Claude], who not only translated Aeschylus, but in whose play, *Le Repos du septiéme jour*, a city plagued by the spirits of the dead, who, like flies, contaminate the people's food (and the second act of *The Flies* is a festival of the spirits of the dead), is redeemed by a king who takes upon himself the guilt of all the people. This king, moreover, descends to a hell of total sightlessness, which reminds us, if only in reverse, of the unlidded, staring eyes *of Huis Clos.* And now M. Albert Camus has given us a plague-city as the theme for a novel, half-realistic, half-Kafkaesque, in *La Peste.*

After these two plays, *The Age of Reason* and *Le Sursis* seem curiously tame. Heaven knows, it is not the choice of material, which is sensational enough. I think it is that a philosophy largely composed of violent and imaginative dramatic symbols accommodates itself with difficulty to the cosier form of the novel. Without using the word in its pejorative sense, I think we could say that post-war French existentialism is essentially theatrical. But I think we could also say that Sartre has hamstrung himself by making certain doctrinaire demands on the novel, which, he claims, in an essay on Mauriac to which we shall revert in a moment, ought to envelop its author in the majestic flow of real time or, in other words, dare to be tedious. *The Age of Reason* covers very thoroughly a period of a few days in 1938. The Spanish Civil War is burning itself out. *Le Sursis* takes in the

September crisis and Munich. The characters are embodied predicaments. Sartre has fished out of the Parisian stewpot of 1938 a number of cases of "bad faith" or of people who are "haunted" by their "being-for-other-people" and who refuse to make the leap by which they may transcend themselves and move from suffocating pre-occupation to the peaks of vertiginous anguish. Is this a wise thing to do in a novel? I think not. I think case-histories are best either listed briefly and classified in the manner of Kraft-Ebbing or examined under broad heads as in Berdyaev's *Freedom and Slavery* (and by Sartre himself in "Portrait of the Anti-Semite") or rendered in the fullest subjective detail as in *La Nausée.* I think, too, that in *The Age of Reason* Sartre has done precisely what he accuses Mauriac of doing, postulating artificial moral situations. For these homosexual archangels and Russian Peter Pans are not free. Their destiny has been as firmly fastened upon them by their author as ever Thérèse Desqueyroux's "power to poison and corrupt" was fastened on her by Mauriac.

Those who argue that the existentialists are but the Calvinists of to-day will note with pleasure that, in *The Age of Reason,* the forms of sin by which Sartre's characters enslave themselves are almost invariably sexual. At the end of the novel, Mathieu Delarue, the teacher of philosophy, takes a negative decision. He will not marry his mistress, Marcelle, who is pregnant and who in any case long ago went stale on him. Sartre's attitude to this decision appears to me to be highly ambivalent. On the whole, he seems to approve of it. It is not a true decision. Mathieu is not yet fully *engage.* Still, it will have to do for a start. One transcends oneself slowly. The individual existent must look before it leaps and learn to walk before it can run. At the same time, Sartre's conscience. appears to be uneasy. Marcelle is uncomfortably disposed of by the fact that the homosexual Daniel will marry her, partly to spite Mathieu and partly to punish himself. From the point of view of society, this meets the case and lets Mathieu out. Mauriac would have started at this point and told the story of Marcelle. Gabriel Marcel, who is the senior French existentialist and who led the way for Sartre in setting out the drama of exist-

ence upon the boards of a stage, would have argued that Daniel alone had made a decision and that life, which now opened out painfully before Daniel, had closed upon Mathieu. Sartre's emphasis is on freedom. For Marcel, that which distinguishes man from the beasts or true existence from mere life is the making and keeping of vows. After all, to be free of domestic responsibility but *engage* in political or other good works is not an unfamiliar pattern. Many old maids exemplify it. Existentialism began with Kierkegaard's negative decision not to marry Regine Olsen. To Kierkegaard, however, this was a renunciation and not a breathless escape.

The essay *"M. François Mauriac et la liberté"* I have already mentioned. It is further quoted and summarized in my book *The Double Image.* It appeared in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in February, 1939, and, together with other pieces of the same period, may be expected to reappear before these notes are printed in the volume of *Essais critiques* which Gallimard announce as being *en preparation.* It is important because it fixes from the outset Sartre's view of the novel. It condemns Mauriac for standing outside his handiwork (like God) and for composing his material too deliberately. The novelist's place, says Sartre, is inside his novel. A novelist who has come very much closer than Mauriac to presenting his characters wholly from the outside is William Faulkner. Reviewing a French translation of *Sartoris* in the *N. R. F.* for February, 1938, Sartre had already denounced this slow progression of silent gestures and occasional words as a wilful hallucination of reality. Faulkner is guilty of "disloyalty". He wishes to conceal the fact of human consciousness. "Silence. Silence outside us, silence within, it is the impossible dream of a puritanical ultra-stoicism." It is not that there is any lack of sympathy between Sartre and American novelists. Quite the reverse. Six months later, also in the *N. R. F.,* we find him concluding a review of 1919 with the confident declaration : *"Je tiens* ***Dos*** *Passos pour le plus grand écrivain de notre temps",* and indeed Sartre has confessed that at one time he rated Faulkner too with Dostoievski and Meredith, to us already a strange collocation.

But Sartre's literary criticism is never disinterested. He rejects and assimilates in the manner of one exploring possibilities for himself. In the end, what Sartre finds in each of his authors is a wrong consciousness. A right consciousness is described in a note on Husserl in January, 1939, as a bursting out of ourselves. We must be delivered from *"la vie intérieure".* Epistemology in the past has treated knowledge and consciousness as if they were processes of digestion. But now, with Husserl, we see that "everything is outside us, even ourselves". It is there that we shall discover ourselves, "on the highway, in the city, with the crowd, a thing among other things, a man among men" (just exactly what Heidegger says we are not). The last of this series of essays, *"M. Jean Giraudoux et la phtlosophie d' Aristote",* concludes with a rejection of Giraudoux's world of intelligible forms which, if carried only a little further, would lead to the total rejection of aesthetic judgments. I suspect that Sartre's philosophy does preclude aesthetic judgments. In his world there is such a thing as admirable action, but I doubt whether there is any admirable state of rest. That Heidegger never fell into a puritanical rage against images is evident from his two sensitive lectures on Holderlin, and Jaspers too has a valuable place for the "creative repose" of the artist, while for Gabriel Marcel the life of the spirit is most perfectly exemplified in our world by a poet,Rilke.

At the end of the war, with the editorials of *Les Temps Modernes,* we have left minute criticism a long way behind, but we are still on the track of right and wrong consciousnesses of the world. The first editorial, October, 1945, was an appeal to writers to stay in the world. The word *"engagé"* was formally put into currency. "Portrait of the Anti-Semite", the editorial for December, 1945, is the analysis of a contemporary (but surely not a new?) inhumanity. I do not think this document can be too widely publicized. It is, I suppose, journalism and not literature. If any vindication were needed for the right of a man of letters to do political journalism, here it is. This is journalism of the order of Zola's *"J'accuse. . . ."* In Sartre's analysis of anti-Semitism, there are clues taken from Freud and clues taken from Karl Marx, but the existentialist emphasis on freedom of choice was

needed to complete the picture. The anti-Semite has chosen his attitude, which is an attitude to the whole of life and not merely to Jews. He is the man whose alibi is his race. He is deliberately irrational. He knows perfectly well that his views will not bear examination. His hatred of the Jews is the *belle passion* which justifies the mediocrity of his life. He wants to be "pitiless stone, furious torrent,... in short, everything but a man". Yet in the last resort he is a coward. He is the man who is afraid of everything except the Jews.

I am afraid that no summary can accurately convey the richness and the suggestiveness of the argument. Luckily, the essay is available in English, having appeared in the *Partisan Review* of spring, 1946, and having been subsequently issued by the editors as a separate pamphlet. It demonstrates at any rate to me that post-war French existentialism is not only a tonic to philosophy in general but that its special contribution lies in the field of moral criticism or of what, before the word had been debased by Protestant journalism, was known as casuistry. Yet even "Portrait of the Anti-Semite" displays a weakness that was apparent in the early essay on Mauriac. Its application is insufficiently wide. It is true, Sartre says that "elsewhere it will be the Negro, the yellow race" (and that in *The Respectable Prostitute*[1] he shows American racial conflict in the same light). It is true also that he quotes the amusing story of his friend's Uncle Jules, who was an Anglophobe—an Anglophobe, too, of a type taken with absolute seriousness in *The Romance of a Poor Young Man* by the novelist

[1] A mistranslation, of course. " *Respectueux* " means " respectful". The title is not a good one in any case, but it points to the masochism by which both Lizzie and the negro half-accept the right of respectable whites to behave as they do and which apparently led a certain coloured actor, invited to appear in this play in London, to refuse, in the belief that the argument was directed against his race. But the play has been widely productive of anecdote. It is an interesting social fact that, while in London the title was gaily flaunted in large red letters, in puritanical Paris it had to be partly blocked out so that for at least eight months the *métro* was full of posters announcing a play called *La respectueuse.*

who most perfectly represented the French *bourgeoisie* of the nineteenth century. Octave Feuillet. Yet the attack could have been delivered on a wider front. It fails to hit off, for instance, the passions of English conservatism which, like all English passions, are more widely diffused and so more difficult to localize and denounce, but which on that account are no less deadly to their victims.

Of the new plays, little demands to be said. If this essay were able to be prolonged, the remaining space should be devoted not to these but to the philosophy itself on which they rest and to the six editorials under the title *"Qu'est-ce que la littérature?* which we may expect to see presently collected into a volume. *Of Men without Shadows* it seems to be worth expressing the opinion that even its original, uncut form would play well in the theatre if acting and production were flawless, but not otherwise, and that it is at any rate a good deal more edifying than the recent play in which Noel Coward uses a torture scene to further his attempt at convincing us that in this country it would not have been popular playwrights and the right wing who collaborated and who in fact rests his appeal upon just such Paretan "residues" as "Portrait of the Anti-Semite" denounced. It seems also worth pointing out that *Men without Shadows* marks a point at which Sartre's work describes its first full circle. His earliest story "The Wall" is a conscientious attempt to look at death subjectively through the eyes of a man in the condemned cell (a Spanish republican in Falangist hands, but that is neither here nor there). *Men without Shadows* is a similar exploration of wantonly inflicted physical pain (French resistants in the hands of the Militia, but that again is neither here nor there). These are abstractly chosen, universal "limit-situations", in which all men are driven to philosophize. And now to what has been said *de facto* a very little must be added *de jure.* It is not possible altogether to resist the temptation to place one's author.

The obvious comparison is with writers like Koestler, Malraux, St. Exupéry, Hemingway and perhaps Montherlant, exponents of *le courage sans la foi.* With the exception of St. Exupéry, who in *Night Flight* achieved a brief, dew-point per-

fection, I think that Sartre makes all other activist, feverishly contemporary writers look hopelessly sentimental, even when they are not attitudinizing. This is because of his philosophy, which, whether you like it or no, really is a philosophy and not just another "attitude to contemporary experience". It binds together and integrates all he writes. It is true that one's first reading of Koestler suggested utter integrity too. When I first picked up *Dialogue with Death* on a railway bookstall, I must confess that I found it as impressive as *Night Flight.* Since then, Koestler more and more produces on me the impression of a man rushing from battle-front to battle-front systematically confusing the issues. By contrast, Sartre, who emerged under what one might have felt to be doubtful auspices, is seen now to have been working from a centre that was as steady as a rock, if perhaps as ugly too.

In the philosophy itself, there are what seem to me to be weaknesses, pig-headed blindnesses and rushed conclusions. Life does not consist wholly of "limit-situations". This source of coherence and strength has also its practical disadvantages. I am not alone in wishing that Sartre were more often a mere artist. I am not alone in thinking that his best work is still, on the one hand, *La Nausée* and, on the other, *Huis Clos.* When a man is so burdensomely aware of the world around him, it is perhaps best that he should choose a remote or a fanciful theme and thereby set up a system of tension between two worlds, giving depth and complexity to what he writes and preventing it from ever being wholly resolved into conceptual terms. I think that too much art is being attempted today by people who would be better occupied in keeping journalism out of worse hands. I am not sure that journalism necessarily wears thin more quickly than art. The letters of St. Paul, the plays of Aristophanes and the sermons of John Donne were journalism. All the same, I am not sure that a point of rest is not what our age finds it most difficult to achieve and that the "inwardness" of Kierkegaard, the "creative repose" of Jaspers, the "fidelity" and the irreducible mystery of Gabriel Marcel, are not existential studies as worthy of application as the detonation of consciousness in Husserl. Over-stimulation is another name

for hysteria. And yet these cautionary generalizations are not the real answer. The real answer is supplied by a very simple practical test. Sartre is one of the very few contemporary writers by whom, for myself, I do not willingly miss a page. I am not alone in this, either. And I think at least that, in terms of brute calories, he is the most vital of our contemporaries.

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SOMERSET MAUGHAM

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LOUIS MARLOW

MY FIRST approach to Somerset Maugham as a writer was an unusual one, because it was made through what is perhaps the least regarded of his plays, *A Man of Honour,* which I saw at Cambridge well over forty years ago. This play, so I thought then and so I think now, stamps Maugham as a kinsman of Ibsen more clearly than Shaw is stamped as such by any of his plays. Nor is *A Man of Honour* the only Ibsenesque work of Maugham's. The same kind of theme and the same kind of treatment are evident in *Smith,* in *The Circle,* in *The Moon and Sixpence, The Breadwinner, The Sacred Flame,* in *The Facts of Life,* to take only the first plays and stories that come to mind. "The Golden Rule is that there is no Golden Rule." "It is just as important to know when to break the Commandments as to know when to keep them." "Circumstances alter cases." These are the maxims that may be read in much of the work of Maugham as they may be in almost all the plays of Ibsen.

In *A Man of Honour* the chief character, the "man of honour", observes the commandment that a man must "make an honest woman" of the girl he has "seduced", and the results of his honourable conduct are disastrous. In *Smith* the young man looking for a wife defies the commandment not to "marry beneath" him—a social commandment overruled in the case of the man of honour by the "superior" moral one. He marries his sister's parlourmaid, and does so with the prospects of far better results than if he had married in his own class. If his behaviour is superficially viewed, it resembles that of the man of honour, for both these men marry women who are not their social equals. But the circumstances are quite different, therefore what is wrong for the one man is right for the other. In the first play the hero makes a tragic blunder by

self-sacrificingly doing "the proper thing"; the hero of the second play acts wisely by not doing it, and he acts entirely in his own interest. The moral of each play is unmistakably Ibsenesque: "Beware of rules of thumb. Examine them in relation to the particular circumstances and reject them if the circumstances seem to you to demand it." Private judgment—the judgment which a man or woman of character can rightly exercise—is the wisest and best rule of conduct. This is an extreme, a "Left Wing" Protestant doctrine, a logical development from Protestant faith.

This particular moral aspect of Maugham as a writer has not, I think, been thrown often enough into clear relief. It is surely important, and it is a clue to other aspects of his that have been more generally noted by his readers and critics. For Maugham is a serious writer, a moral writer, strongly moved by his own rebel morality. He is a tragic writer, afflicted by human weakness, by human unhappiness, by that "human bondage" of which so much is due to human laws and codes. He is the more tragic because he has not, as Oscar Wilde had, the consolation of an irresponsible sense of comedy, nor has he Thomas Hardy's consolations of poetry and of Nature, nor the consolation of that rich zest for existence, that "life-acceptance" which perhaps only those who possess the poetic sense can fully enjoy.

Even those characters of Maugham's who are shown as rightly and to some extent successfully breaking the law, even those who most nearly triumphantly vindicate individualistic doctrine in Maugham's fiction, are not really triumphant. No word, indeed, could be less appropriate to the ultimate sense and feeling, to the upshot of any play or story that Maugham has written than any word like "triumph". It is better than if the man, or the woman, had done the other thing: that is the most one can say. In *The Circle,* as the last curtain drops, there echoes in our ears the unconsciously ironical laughter of the old man who, having blundered, believes that he has been extremely clever, and the consciously ironical laughter of the others as they hear the "downy old bird's" self-congratulations. This is our last impression, so characteristic of this writer, an impression of human folly and of

the comic irony that may make us some amends by being brought to play about it. As to the eloping Elizabeth and her paramour, they are in the right, they justify the doctrine of Maugham and of Ibsen that "what matters is what you are, not what you do". It was a mistake for the other couple, for Lord Porteous and Lady Kitty to elope—or, rather, it was more damaging in the long run to their well being for them to do so than it would have been for Lady Kitty to have stayed with her husband. But, as Elizabeth and her lover are quite a different sort of couple and their circumstances quite different, it will damage their well being less if they go *off* to Malaya together than if they give each other up. Elizabeth is very clearly informed by her young man that he does not offer happiness to her. The love that he offers is worth—or may be worth—the price she will have to pay for it. In any case, she must accept, she must pay; because of her nature, and because of his, she "can do no other". There is nothing for it, under the circumstances, but adultery.

A different commandment is broken by the mother in *The Sacred Flame.* She kills her son, knowing that it will be the worse for him if she doesn't; and the worse for her, too, for she, devoted to him, will have to witness his utter, incurable misery and devastation. He is the victim of a flying accident, legless and impotent, wholly dependent in loving faith upon his wife: when he finds her out, as he must, he will be slowly and excruciatingly tortured to death. His mother knows this and she gives him a fatal dose of his sleeping-draught. She is right, things being as they are, but neither she nor anyone else has cause for exultation. For this reason, too, we are reminded of Ibsen's plays.

"That man most nobly lives and nobly dies Who keeps the laws himself has made," or something like it, was written by Richard Burton; and in those lines is the kind of exultation that is never to be found in the work of Maugham, who thinks exactly the same. Again and again, in his plays and short stories and novels, unhappiness, relieved by irony, is in the end dominant; most notably, perhaps, in *Of Human Bondage,* the first book of his to gain him what might be called a literary reputation, and certainly one of the unhappiest tales that he ever told. But in *The Moon*

and Sixpence and in *The Breadwinner,* although the conduct of Strickland and of the other stockbroker husband and father undoubtedly caused their commonplace and unadmirable families discomfort and some minor unhappiness, the stories are not tragic or in the main even unhappy. They are ironical, of course, or they would not be Maugham's, but the irony is of a milder sort as in the accounts given of the attempt to bring Strickland to a sense of his duty soon after his flight to Paris, and of the biography of him written by his clergyman son. Strickland, however, is more nearly triumphant than any of Maugham's heroes: at any rate his art triumphs in being brought to life and to achievement and in its so complete justification of his desertion of his family. The "bread-winner" is quite another case. He is an average man, his only distinction being that he has the moral courage to live the life he wants to live, which is not the life of a stockbroker bound daily to his office so that he may provide gentility and comfort for his wife and children, but the life of a *rentier* travelling abroad and seeing the world in a modest way on a part of the money that he reserves for himself from his capital, while his family live, much more modestly than they care to, on the larger part reserved for them. The bread-winner is nothing like so unscrupulous as Strickland, he has not the same cause to be so and he is a "decent fellow"; but he is condemned by the public opinion of the world he lives in as a scoundrel or a lunatic, or both. No one can understand the "rider" that he makes on Ibsen's doctrine that "a woman has the right to live her own life, to realize herself:" "If a woman, then why not a man?" Just as Nora Helmer would have been understood or even condoned if she had left her husband and children for another man, so the bread-winner would have been understood, he would have found some furtive sympathy, if he had left his family for another woman. And the same applies of course to the hero *of The Moon and Sixpence,* notwithstanding the difference of his motives and his character. It is a Strindberg inversion of Ibsen that appears here too.

The Facts of Life is the lightest in treatment and in substance of all Maugham's distinctively Ibsenesque works of fiction. A youth acts in defiance of his father's wise advice: he gambles, he

gets mixed up with a loose woman, he lends money, and these adventures bring him nothing but pleasure and profit. He comes out top, everything ends most agreeably and amusingly, but "triumphantly" would be too strong a word for it. The boy is, rather, "cockawhoop", and well he may be.

No less than Shaw, then, certainly no less though very differently, may Maugham be said to be in the tradition of the great Norwegian dramatist; but of course such a discipleship or heritage, interesting and significant though it is, would not by itself have brought either Shaw or Maugham his fame. *A Man of Honour,* though deriving so clearly from Ibsen, did not succeed because it had no more than a small measure of those other qualities for which Maugham's later plays are distinguished. It had not wit enough, nor a sharp enough irony, nor enough force of dramatic effect. It is an able play, not a brilliant one: it might even be classed among the better of those dull, able plays not infrequently to be seen in experimental theatres. And Ibsen's doctrine is not in itself generally acceptable; it needs high excellencies of dramatic art and of irony or wit to make its presentment palatable to most playgoers or readers of fiction. The average man or woman does not break the commandments, or breaks them at the wrong time and with the wrong results: he or she does not like to be reminded of that, and those who are more weak than strong (the majority) are likely to be intensely irritated by propaganda for an individualist "anarchy" upon which only the strong can rightly act.

When he wrote *A Man of Honour* Maugham had not developed his powers, so he could not "get away with" a play on such a theme. He is not what is called "a born writer": "a made writer" is what he has called himself. His early work—even *Liza of Lambeth* and certainly the books of the period of *The Merry-go-Round*—has little or nothing to distinguish it from the forgotten work of many other writers of that time. Later, when he began to write well, the critics were unfair to him for two reasons: they were prejudiced by their memories of his early faults and, more importantly, they did not want to believe that a writer of such popular plays could possibly have any literary merit. There were

three plays of his running successfully in the West End at the same time, he must be making a lot of money, he could not be anything but a cheap-jack. This was Maugham's second phase; the phase of his first success as a playwright, the time when he became well known, and it was also the time when the critics contemptuously described his work as "near-beer", or, if they knew enough French, as *"faux-bon".* His style, they said, was undistinguished, his characterization superficial, he was cheaply cynical and he was unduly preoccupied by sex.

Such deprecation of Maugham in orthodox literary circles continued even after the publication of *Of Human Bondage* some six years later, in 1915. It was "as much as one's literary life was worth", even during most of the inter-war period, to praise Maugham's writings. As a lecturer, I well remember what grave suspicions of my critical faculties were aroused by my saying that I thought he was worth more than Galsworthy, Bennett, or Barrie. In a comparatively recent book of his—I think *The Summing Up*—he has good-humouredly observed that clever young men don't write essays about him. There is this, however, to be said in apology for his deprecatory critics: Maugham as a playwright had deliberately given the public what they wanted at the end of the first decade of the century—light, amusing, epigrammatic, trivial comedies, rather French, with a touch of the manner of Wilde. He wanted to establish himself, to get known and to get the money that he needed so that he could be free to write as he wanted to write. "I'll give them what they want now," he is reported to have said, "but, when I can, I'll write to please myself and then I'll let them have it!" Perhaps he never said anything of the sort; but the words are prophetic of the catcalls and booing that broke from resentful members of the audience when *The Circle* was put on many years later.

Maugham is now seventy-four, and after the age of seventy every English writer, who has written enough, automatically becomes respectable. He is then respected for his achievement and forgiven for whatever offences he may have committed against the proprieties, against "good taste", or against orthodoxy of any kind. Maugham has now lived down the offence that he

gave by what appeared as such distasteful blemishes or indiscretions to the critics and readers of past years. He is no longer rebuked for cynicism, for unromantic and discomfiting treatment of women and of the sexual impulse; and the highbrows have forgiven him for having made so much money. His material success, since it started about forty years ago, no longer means that he must be an inferior writer.

What, then, is posterity likely to think of him? Will he be some part of the life of the future? That is, will he enter into the lives of unborn readers, whether of many or few in each successive generation, as the greater writers of the past enter into our lives? No writer can do this unless, by virtue of his vision of life and his power of expressing it, he gives something that no one else can. The purely popular dramatists and story-tellers may win contemporary fame and so may second-rate or third-rate writers of recognized "literary merit"; but, after they are dead, other writers of equal facility or talent will oust them because they will satisfy much better the changed tastes, highbrow or lowbrow, of their period. What keeps writing alive is not necessarily those qualities that were chiefly responsible for its appeal to the public that first acclaimed it. An author may lack any real strength of separate identity and may yet, for one accidental reason or another, be eminently successful in his own day. But if he has his own separate feeling for human tragedy or comedy, for the passions, for character, or for Nature; if he has his own poetry or irony or wit or humour, if he has originality in depth, no matter with what trend or bias, then he will continue to be of interest. He will have a tested value and he will become a "classic", if no more than a minor classic like Suckling, Beddoes, or Smollett, supposing that he has limited scope.

It may be that Maugham would himself deprecate any claim upon posterity. Another reported saying of his is that he was under no illusions about his position as a writer: "I know just where I stand: in the very front row of the second-rate ones." Also that "I haven't more talent than the next man, but I have more character." Whether or not Maugham denies that he possesses exceptional talent, he certainly is not anxious to be

described as a man of genius. Once, when a young admirer had been eulogizing him to his face and saying a good many things about his "genius", the unresponsive looks of his host gave him pause, and then, more warily, he said something about "craftsmanship". " 'Craftsmanship'," Maugham repeated, "yes, that's more like it." For this I can vouch as I was there.

It would be idle to endeavour to decide whether this writer has or has not genius: the readers of the future will be better able to judge of that, and their judgments may vary as posterity's judgments sometimes do. But it may be said now and with some conviction that, if Maugham does think himself a second-rate writer with no unusual talent, if he thinks himself a mere craftsman, he is wrong. The individual quality of his best work is unmistakable; no one else could have written it. It is recognizable as his by a paragraph, even sometimes by a sentence. His ironic effects are especially unmistakable; they are different from those of any other writer because they are led up to in a different way, and, when they come, they come communicated with the very tone of their contriver, Nor is his sense of tragedy less his own inalienable property. It is tragedy that is not redeemed or purged by poetry, it has no heightening and brings no liberation: it is sheer unhappiness, sheer loss; it is, in fact, tragedy as most men and women know it, but is there any other living English writer who has shown the same sense of this usual kind of misery? Writers of other countries and of past generations come to mind—de Maupassant, Gissing—but their vision is different, they give different effects. In *The Painted Veil*—though this is not one of his best books—the wretchedness of Kitty remains unforgettable because the sense of it is stamped with Maugham's identity; and the sorrow of Mrs. Hamlyn in the short story called *P. & O.* stays in the memory for the same reason, so do the anguish and frustration of Eva in *For Services Rendered.*

Like some other writers of exceptional faculties, Maugham is able to identify himself with his women characters and, discarding male tolerance of women's faults, he does this with an effect that used to shock people who prided themselves on their chivalrous regard for the fair sex. The effect was likely to startle

anybody, because it was new, or, at least, Maugham's "interior" view of women was new to most earlier twentieth century readers. He makes especially clear certain sexual realities of women and the profound differences between these realities and those of men, clashing differences inevitably involving antagonisms, so that women and men, seen under this light as animals of two different species, must become enemies. Other writers have exhibited the same conflict, but not in Maugham's way; not with the same identification of the writer with the sexual nature of women, not with the same realistic, logical sense of all that the conflict involves. More remarkable, perhaps, than any other disclosure that Maugham makes about women is his disclosure of their physical sexual appetites, of that female lust which all respectable men in Victorian and even in Edwardian times refused to believe had any existence. There is, I think, no writer who gives quite the same impression of inside information on this matter as Maugham does, who is able to convince us in the same way that this is really how women feel when they are under erotic stress, differentiating their feelings so sharply from the feelings of men in the same case; and the reason why he convinces thus is because he seems to be writing not from the observation that a man might make in experience with a responsive woman, but from the experience of the woman herself. He seems to possess the special knowledge of the gynecologist, a gynecologist who has the rare ability to, as it were, "become" his patients. Maugham's medical training and practice may partly account for his intimacy with the feelings of women as it may partly account for his psychological observation in general. As with Chekhov and Schnitzler we not infrequently feel that it is a doctor's observation, professional, experienced, and seemingly callous, of human nature, male and female.

Another reason why Maugham's intimations of the erotic emotions of women are so unlike the usual intimations given in plays and novels is that he is not a romantic any more than he is a sentimentalist: he does not allow romantic or sentimental glamour to interfere with physical realities either by heightening them or by falsifying them. Even Elizabeth in *The Circle* is not in

love in the full romantic sense; she is not a romantic girl. Nor is any one of Maugham's women romantic. They are passionate, they can be tender, or they can be sentimental with their sentimentalism satirically viewed, but there is no authentic poetry in them, they do not "smite the high chill air with flame".

It used to be—perhaps it still is—a fairly common complaint against Maugham that he does not appreciate the better qualities of women; that he presents women as callous, brutal, selfish, vain, silly, trivial, mendacious and unscrupulous, ("Not more unscrupulous than most women," Lady George in *Our Betters* defends herself) and there is no doubt that he does present such women, no doubt that he is what is called "disillusioned" about the sex. But few better, more unselfish—or, indeed, more saintly—women can be found in modern fiction than the nuns in *The Painted Veil,* and they are not the only good women depicted by this writer. There is Mrs. Ardsley in *For Services Rendered,* that good woman who is also a woman of good sense, of strength of character, and of fortitude, which Maugham prizes perhaps more highly than any other virtue. There is the mother in *The Sacred Flame,* there are minor characters such as Mrs. Hamlyn, and there is Rosie in *Cakes and Ale,* Rosie the most attractive and the most refreshing of all Maugham's women, a comedy figure but an intrinsically good woman none the less, one of those whom one would wish multiplied through every country so as to make the world a happier place. Kitty in *The Painted Veil,* Leslie in *The Letter,* are by no means wholly good or admirable women; but they are portrayed with humane sympathy as well as with understanding, especially Kitty in the later part of the book.

Maugham, like Joseph Conrad, shows strong distaste for much that is to be found in Western life and ideas and standards; European and American women seem to him, as they did to Conrad, in many respects de-feminized and therefore spoilt: inferior, in certain essential qualities, to the women of the East who not only make their men happier but are happier themselves, less discontented, even under what seem to us to be very bad conditions of life, because their basic demands as women are satisfied. Maugham's affinity with Eastern thought and with the

Eastern way of life is clearly enough shown in most of his later stories and in his play *East of Suez.* It has been recently said that he is part hermit and part man of the world. Perhaps the reason for this is that as a writer of fiction he has had to be concerned with a world that on the whole he dislikes: while taking part in the life of this Western world, while moving in it and observing it, even while being greatly interested in it, he has had the evident impulse to escape.

This writer's preoccupations with and attraction to Eastern philosophy and religion appeared as unexpectedly, even startlingly strong in his comparatively recent novel *The Razor's Edge,* a book that must have caused some revision of the opinion of those who had persisted in believing him a complete materialist. In his earlier days he may have been that; but his later and long continued Eastern contacts, his increasing awareness of Eastern spiritual thought and practice, could hardly have failed to challenge his materialism and, at the very least, to modify it. Ten years or more before he wrote *The Razor's Edge* he had written *Sheppey,* and that play is based upon a strong sense of spiritual values. Sheppey, trying to be a literal Christian, is overcome by the world, but he saves his soul. Maugham has said that *For Services Rendered* is his only propagandist play, and it is the only play of his that bears evident marks, indeed too evident, of propagandist intention and design. But in a broader or looser sense many of his plays are propagandist, and surely *Sheppey* may be considered as propaganda against Western materialism.

Formerly current criticisms of Maugham can hardly, therefore, carry the weight that once they seemed to carry. To anyone who knows his work as a whole, he cannot now appear as a woman-hater, a brutal cynic, a sufferer from sex-obsession, a drear materialist. Nor does he appear as nothing more than an exceptionally clever craftsman in the arts of the novel and play and short story. It was perhaps his craftsmanship almost as much as his success that prejudiced former critics against giving him the distinguished place that he has long since deserved in contemporary literature. He was too good a craftsman, they seem to have thought, to be anything more. It was easy to dismiss him (as he

has seemed modestly disposed to dismiss himself) to that lower rank, with perhaps some justifying reflections upon his remoteness from those wayward, faulty, blundering men of genius of whom Browning's Andrea said that "There burns a truer light of God in them, In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain . . . than goes on to prompt This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine".

A quite recent criticism of Maugham is one that has more substance. It has been said that he defaces his writing with "clichés", that he is more and more exclusively concerned with the execution of his story and with its consequent effect; that he is becoming more and more commonplace in his phraseology and in his style. In or behind this there is some truth, although Maugham has again and again shown and continues to show that he is capable of a drastic pungency of expression that is very much his own. But he has always fought shy of literary mannerisms, was always on his guard against "fine writing", has always taken care not to ride the literary high-horse. When he began to write, preciousness, literary affectation, decorativeness, style with a good deal of nonsense about it, were special dangers for young writers. ("Should power of inspiration from Parnassus' heights be esteemed as sole criterion, then were the Laureate Crown for Mr. Swinburne's head alone. But a republican singer could hardly, with grace, wear a Crown Queen-given.") Young writers, trying to copy Wilde and Pater, often made fools of themselves; and Maugham would, I think, have always been very much alive to the risk of ridicule on the score of pretentious or pseudo-poetical writing. His preference for Hazlitt as opposed to Lamb or to de Quincey is significant. Then, again, he is a playwright, and it is impossible for a playwright to give the impression of reality unless he makes his characters talk in an ordinary way, using a certain number of "cliches". This is also true of the novelist, but dialogue is not the greater part of a novelist's work, so he does not get so much into the habit as the playwright does of writing down trite expressions which may affect his own style.

