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NEW WRITING AND DAYLIGHT
(1946—VII)

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NEW WRITING AND DAYLIGHT

1946



JOHN LEHMANN
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CONTENTS

IN DAYLIGHT—II John Lehmann 7
AUTOLYCUS Louis MacNeice 13
THE FIVE FACES OF PITY George Barker 14
IPHIGENIA IN TAURIS John Heath-Stubbs 17
THE LITTLE FEARS William Sansom 18
THE EXCURSION Gavin Lambert 31
THE DEATH FEAST OF THE GREEKS Angelos Sikelianos 44
TWO POEMS George Seferis 47
THE MAD POMEGRANATE-TREE Odysseus Elytis 48
MADAME PARPILLON'S INN Noel Devaulx 49
TWO POEMS František Halas 56
THE TIME OF CALAMITY André Chamson 57

THE FUTURE OF FICTION:

I. by Rose Macaulay 71
II. by V. S. Pritchett 75
III. by Arthur Koestler 82
IV. by L. P. Hartley 86
V. by Walter Allen 91
VI. by Osbert Sitwell 95

THE EUROPEAN ARTIST:

PAUL VALÉRY André Gide 98
A MASTER OF PASTICHE Michael Ayrton 108
AT THE KLEE EXHIBITION Keith Vaughan 117
FIVE ATHENIAN ARTISTS Alexis Solomos 122
BETWEEN EAST AND WEST Václav Černý 129
THE WORLD OF ALFRED HITCHCOCK J. Maclaren-Ross 134

IAGO Edith Sitwell 141
TWO POEMS Lawrence Durrell 151
POEM Terence Tiller 153
FROM A CYPRUS DIARY Laurie Lee 153

ILLUSTRATIONS

GRÜNEWALD: DETAIL FROM CRUCIFIXION	*facing page*		112
PICASSO: STUDY OF A HAND	,,	,,	112
PAUL KLEE: THE MOUNTAIN OF THE SACRED CAT	,,	,,	112
PAUL KLEE: COMEDY	,,	,,	113
PAUL KLEE: FLORA IN AN OLD ROSE GARDEN	,,	,,	113
NIKOS ENGONOPOULOS: HOUSE IN PIRAEUS WITH STATUE	,,	,,	113
Romeo and Juliet IN PRAGUE	,,	,,	128
Caligula IN PARIS	,,	,,	128
LES BALLETS DES CHAMPS ELYSÉES: *Les Forains*	,,	,,	128
LES BALLETS DES CHAMPS ELYSÉES: *Les Amours de Jupiter*	,,	,,	128
Adam Zero AT COVENT GARDEN	,,	,,	129
The Sleeping Beauty AT COVENT GARDEN	,,	,,	129
Tobacco Road IN ATHENS	,,	,,	129
Mourning Becomes Electra IN ATHENS	,,	,,	129

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'Madame Parpillon's Inn' will be included in a collection of stories by Noel Devaulx to be published by Allan Wingate.

In Daylight—II

By JOHN LEHMANN

FROM my bedroom window I can see, except where the summer green of the trees has closed up all the interstices of the great branching plane trees, the golden cross that tops the Brompton Oratory. I live, in fact, not more than a rather long and powerful stone's throw from that imposing mausoleum of bygone culture, the Victoria and Albert Museum. One morning, early this year, I was roused from sleep by a noise of raging tigers. Leaping out of bed and pulling the curtains apart, I beheld in the grey dawn light an extraordinary scene: down in the street, in the middle distance, a mob of black-coated human beings—most of them evidently early workers, for they were still jumping off buses that stood jammed in the mêlée—were besieging the doors of the Museum, and fighting savagely with one another, while cries of 'Picasso! We want Picasso!' were mixed with even more blood-curdling utterances. . . . It was a relief, a few seconds later, to wake up in truth and find the curtains still drawn, the streets silent, and the whole thing nothing but a dream.

The sources of this dream were dubiously mixed, but I traced one back, before I fell asleep again, to a gathering in Paris, a few weeks before, when several French writers had expressed to me, in politely veiled fashion, their distress and perplexity about the 'disturbances' which had marked, and were still marking, the Picasso-Matisse Exhibition at the Victoria and Albert. It took some time to reassure them that these disturbances were purely imaginary, that French prestige had suffered no fatal blow, and that such scenes as some journalist with an axe to grind had described for them could never take place in modern London.

Regretfully, I realized that I had convinced very few of them. But what was far worse was that, on reflection, I discovered that I hadn't convinced myself. My uneasiness grew on the homeward journey; and was sharply inflamed a day or two later by an alarming incident. I had been to a painter's studio to collect some canvases for reproduction, and hailed a taxi to take them home. To my astonishment, the driver demanded to see the pictures before he allowed me to get in: it was only when he was satisfied, as it seemed, with their aesthetic quality, that he consented to accept me as a passenger.

People have talked lightly of the 'revolution of our time', but here was the Red Flag indeed, I thought, and on it were inscribed the magic letters CEMA. Perhaps such scenes as the French had imagined might any day take place in a population whose culture-consciousness had been so decisively aroused. Who knows?—Bakers may at any

moment now refuse to serve bread to poets of whose work they disapprove, and bus-conductors drive off actors whose performances have been torn to pieces in the morning papers. It is impossible to calculate how far this revolution may go, for it is gathering speed with every month that passes.

Cynics may put it down to an utter weariness of war and politics, and an almost utter emptiness of shops, and assert that as soon as peace and plenty have really made their appearance, the Philistine Restoration will not tarry. I am inclined, however, to think they are wrong, or wrong at any rate in large part. It was not only because large numbers of people were denied the distractions and enjoyments of normal urban life that books were in such demand during the war, nor because there was more money to buy them with less to compete with them in the shops; all one's experience goes to suggest that the war awoke something in human beings, a revolt, often only half-conscious, against the material values and dogmas of our civilization, a deep craving to live in some other way than under the iron compulsion of time's progress, which art and literature were called on to satisfy. But this newly aroused, or rather newly strengthened craving was only one stream leading to the revolution: it was joined and complemented by another stream, whose waters are in no danger of being dried up by the peace. Cultural diffusion and cultural competition have come to stay, though they both involve a state intervention and a national self-consciousness in artistic matters which is less characteristic of our country than any other in Europe. This feeling of wearing a hat that doesn't quite fit, or looks somehow a little bit foreign, is at the bottom of the misjudgments and uncertainties which have marked the growth of the British Council and the Arts Council; but as no one can conceive of life without the hat now, we shall no doubt get used to it very soon and evolve a typically British tilt at which to wear it.

Even twenty years ago, the influential position that has been reached to-day in our national life by bodies whose business it is to foster and spread the understanding of the arts would have seemed remarkable; but if an intelligent Englishman had fallen into a Rip Van Winkle sleep fifty years ago in some Italian villa and, roused by recent bombardments, proceeded on a Grand Tour in reverse to his homeland, he would be utterly amazed at what he saw and heard in this connection (let alone any other). As he passed through the ancient capitals he would be perplexed enough at the ramifications of British Council activity in the sponsoring of lectures, exhibitions, theatrical and musical visits and propaganda publications; but he would be even more perplexed at the complaints he might hear from his own countrymen that the British reading-room was a disgrace if compared with the American reading-room, or that British plays were

not nearly so numerous in Ruritanian theatres as Russian plays, and something must be done about it, a question asked in Parliament. . . . And when he reached London at last, what would he make of exhibitions of official war-artists? Would he be able to square Graham Sutherland's (officially commissioned) Cornish tin-mines with his view of an artist's job in wartime? Would he not rub his eyes to find a national ballet established at Covent Garden, a national theatre-company setting out to take New York by storm, and a dozen smaller companies to tour the smaller towns, the mines and factories, and all with Treasury support? The WEA he would probably just have heard of, as an infinitely smaller and more struggling organization; but would he find it easy to believe that the War Office had actively encouraged an enlightened educational organization called ABCA, which had survived to fulfil similar functions in peacetime? And if his bewildered wanderings led him, this winter, down Knightsbridge towards the Victoria and Albert Museum, to an exhibition sponsored by the Governments of two countries . . . . But, no, one bad dream on that subject is enough.

All this development of agencies to sustain the artist, to give him a place of dignity and respect in the community, and to bring him within the reach and understanding of millions from whom he was absolutely divided in an earlier epoch of our industrial civilization, all this is the fulfilment of the dreams of thinkers and idealists for generations. And yet, now that we have it at last, now that a Foreign Minister who began life as a farmer's boy, finds time from the furious conferences of international anarchy to open an exhibition of Rouault and Braque, an anxious question obtrudes itself. Never was the machinery in this country, and in every other great country, more complex and powerful for this cultural work; but is there sufficient—and adequate—raw material of living culture to supply it? Will it be said of our age that its fatality was to exploit more and more what was less and less there?

Most people who have reflected on the present state of literature and art will agree, I think, that something is wrong; but, as in every obscure disease, diagnosis will vary with intuition and experience. Consider, however, some of the symptoms. In Soviet Russia, where state support of the artist has probably reached its highest development, I must repeat—in spite of severe castigation recently meted out to me in the Soviet press—there is absolutely nothing that can be compared in quality or power, in any of the arts, with what was created not merely in pre-revolutionary times but also in the early days of the Revolution. In France as the buzz of excitement dies down about Resistance literature and Existentialism-à-la-Sartre, what is there left? Very little more than the few distinguished names already prominent between the wars or even earlier, with Gide,

Mauriac, Malraux, Bernanos at their head. Even Sartre had done much of his best work before the war. And, brilliant as they are, can a vigorous theatre exist on the cerebral subtleties of *Huis Clos* and *Caligula* alone? In our own country, why is it that the triumphs of our stage, under CEMA's discreet but influential guidance, have been almost all in revivals of Shakespeare, Sheridan, Congreve, Wilde and Shaw? There is the brave venture of the Mercury Theatre, but one small creative centre does not make a theatrical summer, and a couple of poetic dramas do not lead away from the tomb. In ballet the position might appear to be much more favourable, and it is indeed something of a triumph that we have managed, in spite of war difficulties, to establish a national company in Covent Garden of the general level of excellence of the Sadler's Wells; yet even there no new choreographers have appeared for too many years, and the classics still put to-day's inventions in the shade. Neither the Sadler's Wells nor the Ballet Rambert nor the Ballet des Champs Elysées nor the Ballet Theatre of New York—and each of these companies has its own particular excellencies—lead one to contest the view that the path from Diaghileff is still winding downhill. The fate of the English novel is debated in this volume by a number of highly qualified experts; their views differ widely, but most of them agree in finding the immediate situation in need of apology and explanation.

In a remarkable contribution to the broadcast series of talks on 'The Challenge of Our Time', Canon Demant analysed the disorders of modern life as due to two main causes: one, that we had to live more for the equipment of our civilization than for the purposes it was meant to serve; two, that a process was at work rather like the one that produces the rings of rich grass one sometimes sees in fields, which have dried up inside the circle. This is how he described it:

> 'The ring is produced by a fungus that fertilizes the ground so richly that the growth it produces completely exhausts the life-giving powers of the first patch. Then the outer ring is stimulated in the same way by the spores of the fungus. This outer ring then dies and kills the soil underneath, and you have a series of widening rings consisting of exuberant foliage leaving inside a growing circle of devitalized soil. That I believe is what is happening to our civilization. There is always the danger that the fabric of civilization—its government, its organization, its machinery, its knowledge, and the sophisticated habits of its people—will develop at the cost of weakening the common ground of human existence, out of which the whole thing grows. Now I am maintaining that our modern civilization has been doing this for over a century on a scale and at a rate never known before in the history of man. . . .'

Is it an exaggeration to apply such an image to the process which threatens us, which William Morris (though he may have prescribed the wrong remedy) saw destroying our architecture and the natural instinct for beauty in all other branches of applied art over half a century ago, and which, reaching now a giddy acceleration under the impetus of two all-in wars, threatens to empty the shopwindows of art of all but synthetic and canned foods, while the shop itself becomes ever more streamlined, chromium plated and cunningly lit by daylight-imitating electric tubes? There is all too much evidence to confirm Canon Demant's interpretation. We have the glossiest and most luxuriously produced magazines, but the glossier they become, the less they seem to contain. We have Hollywood buying French films and turning them into smarty products that will slip smoothly down the channels of Hollywood's vast distributive apparatus, far vaster than the original makers could command, and killing in them at the same time almost all they had of individual excellence and vitamins for the imagination. We have the B.B.C. with all its pullulating cells of intricate and expensive machine activity, failing to create any new art but adding enormously to the area of exploitation of what has been created in other ways and at other times. It is surely not what such poets as Louis MacNeice have written for the radio, but the poems they have written quite independently that are their true titles to fame. I do not want to suggest that we would be better off without the B.B.C. or its sister organizations in other countries; but I do believe that in their vast appetite of programme there is a danger that the secondary activity of culture dissemination and exploitation may crowd out the primary, the only truly life-giving activity of artistic creation. The economics are important: the old patronage, once wielded by the landed aristocracy, and then by the merchant princes, is now, in this age of levelled incomes and high taxation, increasingly in the hands of the state and such semi-state agencies as the B.B.C.; they offer the opportunity, both to the would-be artist who enters their regular employment and the guest artist they invite to speak in their studios or write in their books, of solving the economic problem in a congenial way; but is not the lamentable example of the writer who has become the voice of the state and ceased to follow his true creative bent, and the poet who spends his time writing pot-boiling articles, lectures and scripts, daily, horrifyingly before us? It is chastening to remember that the whole point of the state patronage such writers as Congreve and Wordsworth enjoyed—when once it had been procured for them by a landed (and no doubt corrupt) aristocracy—was that they had to do practically nothing at all for it.

If this analysis is true, what can we do about it? The individual seems puny and powerless in the face of the huge amok forces

of our world, but it was E. M. Forster who said, in the same series of talks as Canon Demant:

> 'I have no mystic faith in the people. I have in the individual. He seems to me a divine achievement and I mistrust any view which belittles him. If anyone calls you a wretched little individual—and I have been called that—don't you take it lying down. You are important because everyone else is an individual too, including the person who criticizes you. In asserting your personality you are really playing for your side. . . . What ought the writer, the artist, to do when faced by the Challenge of our Time? Briefly, he ought to express what he wants and not what he is told to express by the planning authorities. He ought to impose a discipline on himself rather than accept one from outside. And that discipline may be aesthetic, rather than social or moral. . . .'

Luckily, there still are in Europe some artists who are determined to remain individuals, who have hardened the shell of their creative personalities to withstand the vicious thrush-beaks of our times. It is such artists, small though their number may be in comparison with the vast number passing for artists, who give one the grain of hope to believe that, though there may be more and more exploitation, it will not be of less and less. Some of them even sit, camouflaged and inscrutable, in state office, rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's with a very precise definition in their minds of where Caesar gets off. May they be preserved from the dangers howling round them, with the aid of Caesar's stupidity or Caesar's superstition. In our own country there is hope for them, perhaps in England more hope than anywhere else to-day. Does that sound like patriotic boasting? There are sober and solid reasons for such a judgment, which should lead us not to vainglory, but devoted work. England has always bred individuals, in the arts as in everything else; and in the greatest of her arts, in her poetry, the soil, fertilized so long ago by the inexhaustible power of Shakespeare, is so rich for the growing of new, individual poetic talent, that it is impossible to believe that it can cease to put out bold flowers in our lifetime. We are also fortunate that the spiritual soil has not been exhausted by the experiences of the last decade, as in some other countries which have endured unassuagable political differences, foreign domination, censorship, and terror. The effect of such influences, whether conscious or unconscious, as the power of a nation in the world, the clearness of its conscience, the dignity of the principles it has vindicated, is mysterious and incalculable on that nation's artists, but sometimes sympathetic foreigners remind us of the importance of these influences

for ourselves; and I for one am convinced that the hair's-breadth triumphs of 1940 were the unapparent stimulus to much that we are proud of in the work of our poets, painters and musicians since that date,—as the bludgeoning victories of 1945 could never have been.

If, even amid the disillusionments and undisciplined anxieties of peace, the relaxed tension that only appears to show that the elastic has perished, we have poets like Edith Sitwell and Louis MacNeice whose work seems to advance further all the time in the range of experience it concentrates and the power of its technical means, or like Dylan Thomas and Laurie Lee who still, in spite of all that (in Demant's words) 'tends to destroy the natural soil of human achievement' seem able to bring one in close and tingling contact with it, and most effectively to supply that dying faculty of the soul which art replaces; if we have painters like Graham Sutherland and musicians like Benjamin Britten and Michael Tippett who are making fresh discoveries with everything they paint or compose; then indeed we can hope for ourselves, and hope too to play the part for which we appear to be cast by the Time-spirit in a West every day in greater need of realizing its highest spiritual potential. Our civilization is still in the grip of fatality, of the mechanical thinking that the most far-seeing of our poets and thinkers realized as one of its greatest dangers over a hundred years ago. That fatality has established the 'closed society' over a large part of the earth's surface already, and seems capable, by the justice of fate, only of giving birth to the ever more perfect machine in spasms which it no longer controls. The West must surely begin to believe again in miracles if it is to survive: even Hitler understood that in the confusions of his paranoiac personality, but he chose the miracles of the Devil. It is the opposite, countervailing miracles that we must choose: the miracles of the creative imagination in our Christian inspiration.

May, 1946.

Autolycus

By LOUIS MACNEICE

In his last phase when hardly bothering
To be a dramatist, the Master turned away
From his taut plots and complex characters
To tapestried romances, conjuring
With rainbow names and handfuls of sea-spray
And from them turned out happy Ever-afters.

Eclectic always, now extravagant,
Sighting his matter through a timeless prism
He ranged his classical bric-à-brac in grottos
Where knights of Ancient Greece had Latin mottoes
And fishermen their flapjacks—none should want
Colour for lack of an anachronism.

A gay world certainly though pocked and scored
With childish horrors and a fresh world though
Its mainsprings were old gags—babies exposed,
Identities confused and queens to be restored;
But when the cracker bursts it proves as you supposed—
Trinket and moral tumble out just so.

Such innocence—In his own words it was
Like an old tale, only that where time leaps
Between Acts Three and Four there was something born
Which made the stock-type virgin dance like corn
In a wind that having known foul marshes, barren steeps,
Felt therefore kindly towards Marinas, Perditas . . .

So crystal learned to talk. But Shakespeare balanced it
With what we knew already, gabbing earth
Hot from Eastcheap—Watch your pockets when
That rogue comes round the corner, he can slit
Purse-strings as quickly as his maker's pen
Will try your heartstrings in the name of mirth.

O master pedlar with your confidence tricks,
Brooches, pomanders, broadsheets and what-have-you,
Who hawking entertainment rook your client
And leave him brooding, why should we forgive you
Did we not know that, though more self-reliant
Than we, you too were born and grew up in a fix?

The Five Faces of Pity

By GEORGE BARKER

I

The gift of the spirit that destroys man's reason,
O real supernatural friend, let visit me now:
I have seen the vision lie down with the illusion.

O real supernatural friend, here teach me how
To bear witness in this darkness to those graces
Whom, glory folded about them, I cannot know.

War, the unbearable beast in the sky, effaces
The effigies of Pity that rise up on a cloud:
The living and the dying hide their faces.

The dragon is in nebulae. Death has endowed
Each of us with a cockeyed crown of remorse.
We walk in a world where even the flesh is proud.

Sigh, O you far stars, weep over the whole universe
Where, grieving, the great blind is drawn and the one
Solitary crow of sorrow circles silently over our cause.

O will the labours of Pity never be done?

II

On a war's bed I was watching beside water:
Saw through a window Pity asleep on the quiet
Lake like a figure afloat in the eye of nature.

Sleeping, her swan had, in the stormcentre of riot,
Calmed fury like that one-time walker on waves
Who so amazed the water with his spirit

That it surrendered. For all creation behaves
As it is told by an impassioned faith.
Division exists only to prove who loves.

Then I saw Pity get up like a wraith
And step in sleep about her earthbound hovel:
Where her foot fell atonement laid a wreath.

But the loud ineffectual uproar of our evil
Crowds silent space. The immortal mirage
Flies off, in light, on its eternal travail

Till all space shimmers with our immoral image.

III

May it not, somehow, become fatal for all those
Who have solicited the various adverse powers
To advance them in an unforgiveable purpose.

And meaningless to me the sailors' eyes,
And their limbs bound to the hard altar-stone,
Brown throats lying bare—like sheep beneath my stern
Cold knife of flint and unimpassioned hand;
For the unwavering scrutiny of my gaze,
Amid the smoke-swirl and the din of cymbals,
Seeks still a half-remembered face in vain.

II

In dreams I see him go
Down endless roads of nightmare still pursued
Who dares not look behind;
And hear my mother scream, my sister curse
Upon the furthest frontier of sleep;
But wake to know the grey and Scythian dawn,
And the king's horses whinnying in their stables.

For it was long ago
The virgin wind blew me to this strange coast,
Light as a winter leaf
(And in my place a stag with golden horns.)

Brother, I wait here at the world's wild end
Until you come, and in the ambiguous grace
Of my girl's limbs, untouched, and sacred to
The swift manslaying goddess of the wood,
You find the image of your childhood,
Exempt from the old curse,
And in my eyes the promise of your peace.

The Little Fears

By WILLIAM SANSOM

It was one day when I visited the coffee bar that such a strange thing occurred. I was sitting at one of the little rose-topped tables on the left side of the room, the gas-jet burnt slowly through the trellis beneath the urn, the Madame in her tranquil casework of bosom and black silk stood watching the cups and not moving: we were waiting, in the morning quiet, for my coffee to make itself. The café—an exiled French place of rose-tiled tables, cream walls, polished mahogany—was not otherwise empty. A business man sat near the door reading a page of accounts spread before him on the

table; another man sat at the back end of the café, by the bar, tented by his outstretched newspaper and lost in the shadow angled beneath a high window; the small waitress stood on a chair and polished some brass spikes on a coatstand. All were thus engaged quietly with themselves, all waited in divisions of their own absorbed silence. Perhaps it was such a remoteness among people grouped intimately in what was quite a small café that made me suddenly aware of a presence invested in the silence, a presence as intimate as the human presence was remote. It seemed a silence more of pause than of tranquillity.

Of course, it is more difficult to sit at ease among such a small group of individuals than in some indeterminate crowd. At any moment the business man might have raised his glass, the man in the shadows might have lowered his paper—and I would have found myself addressed. So that, silence or no silence, it was necessary for me to keep my head a little bowed, to trace with my fingernail the pattern of the rose tiles. In this way I felt that I, too, appeared absorbed, armoured: though I longed for the complete armour of a newspaper. Soon I would be re-reading a letter, then examining those well-known contents of my wallet.

Sometimes I looked up and around me; but then again, in the clearer lighter air freed from those darknesses that press down upon a head bowed in apprehension, that distinct and uneasy sense of pause remained. The windows—at the front these were curtained with cool cream curtains, they diffused dully the daylight from the street that passed opaquely outside. And at the back of the café one small window only was set high up in the wall: this window looked out upon a well in the buildings about, a grimed place of service lifts and tiles, and the only light that filtered through was reflected from these tiles; except for a line of white sky, thin as escape, elusive as holiday, that was just visible above the buildings opposite. Inset in the wall just below this window a circular iron ventilator revolved, its fan wheeling very slowly. Thus the coffee-room lay only in a diffused light, bare and without colour, so that there was much soft shadow casting altogether a recessive, sleeping atmosphere over each fitment and furniture. The mahogany frames of the wall mirrors gave off a melancholy lustre, the cream panels no more than whispered the design of their dust-embossed floral festoons. The coat-spikes shone with a yellow and faded glint of brass. There was light enough for Madame, the waitress and her customers easily to be recognized; yet each one of them seemed to throw out a veil of darkness, as if their own shadows groped to possess them, like the darkness that suddenly overtakes a face moving away against the window's light, like the shadows obscuring with premonitory gloom the figures in a steel engraving. Wall mirrors, on which still stared the remnants in white

lettering of a word '. . ocolat', reflected with greater emphasis these shadows and dull lights: yet these old mirrors also sparkled with the only brightness in the room—jagged points of quicksilver flashed and winked back the light of a gas fire glowing quietly in its hearth of rose tiles. Over all there was bound this resident silence. The room just breathed. The Madame watched the coffee.

Then that man sitting back in the darkest part suddenly rustled his newspaper. The noise fluttered with abrupt violence—at the same time his chair or his shoe grated shrilly on the floor. It made the shuddering sound of steel scraping glass. I looked down at my table, instantly, senses shrivelling in like snail's horns. The noise had come violently—now it ceased as abruptly, the silence returned with greater violence. Now, too, this silence was reinforced by a soft and continuous sound—a hissing, rubbery noise—Madame must have turned up the gas-jet beneath the urn. I looked up and saw that this was true, she was still fidgeting with a rubber tube that supplied the brass jet like the tube of a bunsen burner. Half-fearfully, half-boldly shaking these fears away, I looked over towards the man who had rustled his paper.

He was still hidden. The newspaper seemed not to have moved. His two hands were crushing the paper they grasped. I could just make out the nature of those two hands. Short, square-ended fingers, like the flat heads of hammer-headed fish, fatter and thicker each head than the finger-bodies themselves: bloodless, but thick and yellow with strength. I looked away from them, down, and saw then with a shock that beneath the table, like the engine of some varnished leathern torture, there rested a large club-footed boot. The rubbered end of a cane leant against it. I looked away and saw with relief that the small waitress was carrying across from the bar a tray, and my coffee.

I asked her for a bill and a glass of water, wishing now only to escape as quickly as possible. I poured some of the water into my coffee glass and began drinking this cooler coffee as quickly as I could. I poured in more water. It was ridiculous, I knew then that I was panicked simply by little fears, by distastes emanating from earlier years, chiefly by the appearance of that club-foot, and by an undefined nausea towards the chocolate colour of the polished wood, the evocation of this and the rose tiles calling out a forbidden image of chocolates with pink 'insides'. The pale cream curtains like a dull bedroom in the endless lilac afternoons. The shadows, the brass, the mirrors, the ventilator, the bunsen all re-created the setting of some forgotten misdeed.

Again. . . . the crushing of paper from that dark corner beneath the ventilator! Almost with the sound itself I rose, I had decided instantly this time to leave—easier than waiting, lowering the eyes,

entering again into the dark little circle of nerves. As I achieved my height I felt a certainty of escape. But can such escape be so easily achieved? As I rose, so the paper was thrown angrily aside, the man behind it jumped to his feet. The street bell clanged, people began to enter through that door behind me, the café seemed instantly to be filled with people, crowding in, choking the café full. Their chattering thickened the air, they seemed to be pushing me forward—and forward lay only the man with the paper, and the bar; from whence now issued the Madame flanked by her small waitress.

The Madame stood quite still, regarding me with an air of enquiry, as though she wished to put to me a question, yet dared not in view of certain unstated circumstances: but with the waitress at her side she barred effectively the alley-way behind the bar, a way of escape; and indeed perhaps there was in her bearing a knowledge even of this, she was aware that she barred this escape and leant forward not in a mood of enquiry but rather in explanation of her action. But there was no time to think of her, no time at all—the man with the club-foot had already taken a pace forward, away from his table and nearer to me. His large body lowered against the light and now, with that overwhelming certainty of danger that stabs the crisis of a nightmare, when all hopes are suddenly chilled, hopes that perhaps the danger was all the time imagined, that the suspense would suddenly be proved false and subside then into a kindly reality, even that all the time the whole dreamed episode was itself a dream—such hopes died and I found that this man had raised his stick and was thrashing it at me.

(How like a nightmare indeed! I was unable to move. That spectral perception of a 'myself', thought to resemble me yet never quite seen, who had feared this very eventuality, who had wished to escape, and who until now had been invested, even while I was believing the scene into being, with a paradoxical power of incredulity that could dispel these unpleasantnesses with a single cunning wink. Yet now the creation had expanded beyond control, in place of the wink there remained now only a sudden certitude of something unendurable. And the presence of so many people, chattering shadows behind and on all sides, who seemed to be pressing yet never once touched me. And the sudden appearance of that man, sprung so suddenly from behind his secretive paper, sprung abruptly into the full panoply of presence, even in the first instance of perception into an horrible abrupt detail, clear as the instant of terror.)

His face blackbearded, his shoulders square and pegging up some flowing frockish coat. Bearded, like a huge frock-coated grandfather, a grandfather of no figure but only of immense and flowing shape, and blundering heavily on his engined foot, big enough to crush heavily—and a grandfather with a stick. He was beating forward

with this stick, thrashing round me in a short-breathed temper of fury. Yet he never seemed quite to strike me.

I remember—I felt immediately at fault. I was to blame. I had done wrong. I was surprised, perhaps, and wanted to know what was my wrong—but the thought of protesting never entered me. He gave me no time to stutter even a first word of apology—not that as much time as it takes to say a word could yet have elapsed, the episode was still in its first instant—he hobbled a step forward and struck closer with his stick, but prodding now more than thrashing, so that the rubbered cap at the end of the stick once touched my trouser-knees. I could hear a mutter, but no words, hissing and bubbling from his beard, a blathering sound of wet lips and bad teeth. (He would have had small teeth, small teeth look bad, as if their bulk has already decayed and been dissolved.) Then, suddenly, a dog barked behind me! Of course . . . he had been poking at some little dog of his! Only that, after all, a little dog playing hide and seek among so many startling legs!

But the bark repeated itself, and this time it was no bark but the rasp of a chair-leg on the tiles, now repeated more shrilly. There was no dog . . . the man was really hitting at me. And it seemed now that we two were isolated in the empty café, this dark halo of rage looming with the light behind, this patriarchal figure—and the lesser me, into whose spinning head there entered now a further and final conviction more terrible than any other. (An empty café, yet the consciousness of a crowd remained; it was plain that many people were still about, and that in particular Madame and her waitress still stood propped like sewn dolls in their grooves . . . but for all their presence, for all the chatter of the crowd that echoed now distantly in my etherised ears, nevertheless these people had all receded, they were now *unseen*, for that small fear had compressed the vision of my eyes, I could see neither to right nor left, never beyond the dark walls of guilt that seemed to be projected from temples and brow forced huge by the little burden, so that finally only the man, the window and its light were plainly—and how plainly!—visible in a telescoped circle of vision. In this way I was alone with him.) The conviction came, suddenly and unmistakably sure, that this was no idle rage—there was intention and malice and pursual of the moment. I was being murdered. There was no question—then, *then*, I was being murdered.

People are always afraid that others are going to attack them. Watch them in the street, watch the eyes of two people passing! From a distance, each sizes the other up. So much is safe, preparations can be made. But the gulf of safety is quickly decreasing, not by familiar paces but by leaps, for this gulf is shortened by the forward paces of not one but two approachers multiplying to a swift

and dangerous speed. There is little time—the eyes look away! Then like quicksilver the glance of one pair returns, searching anxiously to know the other yet eager to be off, unobserved, at the very moment when these other averted eyes will surely return . . . and return they do, with a jolt, with passion—stony with pride and fear. Who will attack whom? Who is the stronger? As the two glide together over another of these deceptive paces, the two pairs of eyes hold each other, attracted snakily, watching for the glint of attack—or of scorn, of ridicule, of recognition? Four eyes of stone, defence-bound, glittering behind their lapidary glaze with all the bright lights of fear, these four eyes search each other for the worst . . . and the worst, you may be sure, is that one pair of eyes does indeed glint, diverts its path, halts, swings, approaches and addresses the other! The other freezes! How incredible is this new frozen stone, a thousandfold stonier than before! And the head and body bearing the eyes recoil, moving back and away and around by a full pace, circling away in pure defence! . . . And this, all this, because one wishes to ask the other the time.

What then are they afraid of? There is finally one answer—murder. They are afraid, finally, of physical attack. But with all the streets and all the people passing on them, day after day, year after year, the process is not always as pure as murder, it has its inversions: so that you may well find, and one cannot tell how often, and this in turn is an additional danger—you may well find that one who fears such attacks has already decided to strike first, at anyone, anywhere, with the result that this fierce-eyed monster of fears traverses whole streets slaying mercilessly all adversaries, looking only for trouble, seeking to produce exactly that situation he has always feared, and somehow, in a strange way, feeling afterwards comforted. And perhaps later—exhausted. The only ones exempt from these battles are street-vendors and policemen, smooth-nerved slayers by principle of their calling.

Murdering, then . . . this was now in the café the realization of all probable fears, of all previous passings—this what I had always instinctively feared had come at last true. It was happening, my murderer was operating upon me, with a stick, ever more violently in the thrashing of a second, glossing over with dreaded speeds all the passages of warning and suspense for which experience had prepared me. This man attacked directly. In all this time, until now his stick came at last prodding full into my chest, perhaps he had not waved, thrashed or pushed his stick more than five times—single moments of such activity last longer than five hundred thrashes. God, his figure was tall, taller than me, dark against the high window shining beyond and above. I had to raise my chin, raise it and expose my neck beneath to see into his eyes, to find his eyes and see perhaps

through their angry windows into the dangerous source . . . but there were no eyes, no face, only a featureless mask ringed round with black beard, and the beard flossed alive with white fire from that high, blinding daylight behind. The light above shone like pale milk, and I saw the old black ventilator revolving. I saw, too, the cream ceiling with its corners shadowed falsely with dust, and as I raised my chin further, as my face went back, as the rubber prodded on my bare throat's flesh, I saw the ceiling upside down, as though it were a floor, and the walls reversed growing from down upwards, so that in this bare room, such as I had many times created from the nursery ceiling lying in bed for the endless hours of summer evenings long ago, there grew in the centre a nobbed growth of white ivy, and from this, dizzily straight, rose like a hatefully ruled line the black iron stem of the lamp chain, gauzed with the dead leaves of cobwebs, and bearing only one flower, a single circular flower formed of one insatiable marble petal, in whose centre glittered acutely the light. It was across this funeral flower that the black dots swam like massing flies, like diamond fire-flecks willing me down, until, choking, I forgot.

Much later, it seemed, the air cleared and I felt as though people were picking me up. I was, in fact, picking myself up—I must have fallen—and Madame and her maid were in some way helping me, they leaned over and smiled and chattered their solicitudes, and perhaps they rested lightly their hands on my shoulders, giving above all their presence and the colour of familiarity. As if this were echoed in other things, the café seemed to fill again with real people and not shadows. Voices came plainly, a saner light had dispelled the vertiginous murmuring and made of it blessed sentences and human tones. Of my murderer—as my eyes gradually brought into focus the realities about me—of my murderer there was no sign. He had gone. His paper lay on the floor, dead. And nothing more remained but a nervous ache about my throat. I heard people talking: 'It shouldn't be allowed—they shouldn't allow him to be out . . .' (Was it of me they were speaking, or of him?) And: 'Good heavens, a thing like *that!* All over in a moment, too—*I've* never seen anything like it.' (Had I committed the crime?) And: 'Why doesn't somebody fetch the police?'

I had risen. Quickly I thanked Madame, picked up my hat—and by God I was out of that place. As my hand felt the ladylike handle of the door, and as the cream-curtained glass door clicked behind me, I heard a last voice say: 'Picked up his hat and left! Just left!' (Was it of me, or of him?)

Was it me, was it him? Again and again I achieve certainty, only to find it reversed, incontrovertibly reversed by a simple, unseen

readjustment of first premises! Incontrovertible—rather, controversive, for even the reversal itself becomes then insecure, the reversal may be reversed in the fawning of a new perspective. Permutations then extend without horizon . . . error, error, error. All ideas, however sure, seem to germinate within their true seed the other seed of their destruction, and it is this suicide germ that produces the mirror, the sly alternative distorting and damning them: often such an alternative proves to be its exact opposite.

I know nothing. Knowledge has become an apparition—insubstantive and only of ephemeral wonder. It is a sensation. An unnerving experience. Take a simple example—one may live until one's middle age, one may read and live and together achieve a critical poise superior to the platitude. During that time one has heard, let us say, such a suspicious phrase as this spoken by men to women: 'I feel so lonely.' Examine the phrase. It has meaning, it has a direct clarity. Yet it is said too often, its undertones are suspect, its meaning is lost. However . . . wait until suddenly, somewhere in the middle of your life, you wake up to hear those same five words ringing dangerously near your own ears! Ringing in your ears from your own lips. And admit then the certainty that the words sound no longer like a phrase, you yourself mean them, you are yourself at last living the loneliness that first created them, so that now each word stands again in its own right, and with all your void heart you mean the pathetic string of them! This living sense tells you that perhaps before you have never truly lived. Or—and this is the worst—that all these people, these multitudes whom you from your booktop once considered only half aware, that these have been all the time more sensitive than you, that day after day in repeating these simplicities they have succeeded in living them, that life itself consists of a repetition of a limited number of simple experiences, again and again, repeated and repeated—so that only to the critical and the ill do these experiences sound dull, for they have lost the keen sense to savour them, for they themselves are the true insensitives.

This kind of atrophy lies at the root of my distrust of myself, of such as my conclusions after the café episode. First, I concluded that my little fears were drawn from some traditional unease laid in my childhood. Set among circumstances of the chocolate and the pink, shaded by silken cream curtains and lit only by the weary afternoon light, I believed that my mind had been lulled into a melancholy of the past, a mood receptive to the incursion of the strange tyrant. And such a villain! Bearded, dressed in black, club-footed! A stick! He was the epitome of all I was first taught to fear. He was —I must have been certain—wigged. Had the light revealed his features, then there would have been no nose; some dreadful naevus would have cut across the eyes. He was the solitary limping maniac

I sometimes connect now with barbers' saloons, with gas-lit railway corridors, with the dark dripping of laurel . . . and someone who, even without these adult inferences, had the stature of an angry patriarch and an infirmity of the cursed! If my killer had been of a contemporary kind, slim-waisted and high-shouldered, sicilian, slug-eyed, a sinuous dummy of the dance halls and the boxing ring—then I would never have been afraid: or, if afraid, my fear would have been simple, and I too might have attacked. No, it was certainly the sudden evocation of the past, this figure that my memory could never escape, this *apparition* that had un-nerved me.

Yet—a few days later I was proved wrong. My fears again rose . . . this time for different reasons. This time there could be imagined no reflections of my childhood, this time a contemporary ghost assailed me. I should have known, I should have known, it had happened before, at least a terror as similarly and as plainly divorced from anything of the past had touched me before . . . a different fear again, yet interwoven with the others. Let me tell you about it first, quickly, before I come to this more extraordinary affair of the moment. I can tell it quickly. It was as simple as this . . . during the time of national trouble I used to walk, perhaps through a small park in the city, perhaps along an avenue, and suddenly I would become aware of a certain tree or a certain house that lay in my path: it was forced upon me that the tree or the house held a secret of tremendous value, a secret fatal to me, but of inevitable necessity to the whole world. Say, in the park—it was a tree. Then, by the tree, or perhaps some yards off, there would be standing a man. This man would be watching : though perhaps I never saw his eyes see me, he would be watching—indeed, sometimes the man himself would not even appear, sometimes he would remain invisible, mixed with a crowd somewhere up on the higher level of the park. Yet even so he would be studying through his binoculars, he would be watching, and his presence would be felt just as strongly as if he had in fact been standing by the tree. And here is the reason for his vigilance—up in a cleft of the tree, hidden from the casual eye, yet just visible to such inquisitives as myself, there would be a hole, or perhaps a sudden round ball of diseased bark, a growth like an oaken hock: in this hock, unseen, yet carelessly available to the passerby who might conceive a sudden interest in the hock, inside lay the most vital military secret. A weapon of unimagined ferocity that would finally decide the issue—but now still secret, fragile and secret, held in reserve. Rather than hide such a weapon—of whose existence all the warring nations were aware—in the obvious vaults, impregnable though they were judged, yet by this very negation 'impregnable' inviting of attack—rather than this the authority had devised the plan of the oak-hock and its watcher. The innocence of the tree, the presence of the crowds were the pro-

tection of this vital secret. But—every now and then it was conceivable that an inquisitive passer, some botanist or irresponsible casuist, would take it into his head to ascend the tree and examine the hock! Innocent, yet from that moment irremediably guilty! . . . And it was the moment for the watcher to act! Before the guilty one had taken his first step, before he had touched the tree, when only his searching eye had fixed on the hock and proclaimed its purpose—then the watcher would approach, tap his victim on the shoulder, produce a card asserting his authority, and request the passer to accompany him to the park-keepers' hut. In through the laurel hedge they would go. The blind ivy-grown windows of the hut would announce no intention, yet the door would open, they would enter. With a little rattle of gravel and earth the door would close.

Later, the watcher would emerge. Without the passer-by. The passer-by would never be heard of again. He would, in fact, have been liquidated, quietly with cords and lime, one life to preserve a million.

It was sensible, it was true. At first I fancied the whole affair to be an illusion; but then its very reasonableness was forced upon me, I knew it was exactly the truth. And, of course, whenever this feeling came to me, whenever I suspected the presence of the watcher and his cache, I took care to hurry, eyes lowered to my boots, trembling, my shoulders bowed against the watcher's tap, the gravel path a bright and detailed road running swiftly through the world curtained off above and to either side. Sometimes, choked with guilt, I would watch this bright stream, fearful that the smooth flow of clayed pebbles should be disturbed by an iron grating, some innocent drain-cap, the vagrant cache itself beneath my very boots! So that's how I used to feel . . . And it must be plain that this obsession could never have arisen from any recollection of the dark and early days—there was no special scene for it, no smell, no reminiscent angle of the light. A park, an avenue, a shipyard—the feeling and the fear might occur anywhere.

And now what of this latest danger! This dread that threatens me now, as I write this . . . it happened early in the summer, this summer, and again, as chance has it, it happened in a park. But it was a different park, one filled with flowers, gracious and lovely, a place where one could walk in peace and savour at once the flowering growth and man's orderly arrangement of it, a fine architecture of desire and discipline, balanced superbly, serene and breathing at least some illusions of a perfection that is said to be found in peace.

In this park I used to walk and enjoy the quietudes. I came to know each path, each bed of flowers, each tree. Yet, however well one knows such configurations of tree and flower, there remain always new and startling surprises, fresh beauties to be observed. The

outline against the sky of this clump of birch and hazel, of that long-fingered ashtree will change with the season and the year: different patterns are formed, reminiscent, familiar yet subtly, breathlessly changed. And beside the broad lawns the flowers rise in banks, each growth ticketed, so that one may imagine each bloom to have its personal supervisor who has watched it, trained it, watered it with every skilful tutelage to produce from the maiden its most perfect flowerhood. Gardeners, indeed, were to be seen everywhere. Dwarfed and isolated by the huge beds, they could be seen picking away in some corner, or hoeing among the long lanes of the parterre, or standing against the watery haze of their hose-fountains on the hottest summer mornings. Then, when this water softly sprouted and showered, one could drink with one's eyes the coolness, one saw the gravel itself darken to a deeper yellow and exude, a moisture it seemed, of its own making. The roses sparkled heavily with their drink, the rose-branches glistened. It was usually in this rose-garden, quite close to the road, that I heard the distant approach of my new visitor.

At this point the road runs level with the flat area of the rose-garden. Inwards, the park rises in small hills decorated with acacias, magnolias, other feathery and luxurious growths: these form a screen to the rest of the park, so that in the rose-garden one stands in a shallow arena enclosed by these hills and the road. This road runs in a circle round the entire park. It is kept away by tall iron railings, but it may be seen flickering past through these, the broad stone-black road, and in the rose-garden one is nearer to this road than at any other point. The rose-trees are cropped short, they form a rose-red carpet not more than a foot from the ground. One stands, then, isolated in this carpet, with no trees near, no projection but oneself rising from the acre of roses.

It is often when I stand thus, now fearful of the roses, which have assumed, despite their beauty, a quality of poison, but to which, nevertheless, I am inevitably drawn—it is then that far away in the distance I hear the threatening purr of my assailant. It is hardly a sound, yet my ears are ready, they deduce it skilfully from the still, perfumed air. At such a time I know him to be far out somewhere on the circular road; possibly, ingeniously, at its farthest diametric distance from the rose-garden. Ingeniously, for he knows that thus the sound of his approach and the suspense of his growing threat will be given the greatest play.

I divine the purr, the sound like silence—and then the first whispering of an engine: it is a high-pitched engine, angry and chattering, battling and spitting, it makes the sound of a 'contraption' more than of a machine, as though it were propelled by some brittle fusillade of thin steel sticks ceaselessly inter-exploded, rather than by the oiled pistons that were really its motor. For this stranger rode a motor-bicycle.

Gradually, as I stood rooted among the roses, the anger of this machinist rode towards me, spitting its fanlike warning, cracking, muttering, droning, roaring louder and louder. Until at last, blurred through the iron palisade like a shadow behind a screen, his small, black presence came into view, smudged and flying fast. With the speed of the shadow of a bird's wing he came, flying and growing every second greater—until through the nearer and more separate iron railings, I saw his real shape, huddled and black over the angry black machine. He came flickering like a kine-film, ever more apparent as the interstices broadened—until he was flying past the open gates themselves, full in view, the sunlight glinting on his rubbery coat, his amber goggles flashing, legs braced in a predatory spring, head and shoulders hunched forward against the wall of air. A small, white pennant raised on the handlebars flew straight back, without quivering.

I stood among the roses, my head only moved, perhaps only my eyes as they followed the slow parabola of his race . . . and at last the moment came when he drew opposite me, when the railings seemed to vanish, when I saw him plainly, near, and suddenly, for the first time, he raised his eyes from the road and turned their amber circle straight upon me. He stared and then momentarily laughed. His jaw opened and the teeth set in a grin, as the half of an airman's face grins from the cockpit—masked above with leather and dark glass; only the bony teeth and the jaw-bone smiling, the eyes retreated and dangerous with inward thought.

He stared, laughed, turned his head again to the road and was gone, leaving the air charged and busy with an invisible smell as blue as burnt ethyl, with a strange emptiness, as though his impression against the trees beyond had been violently torn away, taking with it a cubic cut of the atmosphere shaped and sized precisely as he was. The spitting engine sound grew smaller as he retreated—yet I knew that really this recession was an advance, once again he was on the circle, instantly beginning again with ravenous speed the scissoring of his intent circuitous attack. While I stood still among those roses, not moving to listen the better, never making a gesture of recognition so that in fact, this stranger knew he was recognized the more clearly —while I stood thus like the statue of a shadow among those alive, perfumed petals, the machinist raced round and round the circular road. Sometimes he laughed, sometimes just turned his head and stared. Once his engines fired into a single air-shattering explosive crack; and again once it seemed that, heard through the summer air, his distant sound had turned off into a side-alley—but only a second later to come vibrating back into the stillness with redoubled strength. . . .

Later, both he and I seemed to tire of the game—for it seemed

that I turned away just at the time when, once and for all, the sound of the machine vanished. But how could I be sure that the sound had not vanished first, and that this was only a release that at last permitted me to turn away? Or, if the opposite were true, and my turning away caused the sound to be dispersed—then indeed a worse suspicion arose, the suggestion that my own will itself attracted the attack! Could I, myself, be inviting these assailants? Was I, somehow, in love with my murder? I, the real seducer, drawing upon myself these agents of my destruction who would at some time, drawn close enough, really destroy me . . .?

Roses mean death, nothing more. Their petals, immobile and curled into a pose of innocence, appearing to unfurl graciously, yet unfurling only to give off a perfume of evil essence—these petals are poison, breathing a sin of grace, a pot-pourri heavy with dews of the monotony that kills. In the dark, against black-green bushes they shine red: they stay stained red in the silver moonlight: when the clouds are heavy, their red burns in the slatey air. But this red is never the red of blood —it is a purple red of venom, a red of hidden violet, the red of a doomed and ancient velvet gown. Incandescent, nameless, timeless, venomous—but always? They were chosen as the emblem of love—for their red hymn that desire kills, that love kills.

I hear him sometimes in the streets, sometimes from behind blocks of brick buildings: his throttle echoes along unseen, he rides parallel to me and invisible. Sometimes, swiftly, he roars across the road behind me, gone by the time I have turned, silenced and swallowed up instantly in tall canals of concrete that as instantly reveal him. A sudden visitant, and always now, always about to appear. . . .

The other day I crossed a street in front of a dray-horse munching into its bag of straw. The huge dray and the munching horse lent the street an air of good, healthsome quiet—one smelt the large odour of the horse and the brisk straw, one sensed a protection in the solid size of the great wooden dray. But—even there, just as I passed the horse's head . . . this machinist was upon me! This time, he grazed my side with his mudguard! He came quietly—he was free-wheeling his black machine. He saw me and slewed round straight at my body. Even at that pace—the purulent vapour still issued from behind, the squat pipes still shivered eagerly—even as he weaved the walking machine at me on his slow-swimming crab's legs, the mudguard hit me hard. He was looking straight at me through the amber goggles, from the black knight's rubbery armour. From behind his leathern wind-mask he apologized, curtly, and then swerved away. He gave me no sensation that the episode was closed.

The Excursion

By GAVIN LAMBERT

THE lake was no more than half a mile inland, and a deep channel connected it with the sea. Near the mouth of this channel, at the end of a bay, the coast, arching precipitately forward, formed a wide, rocky promontory; beyond it stood a lighthouse, now abandoned, mossgrown and wrapped in sea-belt. In summer this headland was vividly coloured, green with bracken and purple with heather; wild daisies and gillyflowers, a thin, sparse border to this rich profusion, straggled in clumps along the cliff-edge, and further down lizards scuttled in and out of crevices and left their skins to curl and grow brittle in the sun. A tall grey house, red-roofed, with attic windows, stood midway between the sea and the lake; its garden sloped down to the channel, where there was a roughly constructed landing-stage, with wooden steps leading down into the water, and a boathouse, its white roof warped and sunken.

This summer the Vereys had gone abroad, leaving Paul and Lilian to look after themselves, with the assistance of Mrs. Banger, an amiable housekeeper. Lilian was easily amused—too easily for Paul, who could persuade her only rarely to go for a sail. On these occasions they bathed from the island in the middle of the lake, anchoring the boat a little way off. The water was cool and salty, more sensitive and private than the sea. You became intimate with its demure ripples and sudden eddies, felt its muscles and learned all their movements. You lay on your back and admired the sky, the steep and lonely hills, perhaps glimpsed the village beyond the headland, and then, turning the other way, saw the curtain of willows that fringed the island, bent almost double as if in bondage, boughs trailing in the water.

In the evenings, Paul used to swim across to this island from the landing-stage. He clambered ashore, and sat watching the sun go down behind the hills in a glow of red, wimpled clouds rising above the cliffs, the surface of the lake growing vague and glassy, heard the moan of sea-birds, and sometimes, if he listened closely, the susurration of the waves. Then, one by one, lights came on in the village, and in the tall grey house, and he swam home.

For the most part Lilian lay on the sofa with a book, did needlework that was delicate and symmetrical, polished her nails, sunbathed, and admired the effect of her glossy blonde hair against her dark skin. Past an early adolescence, she was placid, unruffled, and rather too satisfied with herself; Paul, who had finished his first year at a public school, found her dull and unsympathetic, and mistook her serenity for laziness and lack of vigour. Lilian was not really sluggish; because

she believed it to be elegant and adult not to display enthusiasm, she applied rigid self-control. Feeling her presence, Paul, who was restless and brimming with faith and adoration that could not be set free, became moody. Days of bemused contemplation and self-imposed, unfinished tasks succeeded introspective nights. Lilian told him he was growing up.

Fairly late in life the Vereys had discovered a mutual taste for seclusion and a mansion, and it seemed reasonable to them that Lilian and Paul should enjoy this too. Sea air was bracing, natural scenery invigorated, there was a nearby town, and although the Vereys still found it necessary to spend two or three months of every year abroad, it did not occur to them that their children's lives could possibly be inadequate. If Paul had cared to fish in the lake, rather than sketch it, to make adventurous expeditions up into the hills, had suitable schoolfriends whom he could visit for the holidays, if Lilian had tried to overcome an easy isolation instead of watching herself in the mirror, both might have grown up relatively untroubled and contented, Paul a rider of horses and killer of birds, Lilian settled and provincial in tweeds and a successful marriage.

They were not friendless, but Lilian was formal with visitors, and boys of Paul's age found him difficult; he dropped out of a game too soon, grew silent and dispirited, and when the others had exhausted their invention and did not know what to do, he had no suggestions. His favourite amusement was a solitary one. He walked down the rough, sandy path that bordered the channel until he came to the bay. Crossing the beach until he stood directly beneath the tip of the headland—when the tide was high, he made his way across rocks—he started to climb the cliff at its most difficult point, where the sides were almost sheer and had few footholds. Often he grabbed hold of the strong, coarse stalks of gillyflowers to steady himself, clenching them while his foot sought for a suitable niche in the rock. Three quarters of the way up, there was a narrow fissure, some eighty yards deep; he threw stones down the gulley, waiting for the faint splash and hollow, mournful echo of sound. The cleft was just wide enough to receive a human body. Sometimes a damp, unpleasing odour drifted up from it; unwashed seaweed and the rotting carcases of gulls.

For the plain, awkward boy who blushed when an unexpected remark was addressed to him, there was a flavour of death about this little exploit; the gillyflowers might give way while his feet dangled, and it was possible to fall into the abyss. There were moments of exquisite tension when he almost overbalanced, when there seemed no way up or down, when he was sitting on the edge of the cleft, and, something startling him, he slipped a few inches.

. . . On the summit of the headland Paul lay on his stomach,

his chin resting on his hands, and gazed at the lighthouse, listening to the choir of birds that had gathered near its base. It was their meeting-place; they mourned, called to one another, ate up fish, excreted, and dozed there. He watched them circle slowly down towards it, alight, strut about, and then fly off again, rippling across the water in a brief shower of spray. He listened to their peculiar music until he tired of it, and it would not leave him, but haunted and disturbed his thoughts so that he felt disinclined to stay any longer, and returned home.

There was also an immediate problem that confronted him. Lilian had one friend for whom she cared to bestir herself—not too frequently, it is true—but, abandoning her pretences when he came to the house, she ceased to look bored or preoccupied. Paul conceived a great admiration for Harry, who was three years his senior, had recently left school, and was now arguing with himself and others whether he should go to a university. But this feeling was also a source of grief, for he did not know how to implement it. When Harry came to visit Lilian she made it quite clear to Paul that he was not wanted and had better go out and amuse himself. He knew that Harry and Lilian had very serious conversations, he in bow-tie and spectacles sitting very upright by the window, she clasping her knees on the sofa—they talked about what they were going to do in the world, dying, and the failings of parents, and Paul would have liked to join them, except that he would never have said anything. He was not articulate, and expressed himself badly, self-consciously, but these same thoughts circled in his head while he sketched on the lake or by the sea.

His grief was that Harry knew him only as Lilian's younger brother; always polite and friendly, but that was not enough. Paul had several unconventional ideas on how to bring about intimacy, but never tried any of them. He had to be content with fantasies, imagined cycles of events that brought himself and Harry together; he saved Harry's life, or Harry saved his, or they both saved Lilian's—on second thoughts, this notion was firmly rejected—and so they were united in some feat of daring. 'How can I ever thank you?' Harry asked, and Paul replied quietly, modestly: 'Be my friend.'

Very soon he was to know Harry more closely, but the circumstances were ironical. Harry had suggested to Lilian that they should bathe at midnight in the lake, under the moon, and rather to Paul's surprise she was delighted with the scheme, and became impatient to realize it. 'Although,' Paul reflected bitterly, 'if I had suggested it, she would have scoffed.' There remained, however, Mrs. Banger. The housekeeper was not disagreeable nor unduly inquisitive, but everyone had their susceptibilities, and she could not

be expected to refrain from making suitable comments on the real nature of the expedition. Thus Lilian decided that Paul was to accompany them. This made the affair respectable, and when she told Mrs. Banger about it, nothing was said.

There was a full moon at the moment, the weather was warm, and it was arranged to go for the bathe on the following night. Harry was to come round after supper, and they would sail across to the island. Paul became so excited about it that Lilian rebuked him. 'It'll be fun, but you must remember that Harry and I will want to be together most of the time.' Later she said: 'We're only taking you because we couldn't very well leave you behind.' She was secretly perturbed lest Harry should be angry with her for asking Paul, and think it prudish. He often accused her of enjoying convention. 'You build your life on it,' he said. This piqued Lilian, who lacked any ripening experience outside her family, and believed Harry's glancing contempt to be the outcome of knowledge and conviction. In their conversations these ideas provided a stimulant, and she was always hinting at them. Harry was good-looking, and she guessed he could please himself; this implication of success challenged and alarmed her slightly. She was anxious to live up to his standards, and as she was not quite sure what they were her thoughts became fantasies, and she decorated Harry with mystery and vague, unspecified vices.

It had occurred to Lilian that she might be in love with him. She was sixteen, and ought, she felt, to be falling in love about now. But while she was entranced with Harry's talk of defying accepted morality, the way he exposed people one had been brought up to respect, she had no wish to be initiated. She preferred Harry to be undefined, questionable, and to invent the realities that lay behind his suggestions, fearing an involvement too deep and too compromising. Seeking refuge and yet dissatisfied with it, she lived in the shadow of revelation, suspecting events of a concealed symbolism; and the midnight bathe, in particular, held out promise. Instinctively she safeguarded herself with Paul.

However, on the appointed evening Harry arrived not by himself but with his sister. Philippa stood in the doorway, tall, sturdy, commanding, in navy blue trousers and a striped jersey, her dark cropped hair caught in the gleam of a table-lamp. Her presence was full and undeniable, and yet Lilian, staring at her, could not at first believe in it. Then she wondered why Harry had asked her to come—not, surely, to safeguard himself?

Philippa stood there and waved her hand casually at Lilian. The dislike was mutual. 'Truculent, overbearing, far too boyish,' Lilian thought. Philippa found Lilian feminine in a peculiarly sickly manner, suspected her of slyness and insincerity. All this had never

been spoken; many months ago, after the first formal introduction, each had crept away, full of dark and silent impressions.

The sudden appearance of Philippa made no effect upon Paul, who was aware only of Harry. He was saying: 'I brought Philippa along, I hope you don't mind.'

'There's room for four in the boat,' Lilian remarked.

'She wanted to come,' Harry continued. 'And then I thought—but I see you've asked Paul.'

Lilian glanced quickly at him. 'Evidently we thought the same. Mrs. Banger——'

Malicious, amused, Philippa watched them. 'What is this all about?' she asked.

'In the eyes of our elders and betters,' Lilian explained smoothly, 'Harry and I have reached the dangerous age. But with you or Paul about it doesn't matter.'

'You're only three months older than I am,' Philippa said. 'Aren't I dangerous? Mightn't I——'

'It's not simply a question of years,' Lilian interrupted, her eyes glittering. Her first intention on seeing Philippa had been to declare that she was feeling unwell, and call off the bathe; now, remembering Harry, she decided to go through with it.

Philippa went over to Paul and laid her hand on his shoulder. 'I should hate to think we're in the way. You should have explained, Harry. Shall I go back?'

'Nothing of the sort,' he said angrily. 'Lilian and I merely wished to go for a bathe. Have you got that into your head? As it's so often impossible to amuse oneself without others making unpleasant remarks——'

Philippa interrupted him with a deep, careless laugh. 'Of course I see. And I expect Paul and I will enjoy ourselves. It was only because Lilian——'

'Let's stop arguing, and get on with it, shall we?' Lilian said. She spoke as if an irksome but necessary task confronted them.

Paul became very red. 'I'd suppose I'd better not come, then,' he muttered.

'Why ever not? Come on,' Philippa said, smiling suddenly. 'I'll race you down to the boathouse.' She tore out of the room, Paul following a little doubtfully.

'Don't run, Paul, you'll fall over!' Lilian called after him. She paused. 'Harry——'

'Let's go, shall we?'

'But you're not annoyed?'

'It can't be helped.'

'It's all Philippa's fault, anyhow,' Lilian said vindictively.

'What's she done?'

'Oh, nothing really.' She laughed. 'The trouble is, although she's my age she doesn't understand things in the same way. Too busy climbing trees, I suppose.'

She moved towards the door.

'Wait,' Harry said. 'You didn't really think anything was going to happen to-night? I mean, that I'd be such a——'

'Of course not. Good Lord, Harry. Only other people might have.'

He followed her into the passage, remarking: 'I shouldn't be surprised if we're cut short by a storm. There's been thunder in the distance all day.'

In the moonlit August water they were silent and reflective at first, forgetting each other. Only their splashes, furtive and then increasingly confident, disturbed the warm night. Darkened, the island seemed magnified, the frieze of willows immensely tall and endless, the gentle declivity behind them a vast bowl hewn out of the earth. There was a clear, hard sky emblazoned with stars, one directly above the tip of the headland that lay, black and brittle-looking, like an enormous skeleton. Moonlight polished the bare bones of rocks; there was no glimmer from the village beyond.

Lilian rested on her back, seeing reflected in every star the four of them groping about in the water, brave and solitary, the waiting island and the hills arched in mute protest against the sky. They seemed like members of some secret society, ritual figures perceived dimly in a crystal. Paul, swimming stealthily, watched Harry and listened for the sea; he fancied the long, muffled, indrawn echo of a sound that he never heard, exact analogue of his own emotions, a sigh for what he had not known to lose. Moving with swift strokes away from the others, across the lake, Harry felt the taste of salt upon his lips, water escaping between his limbs; without his spectacles, the distance was a blur, increasing the sense of mastery and freedom that always visited him when bathing. One conquered space so effortlessly, so cleanly.

Philippa's strident voice, calling to Paul, shocked them out of silence: 'Race you round the island!'

Again, rather unwillingly, Paul obeyed. They set off; and soon became invisible, the glib sound of their impact against the water growing fainter, then ceasing. Involuntarily Lilian cried: 'Paul!' No answer came. There might have been only herself and Harry in the lake. She looked round, but could not see him either. 'Harry!' From somewhere she heard his voice, and satisfied, lay once more on her back, closing her eyes. Presently a splash disturbed her, and he was near.

'Isn't it marvellous?'

'Marvellous,' she agreed, kicking her feet vaguely at him, agitating the waves into a small pinnacle of spray, as he swam in a circle round her. Then he made for the boat, which was moored to a willow on the edge of the island, and clambered over the side.

The sail billowed slightly.

'I think there's a wind getting up,' Harry said, glancing at the sky.

The mention of a wind made her feel cold. 'I'm going in,' she announced, and started to swim towards the shore.

Harry inclined his head to one side. 'Do you hear anything? Oh, it's Paul and Philippa—who's won?' he shouted.

'A draw,' Philippa said. 'I thought I was faster than him, too.' They both swam inshore, Paul breathless and hardly able to speak. 'Very close,' he mumbled, seizing a towel.

Philippa shook out her hair. 'I'm going to lie down and look beautiful under the moon.' She glanced quickly at Lilian, who was prone on the grass, and stretched out her arms in mock languor. 'The moon is so flattering,' she said.

Lilian was silent.

'Do you know why the moon is so flattering?' Philippa continued, turning to Paul. 'It's because it casts shadows where they're most needed.'

'Shut up, Philippa,' Harry said irritably.

Silently Paul's lips formed the words, 'Shut up, Lilian,' and they tasted good. He wished that he was Lilian's elder brother.

Harry put on his spectacles and began rubbing his hair with a towel. 'I am beset with doubts,' he remarked in a bantering voice to Lilian. 'Why is everything so impossibly discouraging? We set off on something quite simple—bathing at night, for instance—and look at the difficulties that spring up! A whole host of them in the twinkling of an eye. It's a wonder anybody does anything at all.'

'They're off again,' said Philippa. 'What's so difficult about bathing at night, anyway?'

'You are, for one,' he retorted. 'Nobody wants you here, but you got yourself included somehow. And the blasted Banger woman—she's probably peering out of her bedroom window with a nautical telescope at this very moment.'

'Her bedroom faces the other way,' said Lilian. 'Besides, she's not like that at all.' She sat up. 'Mrs. Banger can give you something to be discouraged about, Harry. She's a complete derelict. Married young, no children, and in a few years her husband was killed in an accident. I don't think she was terribly attached to him, anyway, but that doesn't matter. She went to live with her half-sister, who was deaf. They went out into service together. Then the half-sister died. And here's Mrs. Banger, our housekeeper—here, of all places. What's she had of life?'

'A succession of losses,' Harry said rapidly, before she could tell him. 'And not real losses, either. That's the awful part. You prop your life on half-rotten supports, and when they give way, as you know in your heart of hearts they're bound to, you have to pretend that vast essential girders have fallen.'

'Exactly,' said Lilian, lying down again.

'I'm not sorry for Mrs. Banger,' Philippa informed them. 'If she didn't love her husband, why did she marry him? If she didn't care for her half-sister, why did she go and live with her?'

Harry looked at her with feigned seriousness. 'Ah! Philippa has found what we've all been searching for—the philosopher's stone.'

'Nobody likes me because I please myself,' Philippa said. 'Except Paul, that is. I think he likes me, don't you, Paul?'

Paul blushed. 'Yes, of course.'

'Well,' Harry said loudly, 'we've had our bathe. And now what? Back home again, back to clean sheets and don't forget to turn out the hall light. Lilian and Paul return to Banger, Philippa and I to our loving parents. It's just too nauseating for words.'

Paul nodded intently. He managed to articulate: 'Routine . . .'

'Yes, routine!' Harry echoed. 'But that's not all. It's a routine we impose on ourselves. Do we like being slaves?'

'I do wish you'd stop talking,' Philippa told him. 'You do nothing but complain, Harry. I wonder how Lilian stands it.'

'It's very interesting,' Lilian murmured. 'And I agree with Harry—all this routine is quite loathsome.'

'All right, then!' Philippa stood up, and prodded Harry with her foot. 'Break the routine! We'll go for a sail, and won't come back till morning. The hall light'll stay on all night, everyone will be wondering where we are, and there'll be the devil of a fuss. How's that for a change?'

'Don't be childish,' Harry said. 'Anyhow, that's simply delaying. In five minutes the fuss would die down. They'd say "how thoughtless —I wonder if the grocer's sent that carbolic?" while we ate a hearty breakfast.'

'How do you know? If we go out for a sail, anything might happen.'

'She wants to brave the unknown,' Lilian said. 'So adventurous.'

Philippa laughed. 'There you are! Cowards, both of you. You'll never do anything.'

'Yes!' Paul blurted out.

Lilian stared at him. 'What do you mean?'

He felt uncomfortable. 'I—isn't she right?' he stammered. 'I mean, if we go home, we shan't be doing anything.'

Lilian sighed. 'We talk about breaking away, about freeing ourselves, and Philippa suggests setting off in a little sailing boat at

midnight. Where to? What for? I've never heard anything so useless in my life.'

'Quite.' Harry took off his spectacles, and began to wipe them on the corner of a towel. 'Now, if an ocean liner were suddenly to appear in the lake by accident—just where we are now—we could stow away. That might achieve something.'

'Idiot, it won't!' Philippa cried impatiently. 'If you wait for something like that to happen, you'll never get anywhere. That's the trouble. So you just go on complaining.'

Harry put back his spectacles on the end of his nose, and peered disapprovingly over them at Philippa. 'This is a matter between Lilian and myself. Our problem, not yours. You feel fine, Philippa: we don't.'

'I don't either,' Paul said.

'Well, he'll have to find a way out, too.'

'But——' Paul began, and then stopped. He realized that he could not ask to come with Harry, for clearly he was not wanted. He sighed, and looked wistfully at Lilian who could talk, while he blushed and stammered, who was older . . .

'Yes, I shall have to,' he said.

'Don't be a fool, don't take any notice of them,' Philippa advised. 'They'll never do anything.' She smiled. 'I'm glad we're not in on their conversations, Paul. They must be frightfully boring. Just like two old women.'

Lilian quivered.

'But perhaps they enjoy it,' Paul said.

'Harry, I was wondering—would you like to go for a sail?' Lilian spoke casually, without reference to the conversation. 'I don't feel like going home, you know. And we can't go on lying here all night.'

Harry looked doubtful. 'If you like, I suppose . . .'

'I don't think Paul had better come,' she went on calmly. 'But Philippa can please herself, of course.'

'I always do,' Philippa said. She put her hands in the pockets of her trousers. 'I'll go down and untie the boat, if you like. Come and help me, Paul.'

He followed her.

'Lilian, what are you up to?' Harry asked.

She shrugged. 'I just thought it might be fun. After all, it is boring to go home now.'

'All right.' He stretched lazily. 'But one of these days I shall hit Philippa. Hard.'

'She'd probably hit you back,' Lilian said.

Harry started to dress. He slipped into his flannel trousers, put on his shirt, and adjusted his bow-tie.

'We're not going to the Ritz,' Lilian remarked.

'We may be,' he said. 'Who knows?'

As they came down to the boat, a gust of wind distended the sail, and its sides curled round, embracing the air like a shroud.

'Mayn't I come?' Paul asked. In the moonlight his face was tense and gibbous. Lilian glanced uneasily at him. 'We can't leave you behind, I suppose. What are you so excited about, anyway?'

'Oh, nothing,' he told her, dancing on one leg. 'But I think it's a beautiful idea.' He saw that Philippa had seated herself at the tiller. 'Are you going to steer, then? Do you know how?'

'Of course I do.' Philippa cupped her hands over her mouth and gave a low whistle. 'All aboard for Ararat! Jump in before it's too late!'

'Too late for what?' Paul asked, hastily clambering over the side.

Philippa contorted her face into a droll, ugly expression of fear. 'The parents are coming,' she said. 'Can't you hear their footsteps? Tramp, tramp, tramp——'

'Why do you always try out your witticisms on Paul?' Harry interrupted coldly. 'Are you frightened we shouldn't appreciate them?'

'I'll ask Paul which he chooses.' Philippa tapped him on the shoulder. 'My sense of humour or their beastly conversations? You've sampled both.'

'Can't I go on with both?' Paul inquired guardedly. 'But has she a sense of humour?' he continued, turning to Harry. 'I didn't hear anything funny.'

Lilian smiled. 'Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings. Poor Philippa!' She followed Harry into the boat, and settled herself beneath the sail, drawing a towel round her shoulders. 'I believe it's going to get chilly.'

'There should be quite a swell out at sea,' Philippa observed. 'I hope you're not sick? The wind——'

'If it's rough, we'll have to turn back, that's all. I'm not going to get drenched.'

'Is it bad for the figure?' Philippa asked sympathetically. 'You must be very careful, then.' She looked round. 'Are we all ready?'

Nobody answered.

'We're away, then!' she called, fluttering a handkerchief.

They set sail.

As they entered the channel, Harry lay down on his back in the centre of the boat, resting his head on his arms. The sail shadowed one side of his face; moonlight avoided the other, but his features showed up darkly, motionless and impassive. His feet touched

Lilian's; she shifted them slightly, and pulled the towel more closely round her shoulders. Philippa kept both hands on the tiller, and was oddly silent, but from time to time she hummed to herself under her breath. The soft, unmusical sound travelled along the surface of the water to Paul, who was crouching at the other end of the boat. He leaned over the side, and glimpsed the silver scales of a fish, swift and nocturnal. Momentarily the gleam was dazzling, he blinked, and when he looked again the fish had gone, but he imagined its eyes. They seemed to stare up at him, merged into one sightless pupil which the waves swayed and inflated.

The headland loomed, an august and unfriendly presence; moonlight widened the fissure in the cliff. In the mind, also, its depth multiplied itself infinitely, a cold, vast, downward corridor of darkness. They passed the tall grey house, where the curtains had been drawn across the windows. Lilian glanced quickly at it, made a movement as if to stand up, and then turned the other way. In a moment the landing-stage was behind her. Philippa continued to look ahead, waiting for the slight bend in the channel, and the view of the lighthouse, which meant that soon they would enter the bay. She hummed more loudly, and the noise seemed to come from the boat itself as it glided through the water.

After Paul had been staring for some time the fish's eye vanished with a wink, and he became aware of Philippa's humming, of the sail's occasional shiver as the wind passed through it; he put out his hand and let it trail in the water. Tiring of this, he turned to look at Harry, who was apparently asleep with his eyes wide open. As they turned the bend, moonlight crept up his chin and whitened his lips; he did not stir. Lilian was abstracted. She sat with folded arms, her face lowered, a slight frown wrinkling her forehead.

'The lighthouse!' Philippa shouted.

Paul followed her gaze. There it was, silent and birdless, the dark mass of sea-lichen wet and shining with spray. The gulls no longer proclaiming it a sanctuary, it had a different quality; it was a place of shadows.

Paul made his way down to the stern, and squatted on his heels near Philippa. 'Where are we going?' he asked.

She let go the tiller and flung out her hands towards the horizon. 'As far as you can see,' she told him.

The boat quivered. Already, while they were still in the bay, they could feel that the sea was restless. Waves came to meet them and passed underneath with a slow but urgent tremor. The wind blew in their faces, ruffling their hair and penetrating their clothes, trapped in the curve of a limb and growing colder. Lilian glanced discreetly at Philippa, and sighed, seeing her calm and adamant. She bent down, and began talking in a low voice to Harry.

'It's blowing up,' Paul said, but as he spoke the words excitement changed their meaning. There was something splendid in the threat of wind and waves. He stood up, holding on to the side with one hand, and breathed the air deeply. He felt the vast uncertainty and loneliness of the sea as a consolation, and wanted no other companion.

'Yes, it's blowing up,' he said again.

They sailed on.

A high wave towered in front of them, approached, and broke over the side of the boat. The sail was now drenched with spray and sagged beneath the wind. They were moving more slowly.

Lilian felt the water at her feet. 'We must go back,' she said loudly. 'Turn her round, Philippa.'

'There's really no danger at all,' said Philippa carelessly. 'It's not really rough. But I will if you like.'

'Must we go in?' Paul cried, as the boat started to keel over. 'It's beautiful out here—beautiful!' He spoke breathlessly. 'Isn't it beautiful, Harry?'

'Damned stupid, if you ask me. How on earth are we going to get back with this wind?'

Lilian trembled. 'But we must! We can't lie out here for hours.'

Another wave broke. The boat inclined heavily to one side, and water brimmed down like a torrent.

'It was a mad idea,' Lilian cried shrilly. 'Absolutely mad!'

Philippa laughed, but she was not heard. The wind hollowed out and dispersed the sound, it languished swiftly in the air. She was still trying to swing the boat over, but it scarcely moved. The sea rocked it, the wind resisted it.