That Maugham, like everyone else, has the defects of his qualities no one, least of all himself would seek to deny, His

occasional flatness is the defect of his great virtue of economy, of despatch. His "dryness" cuts both ways. He is so restrained and so well disciplined that we may find ourselves wishing that he would sometimes let himself go for a change. But no criticism can be more unfair or impertinent than criticism of a writer of notable qualities for his deficiency in qualities that it is not in his nature to possess. This is criticism of him for not being another kind of writer. William Somerset Maugham is not a stylist nor a romantic; sometimes, because of a lack of zest and sap, he would seem to "write down" life, to take a lower view of it than the life-lover would think justified; his relish, his amusement, are nearly always oddly reticent and subdued; nor is there eloquence in his writings, certainly not that poetic eloquence with its magical, strange release and overflow. In a sense he may be called "earth-bound", although not only *The Razor's Edge* and *Sheppey* but other indications scattered through his work are a warning against the use of such a word without important reservations. What is certain is that he could have attained neither his reputation nor his popularity—it means a great deal when a disillusioned and "depressing" writer comes to be widely read—if it had not been for his firm possession of the much more than compensating qualities of his defects. He is not only a craftsman of surpassing excellence, both as playwright and as novelist, and a master of the short story—some would say the only living English master; he is a realist with his own barb, an ironist with his own "tragic terseness" and with his own feeling for comedy; he has wit of his own, humour of his own, and his own veracity in portraying character; and he is among the most cogent individualists of our time, one who has modernized the doctrine of Ibsen and given it a new force.

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MULK RAJ ANAND

★

JACK LINDSAY

THE problems for an Indian writer to-day are acute enough. A vast land with enormous diversity of custom caught up in a gigantic process of change after having had its development arrested for centuries by an alien power and directed along narrow choked channels; a medley of social and cultural conflicts reaching from those of tribal levels to those of advanced monopoly-production. . . . The simplest catalogue could go on for pages. A writer, for instance, is confronted at once by questions of idiom, script and language. Thus, Premchand himself, the popular Hindustani author, wrote most of his early work in Persian script, then turned to Hindustani in the Devnagari script; and the problem of varying languages and dialects is complicated by the relation of the whole Indian complex to the English language and culture. Inevitably English, so long the medium of the dominant political stratum, has left all sorts of impresses; and the relation of India to European traditions and developments is primarily posed as a relation to English.

A writer like Mulk Raj Anand, who has set himself simultaneously to express Indian culture and to interpret that culture to England, has a particularly complicated set of strains and stresses to overcome. His extreme importance lies in the fact that he has substantially succeeded in his task, and has become the first Indian in the creative field to do so—since Tagore's reputation in England bore little connection with his genuinely great achievement in Bengali literature. In dealing with Anand we are therefore concerned not only with his creative work for its own intrinsic merits but also with the wider issues it raises of the relations between the new Asiatic cultures and European traditions,

Born in 1905, Anand grew up in a situation which gave him an excellent chance to see and absorb as much as any single person could of the swarming Indian scene—its varying local group-forms and ways of life articulated together to produce something like a comprehensive national picture. For his father, an hereditary craftsman in copper, silver and bronze, left his native town of Amritsar and joined the British Army. As the regiment was transferred from place to place, Anand in his early years saw a great many sections of Indian life, and at the same time was Drought into contact with Europeans, the officers and men of the army. Through his father he gained the traditional pieties of craft and brotherhood, and was taught by him to read and write. Through his mother he was nourished with the songs, tales, myths and epics of the village-community. And the fact that he grew up in a family making the transition from village-life to accommodation with English ways (as expressed in the ideas and techniques of the army) enabled him to develop from his personal experience a full sense of the tensions at play throughout Indian society.

Amid these conflicting influences his eager mind sought a point of rest. Driven by the need of self-expression he wanted to harmonize the discordant voices, to master and understand. He wanted to hold fast to the warm rich tradition handed on to him by father and mother, yet to learn what he could from the English —to absorb the secrets of the dominant strangers without failing to keep faith with his own people. In these early pressures on the keen warm-hearted child we touch what has remained for Anand at all phases of development the key-question. The external pressures were taken within and transformed into spiritual tensions, the basis of a continually-renewed discipline of organic development. Anand has never lost, and never will lose, his restless curiosity about European ways of life and thought, his friendly readiness to find and accept the good wherever it happens

to be; but at the same time he has never ceased, and never will cease, from valuing all his finds in terms of Indian needs and possibilities. He achieves in his personality the unusual mixture of boundless tolerance and good-fellowship together with an unceasing sense of sharp revolutionary pressures.

The years of his youth, however, were dark days, thick with violences, which put every possible difficulty on his struggle for understanding. Every movement he made brought him one way or another up against the hard edges of power clamped down over India's mind, India's simplest bodily need. "And I turned in on myself," he said to me, describing those years, "feeding upon my own lifeblood in the obscure lanes and alleys of towns and villages; and reaching out beyond myself, I found that there were others as well, others struggling to realize the life that was in them and the life that was India." How could a lad of his generous temper not feel himself entirely identified with the people he found so hopelessly oppressed, starving and preyed-on and yet preserving their deep brotherly love? He struggled with them in that murky hell. "And there could be no worse hell than that of India under the Rowlatt Act passed in 1919. In it I fought for my life, along with my companions, fought for the right to be myself, through long illnesses brought about by the savage government floggings during the days of martial law in Amritsar." One of his short stories gives a clear picture of the kind of terror under which intellectual advance was achieved. It tells of a youth who is trying to read a book by Gorky and is afraid of being arrested for owning forbidden literature; he keeps on trying to get alone, and then, just as he is getting down to the book, a mere knock on the door shatters him.

Those were the conditions in which Anand struggled on to master the two worlds, that of Indian lore and brotherly warmth, and that of European culture with its background of science. He came through, reached England, and gained a doctorate of philosophy. Working on a thesis about Hume and his contemporaries, he won that control of Western philosophic method which has enabled him to get Indian culture into a fuller focus, while his unabated loyalty to India's cause meant that the fuller

focus did not involve distortion or denial of all that was vital in his national heritage.

About 1930 he started *off* on a series of novels, planned on Balzacian lines, in which, when completed, was to be revealed the involved pattern of Indian life, its movement into new unities, new complexities, under the pressures of history. His European view gave him the strong sense of general contours, of general conflicts and necessary resolutions; his Indian sensibility was resolved to express this general scheme of movement without losing a whole-hearted sympathy with people as they were, people carrying on a long, rich tradition but at the time same transforming it under the broad pressures. He wanted the large clarifying grasp of historical pattern, but in terms of individual lives, so that the movement from point to point would never be schematic but would embrace the full human factors of resistance and conflict, union and re-integration.

II

He began carefully with one small section of the Indian scene. To test out his method, he took as theme one day in the life of an out-caste, one of the untouchables. Bakha, this lad, has worked at cleaning latrines in the barracks, and the British privates are the first persons outside his own caste who treat him as a human being; the result is a shock which makes him reconsider what he has previously accepted as a fixed and natural order of things. (Thus, by showing in one small case the unintended but inevitable effect of British rule in dissolving the fixed caste or feudal relations which in other ways it has wished to preserve as the basis of its power, Anand reveals at the outset his mastery of method—his capacity to define the general in the particular.) Not that Bakha is led at once to a direct revolt; Anand never oversimplifies the development of character. What has happened is that Bakha adores the soldiers and feels that some new sort of status has been acquired with the suit of old European clothes he has begged from the barracks. Still the virus of change is at work in his being.

A number of things happen to Bakha on this one day, all of which contribute slowly to the changes in his spirit. He goes into town to sweep the gullies and beg food. He chances to jostle a little Hindu merchant, and is beaten and abused. A priest seduces his sister; and when Bakha peeps into the temple to see what is happening, calls out "Defiled, defiled!" His father tells him how once, when he, Bakha, lay ill with fever, he couldn't go into the chemist's to buy medicine for fear of defiling the place, and had to stand in the road asking passers to fetch the medicine for him. All these episodes conspire to crush Bakha's confidence, to force him back into his hopeless caste-position and make him dimly but poignantly feel the forces determined to keep him there.

But amid all these brutal setbacks he keeps on meeting people who have what they think is a solution for the caste-problem. First, an English missionary tells him that Jesus does not recognize caste and that He died specially so that Bakha might be forgiven. All this is gibberish to Bakha, who, however, hangs about in the hope of getting a pair of white trousers. Then the advent of the missionary's wife with painted and powdered face scares him into running *off.* He gets entangled in a crowd waiting for Gandhi, and is impressed by hearing people say that Gandhi is a saint, an incarnation of Vishnu and Krishna. Then Gandhi arrives in his Rolls Royce through flowers and flags; a hymn is sung; Gandhi says that the sweepers are men of god and must keep themselves pure by eating only the right food and refusing the leavings of others. Bakha is more confused than ever, since if he refused the food thrown to him for latrine-jobs he would starve. However, in the crowd he hears a poet remarking that water-closets and a proper drainage system would simply eliminate the whole untouchable problem. Bakha goes home to the out-castes' quarter thinking about this wonderful machine that "can remove dung without anyone having to handle it".

Even a summary gives some idea of the skill with which Anand interweaves his themes and shows the gradual confused emergence in the lad's mind of a critical faculty, a scared but persisting sense of new human values. What provides the unity is the deep simple note of love; Bakha never becomes more than the facts of the

situation warrant, but he is realized subtly from within, and the small trembling advances of his spirit are surely recorded. The whole picture is irradiated by a sympathetic warmth; and the kaleidescopic movement of colour, sight, touch, sound, invoking the Indian scene, is linked throughout with the movement of Bakha's mind. One false note would kill the whole thing dead, but there is no false note.

Untouchable is a slight work, yet revealing great sources of strength. In his next work Anand took a much wider canvas. Munoo, a country-lad, is drawn down from the hill, step by step, into the mills of Bombay. What happens to him has all the improvised character of a set of chance-contacts and odd environmental pressures; but when we finish the book, we realize that the set of accidents add up to a remorseless historical pattern, and Munoo has become the typical peasant dragged by forces he cannot understand into the industrial machine. Again Anand's capacity to express the general through the particular is brilliantly vindicated. Munoo gets his first job as a servant in the house of a babu in a small town. Ceaseless abuse from his distracted and discontented mistress makes him run off. Hiding under the seat in a train, he reaches the nearest city and is taken up by the part-owner of a pickle-factory. After a year his patron is swindled by the other partner, arrested for debt, and beaten up by the police. Munoo works as a market-porter, sleeping in the streets; gets friendly with an elephant-driver and stows away in a circus-train; arrives inBombay and joins with a village-family come up to work in the cotton-mills. He shares their wretched existence till the mills go on short time, which means a reduction for the coolies from semi-starvation to impossible distress. They hold a mass-meeting to decide on a strike, but the agents of the police provoke a communal riot, and the issue is side-tracked.

Up to this point the book is masterly, and the different levels of Indian middle-class society through which Munoo moves as he is being drawn into the industrial sink are expressed excellently through richly individualized types. After the abortive strike, however, Munoo is knocked down by the car of Anglo-Indian Mrs. Mainwaring, who takes him off to Simla as an over-indulged

servant, and he dies of tuberculosis. This episode does not have the organic quality of the previous phases of Munoo's development, and could be omitted with gain to the book. But, taken by and large, *Coolie* shows the warm sympathetic method of *Untouchable* admirably expanding to take in a much wider arc of the social scene.

The next book, *Two Leaves and a Bud,* tells of peasants decoyed into indentured labour on an Assam tea-plantation. Bakha and Munoo were shown as detached individuals drawn into the entanglement of forces which are changing Indian life from the roots upwards; in Munoo the Indian peasant confronts but does not yet understand the money-power which is breaking up the feudal bases. With his third novel Anand sought to grapple directly with the theme of conflict as a group-experience and to use a method enabling him to pass from group to group, from individual to individual inside the thickening conflict-pattern. The result is largely a failure, though there are many good things in the book and the climax has deep ironic pathos. The panicked whites have the workers shot down, though the latter have no intention of using force and merely want to state their case; and the European who tries to cross the barrier is the person who precipitates the disaster. The book helps one to realize something of the reality of the Ghandhist non-resistance movement, where the passivity is religiously alive with the deep warm "togetherness" of a folk who own a long memory of peaceful co-operative ways. It fails to achieve the comprehensive dramatic grip at which it aims, but it releases some of Anand's finest lyrical writing.

III

At this point, to get Anand's work and its aims into perspective, it is necessary to have some idea, however rough, of the Indian Novel before him. One may pick out the main stages of that Novel in terms of four important novelists, each of whom has made a definite contribution. Bankim Chatterjee, Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, and Premchand.

E

The first Chatterjee developed the folk-romance into the novel. (This generalization may stand; though if we take the whole Indian scene, we find he had companions in men like Rashid-ul-Khairi and Nazir Ahmed; and Sarshar in his vast bombinating *Fisana-i-Azad* linked social satire and characterization with a tangle of folk-elements, humours and fantasies.) Chatterjee is an historical romancer deeply concerned with old myth and with religious cult, and so with the inherited sanctities of Indian life. To a large extent he ardently preached conventional morality and lacked artistic detachment. But he founded the Bengali novel. His work shows an awareness of deep stirring forces that threaten to wrench Indian life away from its old moorings, though his reply is by a backwards-looking defence of the old sanctions at all costs. In his *Krishna Kanter Will* he depicts a lovely, kindly, intelligent woman who leaves home for love; such an act means that for him she becomes a worthless harlot and he relentlessly drives her through degradation to death.

Tagore carried on from Bankim Chatterjee, but brought a new humanizing breadth of outlook to bear on the material. He attacks conventional morals and seeks a revaluation; he wants to throw overboard the old sanctions when they are hopelessly compromised with social injustice and cruelty. Language becomes supply expressive in his hands; and a new wealth of varying planes of perception is added to Indian literature, born of Tagore's new universalism, his effort to absorb valuable elements of European culture without weakening the specific Indian attitudes and values.

Out of Tagore in many ways comes Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, who grew up in a Bengal border-town and then worked in Burma—"at the time a seething cauldron of Indian life. Every province and every social type was represented there. Persons who in India were far removed in space, time and beliefs were suddenly thrown together and compelled to enter into a common corporate life." He thus became the novelist of India in the throes of sudden violent change which was breaking up all the old sanctions and so far putting very life in their place. This second Chatterjee was the first fully professional writer in Bengal, and

this fact helped to give him his new focus on social and personal issues. He felt an intense sympathy for his fellows, his readers, who like him were caught up in changes over which they had so little control. Though a keen participator in the Non-Co-operation Movement of 1921 and the Civil Disobedience of 1930, he was not a political novelist in any primary sense; his best work is concerned with the moral issues confronting the uprooted individual. He has a strong love for the broken, the rejected. "His revolutionary urge widened the sympathy and imagination of Chatterjee. … It made him seek human values and dignity in those whom society has discarded. Even rakes and prostitutes, vagabonds and drunkards have elements of innate nobility in their character. . . . (And) if even the fallen and the outcaste have in them a hidden greatness, what about men and women in the lower walks of life?" Morally, Chandra Chatterjee is thus flatly opposed to Bankim Chatterjee; he was the first writer in Bengal who insisted that a woman who transgressed the sexual code wasn't necessarily a lost soul; in fact, he declared, she might well be one of the finest of human beings. [1]

But though in many ways morally and socially revolutionary, Sandra Chatterjee has his strong conservative elements; he is afraid of the falling-away of sanctions, which he sees going on all round, and except for his general feeling of worth in human beings he has no notion what system is to supplant that in decay. There is thus a set of strong cross-currents in his work, though he seeks to find a stable element, a power of love, in the Indian woman, which will ultimately control the situation. His "men are eccentric and egocentric, while normality and tenderness characterize his women."

With Premchand we go a step further into the depths of change. As a writer he falls below Sandra Chatterjee; too often he finds himself submerged inside the tumult of his material; but if he had been able to extend Chatterjee's literary virtues in the way he extended his material, he might have become the Gorky of India.

[1] Quotations about S. C. Chatterjee are from Humayun Kabir's book (Bombay, 1942); for Premchand I have drawn on Gopal's book (Lahore, 1944): both works I have found very useful.

However, even at the lowest evaluation, his work is of considerable importance. After him the serious Indian writer must face up to the full issues of his world; and some account of his themes is relevant here.

Premchand was politically in many ways a mouthpiece of the Gandhi movement. Like Chandra Chatterjee, he seeks in women the clue to the meaning of the break and the renewal in Indian life. His *Sevasdan* deals with a high-spirited girl who wants her ill paid clerk husband to take bribes, because she feels that the world is based on corruption and one must conform. She envies her neighbour Bholi, a prostitute, and ends by deciding to adopt prostitution; but after being turned out, she realizes her error, becomes a dancing-girl and remains chaste. In *Nirmala* the girl-wife, after much self-sacrifice finds her husband an accomplice in political dacoity, leaves him and dedicates her life to service in the family of one of his victims.

In *Rangabhumi* and *Karmabhumi,* and above all in *Godan,* he turns to wider scenes of struggle; in *Karmabhumi* the theme of woman's plight is directly linked with the political struggle. Munni, raped by British soldiers, feels that she must sever herself from her husband and son as a polluted thing; she becomes a symbol of national honour; mass-meetings are held; and it is women, Nina and Sukhda, who lead the campaign. In a sense, the destruction of Munni, the old type of pure woman, leads through her devotion to the release of new forces in the Indian woman. In *Godan,* influenced by Soviet developments, Premchand grapples with the lot of the peasant, right at the core of conflict, and in the characters of Hori and his wife Dhaniya he achieves his finest work. Here we meet the peasant in all his fullness, struggling to maintain himself in a welter of old forms turned to corruption. The main action centres round the act of the village-council in putting a heavy fine on Hori for sheltering a girl whom his son has got with child. The council, instead of expressing the co-operative will of the village, has become the instrument of the men with money, who bleed the village without mercy.

In this book, which comes nearest of all his work to an artistic success, Premchand has gone beyond Gandhist attitudes, and in

the character of Rai Sahib exposes the nationalist capitalist who has courted jail in the satyaghraha movement, goes in for philanthropy, prides himself on being a radical thinker and even flirts with socialism, yet is also a time-serving cheat, who is ready to exact even forced labour. He beats the council at their own game, recognizes the injustice inflicted on Hori, and gets the fine handed over to himself.... Hori himself is a true peasant, drawn in the round with all his flaws as well as his saving virtues. A typical scene is that in which he and his wife go to the pregnant girl, resolved to tell her off and give her no aid; but the nearer they come to her, the less they can sustain their resolve with its underlying fears of a worsened economic position. Hori can only say, "Fear nothing, dear daughter. This is your home."

IV

Anand's position can be grasped only if we see the way in which his work resumes where these writers left off. Bankim Chatterjee turned folk-romance into novel, and despite his narrow outlook achieved something of a sense of historical perspective. The turmoil inside traditional India looks back to ancient roots and yet is driven to face up to a new world, to basically new needs. Tagore gave philosophical and humanistic breadth, the necessary first stages of detachment and implication in the process of building the new man. Chandra Chatterjee went down into the struggle, into something like the full human condition of his broken struggling world. With Premchand the struggle dominated; the sense of unity with the suffering masses was too strong to permit the development of an adequate art-form, but the in flux of new material showed the lines on which the new formative stage must work.

With Anand all these elements are brought together and transformed inside a highly personal creative talent. He resumes Tagore's philosophic universalism in terms of the enormously intensified struggle of values revealed by Sandra Chatterjee and Premchand,

Having overstrained his powers somewhat in *Two Leaves,* he turned back to the familiar earth of the Punjabi village; and secure on that foundation set to work to build an ambitious epical structure—a trilogy dealing with the life of the peasant Lal Singh. To regain close contact, he goes back to the days of his own youth, to the tales of his father, and starts off in the years before 1914. Lalu is a sensitive lad who early comes into collision with the codes and customs of the village. Obscurely stirred by forces which he cannot grasp, he detaches himself from the old ways in decay and sees only the backward side. His intuitive rebelliousness leads him into various scrapes; he becomes a boy-scout and feels his ego unstably enhanced; he is caught playing with the landlord's daughter Maya; he is framed for a theft he never committed and flees. At last he joins the army. Though his enlistment apparently comes as the final step in a series of accidents, he is fated to attempt it; for in no other way can he re-live his brief moment of superiority as a boy-scout and break through the narrow peasant-mesh into that contact with Europeans which promises a fuller life. Not that any snobbish self-seeking is implied. Lalu remains throughout essentially manly and decent; he has absorbed more from the village-code than he knows. But his deeply-motivated need to break through can meet no other outlet.

He carries through with army-life, and finds in it a sort of successful adjustment to the European ways; he goes and fights in France in the 1914-18 war, is captured, and after the war returns to India. The whole experience has developed and shaken him, but he still does not know what its lessons are. He wants to cling to the gains of his army-adjustment, but he also wants to find some form of stability inside Indian life. He is thrown out of the army, without the expected gift of land; for the Colonel fears that he has been treasonably affected in the German prison-camp. He goes back to his native village, to find that his family is broken up, destroyed by the money-forces which had been behind his own flight. But now what he suffers is no lonely despair; all the peasantry are in the same griping pangs. He reacts with a fierce rage, yet still cannot understand what the forces are that seem to have driven him through a blind circle. But, coming into con-

tact with some political rebels, he feels attracted and is taken into the employ of the Count, a declassed landlord. He becomes a revolutionary without knowing more than his own deep indignation and a few catchwords.

He is now part of the Count's conspiratorial system, involved in a long, confused and exciting attempt to rouse the peasantry to action. The group have no theory, only interminable arguments and a desire to use the peasants' ingrained sense of brotherhood as a weapon of spontaneous revolt. Lalu has an interview with Gandhi, in which the latter's character—his capacity for leadership which in the last resort is one with his incapacity to find solutions—is brilliantly explored. All the while events are hurrying the group on, and Lalu comes slowly to feel the insufficiencies of the Count's methods. In the concluding passage Lalu movingly realizes something of the way in which the *shakhti* of the peasants (man-to-man service) can truly become a political force, overthrow the existing society, and beget a free unified India. Lalu has found his living relationship with the village-commune after all, his reconciliation, but on a new and more powerful level.

In this trilogy then—*The Village, Across the Black Waters,* and *The Sword and the Sickle*—Anand has validly extended the method with which he began in *Untouchable.* He has re-discovered the Indian epical tale in terms of contemporary struggle. All the while a continual fusion is going on between the methods of Chatterjee, Tagore, Premchand and the methods which Anand has learned from his study of the European novel; and the result is one long experiment in adapting the Indian elements to Western eyes and the European elements to Indian eyes. In stabilizing and extending the Indian novel Anand is also adding to the tradition of the European novel.

V

In *The Barber's Trade-Union,* a collection of short stories, he felt about for new strands of method and material, linking the folk-forms and their poetic resources with contemporary issues.

A breathing-space before he launched himself once more on the main stream of his aims.

In *The Big Heart* he boldly carried the theme of the trilogy into the present-day urban situation. In discussing the novel with Gopal, I asked him if in his opinion the picture was a true one; he answered in an epigram, "Yes, of India ten years ahead." That may well be. In seizing on the essentials of conflict Anand has possibly reached ahead into clarifications and resolutions not yet generally apparent. For what he has tried to do here is to show the way in which the old group-emotions, the old group-formations, are broken down by the impact of money-values and industrialization, yet in their very breaking produce the basis of a new unity, a new harmony, and so create the conditions for the defeat of the enemy. At the same time he moves somewhat over to the Indian side of the balance of Indian-and-European in his artistic method.

Ananta is seeking to build up a trade union among the thathiars, the copper-smiths, who are being ground down into starvation by the advent of the machine into the town-economy. But as much as the giant Ananta, with his powerful overdriven frame and his immense thwarted capacity for enjoyment, the theme of the book is the craft-brotherhood. Ananta himself, like all the other craft-brothers, is being radically affected by the changes coming over their organization which has its roots far back in tribal life. But whereas they mostly succumb, are crushed or come to weakened terms with the destroyer, Ananta is obsessed with the vision of harnessing the new force to the group-needs. A couple of the smiths who are richer than the others have managed to grab the machines and the employing power; they are cut off from the group which they proceed to break up. In a very fine scene, the marriage, traditional moment of union and fertility-ritual, reveals the collapse of the brotherhood and the triumph of money-values. Yet even in collapse the old forms keep their magic. The machine-owners want to hold the brotherhood, in which is emotionally vested the source of life and sanction; the dispossessed thathiars feel that somehow it ought to be protecting them, though in fact they now have no protection and turn to religious escapes,

angry or passive anarchisms, abject fears and collusions. Only Ananta, who has been to the cotton-mills of Ahmedabad and the foundries of Bombay, has the clue; he sees the way in which the brotherhood can be transformed into the trade-union and the trade-union be used to reconstitute, with new freedom, all that was good in the old way of craft-unity. But he cannot explain his conviction; he cannot put his awareness into immediately persuasive terms—even though he has the poet on his side. In the end the darkly-embittered Ralia smashes up the machines in a mad fury; and Ananta, trying to stop him, is killed. Caught between the machine and the oppressed peasants and craftsmen the machine-defender is destroyed, even though he is trying to say the opposite of what the machine-owner says. His earnest intuitions cannot yet fuse with the poet's too-sensitive wisdoms and lead the people into peace and plenty. But there is nothing pessimistic in these conclusions: the very forces which defeat Ananta are those which will carry his ideas into actualization.

This book, as I said, is the most Indian in texture of Anand's writing. It has much of the hectic overstrained element so common in Indian writing, the feeling of a disproportion somewhere between emotions and their causes. But the effect is here intentional, used because it is inherent in the situation, in the very texture of the consciousness of the people at the particular point of stress in which they find themselves—individuals pivotally trying to carry the immense weight of a decadent feudal system corroded with money-oppressions and painfully clinging to ancient forms of thought and action to stave off attack:

> "The sudden cramp, which has got hold of the souls of men ever since the ragged rhythm of the machines in the shed began to drown the hammer-strokes with which the coppersmiths were use'd to smooth rough metal into shape and imprint the polish of gold on finished pots, augurs ill for them as a caste. . .. Within him there was the surging of a peculiar *ghaoon maoon,* a kind of disturbance spreading like knife-edges from the bits of the dream he had just had before he came to work."

This kind of sensation colours the whole theme, the deep inner dread of men who feel defenceless before an unknown enemy; and which Ananta, who knows the enemy but knows also in his intuitive way the complexity of the human situation, feels most of all.

Anand is less concerned with intimate domesticities than Chatterjee or even Tagore; he is less concerned than Premchand with the passive agonies of the women or village-folk who seek in traditional pieties some escape or atonement. It is natural then that the problem of the Indian woman looms less strongly in his work than in that of these others. But though the main attention is given to male figures, Bakha, Munoo, Lalu, Ananta, there is no lack of memorable women figures, from Maya who in the trilogy shares Lalu's fate, to Janki, the dying mistress of Ananta. Anand can depict all the fine, gentle, self-sacrificial qualities of the Indian wife, and her dilemmas in the new epoch. Not that he romantically falsifies; he shows the nagging, petty, demanding types as well as the self-denying, and brings out well how the strains of the new situation modify, warp or transmute into yet finer forms the traditional responses of the women.

In *Two Leaves* the gentle sweet charm of the Indian women is the background to the lust of Reggie, the public-school chap who can't control himself amid such easily-crushed victims. But with Anand something firmer, clearer, more decisively realized than in previous works enters the Indian novel; and in shifting from the domestic scene he inevitably is not so primarily taken up with the lot of women.

VI

In 1945, immediately after the publication *of The Big Heart,* Anand went back to India. His main work there has been the founding and editing of a magazine *Marg,* which deals with Art and Architecture. Its aim is to interpret European developments in ways that will help India to escape the errors which have made industrialism synonymous with ugliness, distortion and filth in

Europe. But he has also been struggling to grasp anew the essence of the changes going on in Indian society and the Indian soul. Clearly, his fiction will now enter a new phase. In a letter he tells me that he has completed the first part of a long auto-biographical novel; and he has been gathering material for many new lines of approach to his basic themes.

Implicit in all his approach is a carefully considered philosophical attitude. Here he is the heir of Tagore; and he himself has kept stressing the relationship by returning every now and then to Tagore and analysing afresh his attempt to harmonize Western and Eastern traditions. He has a profound belief that it is necessary to carry on this work—that without it the next stage of human development must fail. The unity of East and West is not a matter of huddling together the traditional attitudes of both areas; rather it lies in finding a new unitary outlook, in which the values of art, science and ethics are all integrated in a fuller and clearer sense of the essential formative forces at work within men. A world-community, in which the mad contradictions driving to exploitation and war through the profit-motive will be eliminated, needs in this view the lessons that India can teach. And while on the one hand this entails the extension of the virtues of tolerance, honesty, love and brotherhood throughout all the spheres of life—throughout the upper levels of culture and all social and political organization—it also entails a "return to the people" in whom these virtues find their simple and deep root. Anand writes of Tagore:

> "For he inspired the people with the belief that man can conquer nature, possess it, and reap the rich fruits that it can yield. Always he was 'where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones'. … I have deliberately emphasized the fact that Tagore went to the people for inspiration, because the intelligentsia of his time, as well as of our own, showed a tendency to despise the only integral tradition of culture which has survived among us to any extent, the culture of our primitive closely-knit communities, on the basis of which alone a renaissance can be built up. . . .

> Our destiny is bound up with them as of children to their parents for we have to inherit the memories of their suffering and we have to expiate it in our art. . . .
>
> Above all, in this hour of the crisis of European urban civilization, when we live continually under sentence of death from the threat of the atom bomb, we can bathe ourselves in the immortal spirit of our people and achieve the moral strength with which they have always struggled against the brute force of one tyrant after another."

Now that is the kind of attitude which can only too easily become sentimental and vulgarized in a country where the people have lost most of their folk-bases; but it rings true in the mouth of a Tagore, a Tolstoy, an Anand. In England we cannot echo it just like that; but there is something in its innermost meaning that we need desperately to rediscover and re-phrase in terms of our own situation. That, anyway, is the sort of message which Anand wants passionately to give to the world; and in his novels, it is to a very high degree of success incarnated in the picture of individuals torn loose from old community-moorings and painfully but patiently fighting their way through to a new haven of unity, a new realization of human dignity and of the indestructible sources of love.

Anand has brought powerful new energies into Indian culture; he has also brought something precious into our own literature, something which at this phase we badly need. An unquenchable faith in the goodness of man and the power of love, a faith which has had all falsity and sentimentality burned out of it by the fires of intense suffering. Here, in the unforgettable picture of men and women often forced down into bestial conditions of living by a stupid and ruthless tyranny we touch the spring of human renewal. A phial of almost intolerable sweetness is broken. Values are naked, and the process of transformation goes on under our eyes, as simply as the flow of winds and waters. What Anand wants to achieve is achieved. We know what is holding us down, and we know what we must do to keep our souls alive. And that is the return to the pure sources,

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VIRGINIA WOOLF

*

JOHN LEHMANN

WHEN I think of Virginia Woolf the picture that first springs to my mind is of her workroom in Tavistock Square. It was a big, square studio with a skylight, built on the the basement. It was used by the Hogarth Press as a stock-room, and there, in the midst of an ever-encroaching forest of books, was her desk, stuffed and littered with papers, letters, and innumerable half-finished manuscripts. I was learning my job as manager then, in the little back room, and she would pass my window every day as she went in to work. She would stay there for hours, writing steadily; if it wasn't a novel, it was an article, or a story, or her own diary; I don't think she was happy unless her pen was moving over the paper in that thin, elegant, intellectual handwriting with the beautiful flourishes; and that is the reason why, after her death, so many unknown treasures were found among her papers, though only too few were in a finished state. Sometimes she would move over to the disused scullery that had been converted by Leonard Woolf into a printing room, and help to set up type for the occasional small volumes that were still produced entirely by the Hogarth Press; and sometimes, when a new book had just been published and there was a heavy rush of orders to be dealt with, she would come into the front room and work with the staff, tying up parcels and sticking on labels. The young poets and novelists who came to leave manuscripts, hoping desperately that the so famous, elusive author would read and approve their works, never guessed that she was there in person, working unobtrusively under their very eyes.