'I can't keep the sea out if I swing her over!' she called as another wave came over the side. Harry stumbled towards her, running a hand through his hair. She relinquished the tiller, edged her way forward, and he took her place.

'But the wind came up so suddenly!' Lilian began. The damp sail billowed in her face, clung to it; then it seemed to have grown arms, and wrapped itself tenaciously round her waist. Muttering, she disentangled it, lost her balance, and collapsed into a pool of water at the bottom of the boat.

Paul felt a drop of rain on the back of his neck. He looked up at the sky, and thought that the stars were dimming. The sky was very close, only just above his head. Harry, Lilian, Philippa, were suddenly diminished, and he imagined himself alone in the boat, taking his life into his own hands—trembling, his fingers curled. This was the first, only moment of real confidence, when disappointment and loneliness no longer grieved him. Heedless of the rain that sprinkled his upturned face, he continued to gaze at the sky, at the

stars that flickered. He heard voices and exclamations, but they were foreign, distant, and not for him. Even while he listened they grew quieter.

He did not see the tall, quivering wave; but when the boat lurched, tipped convulsively, fell back without a cry into the sea. Harry ran forward to save him, but was too late.

As Mr. Verey drove the car up to the front door, a flight of birds breakfasting close by in the rock-garden dispersed with loud cries of complaint. While they fluttered into the sky and cawed down at her, Lilian entered the car and sat down at the back beside Mrs. Banger. Soon, when the last suitcase had been strapped to the grid—vans had taken away the furniture a few hours ago—the tall grey house was receding; sunlight, glancing off the red roof, the grey shutters, refracted by tall windows now fastened up and curtainless, seemed to search every inlet and angle, remorselessly to explore emptiness and pattern silence with an alien, lonely brilliance. For the house had never looked inhabited, was untamed by living, and now, vacant, proclaimed its aloofness and indifference.

The road twisted towards the lake. This morning it was calm, and near the island willow leaves floated glittering on the surface of the water. Instantly she recognized the scene; it had the familiarity, hauntingly strange, of a dream recurring—herself running up the slope towards the tall grey house, shoeless, water from her clothes splashing the white paving-stones. Harry called after her, but she gave no sign that she had heard him. He was standing by the boat-house, not seeing her clearly, at what it then seemed would be the last time, for he was without his spectacles; while Philippa, already crossing the garden, walked away with long, heavy strides towards the lake, swinging her arms and humming still with a soft, desperate insistence. Below them, by the landing-stage, the boat nodded restlessly, its sail torn and drooping, the tiller broken. Lilian remembered the trail of water following her across the hall, up the stairway, along the first landing, on the floor by Mrs. Banger's bed—and the housekeeper's face, flat and inexpressive, her eyes drowsy from sleep, her hair rolled tightly in yellow paper curlers. 'There,' she said, 'there . . .'

The island was now receding, lightly shadowed, willow branches skimming the cool, radiant water. Lilian reached forward and touched her mother on the shoulder.

'It was beautiful, wasn't it?' she said. 'The lake—the island—the channel that ran into the sea?' She could not say 'is.' Too burdened with memories, the place had lapsed into the past, becoming a photograph in the mind's album of hills and rivers and trees, glazed, heightened by the sense of vanished moments and distance irrevocably

increasing—but a landscape, however one viewed it, bound up with Harry and herself, sealed and made over to them by death. As she lay back in the car, fragments of landscape reflected in the driving mirror still quickening that memory, Lilian watched her father and mother—silent, faithful, aware closely of each other without looking or touching—and was conscious of a life, a love unshared. Now they had come, had stemmed and quietened her sorrow, she thought only of things impossible to tell them. Undeceived, they had questioned her at first; but she gave away nothing, as if it were not hers to give.

In the mirror, Mrs. Verey saw her daughter lie back and close her eyes. One had to be tactful, she realized, to rely on new people, new surroundings—Mrs. Verey had not lost her faith in surroundings. The road now curved away from the lake, twisting through a long valley between two ranges of hills. Lilian did not see that these hills had screened the lake, passed without a shadow of turning. Soothed by the car's motion, wrapped in her secret, voluntary exile, she was thinking: 'we are going away . . . but I have embarked already. I am not with them.' Distance receded. 'I am there.'

The Death Feast of the Greeks

By ANGELOS SIKELIANOS

Translated from the Greek by Lawrence Durrell

BECAUSE so much my friends desired
To hear new songs of fire upon my lips
Break out as in the past like burning streams
The gusts of song broke out, here to their table
They had invited me, beyond the city,
In some great rooms with windows opening
On to the gardens, with the stars above them.
There a table they had set with roses
Between the crystal cups, and wreaths of greenery
Upon the walls, whose fragrance spread about:
In silver candlesticks they lit
Small flames that bending in the draught
Turned sideways, lengthening, but not going out. . . .

And here unspeaking we sat down and ate
The frugal meal, and half unwilling
Each in his mind the same thought turned.

But when the black wine was opened—
Wine a dear friend had brought, thinking of me—
Full of savour and fragrant in itself
As the black blood of Dionysus spilled,
He turned towards me with his brimming glass,
And called me by my name: 'Angelos'
He said 'Now Angelos, dear friend,
If you so wish it, speak to us, recite' . . .

And I: 'You ask me, O my friend, to speak
And yet as you sit there cup in hand,
Filled to the brim, would you not say it put
A final frontier in between our souls,
Between our thoughts and silence, would you not?
Tell me, who first thought of this supper,
Standing above it like a hierophant,
To decorate it so and make it seem so much
A collation for the sacred Pluto,
A walled-in deserted feast of the dead, where here
The thoughts of all partaking burn
At the altar, an offering and a requiem?

It seems to me that as the winged ants alight
Upon an ear of wheat, this feast has stirred
The souls of the dead, they wake in us,
And deep from their eternal darkness rise.
And deep inside us we can feel their tracks,
As if still higher, above the vigil of death,
They went onwards, silent, over the rocks,
Drinking from wells of courage: and of others
Ancient, unnumbered spirits, many, many.
So many filling up the night until
The living are far outnumbered by the dead.
Like moths to candles are they drawn, I feel them
Crowding in every corner, O suffer them only
To come closer, stretch out their hands
Over the table we have set for Pluto,
Over this death-feast, let us suffer them
To enter and be one with us.'

And with this cup you gave me, friend,
Full to the brim wherein I see reflected,
My image, as if from another world:
And with the wine you brought for me—

How rich and full-bodied like the black
Blood of Dionysus spilled, O let us
Commune here as once the Initiates did.
Dipping in Agathodemon's chalice, keeping
Our own deep silence till the time,
And it may not be far, when suddenly
The powers of the God begin to groan in us,
And his shrieks like earthquakes raise
In full array, the dead among the living,
Under the battering of the divine assault . . .
As for the new
Songs of fire you so much long to hear,
They too shall find their time.

I spoke. And all who understood me, drank,
And when, the last to drink, I bent my head
To follow them, it was as a priest might drink
Of the grail in some great sanctuary, slowly
Draining the chalice to the last deep drop.
Then each his footsteps softly turned
To the open windows—all the candles now
Had guttered one by one—and saw where black,
Enstarred, the ocean lay of the night,
Dumbly upholding us upon its beat;
In the darkness there—and if none of us
Should ever speak again—from deep within
And final towards the gloom and stars spired up
The same thought and the vow:
Hear O Hear,
Dionysus-Hades, Divine Protector,
Hold back our hearts with the black
Wine of your pain strengthen and save
For the great hour when suddenly Your shout
Rends, like an earthquake, waking us,
Making us one with the dead,
Under the battering of the divine assault.

Two Poems

By GEORGE SEFERIS

Translated from the Greek by Nanos Valaoritis and Bernard Spencer

REMEMBER THE BATHS IN WHICH YOU PLUNGED

I WOKE with this marble head in my hands
Which tires my elbows and I do not know where to put it,
It fell in the dream as I was rising from the dream
Thus our lives joined and it will be hard for them to disentangle

I look into the eyes which are neither shut nor open
I speak to the mouth which continually tries to speak
I hold the cheeks which have come through the skin
I can do no more;

My hands vanish and move towards me
Mutilated.

AND THE NAME IS ORESTES

Into the sling, into the sling again, the sling
How many laps, how many circles of blood, how many dark
Tiers; the people who watch me
Who were watching when on the chariot
Splendid, I raised my hand, and they applauded.

The foam of the horses spatters me, when will the horses weary?
The axle grinds, the axle glows, when will the axle catch fire?
When will the reins snap, when will the hooves tread full on the ground
On the soft grass, among the poppies where
In spring you picked a daisy.
They were beautiful, your eyes, but you did not know where to look
Nor did I, I without a country
Who am struggling here, how many laps of the course
And my knees fail me above the axle
Above the wheels above the cruel course
The knees fail easily when the gods wish it,
None can escape, strength is in vain you cannot
Escape from the sea which cradled you and which you seek
In this hour of struggle among the panting of the horses
With the reeds which sang in autumn in the Lydian mode
The sea which you cannot recover although you run
Although you circle in front of the dark Eumenides in their boredom,
Unforgiven.

The Mad Pomegranate-Tree

By ODYSSEUS ELYTIS

Translated from the Greek by Nanos Valaoritis and Bernard Spencer

In these whitewashed courtyards where the South Wind blows
Whistling through arcaded rooms, O tell me
Is it the mad pomegranate-tree
That darts into the light scattering her fertile laughter
With whims and whispers of the wind
O tell me is it the mad pomegranate-tree
That shakes with newborn foliage at dawn
Opening all her colours high with shudders of triumph?

When the naked girls awake in the plains
Reaping the clovers with their fair hands
Tossing the depths of their slumber
O tell me is it this mad pomegranate-tree
That slips the lights in their fresh baskets
That overflows their names with songs
Is it the mad pomegranate-tree
That fights the shadows of the world?

The jealous day adorns herself with seven glowing wings
Surrounding the eternal sun with a million prisms
O tell me, is it this mad pomegranate-tree
That grasps a horse's mane with a hundred lashes
In her runaway race
Sometimes sad and sometimes grumbling
O tell me, is it the mad pomegranate-tree
Shouting the dawn of a new hope?

O tell me is it this mad pomegranate-tree
Rejoicing in the far-away
Shaking a handkerchief of leaves and fresh fire
A sea pregnant with a thousand ships
With waves that run and roll for ever
Towards untrodden shores, O tell me
Is it the mad pomegranate-tree
That creaks her rigging high in the lucid air?

In the grape-blue heights feasting and flaring
Defiant, dangerous, tell me

Is it the mad pomegranate-tree
Smashing with light clean in the middle of the world
The tempests of the demon
Spreading from end to end
The yellow mane of dawn
Embroidered with crops and songs
O tell me is it the mad pomegranate-tree
That swiftly unfastens the silk dress of the day?

In April's petticoats and the cicadas of August
O tell me, she who plays, she who works, she who drives us crazy
Shaking from Menace all his bad black shadows
Pouring drunken birds into the sun
O tell me she that opens her wings in the breast of things
In the breast of our deep dreams
Is it the mad pomegranate-tree?

Madame Parpillon's Inn

By NOEL DEVAULX

Translated from the French by Betty Askwith

'In such an hour as ye think not . . .'—Matt. xxiv. 44.

I DISCOVERED my boarding-house in a winding street not far from the jail. A little frequented district with over fragrant gutters, where I lodged at the smallest possible expense, before I obtained—can I say by what labour and through what a spirit of saving—the situation that . . . my God! which . . .

Yes, it was a charming inn. Simple of course: you emptied your own conveniences without turning up your nose, you refilled the water jug at the cistern for yourself. But if, in spite of the enthusiasms of the present age, you prefer the glories of the table to those of society, how could you do better, I ask you, than by keeping an eye on Madame Parpillon's small cakes and golden fritters?

A plump old age, wrinkled in little folds, ruffled like an owl. A treasure house of proverbs trotting along, with falling stockings, leaving behind a whiff of aniseed. Oh, I don't recommend the place to experts in trifling escapades! One never discovered an amorous chambermaid slipping either a keepsake into the omelette or a love-letter into one's shoe. On the other hand in the winter I found my bed warmed and my shirt aired, and when the time of year for coddling

was gone by, my hostess made it up to me by lacing my coffee with a thimbleful of brandy or of armagnac: 'Ha, if my coffee's good, it's because *I know how to make it!*'

When Monsieur Parpillon, that great sportsman, prince of good fellows at feasts and drinking bouts, was alive, there was a rowdy coming and going of guests and feminine spectators. The wife had a kitchen-boy, a manservant who looked after the woodpile and the stables, not to mention a little scullery-maid; nymph of the grease and of the dishwater. At Christmas time half the town (by half I mean the gossips and the horse-copers), scrambled to take part in a frantic lottery, where ducks and plovers were the prizes. And the inn-sign 'At the Departure of the Hours', wrought in iron open work by a blacksmith who was something of a poet, auspiciously represented a holiday from care and time.

After the old man died there were no more songs. The winter of ingratitude roughly overtook the stags' heads adorning the hall, which once flowered with capes and coats. The cook boy profited by his skill with creamy puddings and crisp soufflés at the Comet Inn. The stableman retired more discreetly taking a few odds and ends of silver with him. But the scullery maid, showing a surprising amount of feeling for such an amphibious creature, would only leave when all the rooms had been closed, one after the other, the carpets rolled up and the mattresses embalmed in camphor. Madame Parpillon, given over to her memories, continued for some time to lay the table, either from habit or from false shame. Then the enormous dining-room, where the red plush and the yellow fly-blown ceiling once watched over the doubtful jokes of the old days, was in its turn condemned and the chandelier wrapped up in a cocoon of green paper ready for uneasy metamorphoses. Henceforward nothing was heard but the babbling of the old clock and the purring of the cat. The yard, which used to echo with pawing horses and with quarrels, became a refuge on market days for children playing hopscotch and quoits.

My arrival was the signal for a great disturbance. Followed by the silent discontented old woman, I routed mice and blackbeetles, opened the shutters, lifted up the covers in a cloud of moths, and returned from an expedition to the dining-room with my legs black with fleas. Nevertheless I stood firm. I willingly put up with the most extraordinary conditions. Yes, I would split the wood and empty the ash-trays. I undertook the dust-bin, I swore to keep the polished floor in apple-pie order . . . In all this you will rightly suspect that my main motive was economy, but I must say that to my great astonishment I began to feel the charm of this deserted inn. So successfully did I make myself out gently flattering, roguish and affectionate, that after having grumbled for the first few days, spoilt

the dishes and sulked like a schoolgirl, the hostess found me an attic away from the ants, feasted my Sundays with a cup of creamy chocolate and slices of bread and butter, and finally started on long hours of mending for the benefit of my three pairs of stockings (my wardrobe, at the beginning of my career, went in threes).

When I seemed sufficiently domesticated, resembling the clock and Minesse the cat, becoming part of the smells and the semi-darkness, she liked talking to me more intimately. During the first warm days we began the lazy habit of dawdling in the yard at the kitchen-door, beneath a dead wistaria which sheltered a rude bench and round iron table. There we chatted peacefully and I soon saw that Madame Parpillon, like so many of my customers in the back-shop after lunch, shared my taste for great problems, homely discussions about God and Fate and Death. If she left the perennial subject of the inn's past glories, it was to expound her ideas on hell which she pictured for herself with the help of an old illustrated catechism. One could recognize the unscrupulous stableman and the faithless cook mixed up with the other damned whom she had had to put up with or who still hid their formidable identity.

As to heaven she filled up the gaps in the anthology by imagining an inn to her own taste, stuffed with preserves, with pies and with potted meats, frequented by commercial travellers. She added, aiming at me, 'a distinguished clientèle. . . .' Finally she often liked to return to a quarrel she had with death. She accused it in general of breaking the basic laws of housewifery, the rules of thrift and of stores; but however comical it may seem this was the root of her resentment. She did not know how to read. It was the great sorrow of her life and, according to her, the only source of her troubles since the death of M. Parpillon. Whatever one might tell her to try and make her understand how one acquired such a talent, she was convinced that the real reason was optical and lay in a certain conformation of the eye. Thus she felt herself defied and frustrated by those multitudes of eyelids sealed down upon their secret. 'If I could only wear their eyes' she would say bitterly. . . . She was horribly envious and it was lucky for the repose of the dead that she had so lively a respect for memory and for tombs.

Her anger calmed down, I told her how for my part I used to imagine all the hours of my life, with one exception; how even those belonging to extreme old age bore a familiar and friendly aspect, but that when I tried to stare at the last one, it obstinately turned away its head and left me to my own devices. In this diorama it was the far off projects belonging to the future that were the most clearly illuminated: the haberdashery business that I dreamt of acquiring with my savings augmented by my small family inheritance. I saw my wife, my devoted wife, the one in fact I later selected, with her

mittens and her love for bills. It is true that I expected a girl and a boy and life has decreed otherwise. But I foresaw, fairly and squarely, the suburban house and the palm tree in the middle of the garden, which for a long time feared the frost. I remember that everything shone in the richest colours, just as to-day the immediate future lights up that picture in which, shaking off our rheumatisms, and enjoying the first spring sunshine, we shall promenade arm in arm down the covered walk.

Thus my imagination gave me the effect of a magic lantern, in which the future called for a flood of light and condemned the past to a dreary black and white. Not that my memories were muddled nor incomplete. But things and people only preserved a diminished life without warmth nor depth. The long days at school which typhoid fever forced me to give up, as well as the evenings spent in the dining-room between Aunt Caro and Aunt Emily had the same discoloured threadbare aspect.

But the last hour of all, that was totally invisible. And if I presumed to raise my voice, to call upon my rights, to speak about compulsion, the struggle with the imperceptible sooner or later turned against me and only the night delivered me. (My sleep was proof against ghosts.) The night delivered me from that intractable hour by dismissing them all together.

All this told, punctuated by the approval of my confidante, I went upstairs leaving her noisily fastening the bolts and rummaging in the kitchen. Shortly afterwards in her nightdress she brought me a tisane. Then I remained for some moments breathing in the cool air, my head thrust through the dormer window. I looked on to the yard. Below my hostess' little light soon went out. The stables were swallowed up in the mist.

. . . . .

The main building looks on to the rue Grenouillère, a dark and tortuous alleyway which follows the remains of the old ramparts, whereas the carriage entrance now condemned, opens on to the rue Fusterie. In the square the inn-sign advertises its promises of enjoyment and carefree comfort.

Leaving the inn and following the windings of the alley, you come to an undistinguished well in the middle of a triangular open space; to a decaying tower, where the knife-grinder's family grows and multiplies; to a dry fountain, where the street urchins ride astride on the tritons. Finally, there is the prison crowned with broken glass, and with a girl waiting before its nailed door.

A stairway leads to the Capitol gardens, mounting freely between the heaps of household rubbish. I advise you to watch your feet as you climb. But when you have reached the last step, turn round;

it is a three star view. Well, every single day, I finished up by giving myself this treat before returning on my proper course. It became almost an obsession. Whether I tried to loiter along the Rue de Canal where the old tanneries are, or to acquaint myself with the small businesses on the Place St. Ferdinand, an opportune turning always brought me back to the staircase. Minesse, the cat, and Madame Parpillon, placid as a priest's servant, encouraged my regular tastes. One day long after the view had lost its novelty, I half sprawled on the best placed bench, sunk in listlessness, watching the tossing of a nearby cypress against the sky, or dozing in the warm sun.

To my left, cut off by thick shrubberies, a terrace overlooked the river. A slope of pink gravel between two tamarisk hedges mounted towards me, proffering an invitation. But I guessed that it was a spot for lovers' meetings. One often heard excited giggles, shared scuffling which suggested rowdy behaviour. At that time I still retained my modesty. 'Nothing is so charming', they used to say, 'as a young man's bashfulness.' ('And if he sings! . . .' my Aunt Emily would add, but I was less favoured on this score). Anyway I avoided the terrace. Now one very hot day when the town seemed to simmer beneath a light golden crust, which the steeples could hardly pierce, I was dragged out of my drowsiness by a rustle of skirts, and before I had time, remembering where I was, to pull myself together, a lady appeared at the top of the steps, swinging her ample petticoats. Her demeanour was off-handed and impulsive; humming to herself she described a thousand patterns in the air with her long-handled parasol, until, on reaching my level, she bowed with great ceremony and cried out, 'Hail Stranger!' then again, honouring me with another curtsey 'Hail Stranger!'

You will easily imagine my surprise. I think I may be forgiven for finding myself nailed to the bench without being able to greet her nor to show the most ordinary sign of gratitude. And I have good reasons for anticipating the indulgence of my readers if I admit to having stared at her almost rudely, even betraying an unmannerly shrinking. But how can I make it credible that although I carry in my mind after so many years the least trimming on her bodice, her knots of peach-coloured velvet, the sides of her poke bonnet, at the same time her face escapes me, leaving a blank between the fluttering curls, a deep emptiness which the eye plumbed in vain. I think that I was going to yield to terror, I was going to scream or run, when a violent peal of bells sounded from the almonry of the Black Penitents a stone's throw away. This chapel adjoins the prison, and the brotherhood, which still on All Saints' Day walks in cowled procession, used to officiate for the condemned. However, this dismal duty never much embittered its devotions, and the little church was

the most delicious boudoir you can imagine, decorated with smiling paintings and a thousand knick-knacks. Little used for many years and given over to tourists, it so seldom gave tongue that, taken aback by the clamour, I threw a rapid glance towards the belfry. My visitor seized the opportunity to give me the slip. It was nearly time for business and I had to make an effort to shake off my stupor.

At that time I travelled in haberdashery, and I may say that prospecting in country districts, however complicated, due to the bad organization of transport, was child's play compared to the work in town. Think of all that world of home-dressmakers, inexhaustible for a lively and conscientious commercial traveller. Consider that they inhabit by the thousand impossible districts, where narrow passages, full of blind alleys, lead you on from court to court up to the stairway, which is almost never the one you are looking for. It takes nearly a week to sell a gross of cotton-reels. In addition—one can't blame them for it, poor girls, and I couldn't be sure that my prepossessing face and shy manners weren't the real culprits—in addition, I say, I had hardly unpacked my samples but they made me hold one end of a sheet in order to fold it, or wind their tatting, or go down on all fours to look for a needle. Moreover, as I obtained my list of addresses from the vestry (since the district is mixed), most of my customers consisted of sentimental old maids, delighted to find a fresh and compassionate heart, so much so that a whole day could pass between the piles of linen, in stories of fictitious love affairs, of broken engagements, without any appreciable profit on so much forbearance.

But how describe the pickle I was in after this last encounter? What would have become of my brilliant projects and of my magic lantern, if I hadn't broken the charm by main force and become once more conscious of my task? Every morning I bravely took out my attaché cases, but I soon hid them in some nook, in some abandoned hut, in order to follow an illusionary trail. I haunted the terrace where lovers used to meet. Now it was minus both sunshine and park benches, and it was rare for me to encounter some dismal old man. I even hoped in my blindness to find some support, who knows? a hint which might be useful, from Madame Parpillon. She listened to me with no sympathy. I was foolish enough, it is true, to lay stress on the very unusual personality of the apparition. But she might at least have spared me her sarcasms and not wantonly diminished a memory of whose fragility I was quite aware. In fact she went so far that she became remorseful, if one can so interpret her embarrassed attitude; if I risked the least allusion to the Lady, she immediately stole away, having suddenly become occupied with hypothetical gooseberry jam.

Hypnotized by this absent face, and encouraged in addition by

the coolness of the evenings, the idea struck me of carrying on my futile pranks after supper. But whether the old woman really thought of herself as my soul's guardian, or whether I had spoilt her so much that she was afraid of sitting up alone, she made difficulties. How dangerous if I were to come back to my attic—one might guess in what state—with a lighted candle! Was someone going to go down at midnight to unlock the door for the gentleman? . . . She spoke to me of my reputation, of a young man's situation in life. She put forward, which still amuses me, the scandal of the neighbourhood, the noise, the harm it would do her inn. In short, however I might go to the expense of a small oil lamp, of a duplicate key, and undertake never to stay out later than eleven o'clock, after my first excursion our relations lost their friendly openness. I found myself suspected, almost spied on. And, as the cooking itself began to feel the effects of this, I was only half sorry when my hasty furtive departure took place following the event which I am about to relate.

. . . . . .

I have always had the foible of not being able to go to sleep—even after a tiring journey—without having put everything around me into apple pie order. I hardly get into bed before getting out ten times over to pick up a thread or to smooth the fringes of a rug. . . . One evening when I had overstepped the allotted hour and had, in addition, been very late tidying up, I felt as I put out the light the moon's fingers on my cheek. A pleasing, lazy caress which beguiled me into leaving my bed and which lingered as I thrust my head out above the wooden roof-gutter.

The yard was dazzling. Three heavy travelling carriages, harnessed with four horses apiece, and ready equipped for the night were lined up in front of the lit coach houses, facing the wide open gate. Not far away a group of young women whispered together, excited by the departure. I counted them by means of their straw bonnets which nodded together, following the tittle-tattle and the laughter. I could not properly see the faces but I could easily make out the poke bonnets, the general demeanour, the gestures with the parasols. . . . I counted twelve of them . . . plus Madame Parpillon, since she was there, examining the harness with the ease of one who performs a daily task, trimming the lanterns and serving stirrup cups to the drivers!

So much deceit on the part of my hostess took me aback, so much pretended goodwill. After our abandoned talks, aggravated by her tendency to false confidences, what a blow to see her busy in the very heart of my destiny, in possession, of the one gap in my life, of the only dark patch! Too late I understood her meddling and interfering. The shabbiness of the inn was only a pretence, the better to

disguise what guests she lodged. The evening tisane was a trap. The quarrel with death was a trick. I was embittered by finding that it was one and the same person who, as she allowed my stew to simmer, prepared for me this courteous interview with the empty mask, then, blinding my eyes, frustrating my progress, inflamed my passionate expectations! Yes, she who rummaged in the corners of the cellar, who flavoured the tarts for my sake, would it be she who quite soon, to-morrow, after the return from this nightmare ride, would enter into my attic, leading by the hand my mysterious fiancée? I dressed myself in the greatest confusion. I was going to fly, abandoning my samples and my luggage, when a regret, stronger than my fear, led me to give a last look at the yard. Already the lights were going out on top of the stables which were decaying visibly. The horses pawed the ground. The drivers turned towards the travellers who prattled with renewed ardour. But I despaired of recognizing my fugitive among her sisters. More so as the voices no longer reached me. I could just imagine that I recognized her manner when another of them, dropping a malicious curtsey, again filled me with doubts.

Once more there was a delay; they must embrace before each one regained her carriage and the large bonnets were in the way. This done, they got in decorously, lifting up their lace petticoats. The drivers took forever buttoning their capes. At last the old woman made a sign. One carriage got under way.

The street was paved with mist into which the coaches vanished. As the last one shaved the corner stone the carriage-door indiscreetly flew open. She who is promised to me leant forward a moment and immediately disappeared.

Two Poems

By FRANTIŠEK HALAS

Translated from the Czech by Willa Muir

OBOLUS

I hear the ghost of a voice that cries: stay now
to ripen for what coming summers bring
from their stored clouds, upon your brow
the spendthrift silver scattering.

Born weeping, go not weeping back
to the realm of shadows underground,
leave cowards to wailing and fear of wrack,
in time enough yourself will stand frostbound

in the hall of death by waters of oblivion,
upon your lips one verse preserved by luck
a modest obolus to pay the ferryman
struck dead there when your pulse of life was struck.

FROM THE DEPTHS

An ardent lie is my love for this our world
by God illumined and sullied by the devil
and with angry tenderness I love this world

like a nest in cloud-cuckoo-land stuck with straws
this earth of ours rotates and sways and yaws
empty of grace and lucent with its woes

a famished bottom full of creeping vermin
among whom all you fear to see in dreams
by the broad light of day you can determine

In the rush of darkness between birth and death
cold under a calcareous graveyard moon
you pluck dawn's golden strings that choke your breath

then sorrow finds no hold here, reaching far
beyond the last fledgling of the Pleiades
which chirps unheeding to its sister stars

why then be angry O my swelling heart
star-dust will parch and dry up all salt tears
that down the chill rose of the cheek may start.

The Time of Calamity

By ANDRÉ CHAMSON

Two scenes from 'The Well of Miracles', translated from the French by John Rodker

I

FROM my window, the eye plunged into a yard cut off by a brick wall from the alley. Time had eaten away its cement. Now it was cross-hatched with lines that made the whole small scene look decrepit.

And in the centre of this sort of well stood a small mud-walled windowless house, its only entrance a double door shut by a wooden crossbar. It was only a shed into which one never saw anyone go and I often wondered what purpose it might be put to.

All that winter I had seen people slip as swiftly into the alley as the gusts that sent the hoarfrost flying at each step. All were muffled in old coats and seemed without faces or hands. Men or women, all had market bags that were all but empty, whose leather handles were mended with string. The bags hung from their wrists above those invisible hands hidden deep in pockets. Whenever I pressed my forehead to the window, in yellow fog or in the sorrowful light of grey February mornings, I would see them trotting along thus, wretched and hurried. The greybeard on my floor often told me how that alley, for long, long years, from his childhood in fact, had been known as 'Lover's Walk'. But none of the couples who passed now took each other's arms. It was as though there no longer existed a single being who dreamt of love in the small town.

Towards the 15th of March, a sort of heat wave set in. The putty coloured buds burst on every spur. Green grass shot from the rubble and from the foot of the walls. The new light seemed to swathe the whole world. One morning I opened my windows that looked on the yard. It was as though the time of calamity had passed. From the depths of my room I sensed the crystal depths of the silence which went stretching beyond the tiled roofs and their maze of ridges to a blue gulf crossed by clouds. Days passed, but I was never weary of that silence. The life we lived was transformed by a mysterious illusion; everything was changed. Yet, in the covered market, laid out on benches, were rows of fat geese, plucked and white, that no one bought, while big-bellied women with distressed faces and solemn dirty greybeards queued for hours to buy a few roots. But on the 21st, at 6.11 a.m., even so, it was Spring, and a mysterious hope reflected the transfigured light deep in all eyes that met human glances.

That day, early in the forenoon, I heard moans in the yard. They came from the mud-wall shed with the permanently shut doors. It was a succession of infant moanings, almost timid, a scale of two or three very high notes. I do not know why I immediately thought that one of the children with bloodless legs, whom I saw playing in the gutter whenever I went out, had just been taken ill. To wail thus, he must have been hurt, some sharp, deep hurt, that hurts deep in the flesh rather than on the surface. But as I listened to these moans, repeated at irregular intervals, it seemed to me that only some frail creature without consciousness could be uttering them. One could not recognize that tremor of lucidity that traverses even the most pitiable human cries. The child must have meningitis. I assured myself that was it. It was at the bottom of that pit where

the flesh suffers though the spirit inhabits it no more. But as I listened still more closely, in self-centred anxiety as it were, I suddenly made out a whole range of different wails that could not have come from the same throat. . It was not the moans of a single child I heard, but a whole orchestra of moans responding to each other. All at once, a tumult rose and the moans followed each other fast, evoked each other, though always muted by some mysterious terror. They ended suddenly in a howl, in the baying of a dog that seemed as if it could go no further, and then once more silence fell on the little house.

But then, at the mouth of the alley, a strange sight met my glance. Coming in my direction was a man with a bent back, whose face I could not see, pushing a grey painted hand-cart. On it was a tall iron cage packed with dogs. They pressed their black muzzles through the bars and snuffed the wind with fluttering nostrils. The man drew near. Now, just below, all I could see was his bent back and the skin of his neck, with its tendril or two of long hair. He wore a beret low on his eyes, a tunic, the shoulder-straps of which were minus the buttons and black cloth trousers, shiny with use. He stopped his cart in front of the shed and opened both leaves of the door. The moans started again. To those which came from the black hole in the little house were now added the howls of the dogs in the iron cage. It was one incessant uproar. By and by I was able to make out the interior of the shed. It was lined with small cells, each shut by an iron grid. Inside these were dogs that spun round and round uttering the lugubrious howls I had at first mistaken for those of children. The man in the black trousers held a sort of lasso with a leather handle in his right hand. He slipped the running noose round the neck of one of the dogs in the iron cage in the cart and, raising a small sliding door, pulled the dog out and dragged it into the shed. I could not see very far in owing to the angle caused by the big wood lintel over the door. I heard a grid shut, then saw the man come back in search of another animal. The first had been a wiry haired terrier, which, half-throttled by the leather thong, kept on turning its head back to gaze through bushy tufts at the yard door. Next came a white fox terrier that seemed to curvet along like a wooden horse at a fair. The tip of its sharp muzzle looked like some submerged round scrap of leather. Then came a yellow mongrel of indefinable breed, snarling and baring its teeth, which the man cowed with sudden jerks of the lasso. The little house was quiet. Not a dog barked. In one of the cages nearest the big door I saw a sort of spaniel watch the newcomers file past as a captive who, dazed by months of solitude, looks at a batch of prisoners silently pass into prison gates. The last dog was a skinny crock with staring bones under the grey, mange-ridden skin. I heard the grid fall behind this too and the man

reappeared, his whip slung from his shoulder and his hands in his pockets.

He spat before him a gob as straight as a shot that sprayed in a frothy star on a stone. Then he fumbled lengthily in his pockets and drew out a fag-paper and some shreds of tobacco. He rolled his cigarette between two fingers, using one hand, then spat again and, with a trumpeter's gesture, swung the paper to his tongue: a match crackled under his left shoe and I saw the smoke climb up and beyond like a tiny mist soon puffed away by the wind.

As he drew at his cigarette, the man talked to himself. I heard the sound of his voice, like the creak of a chain in a well. Horrible oaths broke hoarse from his lips. At first I could only catch one or two, then I heard disjointed phrases:

'Christ! I should have fixed it up as piece-work, instead of so much a day. . . . They're as thick as fleas, these curs! Ah, the shite . . . But if I'm to do them in, it'll have to be so much a head. Well, how much? I say twenty sous . . . Strike me pink, it's three francs I'd better say. Twenty sous? Three francs? Well, let them chew on it . . . Anyway, we'll see! It's up to the big shots! They can come down. . . . But it's certain I won't finish them off except as piece-work."

He shut the double door, swung back the wood cross-bar and scraped his heels on the earth floor of the yard. Then he got into the shafts of the handcart and left my well, his face still turned earthwards. I had not managed to tell whether he was young or old. . . .

When the creaking of the wheels had died away down the alley, the dogs started howling again. They sobbed as they answered each other like children lost in the snow. For over an hour I heard their moans continue. I could now distinguish one from another, could tell how much time would alternate between that high-pitched howl that drowned all others and the raucous panting that was, as it were, the accompaniment to this terrible concert. Neither my will nor familiarity seemed to avail to make me indifferent to that tumult. Yet, no sound exists that man cannot, in time, thrust into silence or drive out from what he feels: neither the roar of trains on the permanent way, nor mountain torrents cascading down, nor even that of the cannon. But this medley of howls and moans, this tumult of dogs shut in the gloom of the low house, compelled recognition as the only sounds one could not possibly ignore. I could not stop listening to them. And as time passed, I realized ever more clearly that these utterances were atrocious because they were like human moans, though more atrocious still because there was missing in them what we call consciousness. Human and inhuman at the same time, they resembled the cries of the last agony, when the suffering flesh cries and cries out though the spirit has departed.

Only then did I remember the advertisement I had read in the papers a few days before. Between obituaries and items announcing new restrictions, the mayor gave notice to the townsfolk that all stray dogs would be picked up by the municipality. Their owners would be allowed a day in which to claim them and pay a fine, failing which the dogs would 'suffer a quick death by absolutely humane methods'. For months, nothing but half-starved dogs, which bared their teeth at the passer-by, had been seen in the streets. In this race to utter destitution, in which the whole world seemed to partake, the beasts walked in front of the men, and only the small garden birds or the fish in the stream might still believe in the omnipotent goodness of their Creator.

The man returned after an hour, and a new load of dogs was emptied into the black house in which the sun's rays, split into sheaves, pierced a universe of motes and dust as thronged as the Milky Way. The dogs were silent again in his presence. When he had once more left for the town, between the shafts of his handcart, they started their howling again and I went out, no longer to hear them.

All that day I thought no more of the dogs. Every moment that passed, dozens of young men, women, greybeards or children would be having to die somewhere, in a world infinitely more cramped and nearer than that I had glimpsed in the dancing motes lit up by the sun-rays that filtered through the stable door. People were skinny, silent. They walked fast through the small badly paved streets that, by some mysterious transformation, looked now as sordid as they had in the late Middle Ages. Only, deep in all eyes was a strange flicker that seemed like the first gleams of hope. But the women all looked as though they were wearing clothes that were not theirs and their wooden soles went clattering through the streets.

At night, in bed, I did not hear the dogs howling outside my closed shutters and shut windows behind the two damask curtains worn thin by time. But, before dawn, when the day was but a pale gleam deep in the sky, gliding into a colourless world in which all was but white or black, their howls would suddenly wake me. It was not at the moon that they bayed thus, but at the coming day and man's awakening. Life and death were in their howls, but each very remote from consciousness in the utter purity of life and the utter purity of death.

At half-past seven I heard the wheels of the handcart. I got up and went to the window. The man in black trousers opened the shed door. I saw his hands on the cross-bar, big hands with short fingers, broader than long. The left was tied in a dirty bandage, stained with dark blood. Only the night before that hand had been uninjured. Some dog must have bit him as it was getting late. He still wore his lasso like a rifle, slung from his shoulder. And he soliloquized aloud, as on the previous day.

Day, with even stride, came speeding over and down the house tops. It stopped for an instant at the gutters, then slid swiftly down the house fronts to the foot of the red brick walls, and transmuted the colour of the grass-tufts, while two white clouds, obdurate to these metamorphoses of the light, continued their trackless path across the sky.

'Thirty sous,' said the black-trousered man: ''t ain't much . . . they think you can feed on your fat, let alone food tickets . . . Still, it's not so bad if it's piece-work! Ah, the shite . . . The wretched curs!'

He had opened the stable door. Again I saw the spaniel in its dark cage by the wall at the door. Its head lay stretched on its paws, the eyes were open. Every sound had been stilled. The man took his lasso in his left hand. He raised the grid that shut the spaniel's cage and slipped the noose over its head. The animal had risen. The man dragged it suddenly forward and then placed it on his back, passing it over the shoulder like a big sack. I saw the four white paws stretch out. Still on the same spot, the man did a sort of dance, then hurled the dog to the ground. It fell on its side, as flat as a cardboard toy or as though drawn on the earth.

'Filthy cur!' said the man. 'Still, that's thirty sous for a start . . .'

A dog in the depths of the stable began to howl, stopped, then resumed on a higher note to which other dogs immediately responded.

'O.K.! O.K.! Less of that there! We'll soon deal with you!'

The man had plunged into the stable. I could not see him now but I heard his voice amid the tumult of barking.

'Here then! No obstinacy now! . . . It's the merest nothing, sweetest, pettikins! . . . Ah, filthy curs!'

I heard a grunt such as millers make when they hoist a flour sack on their backs. I saw the dancing feet of the man under the lintel. Then a mat of hair fell and flattened itself beside the body of the dead spaniel. It was the terrier.

'And thirty sous more!' said the man's voice. Almost immediately the dog-catcher went on, as though talking to some invisible person in the house.

'Now, now, no fuss now, no nonsense. . . . It's the merest nothing, nothing at all! Far better than croaking of hunger out in the streets. Haven't you starved enough now, you idiot, you? Not a bite anywhere for chaps like you . . . Where's your food card? Where's your cash? Come on now!'

I heard his grunt, then saw his feet nearing the door, only visible below the ankle. A dog fell over the terrier's body. It was the mangy dog that was nothing but bones.

'Thirty sous,' the voice said again, with its joyous lilt. And the feet again vanished into the house.

'And you still want to live, eh? Why, you're as stupid as humans! It's all very well for us not to want to slip off . . . so what! Oh, you're seeing sense, are you . . . Come on, old chap! This isn't the moment at all to put on airs. Why, the whole business doesn't mean a thing, my little squit . . .'

There was the same grunt and one more dog fell on the heap of dead.

'And that's thirty sous more . . . Well, one's got to live somehow! You wouldn't stop a chap earning his turnips, eh? Croak, one's got to . . . Nothing's better . . . Croak, one's got to. . . .'

II

Then there was the girl. . . .

Our first vision of some creature often impresses that image so strongly on our minds that we can never again see it except in that aspect. This girl materialized for me, one winter's day, when there was still wood for warmth, in the fitful light of a blazing hearth, at the far end of a dim room entered from the street. At first, I saw nothing but her profile, not silhouetted by the fire but gleaming in the phosphorescence of glowing embers. It was bent slightly forward as if attentive, with a kind of gauzy head-covering about it that itself seemed phosphorescent. You would have thought it some fantastic airy apparition, some little fairy escaped from A Midsummer Night's Dream to seek refuge by the fire from the harshnesses of winter.

Always this girl, for me, remained the same ethereal apparition, the same diaphanous creature. One after another, the metamorphoses of misery changed everyone around me. Life's every aspect became sordid or tragic. But the fifteen year old girl I had seen by the fire, in the glow of the little dancing flames, was never to change for me from that ethereal apparition, that image of silence, of melancholy, that none of the woes that thronged upon them seemed to touch.

Yet she had known misfortune even before it descended on our town. She came from some distant place, some market town on a high road. Now she had drifted into these two ground-floor rooms with her mother and uncle, an old tar who had sailed all the seas of the world. In those days of poverty and despair, that family was one of the most wretched imaginable. But a needle will do to make a dressmaker and, when one works at home, one can work all night. The mother thus kept her family alive and the old uncle did any old job. 'It would always add a bit to the pot.'

Though this old uncle was well over sixty, he still walked with a rolling gait, his shoulders swinging under the jersey. His face was brick-red with unmoving eyebrows and his small blue eyes seemed to fix some point at least ten miles away. In the early calamitous days he was drunk every other day, though in a dignified manner: neither quarrelsome nor giving offence. Actually, he only needed one glass of wine to send him reeling. Though I should add that he drank on an empty stomach, when he woke, for his coffee went to his sister to drink at two or three in the morning as she plied her needle, and his sugar to the girl 'who needed it so as to grow' as he had confided to me. But doubling Cape Horn, even imaginatively, demanded a fresh glass of thin wine, and crossing the line, even as a dream, called for another. Then Mathurin broke loose. He talked of Cape Horn as others talk of Paris bridges!

'It's there the waves run sixty feet high. . . . The very end of the earth, my boy! So hoist all sail for the South Seas . . . Ah! wooden ships, those were the days. . . . Oh! if we could only leave, how happy we could be!'

But times got so bad that Mathurin could not even get his waking glass. It was dreadful, his getting used to doing without. As though he was stunned by human malevolence, months passed before he spoke. Then his gaiety returned as did his memories of Cape Horn, his rolling gait, the involuntary winks, unmoving brows and twitching nostrils. Now Mathurin had no need of even a glass of wine to be drunk. In a perpetual fast, he no longer emerged from his dreams. His hangover embraced the whole universe.

It was Mathurin I got to know first. He was the mailboat between station and town, the coaster that sailed from street to street and cheerfully took on the most bothersome jobs. It was through him that I came to know his sister. I needed a couple of old shirts repaired and it was when I was taking them to him, one evening last winter, that for the first time I saw the girl by the fire.

I've already said that she seemed a fairy. But I must add that everything around her was fairylike too. Though furnished with wooden benches and boxes the poverty-stricken home seemed cosy and charming. If the mother slaved as a sempstress, the girl went to college and learnt Greek. Nothing in the least indicated their social class before they took to the highroads. What tragedy was it broke up their home? Where were the father and eldest son of whom they never spoke, but whose photographs in uniform I saw on a box? They were not just refugees but two creatures exempt from humility or pride now at home in calamity, who though they struggled against it wasted no moments regretting their past life.

Only the old uncle broke their silence with his absurd remarks. 'Ah! children, it's there one could be happy!' But the mother went on silently working. I felt she only thought of the future. The girl followed the lines of the Odyssey with the tip of a finger. I went up to her and soon discovered that I no longer knew any Greek: all the same we began to talk of Ulysses. Soon, we were good friends. One evening, as I called her Christine de Pisan, I surprised her mother smiling. A strange time, when dressmakers knew the history of illustrious women! A strange time when poverty-stricken children could continue their studies, in spite of famine and despair! At least, thanks to that small face, illumined for me by the glow from the hearth, poring on lines across which the frail shade of Nausicaa passed, I too, began to dream of the future.

At times the mother would ask me to do her a slight service and that, so simply that it seemed an honour. Generally it was an envelope that had to be placed on top of some letter-box, without knocking at the door for which it was meant. 'Now take care,' she would say, and at times add, gazing fixedly at me: 'We live in times when one has to suspect everyone and trust a few completely.' I do not know why it then seemed as though I were carrying the Holy Sacrament.

But Christine de Pisan's uncle had now once for all exchanged his red wine for his obsessions. Never for a moment did he sober up from his fantasies. With his rolling gait, his tanned and retanned face and funny voice, he mooned about the town stopping the passers-by to keep them posted of his plans. For weeks, he spoke of nothing but 'the great voyage!'

"I'll take the sister and kid! Good-bye poverty, good-bye Bordeaux.' Followed a short laugh, a sudden blink, the eyebrows ever as unmoving. 'The world's big, dear friend! Why stay here, where we shall all of us croak! . . . to-morrow there'll be yellow fever, dysentery . . . Cast off! Full steam ahead!' He gave the names of the ships and pretended to search for the names of the captains. 'Leaving Tuesday for the South Seas via the Cape . . .' But the ship never left. It was a long way to the sea. The dressmaker went on mending shirts and the girl continued her imaginary journey with Ulysses for her companion. 'We sail in a week,' said the uncle, his eyes blinking anew. But no one ever now went on voyages. There were no more white sails on the seas.

By dint of talking of the South Seas, of islands where one could be happy, Mathurin seemed to rid himself of his obsessions. They evaporated as intoxication does, as dew in the sun. Still, at times, in a timid voice he would say, 'We'll go to Pomotu.' 'But they're fighting there,' his sister replied, not even turning her head. 'To the Philippines, then,' he resumed, with a touch, as it were, of

fear. 'What a crazy idea.' Then, after a silence that lasted some minutes he would end in a still more dubious voice: 'The Kerguelens, then?' His sister no longer replied. The girl sailed with Ulysses on a shoreless, timeless sea: 'Polia Thalassa,' I heard her murmur. But Mathurin no longer suggested stops or ports. He was back in the drunk's good-natured sadness: the drunkard weaned of his wine.

For some weeks he stayed immersed in this melancholy. Then, one night, having gone to get some bit of mending, I've forgotten what, I found him sitting at the girl's side, blinking away and talking as loud as in the best Cape Horn days. She was listening with a smile.

'Listen,' he said, 'I've found our island . . . No need of a freighter or three-master to get there . . . a simple boat will do it . . . Pull, my hearty, you've still some back to put in it now . . . The bad times are finished for good, my babe . . . The island's mine. It's I discovered it . . . No one will come to bother us there . . . We'll take some sound chaps we know . . . that's when we're all fixed up,' he added, as he saw me.

'Where is it, this island of yours?' the girl asked.

This question seemed to terrify him. He looked at me, looked at his sister and, for the very first time it may be, moved his eyebrows a little. Still, I felt he was going to reply! I was one of the sound chaps he knew and trust overcame suspicion. What secret was he about to reveal? Of what *terra incognita* disclose the existence? What memory of twenty years sailing the seas, exhume to our sight?

'Well, listen carefully. . . . When you pass the bridge on the way to the station, if you look downstream, before it makes that big sweep round by the promenade, you can see it . . .'

His eyes beneath the rigid double bar of the tense eyebrows seemed to gaze at a most distant horizon. From a crowsnest that swung with the sea, it was as though a voice had just cried: Land! The island's in sight! Wretchedness farewell!' Already, its leafy dome bulged under the dome of the sky. The beach is sandy, low. A tangle of grass and reeds waves over marshy pools.

'You can see it . . . I've been there.'

'But uncle, it's the size of a handkerchief.'

'I've been there . . . No reefs, no currents . . . Three good pulls and you're ashore. I've reconnoitred the beach northwards . . . fine sand and reeds. It rises a little towards the interior. In the middle you've hills and wonderful trees. Not an animal, not a man did I see, only birds . . . birds in the trees . . . and all around water, nothing but water . . ."

'But uncle, it's . . .'

The mother looked up. The lamplight shone in her face as in a mirror. Her lips said 'ssh', then her head dropped and the light disappeared. The girl had understood. She said nothing and once more grew attentive. Mathurin had got up. He roamed around the room, rolling his shoulders under the jersey. We had all listened. Where does intoxication end? Where madness begin? Where reason resume its sway? We had all set sail for the wonderful isle.

'It's hurt me too long seeing you here. This is no sort of existence . . . Without Mathurin, you'd have gone under. The worst is starving to death in a town where people look on. Farewell misery! We've left it behind. . . . We'll take rabbits. They'll make their burrows on the island . . . They'll be swarming in under three months . . . I've seen it in the South Seas, cliffs covered with goats. . . . We'll take a goat too . . . I'll make a garden on the hill, at the highest spot there, well away from the fevers . . . I'll catch you birds.'

From that day, Mathurin never sobered up from his dream. This great project filled all his days. He was seeking a pair of rabbits, 'good breeders and hardy too.' Whenever I met him in the street, he confided his worries.

'I don't quite know the kind of climate we'll find on that island . . . of course, if it turns colder, the rabbits will pile on fur, but if it gets warm, they'll get as bare as rats . . . That's life that is . . . furs when it's cold, skin when it's hot.'

But to find a pair of rabbits was no easy matter. Mathurin managed it, however. He did odd errands between the country and town and the farmers gave him an albino buck and a grey doe.

'They'll get acclimatized, it's a cert. Then we shall have a white breed with little grey spots. First-class meat and best Canadian fur . . . You've got to think about clothes seeing we shall be at the back of beyond.'

In the dim ground-floor room, the two rabbits scurried among the boxes, and signalled with thuds of their paws like fencing masters. 'Rat, tat, ratatat, tat.' They scurried under the beds, explored the ashes and posed like dancing bears at a respectful distance from visitors. Sometimes, at night, I surprised the mother and girl eating some root vegetable. From time to time they threw melancholy glances at the rabbits. But the rabbits were sacred. They were under the protection of that primitive community which was developing in the clear but wandering mind of the old sailor: they were the totem and taboo of the family.

'They must breed above all!' murmured Mathurin. 'When we've a thousand, we'll eat rabbit every day.'

Nearly every evening at sundown, Mathurin went to lean on the parapet of the bridge, in the middle of the river, to gaze at his isle, in the distance. The sun flooded it with a magical radiance. It looked huge, thousands of miles away. The clump of trees that hung over it seemed like some deep mysterious forest. The huge ball of vegetation reflected itself in the water and the island looked like a sphere, another earth, enclosed in ours, yet floating free of it.

If Mathurin had walked down the promenade to the point where the river made a wide sweep, he would have had the island directly below, torn from the mirages caused by the sun, an island narrow and low set in the mocking plash of running water. But never did he go to look at his isle from this point where all its glamour was lost. The bridge, for him, was the fo'c'sle of a vessel. The setting sun, to his eyes, opened unsuspected vistas, and the isle, anchored between both banks of the city, emerged for him from a sea that heaved to the very Pacific.

Meanwhile, the girl followed Ulysses through the miraculous perils of another sea. Mathurin's intoxication seemed now to possess them all. It tore the girl and her mother from the dark malevolence of the calamitous times. And I, whenever I was too dead-beat with despair, would go and knock at their street door and feel for an instant freed by the mere sight of the girl's delicate profile bent over the glow in the hearth. What spell was it that tore me then from my misery and its obsessions? What charm held me under its spell? Was it the girl and her silent studiousness? Or the mother so fiercely determined to feed her brood? Or Mathurin, with his intoxication, his raving and his great voyage for the enchanted isle where all our trials would end?

For I, too, let myself be caught in this dream of departure. Yet there was nothing in me of a sailor and there were reasons why I should stay. Like a sentry, I was waiting for what had to come. But even the watcher, hid in his hole, with all his senses strung to the void and the night, may dream at moments and make his own Spring, as he silently blows on numb fingers. And this illusion, commingled of grace and madness, the girl and sailor at moments gave me.

I remember the last time I gossiped with him. It was on the bridge, in the red dust of evening, in the midst of a vast pulsation of sea-smelling air that seemed to lose itself in infinite distance. Mathurin gazed at his isle. His eyes gleamed and his tanned face was as rigid as a bit of old leather. He seemed to be talking with difficulty, as though with a quid in his mouth.

'To-morrow we sail . . . 'Twill be an easy crossing . . . See those clouds, on the skyline there? Fair weather, that is . . . The doe'll

soon litter . . . Misery good-bye . . . Haul away there, haul away, O!'

As I left, I thought I saw a fugitive gleam in the glittering eyes that seemed to betoken derangement: it was like the sudden flash of a swerving mirror. But his glance went off into space. Night was approaching. The mysterious island had vanished away in the distance and its trees drifted downstream on the slow waters of the river.

The next day but one, early, someone rang my bell. 'You know the old sailor, that Mathurin who ran errands?'

I had barely said yes before I was dragged to the hospital. In the garden, lunatics sang. It was the crown of Springtide. My guide was sparing of words. He cared nothing for men.

'It won't take long,' he went on repeating. Outside the operating annexe, there hovered a smell of ether that was stronger even than that of the compost-heaps turned since the last shower. Nurses with white caps, unseeing, watched us pass. It was as though you were in a land where people could no longer see each other, where the people one passed belonged to a different species whose glance passed unseeing by. Nor could the lunatics see us better and two greybeards who sat on a bench, in a shower of sunlight, turned grey lidless eyes to us that revealed white pupils.

Having passed through the gardens, we saw a small house with shut windows backing on the cemetery wall. My guide pushed open the black door and I went in after him. A dim bulb gave light to the room. There were three laid out on the big, barely sloping slab, from which slid runnels of water.

'Undo 70.'

Swathed in white from head to foot they looked like mysterious chrysalids. I gazed till I all but fell on them. But hands had already pulled up the shroud over No. 70's face.

'Is that him?'

'That's him.'

I had only seen Mathurin's face for a few seconds again. They had found him dead the morning before, by the bridge. And I had barely had time to recognize him before the attendant covered him up. It was as though that oblong form had that moment dropped into the water with his No. 70 tied to his feet, like the round-shot of the sailor consigned to the sea. His face, of which I had caught but a glimpse, sank into depths from which nothing ever re-arises. He had appeared to me, for the last time, sculptured in a substance other than that of which live men are made, that looked as imperishable as that of statues, but which, nevertheless, would dissolve in the minute processes of the pit, that all the dead share.

Leaving the hospital, I walked over the bridge. Again I saw the island. It was still early and morning enveloped it in the same mirage as at eve. There, in the middle of the town, between the two banks lined with factories and houses, above the spreading waters swathed in drifting mist, it still looked that refuge inaccessible to calamity of which Mathurin had dreamt.

THE FUTURE OF FICTION

I

By ROSE MACAULAY

THE novel, as narrative entertainment, has always had formidable rivals—the ballad, the play, the short tale, the biography and autobiography, the memoir, the history. Until about two centuries ago, it put up a weakish fight against these competitors. Then it entered on its hey-day, and for a long time victoriously held the field. Now its position totters. To the formidable rivals is added another—the film drama. And two of its ancient competitors have grown of late in popularity among writers—the short story and the report of facts. There are obvious reasons for the strengthening hold of both of these on the writer. The short story, besides taking less time to write, and often making an interim appearance in some magazine, has grown in recent years far less exacting in form and content than of old. It used to be required to have a beginning and an end; it was supposed to be self-contained, to have a plot, a story; it ended with the closing of a door on the incident or situation depicted (sometimes with some sudden booby-trap of a surprise to fall on the reader's head, but not all writers attempted this.) So the form was exacting: it was a drama in miniature, cut out and sewn together without loose ends; it made more demands than a novel on the concentration, relevance, and story-telling deftness of the narrator. Take a short (or shortish) story by Henry James, Maupassant, Anatole France, Balzac, Kipling, O. Henry, W. W. Jacobs, Somerset Maugham, Aldous Huxley,—different as all these are, they all tell a tale, they begin with an opening and end with a climax; they do not just stop. But now a short story may be, and often is, quite different; it can be an odd length chopped off a piece; any bit of any novel-in-progress will do; you merely cut it off and serve. Your readers have a sense of dipping into the middle of some untold tale; they may like the fragment before them, or they may be annoyed by its vagueness, its unrelatedness, its lack of climax, sometimes its insignificance. It is often like sitting opposite travellers in a train; there they sit, doing nothing in particular, reading newspapers, eating chocolate, occasionally passing a remark; and there you sit opposite, waiting for one of them to jump out of the window, pull the alarm cord, say something interesting; but they don't. The train reaches your station; you get out, leaving them still sitting; you will never know why they are travelling, where they are going, or why your attention has been focused on them for perhaps half an hour. It is too easy, too dull; everyone can do it,

there seems no reason why anyone should. All round the Danube, the Volga, the great ruminating regions of Central Eúrope, the natives sit writing like that. 'The sun was rising. In the yard my Uncle Mischa was killing pigs . . .' and so on, till the sun sets on the European day, and Uncle Mischa and the rest go to bed. It is sometimes good; often less so. The French, an impatient, unruminative, bustling people, do not write like that; they still like snap and point in their narratives. The British, lazier-minded, are largely adopting the unexacting form; it suits them. It suits them so well that it may drive out the novel altogether. There are, of course, practitioners of the short story to-day who use an art as deft and exacting as that of any novelist; indeed, more so; but they are exceptions. I do not remember any among the quite young.

There is another thing that makes against the long novel: life has during the past years been disintegrated, broken into odd, unshapely bits, one not fitting into another; discontinuity has been the mood of our brittle time. Can we fit the pieces together, weld them into a coherent shape? Young minds and older have alike been fragmented; the young, fortunately, are tougher and more resilient, and have the better chance of recovery. But the young have also more formidably encountered another great rival to fiction—fact. Life, always exciting, has become far more so in our desperate, storm-beaten age. Millions of people have lived through adventures and experiences in whose grim flare the candle-light of polite fiction fades to pallor. Of those millions, some thousands are capable of setting down their experiences in communicable form. Some hundreds may choose to let the flare light them along the paths of imaginative fiction; most will not, or cannot, do this, but are capable of constructing out of the priceless material flung at them by fate, true tales, which, even if not brilliantly set down, are valuable for the sheer excitement of what they report. It is hard, for instance, to see how hiding and being hunted by a fierce enemy across continents, deserts or jungles could be made dull: though the odds are that we shall before long be shown all too often how it can. Still, there it is: life has flared for millions into a grim thriller; why, then, novels?

The answer is, of course, that novels are not, in this sense, thrillers; they are the portrayal of human beings, their manners, their talk, their dreams, their relationships with one another, their souls. In so far as this is well or ill done, the serious novel is good or bad; and neither the short story nor the factual report has such room, or such a manner, as to do it well. But here yet another rival appears—the autobiography, a form always, overtly or covertly, popular. How many young writers (for it is on young writers that the novels' future must, in the main, depend) will resist the seductions of autobiography, short story, and factual report, and commit themselves to the long,

slow, often tedious, but so rewarding ascent of the long novel? It is impossible to guess; the post-war period has not yet established itself; we are not yet back. The signs are few and ambiguous. A kind of miasma, a dullness, still obscures the imaginative life of many; some writers too old to have been closely engaged in war have nevertheless found the war years impossible to write in; it has been a tragedy too vast, too gross, too ill-understood; it has clogged and stunned imagination, and intellectual activity has been paralysed, or has perhaps found its vent in study and research. Younger writers, if not actively engaged in war, have often been fulfilling strange, incongruous tasks; their experience has been deflected into some channel not necessarily either stimulating or cramping; out of such experience there have come already a few interesting novels. Inevitably a limited experience, it is not to be expected that its impact on fiction will be great or lasting. Nor even that of actual fighting experience. The minds of writers are usually tough; they push through encumbering obstacles with the pertinacity of moles, throwing up casual mounds on the way, but arriving eventually at the goals nature has destined them for. After the last war, novels of actual experience were fewer than was expected. But the effect of war on imagination and manner is incalculable. A young man who has spent his adult years at high tension, among perils, discomforts, fears, adventures, will not see or write of life as if he had lived at ease; he will be either toughened or sensitized; he will have in his consciousness and unconsciousness a whole field of experience which must affect his every thought. The communal living, the unsteady, chancey drug of danger, the constant keying up of nerve and sinew, may have broken his mind into disorderly fragments, made consecutive thought, initiative and concentration difficult; if he writes, he may write in spasms and fragments, without coherent pattern; if he writes novels, he may evolve some new form; or, in reaction, and in search of elegance, pleasure and safety, he may turn with zest to the solid, traditional, comfortable forms of the past.

So far, such signs as there are do not point along this road. Fragments, impressions, brief glimpses—these are, on the whole, the mode. No new *style* is even faintly to be seen on the horizon; the younger writers seem (so far) content with clear, plain, brisk, expressive, sometimes pedestrian English. In an age of much verse, probably those with an urge towards the baroque and ornate vent it thus. Prose is simple and colloquial. There may be a reaction against this austerity, when (if) a more decorated and lavish age returns; but at present the tendency is to prefer plain to coloured, Yeats's *Oedipus* to Gilbert Murray's (in spite of Yeats's innocence of Greek), the Douai translation to the Authorized, Cotton's Montaigne to Florio's. There has been, in fact (as that great stylist, Logan Pearsall Smith has

complained), a flight from style. Unless there is a drift back, the novel of the future will be in plain, uncoloured English, with no frills; the Max Beerbohm period is dead, those laurel trees are cut, and we shall go no more (for the moment) into those elegant, aromatic and verbaceous woods. Those who write mannered English are all of older generations; the future of the novel is not with them. Colloquial ease is the mode. There has been a reaction from excessive Hemingway naturalism and mannerisms; but Hemingway's vivid reporting remains a model more eagerly pursued than successfully copied. Arthur Koestler, a leader of many disciples, has no style that can be imitated; his quality lies in the intensity of his imagination that creates for him a private world; it is probably incommunicable. His own future as a novelist seems at the moment dubious; in his last novel he stumbled over the intrusive snag of psycho-analysis and flawed a fine and impressive book. Till novelists learn to use such analysis more profoundly and more subtly, they had better forget it; it should be performed tacitly by the author, not wordily by his characters on one another (as it was also in Nigel Balchin's *Mine Own Executioner*—for that reason much less good than the specialized and fascinating *Small Back Room*).

Who are the young (under thirty-five) novelists just now? There is Philip Toynbee, of whom a good deal may be hoped; so far his best work has been a chapter from his school memories, published in a magazine; his last novel, *The Barricades*, had an excellent theme and some good things in it, but strayed about and never seemed quite to come to grips with its subject. There are others; some have written autobiographically and possibly can no other; time will show. The novelists in the forties and older are still setting the pace; it is they who have foisted on us that improbable figure, the saint; is this strange expression of the homage of the guilty contemporary conscience to virtue in for a long run? A gifted and various generation, these established novelists will not decide the novel's future; those paths will be trodden out by the generations pushing up behind them.

A new prophet might arise; someone who will do for the coming generation what D. H. Lawrence, Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Hemingway, did for the twenties, what E. M. Forster did for novelists just before the last war, what Henry James, Arnold Bennett, Galsworthy and H. G. Wells did for the Edwardians; some new arrival who shall capture minds and set a mode. If this should occur, there may be, among those herd-like and fashion-conscious people, young writers, a new inspiration and a new kind of novel. If not, the present drift away from the full-length novel may end in the complete depreciation of this form of literature. At the moment, the longest contemporary novels are, on the whole, the worst. Young writers (inevitably snobs), surveying the specimens before them, may shy

away from the highway and seek to exercise their talents in by-ways. This would be a pity. For novels, as Isaac D'Israeli remarked, though they may often form 'a library of illiterate authors for illiterate readers', are, on the other hand, when created by genius, 'precious to the philosopher. They paint the character of an individual or the manners of an age more perfectly than any other species of composition: it is in novels we observe, as it were passing before our eyes, the refined frivolity of the French, the gloomy and disordered sensibility of the German, and the petty intrigues of the modern Italian.' And, of course, the peculiar vagaries of the British.

It is much to be hoped that writers will never cease to spread these charming panoramas before our eyes.

II

By V. S. PRITCHETT

AFTER their long silence it is natural to wonder what is going on in the minds of the English novelists. Has another Proust, cunningly insulated from total war, been secretly writing all the time? There was said to be a crisis in the condition of the novel: in the eight paralysed years since Munich has that crisis been surmounted in the course of idleness by unconscious cerebration? Was the war our psycho-analyst upon whom we successfully transferred the novel's neurosis? Or do we take up the pen again to be faced by the old difficulty? What we have meant to convey during the last twenty-five years by the words 'the future of the novel', was our doubt whether the novel had any future at all; a doubt that first arose when *Ulysses* looked like the novel to end all novels, when the first long narrative films succeeded and the monopoly of the novel came to an end; but above all when our most talented novelists retired into the private gardens of their sensibility and left the world outside to their inferiors. Since *Sons and Lovers* and *A Passage to India*, have there been any English novels of the highest rank? A quarter of a century has passed since these two books were written.

It is doubtful whether a novelist is the best investigator of these questions. For him 'the novel' is the novels he has not written; and a guess at the future of the novel will mean for him, the novels he thinks someone else ought to write: *he* intends otherwise. The views of a novelist are hardly more than the steam rising from a simmering pot. Or more precisely, they are arguments with his own conscience and imagination, clues to his own conflicts. Very well he knows that themes, tendencies, methods cannot be imposed. Very doubtfully may they even be self-imposed; any novel he may write rises

from the contention within. If he asks for a less esoteric sensibility and for a range altogether wider in the novel, it is because he is dissatisfied with himself and is not equipped to be very much more. The novelist is what he is.

Still, certain things are obvious.

Talent abounds; the highest talent. If we take any half dozen distinguished novelists under 50 we must admire their feeling, their brains, their writing, their diverse and original skills. They know how to write. They never exceed their knowledge. They make no gross errors. For them the novel is an art and they practise it with fidelity. How rarely one is bored by the best modern novels; how often, in the past, have 'the great' bored us, how awkwardly distended by errors they have been. If only, we say, we could combine all the skill of the modern novelist in one outstanding imagination, if we could only roll any half dozen of our novelists into one. If only—and there lies the undefined mystery of our dissatisfaction. It may be that these distinguished novelists are much more than distinguished; perhaps they, and all contemporary literature, are hopelessly over-shadowed by the events of the last ten years. Life may not only have afflicted the creative with its excesses; life may have dulled the ear of criticism also.

If this is not so we can fall back upon the now hackneyed explanations of the lack of 'great novels'; the breakdown of our civilisation; the enfeeblement of upper middle class culture; the fact that two wars have robbed two generations of their maturity; the fact that life has behaved exorbitantly. Every writer (I believe Mr. Desmond MacCarthy once said), has to decide the amount of life he will live: it is possible for writers to live too much; and, in one sense, the compressed concentration on skill, intelligence and sensibility suggests the unmanageable pressure of public life upon the writer's mind which, to some extent, must always run counter to the open direction of the world. Our half dozen writers stand on the dwindling ground of private life. There is also a not unimportant mechanical consideration. An uncontrollable amount of visual and oral experience is despatched by screen and radio directly to the audience without ceremony, experience which was once the monopoly of the novelist; and he finds himself in a position similar to the painters' when photography was invented. Here the dilemma of the novelist is painful; he is on the flood tide of a popular movement, a class revolution which offers new subjects and even new language; one which may conceivably heal the split in our culture. But he finds that the cinema and the radio sweep away his advantage the moment he attains it. This is an age of the senses, not of the mind; an age made for the reporter not for the imagination. The novelist is also bound to reflect in dismay that the modern novel is only 200 years old. It is the youngest literary

form, far younger, for example, than the drama. The novel was born with modern capitalism, it is saturated with individualism and liberal culture; it is characteristically middle class. Is the novel tied to the fate of capitalism and the liberal view of life? Is the novel condemned quietly to become an anomaly in the socialist climate where freedom, individualism, liberal thought and the preoccupation with individual fate are despised, discouraged or, worse still, are painlessly forgotten? When we think of the future of the novel, we are enquiring whether it is the form which will continue to attract the best creative minds; and it may be that the intellectual atmosphere of the collective state will be kinder to other forms of writing. Under socialism, the sociable art may wane; just as, since the flowering of sociability, epics like *Paradise Lost*, compendious narratives like *The Canterbury Tales* and sagas like *Beowulf*, are no longer written. Official myths may come to mean more to us than private histories, and this condition—as Greek literature shows us—is above all congenial to the drama. It may very well be that 'official' art—in this sense—will be superior to the private or unofficial art of the novelist, and already the cinema has shown the capacity—crude though it is—to create myths and 'heroes of our time'—a capacity which the novel has lost. When we say there are too many novels we mean that so many different views of life become in the end gratuitous and self-destructive; and we would like to return to a form of art which, working under more stimulating restrictions, would speak with the single voice of a classical authority.

Still, though we allow our pessimism to make this kind of bed, we novelists are not obliged to lie on it. After all the novel *is* a young form and its strength lies in its adaptability. Private life dwindles: for long, ever since D. H. Lawrence, indeed ever since Wells's *The New Machiavelli*, the interest in character for its own sake has gone. Lives, states of mind, states of soul, collective feeling have replaced the concern with the friction of character in its own circle. Sensibility itself has dissolved character of the traditional kind. The people in Miss Compton Burnett's novels move like the featureless hierophants of some tortuous ceremony. The chief character is no longer the hero, the heroine or the villain but, in a large number of novels, is really an impersonal shadow, a presence that we may call 'the contemporary situation'. Without knowing it, often by responding with his private sensibility only, the novelist has slipped into the role of unofficial historian. He has become the historian of the crisis in civilization, whether he writes politically (as Koestler has done), as a religious man like Graham Greene or with the obliquity of those dispossessed poets, Henry Green and Miss Elizabeth Bowen. This strange new personage has taken possession of the novel as a mist takes possession of the streets and all who breathe it are transformed and, I think, are

also diminished. When we regret that there are no 'great characters' in the modern novel, people like Squire Western, Lovelace, Micawber, Sir Willoughby Patterne or Lord Jim, the reply must be that 'the contemporary situation' has brought them all to a single level.

In making this judgment, we must record the losses of the novel, but we need not go deeply into them. From the point of life, range has been lost; from the point of religion or ethics, spiritual and moral conflict have been lost—we analyse and endure, we do not choose and act—from the point of view of morals or politics, purpose has been lost. We sum up the case against ourselves by saying that the novel has become a diversified autobiography. The 'I' whether he is the reporter, the camera man, the sensibility, the split self of our time, dominates these books. The 'they' of the Victorians—even the 'they' of Wells, Bennett, Conrad and the Lawrence of the mining stories, has receded. Nor need we go far into the gains: the elision of false scenery, explanatory essays, useless sub plots, tendentious and literary dialogue, and the great gain in narrative and psychological alacrity. Loss of substance, gain of means, must still (I think) be the general judgment on the condition of the contemporary novel. The war-time novels have followed Hemingway-ese—the false tough or fake poker-faced—to the point of self parody. They roneo Isherwood also.

The heart of the problem for the modern novelist is that he has had a glut of new means, new manners, new styles; he has been poor in material or passive in his use of it. He looks no subject full in the face and he has accordingly been distracted by the outskirts of it. To his enormous credit the modern English novelist—writers like Isherwood, Elizabeth Bowen and Graham Greene—have conserved the human fragments in an iron age when human lives, what I feel and you feel, are considered to be shameful. Human beings are simply archaic, ivy-covered ruins, preserved by the connoisseur, and they stand out oddly in the new world of the masses. They are seen in a twilight.

And yet, under the new dispensation, is it true? *Are* human beings in fact so isolated, so free of responsibility, so passive before fate? Is their environment merely the dwindling ground they stand on? Obviously not. Before the war the young novelist's stock remedy was Marxism and social realism. We were due for a working class novel, a political novel, a novel reconstituted by renewed contact with society. It must be said that Marxism has inspired no novels of the first class—at a guess, I would say, Marxism is more likely to inspire drama—nor have there even been any English novels about social justice or economic conditions, or even novels of plain reporting, which arouse much interest. The decadent bourgeois formalist with his passion for psychology has had all the talent. Realism—

ideological and literary—has been hardly more than pedestrian. I take it that Marxist theory was too black and white for the English scene. Marxism and social realism have certainly produced no novels of the first order in Russian either; and, to be just, one is not sure whether this is due to the lack of amenity and excess of dynamic in the doctrine or a lack of freedom and security in which to consider it. The valuable work of Marxism has been in literary criticism where it has traced literature back to one of its sources in social life; and perhaps, if Marxism could be disentangled from the miserable manœuvres of party politics, and be prevented from the cheerless habit of hanging itself in the loops of the party line it might inspire the novelist. But one must doubt whether straight doctrine of any kind ever moved the imagination, which indeed thrives rather on mixtures. *Paradise Lost* was not written by a straight Cromwellian Puritan. The real political subject of the last fifteen years has not been the clash of beliefs, but the vacillations and disillusions accompanying the wish to believe.

Another remedy offered to the novelist was the return to the Christian tradition, the revival of the frame of original sin, the beauties of irrationalism; or a return to "values", though the conditions which produced them, the condition of stability above all, are lacking. And it must be said that the brilliant school of Catholic pessimists and converts has brought new material to the novel. The soul—one of the repressed subjects of a rational period—has the attraction of the repressed. Original sin has replaced sex as the exquisitely forbidden fruit; and the pleasure of showing how good are the souls of bad men has been exploited with brilliance. In their badness lies the soil of faith: a bad Catholic is better than a good non-Catholic. The Catholic novelist has the great advantage of writing against the current of his time.

But against them must be put the fact that the Catholics are all converts: they write with Protestant zeal and the Calvinist zest for damnation. Like the Marxists, they are totalitarians and totalitarians do not value individual human life. Not for long. Never when we come to the precise test. Like the Marxists, like the sceptics of our generation, they are specialists. There is no conflict. There is the medicinal application of doctrine to life. The result is that although the religious approach has added new material to the novel, new material that is handled with all the advantage of the long, flexible western tradition of Catholic culture, it is still specialized. The range is still narrow. Life has gone into hospital: the smell of ether, the smell of the surgery, the unpitying point of the surgeon's knife, are suggested by these brilliant misanthropists, who would persuade us that we all urgently need an operation.