The other picture that comes continually to my mind is of evenings down at Monk's House, the old cottage in Sussex she and Leonard Woolf had bought and rebuilt for themselves. After

dinner, in the room on the first floor that looked out on the little garden, with its orchard on one side and goldfish pond on the other, she would sit in her chair by the fire smoking the strong cigarettes she rolled for herself in a long holder, and talk. She wanted to know about everybody and everything. What was young X writing? Was it true that So-and-so had broken up his best friend's marriage? What did we think of the latest magazine? The latest production *of The Duchess of Malfi or Twelfth Ntghtl* What on earth was she to answer to the old bore Z, who kept on writing her pompous fan-letters from America? She delighted in witty gossip, and would discuss the comic and tragic events of the day as keenly as the deepest problems of literature. There can never have been anyone on whom the mantle of acknowledged literary greatness lay less heavily.

Above all, until the very end of her life, she maintained her interest in what young people were writing. She did a great deal of reading for the press, and, except for specialist works or economic or political problems, there were few manuscripts submitted to us which did not pass through her hands. She was always on the look out for promise, for a sign of the true gift, and on the last occasion I saw her, only a week or two before her death, she discussed a first collection of poems sent in by a young writer. There was much she did not like about them, she found them too often obscure and confusing, but, nevertheless, there were moments of music, flashes of imagery, that made her feel he ought to be published. She took away with her a bundle of stories and poems which had been submitted to *New Writing,* and her wise and sympathetic comments on them—comments for which she apologized, feeling she was not up to her best—reached me only shortly before the news of the tragedy.

Her attitude towards the writing of the generation below her was of a piece with her whole attitude towards literature. One may think that she failed sometimes in appreciation, but the remarkable thing is how quickly, most of the time, she grasped the changing conditions and changing outlook on life that lay beneath a change of taste, and how finely she could distinguish the dross from the gold in what was new. This emerges clearly from two

articles she wrote about the work of my own contemporaries, the *Letter to a Young Poet* and *The Leaning Tower.* She was critical of many inadequacies, but with her fresh insight and intelligence she saw why the inadequacies were there, the generous impulse and the fatal setting which prevented the birth of the great work of art. But while she recognized the difficulties, and all the claims of the contemporary, she distrusted the clamour of opposing "schools" and "movements", and gave sound reasons for her distrust. "Never think yourself singular," she says in the *Letter to a Young Poety* "never think your own case much harder than other people's." She suggests that it is the enormous development of the reading public that encourages the idea that literature is full of violent battles, victories and defeats:

> "Now, of course, writers themselves know very well that there is not a word of truth in all this—there are no battles, and no murders and no defeats, and no victories. But as it is of the utmost importance that readers should be amused, writers acquiesce. They dress themselves up. They act their parts; one leads; the other follows. One is romantic, the other realist. One is advanced, the other out of date. There is no harm in it, so long as you take it as a joke, but once you believe in it, once you begin to take yourself seriously as a leader or as a follower, as a modern or as a conservative, then you become a self-conscious, biting and scratching little animal, whose work is not of the slightest value or importance to anybody. Think of yourself rather as something much humbler and less spectacular, but to my mind far more interesting—a poet in whom live all the poets of the past, from whom all poets in time to come will spring … in short, you are an immensely ancient, complex and continuous character, for which reason please treat yourself with respect. ..."

Always this idea of the immense antiquity of literature, the enduring tradition, dominated her critical thinking. Readers who know her chiefly through her novels are apt to think of her only as a daring innovator in style and manner, the truly modern writer

who had finally broken with the conventions of the pre-1914 novel. She was, indeed, very conscious of the chasm that the first World War had opened up across the life of her time, and of the demands this difference made on the artist who would interpret it, but her greatness was to combine with this awareness an understanding of the achievement of the past, towering always on the horizon, warning and inspiring and restoring a sense of proportion to all who were sensible enough to lift their eyes to it. The range of intellectual interests revealed in her first collection of essays, *The Common Reader,* is sufficient proof of this: Chaucer, Elizabethan plays, Defoe, Jane Austen, Montaigne, the Russian novelists, Joseph Conrad are among her subjects, and she treats them all with the same mixture of finely-discriminating intelligence and common sense, the same loving, recreating force of imagination. The intensity of her sympathy varies; she has a bias towards the feminine, being herself a determined feminist, and also towards the great diary and memoir-writers; but her passionate belief in literature and her sense of its wholeness were always there in the background. At the end of the last essay in the volume, *How it Strikes a Contemporary,* she writes:

> "As for the critics, whose task it is to pass judgment upon the books of the moment, whose work, let us admit, is difficult, dangerous, and often distasteful, let us ask them to be generous of encouragement, but sparing of those wreaths and coronets which are so apt to get awry and fade, and make the wearers, in six months' time, look a little ridiculous. Let them take a wider, a less personal view of modern literature, and look indeed upon the writers as if they were engaged upon some vast building, which, being built by common effort, the separate workmen may well remain anonymous. . . . Let me recall to their memory that gaunt aristocrat, Lady Hester Stanhope, who kept a milk-white horse in her stable in readiness for the Messiah, and was for ever scanning the mountain-tops, impatiently but with confidence, for signs of his approach, and ask them to follow her example; scan the horizon; see the past

in relation to the future; and so prepare the way for masterpieces to come."

In the same volume, Virginia Woolf reprinted her famous essay on *Modern Fiction,* which originally appeared in 1919, and was in a sense an apologia for the direction her own work was about to take. The change was indeed startling. With her first book. *The Voyage Out,* which was published in 1915, after she had rewritten it from beginning to end at least five times, she is playing the established rules of the game. The handling of the material, the telling of the story disturb no conventional notions; no one could say, "But I don't understand what she's getting at", as so many bewildered library subscribers were to exclaim to one another later on; the book was only lifted above the average readable novel of the day by a sensibility, an imaginative touch and a distinction of style that are rare in any novel, let alone a first effort. *Night and Day,* published a year or two later, is in some ways even more conventional. Then came the little volume of short pieces—to call them stories or sketches is to define them too narrowly—called *Monday or Tuesday;* one suddenly finds oneself in an entirely different world. It is no longer the world of solid character and narration, but of suggestion, atmosphere exquisitely rendered, disembodied moods, glittering descriptions of colour and light, behind the tension of which one can feel an agonized apprehension of beauty and suffering; it is poetry. And from that moment onwards Virginia Woolf was to remain more poet than novelist, for ever searching for new means of dissolving prose into poetry, of refining away all but the husk of action in works which still went under the name of novels, and irradiating them with this strange new light.

The intellectual basis for this profound disturbance in her own spirit, she elaborated skilfully in *Modern Fiction* by a destructive critique of three dominant figures in the fiction of the day—Galsworthy, Bennett and Wells—and an appeal to the Russians: "If we want understanding of the soul and heart, where else shall we find it of comparable profundity? If we are sick of our own materialism, the least considerable of their novelists has by right

of birth a natural reverence for the human spirit." Hardy, Conrad and Hudson, she claimed, had the root of the matter in them; but she would go further herself:

> "Admitting the vagueness which afflicts all criticism of novels, let us hazard the opinion that for us at this moment the form of fiction most in vogue more often misses than secures the thing we seek. Whether we call it life or spirit, truth or reality, this, the essential thing, has moved off, or on, and refuses to be contained any longer in such ill-fitting vestments as we provide. So much of the enormous labour of proving the solidity, the likeness to life, of the story, is not merely labour thrown away, but labour misplaced to the extent of obscuring and blotting out the light of the conception. . . . Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms, and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old. . . . Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible?"

There could be no clearer signpost than these sentences to the great series of novel-poems which were to begin with *Jacob's Room* in 1922 and go on to the wonderful unrevized *Between the Acts* published after her death in 1941, and on which the fame of Virginia Woolf in the world of letters must ultimately rest. Here, within this "luminous halo", she attempted again and again to find symbols for human existence; to construct scenes, to weave patterns of imagery and feeling which would contain something of the vision that seemed always to be escaping before it had been fully apprehended; a dazzling vision which had changed the whole

course of her art and threatened to crack the walls of her being every time she set out to recapture it. Again and again in these books she introduces characters who are struggling to express the inexpressible, whose intellect or imagination is taut with the effort to reach beyond the frontiers of what has already been discovered or created—images, in many guises, of the artist herself. There are the figures representing the intellect: Jacob pursuing his argument with Timmy Durrant, "when only half a sentence followed; but these half-sentences are like flags set on tops of buildings to the observer of external sights down below"; Mr. Ramsay, in *To the Lighthouse,* the philosopher who has got as far as "Q" in the alphabet of thought, in which "Z" is only reached once by one man in a generation, bracing himself to reach "R" and dreading failure as "a shutter, like the leathern eyelid of a lizard, flickered over the intensity of his gaze and obscured the letter 'R'". This dread of failure in the attempt is always near her chosen characters; it oppresses Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse* until the very end, when she suddenly sees how to finish her picture; it is a raging despair to Miss La Trobe, the mysterious producer of the pageant in *Between the Acts,* who groans "A failure!" as she puts away the records and crosses the terrace where "she had suffered triumph, humiliation, ecstasy, despair—for nothing," to find her ultimate vision dawning on her at last in the village pub; it breaks in for a moment on the apparent triumph of Mrs. Dalloway, who has created not a pageant but a party, causing her inwardly to cry: "Why, after all, did she do these things? Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire? Might it consume her, anyhow! Burn her to cinders!" Beside the male thinkers and the artists, the arrangers, are the poets and visionaries; Neville, in *The Waves,* whose "roots go down through veins of lead and silver," and who describes himself: "sealed and blind, with earth stopping my ears, I have yet heard rumour of wars; and the nightingale; have felt the hurrying of many troops of men flocking hither and thither in quest of civilization like flocks of birds migrating, seeking the summer"; Isa, in *Between the Acts,* who muses in the garden: "Where do I wander? Down what draughty tunnels? Where the eyeless wind blows? And there grows nothing for the eye. No

roses. To issue where? In some harvestless dim field where no evening lets fall her mantle; nor sun rises. All's equal there. Unblowing, ungrowing are the roses there. Change is not; nor the mutable and lovable; nor greetings nor partings; nor furtive findings and feelings, where hand seeks hand and eye seeks shelter from the eye?" Neville experiences the sensation, part pain and part relief, of returning to the "machine" of everyday life from his explorations into the poetic; from the blinding, prophetic hallucinations of the shell-shocked Septimus Warren Smith, in *Mrs. Dalloway,* the descent to the normal is more terrifying, but Lucrezia, his wife, finds in his poems and scribblings something not altogether madness. Like Rhoda, in *The Waves,* Mrs. Jarvis, in *Jacob's Room,* is troubled in her moments of vision by something incommunicable, something unfulfilled: "Yes, yes, when the lark soars; when the sheep, moving a step or two onwards, crop the turf, and at the same time set their bells tinkling; when the breeze first blows, then dies down, leaving the cheek kissed; when the ships on the sea below seem to cross each other and pass on as if drawn by an invisible hand; when there are distant concussions in the air and phantom horsemen galloping, ceasing; when the horizon swims blue, green, emotional—then Mrs. Jarvis, heaving a sigh, thinks to herself: 'If only someone could give me. … If I could give someone. . . .' "

For these successive expeditions towards the inexpressible, Virginia Woolf never chooses quite the same road, never uses quite the same technique. Interior monologue is the main instrument, appearing in all the novels, ranging from the most mundane reflections to the pure poetry of Isa, fluid and informal in all but *The Waves,* where it becomes static and formal, but used a little differently in each. In *Jacob's Room* an extreme impressionism covers many years and many different scenes by the slightest touches—a paragraph of description, or a few thoughts, or a burst of dialogue is often enough for each; with *Mrs. Dalloway* the events and reflections of a single day fill a book of much the same length; in *To the Lighthouse* two scenes of fairly short duration in time are divided by a choral passage of description, "Time Passes",

in which time moves infinitely faster and actual events are only indicated here and there in brief bracketed sentences. With *The Waves* the technique is more radically altered, but it is nevertheless a logical possible development from the earlier techniques; the new form of the interior dialogue is only more deliberate and artificial, and an attempt is made to present it as if it were not "interior" at all, but spoken, as it were, dramatically; the choral interludes where the waves break on the shore and the sun slowly crosses the heavens to mark the passage of years are the development of devices already experimented with in *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse.* The problem in each of these books is the problem which lay concealed all the time beneath the endeavour to leave out plot, and concentrate on "the soul": how shall one show the workings of time on the lives of people? On each occasion she found a new solution, but the curious structural uncertainty of her next novel, *The Years,* makes one feel that she became increasingly dissatisfied with these solutions. *Between the Acts* to some extent avoids the problem; one cannot tell from it whether a new solution was emerging in her mind at the time of her death.

It is, perhaps, impossible to analyse all that gives these works their entirely unique and haunting quality, that makes one feel that nowhere in the English novel have such profound things been said about human existence and by the slightest means. One can only distinguish some of the main elements in Virginia Woolf's art. Above all, her astonishing sense of form and rhythmic pulse. *Jacob's Room* seems to describe a perfect parabola, from the opening when the cry of Archer is heard calling for Jacob, whom he cannot find on the beach, to the cry wrung out of Bonamy at the end for the Jacob he will never find again; and the end of *To the Lighthouse* seems to resolve all the themes of the book without one note wrong; it is as if you were listening to a flawlessly written piece of music, and the emotional and intellectual satisfaction at the end is complete—though it must remain in the symbolism of the journey to the lighthouse and escapes any attempt at rational definition. There are themes which recur again and again, from novel to novel. The cry of "Jacob! Jacob!" that rises from *Jacob's Room* is paralleled by the cry of "Mrs. Ramsay!

Mrs. Ramsay!" from Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse,* notes of an almost unendurable sadness that sounds softer or more poignant through all the books; it is round this sadness, this longing for something that cannot be reached or found again, that *The Waves* is constructed, where Percival, who died in India, repeats this theme of Jacob, the young man like a Greek statue come to life; the echoing sadness and the continual questioning of life and death which accompanies it are often deepened by the introduction and repetition of lines of poetry: "O, western wind, when wilt thou blow", for instance, in *The Waves,* and "Luriana Lurilee" in *To the Lighthouse.* The poets themselves are always present—Shakespeare, Shelley, Byron, the Greeks—their names appear again and again and each time it is as if lamps were being lit; civilization, what man has created with art and learning—and with love—appears always as a light against darkness; Cambridge is imagined as emitting a radiance into the day as well as the night; in *To the Lighthouse,* the *Bceuf en daube* dinner, with darkness creeping up to the window-panes becomes, as if by magic, no longer a dinner but an image of all this. Greece is one symbol among many she uses to create a sense of the past spreading illimitably round the lives of her characters; there are the strange skulls and bleached bones, the, Phoenicians sleeping in the barrows, the old barn like a Greek temple, the banners trembling above tombs; and this sense of the past blends with the sea, the sound of waves breaking on the shore, which is heard not only in *The Waves* but in *Jacob's Room* and *To the Lighthouse* as well; and when the pulse of time is not sounding from the sea it falls from clock-towers, in *Mrs, Dalloway* and *Between the Acts,* when the hour booms out over city or country-side. The past and its mystery; death and its mystery; love with its mystery, now transforming the whole of life with its glow, now savage as tigers; the dazzling surface radiance of the world and a terror and despair lurking always beneath; nowhere in modern writing have these things found symbols more audacious and memorable than in the novel-poems of Virginia Woolf, so that one can truly say that she enlarged the sensibility of her time, and *changed* English literature.

The strain was terrific, what she suffered in this giving birth

to masterpieces not to be measured. When a novel was reaching its completion, she would often have to leave it altogether, not once but several times, and go away or rest in the writing of lighter sketches and reviews. She took other longer holidays; she wrote *Flush,* and *Orlando,* and *A Room of One's Own,* and thereby gained a delighted reading public that was to be checked and baffled when the next novel appeared. She also showed that she could write a long biography with all the skill, tact and understanding she displayed in her shorter portraits; *Roger Fry,* most of which was written during the war, is a model of how to write the life of a contemporary figure who had also been a close friend. But at the same time as *Roger Fry* she was also working on the last, posthumously published novel, *Between the Acts.* This was the answer to those who believed that Virginia Woolf had exhausted the poet in her; it never received her final shaping, and rough corners stick out of it here and there; nevertheless, as it stands, it must be considered one of her greatest, most poetic achievements. Beneath this slight story of a pageant which takes place in an English village in the late summer of 1939 lies a parable, a vision of the whole of English history, which reaches out to becoming a vision of the whole of life. The poetic symbolism is as subtle and profound as ever, more frightening, perhaps, than in any of her earlier books. Instead of a fully realized picture she gives us a series of brilliant, suggestive moments, stabs of paint of a startling beauty on a canvas in which she seems to leave large spaces empty. It is possible that if she had lived she might have filled in those gaps and elaborated the symbolism; but she may have felt, on this last and most daring of her voyages of exploration towards the inexpressible, that these hints and unfinished outlines were all she trusted herself to put on her map of the territory she was discovering. The imminence of the war is only directly indicated by the bombers that suddenly roar over the pageant, drowning the speaker's words for a few seconds. Yet it is there all through. It is as if she were trying to say that, though the moment of time in which we live may seem so violent that it reduces us to "scraps, orts and fragments", and the pattern of history to meaninglessness, nevertheless even this moment is

part of a great developing process which has brought so many changes already, that there is a unity, a single process which we may fail, in our agony of action and suffering, to discern. The note of sadness, the questioning, run through *Between the Acts* as they run through the earlier novels, but there is gaiety, too; and the final impression is of hope and confidence, more marked, perhaps, than ever before. The closing pages, in which the particular place and the particular time seem to disappear, are, surely, an affirmation of belief that there has always been struggle "in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night", before a new life could be born, that over our present troubles the creative forces of life will, once again as so often in the past, triumph as surely as the day follows night.

It was not the war which brought Virginia Woolf to the tragedy which ended her life; in the great crisis of 1940 she showed an imperturbability in the face of disaster and personal danger that would have been remarkable among many of her far less sensitive compatriots. No, it was the strain of the task she had set herself, the dread of the fine instrument breaking which had created so many wonderful things already under the pressure of this last heroic attempt. One cannot help thinking of Rhoda in *The Waves,* who cries: "There is some check in the flow of my being; a deep stream presses on some obstacle; it jerks; it tugs; some knot in the centre resists. Oh, this is pain, this is anguish! I faint, I fail. Now my body thaws; I am unsealed, I am incandescent. Now the stream pours in a deep tide, fertilizing, opening the shut, forcing the tight-folded, flooding free. To whom shall I give all that now flows through me, from my warm, my porous body? I will gather my flowers and present them—Oh! to whom?" At the end that "knot in the centre" resisted too inexorably, and she gave her garland of flower to—Death. What she might have achieved if that marvellous and still unstanched flow had broken down the "check" once more, one can only guess; the full richness and significance of what she had already given the world is yet to be understood,

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IGNAZIO SILONE

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GEORGE WOODCOCK

IGNAZIO SILONE has been described as a realistic novelist. Before, however, we judge the accuracy of this description, we must reach a definition of the term "realism", which, like other words classifying literary or artistic works, has in the past been used loosely and without a precise understanding of its meaning.

There are two kinds of writing commonly described as realist. The first is writing concerned with the outward and material manifestations of life, the symptoms rather than the underlying conditions and causes. Man is represented as a creature dominated by his material environment and responding to it in a way which bears no apparent relationship to any universal reality underlying both the environment and the human reactions. Such an approach almost ignores the intellect and negates completely the life of the spirit, nor is it linked to any philosophical conception which integrates the various aspects of life. Thus, the approach embodied in this so-called realism is in fact unrealistic because it portrays not reality but merely a single aspect of appearance.

The second type of "realism" is Socialist Realism. This attempts to support a superficial and materialist representation of life by a Marxist dogma of the nature of history and society. Man is still economic and dominated by environment, still chained to a material and physical universe, and his highest ends are the achievements of material changes in the basis of ownership and social organization. Again, spiritual reality is ignored, and the intellect recognized only as a means to material objectives. The reality underlying these material symptoms is conceived in terms of a universe governed by materialistic laws borrowed from a superannuated system of scientific thought and combined incongruously with a metaphysical and immaterialist theory of history

—based on a series of brilliant generalizations which have broken down in practice because in the last resort men are not masses, but individuals reacting in individual ways to the stimulus of historical forces and the operation of natural laws.

True realism, I submit, must seek to portray life in a manner that will embrace all its aspects, whether manifested physically, intellectually or spiritually. It must reveal to the full extent of the writer's knowledge and ability the nature of human development, and the complex unity of natural law by which it is motivated and governed. The writer who endeavours to show in his work such an integrated view of man and of his relationships with the world in which he lives and works, is truly a realist.

Ignazio Silone is a realist of this kind. His novels portray with remarkable vividness the life which the people of the Italian countryside lived under the Fascist dictatorship, the miserable hunger of the oppressed peasantry, the slow ruin of the small land-owners, and the insecure prosperity in which the intriguing politicians and professional men contrived to live by destroying their moral feelings and ignoring the sufferings of the poor. But they demonstrate as well that the struggle through which the Italian people are passing is not merely a struggle for material ends, and that it is no isolated event, but rather one aspect of a moral conflict that embraces all mankind. The later novels in particular are concerned with the spiritual developments which mature in the minds of the revolutionary, the isolated liberal, the peasant in whom the power of thought is still not crushed; there is a steady movement of vision towards a realization of the manner in which men can attain a life based on natural laws of freedom and mutual trust.

Silone's writing is concerned with social matters. Yet he is not a political novelist, for his writing proceeds steadily towards a conclusion that the regeneration of human society is governed by moral rather than political laws. Even less is he a propagandist, in the commonly accepted sense of the word, which in our day tends to signify a writer who seeks to convert people to an exclusive creed, and whose representation of life springs not from authentic experience but from preconceived dogmas. The

propagandist, by a meaningless abracadabra of generalizations and false symbols, attempts to induce action which cannot be fruitful, because it is based not on concrete temporal realities but on an intellectual abstraction. Silone, on the other hand, is a writer who has sought the truth patiently and has enriched his knowledge from the fruits of his experience. He has attained certain beliefs concerning the life of man, both as an individual and in society, but these have come to him not merely from studying the systems of political theorists, but also from observing the external world and the inner life of man realistically, as he finds them and not as the theorists tell him they exist. By such means, he has developed from a believer in political dogma into an individual thinker, striving to realize from direct experience and thought the nature of man's problem and the moral laws by which it can be solved.

To conclude these preliminary definitions, I would add that Silone is at once, and in a real manner, an autobiographical and an allegorical writer. All valuable writing is, in a sense, autobiographical, in that it is based on the writer's experience. Silone, however, belongs to the class of writers whose work is directly autobiographical, because it attempts to delineate accurately his own search for the truth. It is allegorical, in that the events he describes are related to a moral progression and a social vision as vital as those which are brought to life in the great and more direct allegories, the writings of Kafka and Swift.

Silone was born in the small town of Pescina, on the edge of Lake Fucino, which lies in the Marsica province of the mountainous Abruzzi. The date of his birth is perhaps symbolic. It was the last May Day of the nineteenth century.

He was the son of a small landowner, who worked almost as hard at farming as the peasants and landless labourers around him. As a child he moved among the poor peasants, went to school with their children, and came early to understand and love them. This love of the poor has remained with him throughout his life, has dominated his actions and given his writings their outstanding quality of sympathy for human suffering.

When the Fascists gained power Silone left Italy and took up

the life of exile which has been the lot of so many great Italian writers, from Dante to Mazzini and beyond. His zeal for political action, however, led him to return, and in 1925 he began underground work as an agitator. At this time he was a member of the Communist Party. In 1928 he found it virtually impossible to continue his political work without being captured and possibly murdered. He returned to Switzerland, and in Italy he was "denounced (in absence) to the Fascist Special Tribune for clandestine political activity".

He had already begun to question his political activities and the validity of the Marxist theories on which they had been based. By 1930 his ideas had changed so much that he left the Communist Party, and since that time he has styled himself an "independent Communist". During his exile he stood aloof from all the Italian political groups, and his denunciation of politicians and political organizations at that period earned him their hostility.

From 1930 to the end of the Fascist regime he lived mostly in Switzerland, where he wrote all his important books, of which five have been published in England. They are, a series of three novels, *Fontamara, Bread and Wine,* and *The Seed Beneath the Snow,* a full-length dialogue on Fascism called *The School for Dictators,* and a play, *And He Did Hide Himself.*

In discussing Silone's writings, I intend to deal firstly with his three novels, which represent his progress as an individual thinker searching for the values that govern the liberation of man.

Fontamara, his first novel, written during 1930, is intended primarily as a simple story to show the life of the poor in Fascist Italy, and, although it is by no means direct propaganda, and has certain interesting undertones of intention, it is much less complex and less elaborately written than his two later works.

Fontamara is a miserable village in the hills above Lake Fucino. Its inhabitants are peasants of the poorest type, "the heirs to generations of poverty". They hate the authorities, the landlords, the carabinieri, the town people, and the Piedmontese. They evade paying taxes, and distrust the government almost by instinct. Nevertheless, the fact that each is the owner of a miserable portion of infertile land makes them cautious and conservative. Their

attitude is changed by the series of events described in the story.

The peasants are tricked by a Fascist official into signing a petition asking for the diversion of their stream away from the peasant fields into a piece of land which the *podesta* of the nearest town has just bought cheaply. A number of women go into the town to try and gain redress for their grievance. Once again they are tricked, this time by a lawyer posing as The People's Friend, who persuades them to accept a poor compromise.

Afterwards the village is attacked by Fascist militia, who arrive when the men are in the fields, break up the homes and rape the women. The most conservative and torpid of the villagers are finally shaken by this series of outrages.

"What was quite clear was that the militia had come to Fontamara and raped a number of women. But they had done so in the name of the law and in the presence of a police commissary, and that was not so clear.

"At the Fucino they had put up the rents of the smallholders and lowered the rents of the big proprietors. That was clear. But the proposal to do this had been made by the representative of the poor peasants and that was not so clear. . . .

"Each of our misfortunes, examined separately, was not new, for similar misfortunes had often happened in the past. But the way they befell us was new and strange.

"The whole thing was absolutely beyond our understanding."

The peasants are finally disillusioned when they realize that the arrangement made for the diversion of the stream means that their fields will be completely dried up because so little water will be left to them.

"All the same, no one was resigned to the loss of water. No one was resigned to the loss of his entire crop. No one could reconcile himself to the prospect of winter without bread or soup.

" 'If there's no justice against thieves, we've reached the end of all things,' said Ponzio Pilato.

" 'When the law has broken down and the first to violate it are those whose business it is to enforce it, it's time to go back to the law of the people,' said the old cobbler one night.

" 'What is the law of the people?'

" 'God helps him who helps himself,' said Baldissera."

At this time Berardo Viola, a landless peasant, goes to Rome in the hope of earning some money. He falls in with the Mystery Man, a young revolutionary who had once saved the peasants from an *agent provocateur,* and is arrested with him. In prison Berardo tells the Mystery Man of the troubles of the *Fontamarese,* and then sacrifices himself by declaring that he is the Mystery Man. He is tortured to death by the Fascists. The real Mystery Man is set free and immediately goes to Fontamara, where he provides the peasants with the materials for a duplicated paper to tell the grievances of the country people. The peasants make their newspaper and distribute it in the surrounding villages. The same day Fontamara is invaded by Fascists and the peasants, except the few who escape to the hills, are massacred.

Fontamara can be considered from two aspects. As a portrayal of the evils of Fascism, it is confident and successful, both artistically and as a representation of factual truth. But as propaganda for a party or for any definite course of action it is virtually useless, because it is already impregnated with those doubts concerning the role of the revolutionary agitator which become so prominent in the later novels. Whether or not Silone intended it, the Mystery Man appears as a bringer of evil to the peasants, as a partner, however unwilling, with the Fascists in the perpetration of their final tragedy. He saves them from the trouble which their enemy, the *agent provocateur,* would have brought them, and precipitates them into an even worse desolation by an action which he should have known would end in tragedy. One feels, in fact, very little kindness for the revolutionary in this instance; all one's sympathy goes to the peasants, ground between the upper and nether millstones of rival systems of politics. *Fontamara* already raises a

problem which must sooner or later have troubled the conscience of every sincere revolutionary who had a real feeling for the people. How far is the revolutionary justified in leading the people into action which he knows will bring them an immediate increase in suffering, even if he believes that in the long run such action will precipitate their freedom? How much truth is there in the revolutionary casuistry that the people must be induced to rebel against their masters and suffer for their rebellion so that they may be taught the true character of the ruling class and by this means be brought to overthrow its tyranny? The question might be put in the words of the survivors of Fontamara:

> "After so much strife and anguish and tears, and wounds and blood, and hatred and despair—what are we to do?"

It is a question which as yet Silone is content merely to pose rather than to answer, for *Fontamara* is a book concerned first of all with the tragedy of the peasants, and only indirectly with the problems of the revolutionary.

In the two later novels, the revolutionary becomes the central figure, and the complex structure of Italian social life is the background against which is enacted his physical struggle for outward freedom, and the mental struggle through which he develops from a materialist party dogmatist into an individual thinker whose view of society is moral and universal, rather than political and sectarian.

Bread and Wine opens with the arrival in the Marsica of the revolutionary Pietro Spina, ill with consumption after months in hiding. A peasant fetches to him a doctor who was at school with him in his youth, and who has temporized with the Fascist régime. Sacca, the doctor, speaks of the disillusionment of his class. His description fits not only Italy, but also all countries caught in the toils of a society based on authority and war; Spina's reply has an equally universal application.

> " 'All our life is lived provisionally,' he said. 'We think that for the time being things are bad, that for the time being

we must adapt ourselves, even humiliate ourselves, but that it is all just temporary, and that one day life, real life, will begin. We get ready to die, still complaining that we have only one life, and spend the whole of it living provisionally, waiting for real life to begin. And thus the time passes. Nobody lives in the present. Nobody has any profit from his daily life. Nobody can say: "On that day, on that occasion, my life began". Even those who enjoy all the advantages of belonging to the government party have to live by intrigue, and are thoroughly nauseated by the dominant stupidity. They too live provisionally, and spend their lives waiting.'

" 'One must not wait,' said Spina. ' In exile one spends one's life waiting too. One must act. One must say: "Enough! from this very day." '

" 'But if there is no liberty?' said Nunzio Sacca.

" 'Liberty isn't a thing you are given as a present,' said Spina. 'You can be a free man under a dictatorship. It is sufficient if you struggle against it. He who thinks with his own head is a free man. He who struggles for what he believes to be right is a free man. . . . Liberty is something you have to take for yourself. It's no use begging it from others.' "

Through Sacca's arrangements, Spina goes disguised as a priest to the foothills of the Apennines. There, trusted because of his cloth, he is able to see intimately into the lives and minds of the country people. Resting from the hard political struggle, he has leisure to test his ideas and his motives. He begins to doubt the whole conception of life which has motivated his action up to the present time.

In the two girls whom he encounters and who become devoted to him are represented the two influences which attack his beliefs. Bianchina is the desire to enjoy freely the physical, worldly side of life. Christina is the desire for spiritual fulfilment. Both make him realize how much he has become lost in subservience to political dogma.

"Is it possible to take part in political life, to devote oneself

to the service of a party, and remain sincere?" he writes in his notebook.

"Has not truth, for me, become party truth? Has not justice, for me, become party justice?

"Have not party interests ended by deadening all my discrimination between moral values? Do I, too, not despise them as petty-bourgeois prejudices?

"Have I escaped from the bondage of a decadent Church only to fall into bondage to the opportunism of a party?

"What has become of my enthusiasm of that time? By putting politics before everything else, before all other spiritual needs, have I not impoverished, sterilized my life? Has it not meant that I have neglected deeper interests?"

This is a situation that must inevitably face the revolutionary who has not allowed himself to become completely crushed by political dogma. It is, moreover, a critical situation which, unless it results in the positive assertion of spiritual and moral values, will lead to the eventual inner destruction of any moral or aesthetic sense the revolutionary may possess. The revolutionaries who fail to assert their moral values become the betrayers of the revolution, the Stalins and Robespierres.

Such changes in attitude are never achieved immediately, nor does an intellectual enlightenment usually result in a sudden change in action, for there are still emotional loyalties which drag heavily on the subject of such a conversion. Thus Spina tries to throw aside his doubts by returning to political action. He finds discontent among the young people of Fossa and tries to convert them to his political creed. Yet in talking to them he shows his lack of faith in the dogmas he still pretends to hold.