In their general terms, these two movements, the religious and the

political, have done a service to the novelist. They have reawakened his interest in ordinary people, they have interested him in the present melting of classes—in which a new class, the upper-working or lower middle-class—are coming to power, as interestingly as Balzac's manufacturers—they are restoring the sense of environment. But they touch only the fringe of their two subjects, the side to which their doctrine exclusively directs them. Money and religion: yes, those are the two repressed subjects in the modern novel upon which furtively we open the door, two matters so closely entwined in human life that in observing the lives of ordinary people we can never escape them. Not only that: their aspect changes in every generation, as certainly as the fashion of love. How far we have moved, under the still continued influence of the Romantic movement, from the eighteenth century's preoccupation with self-interest, so despised by the sensibility, and yet ubiquitous. So persistent that who can doubt in a vulgar society such as ours, a society of the common people, that it has the interest of a major passion. There exists at present a kind of mystique of the plain, the ordinary, of all that we mean by the sound, human feeling of 'the people'; it is dangerous and insensitive to fail to observe the other side of this mystique. The movement dominated by the word 'people' has a strong Puritan derivation: the inseparable companion, the unholy whisper at its elbow, is the picaro or rogue.

The failure to write about money, in our generation, has its roots, I believe, in the reaction against the Protestant outlook on life, for Protestantism is not totalitarian. Its vitality has lain in its readiness to break up into new forms; and, in England, its spirit has, paradoxically, done much to create 'the people' movement. Condemned by its intimate association with individualism and capitalism, its hatred of the medieval outlook, its repugnance to anonymity, the Protestant attitude has enormously in its favour the belief in the necessity of virtue and good conduct. There is no salvation through sin. There is salvation only in virtue and restraint. The Protestant lives on earth. This religious attitude is now profoundly part of English character; and in ignoring the consequences of it, the novelist ignores important elements in psychology, for religion intones the fundamental human responses. One example may be taken from a Victorian novel, simply to show what the modern novelist has totally neglected: I mean the quite common wish to be good. In psychological terms one would say that the novelist has ostracised the super-ego. The example comes from *Felix Holt* and George Eliot was the novelist of the super-ego above all. Here one sees the mischievous and agreeable Esther Lyon sitting beside the harsh and doctrinaire young Radical at one of his meetings—meetings so topical and disturbing to mid-Victorians, so boring, it must be confessed, to us—

and, at the sight of his handsome face, she is perturbed, not by the so improbably direct sexual desires our contemporaries immediately imagine; but by the longing 'to be better'. We need not suppose that longing takes this precise form nowadays when a nice girl sits next to a handsome one-track communist, or any other young man with an overmastering idea in his head, but the idea of self-elevation is a permanently recurring episode in love, and is fertile in social consequences. In our own time, so far have we removed from the close observation of environment, we are inclined to take too primitive a view of human conduct and society. The truth is that primitive and the civilised have settled down to living side by side.

I am not suggesting a crop of pious novels. I am suggesting that what in its broadest sense can be called the Protestant environment, has been neglected by the satirical and the serious. For the novelist, the mad religions are as fruitful as the serious ones. I am suggesting a world with which the novelist can do as he likes. A second suggestion grows out of this: it has already stimulated some of the work of Rex Warner, though he has not infused his subjects with the juice of human life. There might well be a return to the unromantic, unpicturesque rendering of the great characters who are really great moral types: to the hypocrite, the miser, the envious man, the tyrant, the sycophant, the sadist, the virtuous man, the lazy man. Ben Jonson, Bunyan, Molière and (half-way towards ourselves) Balzac show the way. Above all, the moralized figures of the Russian novel, characters like Prince Myshkin, the superb Iudushka of *The Golovlyov Family*, or the sublime Oblomov. The novelist who is imbued with the idea of the virtue and imagination of 'the people', ought to seek to create myths which the cinema has—so crudely—already succeeded in creating, without benefit of moral reflection; in these moral types, whom all recognize, upon whom all brood, he might find matter which is not repugnant to the intellect and which is delightful to the general imagination. They are the necessary demi-gods, the humanized ideas, which a new humanism will have to create if it is to survive aesthetically. Our world is not likely to be satisfied for much longer with the picaresque novel, which has become popular in the present period of chaos. If our world survives at all, the craving for these moral figures, these moralities, will impose itself, I believe, upon the novelist. The experience of war whatever else it is on the surface, has deposited in millions of men deprived of any other intellectual resource, a simple rudimentary moral interest in the types among whom they have lived. For man is sustained by the sight of his fellows and, in these years, has often been sustained by nothing else.

III

By ARTHUR KOESTLER

1

NOVELS date more than drama and poetry. The reason for this is the novel's pseudo-objectivity. The characters on the stage speak for themselves; the poet, whose method is direct and frankly subjective, speaks for himself; but in the novel the author speaks for his characters and pretends to give an objective account of their thoughts, feelings and actions. This pretension is, of course, pure swindle. For the narrative reflects not only the author's personal philosophy, idiosyncrasies and style (that, in itself, would be all right); but also smuggles in, under the label of objectivity, the whole baggage of the prejudices and conventions of his time. As the narrator, *ex hypothesi*, is omniscient, ubiquitous and non-existent as a person, it is the period itself which speaks through him. The novel's period-character is implicit and mainly unconscious, therefore all the more revealing.

2

Elizabeth Bowen said somewhere, that the object of the novel is the non-poetic statement of a poetic truth. As a recent convert to semantics, I began to doubt whether I knew what a poetic truth is, though I always thought I did. I imagined Professor Ogden taking the class:

'In current usage we call a scientific truth a statement of the type that the attraction of a heavy body decreases in inverse ratio to the square of the distance. Now, Bowen, will you give us an example of what you call a statement of "poetic" truth?'—'The wine-dark sea, I suppose.'—'Is that a *statement*, Bowen? And how, by expressing it in non-poetical form, is it supposed to become a novel?'

Still, I side with Miss Bowen, but her formula needs elucidation. As a next step I suggest this phrase of Gerhart Hauptman's: 'Poetry is the distant echo of the primitive word behind the veil of words.' It seems to me that the action of the novel is always the distant echo of some primitive action behind the veil of the period's costumes and conventions. The word 'primitive' is used here in the sense of the archaic and perendial, the Jungian archetype. Archetypes are ever-repeated typical experiences rooted in the human condition; inherited, built-in patterns of instinct-conflicts; the psychic residue of the 'suffering and delight that has happened countless times in our ancestral history, and on the average follows ever the same course.' The statement of a poetic truth thus becomes the statement of a

specific experience, conflict or situation under its generic aspect, *sub specie aeternitatis.*

The great significant works in the history of fiction are variations and combinations of a limited number of archetypal leitmotives, which first occur in mythology and are re-stated on the specific level of the period. Their listing would be a gratifying task for a research thesis. Here is one example: the type of story based on the archetypal figure of the 'idiot', the inspired fool. Its heroes are ever-new incarnations of the ideas of charity and innocence. They appear to their environment as naïve, foolish, even mentally deficient—not because they lack intelligence, but because their system of values differs from the conventional values of their surroundings. Their simplicity moves on a higher plane than the craftiness of their time; so that the clever ones, when they look down at them, have to lift their faces upward. Equally typical is the narrator's attitude to his hero: a tender ridicule, a sigh of regret for his own lack of courage to take his hero quite seriously, for alas, one has to keep one's feet on the earth. Examples of this chain are: the *Perceval legend*; the *Irish Lay of the Great Fool*; the Welsh and Germanic variations of it; *Don Quichote*; *Ulenspiegel*; numerous variations of the *enfant terrible* and the gentle-savage-goes-to-town themes; Mascreel's *The Sun*; Shaw's *Black Girl in Search of God*; Dostoevski's *Idiot*; Thornton Wilder's *Heaven is my Destination*; Camus' *L'Étranger* (with a new twist); and so on. Other frequently recurring archetypes are: conflict between two loyalties (Penelope *v.* Troyan war, Katinka or the Five Year Plan); between instinct and convention (Bovary, Karenina); sensitive hero and callous world (all public school novels and most autobiographies); shock and conversion (a Russian speciality but also a favourite motif with E. M. Forster); the conquest of fear (from Hercules to Hemingway) and of the flesh (from Buddha to Huxley). There are perhaps a dozen or so more—but not much more. The themes of fictions are limited; only their variations are inexhaustible.

Novels which are not fed from archetypal sources are shallow or phoney. They are like a house with elaborate plumbing, bathrooms, cold- and hot-water taps, which the builder forgot to connect with the main.

3

We may thus distinguish in the novel a constant and a variable factor. The constants are the archetypes, the predicaments inherent in the human condition. The variable factor is the cultural pattern of the period and its conscious and unconscious techniques of projection.

As far as the first factor is concerned, we need not worry about the novel's future. Novelists will not run out of themes as long as mankind has not reached a state of nirvanic perfection and diffused its

emotions in social enthropy. Moreover, their themes will always remain new, for archetypes enjoy eternal youth like their early incarnations, the Olympians.

As to the variable factor, my prediction is that the fiction of the period between the second and the third world wars will be dominated by a trend towards three Rs: Realism, Rhythm, Relevance.

By *Realism*, I mean neither the naturalism of Zola, nor the philosophy of Babbit, the diplomacy of M. Vishinski or the pompiers of the Grand Salon. Realism in fiction is the striving to approach the reality of the human condition with as open a mind, and with as much disregard for convention, prejudice and habit as one's capacities permit. It means discarding traditions which screen vital bands in the human spectrum and taking in new extensions of the visible range offered by psychology, the social sciences, the evolution of language. The opposite of this realism is not idealism but smugness and the ambition to be recommended by the Book Society. Realism requires courage and integrity. But alas, these manly virtues are not enough; the less spectacular and more difficult task in realism is to assimilate the new extensions of the spectrum—and to assimilate them so completely that no residue of learnedness, no label of the scientific department-store should remain. To-day psychoanalytical novels still remind one of the interior decoration of the *nouveau riche*.

Some critics deny the necessity for the artist of taking in extensions of the spectrum. They wallow in statements like 'Stendhal knew all that before Freud' and 'Tolstoi wouldn't have gained much by reading Marx.' One might as well say that it makes no difference to the artist whether he knows that the earth is a planet or believes that it is a disc supported by Atlas, and the centre of the world. If we analyse our emotions while reading the classics, even such recent ones as Tolstoi and Stendhal, we will discover that part of our enjoyment is provided by a secretly patronizing attitude, as when listening to the talk of precocious children—how clever of them to know that at their age. We don't judge them at their face value, but at their period value.

And so back to the difficulty of assimilating new aspects of reality. The approach to realism in the history of fiction is gradual. In the average Victorian novel, the whole range of sex was represented by a gap in the spectrum. To-day, a number of its aspects are admitted; but it would be naïve to believe that these suffice to cover even the most recurrent thoughts and emotions of real people. The menstrual cycle plays an outstanding part in every woman's life. To-day, a writer may take his courage into both hands and allude to it; yet even to-day he won't be able to do it with grace and ease. The passage will

hit the reader in the eye, and the author will feel that he is handling a hammer. As for the full implications of Freud, fiction won't be able to digest them for perhaps another half century. Art isn't ripe yet to represent the most fundamental act of reality, procreation; even a Hemingway fails, when he tries it. In the famous sleeping-bag scenes, the narrator's words chase after emotion with as much chance of catching it as greyhounds an electric Rabbit.

Relevance is a quality in fiction which connects it with the dynamic currents, the essential pattern, of the period. In our period, these currents have become tidal waves which spare no private islands. It is no longer a question whether ivory towers are desirable; the point is that they have become physically impossible. One could easily ignore the Boer War and the Dreyfus affair; one cannot escape the implications of the atom bomb. As public concerns invade an ever-increasing sector of the space inside the individual's skull, even his private and intimate interests become saturated with relevance. The fiction of the next few decades will be situated in a strong magnetic field which imposes its structural pattern on the raw material like on a heap of iron filings. This is true even on the deliberately escapist type of fiction. George Orwell has recently analysed the development of the crime story from *Raffles* to *Miss Blandish*, and similar conclusions could be reached by comparing the progress of 'Romance' from the Bibliothèque Rose to the American magazine story; or the evolution of humour from *Punch* to the *New Yorker*.

Finally, *Rhythm*. The rhythm of a narrative is a measure of its artistic economy; and economy is not brevity, but implicitness. Implicitness is a technique which forces the reader to work out for himself what is implied. Language itself is never completely explicit —words are mere stepping-stones for thoughts. When listening to speech, we have continuously to establish connections between the words, otherwise, as when our attention flags, they become a mere medley of sounds. Economy in art thus has its roots in the basic mechanism of communicating thought-contents by acoustic or optic signs and is a purposeful development of it. The reader has to fill in the gaps by drawing his own conclusions and projecting his own emotions; economy compels the consumer to re-live the producer's creative effort. The artist rules his subjects by turning them into accomplices.

Civilization accelerates the rhythm of art, not because cars run faster but because thoughts run faster. Newspapers, radio, mass-produced books, have beaten and smoothed our associative pathways, and established a network of fast-running association trains where the Victorian reader's imagination ambled in a mail-coach. This does

not mean that the rhythm of the narrative must necessarily become hectic and jumpy as Dos Passos' camera eye, or syncopated as a Hemingway dialogue. Nor should the narrator run after the train like the nimble-witted Ulysses. His function is rather that of the pointsman's at the switchbox.

4

If we accept the three Rs as a tentative scale of measurement for the dominant trends in fiction, we are forced to conclude that the English novel is falling behind the French and American. The French are ahead of us in Realism and Relevance; the Americans, in Realism and Rhythm. The reasons cannot be analysed here. One of them is that to be a novelist has come to be regarded too much of a respectable profession in England—almost like being a solicitor or public trustee. When art ceases to scandalize, it becomes suspect of having lost its daring.

IV

By L. P. HARTLEY

SINCE fiction is of all forms of art the most representational, the future of the novel is largely bound up with the future of society, which is its subject-matter; and what form society will take, no one knows. But if our daily life becomes too dull or too disagreeable or too organized or too disorganized for the public to want to read about it, fiction, like painting, may become less representational and take refuge in symbolism and mysticism. Indeed, there are signs that this is already happening. To imitate the surface of life, as Trollope did, without trying to interpret it, no longer satisfies serious modern novelists.

No one can ignore the influence of Kafka on the fiction of to-day. Perhaps it is the strongest single influence there is. D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce and Virginia Woolf were all innovators. But they did not so much enlarge the scope of fiction as cultivate intensively certain areas of it; their contributions were of manner and method and point of view. Neither Lawrence nor Virginia Woolf was much interested in characterization; his biologico-mystical approach reduced personality to a few types, the complex intellectual living ineffectively from the higher centres, the primitive peasant comfortably nourished by the lower; while her pointillist impressionism dissolved personality in a cloud of coloured motes and even disintegrated consecutive thought. As to Joyce, he was an experimentalist in fictional forms for whom sound

counted so much that he tired of meaning and ultimately used it as an adjunct to sound and became unintelligible except to initiates. However, all three writers carried their theory and practice to a point beyond which it was impossible to go, leaving no room for imitators. Most people would agree that Joyce and Lawrence went too far, reaching a dead end and incurring the nemesis of a *reductio ad absurdum*; Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* shows that for her the road was still open, though to what destination it was leading must remain her secret.

But Kafka uncovered new layers of consciousness, investing our waking thoughts with the compulsions and frustrations of nightmare, yet without falsifying them; for one does not have to dig far below the surface to find the anxiety or the sense of guilt which is the ruling factor in many people's lives—the anxiety which underlies *The Castle*; the sense of guilt which haunts the bewildered hero of *The Trial*. Fiction, even if it does not actually follow the recent example of Mr. Nigel Balchin and take its subject matter from psycho-analysis, may find itself exploring, as Miss Anna Kavan does, mental states that, a short time ago, would have been considered prohibitively neurotic and morbid. For though we hear a lot about the perfectly integrated personality, as something to aim at, that personality, it is increasingly realized, is almost as rare as the phœnix; and to represent a human being as suffering from some form of nervous instability may be, on the whole, less misleading than to represent him or her without one. Judged in the light of two world wars, Edgar Allan Poe's vision of the complete human consciousness may well seem nearer to the truth than Jane Austen's.

But one does not have to be unduly philistine or robust to suspect that the appeal of novels having their centre in the psychoanalyst's consulting-room, would be, to say the least, limited. To me, at any rate, novels are more interesting when the authors allow themselves a large measure of free-will. Without free-will one cannot have the moral conflict which was the life and soul of the great Victorian novels and which is still to be found in such a novelist as M. Mauriac. How much free-will did Kafka allow his tormented heroes? Very little, I think; they are actuated by an inner compulsion. But this compulsion is at least as much mystical as neurotic in origin, or can be explained as such. (Many psychoanalysts of to-day would not be ashamed to call themselves mystics.) Thus we may view *The Castle* as a kind of Pilgrim's Progress, the search for God through appearance after appearance which deludes the seeker; and *The Trial* as symbolizing the sense of guilt to which any Christian is liable until he is assured of absolution.

Several much-discussed recent novels, *The Razor's Edge*, *Time Must Have a Stop* and *Brideshead Revisited* show their authors searching, in

different directions, for the same thing: a state of mind, attainable on earth, in which the individual finds appeasement by communion with a happiness or goodness outside and greater than himself. In all three, this aim was to be arrived at by self-denial rather than self-expression, by drawing away from the world, rather than mixing with it. Don Quixote, on the other hand, maintained his spiritual well-being (which was almost absolute, for he seldom thought himself in the wrong) by obeying that categorical imperative, the rule of Knighthood, which involved certain abstentions but, in the main, meant doing something, not refraining from doing it.

Perhaps the greatest of all novels, in spite of its omission, or serious neglect of, such large aspects of human life as sex and tragedy, Don Quixote is an allegory. One might risk a generalization that fiction written in or after very troublous times (Cervantes served a long sentence in a Turkish prison), tends to be allegorical; actuality has become distasteful, as it may have been to Shakespeare when he wrote *The Tempest*. So we may be in for an era of symbolical novels of the type of Mr. Rex Warner's haunting story, *The Aerodrome*, or at any rate, of novels that look at reality from an angle that is not the ordinary man's.

On the other hand, the *Iliad* was written about times as dangerous and uncomfortable as those we have been living through, and there every action bears its face value, or if it has a secondary purpose, it is to illustrate character, not to prefigure a universal truth, still less to suggest an ironical interpretation of life. But Homer was a pagan and therefore able to accept life; we, if not Christians, have been brought up in the Christian tradition, and so we pine for what is not, find life morally and aesthetically unsatisfying, and feel we must remould it nearer to our heart's desire.

There are other ways open to the novelist of escaping from actuality besides symbolism or mysticism. There is the historical novel, which certainly has not been losing popularity during the last few decades; perhaps we shall see a rebirth of the convention, generally observed by Shakespeare, that serious fiction can only concern itself with past happenings. Again there is the detective story and its affiliations, which can draw on an apparently inexhaustible reservoir of interest—murder and crime in general—and which admit a good deal of characterization as well. Perhaps every story will be a murder story, even if the murder is a mere formality, like the preliminary handshake in a boxing-match. For if the daily newspapers prove anything, it is that the public is more than half in love with death—not 'easeful death', but violent, sudden death, not death the outcome of a train of tragic circumstances, but death as it seizes blindly upon mothers, children and young girls: the mere fact of death. Our age grows ever more avid of sensation; death is the most sensational thought the

mind can entertain, and one must not overlook its attraction in considering the future of the novel.

I do not foresee a quick revival of the comic spirit. Comedy needs a background of peace, and even prosperity, before its convention can be accepted; the comedy we have now is bitter and dangerous, like a seemingly playful animal that suddenly bites your hand. And satire, how can satire flourish in a world that has so caricatured itself, so paraded and proclaimed all its most ignoble features, that there is nothing left to satirize?

Romance is a traditional alternative to realism; but I fancy that romance, as, for instance, Conrad understood it, is too mild a medicine for a war-sick world. Romance is an indulgence for the healthy-minded, a gentle intoxicant, like wine; we seem to need something more drastic, a more violent change of mental climate, knock-out dope that will stun the consciousness, not merely lull it.

Characterization? I suppose most people would say that a novel lives by its characterization more than by the possession of any other single quality. A novel may be badly written, badly constructed, devoid of ideas, but if the characters are life-like, and a little more than that, it will pull through. But they must be outstanding; and here again the spirit of the age, which is all for equality, is against outstanding characters in life or in fiction. The war has hardly produced a single figure at whose name the imagination kindles, nor has war-time fiction. I resent these qualities in which you excel me; I even resent those qualities in which you differ from me. I want you to be like me, so that if there is anything odd about me it shan't be noticed. This is no state of mind in which to create the hero, or the villain, of a novel. But in saying that, we lay our finger on another difficulty that confronts the novelist of the future. We have grown more and more distrustful of the hero-villain antithesis; we feel that the terms are meaningless, abstractions that have no counterpart in reality. Who is a hero and who is a villain? Indeed, many people's sympathies are drawn to the latter; I have seen Iago played as the hero of *Othello*, if by hero we mean someone to whom our sympathies instinctively go out; and only the other day a friend told me he found Milly Theale and Maggie Verver, in whom Henry James may have embodied his idea of virtue, less alluring than Kate Croy or Charlotte Stant, the two adventuresses who preyed on them.

But I don't think this means that the novelist of the future will set out to glorify wickedness. Our impulse is rather to pull down the good than to exalt the bad, to reduce character to a sameness, a flat level of mediocrity in whose presence we need not feel ashamed of our own littleness. It is not the Victorians we object to, but their eminence; we needs must love the middling when we see it, because then we feel safe, safe from the challenge of the remarkable or the

distinguished. We like to see a Prime Minister wearing a boiler suit and smoking a cigar, because the boiler suit is a lowest common denominator and the cigar shows that he has the same weaknesses as we, and cannot do without tobacco.

So it seems possible that the heroes of the future will not be men of the type of Ulysses or Hamlet, but men hardly, if at all, more exceptional than ourselves, men who do not move us to envy or emulation, men whom we can identify with ourselves, not men with whom we wish to be identified. We want to escape, but into something larger and more impersonal than the daydream of an improved or idealized self.

Still, society may be stabilized and conditions return, like those of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, interesting enough to be written about for themselves. Fielding and Trollope found the material around them sufficient; they did not have to create a new world out of unsatisfied emotional longings. In our own day, writers as dissimilar as Miss Elizabeth Bowen and Mr. Joyce Cary, do accept the challenge of actuality. Mr. Cary has unshakable confidence in life, life now, and its ability to give any man what he asks of it. Even his novel about delinquent children—a sufficiently depressing theme—did not leave one feeling depressed; for him there is always glory round the corner. Miss Bowen's confidence is in art. The life she portrays is as full of rents and fissures as a bombed-out building, and smells of decay, but she portrays it unflinchingly, and with only a sidelong glance at some 'mysterious Kôr' created by the spirit in the image of its dreams.

Fiction is a mixed art in which the aesthetic impulse is not always the most active one. To write a good novel, one need not be a great artist: Balzac was not, nor was Dickens. Moral indignation would hardly make a man paint a good picture, but it might easily make him write a good novel. Indeed, one might say that the novels, even the great novels, which have been written to satisfy an aesthetic impulse, are in the minority. In fiction, art is often content to co-operate with some other, less elusive activity of the human spirit. What partner it will choose, what conditions it will find stimulating, are its own affair, and not to be laid down by logic. A well-known writer begins one of his stories with this complaint:

> The chief difficulty under which the creative artist, more especially the novelist, labours, is this: that the violent agitation from end to end, and from top to bottom, of the background against which his figures are placed, renders the movements of these figures meaningless and unimportant. As well try to concentrate upon a game of chess in an earthquake!

So Sir Osbert Sitwell sums up the novelist's predicament; and his diagnosis may be as true of the future as it is now and as it was in

1941. But having made it, having handicapped, even disqualified his own art in advance, he proceeded to write one of his best short stories, *Death of a God*—showing that fiction, like other kinds of art, is apt to defy conjecture and to confound the prophets.

V

By WALTER ALLEN

FICTION has existed for thousands of years: its future would therefore seem secure. But that of the novel, the main vehicle of fiction in our time and scarcely two hundred and fifty years old, is less certain. Indeed, in the past twenty years, its death has been prophesied many times. There was the competition, we were told, of the film and the radio; but the novel is still the chief source of the film script, and potting Victorian and Edwardian novels for Sunday evening broadcasts has become a minor literary industry. The radio story-teller who would recapture the oral tradition of fiction has yet to come into existence, and there are no signs of his immediate nativity. Besides, surprisingly enough, people are not satisfied simply by seeing and hearing. They still want to read.

But will they go on wanting to read novels? In the thirties, an austere period, hungry for actuality and suspicious of everything that was not fact, it was argued that the novel would disappear and its place be taken by the autobiography and the documentary narrative. I find an eminent representative of the thirties writing in 1938: 'After the twenties, the political age: authors, and poets, die away among undergraduates. The October and Labour Club for them, and Gollancz Books, and Hunger Marches: art-activities only for the Conservatives, that is, for the cloddish and the non-political; and what activities there are in the Universities, a bit Blundenesque and reactionary.' So the characteristic prose of the thirties, if the above description of it is taken as accurate, were works of autobiography like *A Georgian Boyhood, Lions and Shadows* and *East End My Cradle*, works of reportage like *Homage to Catalonia* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*, and the various collections of Mass-Observation reports. The novel was under a cloud, suspected of being frivolous unless it exposed the Means Test or demanded arms for Spain. The free play of imagination was *verboten*. The touchstone of a novelist's integrity was fidelity to his own immediate experience. More and more the setting of the novel became as contemporaneous as possible, so that the type-novel of the thirties, its ideal, is Malraux' *Days of Hope*. The novel aspired to the condition of the Mass-Observation report. Had the practice

been insisted upon as dogma, then Defoe and Tolstoy would have been heretics, branded as flagrant and unashamed liars since the one had never been wrecked on a desert island and yet wrote as if he had and the other was unborn when Napoleon invaded Russia. Nevertheless, since the *sine qua non* of the thirties novel was fidelity to personal experience, those theorists were logical who predicted the death of the novel and the triumph in its stead of autobiography and reportage.

But literary periods, however convenient they may be for critics, are not solid blocks of time in which authors lie congealed like fish in ice. One definition of a period is indeed 'the time during which a disease runs its course', and when the disease has run its course, the period can be seen with some objectivity. How apt to-day seem Virginia Woolf's words on the work of Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy, when applied to the novels of social realism of the thirties: 'What odd books they are! Sometimes I wonder if we are right to call them books at all. For they leave one with so strange a feeling of incompleteness and dissatisfaction. In order to complete them it seems necessary to do something—to join a society, or, more desperately, to write a cheque'. Or perhaps march in a procession.

It isn't true, of course, of all the fiction of the thirties. If it were, the theorists would have been right and the novel by now be dead. While politically conscious writers solemnly discussed socialist realism and racked their brains in an endeavour to equate Balzac the great realist, whom Marx himself had blessed, with Balzac the royalist reactionary, other novelists had not forgotten the novelist's fundamental task, which, put with excessive simplicity, is to be a convincing liar, to describe events that took place before his birth or situations and emotions that he has not himself experienced, in other words, to tell a story and force the reader to accept it as true for at any rate the time during which it is being read. Mrs. Woolf ends her essay *Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown*, from which I have quoted, with 'one final and surpassingly rash prediction—we are trembling on the verge of one of the great ages of English literature'. The past twenty years have not been a great age, but it is at least interesting to note the novelists on whose verge we were trembling in 1924. They include L. H. Myers, Robert Graves, I. Compton-Burnett, Elizabeth Bowen, Rosamond Lehmann, Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, Anthony Powell, Osbert Sitwell, William Plomer, James Hanley, Christopher Isherwood, Henry Green, George Orwell, Joyce Cary, John Collier, Rex Warner, Frank Tilsley and F. L. Green. All these are very different writers, writers of varying stature; but they are all novelists who have added uniquely to the traditions of English fiction because all have been obsessed by the desire without which the most accomplished writer is nothing as a novelist, the desire to tell a story, to describe what happens to human beings in certain situations. During the past twenty years it

has been they—and a few others—who have kept the novel alive in England.

The names, it may be noted, cut across all literary fashions, make hay of all the slick generalizations on literary trends and periods of critics who assess 'contemporary significance'. L. H. Myers, for instance, was neglected by critics during his lifetime; possibly because attention to his work would have broken the neat pattern of significance. He was, from the critics' point of view, too eccentric. Nor has anyone yet written at length on Joyce Cary, in many respects the most remarkable living English novelist. Myers and Cary will serve to illustrate my thesis, though others from the list would do equally well. Myers, a mystic and an anarchist, had a vision of the good life, which implies, of course, a vision of the bad life too, which he expressed mainly in terms of the India of Akbar. Doing so, he created his own world, a world as personal to him, as vivid, and as unique as the very different worlds of Graham Greene, for instance, or Henry Green. I take it that the ability to create a world of his own is one sign of the novelist as artist.

Cary is a novelist of different, indeed, of opposed scope. Myers, like Graham Greene and Henry Green, turned everything into himself. Cary has the opposite faculty of seeming to be able to become all things at will. His early novels of West African life, *Aissa Saved* and *The American Visitor*, should be reprinted as soon as paper supplies make it possible: they are gay, witty, tender, warmly sympathetic studies of native life. But it is during the war years that he has reached full stature, in his trilogy *Herself Surprised*, *To be a Pilgrim* and *The Horse's Mouth*—they are related, but suffer scarcely at all if read out of sequence. In these, like Defoe, he is what one is tempted to call the novelist pure and simple. Like Keats watching his sparrow, he loses his own identity and becomes in turn, seemingly at will, a domestic servant of warm heart and easy virtue, an opinionated and crochety old liberal nonconformist solicitor who cannot resist the temptation towards indecent exposure, and an unscrupulous amoral painter of genius. Their stories he tells in the first person, and in every case the sense of identity is complete.

The point of both these instances is that they illustrate the fact that the novel is made up not simply of autobiography and reportage. The novelist is not urged in the first instance either to tell the story of his own life or to describe the facts of existence in the pickle factory in which he once worked. It is probable that every novelist is working out in his art, a highly personal and largely unconscious myth; but it will have no more obvious relation to his ordinary waking life than a dream. He will make use of personal experience as it suits his purpose. What the novelist is doing, overtly and calculatedly, is to show human beings in action, in relation to God, to other human

beings, to society, sometimes to a place. His vehicle is the story, the narrative of fictitious events. To exhibit his human beings with maximum sharpness and clarity he may deal as arbitrarily as he pleases with actuality, with fact, and commit as many improbabilities as he can convincingly get away with, for what we call improbability in real life is not necessarily improbable at all in fiction. His job, at its lowest, is to be a convincing liar, and so long as he convinces within his context, no one will bother about improbability.

This, then, is a plea for the free exercise of imagination and invention on the part of the novelist. The kind of world he imagines, the situations he invents, are his affair. They may be realistic or fantastic, it doesn't matter. He can go back to a narrative as simple as Defoe's or Fielding's, or use a technique as subtle and complex as James's or Joyce's. That, too, doesn't matter, for the only criterion is success. A bad derivative of Joyce or Kafka is just as boring as pseudo-Dickens. But certainly the novelist will find himself less hampered in power of invention, in freedom to create from everything that is within him and outside him, if he does not confuse his function with that of memoirist or the journalist. The novelist is not on oath.

Also, he will do well not to bother too much about contemporary fashions whether in aesthetics or politics, for fashion is the enemy of all art and the artist's main struggle must always be to be himself. Above all, he will remember his reader, and this is true whether his novel is the straightforward naïve narrative or a complex composition. He will remember that, no matter how important his own views on human life and destiny seem to him, we read poetry and fiction as we look at pictures, watch plays and listen to music, primarily to be entertained, to be diverted. Entertainment can range, it need not be pointed out, from having one's ribs tickled to being purged by pity and terror, but unless the reader is entertained, all else fails, and the basis of entertainment in the novel is ultimately the story.

Men have listened to stories for so long that the desire to hear a story is now, if not instinctive, at least ingrained. The principal form of the story in our time is the novel; and the only people who can kill the novel are the novelists themselves. If they continue to go on with their job—and if they are ever in doubt what that is, they can find out by referring to the great novels from Defoe and Fielding to Proust and Joyce—the future of fiction will look after itself. It certainly cannot be guaranteed by drawing up specifications for authors to follow. For regrettable though it may seem to publishers and critics, novels are not written like that.

VI

By OSBERT SITWELL

THE *Future of Fiction*, I suspect, really means the same thing as our old friend, with whom for forty years we have been acquainted, *The Decay of the Novel*. But during my lifetime so far, since I first remember this subject being discussed, the novel has remained almost the one solid fact in a dissolving world. Those discussing its decay have slid downhill with a bump, but the novel is still the novel. Scientific barbarism encroaches like a jungle on every side; the arts in England are more than ever unpopular (vide, on the one hand, the Royal Academy, on the other, the Philistine Renaissance as it was to be observed in the recent rumpus about Picasso and Klee): only the novel, and, especially, the short story, flourish on the dung-heap that men have made of the world. Novelists die, but not the novel. And the reason, I apprehend, is that the novel is essentially not an art form.

Of course it can be made into an art form by any novelist who happens to be an artist. And I, for one, am biased, because I am a writer who, for better or worse, cannot write without making of what he is writing a work of art. . . . It seems to me strange, in this connection, that when dealing with the novel, several distinguished writers have denounced the creation of flat or two-dimensional characters, proclaiming three-dimensional as the only true characters. This view, however, approximates too nearly to the Royal Academy standard for pictures. ('*I've* never seen a man with a nose like that!') The flat character may, in some places, be necessary to a novel, and many writers have found it so, and made use of it as a device. . . . Nor have I seen stated—perhaps because it is so obvious—something that I believe to be true; that the novel as a work of art must be seen first as a visual shape, a bone-form, a container or a skeleton.

No: the novel is not by its very essence an art form, as for instance, must be any poem. It is merely a convenience. And to talk, then, about the Future of the Novel (it will be seen that I am adhering to my own title, rather than that supplied by the Editor) is like talking of the future of the Suit-Case (ex-Portmanteau). It depends on who packs it, on where the traveller is going, and on whether the journey is really necessary.

In fact, the Future of Fiction depends on the future of those who read and write it—and this seems dubious. If, as I incline to think, the final War to End War, comes within seven years, a very limited period of development lies before it and us. Or, on the other hand, we may be entering ant-land, and ants have no time to read novels;

only pamphlets on how one ant may learn to do the work of seven or, better still, of seventy. But, for the purposes of this symposium, we must postulate a long and prosperous stretch of time, in which things can grow, as well as decay. In that epoch, I should foresee an enormous enriching, widening and deepening of fiction, along many new lines, scientific, psycho-analytical, and with a whole world of leisure, in a society freed from the cramping effect of class, where every man and woman is educated enough, and has sufficient leisure, to savour work of the finest order. Even if only a tenth of that goal is attained, fiction will flower. Protean as is the novel, in that same respect the short story exceeds it. In the last two decades, an immense advance in the scope and technique of the short story has been achieved, and in the splintering of life which it represents. (At present, it seems, in the hands of some of the younger writers, to be suffering from what I have heard the French describe as a *Kafkard*: but this will pass.) Moreover, should the future of mankind be short, the short story will yet flourish: for the plain reason that short stories are easier to write in an earthquake than are novels, and easier to read. A background wobble may inspire, in this form, instead of detracting from inspiration.

When I began to write my own first novel—*Before the Bombardment*—one of the most eminent of our literary critics gave me the advice: 'Always keep in mind what Flaubert would have done.' That was certainly the worst counsel it was possible to offer. On no account should a writer ever sit down, and ask himself, when in difficulties, What would Balzac, Flaubert, Tolstoy, etc., have done? These writers should have been absorbed into the novelist before he begins; they should be in his fingers. His mind should be revolutionary. In that way, tradition is created. But the critics would welcome always, a crop of yesterday's best writers: instead, in my younger days, they received Joyce, Lawrence, Gertrude Stein—to name three, only: and, later, Céline and Kafka. All of these enriched the novel. Fortunately for them, however, the bad novels always outnumber the good by some 10,000 to 1. And also, it must be admitted that bad novels are, on occasion, easier to read than good: from which the lesson may be learnt that, just as Time is said to be the fourth dimension, because no object can exist without it, in that same relation does readability stand to the novel. And the reader will understand that in talking of this novel's fourth dimension, I am not confounding lack of obscurity, with readability. . . . Joyce, at his most obscure, is eminently readable.

When we discuss the Future of Fiction, it must be remembered that the novel has a great hold upon the affections of the public. This is, perhaps, due to Man's conceit, and resembles the fascination that a piece of looking-glass exercises over an ape. Man dominates the

novel, and accordingly to him the novel is good. . . . But alas—and this militates against the future development of fiction—the ape has grown hysterical, more hysterical now than inquisitive. He must be shown himself as he wishes to see himself: a noble, but not an intelligent ape. In fiction and the drama, the charwoman has ousted the old Byronic hero as the ideal after which humanity is striving. In a war, the public demands stories of war-fortitude, about bomb-shelters, bombs and over-crowded trains. Yet (see *Letter to My Son*), the artist must be allowed to get his nose away from reality a little: he must have time in which to write, to think, to breathe. He must be allowed for a time to live aloof, and for a few minutes to leave the Communal Ivory Asylum—for the horrors of the world pass belief, and have become delusional—and to pop into an Ivory Tower—but only for a few. Then, the crowd hysteria switches over, as the war ends (a thing that no one ever expects, for to think of an end to war during a modern war is treason), and no one will read of bombs or bomb shelters. The charwoman has to be shifted to new ground. . . . Similarly, patriotic emotion has led the world, for example, to dismiss Céline, who is a very great writer; though he always made clear his views on patriotism long before the war. The fact remains that *Voyage Au Bout de la Nuit* is, in its way, as great as Swift. If one wants charwomen, Madame Henroville—if I rightly remember her name—is incomparable, and the sweep of allegory is overwhelming. Who else can paint such wastes as the Parisian suburbs? What a different world he takes us to, from that whither we are conducted by some of our lesser and greater tits, pecking away in this, our winter, at their suet and wild, wild coconuts.

The Future of Fiction lies, then, I think, in every direction: but it must find freedom. . . . I wrote just now that much depended on where the traveller was going—Wells, for example, to a political meeting or a Scientific Study Group; Aldous Huxley, on a journey with many changes, from Garsington, to a coenobitic conclave in Hollywood. The reporter of events—those mercuries whose names I forget and whose works—*Muscling in on the Fall of Paris*, or *Berlin Tiddlywinks*—I never read but see bought with avidity at railway bookstalls, these should rescue fiction again from the tyranny of unwanted fact. For a great novel must reveal an enormous panorama with a sudden light illuminating for us things we had not seen: it can be an enormous view inside the mind, like Proust's, or outside, like Tolstoy's. It must be the interpretation of a whole world.

★

THE EUROPEAN ARTIST

Paul Valéry

By ANDRÉ GIDE

Translated from the French by Dorothy Bussy

NOTHING could do greater honour to our Provisional Government than the magnificent funeral officially bestowed on Paul Valéry, with a pomp and circumstance worthy of that most eminent representative of the genius of France—Paul Valéry, thanks to whose shining light our country still keeps her supreme rank in the spiritual world, in spite of our historic reverses and our apparent wretchedness. Such recognition is as astonishing as it is remarkable, for Paul Valéry's outstanding value is of the kind that does not appeal to popular favour. That it was indirectly and, as it were, unintentionally, of immense service to France is a fact that could be appreciated only by very few. His activity was unconcerned with public affairs and was exercised in a region set apart, aloof from events, but one where, unknown to ourselves, our destinies are being played for. 'Events bore me,' he used to say. 'Events are the froth of circumstance. It's the sea I'm interested in. It's the sea we fish in; the sea we sail on; the sea we dive into.'

And no one ever dived deeper than he.

. . . . .

From his early youth he was stirred by a secret ambition. I cannot imagine a nobler one. Compared with it, that of Balzac's heroes only raises a smile. But even on the profane and worldly plane that is theirs, Valéry succeeded as well as, and indeed better, than any of them. He knew how honours are won; he knew what they are worth and what they cost in peace of mind. He was willing to pay the price, if only to show others and prove to himself that there was nothing in them out of his reach. What he wanted was the right to despise such things. For his inclination was to despise things in general. There lies his strength. The domination he desired was of a different kind—the domination of the mind itself. Anything else seemed to him derisory. To dominate not the minds of others, but his own; to know its working, to make himself master of that, in order to use it as he chose. It was towards this that his efforts were constantly directed. A queer kind of Narcissus, wishing to dominate Mind by means of Mind. Anything more than that was of no interest to him; not the object itself, no; but the means of obtaining it—when he wished—how he wished; *to be able* to. . . . 'My nature,' he would

say, 'is potential.' It is fortunate for us that Valéry chose to apply his method to literary ends. 'The field of letters,' said he, 'is the one in which I thought it would be easiest to exist.' From henceforward, he considered his most admirable poems, his most accomplished prose in the light of *exercises**—'Q.E.D.'s.' This is how he spoke of his *Jeune Parque*. And I have no doubt that he could have exercised the sovereign method he applied here in any other field and with the same triumphant results. Yes; I can easily imagine Paul Valéry a great statesman, a great diplomat, a financier, a man of science, an engineer or a doctor. And I even wonder whether he might not have been as eminent in architecture, painting or music as he was in poetry; though these, indeed, require special gifts. But Valéry possessed those gifts, too, in almost equal measure.

Like Edgar Allan Poe, he started from this principle—that the artist, be he painter, poet or musician, must take as the ground on which to build, not his own emotion but that which he wishes to excite in his listener, his spectator or his reader. Like the actor Diderot holds up to our admiration in his *Paradoxe sur le Comédien*, his business is not to be moved but to be moving. This was Leonardo da Vinci's and Wagner's procedure. Valéry would not believe in the Romantics' 'Muse,' and made a mock of what is called 'Inspiration.' He would willingly have taken as his motto Flaubert's saying, 'Inspiration? It consists in sitting down to one's writing-table every day at the same time.' To the very end of his life, Valéry rose before dawn and, till other people disturbed him by waking, he worked.

He worked, I suppose, in the same way as Descartes, not precisely at any special task, but at pursuing his thoughts to their last entrenchments. During nearly twenty years, while his companions of early days were striving over productions which he considered of slight importance, Valéry was silently searching. When confronted with any work of value, he would ask himself, 'How was it done?' The made dish appealed to him far less than the recipe. He scorned chance flashes of genius. And in particular, he couldn't endure being taken in. When we were still quite young (we were barely twenty when there began between us that inestimable intercourse which was only to end with his death) he pinned up on his bedroom wall the famous maxim (I have forgotten the Greek), 'Never cease to mistrust.' And, in fact, he treated everything with mistrust—human beings, objects, convictions, professions of faith, faith itself; and above all, words—and we know what latent energy is released by the disintegration of those dangerous atoms.

I remember one evening his reading aloud to me one or other of Maurice Barrès' eloquent speeches; (we were sitting together in a little café in the Boulevard St. Germain, near the Ministry of War,

* Everything I think about art is related to the idea of '*exercise*.'

where, at that time Valéry filled some very insignificant post). With a smile, he raised his voice oratorically, then, diverging from the text, but without changing his tone and as though continuing to read from it, he finally wound up, 'And we see rising before us the spectre of (here a pause) *hideous* facility!' The scorn and horror he felt for all facility lay at the bottom of those inflexible demands he made upon himself—demands which were to carry him so far. In the meantime he *produced nothing.*

His silence began at last to make us uneasy; some of us would speak of it ironically. 'And what about your great Valéry, who made such a brilliant start? He has stopped short at those few early poems of his. Full of promise, no doubt, but now he's turned silent. He'll always be silent. You must admit you rather over-rated him. He has petered out already . . .' He began to be taken for a 'would-be' and already almost for a 'might-have-been'.

His talk, however, was as dazzling as ever. So much so that I began to fear that he would rest satisfied with that. I was anxious too lest, with his love of precision, the attraction of mathematics might prove too much for him. In those days it was not at a table that he worked, with a sheet or two of white paper, but at an enormous blackboard, which was very much in the way in the humble little room he lived in at that time.* He used to draw strange signs on it, complicated equations, and I understood not a word of the formulae, which he insisted on explaining to me lengthily, in spite of my incompetence; for he cared very little whether he was understood or not, and it was more for himself or to himself that he talked, than to others. This was the reason, too, that he paid so little attention to his enunciation which all his life was exceedingly indistinct. It often happened that the flocks of faithful that sat under him at the Collège de France, the Vieux Colombier, the Sorbonne or elsewhere, had to be content with seeing him and give up any hope of understanding him, unable as they were, to ask him to repeat his words, as was possible in private conversation. For that matter, he was often satisfied with any listener who seemed sufficiently attentive and allowed him to flow on to his heart's content, without interrupting him. In the days of our youth, he used to sing the praises of a certain 'interlocutor,' who was as deferential and silent as could be wished, drinking in his words and content with expressing his rapt admiration by looks alone. Valéry used to meet him every day at the same hour on the outside of a bus. This unknown individual aroused my curiosity. I was jealous of him. Who could he be? . . . After a series of investigations, I discovered at last that he was the swimming master of the Rochechouart swimming baths.

It was mathematics that chiefly occupied his thoughts at this

* Impasse Royer Collard at the end of the Rue Gay Lussac.

time, not at first geometry, for which he began by showing an utter lack of comprehension. 'When,' he said, 'at school, I first heard a professor say, "Take the triangle A B C and superimpose it on the triangle A B C," my brain refused to follow.* What on earth could it mean? It's useless to go on. I'll have none of it.' Let others judge it such an exclusion of geometry is reasonable. I doubt whether Valéry was able to keep it up, seeing that, on the other hand, he went on undauntedly with the study of astronomy. He gave Lobatchevsky, Clerk Maxwell and Riemann an attention he denied all purely literary works. Once, when he was staying with me at La Roque, he was delighted to find on his bedside table a copy of Clerk Maxwell's works which I had had the pleasure of getting for him. One evening he took down from my shelves the two volumes of Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which he returned next morning, saying he had spent part of the night reading them.

'What!' I cried, 'all through?'

'Oh! Quite enough. I'm acquainted now with the book's general run, which is pleasing enough. I've seen where it starts from and where it gets to. Between the two, it's just filling up. A good secretary who had caught the hang of it, would have done very nearly as well. The *Farà da sé* doesn't interest me.'

He was very quick to assimilate the small amount of nourishment to be found in a book, and oftener than not, once he had gathered the gist of it, his curiosity passed on to other things. Lingering, even among delights, gave him no pleasure. *Ars non stagnat*, was his motto; and, as he esteemed a work of art only so far as the artist could reproduce it at will, 'Why reproduce,' thought he, 'what has already been done to perfection?' The important thing was to bring each undertaking to perfection as quickly as possible, so as to be able to leave it then and there. And so, after he had got his hand in by the 'exercises' of the *Jeune Parque*, he went on to perfect, one after the other, those accomplished works, his great poems. He went forward unceasingly, thinking shame not to hide his gropings, his retouches, his first drafts, leaving his fellow-writers behind to go on indefatigably repeating the same verses, the same books, or, without having made any progress, their equivalents.

He had, in fact, no little contempt for literature, and particularly for novels. The truth is, he was not interested in other people, at any rate as individuals, for he refused to give in to—I was going to say—sympathy, but I don't want the word to be misunderstood, or that it should be thought I mean he was incapable of affection. No; only that he was unwilling to allow the thoughts or emotions of others to trespass, by contagion, on his own domain. Wasn't this what

* He recurred to this incidentally in 1934 when in his essay, *Fluctuations sur la Liberté*, he wrote 'I cannot even conceive the equality of figures as used in geometry.'

La Rochefoucauld meant when he wrote, 'I am little susceptible to pity and wish I were not so at all?'

In consequence, his admirations in the field of letters were rare, more and more grudging, and quickly outgrown or outworn. I was astonished to find, for instance, that the feeling he had at first professed for Stendhal* made him smile at the latter end of his life; he then paradoxically declared that he preferred Restif de la Bretonne or Casanova. For that matter he read little, feeling no need to have recourse to others in order himself to think.

I believe, however, that his devotion to Mallarmé persisted unaltered. He looked on him as his master and predecessor in the arduous path he himself was to tread after him, but in which, as I think, he was soon to surpass him. With all this, Valéry was one of the most faithful of friends. 'I am in love with friendship,' he might have said with Montesquieu. Notwithstanding his aversion to sentimentality, he gave his intimates many proofs of the sensibility and tenderness of his heart, but also of his extreme reserve, which was so great that he would, no doubt, blame me for mentioning them. This reputed cynic was capable of the most exquisite attentions and kindnesses towards the people he was attached to. Now that he is no longer with us, I may be permitted to tell how, shortly after Mallarmé's death, he came to me saying, 'There is some talk of putting up a memorial to him and there will be, very properly, lists of subscribers in the newspapers. But Mallarmé has left a widow and daughter in the apartment we used to go to so often, and its rent has to be paid. How? Nobody cares about that. I'm not able to undertake this expense by myself, but I thought you might perhaps help me. You won't say anything about it though, will you?'

Throughout his life he was preoccupied by money matters and was in constant fear of running short. It was this, as well as his desire to oblige, that prevented him disentangling himself from the unending demands, solicitations, requests to which he was subject. Hence, his innumerable addresses and prefaces. 'People,' he wrote, 'seem not to understand or not to believe—and yet I have repeated it often enough—that the greater part of my work has been written in *answer* to requests or to chance circumstances, and that without these solicitations or necessities coming from outside, it would not exist.' The excessive number of engagements with which he allowed himself to be burdened, exhausted him. He longed to throw up the sponge and beg for mercy. 'All these overcharming persons,' he said, 'will kill me. Do you know the epitaph that ought to be inscribed on my tomb? "Here lies Paul Valéry, done to death by others".'

* "I have no interest in, I have no need of his emotions," he said of Stendhal in particular. "I only want him to instruct me as to his methods."

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that many of his best pages were elicited in this way. For that matter, nothing he wrote could afford to be neglected. Dipping into his accumulated reserves, he scattered his treasures about him in a sparkling shower. His writings, however, were of so rare a quality that they appealed only to a restricted public. His books were not best sellers. Their teaching could be understood only by an élite, and indeed, it was not desirable it should reach a larger circle, for like Nietszche's, it might very well lead astray those readers it fails to invigorate.

His reputation, meanwhile, soon spread, and not only in France. Cecil Rhodes, having heard Valéry well spoken of, I don't exactly know by whom, sent for him to London when he was still quite young, to entrust him with some highly important work. Bound over to secrecy and moreover little given to being expansive, it was to very few people that Valéry confided this extraordinary adventure, which was particularly surprising in such an uneventful life as his. As soon as he got back from London, where his mysterious task kept him some weeks, he told me the story, which I barely remember, of the strange conditions to which he had been subjected. As for the nature of the work itself, his vow of silence forbade him to say a single word concerning it. I only heard that immediately on arrival in England, he was met by an individual whose name he never learnt, and then taken to London and deposited in a kind of apartment which was comfortable but hermetically sealed from the outer world. During the whole of his stay he was not once allowed out and was forbidden to communicate with a living soul. A servant, who was either a real or pretence deaf-mute or someone who knew no common language, brought him his meals every day and went away again without having opened his lips. This almost pleasant jail ended only when Valéry had finished his job. He was then taken back to the port where he had landed, by the same individual who had met him, and kept only a dream-like memory of the whole affair.

Certain journalists have mentioned a situation he is said to have taken at the Agençe Havas in 1900 and kept for a considerable time. This is not quite the case. The truth is that old M. Lebey, the founder of the famous Agency, engaged him as his private secretary, reader and adviser—a confidential post, in which Valéry had ample opportunities of exercising his sagacity, his competence in political, diplomatic and financial matters, the sureness of his judgment, his probity, his tact and finally, the exquisite courtesy of his manners and the sensitiveness of his feelings. He used to speak of the old gentleman, to whom he became much attached, with great deference; 'something like old M. Leuwen' he would say. He suffered from a form of trembling paralysis which deprived him of the control of his movements. When people came to see him, as he was unable to

hold out his hand because of its shaking, he would say, 'Please hold on to my hand.' Seated in a big armchair, he used to listen to Valéry reading aloud the newspapers or Bourdaloue's sermons, which he preferred to Bossuet's; but Valéry confessed to me that he used often to skip whole pages. This lasted months and years. He no doubt learnt a great deal in the company of this wise old man and in the discharge of his delicate duties, which brought into play the practical qualities of his mind. When, leaving the abstract region of mathematics, he turned his eyes on the present day world (*Regards sur le Monde Actuel*), his views and judgments were so far-seeing that they strike us now as being prophetic, and I think that at that time no one can have had a sounder appreciation of the situation in Europe and France.

What he wrote in 1927 on the subject of the French nation is still strikingly applicable and remarkably appropriate at the present time:

'This country, full of nerves and contrasts as she is, finds unexpected resources in those very contrasts. The secret of her prodigious power of resistance lies, perhaps, in the great and manifold differences that she combines within herself. In the French people, apparent lightness of character is allied to singular endurance and resilience. The general ease and pleasantness of social relations in France are accompanied by a critical acuteness which is always on the alert. Perhaps she is the only country in which ridicule has played a historic part; governments have been undermined and overthrown by it, and a witticism or a happy—sometimes too happy—shaft is enough, in the eyes of the public, to damage, almost instantaneously, powers and reputations of the highest importance. *On the other hand, a kind of natural indiscipline may be observed among the French, which always gives way when the necessity for discipline becomes evident. It happens that the nation is suddenly found to be united at the very moment that it might have been expected to be divided.*'

Before retreating into silence, Valéry consented to publish two works, one immediately after the other, in two different reviews—'*La Méthode de Léonard de Vinci*' (1894) in Madame Adam's *Nouvelle Revue* and, in *Le Centaure*, at that time edited by Pierre Louys, the astounding '*Soirée avec M. Teste*' (1895). To that extraordinary creation, unparalleled in any other tongue, to that accomplished and perfect work, each one of us was compelled to do homage. As he had just disclosed his method to us through the medium of Leonardo, Valéry, thanks to this semi-mythical alibi, here revealed his ethic, his attitude towards things, beings, ideas, life. This he maintained and to the end remained faithful—constant to himself, so that a little while before his death he was able to say (I quote his very words), 'The principal themes round which I have grouped my

thoughts are still in my mind UNSHAKEABLE.' He spoke this last word strongly, accentuating each syllable.

. . . . .

But let there be no mistake. Monsieur Teste is not Valéry, but only a projection of him—of a Valéry stripped of the playfulness, the poetic humour, the charming grace, of everything, in fact, that made us love him. Doubtless he considered all the stir and bustle that went on around him as vanity and worthy only of a passing attention, but more often, as long as he was not disturbed by it, he looked on it with indulgence or even with the kind of amusement we sometimes take in the trifling games of children. I remember in bygone days with what amazing gusto he manipulated the marionettes of a little Punch and Judy theatre, in order to entertain his family circle, just as, at a later time, he lent himself to the play of society conversation and drawing-room comedy. For that matter he enjoyed it; petted, made much of, listening very little, talking a great deal, sparkling with wit, he was manifestly amused by his easy successes, or rather, by the very ease with which he won his successes. Even with his intimates, the gravity of his thoughts never clouded the amenity of his temper. Nothing can be more instructive on this point than the fictitious Madame Teste's letter—an incomparable work of exquisite delicacy and a singular revelation of our mathematician's secret sensibility. 'I think,' he makes Madame Teste say, rather plaintively, of her terrible husband, 'I think he is too logical in his ideas.' And in another passage (*Orientem Versus*) Valéry, fully conscious of the deadly danger of being too implacably rigorous, writes, 'I'm impatient of vagueness. It's a kind of malady—a peculiar irritability, directed against life, for life would be impossible if we refused to accept the *near enough*.'

Yes, literature is laid over a ground of *near enough*; it's in the *near enough* that we are all floundering. I was only too much aware of this in his presence, and the charm of his manner did not always prevent me from feeling abashed. It was his great respect for others, as well as his own indifference, that enabled him to tolerate a religious turn of mind, but solely in others, for, needless to say, he himself refused to accept any creed whatever. He had a particular aversion to Protestantism, which strips the Christian religion of all that Catholicism has bestowed on it—its outward charm, the political order of its structure, the practised experience of its relationships. So that he took sides with the Jesuits and against Pascal. He had, moreover, a loathing of religious phraseology and indeed, for all vague expressions. To such *assignats*, paper money with nothing behind them, he would give no credit. And this reminds me of an absurd example of that delightful vivacity of which I was speaking just now:

A slight feverish attack had kept me in bed for several days. He came to see me and as he sat by my bedside, we had a long talk. What about? The Christian virtues, I believe. And as I took up their defence, I let fall the word 'abnegation.' Paul started up, sprang from his chair and rushed to the door in pretence agitation: 'Ice!' he shouted. 'Quick! Bring some ice! The patient is delirious! He is abnegating!'—thus inventing an impossible French word—'Il ABNEGUE.'

Full of deference for others, I said, but not of respect. Deference is a first convenient stage on the road to veneration, and veneration implies respect. Now Valéry knew how much respect interfered with us. 'The white man possesses a quality which has enabled him to make his way—disrespect,' writes Henri Michaux, disrespectfully. Valéry, whose mind wanted 'to make its way,' was not to be stopped by any form of laziness. He said laughingly (or did he write it?), 'It's curious how many people lose their lives in accidents for want of letting go their umbrellas!' To get rid of all impediments was his constant preoccupation, and it is impossible to imagine a freer mind than his.

. . . . .

Don't let people accuse me, as they have so often done in the cases of Dostoievsky, Goethe and Montaigne, of putting my own colour on Valéry. Nothing could be more different than our two natures, nothing more contrary than the bent of our two minds. Mine, 'naturally inclined to veneration', as Goethe said of his own, as much as Valéry's was resolutely bent on impiety, antagonistic to all accepted and unverified beliefs, resolutely sceptical (at once doubting and seeking), regardless of agreement, approval or sympathy and apparently free from all human weaknesses, vain curiosities, adventitious preoccupations, procrastinations, sentimental dallyings. To everything likely to distract him from his quest, he said 'NO!' Whereas I, if like him and in his wake, I had doubts, it was of myself. He seemed barely aware of his ascendancy. My friendship submitted to it, not without some kicking, but the small resistance I attempted to offer him rapidly broke down and retreated in discomfiture. But one thing was clear to me, of which I never doubted —that he was always right. His scorn occasionally hurt me, at least at some points, but I acknowledged he had the right to be scornful—a right he had won in hard fought battle. His stark, iconoclastic hammer spared nothing. And in those days I was incapable of answering his quips ironically, as I did a short time before the war at a meeting of the Radio Committee, when I had the pleasure of sitting beside him at the green table. *A propos* of some broadcast, the name of Homer came up, and Valéry bent towards me and whispered, 'Have you ever read anything more boring than

the *Iliad*?' 'Yes,' I answered, 'the *Chanson de Roland*.' (If I had been a little more on the spot I should have said, *La Jeune Parque*.)

Not that, as time went on, I took him less seriously (I am almost tempted to say, 'On the contrary'), but I, on my part, had become more sure of myself. In the first days to which my memories of Paul Valéry go back, I would generally come away from our talks with a shaken mind and heart. 'He breaks your spirit with a single word,' writes Madame Teste of her husband, 'and I feel like a spoilt pot, thrown away by the potter on to his heap of failures.' Yes; that was the very thing I felt too. And she adds, 'He is hard as an angel'; and again, 'His existence seems to put in doubt everybody else's.' My admiration must have been lively indeed for my friendship not to have been too severely wounded. Nothing that I lived for seemed to have any value in his eyes, and I could not believe that he had the smallest consideration for anything I had written or wished to write. To have thought this due to any insufficiency on his part would have seemed to me presumption on mine. But he managed to show me his affection in so discreet—so almost tender a fashion—that it went to my heart more surely than any effusions. Nothing could have flattered, nothing could have touched me more, than his reliance on my literary taste, when he called me in for consultation on some poem he had just elaborated; nothing could have shown me better that he attached importance, at any rate, to my judgment. Doubtless confidences were distasteful to him, and as he considered confessions a shocking form of exhibitionism, he disliked what I liked and what I considered it my duty to write, but he esteemed that I knew how to write and that esteem was enough for me.*

I was greatly surprised one day by the unexpected praise he gave me for an article of mine to which, I confess, I attached very little importance; it was the *Dialogue with a German*, written shortly after the other war.

'But it's mere reporting,' I protested.

'No matter!' he went on. 'Its line is perfect.'

I believe this was the only praise he ever gave me, at any rate, as far as I can remember.

May the portrait I have tried to trace of him here be one that would have pleased him!

. . . . .

Admirable as most of Valéry's poems seem to us, I am not sure that I do not prefer his prose; many of his pages, I believe, will remain among the most perfect that have ever been written in any

* I am not speaking here of the Valéry of early days, but of what he became later, of what he made himself become.

language. Let me add at once that I know few French writers, if indeed I know any (in Germany there is Goethe), who have excelled equally in both forms. And without any doubt, it is from his prose that I expect the most salutary, the most efficacious action. For it concerns me very little that a certain number of writers modified their theory and practice of poetry to follow in his footsteps, and that a quantity of prentice hands were induced to versify in imitation of him. This turn of the helm against the current of excessive licence well deserved to be given, but it is on quite another plane and in a more veiled manner that the extraordinary benefit of Valéry's influence was exercised. This *asper contemptor deum* seems to me, above all, a master liberator. No one—not even Voltaire himself, ever did more to emancipate us, to wean us from faiths, cults, beliefs. At the very moment that France, bleeding from her wounds, seems ready to fly for refuge to religious devotion and seek there consolation and salvation (as she did at the end of Louis XIV's reign, after our military reverses, when the bigotry of the age, in conjunction with his own, drove Racine to silence), Valéry's virile teaching takes on special importance, as did the example of his resistance compared with the base compliance of others. 'NO' he said obstinately, and stood, a living testimony of the unbowed and unconquerable mind.

'But how comes it,' he would say to me, 'that men take their rest so soon? Why are they content with so little?'

A Master of Pastiche

By MICHAEL AYRTON

A Personal Reaction to Picasso

"There ought to be a dictator of painting."—Picasso, 1935.

To write anything but praise, or to attempt anything but a favourable analysis of the present value and future significance of the art of Picasso, is to be attacked at once. I have taken this risk in print on several occasions and have been variously accused of personal jealousy, fifth column activity and high treason. I have also been taken to task for changing my spots in midstream, to coin a mixed metaphor in the manner of the master's own painting. It has been pointed out to me that, like most contemporary painters, I myself have been influenced by Picasso, and that I should genuflect before the work of that great genius who has altered the course of European art. Finally I have been told that I do not understand his art.

I have never denied his genius nor its effect either upon European art or upon myself. Picasso's influence has probably been greater in his own time than that of any artist in history, and unquestionably he has changed the course, not only of art, but of decoration, and the applied arts. There is no question of his genius. I suggest, however, that changing the course of European art does not *ipso facto* improve that course and that, whilst to have done so compels admiration, it does not necessarily command veneration. Such men as Hitler have changed the course of human history to the disadvantage of mankind, and I believe that Picasso, taking all into account, has been of very negative service to art in his changing of its course. But the one accusation I find hard to take, is that of not understanding Picasso. Heavens alive, his work is not difficult to understand. If it was really obscure, if it really required long and concentrated study, Picasso would not be the richest and the most famous artist alive. Once the fairly simple mechanism of his approach is grasped, and once one is familiar with a large body of his work, his diverse mannerisms and his recapitulation of basic themes follow an inevitable, perfectly comprehensible, course.

Picasso has required numerous art forms upon which to base his experiments. He is not concerned with nature, nor with a single tradition, and in this he differs from the artists of the past, as Woolworth's differs from the craftsman's shop. What he does is to engulf an existing formula, choosing it seems at random from the history of his art. It may be Negro sculpture, Greek vase painting, or the drawings of Ingres. This formula, once digested, he regurgitates, like the albatross feeding her young, accentuating certain characteristics and obliterating others. Having exhausted one formula he turns to another, possibly maintaining part of the first. As soon as the student recognizes the process, he will, with a fair knowledge of art history, be able to recognize the derivation and judge the value of the variations.

Nothing could be simpler than this process, and it is indicative of Picasso's genius that the objects he choses as the vehicle for his method have always been equally simple—a table, a female nude, a piece of newsprint or an old guitar. From the point of view of the audience, the commonplace object combined with the spectator's vague familiarity with the underlying mode—the classic Greco-Roman head, for instance, establishes a comfortable association of ideas which prepares him for whatever apparently outrageous exaggeration Picasso may see fit to use to enliven his picture. Since Picasso has a magnificent gift for linear expression and complete technical mastery at his command, the result is a very tasty, or intentionally very disgusting, dish. But whatever the taste, it remains a dish; it is cooking, not art. The opposition will say nonsense; they will say that all painting is only

this, and that Picasso is perfectly entitled to employ these means since he triumphantly justifies them. I would say that whilst this utilization of an adopted manner begins the development of all young artists, whilst the influence and traditions of his predecessors are at the basis of all great artists' work, that to carry on this procedure throughout a long life is not to develop a vision but to perfect a pastiche. Changing the derivation does not complete the artist. The difference between say, Breughel and Picasso, is that whilst Breughel produced pastiches of Bosch in his youth he looked at nature as well and eventually arrived at a mature and personal vision of nature itself, whereas Picasso has never been able to shed the element of pastiche underlying his work because he has always looked to art and not to nature to supply his visual material. Paradoxically the *dilettanti* of to-day who are so foolishly quick to despise a legitimate influence present in a young artist's work are prepared to swallow with delight the painting of Picasso whose derivations have been so blatant for forty years. Originality is in itself an exceedingly unimportant aspect of art from the point of view of the practitioner, and it has only achieved a spurious importance during the twentieth century, the very times which have been dominated by Picasso himself. This significant paradox is in my view one of the major disservices which the art of Picasso has paid to contemporary painting, for it is Picasso's transitions from one derivation to another which have created the false supposition that self-conscious variation of style is originality and therefore commendable. Genuine originality in painting is not a conscious virtue but merely the artist's minute personal addition made to a tradition by the study of nature. In a broadcast recently, an admirer of Picasso praised him for the fact that he had 'opened his mind with astounding versatility to a wide number of stylistic influences' and went on to enumerate them at length, as if there were some unusual virtue contained therein. But is there? and is his constant delving into the secrets of gradually evolved methods applicable to the problems and ways of thought of divers times past, compatible with Picasso's mystic dictum, 'I find, I do not seek'? Theft may be the perquisite of genius in an art but kleptomania is another thing.

Perhaps the reply to my argument would be to repeat that any means are legitimate to attain the ends and are not Picasso's ends marvellous? In my view the whole of Picasso's art has been an intellectual exercise of which ninety per cent has been pure artistic vampirism without the natural visual stimulus necessary to produce great art. Picasso is a genius after all and can only be judged by those standards, for his ends are, if nothing else, marvellous as sheer virtuosity. Marvellous, but utterly false, and the means carry with them, in Picasso's supernormal talents, a tremendous power to communicate the spurious and to menace the living stream which

the visual arts have been since pre-history. Picasso's achievement has been to juggle with the archaic so fast that it appears alive as it glitters in mid-air. Had he not been an acrobat, as Jean Cocteau remarked, he would not have saved himself. Picasso's intellectual power is coated with the fierce colour of his nationality. The trappings of Spanish passion, bulls, women, guitars, blood and cruelty, recur at intervals and convey, again I think by association of ideas and brilliance in performance, deep, vital emotions which, in my own view, are often simply not there.

I do not believe that it is possible to create living art out of anything but the direct visual experience of nature, combined with the heritage of a tradition, unless it be by the practice of magic ritual. Since Picasso does not attempt the former, he must be considered in terms of the latter, and considered in these terms his processes of stylistic inversion and formal disintegration are black magic, no more, no less. That inversion and disintegration of form are present in most of his work may be easily observed at once in Cubism, which was based on the latter principle and in the convention which he has employed at intervals, of restating the human head in unrelated sections.* The parallel with black magic can be carried further, for destructive distortion and alteration of ritual is the basis of diabolism. To his most devoted admirers he is celebrated for his gift for paraphrase. Black magic is also the cult of personal power, and fame goes with it. Of these two latter attributes Picasso shows no lack. He is the most powerful influence and the most famous artist alive, but is it possible that any contribution to the mainstream of European art can be made by his particular form of diabolic egocentricity? In view of the fact that black magic is a death cult and in view of the fact that the whole impetus of Picasso's art stems from manners and modes created for now extinct ends—the Romanesque, Catalan primitives, the Greek vase and medieval stained glass are examples—he is a very master of necrophily. Magnificent embalming—but death all the same.

Regarded without hysteria, it is surely plain enough that Picasso's constant, mercurial changes of style, which are to-day extolled as the fruits of an unique and all-embracing genius, are not a genuine development but superlative conjuring. Remarkable though it is to have pulled so many rabbits from a three-cornered hat, it is not necessarily a superior procedure to the more prosaic course of visual development employed by all previous great masters of painting.

It is obvious that present-day transport and world-wide communications have made it possible for the twentieth-century artist to acquire a greater general knowledge of the world's art without

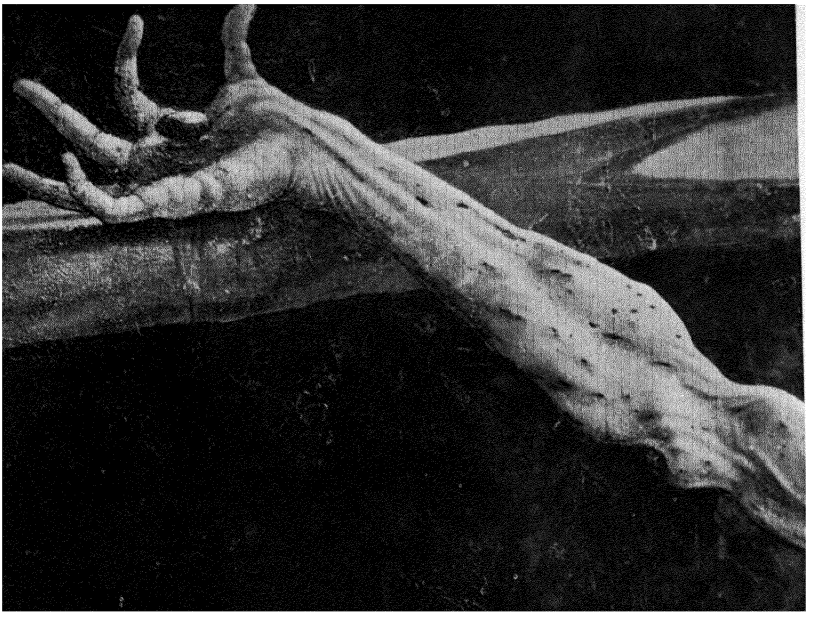
* 'In my case a picture is a sum of destructions.' Picasso, 1935. *Conversation with Picasso*—Christian Zervos—Cahiers d'Art, 1935.

leaving his capital city, than could his sixteenth-century predecessor. But Picasso's eclecticism is not excusable simply on the grounds that earlier masters would have utilized the same gamut of stylistic derivation as Picasso, had they had the opportunity. I do not believe that they would, because once each, following in his natural tradition, had accepted from his predecessors the influences of best service to his vision, he turned to nature for his material. Pieter Breughel, for instance, learned much from Hieronymus Bosch and Joachim Patenir in his youth, and indeed he scrupulously imitated the Bosch for several years; Watteau acknowledged and paid his debt to Rubens, El Greco to Tintoretto and Goya to Velasquez, but these men must have been equally well aware of other aspects of painting. Breughel must have seen Italian and Spanish pictures, Rembrandt, in his days of affluence, collected every form of *objet d'art* from Indian miniatures to Mantegnas, and Watteau knew the collections of pictures from all the European schools which were assembled in Paris, and so on. But these artists having assimilated what was useful to their own art, from that of other men and other times, looked at the object, and adapted it to their purposes. Herein they differ radically from Picasso, for they discarded the borrowed props of style quite early in life, in favour of natural observation. The art of a Breughel, a Rembrandt, or a Goya is a complete and logical development from beginning to end, so is that of Rouault or Renoir and even that of Blake; for though the latter borrowed technical crutches from the Italians, and though nature was a secondary consideration in his art, his expression was consistent and its strength lies in that consistency. Blake was not remarkable as a technician and his own technical shortcomings excuse to some extent his borrowed mannerisms. No such excuse is needed by Picasso, the greatest technician of his age.

I suggest that the sheer instability of Picasso's genius is not a priceless miracle, but simply the result of exhausting the possibilities of manner to such an extent that his most original-looking works are actually those in which he combines his own early periods with his current clichés, thus confusing the obvious sources. And yet he himself has strenuously denigrated self-imitation.* The effect that idolatry of these essential weaknesses has had on his numerous followers has been to deify an originality which in actual fact is only ingenuity.