"There are many distinctions that are distinctions of words only. There are many alliances that are alliances of words only. In no century have words been so perverted from their natural purpose of putting man in touch with man as they are to-day. To speak and to deceive (often to deceive oneself) have become almost synonymous. So far has this process gone that I, wishing

to speak to you sincerely and fraternally, with no other object in mind than that of understanding you and making myself understood by you, if I begin to search for the right words, remain in perplexity, so false, so equivocal, hackneyed and compromised they are. Therefore it is perhaps better to keep silent and to trust the silence."

As in *Fontamara,* his attempts at political action end in tragedy for others. A student he urges to work for the party is killed by the militia. Bianchina, whom he recommends to go to Rome, becomes a whore. He himself is discovered and has to escape into the mountains, but Christina, who follows him for love, falls a prey to the wolves among the mountain snow. In the same way, the physical and spiritual lives are destroyed in the man who is ruled by the abstractions of dogma.

The Seed Beneath the Snow continues Spina's spiritual progress. A large portion of the book is devoted to an intricate and successful description of the corruption and tragedy of the life of the Italian middle class, but as this is still the background against which Spina's struggle is enacted, I have chosen to ignore it for reasons of space. From a literary criterion, this is the most successful of Silone's books. The structure is more closely integrated, the characterization more rich than in his previous work. There is a greater beauty of imagery and language, and the slightly overdone gruesomeness of the earlier novels is tempered by a more friendly mellowness.

Nearly one half of the book is used to describe the rural society, in which only a few retain their integrity. The rest are too much engrossed in the intrigues necessary for power, or even for safety. Then, against this elaborate background, is introduced Spina's experience as he hid in a miserable donkey's stable on the mountain side, told to his grandmother, who has taken him into her own house.

Here, by the devotion of a dumb peasant lad who came every day to sit with him, he realizes the value of companionship, and comes nearer to the poor than he was ever brought by his political Actions.

"How can I possibly give you an idea, Grandmother, of the simple, silent, deep friendship between us? I could barely see the dark hulk of his heavy body and hear his deep slow breathing, but there was a certain affinity between his body and the bodies of the other objects in that cave—the donkey, myself, the mice, the trough, the straw, the packsaddle and the broken lantern—a communion, a brotherhood, whose discovery flooded my heart with a new feeling which perhaps I should call peace or even happiness. … I feel now as if I had never really been myself before, as if I had been playing a part like an actor on the stage, wearing a mask and declaiming prepared speeches. This life and this civilization of ours seems to me a theatrical, conventional, lying sham. . . .

"… I have come to think that the quiet, the peace, the happiness, the well-being, the homeliness, the companionship which I found in that stable derived from a contact with simple, true, difficult, painful forms of life, immune from the plague of rhetoric".

Spina experiences what is known as a "change of heart", transmitted with all the vividness of a mystical experience. He realizes in the symbolic unity of nature a meaning and a pattern which are expressed humanly in brotherhood and companionship. In observing the processes of nature, he sees, moreover, an earnest of the growth of truth and freedom among men. This is the "seed beneath the snow".

"At first I feared that the seed was already dead but, after I had carefully cleared away the earth around it with a straw, I discovered a slender white tongue like a stalk of grass coming out of it. My whole being, my whole heart came to centre about that little seed, Grandmother. I was in despair because I didn't know how to keep it alive: even now I'm not sure that I did the right thing. To keep out the cold and to replace the shelter of the board which I had removed, I covered it with a little earth; every morning I melted some snow over it to provide it with water and, to give it heat, I breathed on it.

> That clod of earth with its tiny, weak, exposed yet living, hidden treasure came to hold for me the mystery, the familiarity and the sacredness of a mother's breast. . . . My own existence, I knew, was as precarious and as exposed to danger as that of the seed abandoned beneath the snow, and yet it was as natural, as vital as life itself, not an image, a pretence or an imitation of life, but life itself, at its sorrowful and dangerous source."

Spina's experience is now involved in the discovery of brotherhood. With his grandmother he finds a new relationship based on their common faith in spiritual realities. Then his dumb friend comes to the town where he is hiding. Spina leaves his grandmother's house and joins Infante, the dumb boy, and Simone the Polecat, a peasant who gives them a refuge. With Infante and Simone he discovers a relationship more deep and comradely than any he had ever enjoyed before. He realizes in this why his political activity was futile.

> ". . . All in all, I must have been acquainted with several thousand persons in the Party more or less and known a few dozen among them a little better. But in fifteen years I never knew a soul as well as I know you and Infante. I used to think it was my fault, but I came to see that the same thing was true of the others. To tell the truth, they didn't hold much with friendship in the Party; there was something suspicious about it, as if it might engender the formation of cliques and gangs. For this reason I should even rightly admit that friendship, in the true and human meaning of the word, was regarded and despised as a remnant of bourgeois individualism."

Later, Spina flees to a town in the mountains, accompanied by Faustina, a beautiful and intelligent girl who in this book embodies the qualities represented by the two girls in *Bread and Wine.* She represents the union of physical and spiritual happiness and fulfilment. With Faustina he discusses the change that has occurred in his philosophy.

"It was more painful for me than I can tell you, Faustina, after I had come back from exile abroad in order to work and fight against the dictatorship, to spend almost a whole year in inactivity here in the country, rusting away, all because I was going through a spiritual crisis. But this much I learned at my own expense: that before we can give something of ourselves to others, we must first possess ourselves. A man who is spiritually a slave cannot work for true freedom. To look after one's own soul no longer seems to me a waste of time or, as I once used to say pontifically, a sign of bourgeois decadence. When all is said and done, there is no better and more necessary occupation than man's effort to know himself and the meaning of his life on earth. Everything else will follow, as the cart follows the horse. I now feel that the two fundamental motives of my existence came out of this spiritual crisis stronger than ever: the rejection of our present social order and attachment to the poor, two motives which are but one. . . . My love for the poor must have come down to me from a previous existence; I can imagine myself armless and legless but not without my feeling for them. This love for the poor has been my salvation; were it not for this, Faustina, I might have wound up as a Government orator."

This is Spina's final credo, on which his fate is cast. He has left the abstractions of political dogma, the artificial cage of party practice, and entered upon the intimate reality of direct knowledge between men. On this only can the society he desires be built, patiently and with love.

The change in his ideas is symbolized in the ending of the book. This time Spina asks and gains no sacrifice of others to achieve his objects. The political machine demands its victims, but the loving man gives himself. Spina has planned to leave Italy and live abroad with Faustina, thus achieving the end of his conflict and the gaining of complete physical and spiritual happiness. But Infante commits a murder and Spina lets himself be led away into prison in his place. Thus the man who seeks to save mankind by moral values has a task as much

burdened by hardship and self-sacrifice as that of any political martyr.

We have seen, both in Silone's life and in his novels, the development of a sense of the reality of moral and spiritual values, and of the futility of any attempt to change society that is not derived from a conception of morality. But, because Silone has not been explicit in his novels as to the exact nature of the social programmes he would advocate, we must not consider that he has retired into a mysticism that has no contact with social facts. On the contrary, his realization of the need for a moral basis for social action, springs, in part, from his own experience as a political worker, and his ever-present desire for a life that will relieve the poor and the oppressed from their miserable fate.

It is in *The School for Dictators* that we find Silone's social attitude most clearly expressed. Primarily, this book is an analysis of the nature and methods of Fascism, and, as such, although it is probably the best book of its kind, it is not of immediate interest. In this essay we are concerned with the glimpses we gain of Silone's view of a free society.

His social creed is essentially and thoroughly libertarian. He states:

> " If I may for one moment abandon the role of cynic that I have assumed in these conversations, I will frankly confess that I *only* believe in miracles. Other things I have no need to believe, because I see them. But I believe in the miracle of liberty, although I see all the things that are opposed to it."

It is in such a belief in freedom, irrational because it is above reason, that Silone's creed becomes truly religious. Faith, as well as reason, is necessary for the achievement of harmony among men. In the last resort every great social thinker has found his energy in a faith that went beyond his reasoning powers, in a belief in qualities and potentialities of man for which the material world can afford no proof.

Moral teachings have often been derided by politicians as being unrealistic. Yet it is just because most politicians are not actuated

by moral values that their own efforts have been so harmful to the interests of humanity.

> "... a genuine knowledge of social reality does not suffice if it is not supported by a strong moral sense."

It is, in fact, only by the realization and revelation of the natural laws concerning humanity that social knowledge can be imparted, and only by the spreading of knowledge can communal happiness be attained. With such knowledge, politics as we know, it becomes redundant, for

> "Is not a certain ignorance of the laws that govern human society at the very basis of all politics?"

Silone's criticism of existing political institutions, whether of the State or of parties attempting to take over the State, is directed towards both their methods and their ends. He attacks the domination of machine and technique, the predominance of the means over the end.

> "Machines, which ought to be man's instrument, enslave him, the state enslaves society, the bureaucracy enslaves the state, the church enslaves religion, parliament enslaves democracy, institutions enslave justice, academies enslave art, the army enslaves the nation, the party enslaves the cause, the dictatorship of the proletariat enslaves Socialism. . . .
>
> "Technique aims at the mechanical use of men, while liberty considers the human personality as sacred. A technique of the progressive stupefaction of the masses exists. A technique of liberty does not and cannot exist."

Liberty can only arise organically from free companionship among men and the growth of trust and brotherhood. It cannot be imposed from without, but must be gained by each man, individually and in co-operation with his fellows.

On social organization Silone's ideas may be epitomized as,

firstly, the use and control of the means of production by the workers themselves, and, secondly, a federalist social structure based on local and functional autonomy.

> "Socialism means socialization. Nationalization, whether partial or total, is not socialism. Why? Capitalism has separated labour from the ownership of the means of production. Under the feudal system the two were united. Socialism aims at re-uniting labour and the means of production on the technical and social level that has been made possible by modern industry, taking the latter out of the hands of private individuals and the state and giving it to the labouring community."

At the downfall of the Fascist régime, Silone's actions seemed to show some change in his attitude, for he returned to Italy and joined actively in Italian political life as a socialist leader and editor of *Avanti.* His subsequent development, however, was strikingly similar to that of his own hero, Spina, for he discovered that all he had himself said about political movements was in fact true: in 1947 he resigned the editorship of *Avanti,* denouncing the totalitarian nature of mass parties, of which he said:

> "These represent, for democracy, the same danger as the trusts in economy. They tend in the interior of their organizations towards an oligarchical regime, towards the concentration of the direction of the party among the hands of a few leaders, linked to each other by the solidarity of gangster chiefs towards the outside world. These parties gain more and more hold over public opinion. It is useless to combat monopoly in the economic order and to protect it in politics, for politics exercises a more and more direct influence on economic life: one kind of trust would thus simply be replaced by another."

I can do no better than end this study with an extract from a statement summarizing his philosophical and social beliefs, which was published in American and English periodicals in 1942.

"The struggle between Socialism and Fascism will not be decided by war, the truth being that wars in general decide nothing. It may well be that Fascism will be conquered by force of arms, and nevertheless will develop in the victor states—perhaps even with a democratic or socialistic mask, under the form of a 'Red Fascism'. History is made by men, not by social determinisms, and I confess that I am not pessimistic.

"In summing up, I stand for: (i) an integral federalism and *(2)* an ethical conception of Socialism. Federalism is often recommended these days as a penalty for defeated nations. But it would not be a penalty; it would be a triumph for our cause. As for the ethical conception of socialism, it does not demand a new morality; there is no question of seeking a new justification for Socialism; all we have to do is to recognize its true potentiality."

Here, as in the rest of Silone's writing, we find a developed and almost prophetic insight which can only be gained by relinquishing the dogmas of political orthodoxy, and rediscovering by individual experience the simple and difficult truths of brotherhood and mutual trust among men, the veritable seed beneath the snow from which will rise the harvest of freedom.

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W. H, AUDEN

*

RONALD MASON

WHEN Auden wrote *Spain* in 1937 he achieved, in one considerable utterance, the stature of an important poet, with the power to give arresting artistic form to the instinctive apprehensions of his entire generation. It is not every eminent modern poet who has this power; and although this function is not essential to great poetry, it is doubtful whether a poet without the capacity to perform it can maintain high artistic status for long. Without it an artist loses contact with the present, risks extravagance in his use of the imagination, and has to be content with the eccentricities rather than with the central significance of his art.

Auden's own propensity to extravagance, originating in his exceptionally live intelligence and vagabond curiosity, is a matter of public notoriety and I need not insist on it. He is not fully rid of it yet, for it is just as apparent in the Caliban section *of The Sea and the Mirror* as it was in the early *Letter to a Wound.* Auden sprang to a fully responsible stature when he wrote *Spain,* and for all the lyric virtuosity of his previous poems he has been a finer and more considerable artist ever since; yet he may expel his mischievousness with a pitchfork as often as he likes, and as often it will return. Nevertheless *Spain* represents an important symbolical climacteric in the tale of Auden's development; it marks the first occasion on which he allowed the tension of subjective intuition and objective reason to be sustained for long enough to eject a poetic utterance of really moving and relevant eloquence. It marked the end of a strain of sardonic detachment which revealed a mind of consuming eagerness, with a power of assimilation of impressions only equalled by its staggering facility in transforming them into verse, for the most part, satiric verse, for

in common with all minds uncertain of their direction he elected first for analytical treatment of his themes, relying on his scientific talents to predominate over his imaginative, which he used for the time for the secondary duties of setting and decoration only. The early part of his career was therefore that of a tireless and disconcerting experimenter in forms, whose impatience and energy did not defeat considerable technical excellence, but whose very inventiveness endangered the stability of his value.

The Spanish Civil War, performing for our own generation a precisely similar service to that effected by the French Revolution for the English Romantics, was itself a sufficiently concrete symbol of the abstract struggle for power that had for so many years been the burden of the intellectual diagnoses of the modern discontent. Auden, always fascinated by symbols, was one of the first to realize not only the political but the cultural and imaginative importance of this symbolical conflict. It refined away from his art, the expansive and irritating wooliness that had done so much to muffle the impact of such dynamic creations as *The Dog Beneath the Skin* and *The Ascent of F6;* it gave his expression a direction and an "edge'; and in the few short pages of *Spain,* though it was not free from a leavening of his characteristic banality, he attained at last a significant and creative precision.

"On that arid square, that fragment nipped off from hot
Africa, soldered so crudely to inventive Europe,
On that tableland scored by rivers,
Our fever's menacing shapes are precise and alive."

Precise and alive—the qualities of poetry that matters; and for Auden, always electrically alive, to find a precise direction was an achievement of great importance in the history of the struggle of modern art, to express itself in significant terms of modern awareness and modern application. His assumption, in *Spain, of* the essential prerogatives and responsibilities of the artist in a world at war, provides perhaps the most eloquent modern expression of such a man's position—and incidentally, by fulfilling complete poetic consciousness of a state of world war several years

before the historical fact of it, is a complete answer to the complaint that the Second World War produced no poets to compare with the First. *Spain* is not so much a proclamation in round terms of Auden's awareness, as evidence in every line that his poetry was at last being inspired by the condition of men rather than by the condition of Auden.

With the publication in America of a collected edition of Auden's works, it is possible to get him into perspective and to examine the form which his newly-found responsibility took during and after the Spanish War. This edition has not yet appeared in the country; and in spite of an unhappy system of printing many of the poems in alphabetical rather than chronological order, which makes it very difficult to see the book as it should be seen, as an organic and progressive whole, it is nevertheless of great value and attractiveness and contains incidentally a number of individual poems that have not yet been published over here. The pleasure of having such a bulk of vitality between two covers compensates for the omission of some old favourites among the lighter verses, notably the *Letter to Lord Byron,* presumably rejected as ephemeral; but this admirably-produced edition is stated to contain everything that Auden wants perpetuated right down to the *For the Time Being* volume, and accordingly it is on this book alone that his readers are expected to judge him.

Worrying chronology out of the alphabet, we can pick up without much difficulty the record of his sure development. The kindling in *Spain* of the spark of his true inspiration into a significant maturity marks the important spiritual transition; and while his technical achievements are constantly expanding and exciting from the first, the advance in temper and outlook since 1937 is patent. Phrases, that were merely hints before, take shape as poems after; his irritating irresponsibilities become from this date steadily fewer. Unfortunately, his very vitality has still a deceptive youthfulness in its expression which misleads the unwary or unsympathetic into exasperation with his rejection of oracular dignity; and it has resulted in some quarters in a failure, or rather a refusal, to comprehend the real scope and depth of his capacities.

Before 1937 his embittered social conscience lacked adequate roots. He saw keenly enough through his own eyes as well as through Eliot's the wreckage and decay of the waste land; he had been brought up in the North and in the industrial Midlands, and his early years saw him through the slump. England became in his eyes a land of mouldering machinery immediately symbolizing defunct ideals; and being too much of a realist to resuscitate dead idealisms that others had worn out, he wrote his early poems in a mood of bantering cynicism that revealed to sympathetic readers how bitterly intelligent was his estimate of contemporary values, and at the same time how reluctant or impotent he was to supply anything at the moment towards a recovery except pertinent comment. Hardboiled and cosmopolitan, he took a competent birds-eye view of the confusions of his generation, and out of a rich magpie's hoard of collected impressions dealt out poem after sardonic poem, the melancholy irony at the heart of his prolific rhythms seasoning with a salutary taming discipline his apparently inexhaustible technical flexibility. All his native lyricism became subordinate to this irony; a vein in Auden which grew stronger with his development until it created in him an essential detachment, a studied impersonal brake on lyric emotion, that kept him of necessity a little aloof. The doubting rat that gnawed at Auden's innermost poetic inspiration, forbade his whole-souled identification with the conflicts he so clearly perceived; throughout all his earlier lyric verse his ultimate doubt makes him distrust his vision and leaves him, while intellectually unassailable, yet poetically maimed.

The isolation of the sceptic (cast out by life, in Chesterton's famous apologue) was sapping Auden's astonishing creativeness. The occasional outstanding lyrics in which he achieved a wholeness of vision untrammelled by the too-familiar sardonic doubt, are witness to the restriction that his self-induced detachment was enforcing upon his poetry. Disgusted with reaction, impatient of half-baked idealism, inflamed with a sense of urgency yet distrustful of the enthusiasms bent upon fulfilling it, he hovered tentatively above the map of Europe in an uneasy void created for him by his own malaise; and not all his anger nor all his pity could

reduce the distance between himself and the people for whom he was writing. His profuse inventiveness never deserted him; but too often readers of his early poetry are left with a sense of vitality without direction, of intellectual exuberance without adequate imaginative experience to engage it.

With *Spain* his malaise took coherent and valuable shape at last; his fever's menacing shapes have become precise and alive for the reason that he was at last able to make an imaginative diagnosis for the generation that the fever afflicted. The responsibility he assumed then coupled itself with his brilliant and resilient technique to increase his capacity for creative illumination of the peculiarly tortuous darkness that confounded his contemporaries; and evidence that his departure for America did not in fact affect his sensitive contact with the problems underlying the surface conflicts is provided by the superb *September* i, 1939, with its great affirmation of the supreme relevance of the poet in a context which appeared to be the living negation of his value:

> All that I have is a voice
> To undo the folded lie,
> The romantic lie in the brain
> Of the sensual Man in the Street,
> The lie of Authority
> Whose buildings scrape the sky;
> There is no such thing as the State
> And no one exists alone:
> Hunger allows no choice
> To the citizen or the police,
> We must love one another or die.

That magnificent stanza expressed the core of his public faith; and I hope it is typographical rather than philosophical error which has mysteriously excluded it from the poem in the American collected edition. If he has since seen reason to suppress it, that reason remains obscure to me: the more so since its inevitable conclusion aligns itself as inevitably with a strain, new to Auden but familiar in certain great predecessors of his, that

began to appear with the first of his collections finding their way back across the Atlantic, and has increased to a point where it assumes a central importance in his work.

Every eye must weep alone
Till I Will be overthrown

—he declared in the short dedicatory poem prefixed to *Another Time.* The manner and the vision are Blake's; with Auden this is no surprise, for it is a familiar habit of his to assimilate an admired author both in style and perception, and to garnish him with native tricks of his own. In this way Housman, Blake, Eliot, the ballads, and Rilke have all taken punishment from him, and have yielded to his predatory imagination in return a series of unique vantage-points for vision. Here the vision is Blake's, and for Auden it is a new and significant one. It appeared early in the war, when close contemplation of the hideous spiritual complexities of the contemporary scene had combined with his newly-matured responsibility to drive him away from his emotional Communism, his light-fingered, ironic psycho-analysis and his private world of nursery symbolisms into a deadly serious examination of the personal integration of the individual man in collective mankind. And in *Another Time* there are hints that he had found the valuable secret embodied in the Blakean couplet I have just quoted, a secret even more philosophical than poetic, more religious than philosophical, the secret that he holds in common with Shakespeare and Dostoievsky as well as with Blake, and which is at the roots of some of the most striking imaginative work in the world's literature; the doctrine of the abnegation of the individual self and its active agent the **will,** which being interpreted and extended becomes a positive proclamation of the necessity of active love.

This vision once glimpsed, there can be no reversion. Yet his next poem, *New Tear Letter,* betrayed no sign of it; was in fact a pretentious farrago of facile rhymed octosyllabics, embodying series after series of slick and hardly significant highbrow wisecracks—a panorama, in fact, of intellectual bewilderment, in

which the mature poet sweated out of himself once and for all his irrepressibly volatile adolescence. It had no direction and no shape, it had, so far as could be seen, no purpose; it had in concentration all the perky and ostentatious tricks of the trade, which had been sown broadcast among his earlier and more readily forgivable verses. D. S. Savage, stigmatizing it in *The Personal Principle* as Auden's final abdication as a poet, can be forgiven in his context for what has proved in the sequel to be a rash and incomplete judgment. Savage's error—one which weighted decisively an already prejudiced adverse summary—was to mistake a temporary backwater for the full tide of the poet's development, and to refuse the leniency of the interim judgment which individual works of the eccentric and volatile nature of Auden's are entitled to demand. He is a poet to be judged in perspective, in progression, or not at all. Savage assumed, I think unwarrantably, that the decline in standard revealed in a single work was an inevitable indication of a general and progressive loss of power. But Auden was still in his thirties; and not all works of imagination are conceived by the artist as fulfilling the same functions. Some are intentionally progressive; others as deliberately mark time, fulfilling a necessary recapitulatory function in the poet's mind preparatory to a further expansion of the imaginative field. Thus Melville's *Redburn* and *White Jacket* are the necessary realistic successors of the profoundly fanciful *Mardi;* that *Moby Dick* was built on their backs is the conclusive justification of their basic pedestrianism. In the same way it is possible to regard *New Tear Letter,* chaotic and pretentious though it is, as a piece of stocktaking salutary to Auden if to no one else, and a vehicle by which he was able to cleanse his stuffed bosom of much perilous, or at least superfluous, stuff. Ultimately it echoes an intellectual despair, symptomatic of an over-educated and under-imaginative generation, the failure of whose fathers' faith left them hanging over horrible gulfs of doubt and dilemma —a spiritual state admirably diagnosed by one of their most perceptive sufferers and spokesmen, the latter-day Amiel "Palinurus", whose *The Unquiet Grave* supersedes *New Tear Letter* and indeed most of the work done in kindred style by his contemporaries

of the last decade and a half. *New Tear Letter* was perhaps the necessary but untidy bundling-away of the intellectual clutter with which Auden's mounting imagination was continually encumbered. The clearance gave space for the amplification of the hinted Blakean vision, which had had spasmodic expression before this laborious but effective stocktaking.

For the Time Being, falling into the two distinct parts, a Christmas Oratorio and a poetic commentary on *The Tempest*, broke a three or four year silence with a most reassuring mastery of lyric mood and manner and a new economical consistency of purpose. Perhaps for the first time Auden has succeeded here in subduing his remarkable technique to the exacting limits of a carefully-chosen series of differing moods. Consequently the dramatic effect *of The Sea and the Mirror* is far more intense than that of a mere orthodox drama like *The Dog beneath the Skin,* and the impact of the philosophical communication which the poem is designed to convey, is correspondingly more direct and impressive. And it is the philosophical foundation of this poem, rather than its lyric virtuosity, which arrests the immediate imaginative interest of sympathetic critics of Auden.

The very first lyric piece states it. His characteristically rapacious allusiveness ropes in Shakespeare to his aid; Shakespeare at his dead centre.

> All the rest is silence
> On the other side of the wall,
> And the silence ripeness
> And the ripeness all.

It does not need much schooling either in Shakespeare or in poetic and philosophical theory to recognize Auden's new mood, and to see how it has developed from the awareness of responsibility in *Spain,* through the awareness of the necessity for the abrogation of the will in *Another Time,* and the awareness of the necessity of positive love in *September I*, 1939, to the avowedly Shakespearean comprehension of forgiveness that is patent in *The Sea and the Mirror.* The keys to it may not all be in Auden ; most are in Shakespeare, others in Blake, in Keats' letters, in the

New Testament, in *The Brothers Karamazov;* but pickings from here and from there in Auden's conscious or unconscious recollection mount up to an impressive certainty in this poem. On the framework of *The Tempest,* itself one of the most conspicuously Christian utterances in literature, Auden constructs his dramatic statement of the imperative call for contemporary reconciliation; and his poem is the more effective for its concentration on the chief dark figure in *The Tempest* whom Shakespeare omitted from the general forgiveness.

> Your all is partial, Prospero,
> My will is all my own;
> Your need to love shall never know
> Me; I am I, Antonio,
> By choice myself, alone.

Whether this echoes or amplifies Shakespeare correctly or not, is not at present relevant. Auden has extracted the lesson either from Shakespeare ready-made or from a hint that Shakespeare, by omission or otherwise, has given him. It may be legitimate criticism; it certainly is legitimate expression of the profound problem facing the modern world. Auden's progress from the "attached" to the "non-attached" man has driven him to face this most formidable barrier confronting sensitive civilization; the problem of the irreconcilable. It is essential for man to relinquish his self-will; to stop being Stavrogin and to become Alyosha, to renounce Miltonic inversion and espouse Negative Capability. Every eye must weep alone Till I Will be overthrown; well and good. Prospero forgives his enemies; but what if his enemies refuse to be forgiven, refuse to join the band of reconciled regenerates, prefer to retain mastery of their own fate? Says Auden's Antonio to Prospero,

> . . . While I stand outside,
> Your circle, the will to charm, is still there.
> As I exist so you shall be denied,
> Forced to remain our melancholy mentor,
> The grown-up man, the adult in his pride.

Never have time to curl up at the centre
Time turns on when completely reconciled.
Never become and therefore never enter
The green occluded pasture as a child.

The recalcitrance of the defeated, the refusal to surrender, makes the renunciation of self automatically impossible in Prospero; the refusal to be reconciled annuls his victory at the start. Auden's awareness of this fearful potential and practical snag at the heart of the glorious perfectionist theory invests this poem, and his own poetic stature, with an authority and an attractiveness which have few rivals in modern literature. Progress from this point in poetry as well as in philosophy will require perhaps as great an imaginative effort to achieve as was necessary for his arrival at it. The *Christmas Oratorio,* by Eliot out of Browning, does little to suggest that in that work Auden even began to address himself to the task. In an age conscious enough of its perplexities the poet who propounds them perceptively enough to illuminate some of the way through them is a rarer bird than the common enough specimen who simply propounds them. That Auden in the past few years has developed from one of the most illustrious of the latter class, to one of the most potentially valuable of the former, is the conclusion to which the bulk of his collected poetry leads; a conclusion which may be the beginning of an imaginative maturity rare in our literature, and in our troubled times and conditions infinitely desirable.

The deplorable time-lag between the conception of a contemporary poem and its publication is now enlarged, in Auden's case, by the width of the Atlantic. Of the reasons for his assumption of American nationality we can know only what his published work cares to tell us; and that is not much. About the value of the change there can of course be a dozen opinions, and the difficulty of assessing it is not assisted by the deadly slowness with which this English poet's work trickles through to English readers. Already, we are told, another long poem has been published—*The Age of Anxiety,* a "Baroque Eclogue" as he calls it, in which post-war U.S.A. is anatomized and salvation sought

in it in vain. Reports convey tantalizing hints of its skill and maturity; but for evidence of it the English have got to wait. And we must reconcile ourselves, I am afraid, to taking all our Auden in future in minute doses too long-drawn-out for our taste. His prodigious productiveness of the middle thirties has unfitted us for this compulsory drought. But a civilization is upon us in which a film star may fly the Atlantic in a few hours while a work of high literary importance may take nearly as many years.

Whatever view each one of us may take of Auden's withdrawal from his native land, those who grew to critical consciousness in the thirties are already aware of the loss. Auden in England spoke out for a residual defiance and exultation present in each one of us, as an element even of our contemporary despair. Auden away from England loses his representative voice. Certainly he has widened his horizons, enriched his technical, yes and his spiritual equipment, achieved in his latest books a stature and a sanction lacking even in the best of his pre-war work. But during the time of transition he is a man without an imaginative home, without even the creative nostalgia of the exile. Henry James and T. S. Eliot before him, travelling the other way, were able to shake off the parochialism that stunted American culture, and acquired in exchange the thousand-year-old spiritual civilization of Europe. There could be little but enrichment there. But Auden has done the opposite. Seeing, I suppose, spiritual death where those others saw the only spiritual salvation (and in the light of the history of his time who is going to blame him?) he has torn himself out of the ancestral cabbage-patch and adventured into a new and only partially-charted civilization. "The influence of American culture upon W. H. Auden" will doubtless be a favourite set question in Higher Schools English in a hundred years or so. It is not my job to write the answer out now—but merely to record the warning that his migration has the possibility of a pronounced enrichment of his highly individual talent, but also the alternative possibility of a limitation of his value, which may or may not benefit from radical change. His next poems may be among the most important that he will write; perhaps of outstanding importance in literary history. For they

will record what is by all standards a rarity; the progress of an adventurous imagination away from the security and depth of a familiar culture into the uncertainties of an adopted way of life.

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JOHN COWPER POWYS

★

MALCOLM ELWIN

JOHN COWPER POWYS has suffered more unfairly from the paper shortage than any other writer of comparable stature. After Bernard Shaw, he stands with Somerset Maugham as a doyen among living English writers, His fame is accepted and assured, and the books that have built his fame are in demand by the rising generation of readers eager to equip inquiring minds with knowledge of the modern masters. But all his great novels are unobtainable except at extravagant prices from second-hand booksellers. Only wealthy collectors can afford second-hand copies of the supreme masterpiece, *A Glastonbury Romance.* On its publication in 1941 *Owen Glendower* was sold out in a few weeks and there was no paper for a second impression of its 952 pages.

The length of the novels is their handicap in claims on the paper quota, just as their length and discursiveness have been an obstacle to their popularity. It is ironical that such should have been the case in the decade of *A Glastonbury Romance,* for the nineteen-thirties witnessed a revival in fashion for long novels—an unknown writer scored sensational success with the interminable *Gone With the Wind* and Hugh Walpole crowned his career with the four bulky volumes of his *Herries Saga.* But Walpole's conscious artistry as a storyteller enabled him to devise narrative, incidents, and characters according to a prescribed plan; condensation, resulting from a sense of selection and rejection acquired in years of application to his art, achieved an economy of effect, rendering his stories readily palatable to a meagre intellectual appetite.

Such economy, so far from seeming a virtue, would appear a defect to the genius in which prodigality—the antithesis of

economy—is an abiding quality. Repeatedly Powys has denied that he is an artist. To John Crow in *A Glastonbury Romance* he ascribes a feeling like his own:

> "Deep in his sidelong, shifty, dodging, sheering-off nature there was lodged an invincible distaste for all artistic theories. He could recognize genius *in the raw,* but a certain particular expository tone made him feel as if his stomach was full of grey ashes."

And in his study of Dostoievsky

> "I think the bulk of our writers regard their work as an art of which they have learnt the trick, an art with an elaborate technique that they are by degrees making more perfect, an art that is honourable in itself and the cause why honour comes to the artist who has learnt such a difficult art. Now I do not believe that Dostoievsky in all the course of his life ever regarded his work in this way. I doubt if he thought of it as 'art' at all."

Dostoievsky is his own chosen master, and what he writes of Dostoievsky may be applied as aptly to himself—"as far as artistry goes he is the most careless, reckless, irresponsible writer of all great novelists, except perhaps Sir Walter Scott."

After reading his *Dostoievsky,* a close friend wrote that, while the book shed for him much new light on Dostoievsky, it told him even more of John Cowper Powys himself. Powys regards criticism as "essentially personal", and during the forty years when the staple of his livelihood was lecturing on literature, his popular success derived from his capacity to convey vital personal impressions of great writers and their works. As a lecturer he spoke without notes, and his style as an essayist—in, for instance, *The Pleasures of Literature,* where he discourses on such divers subjects as Homer and Rabelais, the Bible and Nietzsche, Milton, Wordsworth, and Dickens—is the conversational exposition of an impromptu speaker, elaborating ideas born to his imagination

from the subjects under discussion. As a critic he is pre-eminently an interpreter, and his interpretations are as peculiarly personal as the distinctively individual performances of Shakespearian characters by Kean and Kemble, Irving and Phelps, Olivier and Richardson.