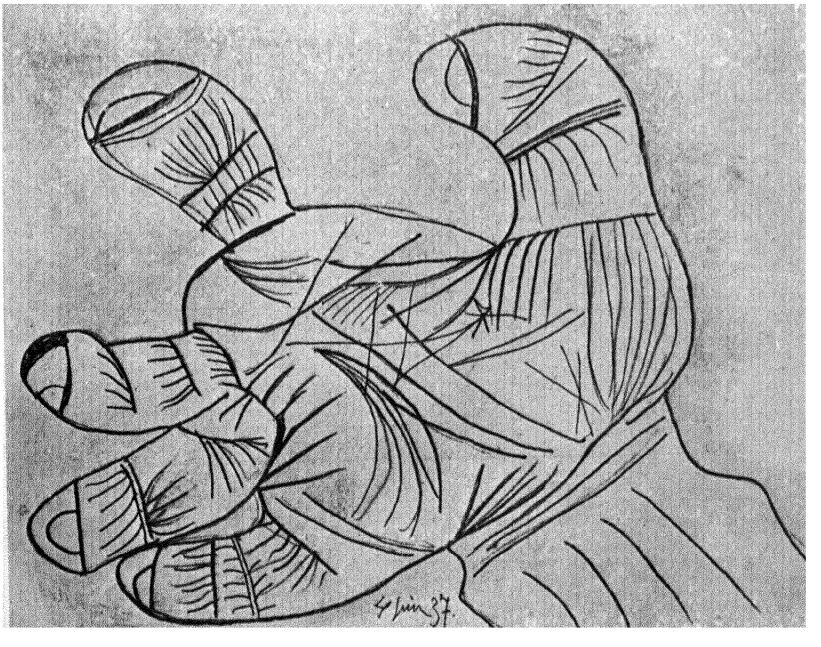
It is, however, obvious that no individual could maintain such sway over the arts for so long, nor carry such conviction to so many intelligent and sensitive artists and laymen, unless he was possessed of tremendous powers. What these powers are, has been dilated upon at enormous length in numerous publications, but what I surmise they amount to is this: Picasso is a master technician and his many 'periods,' whilst they may not accord with the development of a real

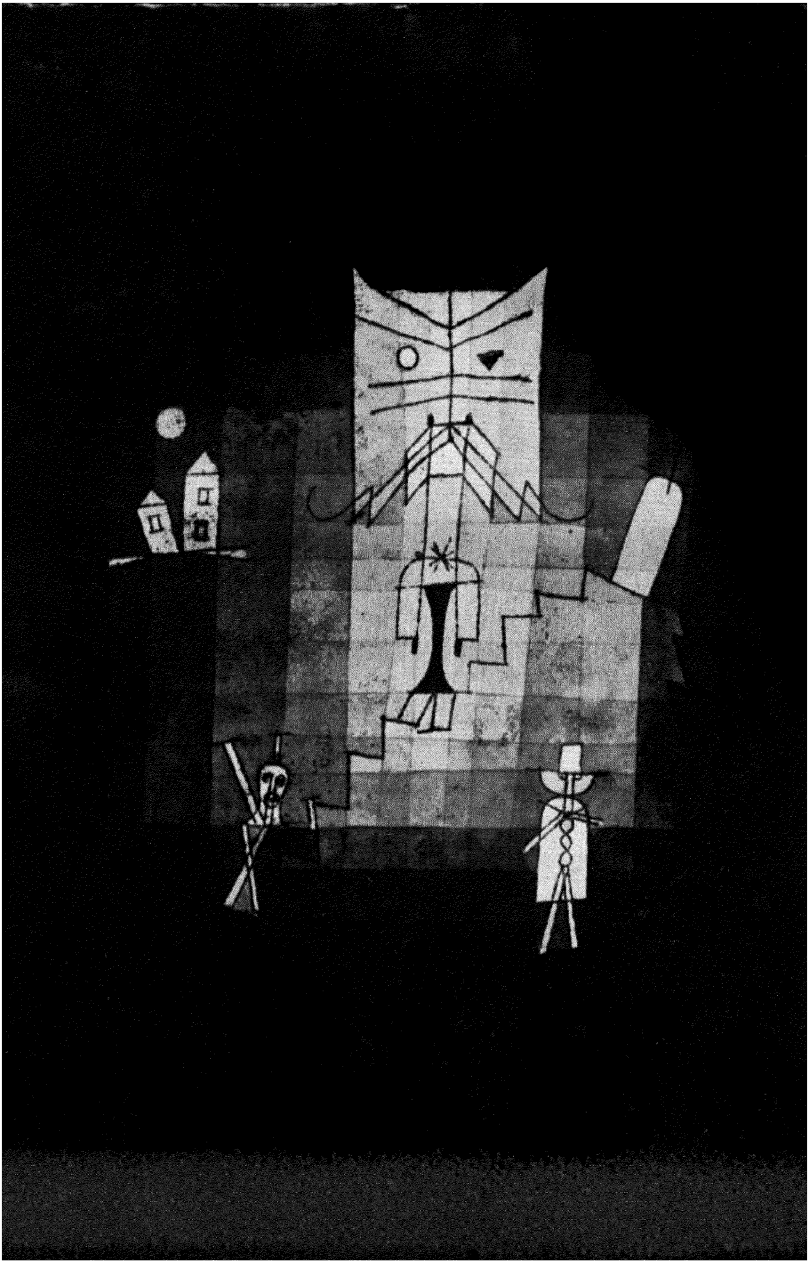
* 'I have a horror of repeating myself.' Picasso, 1935. ibid. ref.



GRÜNEWALD: Detail from Crucifixion

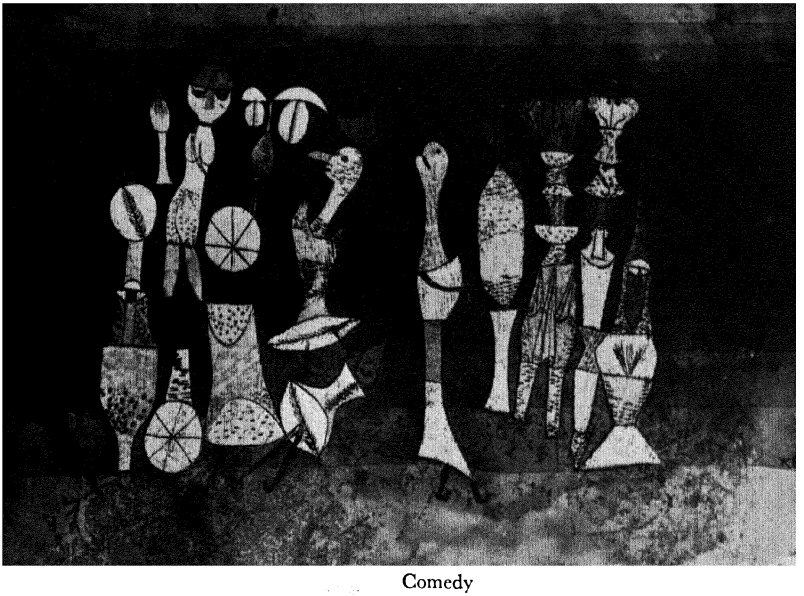
PICASSO: Study of a hand (for Guernica)





PAUL KLEE

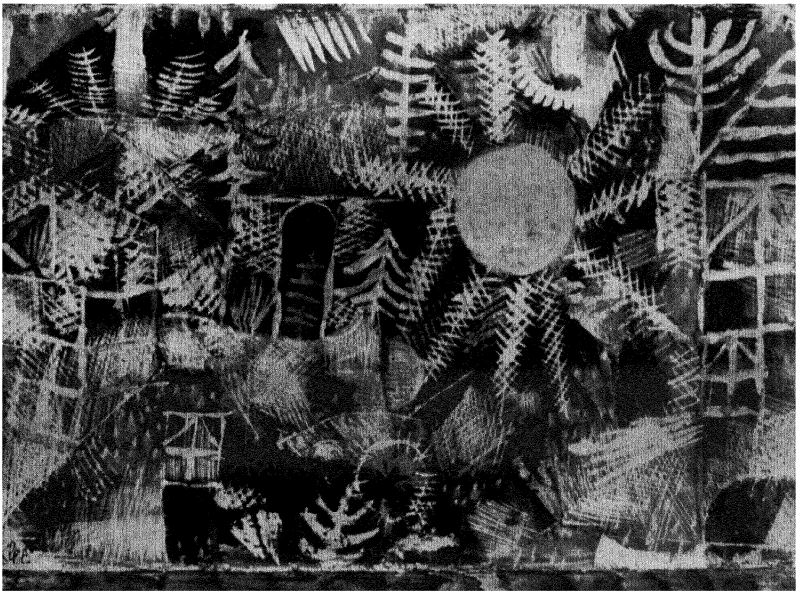
The Mountain of the Sacred Cat



Comedy

PAUL KLEE

Flora in an Old Rose Garden



(Photographs by permission of the Tate Gallery)



NIKOS ENGONOPOULOS

House in Piraeus with Statue

vision, are at least in accord with the prevailing hysteria of the times. Furthermore, the immense excitement, which Picasso is able to evoke, is in part due to his superb use of line, for he is primarily a draughtsman, and also to the emotion provoked by the novelty of his gift for paraphrase and his ability to carry a discovery, or the product of a movement, to a logical, or sometimes illogical, conclusion. It is part of his power that he is able to embrace the efforts of lesser men and restate their aims, in his own terms and in relation to the formula current in his own work. This in itself is the hallmark of a particular form of genius. But more than all this, his power lies in his position relative to his times, his temporal domination. Nor is this incompatible with the archaism of the different stylistic starting points of each new '*epoque.*' It is that Picasso is contemporary in the hysteria of his art in exactly the same way that Hitler is contemporary in the hysteria of his politics, much of which—anti-semitism is an example—is archaic in principle. In the course of profoundly disagreeing with my assessment of Picasso, a contemporary English artist once made the point that Picasso's major positive contribution to painting was his invention of the 'paraphrase of reality.' I do not believe that this is what he has done; rather I believe he has evolved a brilliant paraphrase of *art*, so brilliant and so all-embracing that one is unable to see the wood for the trees and in the immense prodigality of his gifts he has thus foxed a whole generation into believing in a set of 'emperor's new clothes.'* Idolatry has been carried so far that Picasso's every work, from doodle to mural, is now greeted with indiscriminate approval. Even a piece of torn-up paper is solemnly reproduced in a recent book. His own clichés, which he has taken to imitating in his most recent work, are marked as wondrous and immaculate conceptions, new, devastatingly new phenomena of immense value, both in terms of money and posterity. But if one examines his life work, his many periods, one finds that in each one he has but grasped at the straw of another man's discoveries and twisted it to his own ends. This activity may be wonderful in the skill of the achievement, but it is not a deep and personal vision of nature or life and its products are as transitory as the winds. In time they will date as badly as the later music of Igor Stravinsky, a very similar if less important figure.

Picasso is first seen as a child prodigy, painting with precocious skill, and in Paris at the age of nineteen he embarked upon his first recognized 'period,' which is now named after Toulouse Lautrec, who was the principal influence upon Picasso at this time. A perfectly legitimate derivation for a young artist, and undoubtedly of use to him. In 1901 he painted in a decorative, poster-like manner under the influence of van Gogh, Maurice Denis and Vuillard, and in 1902

* 'The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies.' ibid. ref.

he turned to Puvis de Chavannes, a painter of sad, blue lyrical pictures which he skilfully combined with El Greco and the seventeenth-century Baroque mannerists to produce the famous 'Blue period.' To this râgout he added various of Degas's subjects and much of the latter's theatricality. The 'Pink period' which follows is still a fairly straightforward development from the Blue, incorporating the Harlequin of Watteau and a soft Greek flavour compatible with the wistful sentimentality which replaced the morbid gloom of the previous five years. The first of the abrupt transitions took place in 1906 when Matisse presented the young Picasso with a piece of Negro sculpture and Picasso abandoned his previous formula in favour of a stark series of pictures based on Negro art. Three years later he recognized that Negro sculpture was compatible with Cézanne's compression and separation of natural forms, to underline their organic structure. Picasso seized on this logical practice and carried it to its illogical extreme in 'cubism' where his tendency to disintegrate form was given a specious theoretical backing by various poets and apologists. By 1911 the forms were so entirely disintegrated that, far from stressing the natural structure, the sections were only related in terms of design. Originality in one sense, but the basis was Cézanne's ready-made hypothesis, and thus was still based on art and not the observation of nature. Cubism, which passed through various forms, from close imitation of Cézanne, through the 'facet cubism' of complete disintegration, arrived in 1914 at a decorative formula for producing harlequins and loaded tables which included the use of 'pointillism' which Picasso borrowed from Seurat. In 1917 Picasso went to Rome to design the ballet 'Parade' for Diaghilev and in Rome he embarked upon the first of his dual roles. He painted decorative cubist harlequins and at the same time heavy, romantic, realistic female nudes derived from Roman sculpture. His ballet designs combined both, and in 'Pulcinella' an echo of the 'Pink period' with an added overtone of *commedia del arte*. Picasso's appetite for influence now became increasingly vicarious, for he had added Ingres to his scalp belt in 1915, with a large number of pencil drawings in the manner of the great classicist. The 'neo-classic' period which resulted lasted until 1924, but the decorative cubism continued through a series of monumental still lifes which became steadily more calligraphic as Picasso's great linear gift developed. These still lifes still owed a good deal to Cézanne, but they were interwoven with various decorative conventions invented by George Braque and colour relationships derived from Matisse. The late twenties produced a wide variety of concurrent manners from numerous sources, and it is between 1927 and 1936 that Picasso evolved something like an individual contribution to art, a synthetic but very convincing paraphrase. This was naturally a linear convention, arising out of cubism, and the paraphrase

remained a paraphrase of art, but the complexity of interwoven influences was such that this very paraphase seems to be a personal statement, culminating in the famous 'Guernica' of 1936. But during these years, and particularly between 1930 and 1934, Picasso was making hay with the Romanesque, with certain Greek conventions, with a formal still-life manner based on medieval stained glass and with variations on the theme of Mathias Grünewald's 'Crucifixion' at Colmar.

The effect of Grünewald upon Picasso has been enormous, probably the most important individual influence on his work, after Ingres, and probably also the most beneficial, since Grünewald was too big to be swallowed in one gulp and had to be digested slowly. Grünewald himself was probably the greatest Gothic expressionist, if this rather clumsy term may be permitted, who has ever lived. Torment was his métier, he twisted the limbs of his crucified Christ and lamenting Madonna into the most agonizing expressions of human suffering ever portrayed. This was grist to the cruel Spanish mill of Picasso's search for a means of expressing his own apprehension, for Picasso, naturally enough, was sensitive to the increasing misery of his times. Grünewald was the most potent source for such a statement, and from 1930 Picasso began to paint crucifixions and tormented figure pictures concurrently with neo-Greek line drawings, such as the celebrated illustrations to Ovid, curvilinear still lifes in a stained-glass manner and jolly beach pictures in which he combined his earlier Greco-Roman nudes with flat pattern cubism. The so-called 'Bone period' is, however, the most interesting of these multifarious activities, and here Grünewald was responsible for the passion and cruelty of the expression. Between 1928 and 1933 Picasso produced a great deal of sculpture, an art in the practice of which he was singularly, even uniquely, inefficient. He had no sense of the material and inevitably produced the clumsiest possible forms. To justify these heavy lumps he immediately utilized them as sources of expression in paint which he knew he could master, and grafted his Grünewald formula onto it to produce his 'Bone' pictures. In 1934 trouble in Spain turned Picasso to a reconsideration of the bullfight theme, which he made the somewhat banal symbol of his country's pain. At last he was truly moved by an emotion unrelated to art, and, in my own view, the real potential of Picasso may be seen during the brief period between 1934 and 1937. All the technical mastery and gift of expression was in those years turned to a genuine purpose. The hieratic gestures of the figures in the best of his pictures leading up to and following the 'Guernica' of 1936, are derived from Grünewald, the colour and manner from van Gogh, but here, in such key works as the 'Minotauromachy' etching and the paintings of weeping women, something like a genuine synthesis was achieved.

Tenth-century Catalan wall painting was the next art to feed Picasso's avid appetite for formulae and the multi-eyed profiles of the years preceding the 1939 war are derived from that source. During the war, to judge from the pictures recently exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, he has neither advanced nor added any new conventions to those existing in 1938, except in etching, where his aquatint illustrations to Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle* are variations on Chinese and perhaps Persian mannerisms.

This brief chronology does not pretend to be complete, because since 1917 Picasso has produced pictures in several different modes concurrently, with a dazzling inconsistency which gives the lie to most of them. Some contain sections with different and incompatible styles in different parts of the same picture.

What then is the sum total? What is the actual value of the pictorial three-ring circus? I believe that no part of it is great art, by absolute standards, but everyone knows that it is great accomplishment by any standards, and that all of it possesses the power to excite. To pin the history of one's own times, like a butterfly to a setting board, takes genius, and that Picasso has done; to influence the visual approach of half the world requires supernormal power, and this Picasso has; but in my view neither of these impressive achievements adds up to great art. In the hierarchy or the great masters, the greatest have a quality beyond the temporal which Picasso lacks, and shock tactics are not a final way to alter human vision. The crux and centre of Picasso's art is, in my view, hysteria and in this he so echoes the prevailing evil of the age that he seems to be its prophet. Added to this is the element of speed, which Picasso has brought to such a jet-propelled perfection that he can hit the target of taste with repeated but varied hammer blows. For several years now he has painted enormous canvases at the rate of one or more per day, apart from his enormous production of drawings, etchings, lithographs, and sculpture. One of his many styles is therefore almost bound to strike a chord in the personal taste of each individual spectator. One final thing has helped to make Picasso the monument of his time, and that is the useful fact that his painting almost invariably looks better in reproduction than in the original. This is in part due to the fact that Picasso is first and last a draughtsman and quality of paint is never a very important consideration in his work, so that his pictures tell on a small scale as,—say, a Renoir does not. A glance at the recent works at the Victoria and Albert Museum demonstrates this at once. There is no feeling for the medium of oil paint in any of these pictures. A very high proportion of his reputation rests on reproduction, for he is the most widely publicized painter in history, and the hurried and faulty craftsmanship of much of his recent larger work is not discernible in a book of plates on a fairly

small scale, whilst the immense output always provides material for new publications.

The whole body of Picasso's work amounts, in my opinion, to a vast series of brilliant paraphrases on the history of art. This is in itself a wonderful phenomenon entirely compatible with the times, but I believe that it is only of value viewed in this light. In terms of the art of painting, in terms of the living, breathing symbol of man's tribute to the work of God, it is no more than a vast erection of bones in the graveyard of experience.

At the Klee Exhibition

By KEITH VAUGHAN

Landscape with the letter R, I heard her read out from the catalogue to her friend. They both confronted the picture with that expression of mild tolerance that parents wear when they decide finally to give a few moments attention to some unlikely claim by a small child. The landscape looked back with quiet confidence, a pink and amber and black landscape with the letter R. All around were other small pictures each challenging the logical world with its improbable statement. An orange globe is poised above swirling veils of green foliage. Soon it must disappear at exactly that point which a black arrow indicates. The whole picture mounts in gently climbing arabesques, but the sun is sinking, weighed down by the arrow's irrevocable decision. An organism of interlinked lines sends out its lonely warning cry into the threatening rose-coloured mist. Two children play nearby in happy association, unaware of the proximity of danger. The town of Pinz is threatened by arrows, someone must surely get hurt, yet perhaps at the last moment a catastrophe will be avoided.

One is aware of the presence of children but not of childishness. A world of excitement and innocence where monsters terrify but never hurt. Where all the parts are changed and small things play important roles. Where all things have the same share of vitality because everything is believed in and nothing is diminished by prejudice or inflated by sentiment. Lines, squares, colours are children playing in a park on a winter morning. Their cheeks are the colour of the sky. The bare branches of the trees etch the thin lines of their bodies. They raise their arms to form the branches of the trees. They make their games up as they go along. Nearby on a seat a sad-looking man sits watching them to see that they come to no harm. Sometimes he makes a suggestion, drawing their attention to a bird, an

insect, or whatever suddenly delights him. At once they start making childish imitations of the bird. He laughs, understanding their happiness because he is no longer himself a child. Klee is the man who sits watching while the white paper comes alive beneath his fingers. This is Klee's world and it is as well not to make too much noise in it.

One can talk about Klee's world when one would hesitate to talk about Cezanne's world or Picasso's world, because Klee occupies a unique position in regard to what I feel to be the central problem of painting to-day. Painting in this century has been dominated by the conscious search for an order and stability, an image of reconciliation for the conflicting forces of nature, and the creation of an inner world of logic and harmony such as the outer world seemed increasingly unable to achieve. I do not wish to suggest that such a thing is peculiar to the art of this age, only that with the disappearance of security from life, the pursuit seems to have become more urgent and conscious and to have claimed the greatest creative minds of our time often to the exclusion of the other elements in painting. Cezanne first raised the challenge against the complacent serenity of the Impressionists and search parties set out in what, for the sake of convenience, one can distinguish as two main directions.

The Cubists began by analysing downwards, by reducing appearances to that common unit of construction which could eventually unite them. Subsequent developments, with Picasso still the dominating figure, took the analysis upwards, developing the inherent structure pattern of objects until unity was achieved in a new logic of form, bearing little resemblance to, yet still containing the basis of the original formal structure. With the Surrealists analysis was abandoned. Objects were described and juxtaposed in the hope that their surprising and conflicting associations would evoke an irrational order belonging to the subconscious mind. These developments had always one thing in common, that they derived from a knowledge and investigation of the visible world of nature. The other direction was taken by the abstract, or as they preferred to call themselves, *concrete* painters: Kandinsky, Arp, Eggeling, Helion, Max Bill. They saw in Cubism the way through to an absolute order already existing within the laws of geometry and mathematics, and they regarded the artist as high priest rather than creator whose business it was to interpret the oracles. They wanted to make painting an autonomous and impersonal thing, dehumanized, disinfected from all evidence of human contagion. It was the movement which above all others reflected an enthusiasm for the advances in physics and metaphysics of the time, and a certain weariness and exasperation with the whole chaos of human emotions and values.

Between these two main streams, Klee's position is that of a walled garden, which at first sight appears entirely isolated. Closer inspection, however, reveals tributaries leading into it here and there: Cezanne and Van Gogh, Matisse, Picasso, and Kandinsky, but they do no more than irrigate the shrubs and plants that are already securely rooted. Klee's earliest works show a strained, anxious, very minute and cautious observation of the troubled scene around him. But it did not detain him for long. After only a few years he seems to have retired into this garden, not to cut himself off, but to build something out of the simpler things he understood which would give an answer to the problems that perplexed and challenged him. Essentially Klee stands alone, yet as one who was deeply aware of the contradictions and falseness of the modern world, he was naturally in sympathy with all who were pursuing a lonely course against the current.*

Klee differed from the painters of his time most fundamentally in that the visible world held no challenge for him. He was not concerned with deducing a logical harmony from the complex disorder of nature. He started from the other end, from the natural harmony of an unexplored sheet of white paper and discovered in it the conflict of life. With the simplest lines and shapes disposed as one feels they would want to dispose themselves, the problem was to give them a vitality and significance equivalent to the natural world. And so the squares and triangles grow legs and learn to walk. Arrows are at hand to show the way. A triangle can be equally a man, a mountain, or the letter of the alphabet. There are no prejudiced values. Everything is endowed with the same degree of vitality. Simple lines of perspective are at the same time recumbent human figures. An oblong of bright colour launches itself onto the ocean of white paper with all the tenseness and excitement of an Argo setting sail in quest of the Fleece.

Children do something apparently similar in their paintings. Because they cannot grasp the complicated structure of living things, they draw certain simple shapes to represent them. The same shape has to serve several purposes. Their pictures have a natural harmony and crude vitality because of their simplicity, and because of the authority with which they are stated. But their significance is limited to a child's understanding of the world he is representing. Klee preserved all this freshness and sense of adventure, but added

* Klee was personally associated mostly with the abstract painters. He was a close friend of Otto Freundlich, a member of the Concrete group, and worked with Kandinsky at the Bauhaus, whose book *Das Geistige in der Kunst* had made a deep impression on him. He also wrote the foreword to the catalogue of an exhibition of Kandinsky's work. But he expressed himself 'gegen alles Mechanische in der Malerei.' (For this, and other information of a biographical nature concerning Klee I am indebted to M. Jankel Adler.)

to it the maturity of a human understanding and an exceptional sensibility for the material and technique of his craft.

It was natural that technique should come to play a dominant part in the creation of Klee's world; only the finest vessel could contain the essence of such a rare distillation. The penetrating, Rilkean sense of delight that transfixed the smallest objects in his pictures, extends to the actual materials with which he worked. They become the nerves and fibres of his nascent images, the cells that produce the deep blossoms of colour. A sheet of paper is an entire unchartered sea to be explored to its delicate, serrated edges. The whole discoverable world lies within its boundaries. Whatever is outside is invalid; may be alluded to but not included. Before the first line breaks its surface, one feels it vibrate with a peculiar intensity like a sea mist in those moments before the rising sun will disperse it. Ink, chalk, linen, plaster of paris, proclaim an independent sovereign right to exist before they are required to perform any associative function. This rare and magical harmony between the nature and the function of the material is part of Klee's particular genius. Each picture is a new adventure in painting technique. Often it is impossible to tell whether the forms have suggested the material or the material the forms, so tight and closed is the harmony that binds them.

The title, too, is an integral part of the picture, persisting like an echo after the song is finished. It is the final, poetic sanction for the authenticity of Klee's world. Klee was talented as a poet and a musician, as well as a painter; precisely such a combination which, through its threatened dissipation of energy would bring disaster to many a painter. But with Klee there is never any question of the painting depending on a poetical idea for its justification. The title reflects, illuminates, comments, without weakening. Long before an idea is born, the painting is already established on purely visual foundations. One sees, to take a particular example, a mesh of thick, black lines, rather like an enlargement of a half-tone screen, drawn across the whole paper. Each remaining white space between the interstices is coloured with a different colour in such a way that they link hands to form a moving pattern of brightness behind the heavy lattice. The idea is ingenious and delightful, perfectly logical, quite complete. 'There's a gay life outside,' whispers the catalogue, and one is forced to smile, because one has been let in on the secret. Suddenly, one's enjoyment seems coupled to a new octave of the senses.

Often Klee seems to be commenting on his picture in relation to the world at large. Standing outside, alongside the spectator, he makes a fastidiously precise, sometimes ironical, summing up of the situation. *They're Biting*, *Little Performance to the Barrel Organ*, *Becoming Swampy*, *Perspective of a Room with Inhabitants*. One feels enclosed in a quiet, friendly confidence.

And so the game is passed lightly between the three protagonists, the material, the form, and the idea. Each grows out of the same rich soil of Klee's personality. No one thing dominates or obstructs the others. There is no pre-ordained, willed direction, but each thing develops in relation to the rest, shaping and being shaped, sustained only by the constant, mercurial, fine-wired awareness of the artist.

Few artists seem to give so much of themselves away as Klee. Of few artists can one say so certainly what a nice person he would have been to know. Yet the more one tries to analyse and unravel the delicate fabric of his work, the less it seems to contain. Every sounding one takes, every theoretical approach, threatens only to demolish the painting, but leaves it, in effect, quite untouched, so that it is the theory that is lost in the white spaces of silence. It is, no doubt, true that a great deal of the time Klee was skating over the thinnest possible ice. His preoccupation with technique, his delight in the purely physical processes of painting, his comparative unconcern with the raw material of nature were the slenderest threads on which to hang his genius. Had he been a stone or two heavier, less aware, less light-fingered; had his naïve, self-confidence or excitement relaxed, he might so easily have fallen through into an insipid whimsy or an idle decorative doodling. Never being driven, as were so many of his contemporaries, to strive for a goal which only receded the nearer one approached it, he was faced always with the danger of a too easy success.

The ice held because Klee with all his technical brilliance and quiet delight in his own small world retained, above everything, that purely human sympathy which saw beyond to an altogether different existence. One feels in Klee that wide open awareness, an approach to the world with all his senses tuned, sights, sounds, the tangible presence of things making a simultaneous impact. His pictures have the assurance and innocence of childhood where everything is friendly, yet behind it all, a rather sad understanding that the world is not necessarily so. Prickle the Clown and the Wild Man are not creatures of a wayward fancy, but very near relations to Petrouchka. Quietness and precision are the qualities that make Klee's work entirely convincing. Above all, I think it is this sense of quietness that one carries away with one; an insistent, disarming quietness that exudes from everything he did; which swallows up words and theories, and ultimately defeats any effort to analyse his work. It exists today unaccountably, like one of those oases of warm sunshine, protected by ancient lights and enclosed by the reverberating walls of the powerhouses of destructive energy. Amidst the giant conflicts of his time, Klee never hesitated to devote the whole of himself to making a small thing perfectly. His work has an absolute finality—perhaps like the music of Fauré—a voyage completed and the Fleece returned.

Five Athenian Artists

By ALEXIS SOLOMOS

I

In a dark, damp room at an old academy of music in Athens, you might have met during the years of occupation, Carolos Coun and his pupils rehearsing Ibsen. From every studio in the old building came sounds, both comic and sad, of piano, cello, violin, clarinet, sounds of tenors and sopranos. But there was one studio from which there came no sound. It was like the twelfth room in the enchanted palace, the one forbidden to the young prince, or like a clandestine gambling place.

To enter, you had to show your face through a tiny window, and if you were welcome you would be asked in, if not—which was the more usual—you would be ignored. The rehearsal lasted from early in the morning till sunset, with no real relaxation even during the ferocious midday hours of the summer.

The young actors, each sunk in his corner, were quite oblivious to the outer world, and lived their parts within those bleak walls; in immobility at first and with only a murmur; then, slowly, the characters of the play emerged from the book and began to stir the actors' blood like a magic potion, which flowed as far as the tips of their fingers, and formed their lips in the shape of the words. You saw young men of the working classes, with burning eyes and patched trousers, and fair-haired girls with pale lips, who, as the atmosphere of the suburban home or the small coffee shop faded from them, were wrapped in the northern greyness of Rosmersholm, the yellow sunlight of a Georgian tobacco plantation, or the polychromatic glow of a Hungarian Lunapark.

There was something morbid, you might even say, nightmarish, in the profound concentration of the procedure. Coun sat in his own corner like the rest: a tall man, with dark, curly hair, thick lips, with teeth and hands stained black by nicotine. He watched silently. He let the young actors mould the text, give it shape, feel it. As they played, his face mirrored the emotions of all the parts in turn, and by merely looking at him they could be helped over any difficulty they encountered. But there were certain moments when he was galvanized into action, and he would jump and roar across the room, foaming and gesticulating like a lunatic.

From this oppressive room, surrounded by the confused din of the old conservatory, issued all the productions of the Art Theatre, which during the occupation years were the main spiritual food that Athens could offer.

At a time when the theatre was overburdened with cheap comedies and French melodramas, a time when the critics wrote their reviews before seeing the plays, and the audience left half-way through the performance, the first night of *The Wild Duck* took place in an atmosphere of general tension. The people who filled the small theatre and crowded the walls, doors and steps, were still and silent as velvet. No one seemed to breathe. And the silences on the stage—which usually are the signal for the audience to start coughing—were really silent. The people listened to them even more intently than to the words. When the curtain fell on the argument of Dr. Rehling (portrayed by the actor Callergis as Ibsen in his later years), the theatre shook with applause; the students and young artists in the gallery shouted; the critics had not stirred from their seats.

The Wild Duck was followed by more Ibsen, as well as Strindberg, Pirandello, Gorky, Molnar; then came an unexpected interval of Shavian comedy with *Fanny's First Play* (Shaw being Irish was passed by the German censor), and finally Caldwell's gloomy *Tobacco Road*, produced under the title *A Piece of Earth*, by a French author, place Mexico, the characters, Spanish. In the Art Theatre the settings were made of paper; the costumes were borrowed from an old aunt's or a deceased gentleman's wardrobe; the actors lived on the most meagre of salaries; Coun himself for many days at a stretch would exist on raisins alone.

The *kammerspiel* quality had not always been present in Coun's theatrical work. One might even say that his start in the profession was more interesting. Although he passed the years of his youth in a levantine untidiness, he was one of the few to appreciate the theatrical treasures of the Greek national tradition, and to take an interest in making the public more conscious of them.

His early work was devoted especially to Aristophanes, Euripides, and the Cretan drama of the Middle Ages. His love, and awareness, of their living reality and wealth of popular feeling made him interpret classical drama through an entirely contemporary popular vision. In *Plutus* the peasants drink *retsina*, listen to a gramophone and sing lazy oriental tavern songs. He even did not hesitate to present the priest of Zeus in the dress of a Greek orthodox priest. In *Alcestis* the set reminded one of the primitive scenery used in *Karaghiosi* (the popular shadow-show theatre), and the sun was cut out of tin and hung from a visible rope.

Coun's theatrical career—from 1935 when he started the Popular Stage, until 1945, when his Art Theatre was dissolved, having incurred only debts—has been always marked by the spirit of sacrifice. In spite of the inefficiency, the incompleteness which his work often showed, in spite of some evident trends of *decadentisme*, it has always been a brilliant act of sacrifice: the sacrifice of the individual to the

whole, of personal life to art. Any man of the theatre who refuses to be the servant of 'box-office' is always a noble example, but an artist who lives through the days of occupation on a diet of raisins, in order not to abandon his chimaeric aim, is, in his way, a hero of the highest form of resistance.

II

In the basement occupied by Coun some years ago, Yannis Tsarouchis used to enter through the window. Coun would then smoke his cigarettes, caressing a grey kitten on his knees, and Tsarouchis would indulge in ironical reflections on all the élite of the Athenian theatre world, distorting even their publicly accepted merits to odd defects.

Tsarouchis is a slender, fair person, with soft, almost feminine, movements. His face is long, with a white dome of baldness and wide blue eyes. You will see a delicate silhouette dragging its feet lazily along the street, almost pathologically afraid of cars, carrying a clumsy parcel under his arm, or a bunch of aubergines of an interesting colour. You will pity perhaps a weak and awkward man. But when you are near him and hear him talk, then the rest of the world fades and only he exists.

If I mentioned that Tsarouchis used to enter through the window, it was on purpose; for he gives one the impression that even into the temple of art he made his entrance through the window. He started his career as a painter by breaking all ties with the accepted ideals of the day and chose to be branded as unreliable, and insufferable, rather than follow the conventional paths of the artistic world. At a time when our other painters were trying to discover in what way to combine foreign ideas with Greek subject-matter—the Greek island in particular—Tsarouchis followed a more genuine path. He set himself to understand how the popular painter interpreted his Greek environment and how the people from the country or the small towns formalized the world they lived in. And indeed, what had first induced Tsarouchis to express himself in painting was the absorbing fascination that popular art, either pure or applied, exercised over him. He started as a student and reproducer of the art of the people, in its many aspects, namely local costumes, ikons, tavern decorations, embroidery, furniture, and everything that can be found in a village home, a Sunday fair or a mountain church. Through this apprenticeship he learned a great deal: simplicity of line, the special value of basic colours, the superiority of imaginative truth over realism, and the elimination of 'elegance' from his compositions. He also learned light.

In his light one will not find the celestial radiance of a Turner, or that fierce fixation on the sun, which Van Gogh displays. It is

rather the light of the Greek landscape, whose beauty lies in its tender nakedness and apocalyptic truth.

Tsarouchis, himself young, is a lover of youth. In his work, life and light usually take the symbol of ardent and palpable young bodies. And here we have a connecting link between Greek painting and poetry, as expressed by Tsarouchis and Odysseus Elytis respectively. They both live in a world of sunny Sunday mornings where young people have innocent pleasures, where the flowers are modest, and where there is love. Love perhaps reveals their only difference; for where Elytis is carried away by pure delight and merriment, Tsarouchis, the more intellectual of the two, is inclined to melancholy.

Tsarouchis was one of the first to influence Coun in his endeavour to create a Greek theatre. It was through him, one might say, that Coun was brought under the spell of the hidden popular tradition. He also worked with him on the first settings of the Popular Stage. Later on, however, they separated. Tsarouchis could not follow the painful way of the theatrical struggle, with the unavoidable sorrows and disagreeable contacts it entails; the struggle with raisins. Although he cherishes the rebellious life of his youth and his hard experience of the Albanian campaign, he is one of those people who were born to be gold-fishes and live in the stillness of a glass-bowl. When he is surrounded by his young admirers, in his studio, or in Apotsos, the literary tavern, or on a small terrace under Mount Lycabettus in warm summer evenings, and talks for endless hours, then he recovers the serenity of his glass-bowl. Criticism, anecdotes of his own private life, moral and aesthetic theorems surround him with their life-giving temperature. And then he becomes brave and believes in himself. He guides the young, and he is the teacher. But when the bowl breaks, superstition and ancestral remorse overtake him, and cars frighten him. One of the greatest spiritual forces of Greece is then nothing but a bedraggled outcast, of whom the State does not ask any responsible service.

III

In Tsarouchis's studio, back in 1937, I first met Nikos Engonopoulos, painter and poet. His case is a different one; the State has asked of him a responsible service—to be for many years now a small official in the Ministry of Communications. There, in a dull office, bent over plans of roads, never materialized, Engonopoulos's imagination followed the roads of heroes. For, if Tsarouchis is a lyrical artist, Engonopoulos is essentially the heroic bard, and 'the great and free, the brave and strong' are always his theme. Long before he wrote the fine poem on Simon Bolivar or the ode to Picasso, his poems usually paid homage to some undefined, some nameless hero. And

it was, obviously, the self-portrait of the artist, conceived at a dramatic moment in his inner life.

The same figure also appears in his paintings. Despite the different disguises, the figure remains more or less the same: a man or a woman with no face.

It is not without reason, not simply because of a surrealistic orthodoxy, that most of his people are faceless. The 'great and free' never have a face. The different ages dress their heroes, arm them, and credit them with feats; but *who* the hero was no one knows. The artist, of course, will never give him the face of a third person. The only one he would choose would be his own. Yet, our own face is, above all, the most non-existent.