In his novels he is similarly subjective. Arguing that "the whole Dostoievskyan world—underworld and overworld included!—sprang fully armed, like Pallas Athene from the brain of Zeus, *out of his own nature*'," he writes:

> "The important thing with any writer is his own soul; what he's got in his own head, in his own nerves, and in his own character and blood and temperament. And if this is the important thing, what does the occasion matter that taps this flood? Let it be an aesthetic challenge by an idle virtuoso, let it be a gambling debt, let it be the pawning of our last overcoat or of our wife's jewellery, let it be a zealous competition with a rival author."

Scorning the scheme of a planned plot, much less of a Trollopian synopsis, he is usually content to begin a novel by loosing one strange character upon a particular community, and then allowing the story to develop out of this character's reactions upon other characters and theirs upon him and upon each other. Thus Wolf Solent arrives in the first chapter at the Dorset town of Ramsgard, Dud No-man of *Maiden Castle* is revealed in his Dorchester lodging, the world of *Weymouth Sands* is surveyed through the consciousness of Magnus Muir—even in A *Glastonbury Romance,* though Mr. Geard's legacy from Canon Crow quickly emerges as the story's central theme, the scene is disclosed through the medium of John Crow and his arrival as a stranger within the bosom of his family.

These initiating characters betray certain common characteristics—eccentric habits, a sense of loneliness, twisted humour, a fantastic imagination, an inveterate addiction to introspection—and the reader of more than one of his novels advances from suspicion to conviction that the characters are all virtually their

creator himself. These characters do not necessarily turn out to be the "heroes" or chief characters of their stories; for the first hundred pages of *A Glastonbury Romance John* Crow undoubtedly appears as the hero, but he is then superseded by Sam Dekker, and Sam in turn by Mr. Geard, while Owen Evans, Philip Crow, and Persephone Spear each assumes some semblance of their creator's personality. For John Crow's creator, as for John Crow, "the soul of every person he met was something that he was doomed to explore", and so subjective is his manner of approach, that every analysis becomes tinted with self-analysis, and just as the reader of Powys's criticism is conscious of succumbing to the spell of an interpreting imagination, so the reader of the novels recognizes some clue to the manifold arcana of the author's soul.

It is, therefore, no hazardous prediction that John Cowper Powys will be a favourite subject for future biographers. There is no creative writer whose work bears so indelibly and intricately the impress of its author's multiplex character and can be so peculiarly illuminated by a study of his life and personality and thought. It was assuredly without design that the publication of *A Glastonbury Romance* was followed within two years by that of his *Autobiography* in 1934, but this most searching essay in deliberate self-revelation since Rousseau and Goethe came opportunely to supply a key for examining the inspiration of his fiction,

John Cowper Powys was born in 1872, the eldest of eleven children born to the Rev. Charles Francis Powys and Mary Cowper, daughter of the Rev. William Cowper Johnson of Yaxham in Norfolk. His Powys great-grandfather was a brother of the first Lord Lilford and descended from a long line of thrifty landowners, punctuated by occasional legal luminaries, who migrated to Shropshire from their native Wales in the fourteenth century. It would be impertinent to attribute pride in ancestry to one who has described his life's pilgrimage as the " 'declassing' of a bourgeois-born personality, and its fluctuating and wavering approach to the Communistic system of social justice" (though not to the Communistic philosophy, "the chief imponderable advantage" of which he defines, in *The Art of Growing Old,* as "a fanatical hatred of the bourgeois virtues combined with a sensuous

abandonment to a feeling of aesthetic superiority"). But his absorption in personal idiosyncrasy naturally implies curiosity about the incalculable whims of heredity, and "J.C.P." can be tempted to speculate on the traits possibly inherited from the Swiss blood in his father's mother or from his mother's talented grandmother, a lady named Livius hailing from Hamburg, in whom he alone of the family suspects a Jewish origin.

When their friend Louis Marlow published his book, *Welsh Ambassadors,* about John Cowper, Theodore Francis, and Llewelyn Powys, their architect brother A. R. Powys objected that their family had been too long exiled from the land of its origin to be considered Welsh. But, though not a Celt by blood, John Cowper Powys is more Celtic than Saxon in spiritual sympathy, and on his return in 1934 from years of residence in America, he made his home in Wales, where, besides writing his great historical romance *of Owen Glendower,* he has associated himself closely with Welsh literature and periodicals, which not unfairly claim him as a national genius.

Most important and interesting of inherited strains in the Powys stock is their common ancestry with William Cowper the poet, whose first cousin was the great-grandmother of John Cowper Powys's mother. Spiritual kinship with the poet appears obvious in the melancholy habit of thought and deep religious contemplation in the work and character of T. F. Powys, but to John Cowper Powys descended in full measure the tendency to what his brother Llewelyn called Cowper's "sombre, spiritual preoccupations". Toughness derived from his Powys forbears allied to extraordinary moral and intellectual force insured him against such ill effects of neurotic self-immolation as the poet's, but he was so conscious of his Cowper legacy that he has defined his dominant mental process as "Cowperism"—the "pathological activity" of a "sacred malice" that tears away "the portentous mask of comic dignity which conceals the tragic dignity of every human soul".

"People do not understand how imaginative a child's life is," he writes, for "when we grow up we ourselves forget". Children in their nurseries naturally live in a world of make-believe; pro-

gressing to school age, they escape into this world during their leisure from lessons. But as the practical demands of society impress a sense of responsibility, such escape becomes less frequent till, with most of us, it becomes impossible with the harnessing of our imagination to the vehicle of practical commonsense. Like Coleridge and Shelley, John Cowper Powys was instinctively a rebel against society because he persisted in escaping into the world of his imagination. "My dominant life-illusion," he says, "was that I was, or at least would eventually be, a magician, and what is a magician if not one who converts God's 'reality' into his own 'reality', God's world into his own world, and God's nature into his own nature?" His preservation of this life-illusion enabled him—unlike Coleridge, who lost "his shaping spirit of imagination" under duress from the restricting claims of practical circumstance—to remain always a romantic and so to achieve fulfilment in the novels of his maturity.

Like Shelley, he suffered misery at school, where eccentricity marked him as an object for ragging. The exceptional strength of his bony wrists preserved him from the worst excesses of bullying, and he earned a pleasant notoriety at his preparatory school by his gift of story-telling, but "with his inability to catch the easiest 'catch', or to tackle the feeblest 'half-back', with his feeling that the gymnasium was a place of grotesque and monstrous engines of torture", and the swimming bath "a kind of icy Giudecca", he had none of the athletic attributes to impel admiration from his fellows at Sherborne School. Nor did he display compensating qualities in the class-room, for, despite his always voracious reading, he was "no natural scholar"—"my dramatic nature reluctant at the laboriousness of philological niceties". As a result of his habit of escaping into his inner self—in the school library, where he passed his happiest hours, or in such exalted moments as, when loitering in the yard after dark, he vowed to the stars that he would become a poet—he was derisively called "Moony". In his last term he secured peace from persecution by delivering an impassioned speech to the assembled boys of his house, discussing every idiosyncrasy they derided in him, even to the "great de-

lapidated umbrella" he carried and *"my* obscene fashion of chewing my food with my front teeth".

This initial success of his eloquence possibly influenced his choice of a career. His three years at Cambridge were "years of an unbalanced and chaotic idealism", and "the university *as* a university had not the least influence upon my taste, my intelligence, my philosophy, or my character". It had been intended that he should enter the Church, but he confesses to having forgotten how or when he decided against becoming a parson, a fact affording evidence of "how very casually and lightly" he regarded the choice of a profession. The truth seems to have been that he desired a means of livelihood least calculated to interfere with his "secret life of imaginatized and poetized sensations", and the lure of long school holidays inspired his application to the scholastic agency of Messrs. Gabbitas and Thring. Mercifully he was spared even the briefest experience of teaching at a boys' school—for such experience must necessarily have been both brief and painful, since as a school prefect he had always found difficulty in maintaining order and the master's eccentricities would have excited the same derision as the boy's. He was appointed to succeed a German professor as lecturer to all the girls' schools in Brighton, and there in the middle 'nineties, when Wilde and Whistler and Beardsley were the talk of London art circles, he embarked upon an odyssey lasting nearly forty years as a peripatetic philosopher.

At Cambridge he had learned to conquer the shyness and self-consciousness of boyhood, and this emancipation enabled him to capitalize the eccentricities that had handicapped his schooldays. His partiality in boyhood for acting Shakespeare he regards as a manifestation of his tendency to be "a philosophic actor", and he conceived the dramatic philosophies of Plato, Spinoza, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Spengler to be "but the gestures of the play-acting ego as it gathers up within itself its most exciting life-illusion, to heighten the intensity of its normal life-experience". To the lecture-platform he brought the histrionic genius of a great actor, projecting his personality into his subjects so that the subjects themselves seemed to the audience to come before their

eyes and expound the essence of their messages. To use his own metaphor in the preface to *Visions and Revisions,* as lecturer and critic he caused his hearers to glimpse the reflection of his subjects as they were reflected "in the flowing stream of my own consciousness".

This occupation afforded the abundant leisure requisite for indulging his inner life and for frequent visits to his beloved home at Montacute Vicarage in Somerset. Though he was born and spent the first seven years of his life at Shirley in Derbyshire, his roots were in more or less the region of Hardy's Wessex. Even before his father's move from Shirley to Dorchester, he had learned to love Weymouth from staying there with his grandmother, and his father's settlement at Montacute in 1886 established that happy haven of late-Victorian and Edwardian family life of which his brother Llewelyn has drawn loving pictures in *Skin for Skin, Love and Death,* and many of his more Elian essays. He loved the flat fenlands of Norfolk, where he spent holidays with his mother's parents and laid the setting of his second novel, *Rodmoor,* but the lanes and lush meadows south of Sedgemoor—which he roamed first with his father and his next brother Littleton, later with his much younger brother Llewelyn —were the favourite scenes of his ecstasies under the spell of nature, his solitary churchyard meditations, and such communings with the inanimate as John Crow's with the monoliths of Stonehenge and Wolf Solent's with the bending willow beside the waters of the Lunt.

Montacute was the hub of what he called "their circle"—the few select friends, including Louis Marlow and Dr. Bernard O'Neill, who, along with his brothers, were his intimates. With these friends he walked and talked, elaborating his visions of life and his interpretations of nature's moods and men's philosophies. But he was no monologist, as Lamb found the older Coleridge; he had the same stimulating effect upon people as Coleridge in youth—he had, as Louis Marlow says, "the extraordinary gift of drawing out the mental and emotional resources of anyone he met, even though these were resources that they could not draw out for themselves". To Louis Marlow he seemed

"a god whose persuading intonations were clear and loud, a young god, then, hard-fleshed, keen-boned, lean-bellied in his human manifestation, not beautiful, with his loose aberrant mouth, his Mousterian or simian forehead, Villainous low' or Mike a girl's'—he has called it both the one and the other—his beaked nose and the high-toned seemingly artificial colour of his 'Red Indian' cheeks. Yet he did give an effect of beauty, notably when he was lecturing, but not only then; and it was beauty of a transfixing power for those who saw and heard him. He was, and is, full of life, full of beliefs, full of the power to communicate his abundance."

For years he was content to communicate this abundance to his "circle" and to the attendances at his lectures. Before he was thirty he published two slender volumes of verse; in the succeeding decade his only publications were lecture syllabuses. As time progressed, without producing any published evidence of his genius, though they never submitted to doubt, his disciples felt qualms of anxiety. When, in 1909, he was seriously ill with the gastric affliction that caused him to undergo three major operations, his brother Llewelyn became alarmed lest death might intervene before he could leave any lasting evidence of his genius, and spent a whole summer in assiduously copying out some tales of horror that still remain unpublished. John Cowper Powys not only never doubted his own genius but avowed that his "circle" would enjoy enduring fame, to be discussed by future generations like the wits of Will's Coffee House, the guests at Charles Lamb's evenings, or the Pre-Raphaelites. "The genius of his own personality, lighting us all up," writes Louis Marlow, "made such a miracle not only credible to him, but certain."

When he married in 1896, the necessary increase of income accrued from adding some schools at Eastbourne to those at Brighton. When, at thirty-two, his spreading celebrity as a lecturer required his spending every winter in touring the United States, he returned the more eagerly to enjoy the English summer and his friends' society. He was in his forty-second year when circumstances conspired to change the course of his life. His

mother died within a few days of the outbreak of war in August 1914, and in the same month his brother Llewelyn, with whom he had developed a close spiritual and intellectual sympathy, departed to Africa in search of a cure for consumption. Unfit for military service, with his friends dispersed and Montacute no longer the Mecca of his circle, he remained in America and committed to paper those outpourings that he had been accustomed to broadcast in eloquent colloquy. In the space of little more than two years, between October, 1914, and December, 1916, he published no fewer than seven books—a topical pamphlet, *The War and Culture;* two books of criticism, *Visions and Revisions* and *Suspended Judgments,* a volume of verse, *Wolfs Bane,* his first two novels, *Wood and Stone* and *Rodmoor;* and *Confessions of Two Brothers,* a collaboration with his brother Llewelyn, of which two-thirds comprised what amounts to a rough preliminary draft of his later *Autobiography.*

In *The Art of Growing Old* he asserts his belief "that it is better to develop too slowly than too quickly". Galsworthy said, "Live first, write afterwards," and most great novelists have achieved their best work after forty. In his *Autobiography* Powys points out that his habit of "beating time" in indulging his "imaginatized sensations" "militates against the labour required to communicate these feelings to other minds". It is doubtful if he could have written much earlier than he did, for his emotional experiences had been in youth too poignant to bear the process of analysis and crystallization for public consumption.

He speaks in his *Autobiography,* written at sixty, of the agonies he endured as a boy from being overlooked in the act of urination, of the "frightful shock" he suffered on learning at Cambridge of the monthly haemorrhages incidental to the female sex, of the incessant conflict within himself between conscience and his instincts of sensuality and sadism. Louis Marlow recalls how he once described himself as being in a state of "secret torments", and how his friends laughed on his confessing that the cause of his torture was the idea of women's breasts. "John's description of the moods of these perversities of his as 'devilish' always struck me as childish and irritating" writes Louis Marlow, and while ad-

mitting that "they were for him, though for no one else, 'diabolic' in the literal sense," he felt irritated by them as charlatan's tricks unworthy of a great genius and satirized them as such in the character of Jack Welsh in his novel, *The Buffoon.* But when he proceeds to assert that "if he had allowed them full sway, they might have destroyed him as a person and as a writer", Louis Marlow is surely completely and demonstrably wrong. For the "imaginatized sensations" excited by these "perversities" provide the yarn from which the web of his novels is spun.

A lucid and logical mind like Louis Marlow's must feel as much impatience with the characters of the novels as irritation at the eccentricities of their creator. What are the psychological perplexities that torment Wolf Solent into hovering between Gerda and Christie till he loses both women, that impel John Crow to dally with the devotion of his Mary and Sam Dekker to forsake Nell Zoyland after he has got her with child? These women are all eager for the caresses of their lovers; why cannot these men give their women what they want according to the dictates of natural desire?

The answer is—though man's vanity prompts a scoffing denial of the suggestion—that a lucid and logical mind, combined with resolute directness in taking what one wants, is a phenomenon more rare in man than the teasing frustration besetting Powys' characters. When Christie Malakite lets down her hair, takes off her dress, and approaches Wolf Solent as he lies upon her bed, the conventional novelist would break off with a row of asterisks, leaving the reader's erotic fancy to visualize the execution of nature's function. Yet how many men in modern civilization could honestly confess that they have always ruthlessly accepted such opportunities? How many men have not withdrawn and shirked, like Wolf Solent, repressing inclination from consideration for circumstances, from fear of complications, from fear of another woman, of getting a child, of venomous gossip, of becoming tiresomely entangled with another's fate?

"Conscience does make cowards of us all," and while few of us have the courage to confess our cowardice, fewer still will feel sympathy with those convicted of the same fault. Sedulously

concealing our abnormalities and striving to appear normal, we applaud the normal and condemn the abnormal in others. The normal man would have taken the virginity of Christie Malakite; hence we are out of patience with Wolf Solent for his failure to do so. Yet the fact remains that most of us would have behaved as Solent behaved, and Powys the romantic is writing realistically where the conventional novelist presumes upon an improbable normality.

"Since I grew to be fifty," says Powys, "I have totally emancipated myself from the unfortunate notion that sensual pleasure *as such)* or sex pleasure *as such,* is wrong and I think that if in my youth I had had more completely free love affairs this particular viciousness [in "the pleasure of sadistic thoughts"] would have had far less influence over me." Thus far he concurs with his brother Llewelyn's philosophy as defined in *Impassioned Clay* and *Glory of Life.* "Whenever mutual attraction exists between two people it is a life-disavowal to reluct from joy," wrote Llewelyn, and his unrelenting animosity against priestcraft derived from its invariable advocacy of repression. From such repression of natural instincts springs not only the cerebral sadism of which D. H. Lawrence wrote in angry condemnation and John Cowper Powys writes with sympathetic insight, but all the burden of evil that has promoted two wars in the space of a generation and still prevents a generous solution of international problems.

John Cowper Powys appears in his novels as an interpreter of human frailty; like the subjects of his criticism, his fictional characters are reflected in the flowing stream of his own consciousness. There are no categorically evil characters in his fiction, no "villains of the piece"; every individual is disclosed as a creature of circumstance and his own conscience. As Enoch Quirm exclaims in *Maiden Castle;*

> "Everything's in the mind. Everything's created and destroyed by the mind. It's the mind, it's not any devil's magic, that makes and breaks our mirrors and mirages. All's vision, lad, all, I say *all;* and the mind's the only demi-urge."

The condition of the mind inevitably colours the individual

vision, and, in Coleridge's words, "where the spirit of a man is not *filled* with the consciousness of freedom (were it only from its restlessness, as of one still struggling in bondage) all spiritual intercourse is interrupted, not only with others, but even with himself". A simple instance appears in John Crow's friend, Tom Barter:

> "Something … a certain pride, & certain fling, a certain chivalrous magnanimity . . . had been knocked out of him forever by those bullies in Gladman's House at Greylands. They had found Tom Barter a frank gentleman—they had left him a secretive cad. It was only with John, whose friendship antedated those Greylands days, that this reserved man let himself go; only with John and with any petticoat of the lower classes!"

But Barter is a minor character, a man of practical competence in managing factories and driving machines, who finds his emotional outlet with his wenches. The intensity of human tragedy has its most vital interpretation in the more sensitive and complex characters of John Crow and Owen Evans, Wolf Solent and Dud No-man, Jobber Skald and Magnus Muir, and those strange magicians of fanatical inspiration, "Bloody Johnny" Geard with his religious mysticism and faith-healing, Enoch Quirm with his belief in the "destiny laid upon me to reach the life behind life", and Sylvanus Cobbold.

These men are cautiously suspicious of their relations with women, fearful of self-revelation and of surrendering any fragment of their shadowy personal freedom, most resentful of sex attraction when the craving is most acute. For Powys, as he states in *The Art of Happiness,* intelligent women are torn between two conflicting desires, "the first driving her on to escape into her own world .. . the second driving her on to invade the life of her man". All his women are shown in pursuit of one desire or the other or alternating between the two—the beautiful Gerda Torp, the patiently enduring Nancy Quirm, Wizzie Ravelston and Curly Wix, and those brilliant and alluring creatures, Perse-

phone Spear, Perdita Wane, and Thuella Wye. While the man is a rebel and a romantic, the woman is a realist and a life-acceptor. And in the stories of all the sex-relationships among his characters emerges the implacable truth that no happiness between the sexes can endure without tenderness.

In a *Dublin Magazine* review John Redwood Anderson described *Owen Glendower* as "an authentic fragment—though but a single and broken sentence—of the history of the World-Spirit itself". For Powys fulfils his ambition as a "magician" in converting "God's 'reality' into his own 'reality', God's world into his own world, and God's nature into his own nature" —in Redwood Anderson's words, he *"uses* nature as the manifold expression of his single personality, so that, far from his remaining out of the picture, every face on the canvas, be it never so crowded and they never so distinct, is yet an aspect of a multitudinous and all-embracing self-portrait". This is true, not only of *Owen Glendower,* but of its three greatest predecessors, *Maiden Castle, Weymouth Sands* (published in England as *Jobber Skald*),and his supreme masterpiece, *A Glastonbury Romance.*

The late J. D. Beresford defied glib disparagement of enthusiasm by describing *A Glastonbury Romance* as "one of the greatest novels in the world, to be classed with Tolstoy's *War and Peace".* This huge novel presents a panorama of the modern world reflected in the consciousness of a genius at the height of his powers, with a delicate poetic sensibility, a shrewd and searching understanding, a subtle emotional responsiveness, and an imagination magnificently abounding. Into the sleepy Somerset town of Glastonbury comes the stout and elderly mystic Geard to spend Canon Crow's legacy on an experiment in municipal Communism. Capitalism is represented in the masterful, energetic factory-owner, Philip Crow, Communism by the earnest intellectual, Dave Spear, and the proletarian Red Robinson, with his inferiority-complex and lust for self-assertion. Behind and above this ideological strife rises the atmosphere of Glastonbury's antiquity and of its associations with the Arthurian legend and the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, impressing with a sense of historical majesty that reduces the importance of contemporary

contentions to their true significance in relation to time and space. Against this background are unfolded the private dramas of the oddly assorted characters, all more or less inter-related and all playing a particular part in the central action—John Crow and his Mary; Owen Evans with his erudition in mystic lore and his haunting by a nameless sin; Sam Dekker, the vicar's ungainly son, who resigns the love of his beautiful Nell to devote his life to Christ's ideal; Philip, the man of property, with his house-proud little Tilly and his lust for power and Persephone Spear; the beautiful, wayward Persephone, with her "profane mocking demon"; the plain Cordy Geard, in love with Evans, and her luscious sister Crummie; the lusty Zoyland, bastard of the old marquis; young Lady Rachel and her yeoman-poet; the Rev. Mat Dekker, who bears an unmistakable resemblance to his creator's father; Dr. Fell living with the sister he loathes; the old harridan, Mother Legge, old Tewsy her doorkeeper, and tragic-eyed Blackie Morgan; the two old codgers, "Number One" and "Number Two"; the little street-arabs, Bet the madwoman, the community of servant girls, and the mighty conception of "Bloody Johnny" himself. Every one of them impresses as a living reality and captures the centre of the stage at some moment of the action.

There are scenes of intense dramatic power, like the climax of the pageant, when Owen Evans faints in ecstasy as Christ on the cross, and the tremendous finale of Geard's drowning in the flood. Powys may deny that he is a conscious artist, but the comic relief is Shakespearian, as when the moving emotional scene between Evans and Cordy is switched to the Dickensian confabulation between the two old cronies, or when Geard, steeling himself to the ordeal of sleeping in the haunted chamber of Mark's Court, is startled by the sound of the old servants' urinating. The latter incident achieves the reactionary effect that De Quincey noted in the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*—"the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish . . . and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them".

Mention of De Quincey calls for a word on Powys' literary style. It is always lavish, often loose; the torrent of his eloquence is sometimes apt to burst the banks of its stream and bear the reader into bewildering backwaters. A master of digression, he tends sometimes to waste effects in the prodigality of his imagery and ideas. Like De Quincey, he excels in purple passages of impassioned prose; all are too long for quotation—for, like De Quincey, his exalted moments are frequent and long sustained—but for varied examples let the reader of *A Glastonbury Romance* turn to Philip Crow's washing of his hands before dinner at the inn near Wookey Hole, to the scene of Sam's consummation with Nell, to the drowning of Bloody Johnny in the flood.

This essay is intended rather as an introduction for the younger generation unacquainted with this great writer's work than as a commentary for those of my own generation who had the good fortune of being able to acquire the novels on their publication. I have said little of his many philosophical works, *The Art of Happiness, The Meaning of Culture, In Defence of Sensuality, A Philosophy of Solitude, The Art of Growing Old.* I have said nothing of *Morwyn, or the Vengeance of God,* that strange and terrible excursion into the hell reserved for perpetrators of cruelty—for cruelty is for John Cowper, as for Llewelyn Powys, the one unforgivable sin, the one unmitigated, indefensible evil. Nor of his three novels preceding *Wolf Solent,* including the well-knit, dramatic *Ducdame,* which, more closely condensed than his other fiction, may well serve to initiate an appetite for the richer fare of his greater works. *Wolf Solent, Weymouth Sands, Maiden Castle,* and *Owen Glendower* are all novels of great genius, but his two greatest works must surely live as long as any literature and be read by every adolescent presuming to culture—that masterpiece of dramatic and philosophical fiction, *A Glastonbury Romance,* and his *Autobiography.*

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EVELYN WAUGH

★

ROSE MACAULAY

MOST novelists set themselves to explore the world, or some corner of the world, in which they believe themselves to live; they weave their dreanib, imaginations and tales within their apprehensions of the life they perceive about them, composing variations on the theme. Other writers step aside, turn an oblique glance on the world they know, reject it, and, halfdeliberately, halfinstinctively, compose one oftheir own making, a world within a world, in which they can move and invent with greater felicity, sureness and ease. Among the world-creators of our time Evelyn Waugh is the most entertaining, and perhaps the most gifted. The world he invented and decorated with extravagant jeux *d' esprit* is a comic world. In it he moves with the blandest security and ease; from within its circumference he can utter any commentary on life, create and manipulate any beings who inhabit there. Brilliantly equipped to direct the radiant and fantastic circus he has called into being, he can stand within it cracking his whip while his creatures leap through his paper hoops with the most engaging levity, the gravest fantastic capers. His command of verbal style is adept and skilled, his characters admirably irresponsible, his wit unfailing. Like Anthony Blanche in *Brideshead Revisited,* he does more than entertain, "transfiguring the party, shedding a vivid, false light of eccentricity upon everyone", so that prosaic people seem to become creatures of his fantasy.

What would occur should he step out of his delightful baroque circus tent into a solid actual world (if indeed any world is this) was not a question which used to trouble the reader, who accepted his unique contribution as a priceless gift. It would seem that he has

now stepped out of it; and the airs beyond the ropes breathe on us with something less of rarity, with a lusher, less sharp and exhilarating taste. It must be the desire of his most ardent devotees that he should speedily retrace his steps.

He did not begin with the circus. His first published works were a brief and competent essay on the Pre-Raphaelites (at the age of twenty-three) and (at twenty-five) a life of Rossetti, an able, scholarly and entertaining study, which, if it reveals nothing new about its fascinating, over-written hero or his friends, gives on them an intelligent and sympathetic slant. A serious work of interpretation and history, it did nothing to prepare the way for *Decline and Fall,* which broke on the English literary scene the following year. Sub-titled "an illustrated novelette", it was, the author explained in a note, not meant to be shocking but funny. A redundant note: *Decline and Fall* is funny from first to last. Its bland, destructive brilliance lights up a world of comic happenings through which people move with the lunatic logic and inconsequence imparted to them by their creator's ironic vision of mankind. Though it was apparent that a bright particular star has risen in the fictional firmament, that firmament was not empty of stars that twinkled a little similarly, with something of the same bland and gay insouciance. But *Decline and Fall* carried the subversive approach further, enlarging the bounds of erratic nonsense. It opens at Oxford, with a riotous meeting of the Bollinger Club. "A shriller note could now be heard rising from Sir Alastair's rooms; any who have heard that sound will shrink at the recollection of it; it is the sound of the English county families baying for broken glass. ..."

The detachment is complete. (The scene may profitably be compared with the Oxford scenes, more nostalgically and naturalistically handled, in *Brideshead Revisited.)* In the ensuing romp, the Bollinger bloods break up pianos, smash china, throw pictures into water-jugs, tear up sheets and destroy manuscripts, and debag Paul Pennyfeather, the innocuous and luckless hero of this tale, a quiet young man from Lancing who is reading for holy orders; he is sent down for running trouserless across the quad.

porter says to him. "That's what most of the gentlemen does, sir, that gets sent down for indecent behaviour."

That is, in fact, what Paul does; he gets a post in a private school, perhaps the only attractive private school in modern fiction, and continues his innocent and disastrous downward career. The school staff, and in particular the headmaster and his assistant Captain Grimes, are superb figures of comedy; the climate is that of an inspired lunatic asylum, the conversations extremely and ceaselessly funny. The story is gaily, grimly and totally amoral; its vicissitudes catastrophically logical; its ingenuous hero the victim of the most shocking turpitudes and betrayals. He is landed in prison, helped out of it by intriguing friends, and ends officially dead and resuming life in disguise, a quiet Oxford ordinand once more. The book is, apart from the sparkle of its wit and its baroque detail, an excellent and coherent story. It moves from start to finish with experienced ease. It has, I believe, been found vulgar by some critics: but it moves in a sphere where vulgarity, refinement and morality do not apply, the sphere of irreverent and essentially anarchic fantasy. The world, one might say, of Ronald Firbank, of Norman Douglas, perhaps of the brothers Marx. But it reflected none of these; it was a genuinely original comic work.

It was followed next year by *Vile Bodies*, a novel more crowded, less classic and clear-cut in plot, more dispersed in interest, more of a revue show. Disappointing at first reading to some who had looked for another *Decline and Fall,* it proved a dazzling kaleidoscope of brightest Mayfair, brilliantly fantasticated. "The action of the book," says the Author's Note, "is laid in the near future, when existing social tendencies have become more marked. . . . I have assumed a certain speeding up of legal procedure and daily journalism " Social life, too, is sped up; the parties, the racket, the vices, the chatter, the jokes. Here and there Firbank takes a hand; as in the dialogue between the two old *mondaines* on the channel crossing. But Mr. Waugh has not Firbank's butterfly irresponsibility; he is never silly; he knows what he is about; his imagination is at once more constructive and destructive. The giddy whirl of *Vile Bodies* snatches up in its dance at least a dozen

separate groups of people, each with their own story, as in a ballet where groups perform in different corners of the stage, sometimes crossing one another's orbits, entangling one another's courses, flung together and lurching apart like heavenly bodies on the run. The mass effect of unsteady, extravagant fantasy and sick and squalid reaction is breath-taking. The moralist has looked in; the smell of dust and ashes hangs on the circus air; irony has become less bland, the death's head grins among the roses. Every now and then Mr. Waugh extricates himself from his tale and becomes a commentator, pointing a social moral, with "Oh, bright young people", or "You see, that was the kind of party Archie Schwert's party was". When *Vile Bodies* was dramatized, a chorus of draped figures came on between acts and made lament. This damaged the play. But the comments in the book, though out of keeping, are too infrequent to damage it; it pursues its course, kaleidoscopic, various, irresistibly funny. Its wit seldom flags; situations and persons are flung on the scene with lavish extravagance; a more parsimonious or cautious novelist might have reflected that he was using up in this one book material for a dozen. As before, he has *forjeune premier* and fortune's football an ingenuous and luckless youth, see-sawed up and down by fate, roguery, and his own folly. He saunters tranquilly among sudden fortunes and catastrophes, love, loss, customs officers, dud cheques, drunken majors who welsh, young women as debonair and luckless as himself. He has no more moral sense than anyone else in the book, but a rather appealing innocence. We leave him on the battlefield, grasping in his pocket a Huxdane-Halley bomb for the dissemination of leprosy germs among the foe.

Moral scruples nowhere intrude in *Vile Bodies.* That is, no one has them except the author himself, who shows occasional signs; we discern them, apart from explicit comment, in the book's structure. Agatha Runcible, whirling to her fatal crash in a fantastic motor race, then dying among cocktails and chattering friends, and finally buried with only one of her gay companions at the funeral (the others did not bother to go, or were too uneasily alarmed at such a grim intruder on their revels as death), is a

figure perhaps more menacing and exemplary than the Bright Young Person she seems; Mr. Waugh might, with a little less of artistic control, have emphasized this aspect of her, given her in her last moments a spiritual malaise more explicit and profound than her delirium of racing cars. She dies in a nightmare of skidding wheels and crazy speed, crying *"Faster, Faster".* Symbolic, but admirable in its reticent realism. Would the later Waugh, the Waugh of *Brideshead,* have been equal to this, or would he have floundered the girl into remorse, bewildered terror of death, change of heart, perhaps introducing Father Rothschild, the priest, into her last hour? There is no such concession here: Agatha dies as she has lived, in a hectic spin.

It is noticeable that none of these people, young or older, has any interest in art, literature, drama, music, or world affairs. They are amiable nit-wits. True, one of them has apparently had abroad with him some books on architecture, economics and history, and the *Purgatorio;* but really only to give the Dover customs officer opportunity for cracks. "French, eh?" he says of Dante. "I guessed as much, and pretty dirty too, I shouldn't wonder." And, "Particularly against books the Home Secretary is. If we can't stamp out literature in the country, we can at least stop its being brought in from outside. That's what he said the other day in Parliament, and I says Hear Hear. . . ."

A pretty scene; but one cannot believe that the traveller had ever read the books. None of the vile bodies reads anything, except the gossip columns in the papers, for which they also write. A critic has said lately that genuine tragedy at a low level of mentality is a contradiction in terms, and attempts to create it produce an impression of impertinence and moral chaos. I do not myself find this altogether true: one can think of tragedies that befell *low* mentalities, in Dickens, George Eliot, E. M. Forster, and elsewhere. But if it were true, there could be no tragedy in *Decline and Fall* or in *Vile Bodies,* where the intellectual sensibility of the characters is as low as their moral and spiritual apprehension. Indeed, it is lower. It is not out of the question that the young (and old) barbarians should "get religion"; there is a moment at a party when, under the hypnotic influence of a troupe

of evangelists. Lady Metroland's worldly guests quiver on the verge of self-abandonment to religious hysteria.

"But suddenly on the silence vibrant with self-accusation broke the organ voice of England, the hunting-cry of the *ancien regime.* Lady Circumference gave a resounding snort of disapproval. 'What a damned impudent woman,' she said. Adam and Nina began to giggle. ..."

It had been, perhaps, a close thing. The catching of the Bright Young People by any exciting religious movement, whether Aimee Macpherson's Angels, or Mr. Buchman's life-changers, or a branch of an historic church, is always a possibility round the corner. What is not round any corner for them is their conversion to intellectuality, culture, artistic or literary sensibility. Sublimely uneducated, gaily philistine, blandly barbarian, agreeably funny, they reel through the book with the maximum of wit on the part of their creator, the minimum of intelligence on their own. Not for a moment does the brilliance falter or the pace slacken. More truly comic situations, the extravagance of their conception balancing the unemotional economy of their setting forth, are to be found in few novels. As a whole, *Vile Bodies* cannot compete with the more close-knit *Decline and Fall,* but the bits and pieces are as funny, the general effect as glittering. *Decline and Fall* approaches more nearly to the bland shimmer *of South Wind,* that great amoral novel whose ripe intellectual humour none of its contemporaries or successors can emulate. In *South Wind* is true ironic detachment; its author surveys the world with the amused derision of a learned elderly satyr looking on at humanity's capers from his private brake, mocking, philosophic and undisturbed. Norman Douglas deals with all ranks and kinds of person, from peasant to prince; Evelyn Waugh in *Vile Bodies* (more than in *Decline and Fall,* which includes a fantastic scholastic world) concerns himself almost entirely with the rich of Mayfair. Though some of them think themselves poor, they always have money for parties of pleasure. The professional middle classes, who live by their wits, not on inherited capital, and therefore with enforced economy, do not really engage his attention. He is amused and a little beglamoured by the gay and idle rich: too

much so, for his wit can play with peculiar excellence on such small beer as seedy journalists, dingy schoolmasters, and shady adventurers.

Between this and his next (and possibly his best) novel, *Black Mischief,* Mr. Waugh produced two travel books, *Labels* and *Remote People. Labels* is an account of a cruise, slight, bright and amusing; witty bookmaking, but Mr. Waugh's is too acute an intelligence for this kind of travelogue. *Remote People* is, on the other hand, entirely up his street; it deals with an actual country which he might have invented for his comic world. Abyssinia was a gift to him. The book's first and better half is a quite brilliant description of the coronation of the Emperor Haile Selassie, which he went out to report for a newspaper. The eccentricities of Abyssinia's ancient and remarkable Christian uncivilization were near kin to his own creations; no wonder that they captured his humour and imagination, and that he made out of them three delightful books: *Remote People, Black Mischief,* and *Scoop.* The fantastic contradictions, myths and absurdities of the strange barbarian land, the imposing lavishness of the coronation, made of the expedition a stagey comic opera, a happy blend of the pompous, the romantic, the barbarous, the picturesque, the absurd. It was a theme nicely suited to this sardonic and relishing mind. Abyssinia is savoured with a sensibility no less keen because sharply satiric, an intelligence no less efficient because also romantic.

"It is to *Alice in Wonderland* that my thoughts reach in seeking some historical parallel for life in Addis Ababa … it is in Alice only that one finds the peculiar flavour of galvanized and translated reality. . . . How to recapture, how retail, the crazy enchantment of those Ethiopian days?"

However engaged his imagination was by the enchantment, his appreciation of the Abyssinian scene has sobriety and grasp. Picturesque colour and detail, extravagantly funny incidents, abound; so also does information on geography, ethnography, personalities and politics. The book is as amusing and lively an extravaganza as a Waugh novel. That is to say, the Abyssinian half of it is. The second half, which relates travel in East Africa,

is less amusing, less fresh in subject, and has its sententious moments. The writer has stepped outside the circus for an excursion into actual worlds. There are a few good scenes, encounters and fiascos, but too few. The lights are down; there is an effect of writing undertaken without much zest.

The zest is all back again in *Black Mischief,* a gay tapestry woven out of the Abyssinian material; with it we are once more inside the ropes. It is an admirably funny fantasia; several of its characters are really good creations (one uses the word to include the element drawn, in all Mr. Waugh's novels, from life, but fantasticated and dressed up in his own manner)—the ingenuous and aspiring black emperor, the helpful Armenian rascal, the enterprising English cad, the British and French envoys. There are a few London scenes of rather dreary revelry and social life, faintly and less gaily recalling *Vile Bodies,* and dealing with many of the same people; but the bulk of the story occurs in Azania, and is in the best vein of fantastic farce. All the author's gifts are in evidence: unceasing wit, precise economy of phrase, quick-fire dialogue, a background of exquisite absurdity. Basil Seal, the hero-cad, a recurrent figure in the later novels, who here makes his debut, is (within the convention of the circus, and conforming to its terms) a masterly study; a bore to his friends, a cadger, a drunkard, a liar and a thief, he lacks the engaging cheerfulness of Captain Grimes, but has a quality of remorseless and resourceful vice that would fit him for the hero of a gangster novel. *Black Mischief,* whether or not it is Mr. Waugh's best book, is on the whole the most attractive to read.

After it, *A Handful of Dust,* two years later, seems up to a point more ordinary, for it deals with real life: it is a social novel about adultery, treachery, betrayal, tragic and sordid desolation. The gaiety has gone, and much of the wit. The characters seem to lack motive and awareness. The theme is the destruction of a simple, dull and honest bore by his wife, a cad without heart or affections; the social scene is one of dreary squalor and unkindness. Gone is the sparkle of *Vile Bodies,* it is replaced by a neat, crisp, jabbing bitterness and the tragedy of meaningless, silly lusts. Grim events succeed each other; wit is not lacking in their narration, but it has

become angry and adult. The last section of the book, however, gives the tragedy a new and wholly original baroque twist; the dull and ill-used hero, born to be betrayed, is left the victim of a fate contrived with devilish ingenuity, and will pass the rest of his life a slave, reading Dickens aloud to his master in an Amazonian jungle; a brilliant and terrifying *tour de force.* Later, the author wrote an alternative ending, of a more ordinary, cynical type; more probable, less remarkable, it has a closer coherence with the rest of the book. *A Handful of Dust* seems to reach the climax of Mr. Waugh's view of life as the meaningless jigging of barbarous nit-wits. Pleasure, sympathetic or ironic, in their absurdities has vanished: disgust has set in.

What has also gone from his view is detachment. In his next book he is no longer objective: he has come down on a side. In art so naturally ironic and detached as his, this is a serious loss; it undermines his best gifts. And it was unlucky that the first of his partisan, side-taking books should have been a work of history, where objectiveness and truth to fact should be a *sine qua non.* In *Edmund Campion* there is too little of both, though there is interest, brilliance, imagination, and sympathetic interpretation. But it is like a barrister's brief, omitting all that does not support his case. It would seem scarcely credible, for instance, that any one should undertake a serious life of Campion without familiarity with the State Papers of the time, the letters that passed between Madrid, the Vatican, the Spanish ambassador in London, Cardinal Allen of Douai, Father Parsons, Dr. Nicholas Sanders, and the others of the "Spanish party" among the English Catholics (which included nearly all the prominent Jesuits abroad). Yet Mr. Waugh shows no signs throughout his book (or in his lists of references) of having read these, or of familiarity with the unceasing plots, intrigues and correspondence that went on about "the enterprise of England", the plots to invade Britain, murder or depose Elizabeth, and set Philip of Spain on the English throne. The Spanish ambassador wrote continually of his hope to see his Majesty in speedy possession of his realm, that heresy might be extirpated and the Faith restored. English Catholics were absolved from their allegiance, and those who obeyed the Queen's laws put

under sentence of anathema by a Bull whose provocative folly caused even Philip and Alva to protest; for, said Philip, "it will drive the queen and her friends to oppress and persecute the few good Catholics who remain in England". The English exiles were in perpetual intrigue—"traitors who gape daily for the death of the queen", as an agent wrote home. Madrid and Rome financed and equipped one fruitless invasion expedition after another. Yet Mr. Waugh can write almost as if Catholic plots were an invention of Cecil's. Campion was, indeed, an innocent non-political missionary; but Parsons, his chief colleague in the mission, was steeped, like Dr. Allen, in conspiracy. As an earlier biographer of Campion observes, though Campion himself disapproved of the papal policy, and laboured merely to make every Englishman a Catholic, his friends wished to make every Catholic a conspirator. Allen wrote to the Pope that English Catholics were already conspirators, and would welcome Catholic invaders of any nation, since they detested their own government more than any foreign prince, and would all join the Pope's army if it landed, and help to depose "this Jezebel". Such views were an exile's pipe-dream, of a kind familiar in history: their answer was the English Catholic resistance to the Armada, when nearly all Allen's fifth column let him down. But even the innocent Campion's mission was not, as has been pointed out by historians, purely spiritual; indeed, how could it be, since Catholics were contending for more than their lives?

There are other indications of bias (that natural but deadly poison to historians) than the glossing over of the political side of these heroic expeditions. Mr. Waugh's excessive hostility to the Anglican Church leads him too often into inaccuracies, as when he calls it "the crazy, fashionable Calvinism" (ignoring the incessant war waged against it after the Elizabethan settlement by Calvinists and other Puritans) and repeats several times that it had no sacraments. What he of course means is that, in the eyes of his Church, Anglican sacraments were not valid; but, from the way he puts it, one might not gather that the deluded Anglicans believed that they were, or that they were taught that they "verily and indeed received the body and blood of Christ" in

communion. After all, the Prayer Book was mainly translated (as Milton was to complain bitterly) from Catholic missals, though mutilated; it earned the undying hatred of the Puritan party, who were persecuted under Elizabeth with cruel severity. But Mr. Waugh dislikes this wary *via media* so much that he relegates it to the outer darkness of the Protestant left wing. To dislike the deplorable outrages of the Reformation, and many aspects of the whole business, is natural enough; indeed, it is impossible not to; but to take ecclesiastical sides is, to a style such as Mr. Waugh's, part of whose charm is in ironic objectivity and detachment, fatal. Partisanship should be left to thunderers; one cannot have it both ways, and something must be sacrificed to individual style.

Though *Campion* is a very readable and often moving book, and its brave and touching story beautifully told, greater accuracy and balance would have given it a finer urbane polish; as it is, it remains a little one-sided and shrill, and strengthens one's view that its author betrays his gifts when he deserts his own idiom and convention.

Campion is, however, mellowness itself compared with *IVaugh in Abyssinia* (1936), a blast of triumph over the Italian conquest of that land. Mr. Waugh went to Abyssinia to write of its subjugation for "the only London paper that seemed to be taking a realistic view of the situation", and to blow a scornful trumpet against the "whinney of the nonconformist conscience" which had protested against the assault—the same whinney from the same conscience that protested against the Nazis, and is protesting now, though more faintly, against the enslavement of eastern Europe. Mr. Waugh disagreed with this whinney. He found that the Italians had spread order, decency and civilization, that yperite was pretty harmless, though the Abyssinians were "bored and exasperated with a weapon to which they could make no effective return", that Graziani was a most agreeable man, that along the new Italian roads "will pass the eagles of ancient Rome, as they came to our savage ancestors in France and Britain and Germany", and that "the new regime is going to succeed". He completely failed to grasp the idea behind the League sanctions applied to

Italy for its aggression against another League State, and calls the British protests "peevish and impolitic remonstrance".

An odd and rather unchivalrous book. What is its motive? Preference for Italians over Abyssinians? That we most of us share; it should not, but perhaps does, affect the issue. Dislike of black populations? He shows no such dislike in *Remote People, Black Mischief,* or *Scoop.* Support of a policy endorsed by the Italian clergy? Very probably. Dislike of the League of Nations? Again, likely enough. Or merely sympathy with the big battalions? If it were that, Mr. Waugh should now be crying up the Russian domination, and he is not. This book must be pronounced a Fascist tract. Sadly we hasten away from it, to the pleasures of *Scoop.* This gay fantasy (published two years later, and also about Abyssinia) is extremely funny, entirely good-tempered, and of considerable brilliance. If any one in it is a Roman Catholic or a Protestant, Mr. Waugh does not mention it; religion does not throw its fatal apple of discord among the *dramatis persona:-,* every one gets fair treatment, every one is ridiculous, and the whole scene of delicious absurdity. With it Mr. Waugh re-entered his peculiar world; it was a relief to those of us who had begun to fear that we were losing him, that the wit was being slain by the propagandist and the partisan. *Scoop* carries an ingenious plot, and a crackling of jokes only a little less good than those *of Decline and Fall-,* it is a completely light-hearted *jeu d'esprit,* in which journalistic and tourist experience gained in Abyssinia is again brilliantly used. It is Mr. Waugh's last novel for four years.

Written in the summer of 1941, *Put Out More Flags* is a war novel. The rejection of temptations, such as patriotism and public spirit, is creditable, and almost, but not quite, complete. The central character, the iniquitous Basil Seal, is more ingeniously corrupt than ever, making his fortune out of blackmail and evacuees, and alighting for a time in the Ministry of Information, that quarry for wits, where he ruins a friend and appropriates his possessions. The whole composition is gay, heartless, neat and amusing. It stands on the border between fantasy and actuality.

After it (published the same year, with a preliminary note that it dealt with a world now dead and would never be finished) came

a perfectly serious fragment of a novel called *Work Suspended.* Mr. Waugh said that it was his best writing up till then. He is right that it is well written: he always (or nearly always) writes well. It is carefully composed; it lacks the earlier sparkle; it has a seriousness of tone that might or might not have been fully justified by its theme as it developed: it did not develop, so we cannot know. In spite of a fine and delicate vein of comedy (the hero's artist father and the commercial traveller who ran him down and killed him are both charming figures of fun), there is a sobriety, almost a solemnity, of mood that foreshadows that of *Brideshead.* Lucy, the grave young heroine, is presented with restraint, and with a new subtlety of emotion, composed and near-profound, at times a little Jamesian in slant. The style is quiet and full. That it was not finished one feels a loss. It was an experiment, a study, abandoned, in a *new genre;* it seems, fragment though it is, to have balance and perspective; and the key is low; if ecstasy should develop, one does not feel that it would necessarily be flamboyant. It might (or possibly not) have justified its author as a straight novelist. But it shows the warning red—or perhaps only amber—light.

Between suspending this work and writing *Brideshead Revisited* (in 1944), Mr. Waugh underwent development. The baroque became flamboyant, the style curved and flowered; sentimentality at times cushioned it; a grave lushness bloomed. Not continuously, but at intervals, emotionalism, over-brimming the theme, swamped it. The era of brilliant farce was over; the circus was deserted. Irony and humour still remained; there are in *Brideshead wit* of character and some sharply drawn comic scenes; there is also much subtly precise and intelligent writing; but it flowers too often into an orchidaceous luxury of bloom that, in a hitherto ironic wit, startles and disconcerts. Love, the English aristocracy, and the Roman Catholic Church, combine to liquefy a style that should be dry. Like *Work Suspended,* the story is told in the first person; a mode that affords opportunities too tempting for romantic soliloquy. The Oxford section is good, its characters excellently suggested (rather than drawn), its atmosphere authentic, its period the lavish 'twenties. To each character a real-life

model or two is (probably wrongly) attributed by sapient readers, always more anxious than authors for the *roman a clef.* Sebastian Flyte, mentally below normal, drunk, silly, of touching beauty, potentially a saint, has an odd, improbable existence of his own; his equally beautiful, less saintly sister Julia, on the other hand, belongs to the realms of fantasy, one might almost say of the novelette; Lady Marchmain is better, because less romanticized; Lord Marchmain will pass for a rakish eloped father and husband, until his deplorable deathbed; their elder son is a cleverly imagined puritan fantastic. None of them has the sharp actuality of some of the minor and more plebeian figures—stray undergraduates (in particular the sophisticated homosexual), the common Lieutenant Hooper, who excites the acid snob-distaste of the narrator and of Mr. Waugh, Mr. Samgrass the don, a portrait etched with dislike and wit, the narrator's scoffing father, the amiable Glasgow-Irish priest with his cheerful pertinacity, the more elaborate portraits of the Canadian millionaire and the arty, gushing wife. About the Flytes there remains to the end something phoney: they belong to a day-dream, to a grandiose world of elegance and Palladian grace, a more than mortal ecstasy. Their conversation is at times incredible; Julia's monologue about her "sin" on pages 251-3; Lord Marchmain's about his ancestors on his deathbed; some other passages, which flower up from naturalism like exotic purple plants in a hot-house. Some of these purple passages concern love, some a romantic memory, some sin, some religion, some food and drink (which are treated with intense and almost mystical earnestness; a good meal in a restaurant becomes a sacred rite). Mr. Waugh has been charged with snobbishness. I would rather call it self-indulgence in the pleasures of adolescent surrender to glamour, whether to the glamour of beauty, food, rank, love, church, society, or fine writing. For example, dinner:

> "I remember the dinner well—soup of *oseille,* a sole quite simply cooked in a white wine sauce, a *caneton a la presse,* a lemon souffle. At the last minute, fearing that the whole thing was too simple for Rex, I added *caviar aux blinis.* And for wine I let him give me a bottle of 1906 Montrachet, then at its prime,

and, with the duck, a Clos de Bére of 1904. . . . The cream and hot butter mingled and overflowed separating each glaucose bead of caviar from its fellows, capping it in white and gold. . . . The soup was delicious after the rich blinis—hot, thin, bitter, frothy. . . . The sole was so simple and unobtrusive that Rex failed to notice it. We ate to the music of the press—the crunch of the bones, the drip of blood and marrow, the tap of the spoon basting the thin slices of breast. . . .1 rejoiced in the Burgundy. How can I describe it? . . . This Burgundy seemed to me, then, serene and triumphant, a reminder that the world was an older and better place than Rex knew, that mankind in its long passion had learned a better wisdom than his. By chance I met this wine again, lunching with my wine merchant in St. James's Street, in the first autumn of the war; it had softened and faded in the intervening years, but it still spoke in the pure, authentic accent of its prime and . . . whispered faintly, but in the same lapidary phrase, the same words of hope."

Charming, in an austere age, to read of such a meal; but surely the note is pitched too high. As also in the rhapsody on Julia dancing through the season, and the ramblings of the dying marquis.

All these passages, and others, might have been pilloried in bland ridicule in the earlier novels—in Lord Copper's newspapers, for instance, along with the finny creatures plashing their lush way through the reeds.

It is part of the adolescent approach, too, to mistake a part for the whole; this, I think, Mr. Waugh does in *Brideshead,* and it gives just the effect of triviality which should have been avoided in a book alleged to be "an attempt to trace the workings of the divine purpose in a pagan world". No purpose can well have greater importance; no faith can be more worth asserting than that "the human spirit, redeemed, can survive all disasters". But Mr. Waugh seems to equate the divine purpose, the tremendous fact of God at work in the universe, with obedient membership of a church; the human spirit, if redeemed, must loyally conform

to this church and its rules. It is perhaps an inevitable view for a sincere Roman Catholic, and it is not for those outside this communion to criticize it; but no less inevitably, it seems to them to reduce the formidable problems of the universe and the human spirit to a level almost parochial. Divine purpose, human redemption, must flow through channels larger than those of any church; the impression is rather of an attempt to pour the ocean into a stoup. The interest in moral issues which, as has been lately said by a critic, must in the end impose itself again on novelists, transcends (even if it often includes) loyalty to a church: in Mr. Waugh's novel, it is subordinate to and conditioned by this. (Here he differs from that equally convinced Catholic but greater and more sin-haunted moralist, Graham Greene.)

Not only does this concentration on a church narrow the moral issues, but it seems to add a flavour of acrimony, a kind of partisan contempt for other churches, about whose members acid and uncivil remarks are made by persons in the book, voicing, one would say, their author. It is the same belligerent attitude as was shown in *Campion,* but with less excuse, since Protestants and Catholics were in Campion's time at war, and enmity may be part of the period approach. They are now at peace; and great civility and respect are shown, at least in this country, towards Catholics by Protestants. Mr. Waugh's answer would perhaps be that other churches, being in schism, are unworthy of civility in return. This rather truculent and acid attitude seems to have developed some years back, showing itself partly in intemperate assaults on the writings of those from whose views he dissented, those who inclined to agnosticism in religion or to the Left in politics. Strangely fierce intolerances and phobias emerged; one gathered that he despised and hated, rather than tolerated, religious and political dissidents from his own views. Gone is the detachment, and with it the bland, amused tolerance, of the early novels. Belief meant for him hatred of misbelievers; no sympathetic effort to understand their standpoint has been evident, still less the urbane culture which recognizes human error to be distributed among all sections of opinion, including that to which oneself belongs. This is the spirit that shows

itself intermittently, and to its detriment, through *Brideshead Revisited.*

Nevertheless, *Brideshead* has remarkable qualities. When not over-written and lush, and too consciously, opulently graceful, its style is admirable; the construction (the story of the past inserted like a long reverie between the present-day beginning and end) effective; there is humour, though it dissolves helplessly before love, the church, or a delicious meal; there are some well-drawn human beings and some good talk. If Mr. Waugh would sternly root out the sentimentalities and adolescent values which have, so deplorably as it seems to many of us, coiled themselves about the enchanting comic spirit which is his supreme asset as a writer, and return to being the drily ironic narrator of the humours of his world and of his lavish inventive fancy, he would thereby increase his stature, he would be not a less but a more serious and considerable figure in contemporary and future letters. His genius and his reputation seem to stand at the crossroads; his admirers can only hope that he will take the right turning. It is possible that he may. The sentimentality that largely vitiates *Brideshead* is a common, perhaps in some degree or another a universal, weakness. There is in nearly every writer, perhaps in nearly every human being, a soft-headed romantic, who will, if allowed, get out of hand. The creature may expend himself while young in writing sentimental verse or sentimental prose; he may thus write himself out. Or he may throughout his master's life lurk, sly and only partly suppressed, in a corner of his soul, giving the pen now and then a quirk, inserting here a lush phrase, there a row of dots, spying pink roses round the porch and blue-birds on the wing, patting life and death into romantic fancy shapes. He may be thrown out early, leaving only a manageable phantom behind; he may remain, a permanent partner, either growing or dwindling in stature. In Mr. Waugh's case, this romantic being, kept well under in earlier life, would seem to have temporarily seized the pen. An unhappy and quite unsuitable partnership, overdue for dissolution.

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H. E. BATES

*

MICHAEL WILLIAMS

ALTHOUGH it is true to say that H. E. Bates started his literary life as a short-story writer, with *Day's End and Other Stories* in 1928, it is significant that the appearance of subsequent volumes of short stories has been freely punctuated throughout the years by works in the longer medium. Readers who are familiar with this writer's total ouput to date will know without having to be told, that in the novel Bates is continually resolving and solidifying, where in the short story, "each moment implies something it does not state; each sends out a brief signal on a certain emotional wave-length, relying on the attuned mental apparatus of the audience to pick it up".

Above all, the reader of a Bates short story is expected to appreciate the medium in which the writer is working. Without imagination, without the capacity for giving in order to receive, the reader of a short story by H. E. Bates is in for a rough time. To such a reader the barrow boys of the short story owe their bank balances.

One of the least intellectual of writers, Bates is a specialist in mood and feeling. It is not surprising, therefore, that he should rely so implicitly upon atmosphere to suggest the unspoken eloquence of a mood. In this he receives the most powerful assistance from having spent the greater part of his life looking at the English countryside with a passionate, all-embracing love that has sharpened his faculties of perception to so great an extent that, just as he can respond immediately to such natural phenomena as the gentle fall of snow on a winter landscape, or the feel of an orchard when the fruit is on the ground, approaching understanding directly through the senses, so he can bring the same sensuous approach to moments of emotional crisis in the lives of human beings.

It is not sufficient for such a writer to record a photographic impression of a country scene. He has to respond to it with his senses alight, to feel it in the bloodstream, even as Bates feels the atmosphere of the orchard in the story, *A German Idyll:*

> "The dahlias had been staked and tied and the stakes were hooded with flower-pots for earwigs. He touched the heavy heads of the dahlias as he passed along the path to the orchard itself. The grass under the trees, very long and thick, was scattered with fallen plums and pears. The air was full of a smell of the dank grass and a heavy scent, like wine, of the fruit that lay rotting everywhere in the bright sunshine."

A writer so dependent upon mood and feeling is likely to find his sharpest impression either in poetry or in the short story, and I do not think Bates would dispute the statement that his most memorable achievements have been attained within the space of a few thousand words. Nevertheless, an uninterrupted view of this writer's purpose would not be possible without considering the stories and the novels in relation to each other. Bates has very decided views both on the short story and the novel. In 1941, taking his cue from Virginia Woolf, he wrote that "the novel is predominantly an exploration or chronicle of life: reflecting and describing in some form the impact, entanglement, fruition, destruction or fulfilment of human motions and desires." To this can be added Mrs. Woolf's own comment, which Bates quoted with approval at the same time, that in the novel "characters begin young: they grow old; they move from scene to scene, from place to place". These remarks cannot be said to apply to every novel that Bates has written, but they do apply to four of them: *The Fallow Land* (1932), *The Poacher* (1935), *Spella Ho* (1938), and the short novel, *The Bride Comes to Evensford,* which appeared as late as 1943. It is no accident that these four novels, though they are not all equal in quality, are the four most mature novels that Bates has written.

It is not merely a question of differentiating between two distinct forms of literary expression, but also, and even more

significantly, of a capacity for dual vision. Each time Bates writes a short story he is looking at life from an oblique angle, seeing only the luminous moments isolated in time. This intentional narrowing of his line of vision enables him to give to a single incident, which may be emotional, physical, or a combination of both, the concentration which in the novel would be dispersed over a complete lifetime. In the novel, emotions and crises are toned down, seen in perspective, as a part of natural growth. This, at least, is what happens in those of Bates's novels which most faithfully reflect his purpose. What happens when the writer deliberately sets out to flout his purpose can be seen in *Fair Stood The Wind For France,* a novel in which a romantic relationship of love is set against a background of wartime adventure. There is no question here of any failure in technique. *Fair Stood The Wind For France* is a most skilful piece of craftsmanship, distinguished alike by good writing, dramatic incident, shrewd observation, a novel stamped with the hall-mark of the experienced practitioner. But it is a novel which for Bates necessarily represents a faking process. Its failure is at the core, where there is not sufficient depth of soil for nourishment. By the time Bates is in process of guiding the love affair between Franklin and Françoise to a lyrical climax, he has already held onto the note for too long. The rest is flatness, and cannot properly be covered up, however skilfully the attempt is made.

It may be that, because in the short story Bates has so often sailed as near to the rocks as he dared and by doing so produced some of his finest effects, in *Fair Stood The Wind For France* he was determined to bring off an equally fine piece of navigation in the novel. And he might very well have done so had he carried the big guns of a Hemingway. Perhaps it is too early yet to say that he won't. Meanwhile, however, Bates is well advised to keep his dual vision unimpaired, reserving for the short story the especial luminosity of a passionate and sustained lyricism. Here, where it is possible to time an exit to perfection, there is less temptation to hold the note for too long.

The rocks which Bates failed to avoid in *Fair Stood The Wind For France* are ready waiting in the short story, *Love Is Not Love,*

but with this difference: they are evaded. *Love Is Not Love* comes as near to being a pure love story as anything Bates has ever written. A young city typist, after repelling the persistent attentions of a pimply young man in her office, is powerfully attracted to a man she meets casually in a cafe. The attraction is mutual and soon the two are on easy terms. It is shortly after this that the girl discovers that Travers has a wooden leg. At first she is ashamed of her reactions and resolutely pushes them to one side. A climax comes when one day she sees the leg divorced from the living limb. From this moment it only needs the sight of the normal feet of her former admirer, now become quite personable, to make her realize that she cannot continue to go on seeing Travers. But when, after breaking the news to him as gently as she knows how, she looks round and sees him "standing like someone struck into inertia by heat and pain, his huge hands apathetically held at his side", she undergoes a great rush of emotion and runs back into his arms. The note of passionate lyricism on which this story ends is held and released at exactly the right moment. Any failure in this respect would have meant instant bathos. Superficially it might be possible to regard *Love Is Not Love* as a story of love triumphant. To do so, however, would be to confuse the writer's purpose. It is the mood of lyricism in which this story is engulfed that counts for everything. In this instance, the mood is evoked by the love that two human beings have for each other at a particular moment in time. What happens to Travers and his girl when the mood no longer sustains them is a matter for conjecture. It is neither the writer's purpose to suggest the eternal happiness of these two people, nor to suggest any subsequent disillusionment. The moment is unique and complete in itself, and this is what differentiates it from the faking suggestiveness of the relationship between Franklin and Françoise in *Fair Stood The Wind For France,* where the lyricism of the moment is subordinated to the demands of conventional romance.

The truth is that H. E. Bates is just about the most objective short-story writer now writing. So passionate an advocate of the purity of mood and feeling is not likely to be seduced into taking sides with his characters. Indeed, at different times throughout

his stories Bates is on the side of every character. It is very noticeable how when characters who are conventionally unpleasing appear in a Bates story, they do so as human beings capable of instinctive feelings as well as anyone else. In *The Beauty of the Dead,* in which an elderly miser persuades his wife that she doesn't need a fire to die by, the old man's obsession with his possessions is made to assume for the reader the shape and substance of poetry. And even the schoolmaster who tortures a small boy in the story *Jonah And Bruno,* is less a torturer than a means of assisting in the creation of a certain mood at a given moment in time. It may be possible for Bates to fail in the creation of a mood. But it is not possible for him to fall into sentimentality. Not in the short story, that is. This is one reason why it must be so amusing to Bates when reviewers start wondering how it is that a writer who seems to be within such easy reach of sentimentality always manages to avoid it.

Objectivity involves the writer in a withdrawal of personality. In order to see clearly, there must be occasions when he feels bound to stand apart from his characters. And if in order to do this he employs the device of using a narrator, he must be exceedingly careful to see that the narrator is not overburdened with personality. When Bates uses an adult narrator—as he does fairly frequently—he uses him for the most part as a passive receiving set for a series of impressions. Subjective narration in the first person occurs solely in those of his stories which are told by a small boy, and in the telling of which a special boy's-eye view of life is imparted. In those recurring stories which have each time something fresh to say about that old gallant, Uncle Silas, with a lifetime of devilry behind him and a watchful housekeeper at his side, an impression of the great and helpless old age of a man who has led an exceptionally active youth, and who now has to undergo the final humiliation of being washed, is immeasurably heightened by being passed through the filter of a small boy's imagination. The boy's-eye view of life is a level of consciousness for which Bates seems to reserve an especial tenderness, a tenderness due, in part, to the fact that the writer has not allowed himself to forget what it feels like to be a small boy in a

large world and, in part, one suspects, to the realization that the simplicity and purity of a child's vision has a beauty and truthfulness all its own. In *The Duet,* which is not told in the first person but which nevertheless does look out at adult life through the eyes of a small boy, something essential to Bates's purpose in the short story is caught. Horace Stringer is listening to two famous singers who have been staying in his father's house and are now on the concert platform:

> "Horace sat transfixed also. But he was thinking not so much of the singing and of Madame Stronheim and Erasmus joined together on the dais in solemn harmony, as of Erasmus holding Madame Stronheim in his arms in the bedroom and strumming on her stays as though she were a harp, and of Madame Stronheim, as though she were a harp in reality, responding with little musical giggles of joy.
>
> And he was beginning at the same time to have an idea that there were a great many things in the world that were not quite what they seemed to be."

The small boy in *The Duet* has grasped with his small boy's mind at a moment which, in one shape or another, is continuously present in the stories of his creator; a moment which suggests so much more than it holds, and depends for its poignancy so largely upon the ensuing silence. There is a perfect illustration of such a moment in the story, *Quartette.* Here, where two persons are in the grip of an emotion so powerful as to infect even those who do not understand it, the tension is almost unbearable:

> "George Abrahams stood between Tom Willis and Dora Williams, who did not look at each other. As soon as he opened his mouth he knew that he was going to sing very badly, and a second later, for the first time in his experience, he was hearing Miss Appleby forcing her notes, the warm ripe texture of her voice dry and broken. But he could hear on either side of him the voices of two people singing out of a deep pre-occupation, with painful beauty. He thought he could feel the passionate

quality of their singing transcending the small hot room and the small bewildered minds of Miss Appleby and himself."

In the complex emotional mechanism of such stories as *The Bridge, Sally Go Round the Moon* and *I Am Not Myself,* no less than in the passionate voluptuousness of *The Station* and *The Kimono,* or the cold, calculated sensuality of *The Man Who Loved Cats,* the writer is making the reader sensuously aware that in order to see life whole, it is first of all desirable to see it as a succession of isolated moments, each moment having its particular properties of illumination.

In the short story, balanced as he is upon a knife-edge of lyrical feeling, Bates is constantly thinking in symbols. Although symbolism occurs too in the novels, it is used there with a necessary restraint, since too much drilling on the emotional nerves would almost certainly upset the equilibrium of the steadfast vision which is so indispensable to Bates's purpose as a novelist. But in the short story, moods and emotions are frequently of so tenuous a texture that any attempt at direct statement would instantly dissipate their purity.

And what more illuminating symbols could such a writer employ than those suggested by the natural life of the English countryside: orchards, floodland, millstreams, waterfalls, woods and fields, snow, harvest time; realities about which Bates is not only passionately responsive, but also extremely knowledgeable. Here perhaps it is an appropriate moment to remind the reader that Bates is the author of several volumes of essays deriving their inspiration from flower and field, and that he was for some time the contributor of a weekly nature article to *The Spectator.*

In *The House With The Apricot,* in many ways one of the finest storjes that Bates has written, the very tide has a symbolic relation to the rest of the story. A young man is given lodgings in the house of a young woman living alone with her father, an old man in a state of doddering decay. After the traveller has received the gratitude of his hostess for the care he has taken to lose a game of dominoes to the old man, he is moved to compare her, in his mind, with the apricot-tree that stands in the garden. He sees

that like the apricot-tree "she was both rich and barren, strong and useless, and the old man, like the tap root, fed her with his riches but kept her starved of joy". A moment later he is seeing the subject of his meditations smiling with what seems to be a serene and secret happiness. The moment of symbolism, so swift to illuminate, is already past. Its fragrance lingers, but as a bumble-bee lingers in the trumpet of a foxglove, without disturbing the tranquillity of a summer's day. When the narrator goes out to walk in search of wild flowers, he takes with him a note from his hostess with instructions to drop it into the house of a certain Mr. Abel Skinner. During his walk he is roughly accosted by a villainous-looking individual who shouts at him to get *off* his land. This, it transpires, is the man for whom the note was intended, and when Skinner is made to understand that the trespasser is the bearer of a note from the girl in the house at the foot of the hill, his demeanour undergoes a decided change. The two men go down together to Skinner's decrepit farmhouse, where the farmer proceeds to get exceedingly drunk, singing and belching with a freedom that astonishes his guest, who beats an unnoticed retreat in the middle of it all. When, later, the young man learns from his hostess that Abel Skinner has accepted her invitation to dine at the house with the apricot, he thinks immediately of the scene he has recently witnessed in the farm-house, and wonders with some trepidation how this Skinner is going to behave. However, when Skinner does arrive he is hardly recognizable as the same man. Irreproachably dressed, refusing the wine that is offered him, he sips his water with delicate sips.

> "All the time he behaved with a sort of respectable, restrained, Sunday-conscious cheerfulness. He carved beautifully. Once or twice he made little gestures or jokes, always beyond reproach, which made Angela titter. Finally when we were all served he took off his spectacles, laid them in his jacket and began to eat. He had carved himself a single slice off the breast."

It soon becomes apparent to the young man that Angela and

Skinner are engaged to be married, and that in Angela's eyes Mr. Abel Skinner is little short of being Clark Gable.

It is not possible to read *The House With The Apricot* without forcing the mind outside and beyond the framework of the story, the concluding words of which are no more final than in any other of Bates's works in the shorter medium. From the symbolism implicit in the title it might justifiably be supposed that *The House With The Apricot* is a story of irony. It is nothing so pointed. Sensuously impressionistic, perfect in its representation of fleeting moods, *The House With The Apricot* is built upon an edifice of wondering supposition.

If, however, the reader will consider *The House With The Apricot* in relation to the novels, he will see how the lyricism, which in the short stories is suspended luminously in time, is subjected to an ironing out process. Catherine Foster, in the novel of that name, also has her moments of lyricism, though naturally they are not observed in such a brilliant light. Married to the prosaic and unimaginative corn chandler, Andrew Foster, Catherine is starved of the poetry which her romantic spirit craves so ardently. The bird is fluttering its wings against the bars of the cage. The door of the cage is opened by Andrew's brother, Charles, a young man who makes up in poetry what he lacks in substance. The love affair between Catherine and Charles is passionate, romantic, and brief. When it is arbitrarily ended by Charles, Catherine is forced to look life full in the face. The bird, which now knows what it is to soar into the air as blithely as a lark, is back in the cage. Catherine's resignation is final and complete, and its very permanence gives it a serenity which, in its way, is strangely beautiful.

The end of *Catherine Foster* bears a striking similarity to the ending of *The Bride Comes to Evensford.* In both cases a woman comes face to face with a reality that has finally established itself as permanent and inevitable, and although in the one instance resignation is a product of the breaking up of a single emotional experience, and in the other comes when the wheel has had time to turn full cycle, the return, albeit not without its bitter taste, is a cause for serenity.

Until in 1932 Bates wrote *The Fallow Land,* he was, to a large extent, still dominated by the passion for Tchekovian incident which governed his work in the short story, and although even in these earlier novels his broader purpose was plainly discernible, the state of permanence implicit in their conclusion was too often reached by means of a short cut. Nothing, for instance, could be more final than the deaths of Tessie and Jenny in *The Two Sisters,* nor more significant than that the source of their death, the river, was also the source of their greatest happiness; but here finality, not being closely enough allied to physical growth, has too arbitrary an air to suggest the full strength of inevitability. Much the same thing applies to the return of Pauline to the slum *of Charlotte's Row,* for Pauline's return, like the emotional return made by Catherine Foster, was the result not of natural growth, but of an incident.

In *The Fallow Land,* however, the impression of natural growth is substantiated by the constant presence of the land itself, and there seems no doubt that Bates's unshakable faith in the land and the men and women who live in close relation to it, sustained him in his purpose. So single-minded a contemplation of the land was bound, one feels, to result in fruition. In this connection it is rewarding to see how, at almost the last moment, the novelist switches concentration from the admirable and virtuous Deborah Mortimer to the far less admirable Jess, who is returning as an old man to the land and the wife—now dying and without further use for him—he deserted when he was in the heyday of the blood. The wheel has, in truth, come full cycle. As old Jess Mortimer stares across at the field he knows so well, he sees it not as the field which Deborah's lone faith made rich with increase, but as the field he knows to be unchangeable, a field as permanent as his own return to it:

> "The field lay rough and fallow, without a furrow turned. It looked to him just as it had looked in his father's time, as though it had never been touched, the same old field difficult to plough and worse to reap, never worth the trouble of seed or harvest."

The Poacher, like *The Fallow Land,* is primarily a novel of physical growth, and in both these novels, so sensuous with the atmosphere of the English countryside, life proceeds with the placid unquestioning assurance of a pair of plough horses moving lazily across a field of arable. The lyricism which in the short story is given over to the moment, is here implicit in the atmosphere of slowly maturing growth. Jess Mortimer is not, considered objectively, a pretty character, yet his end in the novel is similar to the end of the pure-hearted Luke Bishop in *The Poacher.* Luke too is an old man wrapped in loneliness and, unlike Jess Mortimer, he has not even a roof over his head. It is not a case of cither man having deserved his lonely estate, but of life resolving itself. The impression left by both novels is one of serenity and fruition, of life seen in the round.

Now it is obvious that both Jess Mortimer and Luke Bishop must at one time or another have experienced moments in which their spirits soared in flights of lyricism which neither man could have explained to himself. It is even possible to point to such moments in the two novels. But in order to catch at the extremities of poignancy reached in a moment of time, it would be necessary for the mind to reach out beyond the novels and lift these moments out of the short stories. If this were not the case and Bates had allowed himself to be seduced from his purpose by holding up time in the novels and segregating one moment from another, he would not be justified in writing novels at all. Yet, by reading the novels and short stories and bearing in mind their complementary relationship to each other, it is possible to have the best of both worlds without injury to either one in the process.

If we compare Luke Bishop in *The Poacher* with Bruno Shadbolt in *Spella Ho* we see that whilst both characters have certain things in common the difference between the two is nevertheless very great. Both Bruno and Luke are, basically, creatures of instinct. Both, early on in their lives, have to pass through a crisis which is to play a large part in determining their future actions. Luke sees his father struck down in his prime as the result of a brush with a gamekeeper, Bruno sees his in the arms of a greedy woman. Luke reacts to his crisis instinctively.

Bruno also reacts instinctively, at first; but soon his brain is working with massive logic. From the moment Bruno Shadbolt begins to fumble with logic he and Luke Bishop are creatures set apart from each other. The tempo of Luke Bishop's life is slow; that of Bruno Shadbolt's, slow at first, gathers momentum as instinct increasingly gives way to more complicated mental processes.

Part, at least, of Bates's purpose in *Spella Ho* is revealed by the division of the novel into seven parts, the five middle parts being called after the names of the different women in Bruno Shadbolt's life, and the first and last part bearing the name of the big house from which Bruno stole coal as a boy and which as an old man he owned. All the same, whilst it is clear enough that in *Spella Ho* Bates was concerned to make a much more detailed statement about life than he had hitherto attempted, the growth of Bruno Shadbolt has a purpose beyond itself. When, at last, Bruno looks back across the years it is to see that Time has paced him with great footsteps of obliteration.

> "He walked up the avenue under the bare limes, the massed claret twigs almost the only colour now in the dark air. He had driven away from the avenue gates with Gerda. There was no record of it. It might not have happened, he thought. He had seen Virginia and Caroline biking down the avenue and coming a cropper in the summer grass, skirts high over pink bloomers such as you now saw displayed in every tuppeny shop in the world and whenever almost a woman sat down at all. There was no record of that moment of terrific unconventionality, or of the two lovely golden creatures. No record. A gasometer had a record. It keeps on, you record it in figures. Pig-iron has more permanence than a woman. It lasts for ever; the stones of a house last with it. What happens to us? he thought. There's no record for us."

So the man of property is able to put into words what the Luke Bishops and Jess Mortimers of the world perceive instinctively but are unable to express.

A man may be simple or complex, the possessor of great wealth or without a roof over his head, a rogue or a saint in the world's eyes, but whatever he is or wherever he goes, he is nevertheless subject to the same natural laws. The moment, however pregnant with promise, must inevitably submerge itself in Time.

This, Bates seems to say, is how it works out in the long run.

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LIAM O'FLAHERTY

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SEAN O'FAOLAIN

I OFTEN think that anybody approaching Irish literature should call to mind at once that very important thing about Irish life, which has such a profound effect on all Irish writing, the fact that Irish life is unconventional. The basic thing about Ireland is that it is a peasant country; what we call "polite society", with its firmly established and clearly defined conventions and rules, amounting, or mounting, to punctilio, exists in Ireland only in enclaves or little islands of convention besieged by the darkness of the folk mind and riddled by Fifth Columns wearing bowler hats underneath which there fumes the Arcane.

It is hard to say what takes the place of our conventions in a peasant's mind. Traditional habits and customs, flexible, varying from place to place, plain undiluted folk taboos and sanctions—by which I mean the habit of doing or not doing things for reasons that he doesn't himself in the least understand? When people live so close to nature as the peasant does conventional behaviour cannot be the important thing. A peasant may be and often is as proud as a prince, he may have and often has the sensibilities of a poet, he may and often does carry himself like a hidalgo; but he does it all and shows it all through his own human dignity and not by a set of outward and recognized tokens or reticences. . Such things give way, in the stress and struggle of nature, to an older, deeper, more traditional and indefinable technique of living and dying-

One can see at once how this way of being traditional without being conventional gives immense opportunities to the story-teller; and one can also see how it sets very strict limitations to him. To put it very loosely, he has immediate access to human nature's deepest and darkest passions; but there is also a vast area

of literature which is barred to him. The comedies and cruelties of refined society are outside his scope, unless he has the unusual gift of wit and experience to play a sort of contrapuntal comedy of contrasts between the sophisticated few and unsophisticated many. And how very few Irish writers have been in a position to do this! George Moore did it, very impishly and with complete success, in *Hail and Farewell.* Somerville and Ross did it with magnificent success. Maria Edgeworth did it in *Castle Rackrent.* I can think of no others. And these three, we observe, are what we call in Ireland people from The Big House. A writer sprung from the peasantry could never do it. A man like Liam O'Flaherty simply could not do it, and when he tries to do it, as he did in his last novel *Land*—in which he most unwisely tried to see the land-war of the last century not from the little hovels of Mayo but from the point of view of the Big Houses of Mayo—the result, to put it mildly, is embarrassing.

One may note that this does not apply only to peasant countries. It applies in every country where conventional society is weak: such as America, or Wales, or old Russia. The novels of all those countries are novels of passion and feeling, and strong emotion, or of brutality, or of savage or farcical humour, never witty humour, with sudden reactions to tenderness and pity and lyricism, and relapses into mysticism or sentimentality. That is what we get in the best of O'Flaherty's stories.

Now, for all such countries the proper kind of writer is the brainless genius. The classical Irish example of the brainless genius is Oliver Goldsmith—all heart, all feeling: the sort of writer who, if he ever does try to use the intellect he has not got, talks like Poll Noll. If our writers are not brainless geniuses they either go to London, like Wilde and Shaw—where they find plenty of puzzles on which to exercise their brains for the rest of their lives—or they are creatures of instinctive or mystical wisdom like AE or Yeats, talking and writing the most beautiful and wise nonsense. (If the other sort goes into exile the results are usually disastrous.)

O'Flaherty is a creature of emotion, instinct and vision. What he visions it is sometimes very hard to say. He is our great Don

Quixote, and like Don Quixote it is easy enough to see what he attacks—those old Irish hobgoblins of Prudery, Political Guile, Moral Cowardice, Opportunism, Hypocrisy, Evasiveness, and so forth and so on; but it is not at all so easy to define the Dulcinea whom he adores and defends. For he also has spent so much of his energy in rushing headlong against a host of other well-known, real and imaginary enemies outside Dublin and Connerrmra—in England, Paris, America, in Russia even (for he has a lurking affection for Russia, in spite of his book / *Went to Russia)*—that one is sometimes left wondering whether the ideal beauty that drives him on resides anywhere, even in approximation, on this mortal earth.

He is our Don Quixote, and he is also our Waring. "What's become of Waring?" The recurrent theme of his life is movement; restlessness; explosion; the eternal search; a creature of emotion, always up to something. I have a memory of seeing him, in Dublin, on a race-day driving a jaunting-car down Dawson Street, with three or four butties in merry mood, one of them in a red hunting-coat, Liam dressed as for Ascot, tall hat, grey vest and so on, lashing away at his nag, a gay, reckless party astonishing the respectable. Years after I mentioned the incident to him and he said, half-lightly, half-wryly: "In Dublin you do that sort of mad thing." I took him to mean—an explosion to shatter the boredom.

The first time I met O'Flaherty was in a Wicklow glen where he was living in a white-washed cottage—Synge's Glencree, Joseph Campbell's Glencree: writing hard, only now and again rushing up to Dublin to "explode". When I tried to open the gate and he heard the wild barking of his dogs and came out, I saw the most handsome man I have ever seen: eyes blue-grey as the Atlantic, perfect teeth, well-bred globular head. What struck me first was the challenge in the lift of that head, the questioning slant of those beautiful eyes, his febrile intentness—I had probably interrupted him at his writing—and a voice that though soft and rich was cold; altogether a little frightening for a young man who had not, at the time, published anything and who was gate-crashing on an already famous author. But when I explained that AE

had encouraged me to visit him, that alert, defensive air vanished in a flashing smile like a beautiful and kindly woman. I felt that this alertness of the fellow always prompt to attack was only second-nature to him; the softer thing, the primal thing, was overlaid. So that I was puzzled when we sat in his kitchen and his talk became bellicose, even bombastic, indeed tiresomely so—for in argument he says the wildest things, with great earnestness. What he wanted that day I do not know: all I know is that he wanted it like hell. I remember only one phrase, and it was a little startling: he said that a writer "should want to bite mountains with his teeth".

But, once again, as the time passed and he got on to other things I began to feel that warmer, softer thing underneath and felt, then and later, that all the turbulence, earnestness, energy, eagerness, swagger and noisiness were on the surface, like sweat. His inner nervosity exudes them. Later Edward Garnett told me how they once shared a caravan in Surrey, and one morning after a night of boisterous talk—and Garnett was any man's match at romantic wildness—the old man got up early, for old men do not sleep as well as young men, and he looked long and studiously at the sleeping face of the wild talker on the opposite bunk. It was the gentle face of a child. It is that delicate infancy of the heart, with all the wild wonder and folly of youth, that is the source of O' Flaherty's genius. The rest is a sort of uncontrollable fury of wonder at a life that spends its own beauty, wastes its own splendour, seems to hate or fear its own fineness—Life, to him, meaning Ireland.

His own wonder so amazes himself that he likes to transfer it to his characters. I open one of his best-known books *The Informer* and I come on these five sentences in the course of two pages:

> "They were nodding their heads with that amazing prodigality of emotion which, etc. . . .
>
> Suddenly there was an amazing interruption. . . .
>
> Everybody, for some amazing reason or other, sniffed at the smell of fried sausages. .. .

Gypo was unconscious of the amazement he had caused by his shout. . . .

Mrs. MacPhillip was not amazed."

As I turn over the pages I find this round-eyedness dilated all the time.

"He had become seized by some violent emotion. . . . He was petrified. . . . For some reason or other he jumped to his feet. . . . Everybody was amazed. . . . Spurred by some sudden impulse. . . . He felt moved by an uncontrollable impulse. . . . There was an indescribable coldness. ..."

The large vagueness of that "indescribable" blows out the mind. We do not clearly see what is happening; we do see that something vast has entered the mind of the author and we are impressed and oppressed by sympathy with him. But, it will be agreed, it is not the most satisfactory literary experience. This way of writing is not simply primitive and epic, for the epic is always cold and hard; it is a romantic technique, and it is interesting that all the old Irish sagas have this same quality of extravagance and exaggeration, and are quite different to the spareness of the Saxon and Norse sagas; it is a natural Irish way of writing.

The important thing, I think, to notice about much of O'Flaherty's work is that it is not so much emotional as excited. The amount of physical sensation and nervosity in it is disproportionate. One so often wants to put out a hand and calm the wild colt, to stroke the trembling neck and calm the rolling eyeballs with a "Quiet. Liam! Steady, old man!" Indeed this lashing and leaping of the mustang is O'Flaherty's cardinal danger, for when the soft and deep pulse of the heart should beat in his stories one gets, too readily, the surface trembling of the nerves, the violent rush to the head. His people are always too liable to go berserk. The woman who dreams that she may yet have a child suddenly feels "the blood course madly up her cheek, swelling the veins until she shivered with passion. Often she rushed from the cabin of a summer evening, her bodice open at the neck, her light

shawl across her shoulders, seeking love. . . ." Fergus O'Connor, thinking how he had been buried by a shell in France "gapes at the mouth", "feels his knee begin to tremble", and then "beads of cold sweat broke through his forehead and neck. With an oath he shot out his hands and made for the door. The round ball in his stomach was stifling him. ..."

In *The Black Soul,* one of his earliest novels he describes how Red John went mad, stripped himself stark-naked and hid behind a door to attack the man who had seduced his wife. His enemy,

> "saw Red John standing naked by the wall. He stood with wide-open mouth and staring eyes. His face got cold and then turned white. His nostrils distended. He stared into Red John's eyes and Red John stared into his. . . . Then Red John yelled and tore his jaws open to the utmost with his two hands, as if trying to vomit his fear in the intensity of his yell. He drew up his right leg to his buttock and struck the wall with his sole. 'Go away', he screamed, 'go away, you are going to kill me. . . .'"

That yell with the jaw torn open by the two hands is typically primitive, barbarically wild, like the infant Achilles stuffing food into his mouth with his hands. It is nothing to these flesh-driven creatures of his to want to bite mountains with their teeth; they gasp, choke, shiver, tremble, grip their limbs, feel their muscles grow rigid, scream and sigh and weep. Conceived dynamically they feel daemonically. They may not cease from the dance until they drop, or are sent hastily off the stage, like the Martyr, in the novel so-called, who is hurled blazing with petrol with the cross to which he is crucified, down into a lake hundreds of feet below his Gethsemane.

The lurking enemy is only too obvious. Melodrama is waiting around the corner, and it trips O'Flaherty up far too often. And since the appeal to crude emotion is not very far removed from the appeal to shallow emotion, melodrama, as we know from the stage, goes hand in hand with sentimentality. We frequently see the Americans fall into the same trap. The brutality of their work

seems to guarantee them from all sentimentality; this very exaggeration of brute strength lands them into the lap of such obviously melodramatic types as the "vamp" where the emotions thin down and down into a purely sentimental appeal. O'Flaherty possibly under direct American influence during his period of exile in the war-years, produced in *Land* feminine types that are indistinguishable from American movie women. But the danger was always present.

This, however, as I have said in the beginning, is but the one side of O'Flaherty; the deeper, softer thing lies under this superficial sweat. Otherwise such novels, written with such speed—he normally writes fast; the frequent signs of carelessness in his English alone reveal this—would not bear a moment's consideration; using the word in Henry James's sense, meaning what happens when, at the close of a novel, one puts it down and asks oneself what it is all about. But Irish writing, for the same reasons that make it emotional rather than cerebral, though it does not move towards critical thought moves, if I may say so, at its best to critical feeling. It communicates, at its best, emotional sympathies. O'Flaherty, likewise, is not just another "tough" realist. *Au fond* he is not a realist at all, and, indeed, the sooner Irish writers get it out of their heads that they are realists the better. Like all of them, what he does is to romanticize, or heighten, the stuff of realism.

What makes O'Flaherty romanticize his material, become over-excited by it, angry and violent, is that he is an idealist, and almost a moralist. He is affected by the nobility of the human spirit, excited by the magnificence and courage of primitive man, infuriated by his apparently inevitable defeat. Consider his novel *Skerrett)* which I count his best novel bar *Famine. Skerrett* is a wild, half-savage island schoolmaster cursed by a drunken fool of a wife, an uncontrollable temper, and a complete absence of the cunning of the physically weak and timid. At first he seems a monster. Gradually as disasters fall on him his character grows and grows. He defies the police, the school-inspector, the superstitious islanders, the Parish Priest, never with much worldly sense but at least always with the primitive honesty of his natural

instincts. And we are deeply moved by his love for his little son, and his efforts to humiliate himself before his hysterical wife, until we do, finally, believe the closing judgment on this half-barbarous dominie: "The nobility of his nature lay in his pursuit of godliness. He aimed at being a man who owned no master. And such men, though doomed to destruction by the timid herd, grow after death to the full proportion of their greatness."

It is purely romantic conception, even in its stress on death. It makes one feel that O'Flaherty is often like a gull who has taken up a shell-fish in his claws and let it fall with a crash from a great height, then swooping to see if there is anything worth his respect in what he has totally destroyed, and flying away with screams of rage. He is at rest in only one place—his lovely and quiet short-stories and there he finds his ideal in birds and animals and children's happiness; see, for example, that most tender little tale *Mother and Son*—there or in quiet pauses in his novels as when, in *Famine,* he makes us feel that the graceful young married couple leaving Aran are types of the primal beauty and simplicity of some Golden Age—his dream, his romantic ideal.

Tough Guy? No. He is rather the sort of man whom Santayana had in mind when he wrote: "Those romantic poets whose lives were often so irregular—were they not evidently far more spiritual than the good people whom they shocked? Shelley, Leopardi, Alfred de Musset were essentially children of the spirit; they were condemned to flutter on broken wings only for lack of measure and discipline. . . . The world is not respectable; it is mortal, tormented, confused, deluded for ever; but it is shot through with beauty, with love, with glints of courage and laughter; and in these the spirit. . . struggles to the lights among the thorns."

Perhaps nobody would be more surprised than O'Flaherty to hear himself described as a "child of the spirit". But I have not said what sort of spirit. "Spirit of health, or goblin damned?" His countrymen have no doubt about it; they have banned his books over and over again. Like Horatio they probably feel that "he waxes desperate with imagination". And indeed he does, being that typical Irish phenomenon—the imaginative realist.

One of the most foolish and exasperating habits of some critics is to blame a writer for not doing something other than he is, obviously, capable of doing. It would be wrong to wish O'Flaherty had tamed his melodrama and his violence and written more quiet and more thoughtful novels; one might as well have asked Jane Austen to give us more of crude action in the manner of Henry Fielding, or Henry Fielding to give us more of minute subtlety in the manner of Jane Austen. He has been wise in the manner of all instinctive writers. He has subconsciously known that he cannot contain an emotion for a long stretch except by firing it with nervous excitement, which, of course, inevitably alters and coarsens its quality. He has, therefore, for the most part kept his quieter emotions for the short stories—pieces of not more than four or five pages in length. This sometimes makes people say that he is a better writer of short-stories than of novels. The truth is rather as I have stated it. There are two distinct strains in his nature which he has never blended; and he was probably wise not to try.

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THOMAS MANN

*

CHARLES NEIDER

THOMAS MANN'S position in the artistic tradition Is fairly clear. It is not surprising to find him preoccupied with himself as the isolated artist, for because of his burgher forbears and his own naturally conservative temperament Mann tends to regard the artistic impulse in himself as something suspect, verging on the criminal, a notion directly related to the romantic conception that art is the product of disease. His preoccupation has been quite frank in a literary sense, being the inspiration of his entire output, both fictional and didactic. It has led him to a personal variation of the artist myth, a consideration of himself (and the artist in general) as the middle man between burgher and bohemian, nature and spirit, tradition and revolt. It has also led him to attempt to bring the artist back into the fold of good society after his nineteenth-century escapades, to bridge the chasm between the artist's nineteenth-century isolation and his expected respectability in the coming world state.

One of Mann's earliest published stories, *Little Herr Friedemann,* is a study of the artist as crippled and outcast, the artist's spiritual deformity, his irregularity, being symbolically expressed by a hunched back. The psychology of the protagonist is Mann's; and while it is undoubtedly melodramatized, it is at the same time genuine in tone and direction. All of the familiar notes of Mann's preoccupation with the artist are struck in this early piece: the artist's incapacity for athletics because of his introversion and frailty (this recalls a number of famous literary examples of athletically incapable artists—e.g. Stephen Dedalus in the *Portrait;* the artist as frail is related to the romantic marriage of art and disease), the use of music (with Wagner the favourite) to heighten the elements of yearning and isolation, the artist as pariah: viz,

Mann says of Friedemann, "But at length he had become quite used to standing on one side and not taking part." Friedemann hopes for nothing less than a sexual union with Frau von Rinnlingen, who represents the normal and extrovertive (and cruel); when she rejects him the blow is too much for his injured ego and he drowns himself in the river beside her garden. Even in a small tale like *Disillusionment* there is a hint of Mann's ever-present theme: here it is in the artistic perversity of being forever dissatisfied with the actual—a spiritual jadedness very fin *de siécle.* (The story was written in 1896.) Another early story. *The Dilettante,* is largely autobiographical, expressing the feelings of doubt and anxiety of the young man gambling on a career in literature. It contains, in addition, a number of interesting overtones, among them the earliest expression of the mother-artist, father-burgher motif. Part of the story suggests the *Euddenbrooks* material which was soon to appear, while part of it hints at *Tonio Kröger* and the motif of yearning for the blue-eyed, blond and extrovertive (the healthy burgher type in Mann's allegorical vocabulary, based on romantic tradition and particularly on Nietzsche. Mann's decision that happiness (and therefore external success) for him is *de rigueur* is also seen here at this early date (1897): "I could not permit myself to be unhappy, could not stand the sight of myself in such a role. I should have to hide in the dark like a bat or an owl and gaze with envy at the children of light." But perhaps the most illuminating element in the piece is an implied one. If one equates "dilettante" with "bourgeois artist", the artist as middle man, as official compromiser, one finds the hidden autobiographical core of the story. "Dilettante" here stands as a symbol of the bourgeois artist's tortured striving for direction between the poles of burgher and bohemian. Soon, in *Tonio Kröger,* after the strengthening exercise of *Euddenbrooks,* Mann will firmly rationalize his middle position.

In his early period Mann took sadistic pleasure in projecting what he considered to be the artist's spiritual deformities on to his characters in the form of physical ones. *Tobias Mindernickel,* for example, is a portrait of a love-starved, psychopathically sadistic outcast whose cruelty is matched only by the cruelty of Mann's

prose. *Little Lizzy is* a story of adultery in which the cruelty of Amra toward her unhealthily stout husband, Jacoby, is reminiscent of Gerda von Rinnlingen's cruelty to Friedemann. *Little Lizzy* is particularly interesting because of its early pronouncement on artists. Speaking of Alfred Lautner, the young musician who is Amra's lover, Mann says that "He belonged to the present-day race of small artists who do not demand the utmost of themselves, whose first requirement is to be jolly and happy, who employ their pleasing little talents to heighten their personal charms. It pleases them to play in society the role of the naive genius. Consciously childlike, entirely unmoral and unscrupulous, merry and self-satisfied as they are, and healthy enough to enjoy even their disorders, they are agreeable even in their vanity, so long as that has not been wounded. But woe to these wretched little poseurs when serious misfortune befalls them, with which there is no coquetting, and when they can no longer be pleasant in their own eyes." Mann has learned to speak in the voice of the artist as well as the bourgeois. He will not tolerate any trifling with art on the part of the healthy ones (he describes Lautner as blond, with a sunny smile in his eyes), just as they will not tolerate his trifling in their affairs. Whereas Mann considers happiness *derigueur,* he heartily resents it in those whose primary aim is to be happy—i.e. in those untainted by conscience and *weltschmerz.* Thus his middle role gradually reveals itself even in these very early pieces, written before *Buddenbrooks.* In *Buddenbrooks,* while paying his literary debt to realism and to his nineteenth-century masters, Tolstoy, Flaubert and the Scandinavians, Mann considerably clarifies his notions concerning art and the artist, examining the problem of burgher vs. bohemian in his comparison of Thomas and Christian Buddenbrook, portraying the former as a stalwart but decaying burgher and Christian as the dilettante bohemian suffering from neurasthenia and hypochondria. The theme of art as related to disease is here developed with exceptional vigour. The decay of the burgher family through increasing refinement results in disease and art. The figure of little Hanno, last of the Buddenbrooks, is the most intriguing in the book for at least two reasons: first, because he stands closest in an autobiographical relation to

the author and second, because he is the inspiration for the most beautiful and characteristic passages in the novel. Besides, Hanno foreshadows with precarious frailty the coming Tonio Kröger. *Buddenbrooks,* in this connection, is in several ways a preparatory exercise for *Tonio Kröger.* Among other considerations, the success of the novel, artistically and externally, encouraged Mann to speak of himself openly henceforth in terms of the artist and to take a more positive position as middle man.

In *Tonio Kröger* Mann brings to a crescendo his previously faint articulation regarding himself as artist. That he was expressing the notions and yearnings of his time, particularly among the artistic crowd, was evidenced by the warm reception which the tale received on its appearance in 1903. In Mann's own words (1936), this tale and the group of stories of which it is the spiritual centre "all bear the impress of much melancholy and ironical reflection on the subject of art and the artist: his isolation and equivocal position in the world of reality, considered socially and metaphysically and as a result of his double bond with nature and spirit". The story is delightful because of its lyric bloom and its intellectual core, the latter found in Tonio's conversations with his friend, Lisabeta Ivanovna. Here one comes upon Mann's disgust with bohemian apparel, his reiteration of the decadent idea that simple feelings are banal and that "only the irritations and icy ecstasies of the artist's corrupted nervous system are artistic", his suspicion of the artist-type, his desire for the "normal", his insistence that "The kingdom of art increases and that of health and innocence declines on this earth", his contempt for the dilettante and so on. Despite its evidence of a strangely prolonged adolescence in the author, the tale portrays perfectly the psychology of the sensitive young outcast who seeks acceptance and "regularity". It is a bloodbrother to Joyce's *Portrait,* except that whereas Stephen is proudly scornful of the regular, Tonio regards the regular with irony not unmixed with yearning and compassion. *Tristan, The Hungry, The Infant Prodigy* and *Gladius Dei* all centre around *Tonio Kröger* in time and spirit and continue Mann's probing into the psychology of the artist. They precede his work on *Royal Highness* and the stories which more

or less accompanied his second novel, among them *At the Prophet's* and *Felix Krull.* Around this time, also, Mann composed his only play, *Fiorenza;* and it too, as almost everything he touched in those days, was concerned with the motif of isolation and the artist. *At the Prophet's* is a satire on the bohemian artist and is similar in tone to *Tristan,* which satirizes the aesthete. In *Felix Krull* the theme of artist as criminal, which was hinted at in *The Infant Prodigy*, is fully developed. Not until the First World War was Mann's conception of the artist as isolated seriously shaken. Until that time all of his major figures—Hanno, Tonio, Klaus Heinrich, Felix Krull, Aschenbach—lived in isolated spheres removed from action and direct social responsibility.

II

Mann's *The Magic Mountain* period stems from his experience in the First World War. The war found him embroiled in bitter controversies with his brother Heinrich, who, as spokesman for a European and democratic enlightenment, opposed Mann's nationalistic and sometimes Prussianistic views, views which expressed in political terms his heaviness of character and his temperamental conservatism. Seen from to-day's perspective, Mann's behaviour during the war seems strongly reactionary. It seemed no less so to many of his opponents during the conflagration. In his efforts to defend his position while at the same time searching his mind and conscience, Mann gathered material which in 1918 appeared as *The Reflections of a Non-Political Man.* He has been attacked for this book on many grounds and on many occasions, some quite recent. He has, however, repudiated it; and it is.worth noting that he has never had it translated into English along with his other didactic works. Mann himself has indicated that without the experience of the *Reflections* he could not have written *The Magic Mountain. The Reflections* cleared the political and metaphysical ground for the novel. It cleared the emotional ground as well. As though in atonement for his political isolation during the war, Mann makes Hans Castorp, his

alter ego in the novel, leave the sanatorium, where he has been seduced for seven years, in order to take up arms and thus merge his identity with that of a larger identity of international importance. Castorp is not, of course, presented as an artist; he is, however, an artist on two grounds: because he is Mann's *alter ego* and because of his keen acceptance and synthesis of experience. But Castorp is not, like Heinrich Mann, a man of action or of political responsibility. He is still, like the author, a man feeling his way along the misty road to politics. *The Magic Mountain* is simply the education of Hans Castorp, but it gives us no indication as to how Castorp applies that education except for the detail of his breaking the spell of Davos and going off to the wars. Thus Mann's second period, while theoretically mature, is still characterized by practical, political immaturity. In the artistic sphere Mann had not been standing still. He had arrived from the exploited naturalism *of Buddenbrooks* to the highly polished, involved and musical symbolism of *The Magic Mountain.* Nor had he turned his back altogether on naturalism: he had rather given it a sense of play, a sense of wonder and no little irony. The complex intellectual demands of the second period had called forth a comparably complex and unbehaviouristic artistic technique.

In *The Magic Mountain* Mann's social and individual symbolism his objective and subjective symbolism are humanized, contrasted, fused and accentuated in a remarkable synthesis. Synthesis —and yet not, for synthesis implies a new whole with indistinguishable parts, whereas with Mann the re-creation emphasizes with great clarity the forms of the old yet offers something new. Irony and music; contrast, harmony, social versus individual, plain versus clandestine—counterpoint is the word. The autobiographical merges with or dominates the social, the social merges with or dominates the autobiographical; social because the symbol signifies an idea, or an experience broader than the personal, and autobiographical because the symbol signifies an intensely personal experience. Whose experience? Castorp's, Settembrini's, Peeperkorn's, Naphta's. But what if the symbol is made to carry the weight of Mann's own biography? Then the ironic play becomes really interesting! Irony is duality, in the crude sense

antithesis, but in the hands of a humanizing master it is form and content playing with themselves in a multitude of ever-shifting lights which combine and separate like the melodic lines of a Bach fugue. In his hands it is humane, intelligent and in a sublime sense creative, for it presents at once a realistic image of life and an examination and criticism of it. And in counterpoint it achieves dynamic transparency in addition to the transparency afforded by each partially self-conscious and self-critical symbol, for each of which there is a more or less hidden and ironical explanation by author, symbol or opposing symbol. It is like an X-rayed living body, in which the flesh, though warm, is lucid, and in which the deeper structure is made apparent while in motion. It is this transparency, this intelligibility, which secures Mann's work against the attack of being decadent, esoteric and anti-social. While in the profoundest sense Mann's main intention may be to write autobiography, his burgher-artistic conscience prompts him to give first consideration to story, second to idea and only last to autobiography. It is in this respect that his work is thoroughly social.

And now let us present the number seven as an illustration of the foregoing. The reader may justifiably ask: Why seven?—the book teems with interesting symbols, many of them intellectually more profound and far-reaching, such as the figures of Naphta and Peeperkorn, or, more important still, Hans Castorp, and many of them possess the double virtue of abstraction and concreteness, such as the pencil Castorp borrowed from Hippe and later from Chauchat; while seven is an abstraction in all simplicity and is incapable of conjuring up an image in the sense that Settembrini's checked trousers, Clavdia's Kirghiz eyes or Peeperkorn's sea-captain's hands can conjure them. An even stronger objection may be: Since it is the contention that Mann's symbolism is the synthesis of objective and subjective or social and individual symbols, and since individual symbolism is necessarily autobiographical it must follow—if so abstract and social a symbol as the number seven can in this case be called representative of the third type—that seven is autobiographical—that is, intensely personal—with Mann. Where is the proof? Who can

say with certainty regarding the work of any author, much less the work of so profoundly imaginative and social-minded an artist as Mann, that this item is autobiographical, that not?—unless one has it from the author himself. A good objection; however, there are clues. Mann believes in his "destiny", made clear to him by the regular occurrence of important and auspicious events in his life. He believes in this "destiny", this inner rhythm, this physiological time-organ controlling and directing his physical and spiritual growth and decay, to the extent that he predicted the year of his death—1945, at the age of seventy. And was it a strange coincidence or even stranger inner design which caused Mann to reject precisely seven sections of the manuscript of *Der Zauberberg,* the unpublished sections deposited at Yale? It is not altogether fantastic to assume that numbers in general and seven in particular are personal with Mann. Be that as it may, the answer to the objection lies in the genius Mann has evinced for taking the cold symbols of his objective plan and experiencing them so thoroughly as to recreate them in his own image, so that thus transformed they serve as "autobiography in the guise of fable" as well as fable itself. But the chief reasons for the selection of the symbol seven are that it is the leading leitmotiv and, second, the key symbol of the novel.

III

Mann's third period fills the political gap of the second, for Joseph is portrayed not only in reference to his education, but also to its political and intellectual implications. The Joseph novel itself falls into three sections, corresponding to Mann's three periods: the period prior to the first pit, in which Joseph is the vain dreamer who sets himself off from his brothers and resembles Tonio; the Potiphar period, in which Joseph's Egyptian (cosmopolitan) education takes place and in which he resembles Hans Castorp; and the Pharaoh period, in which Joseph, now apolitical man, acts as the provider for the people. It is the early part of Mann's Joseph period which contains *Mario and the Magician,*

the symbolic and prophetic story of Italian fascism. Later *The Beloved Returns* appears. The Moses story falls into the latter part of the period. In it we have the artist as inspirer, provider and moulder all in one. Mann several times refers to Moses as a sculptor chiseling and blasting and carving his people. This conception brings to mind the lines from Heine's *Confessions* concerning Moses: "I failed to perceive that Moses, notwithstanding his enmity to art, was nevertheless himself a great artist, and possessed the true artistic spirit. Only, this artistic spirit with him, as with his Egyptian countrymen, was applied to the colossal and the imperishable. But not, like the Egyptians, did he construct works of art from bricks and granite, but he built human pyramids and carved human obelisks."

It is Mann's final period which contains the rise of Hitler, Mann's exile and his subsequent polemical activities against the Nazis by means of pamphlets and B.B.C. broadcasts to the German underground. This period is climaxed by the publication of *Joseph the Provider,* the last volume of the Joseph tetralogy, and by Mann's publicly-declared pro-Roosevelt stand in the election of 1944, the latter taken to the extent of lectures urging people to vote for the president.

There is a notion, rather fashionable in certain "realistic" circles, that Mann has decayed since *Buddenbrooks,* with the implication that *The Magic Mountain* is a German metaphysical hulk rather than a novel and that the Joseph books are altogether incomprehensible and out of the world. Thus a representative member of these circles found *Joseph the Provider* difficult, heavy and hardly profound, although he admitted that as simply a novelist, whatever that may mean, Mann is supreme. He added that while *The Magic Mountain* is Mann's greatest novel, his most interesting one is *Buddenbrooks.* In these circles symbolism, thought and musical construction seemingly possess no value. They would have Mann repeat himself in the manner of lesser novelists, always remaining faithful to the *Buddenbrooks* formula; and they would exclude all un-novelistic elements, comforting themselves with what would remain, a primitive compote indeed, consisting only of tale and character. Their attitude clearly

evidences their low opinion of the novel form; and, of course, their own undeveloped taste. Another aspect of their view is the insistence on attempting to equate the work of genius with that of mediocre men. It leads inevitably to a lowest common denominator of taste and, more specifically, to a bull-headed literalness in approaching great and complex works.

The long tetralogy which was begun in pre-Hitler Germany, continued for five years in Switzerland and finished in California, under skies which the author has compared to those of Egypt, is rich in time, art, spiritual overtones, wisdom, story, pathos and in the unique texture which can somehow make suspenseful that which is already so well known to everyone. One recalls the magnificent prelude to the first book, a prelude which has a life of its own and which is a sonorous organ prologue offering orientation and perspective in a style which is a beautiful and complex weaving of themes and ideas. And one remembers the first book itself—largely an introduction to the series, so that its prelude is really a prologue to a prelude—and the poignant story of Jacob, ending with the winning of Rachel and with Rachel's tragic and untimely death. One thinks of the tortuous treatment of time, with numerous foreshadowings and flashbacks, a technique suitable when the story is well known to the reader in advance. Gradually the pattern and its meaning emerge. In the Joseph books the myth has been thoroughly humanized and therefore serves as a sword against reaction and against reaction's exploitation of the myth for its own savage ends. Myths, having their origin in prehistory, are folk legends containing much communal wisdom. Their authorship is communal as well and, while they may look naive on the surface, they are often fierce and cruel, in accordance with the moves of the times which gave them life. And yet they are strangely attractive and exciting to our modern ear because, like the individual's dreams, they are full of the dynamite wisdom of the unconscious. They are thus—because of their savagery and emotional appeal—obvious tools of reaction. The myth can be used by the forces of progress just as readily as by those of reaction, since it is a composite of tradition and the present —and even of the future—and therefore stands on the middle

ground between two conflicting worlds, the world of ignorance, division, the past, on one hand, and the world of enlightenment, unity, the future, on the other. Mann has made it serve progressive ends in the Joseph novels by humanizing it with psychology and humour. Since he believes that the future holds in store an era of collectivism and communal strength, he has aptly chosen and explored an art form symbolizing the collective—the myth. He was attracted to the Joseph myth because of personal and artistic reasons; because of his interest in the myth as tradition and tradition as recurrence; because of his conception of the myth as the eternally and essentially human; and because of his conviction that the concept of humanity must be re-examined and reaffirmed at a time when reaffirmation is urgent, when a new unity and faith, deriving from a consciousness of strength in the typical, the communal rather than in the peculiarly individual, are necessary to usher in the democratic world out of the ashes of the reactionary one. Therefore he chose the Joseph myth as a symbol of unity emerging out of strife, and humanized and "civilized" it into a myth of peace, of communal and spiritual progress out of something which might, in less humanistic hands, have been exploited for its primitive, violent and divisive aspects.

In Mann's case there is a peculiarly tight relationship between the man and the artist, and therefore to study the evolution of the artist in his works is, among other things, to study Mann's development as a political man, his development from a non-political and shoulder-shrugging citizen to the famous and vociferous resister of reaction. In Joseph, Mann recapitulates all his artist themes, in Joseph can be traced all the other figures as well as Mann's biography, in Joseph can be seen the various stages from the isolated to the ultimate stage of completion, of sharing the world's sufferings and joys while contributing to the world. Joseph is all the others. In his role as Hans Castorp, for instance, he leaves the flatland of Canaan to enter the catholic Davos of Egypt. And here he strangely becomes a Goethe-figure, reminding one of Goethe ruling at Weimar and the portrayal of Goethe in *The Beloved Returns.* But of course Joseph rules from below as well as from above, in contradistinction to Goethe, who ruled

only from above. Joseph arrived almost together with Hitler and they matured at about the same rate. While Mann was writing about Joseph's exile into Egypt, he himself was forced into exile from Germany. He was the prophet as well as the tool of events. With his Joseph he became the artist who took his place in society without equivocation, aligning himself with progress and truth against reaction and lies, speaking out, accepting exile rather than the honours of the New Order, and rinding new inspiration on American soil. In short, he became the thoroughly good citizen, the bourgeois.

It has been said that Mann regards himself as primarily a bourgeois and this is not difficult to believe, in spite of his enormous interest in himself as artist, for he has never been the conventional artist in the sense of being bohemian. Mann has never worked at great cost to his burgher existence: he has taken care to marry, to raise children, and to lead a good life, segregating his artistic labouis to the morning hours. Thus he has always come to art as an amateur; and while his love is unique, nevertheless he keeps art at a distance. One result is that his work has not been as prolific as it might have been, hardly as prolific as his biother's. Another and more interesting result is that he has preserved toward his art a remarkable freshness, art being for him a holiday, an excursion, no matter how burdensome at times. This explains his articulateness about his labours: it is as if he is explaining to other burghers his fantastic morning adventures, like some Marco Polo come home out of strange lands with spices and tales.

In a work whose theme and symphonic amplification is the myth, it is not surprising to discover that a leitmotiv—and perhaps the chief leitmotiv—is a myth itself, particularly when the author is Mann, noted for his musical construction. I refer again to the number seven, now to its mythical significance. It is used subtly but extensively in the Joseph work. In *The Magic Mountain* it was the key to a novel of symbolism and magic and therefore its use was along symbolic and magical lines. But in the Joseph its mythical and Biblical aspects are exploited. Thus Mann has achieved a musical continuity between his two maturest works through the choice of a number as leitmotiv for both, whose

traditional reference has been dual: magic and godliness. After employing the number in his novel of modern magic what could be more natural than to employ it again in a novel of ancient magic, particularly since the original text of the new novel required its use to an important extent? But the use of the number in the Joseph is by no means as sophisticated as it is in *The Magic Mountain.* In the latter it is highly cultivated, a hothouse product, clandestine and sly, ironic and highly musical; but in the Joseph it is naive and straightforward. And it is unmusical except in relation to external form; it is not musical from within, it does not pulsate at the core of things, it is modest and fairly self-evident. It represents acceptance and elaboration, no more; there is no synthetic transmutation of value and significance. In other words, its simple, mythical element is stressed rather than its symbolic.

It is always a little presumptuous and unfounded for a critic to assume autobiographical content and symbolism in an author's work, even when he is encouraged to do so by the author's own confessions, for authors are notoriously apt to read into their work, once it is out of their hands, things private, secretly delightful, and confessional in spite of the fact that the cold observer, like the child in the fable, sees the emperor naked and nothing else. But in the case of the Joseph books and in other of Mann's writings, certain analogies between life and fable are sufficiently evident to justify giving them considerable thought. The case of Joseph's two pits is a good example. Twice Joseph is thrown into the pit, once by his brothers and again by Potiphar; the first time because of Joseph's exceeding self-love, even arrogance, the self-love of the dreamer who has begun to make an ivory-tower cult of himself; the second time because of his renunciation of this same self-love, which appears to him now in the form of sexual manhood, love of his maleness, the fleshly. And here irony becomes plain, for the cause of Joseph's double downfall is identical, each time being the same self-love but with this distinction—that Joseph's first fall results from its acceptance and the second from its rejection. Thus the second fall is the more noble and mature; as a matter of fact it is blameless, even virtuous, for it is the renunciation of the flesh—of consummation with the lovely

Mut-em-enet—in favour of the spiritual, in favour of physical purity, and loyalty to Potiphar, Joseph's friend and benefactor.

So much for Joseph's two pits; but what about Mann's? Mann's first was his Prussianism during the First World War, when he wrote *The Reflections of a Non-Political Man,* as though a man interested in the welfare of humanity can ever stand blameless on the sidelines and call himself non-political. The second pit is his exile from his native land and the consequent loss of his German-speaking audience. Note the following striking parallel: the cause of Mann's two falls in each case is the same as it was with Joseph: first because he accepts and then because he rejects—and, as in the case of Joseph, it is precisely self-love. Of course it is a more complicated, more sophisticated, less obvious self-love but nevertheless it is that same self-love of the dreamer, the artist; and in both Joseph and Mann it is expressed on two planes: in personal egotism and in heightened spirituality—the latter, with Joseph, a belief in God and in his being God's favourite; with Mann, his belief in himself as an artist with a mission, an artist loyal to the humanizing ideal of literature and to literature's covenant with the humane. But what is the nature of Mann's double fall? It is this: in the first instance he deserted his loyalty to things of the spirit. In short, by joining the ranks of the German militarists he forsook his loyalty to the word, to his art, and to his destiny as an artist—in practical terms, to his continuing influence as a writer and his continuing ability to win an enlightened, civilized and worthy audience. And, like Joseph, he was punished with smarting in the pit, with smarting, like Joseph's, of an inner nature, a smarting of guilt and revaluation. Now for the second instance: in this he was cast into the pit of exile and thus deprived of his German-speaking audience (something not to be underestimated as an enervating, depressing force), suffering because he renounced that which was largely responsible for his first fall, now expressed in the form of German fascism. Why did he, like Joseph, turn to renunciation? Because, like Joseph, he now refused to compromise his artist-purity, his conscience, having firmly established it in the smarting and revaluation of the first fall. Joseph's self-

love is Mann's self-love, just as Joseph is Mann, for both are artists and both are egotistic. Joseph is more primitive and therefore more naive, but the impulse is the same, except that Joseph's feelings of artist guilt—feelings which largely derive from an excess of self-love—are not so strong as Mann's, since Joseph falls back on the assurance that his role is destined by God and therefore will, in the long run, be one of honour. Mann, however, though not an ordinary believer in God, finds relief from his feelings of guilt in a device not very dissimilar to Joseph's; in fact his device, too, is precisely destiny, his personal destiny of playing an honourable role among men.

Thus we see that there is indeed a broad yet intense parallel between Joseph's two pits on the one hand and Mann's on the other. But at this point a disturbing question arises. Did Mann choose the Joseph legend because of this and similar parallels between the fable and life? If so, then he must have known of his coming exile. Is one therefore to assume the existence and validity of the occult? Is the artist truly, as it has so often been written, a prophet and seer? Does he sense the nature of coming events? Fortunately, it is not necessary to answer such questions to present a sound case. It is undoubtedly true that Mann chose the legend because he felt some inner affinity with it. He himself has said so. Aside from being definitely explicit about his choice, he has given the following insight into his productive mechanism, which is certainly relevant here: "A work must have long roots in my life, secret connections must lead from it to earliest childhood dreams, if I am to consider myself entitled to it, if I am to believe in the legitimacy of what I am doing." But aside from this affinity his choice had political overtones, and it is here that we find the answer to the disturbing question. At the time that Mann was thinking of his new work, events in Germany had already come to such a pass that only the blind (and there were many such) could not sense their direction, only the blind were without some dark suspicions concerning the nature of future events. Nationalism, militarism and despotism were already rife and a wave of anti-semitism was engulfing and shaming the country. Indeed, so far had fascism progressed that even Mann,

still quite a non-political man, chose the Old Testament as the subject for his new book—not by accident, but strictly by design. He writes: "Well, the selection of the Old Testament subject was certainly not mere accident; most certainly there were hidden, defiantly polemic connections between it and certain tendencies of our time which I always found repulsive from the bottom of my soul: the growing vulgar anti-semitism which is an essential part of the fascist mob-myth, and which commits the brutish denial of the fact that Judaism and Hellenism are the two principal pillars upon which our Occidental civilization rests. To write a novel of the Jewish spirit was timely just because it seemed untimely." In brief, Mann had already chosen the course of renunciation and defiance of the New Order, though not overtly as yet. Therefore the second pit needed only the further development and strengthening of the New Order for it to achieve existence. It was already foreshadowed, for it was plain that the Hitlerites would punish those who resisted them. Therefore the particular form of the pit—in this instance exile—was to some extent accidental, but the coming of the pit itself was never in doubt.

Have we stated the case completely? Not quite. Some of the facts chafe under isolation; they belong partly to another context, to another pattern, another parallelism. In short, certain key words possess value in a second pattern, from the point of view of which the first can be seen in a new and equally striking light. The self-love which twice endangered Joseph's life is, as has been stated, the self-love of the artist. But what about the pits? They, too, are the pits of the artist, for only an artist could have gotten himself into them for such causes as we know about. Relegation to these pits is not caused by the irregularity of the criminal or the social or political revolutionary; it is caused by the irregularity, in the first instance, of the insufferably vain dreamer and in the second of the insufferably loyal purist. And renunciation? It is the ambivalent renunciation of the artist-type, which shuns that for which it hungers and which craves precisely and perversely for that from which it keeps aloof—it is the renunciation whose aftermath is suffering. And the maturation following the suffer-

ing in the first pit? It is the maturation not of whole wisdom but again of ambivalence, of trying to play with fire while avoiding it, in other words, the maturation of the middle man. The story of Joseph is, among other things, the parable of the artist as a success among men, and for this reason, if for no other, it must have appealed strongly to Mann, who as an artist has always proclaimed a strong bond with tradition and the regular and who considers happiness and success necessary in this life. Mann is almost the prototype of the regular-irregular artist, the man who refuses to wear a velvet jacket and long hair in sign of his trade, but yet flirts lovingly with death and the illicit in his artistic explorations. Almost but not quite the prototype—for there is always Goethe, Goethe as model and master. Success, however, is not the whole story, nor does Joseph achieve it without danger and struggle—all of which fits in nicely with Mann's experience as an artist. Joseph is the outcast dreamer, full of vanity, physically rather fragile, a decadent from his brothers' burgher and regular point of view, a silly mental man and not a shepherd, not a man who labours in the field or with the flocks. And what of Mann? Mann as a young man is the shady member of a solid burgher family; he is irregular, decadent and unhealthy in their opinion; he has a bad conscience, he suffers from feelings of guilt; he doesn't work as regular people do—on the contrary he dreams, scribbles and dabbles in disturbing things. And so Mann as a young writer writes of the artist who is desperately alone and who dreams of union with the gay, blithe, and blue-eyed, the unfrowning regular folk. For Mann is never completely the artist in the old bohemian sense of complete revolt. He is the new type of artist as middle man, the mediator between tradition and revolt as well as between flesh and spirit.

Joseph, then, is cast out because he is unbearable, a misfit in a land of tents and shepherds. But he is not the only unbearable one, for to him his brothers too are unbearable; to fulfil his talents he must escape their way of life, he must go down to a country where his gifts will be prized instead of despised and where he can attain a sizeable piece of urban wealth, not the wealth of flocks and fields, for he is ambivalent, he is not the man to despise the

material simply because he loves the spiritual. Therefore he must go to a country with an advanced culture, a decadent country which will prize his "decadence" and shower him with wealth and honour because of it. And so he goes (or arranges to have himself sold into, which is the same thing from the viewpoint of fate) to Egypt, knowing that a prophet is not without honour except in his own country. There he rises to greatness and becomes the provider, not only for his own people, who once cast him out, but for all others as well.

And again we note the cogent parallel, this time of ambivalence and success. Mann gains great honours in the foreign land of literature, where his decadent dreams bring a good price, and in the end he showers wealth and honour not on his people alone but on all people; in the end he is the provider, the artist as father and teacher; the artist, in more or less figurative terms, as saviour of the people.

IV

Burgher, artist, tradition, revolt, nature, spirit—these are social terms and we have accepted them conveniently from Mann thus far because they have historical insight and validity. But we are aware that Mann's work is a web of highly personal symbolism too—perhaps so personal that Mann himself is not altogether aware of it. What, let us ask, are the above broad terms disguising in Mann's psychic history? What clues can they afford to a subterranean symbolism general in his work and as yet unsuspected by us?

In *Tonio Kroger* the father-mother dialectic is more directly presented than elsewhere in Mann. As usual, the father is the good citizen, the mother the somewhat suspect hot-blooded creature. The latter comes from somewhere "far down on the map" and is named Consuelo (Mann's own mother came from Brazil). The mother is equated with license, passion, the south; the father with conscience and order; the mother with the new, the father with the traditional. All that Mann has written about the artist's intermediary position is now seen by means of the

symbolism of his fiction to be disguises of a basically sexual motif: the ambivalence between masculine and feminine traits in the artist; or, more expressly stated, the artist's ambivalence between his father and mother. That the sexual motif is indeed basic is indicated by the richness of the unconscious symbolism (soon to be discussed) which pervades the works.

The father symbolizes conscience; this is indicated by the sentence, "It might have been his father in him, that tall, thoughtful, fastidiously dressed man with the wild flower in his buttonhole, that made him suffer so down there in the south. . . ." It is in the south that Tonio's heart becomes "dead and loveless", and that he descends "into the depths of lust and searing sin", suffering "unspeakably" thereby. Tonio is seriously ambivalent. "So for all result he was flung to and fro forever between two crass extremes, between icy intellect [father] and scorching sense [mother] and what with his pangs of conscience led an exhausting life, rare, extraordinary, excessive, which at bottom he, Tonio Kröger, despised." Art is the product of this ambivalence, this disease, this neurosis, and it is directly proportional in excellence to the severity of the neurosis, according to the tale. Thus Mann writes: "But as his health suffered from these excesses, so his artistry was sharpened; it grew fastidious, precious, *raffiné,* morbidly sensitive in questions of tact and taste, rasped by the banal." Art is compulsive. "He worked, not like a man who works that he may live; but as one who is bent on doing nothing but work. . ." The artist, like the Oedipus neurotic, is of doubtful sex. "Is an artist a male, anyhow? Ask the females! It seems to me we artists are all of us something like those unsexed papal singers. . . . ' Tonio desires to be normal, to be like Hans Hansen and Ingeborg Holm; that is, he desires to be like his father. But he is torn by the illicit, which is the feminine in him, and is not in the least surprised to be taken for a criminal on his visit to his native town. His visit is in a sense a journey of rebirth, a journey into the womb of the past, with all its touching nostalgia, and it ends with rhapsodies on the sea, that classic symbol, in mythology and psychoanalysis, of regeneration.

In *Death in Venice,* Aschenbach, the man of iron will, the

descendant of strict and disciplined forebears, is the victim of energies which he has been repressing for years. These overthrow him on two counts—moral and physical. They seduce him to the illicit level of homosexuality and, having witnessed his progressive degeneration, slay him with the plague. The conflict in Aschenbach is between the forces of the conscious and the unconscious minds. Fatigued by his sapping work, and worn out by a lifetime of repression, Aschenbach unconsciously seeks a new life, a rebirth. That is why he heads instinctively towards the sen, the symbol of woman, the womb and parturition. He travels south because the south for him symbolizes the sensuous, the feminine and disorder—in brief the illicit—traits he has inherited from his mother, the daughter of a Bohemian musical conductor.[1] The unconscious, the primitive, makes powerful demands of him. It stirs up primitive images—of jungles and tigers. Aschenbach's yearning for rebirth is indicated even by his repugnant attempts to beautify himself at the Venetian barber's.

Rebirth entails death. That is why Aschenbach must die. It is also why the symbols of death pursue him—the North Cemetery, the stonemason's yard, the snub-nosed man in the portico, with his fangs showing, the old sailor with the goatee, the horrible old man in the rakish panama, and so on. Aschenbach's "yearning for new and distant scenes", his "craving for freedom, release, forgetfulness", are cravings for death so that he may be reborn. As always in Mann, there is the equation between father and discipline and order, and mother and the sensuous, illicit and beautiful. The sea plays a great role in the novella. Its importance for Aschenbach is made clear by Mann: "His love of the ocean had profound sources: the hard-worked artist's longing for rest, his yearning to seek refuge from the thronging manifold shapes of his fancy in the bosom of the simple and vast; and another yearning, opposed to his att and perhaps for that very reason a lure, for the unorganized, the immeasurable, the eternal—in short, for nothingness." This is also a true description of Mann's own interest in the sea.

[1] The coupling of music and the illicit, as well as music and the sea, is prominent in Mann's work.

With these facts in mind one can easily discern a classic pattern of behaviour—the pattern of the Oedipus type of neurotic, torn between his desire for both parents and by his incestuous leanings toward his mother. Aschenbach (or Mann), the Oedipus, represses the feminine in him because it is illicit; it is illicit because it involves incest; but in the last analysis his powerful defences crumble before a sudden if late attack by his primitive unconscious. The homosexual component, emphasized by the figure of Tadzio, is classic in the Oedipus neurosis. All the elements are clear; the ambivalence between the parents and their symbolic equivalents, the fear of incest and consequent punishment, the yearning to return to the womb and to achieve rebirth, the homosexual overtones, result of a too-strong identification with the father. "Thought that can merge wholly into feeling, feeling that can merge wholly into thought—these are the artist's highest joy." This sentence from the tale is but a disguised statement of the neurotic's search for stability and mental health between the opposing poles of the conscious mind (thought) and the unconscious one (feeling).

At first glance it would seem that *The Magic Mountain* contradicts this thesis of the rebirth quest, but the symbols need only to be stripped of their superficial disguise for all their regularity to become transparent. The novel is a tale of Castorp's rebirth on the mountain, in the shadow of death, after he has died in terms of the flatland. Now the earth, like the sea, is a great female symbol —witness the traditional expression Mother Earth. A mountain is an excrescence not unlike the female breast, so that the fertility and feminine motifs are strengthened. As always the feminine motif is powerfully linked to the notions of disorder, disease, the illicit and erotic for Mann—all elements prominent in the life of Davos. The masculine motif is disguised by two father images, the grandfather—stern and orderly, a citizen of good conscience —and Consul Tienappel, the guardian and also a solid burgher type. One of the most interesting disguises is the mountain itself, which stands for the depths of the womb. This use of the opposite for purposes of secret symbolism is profoundly apparent in the study of dream censorship and—now we speak of communal

dreams—in the censorship of folklore and mythology. The gods on Mount Olympus are personifications of forces in the depths of man's unconscious.

Hans Castorp psychologically descends into a pit, although actually he ascends a great mountain as he approaches the Berghof: he experiences giddiness and nausea as if he were seasick, and this is apt, inasmuch as he is figuratively immersing himself in the sea, the sea here disguised as space and time. That the sea is not overlooked even literally is gathered from Castorp's carrying a copy *of Ocean Steamships* and from his remark to his cousin about the eternal snow on the mountain (water in any form is a rebirth symbol). As a matter of fact, the sea motif is extremely prominent, although it is likely to be overlooked in the massive novel, with its shifting focus highlighting the themes of death and time. Hans is a ship engineer, he comes from Hamburg, "a seaboard city", he loves water as he does music, the climacticsequence of the novel, in which he experiences the instant of rebirth, is called "Snow", another is called "By the Ocean of Time", there is an important scene at the waterfall, and Hans, in his great dream while almost freezing to death, conjures up fertility symbols—the rainbow, showers, and especially the sea. This descent into the depths has other aspects as well: Hans descends into the pits of psychoanalysis (depth psychology), the erotic, music, death, the occult. It is such hidden symbolic elements which lend the novel its mythical charm.

And the Joseph saga—the entire story is an effort to return to the womb of the past. Here the theme of rebirth is explicit—in Joseph's pits and arisings therefrom. Mann's sexual symbolism grows increasingly explicit with his profound assimilation of the Freudian explorations.

We have found, therefore, even in this far from inclusive sketch, that Mann's great theme, hidden beneath the surface of his works and probably hidden from himself to a large extent—the theme which is compulsive for him and which wears countless masks—is nothing less traditional and grandiose than that of the Oedipus quest in modern dress. One thinks instantly of the Sophoclean Oedipus and of Hamlet—and of course of Freud.

Nor is that all—for doesn't one also bring to mind the entire gallery of great modern novelists—Proust, Joyce, Lawrence, to make only a beginning? Are they not all on an Oedipus quest, with their obsession with anti-paternal revolt, maternal love, ambivalence, frustration, sex? Proust strives to descend into the womb of present time, Joyce into the womb of language-myth, Lawrence into the womb of past time (primitivism) and orgiastic sensualism, Kafka into the womb of slyly hidden personal and psychoanalytical symbolism. The neurotic hero is the modern hero and he is the artist in disguise. The modern great novel is truly the portrait of the great artist as an Oedipus neurotic.

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