One can imagine the nights of the poet and painter Engonopoulos during the German occupation; nights full of visions of by-gone supermen of the Hellenic race: patriarchs of medieval Constantinople, warriors of the war of Independence, corsairs or fishermen of the Aegean, with whom there mingle and are confused Picasso, Abraham Lincoln and Bolivar—also faceless—clad in the colour of the solitude that bore them.

Thus, the heroes have no face, but they stand with us. Our struggle is theirs.

Engonopoulos can merge in a single composition—either poem or painting—symbols of such different origin and character, as a statue and a telephone, a medieval warrior and a lady of the eighteen nineties, and all of them, obedient to the artist's necessity, unite in one message. Yet, what is more astonishing with him, is the all-prevailing spirit of Greece in his work. Every point of the universe, every moment in history is detached, through a magic power, from its geographical or historical setting, and made to contribute to the predominant idea of the artist's own land. Everything that Engonopoulos touches becomes Greek.

He lives in a crimson house in the middle of a dirty courtyard. In rainy weather, you have to step in more than one puddle before you reach the door. The studio is a large room. In the evening a small green lamp lights the poet's desk, emphasizing the contrast of its green colour with his amber hair and freckles. Three waste-baskets, containing empty packets of English cigarettes, have not been touched for long months. Hanging on the walls, high and low, or on easels, the oil-paintings surround him like inspiring ghosts. Their principal colours are that of cherries or of the deep sea, the colour of oranges or of old Macedonian houses. If you are thirsty, he will offer you water in a huge chalice, saying that, unfortunately, there is no glass available. Then he will go on talking about Madame de Lafayette, an unknown priest from Neocaesarea, salaries, Lautreamont and Tsarouchis.

Engonopoulos and Tsarouchis are *relentless* friends—always ready to back-bite each other. However, against the outcry of the Respectable World, they stand together, back to back, like the double figures of the ancient Hermes, and they face *the others*.

They are poor, as Coun is; they have enemies, as he has. Here we have the same self-sacrifice, which renders them exceptional men. And being such, they can never avoid being solitary.

IV

There is another anchorite of the occupation and post-war years—a man who pronounced his *gran rifiuto* and locked himself up in his home. I am speaking of Demetrios Rondiris, the producer of the National Theatre, whose work London still remembers from the production of *Electra* and *Hamlet*, which he brought over here some eight years ago. He has not been only the teacher of most of our young actors, but accomplished artists, such as Katina Paxinou and Alekos Minotis, owe him the final formation of their acting technique.

Rondiris has always been violently opposed to the policy of the General Direction of the National Theatre, as much under Metaxas or the Germans, as under the new regime of liberation. Ruthless conflicts used to take place between him and each management of the Theatre, conflicts which more or less always ended with him submitting his resignation. He would on no account allow himself to contribute to a work which he considered a shop-window vanity rather than art. As soon as the news of his resignation, however, reached the dressing-rooms, all the actors would run to his office, and with tears in their eyes beg him not to leave them. Then Rondiris would put his papers back into the desk, and, silent and frigid, would return to the rehearsal-hall.

There came a day when the accumulated exasperation of all these conflicts finally burst. The breach with the Theatre was final, and when he emptied his desk this time, it was for good.

Henceforth, Rondiris's flat became the refuge of the discontented. All the young artists of the theatre, on whom the days of wrath had forced various professional compromises, felt a need for a nightly purification. They came to spend a couple of hours in his company, before hurrying home because of the curfew. There they would forget the struggle for existence, their misery and frustration, even their national ambitions, and for a little while they would devote themselves entirely to a desperate communication with the great truths of poetry. They would read and rehearse scenes from Sophocles, Shakespeare, Ibsen, O'Neill—even scenes from *enemies*, such as Schiller and Goldoni.

Rondiris is a gentle, refined person with a somewhat shy disposition. One would place him in the sacred quietude of a Roman Catholic cloister rather than in the turbulence of the theatrical world. One never forgets his eyes, though one never remembers what their colour is. They are always lit—even in the saddest moments—by a non-extinguishable inner joy. And he has a way of transmitting this joy to all who are near him. It seems, at first, that by severely criticizing and reprimanding his disciples, he smothers any spark of optimism in their young souls. Yet what he really does is—in a genuinely Socratic way—to awaken their wiser selves.

V

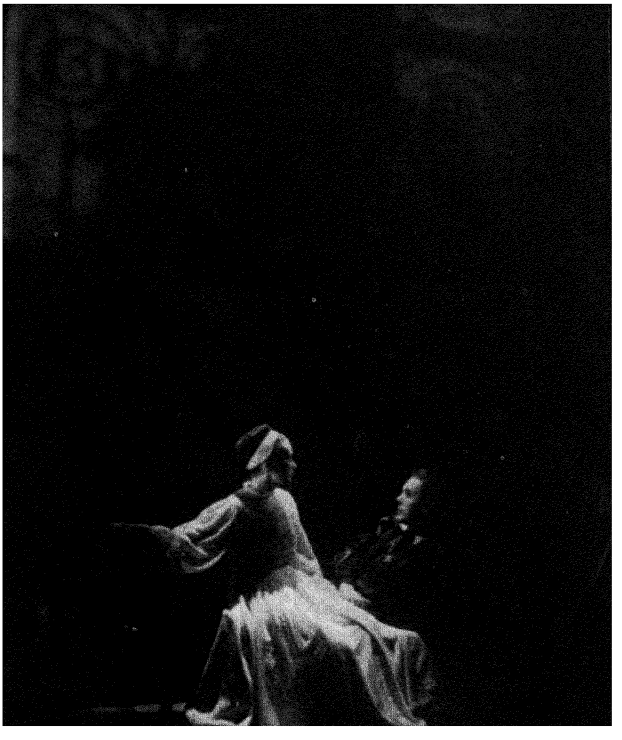
He very seldom leaves his home and books. And when he does so it is only to go to the two dramatic schools where he teaches, or to pay a visit from time to time to Katerina Andreadi's dressing-room.

Katerina's dressing-room—both in her winter and summer theatres—is a stark, implacable room. Nothing of the tradition of bouquets, carpets, or photographs. A mirror, of course; but a mirror in an actress's dressing-room is not the symbol of vanity but the instrument of work.

Of all the actresses working now in Athens, Katerina is by far the most outstanding. The Greek theatre, one might say, follows the system of the bees. Women are usually the big names and the centres of the companies. Marika Kotopouli, however, tired of her long and arduous career, makes her appearance on very rare occasions. Katina Paxinou works in American films. Helen Papadaki was murdered during the December riots. Thus Katerina Andreadi remains alone in the hive.

In times when—as so often happens—the security of the box-office demands all sorts of rubbish, Katerina has to face a dilemma: either to accept its supremacy, or disband her company and stay at home. The latter, however, would mean for her complete annihilation. She has no life of her own, no private world of dinners, amusements, committees or suitors. She is a worker of the theatre in the Stanislavski sense; and she knows no other place of enjoyment than the stage and the stark, implacable dressing-room. So, the only solution to the dilemma would be what we might call a half-sacrifice. A roaring success of the nonsensical kind would provide the means for a hazardous Claudel, O'Neill or O'Casey production. And that is what she actually puts into practice: a sort of Prosperpine-agreement between heaven and hell. Still, her hell never went below *Romance* or *Ladies in Retirement*, or perhaps a shameless Greek play or two about the exploits of black-marketeers and the perils of typists. And that during six long years.

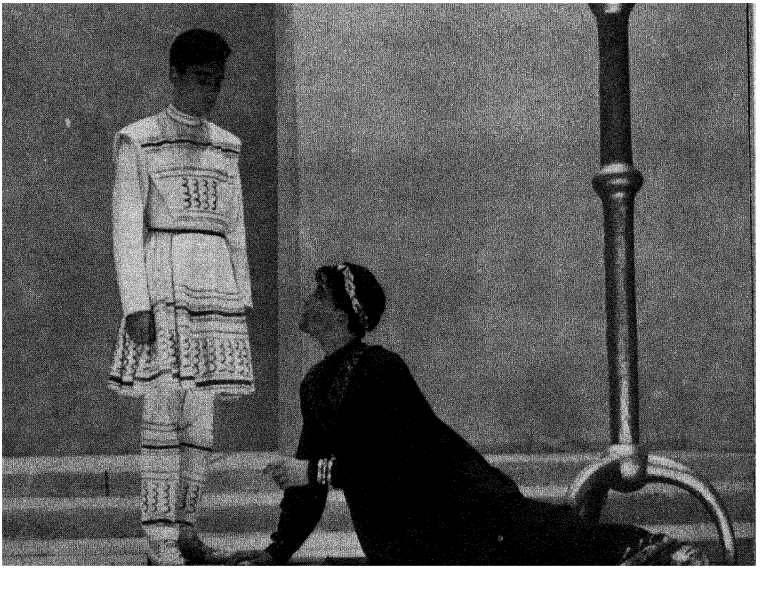
J. SPAL and M. BUREŠOVÁ in ROMEO & JULIET: A PRISONER'S DREAM at the Theatre D46 in Prague, under EMIL BURIAN's direction

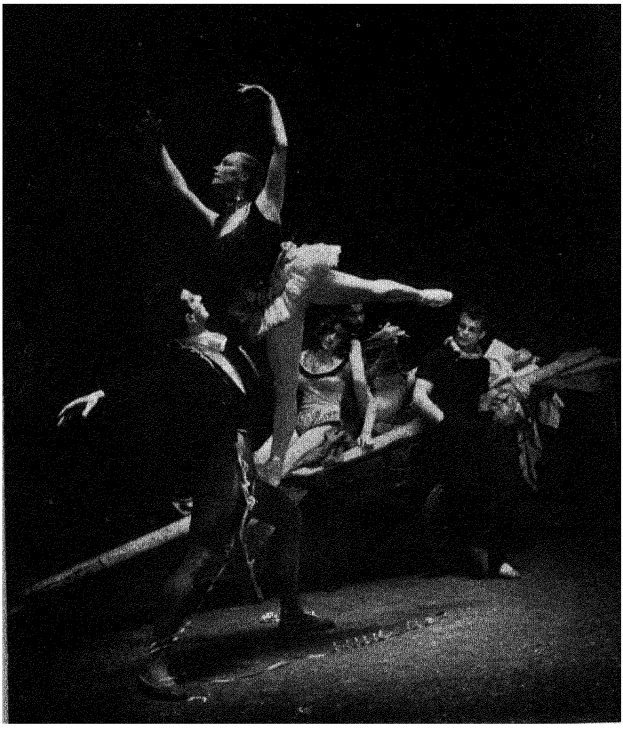


Karel Drbohlav

(*Below*)
GÉRARD PHILIPE (Caligula) and JEAN BARRÈRE (Cherea) in CALIGULA by ALBERT CAMUS at the Théatre Hébertot in Paris

Louis Sylvestre





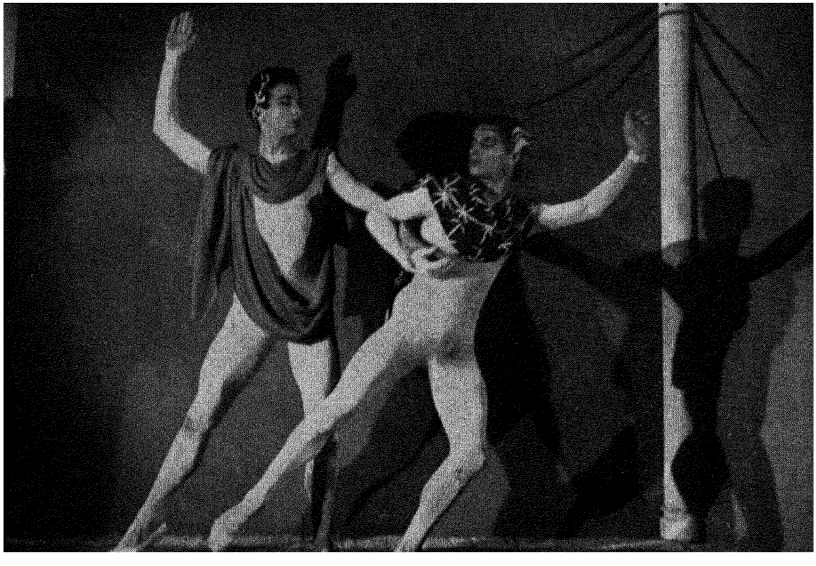
LES BALLETS DES CHAMPS ELYSEES

ROLAND PETIT and SOLANGE SCHWARZ in LES FORAINS

(*Below*) ROLAND PETIT and JEAN BABILÉE in LES AMOURS DE JUPITER

Mandinian

Lido





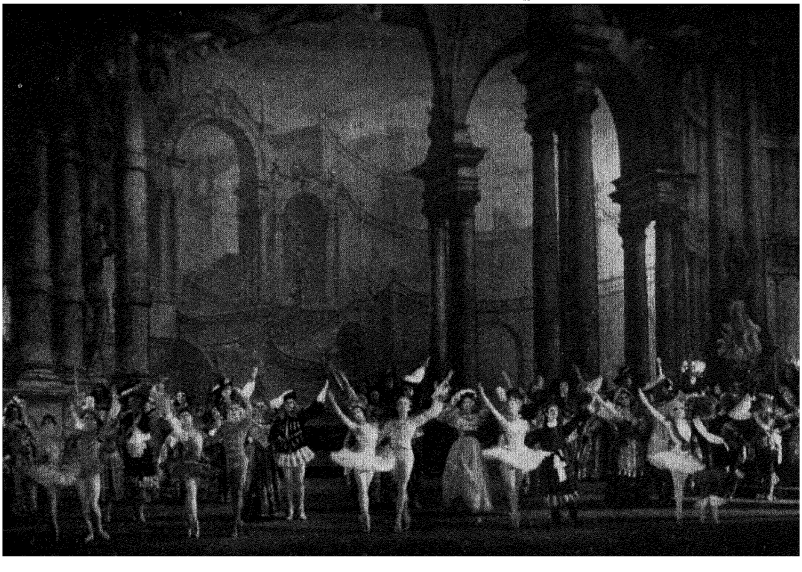
Mandinian

JUNE BRAE and ROBERT HELPMANN in ADAM ZERO

SADLER'S WELLS BALLET at COVENT GARDEN

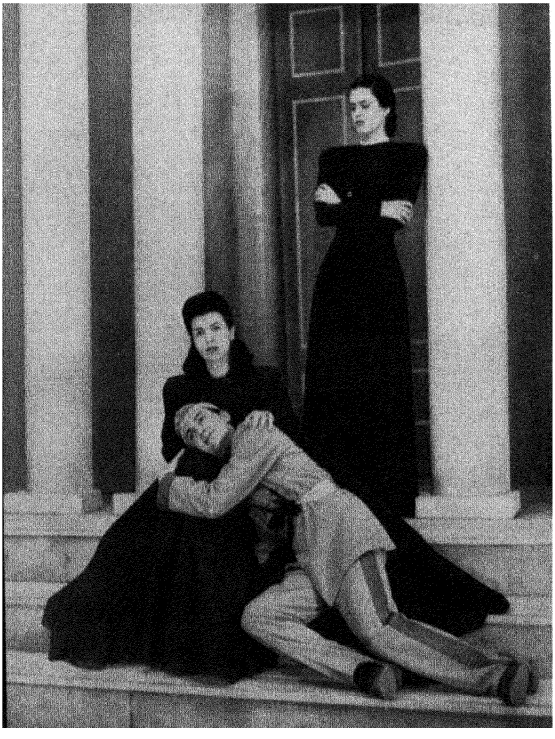
The Company in the Apotheosis of THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

Mandinian





(*Above*)
TOBACCO ROAD
in the production at
Coun's Arts Theatre
(Athens)



(*Left*) MOURNING
BECOMES ELECTRA
produced in Athens

This compromise—the half-sacrifice, as I have called it, or demi-paradise, if you prefer—is what Rondiris, her former fellow-student at the Rheinhardt Seminar, never forgave her. And his visits to the austere dressing-room are always apt to conclude with a quarrel. To produce a play like *Romance* or *Tovaritch* or *Anthony and Anna* is to feed the public with petty lies, which will, he proclaims, eventually corrupt any disposition towards truth that the public has. But Rondiris's great error is to be too uncompromising over his ideals. Katerina, as a woman, can perceive the ideal only through the act. Therefore she knows that she has done what was best. Had she departed she would never have presented Athens with *Strange Interlude* or *Mourning Becomes Electra.* And no one forgets that in pre-war days it was on her stage that we first made our acquaintance with Barrie, Priestley, Rice, Wilder and Giraudoux. During the occupation, on the other hand, when eighty per cent of dramatic literature was banished, she succeeded in keeping a tradition of Anglo-Saxon repertory unextinguished, by using every sort of camouflage.

She is ardently creative, but pathetically conscientious. Even in her happy days of Christine Mannon, Tessa or Alcmene, there will always be a noise back-stage, a late entrance, a missing ash-tray, to make hell for her. As she has the cruel habit of keeping a watchful eye on everything, she can never find rest. And she feels helpless. 'I cannot impose discipline,' she used to say, in the sombre days of 1940–44. 'For how can I impose discipline when the property-man has a son in prison and that actor is starving, and when I cannot afford high wages? So we must never hope for a good theatre. It seems that some superior law is against us.'

But there were moments when self-sacrifice worked miracles. There was collective exertion and a common impulse. And then the superior law—whatever it might be—would be vanquished.

Between East and West

By VÁCLAV ČERNÝ

Translated from the Czech

THE 14th July in 1945 was freely celebrated by Frenchmen for the first time for many years. It was not only a day of joy and of proud historic memories, but also—and this was all to the good—a day to examine the conscience. That was evident from the words of André Le Trocquer in his speech to the delegation of the City of Prague: 'France has realized that it never pays to dishonour solemn promises

and to desert friends, especially if they are the best of friends, like the Czechs.' It was also evident from the words of the leader of the French delegation to Prague, General Leclerc, when he said that in Paris people were aware of the mistakes committed by former political leaders. 'We follow one aim, to restore our dear France, and Franco-Czechoslovak friendship is a part of this restoration.'

All of us in Prague without exception were sincerely pleased by these words. They were for us a clear sign of how truly France to-day wants our co-operation, and how much she is interested in the renewal of mutual friendship: again, the fact that the delegation which visited us was composed of such high personalities spoke to us in clear language. As far back as June, Frenchmen had organized in the Paris Galerie des Beaux-Arts an exhibition of our artists living in France, which was received with great interest. All this is of course very pleasant to us, as could be seen from our newspapers in their references to events connected with both occasions. But the 14th July could and should be an occasion for careful reflection on our part. We indeed have nothing to reproach ourselves with and nothing to atone for, but we must think and reflect here, for we are faced with a question of unusual importance. This question is put forward and formulated in the title of this article. The public here certainly felt it very deeply on the 14th July, as could be seen from the background of newspaper articles and news.

The problem of our cultural orientation is regularly and has from time immemorial been put with an obstinate exclusiveness in these terms: East or West?—and the one seems to exclude the other.

First of all, the East. By the East is usually understood in a narrow sense, Russia, and in a broader sense, Slavdom. Let us say at once that for us a Czech-Russian solidarity, a sincere, real and all-embracing solidarity is a foregone conclusion. It is not necessary to recall the fact that in connection with the new alignment of power-politics which we are now witnessing in Europe, this Russian orientation of our cultural interests is absolutely necessary and advantageous. We do not even want to remember that such an orientation is dictated by our gratitude, and that it is a clear obligation of our common decency in cultural matters. That is obvious. We only want to point out that by opening wide the gates of our spiritual life to the Russian winds we are not falsifying the traditional functions of our culture, nor violating its special character. Ever since the first generation of our national renaissance until to-day, for more than 150 years, the Czechoslovaks have been making pilgrimages to Russia for cultural inspiration and spiritual support, so that this scarcely interrupted pilgrimage to Moscow is almost like a law, like one of the fundamental traditions of our modern life. We remain faithful to it—it is better so.

I am not afraid of the fact that the old Russophilism of our culture is now receiving a quasi-official stamp; it is only an official seal attached to something which was long ago dictated by a natural and unforced love, our old instinct of self-protection which drew us towards the larger family. And I am not at all afraid of the flood of translations from the Russian, or of the diligent efforts of agents and propagandists, who will not let us off anything in the new Soviet literature, not even the most artistically valueless piece of propaganda. Let us not forget that not long ago, in our principal National Treaty, we could not miss out even that shallowed dramatic experiment on the Paris model. No, in this I should be almost inclined to say, the more the better, first of all because I am in favour of completely free and unrestricted cultural imports, and international cultural exchange always and everywhere, even if one takes the rough with the smooth; second, because I know my countrymen, and I know that the Czech reader is culturally almost incorrigibly curious and an almost insatiable consumer. This has, of course, its defects, but I, who have observed at first hand the reading public of other nations, see chiefly the advantages and benefits of it. The Czech reader simply wants to know everything, and so let him have it! On the whole I believe in his judgment, and this can be trained best by a large and all-embracing reading, not by a small one. And finally I am not forgetting that it is our tradition of cultural interest to the East contains a very important element of criticisms in Havlicek, for instance, the judge of the old Russian society and the translator of the satirical Gogol, as well as in Masaryk, the judge of the Slavophiles.

Then there is the West. In the narrow sense again, France is understood to be the most important of the cradles of what is called Western culture, and France is certainly the country where we Czechs went most gladly and most often to become acquainted with it. In the broader sense we think also of England and the Latin countries. It is a fact that here—as well as, for instance, in Russia—the Easterners have always condemned the Westerner, and vice versa. Only we are not very much interested in partisan and polemical anathemas. What is more important for us is to try to define what could be said about the Czech Western orientation by an unbiased person on Czech soil, neither a Westerner nor an Easterner, but simply a Czech.

Such a person would have at once to admit that we are by the very foundation of our culture a specifically and fully Western nation, and that we cannot dispute or undo that historical fact. In the ninth century Christianity of the Eastern Byzantine type and Western Latin Christianity met on our soil, and for two hundred years there was a battle between them,—a cultural struggle. In this struggle the West won, and remained definitely victorious. It was not of course

only a question of the church rites, the liturgy and sacerdotal language, but above all a question of the style and spirit of life, the conception of civilization and the methods of thought and communal and personal relationships. We accepted then, as the basis of our national existence, both the main ideas of Western culture: the Graeco-Roman 'humanitas' and the Christian 'charitas', and this classical-Catholic universalism has given our culture ever since the tenth century—as it has the rest of the European West—a character in sharp distinction from that of the East, and it still is at work in forming our further development. Our first great period of cultural achievement, in the thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, the first great cultural synthesis which we realized, the Gothic synthesis, was really only a natural and logical outcome of our option for the West. It would be interesting to examine in detail how all the individual expressions of our Gothic cultural development—the ideal of the saint in our legends and the ideal of the knight in our chivalrous novels, our love lyrics as well as our painting, sculpture and music, our University and its 'magistri parisienses', and finally the politics of our kings—all reflect the unattainable ideal of Roman and chiefly French models, either directly or indirectly. Then came our Reformation and its sources, the relationships and contacts with the Waldensians, Wycliffians and Calvinists. And our Baroque, which is by its origin so clearly Western, that is Roman. And our national revival, in the spirit of western enlightenment and the thought of the great French revolution. And the whole of our nineteenth century, through which, linked by our greatest names—such as Macha, Neruda, Vrchlicky, Salda and so on—the Western tradition winds like a red thread, giving its Western character to our whole modern culture. And in quoting these names of artists I am leaving out our philosophical, social and political writers from Havlicek to Masaryk, the whole substance of whose thought is Western. And is it not remarkable that these names of our most convinced modern Westerners are at the same time symbols of the truest essence of the Czech character? It is a proof of the complete Western characters of Czech culture. It is a fact that the West played an entirely constructive role in our national life, that it has created and confirmed us, that it has brought us to the knowledge of our own spiritual life and our historical task.

No, the Western character of the Czech spirit and Czech culture is not a problem which could be debated, it is not even a thing to discuss, it is absolutely clear. For ten long centuries the 'homo bohemicus' has understood his efforts towards perfection and fuller humanity, as a part of the broader task which is to be fulfilled in the world by Western man. And so we can ask whether it would not mean shaking the Czech to his deepest ethical foundations if he were to be led away from this spiritual and ethical community of the West, from

that integral entity which was willed and confirmed by long centuries. We can inquire whether to ask a Czech to give up what was the basis of his spiritual life for a thousand years would not mean asking him to give up himself. The spiritual being of our nation is not the work of the last twenty or fifty years; we are not living, nor have we ever lived on borrowed ideas, which could be changed or renewed in every generation. Ten centuries of our spiritual existence and creative work are weighing upon us with their blessed weight, ten centuries of symbiosis and unity with the west, and if they are they are not determining our future as an unchangeable and blind destiny, yet they cannot but show us the direction in which our creative efforts are to go, the methods which we should apply and the traditions of spiritual health and ethical equilibrium which we must observe.

And now to an obscure question we have a clear answer. East or West? Neither West instead of East, nor East instead of West, but East *and* West. With the West we must, whatever happens, preserve a lively and fertile spiritual contact, because we are a Western nation by our ancient culture, and to cut this old contact would mean to fall into a crisis of spiritual perplexity and irresolution without firm foundations. With the East we must increase our contacts to the highest degree, we must not lose any one of these fertile impulses, not a particle of their richness. East *and* West, so that we are ourselves the best informed and the richest. There should not be a good impulse in the world which would not fertilise us, which we could not use for ourselves and in our own fashion. East *and* West, so that we can be the best and most of ourselves. East *and* West, for we must not be ashamed to think of ourselves as a mirror for the whole world and as its centre. East *and* West, not because we want to become an appendage of one or of the other, but because we want it to be said about us more than about anybody else: 'Homo sum . . .' we are human and nothing human must be foreign to us. This presupposes a wide and free outlook into all parts of the world, windows wide open to all the winds of the spirit. It is absolutely essential that our culture, while it remains Czech, should be also in the future as it was in our supreme moments of the past: not merely Western, not merely Eastern, but human.

And here this essay could end, but since I began with a word on France, I shall close with a word on France. Besides, for us the West meant always firstly France, be it in the arts, in science or politics. Even now, or rather especially now, a Czech poet, giving thanks to the Soviet Union does so, whether he wishes it or not, by poetical methods in which can be felt the pulse of French creative thought. So let it be said again: we do not fear for French culture on our soil. If in the future it is as rich in impulses for us as it was during the last 150 years, it will be always followed with great interest, and Czech

curiosity and desire for knowledge will always find its way to France. Only here I think something more is at stake. We have known German culture in Czechoslovakia quite well, without loving it really, and without having exchanged tokens of an inner relationship with the German spirit, be it even the spirit of Goethe. And this is I think what the French are interested in. But then they must listen to a sincere word: French thought here will not automatically come back again to the place which would obviously belong to it, and which our invaders tried to take away by force. France herself abandoned this position—France herself must fight for it again. They were defended, not by her but for her, by Czech writers alone. During the occupation they were our only prophets of French culture in Bohemia, they never cared to point towards the spiritual and ethical bonds which bind our spirit to the French, they never stopped writing poetry and creating from the genius of the West, from the genius of France. The road to the renaissance and strengthening of position of French thought leads here above all through our own poets. Otherwise the French spirit will meet here with the same vivid and eager interest which we gladly offer to everything foreign, but 'le coeur n'y sera pas': and so temporarily we shall not risk our feelings again.

The World of Alfred Hitchcock

By J. MACLAREN-ROSS

By the time this article is printed, Alfred Hitchcock's latest film, *Spellbound*, may have been released in England. Up to the time of writing I have only heard rumours about it—that the script has been written by a famous female psycho-analyst, that the dream-sequences are by Salvador Dalí, and so on and so forth. I do, however, remember reading the original story—a novel by Francis Beeding, about a mental home taken over by a psychopathic patient who impersonates the senior psychiatrist in charge.

This choice of theme seems particularly significant to one who has admiringly followed Mr. Hitchcock's progress as a film-director since the days when *The Lodger*, wearing a white silk scarf and the face of Mr. Ivor Novello, climbed from carpet to linoleum up the decaying but still respectable stairs of the apartment-house to the attic, where he disposed of the remains of his victims. Or did a twin-brother commit the murders, was Mr. Novello wrongly suspected in that early version of Jack-the-Ripper? I don't remember it; it's some time ago since I was fifteen; at the time I didn't even know that the director's name was Alfred Hitchcock: the film when I saw it in France was

called *Les Cheveux d'Or*: apparently, this particular Jack shared the average American soldier's obsession for blondes.

The details are unimportant; here, for the first time, is the stated theme: the impact of the abnormal on the normal—the figure of the psychopath stepping from out of the fog into the world of kippers and aspidistras—as many years later the murderous uncle in *Shadow of a Doubt* was to step back into the bosom of his horribly smug provincial family, looking for peace but unable to accept it in the sleepy, narrow, small-town atmosphere, with the big-hearted dicks disguised as mass-observers on his tail.

In between these two films comes the great Hitchcockian cycle of spy-dramas, in which melodrama is used symbolically, the basic pattern in each case identical, and out of which a new theme begins to emerge: the man hunted by society for a crime that he has not committed. Society must have a scapegoat, and with Hitchcock it is always the innocent, the bewildered, frightened man, shouting out the truth of the conspiracy which no one will believe.

In *The Thirty-nine Steps*, the milkman, with sound British common sense, refuses to credit the hero's story of foreign spies and only agrees to help him escape from a tight corner when he is told a lie about seduction and jealous husbands.

In *The Lady Vanishes*, who will listen to the distraught tales of Margaret Lockwood on board the rushing, roaring express—least of all the two tweeded Englishmen, obsessed with a desire to get home for the cricket: it's true that they do at last join in on the right side, but only when they are actually shot at. (Surely this piece of symbolism could not have been unintentional.)

In *Foreign Correspondent*, the only person who listens sympathetically to the hero's fantastic tale is the chief fifth-columnist himself; a similar situation occurs during the nightmare ballroom-scene in *Saboteur*, when the British general with his medals and the American tap-dancer with his attendant floozies, have turned their backs on the truth exclaiming, respectively, 'Drunk' and 'Screwy.'

In every instance, the 'normal' everyday citizen is shown as a bar to progress, impeding the happy ending through solid stupidity and ignorance—or, truest of all, through misplaced kindness of heart (the fatherly patrolman holding up Teresa Wright in *Shadow of a Doubt*, with a homily on how late little girls should be out, until the sinister uncle, from whom she is fleeing, can grasp her arm). Sometimes, certainly, as in *Saboteur*, the lorry-driver with his bitter, humorous monologue about wives and new hats, does connive at an escape—but only because he is unaware that the hero is a fugitive.

Sometimes, too, the atmosphere of terror and distrust is so diffused that the genuinely normal character appears sinister, like the commercial travellers swapping smutty yarns and showing samples of silk

stockings in *The Thirty-nine Steps*. Anyone may be an enemy agent; the proferred cup of tea may be poisoned; the housekeeper's black, sensible reticule may contain a revolver; an opposite twist makes the dear old vanishing lady a spy, though on the British side.

As a director, Hitchcock employs few startling, technical tricks,* and the smooth, easy surface of his films should not be mistaken for slickness: a word, in any case, far too often employed by literary and cinema critics both here and in the States. It is the atmosphere, the ironic juxtaposition of background and situation, that counts: the brilliant succession of minor characters—the disagreeable lady-librarian in *Shadow of a Doubt*; the malevolent dentist in *The Man Who Knew Too Much*; the horrible little Dickensian pseudo-detective with a passion for pushing people off high places in *Foreign Correspondent*; the young plain-clothes man examining a surrealist painting during the domiciliary visit in *Suspicion*; the polite, broken-nosed butler with the blackjack in *Saboteur*: Hitchcock's most complete portrait-gallery to date.

In Hitchcock's films, one remembers whole scenes, not individual shots: although when he does use the camera to startle, the effect is unforgettable (the diplomat's double with his face blown away in *Foreign Correspondent*). Applying the test of memory, I recall the saboteur talking nostalgically about his childhood, about his small son's toys ('when he smashes them he seems almost sorry'), with a sideglance at the enormous bridge he would like to blow up—as the car gathers speed and the thugs with their arms around each other, sleepily croon 'A Rhapsody for Two.'

In the same picture—which is a sort of summing-up and compendium of all Hitchcock's spy-dramas—I can recall the blind musician with his intuition and his blank, benign face, watching Robert Cummings lift logs awkwardly for the fire, because of the handcuffs on his wrists; the astonishing scene with the freaks in the travelling circus-truck—with the malignant fascist midget (symbolically known as The Major) and the fat, sentimental, bearded lady; the stout society-woman worried about the servant-problem and the ice-cream that hasn't arrived, wringing her jewelled hands, accusing her fellow fifth-columnists of inefficiency; the crowded ballroom with the young couple dancing desperately, the auction of the hostess's jewels while the sinister footman whispers politely in the hero's ear, drawing his attention to the gun pointing from behind the curtain.

To my mind *Saboteur* is the best of all Hitchcock's melodramas, the most full of excitement and suspense—the girl signalling forlornly

* In an essay on Direction by Mr. Hitchcock himself, printed in *Footnotes to the Film* (Lovat Dickson, 1938), he states that nowadays he always tries to tell the story in the simplest possible way, in order to avoid puzzling the audience. He closes this essay with a plea for more freedom—if audiences will give it to him. Let us hope they will.

from the skyscraper window while the taxi-drivers gossip below and the doomed ship awaits its launching—and, of course, the climactic scenes on the Statue of Liberty: Alan Baxter's hoarse, despairing whisper as he clings by his hands over the unnerving drop and his sleeve rips at the seams.

But if, in my opinion, these scenes are as yet unequalled, the earlier films contain moments not easily forgotten—the terrifying 'Knife' sequence in *Blackmail*, where the fateful word drums in the girl's mind out of the mutter of everyday conversation whichever way she turns; the assassin in *Foreign Correspondent* making his escape under cover of a forest of umbrellas: the arc-lamps and the screeching gramophone needle used to torture the old peace-loving diplomat into submission while Eduardo Cianelli's sad, lined, terrible face looks down at him; the aquarium and the bird-shop in *Sabotage* (an adaptation of Joseph Conrad's *Secret Agent* and in many ways one of Hitchcock's few failures); Godfrey Tearle firing point-blank at Robert Donat in *The Thirty-nine Steps* and the quick subsequent cut to the Bible with a bullet embedded in it; the shadow of the strangler's hands intruding on a moonlight serenade in *The Lady Vanishes*; assassination at the opera-house in *Man Who Knew Too Much.*

Then, with the production of *Rebecca* and *Suspicion*, we come to Hitchcock's logical progression from the crowded melodramatic scene to psychological drama with a restricted setting and cast: a mode which culminated in the superb achievement of *Shadow of a Doubt.*

Each of these films derives from its predecessor, with an improvement every time; *Suspicion* derives from *Rebecca* and probably in turn from *Love from a Stranger*: an earlier film which, unfortunately, I have not seen.*

Rebecca was adapted faithfully from the best-selling novel by Daphne du Maurier: the story of a vicious, unquiet spirit whose evil influence dominates, even after death, the corridors of a doomed family-mansion, almost ruining the lives of her former husband and his new bride. There was really little that Hitchcock could do with this modern-gothic tale: the film is oppressive rather than impressive, although the more realistic scenes are handled with the director's usual brilliance—George Sanders imposing his blackmail terms genially over the gnawed carcass of chicken at the picnic-lunch in the car after the inquest, the half-wit muttering over the cigarette-butts in the seductively furnished beach-hut, the fat, vain social-climber tittering coquettishly at Laurence Olivier in the Riviera hotel.

With *Suspicion*, however, the director is once more at home with his story: a reversal of the *Love From a Stranger* theme—the young bride's suspicions of her husband prove, in the end, to be unfounded.

*I regret also that I have not seen "*Rich and Strange*," an experimental film in which, I am told, Hitchcock was given a completely free hand.

Some critics at the time the film was first shown, were disappointed with the final twist: I personally found it satisfying after the suspense of the crazy car-ride towards the fatal cliff: Hitchcock is the only film director who can make one hope for a happy ending. Also, the revelation of the husband's innocence makes the film a complete study of persecution-mania, showing its gradual growth in the girl's mind until it becomes a gigantic shadow, eclipsing all else. A malicious phrase from another woman, a paragraph in the paper, a visit from two detectives, a lady-novelist discussing poisons at the dinner-table, an A.A. map, the kindly, blundering friend subject to heart-attacks who dies of too much brandy in a French hotel, an accident which might have been arranged: once the seed is planted, each of these incidents becomes a significant fact that seems to lead to only one conclusion—murder. True, the cloud finally lifts; the husband is an embezzler and a potential suicide, not a murderer, and a reunion is promised for the young couple in the future, outside the prison-gates.

So, with *Saboteur* in between, we come to *Shadow of a Doubt.* Here, there is hardly any melodrama; the murders happen off the screen; there is little action and only one death—the murderer's fall from a train while attempting to silence the niece who knew too much.

The scene is laid in a small American town, in a 'typical American home,' complete with horrible, precocious children and a detective-story fan for a father. Even the dominant sinister figure itself assumes this time the appearance of outward normality: the saboteur, with the animal speed of movement and the frightening, fish-like face of Alan Baxter, gives way to Uncle Charlie, the charming young psychopath with curly, blond hair and a gleaming smile, actuated by a secret urge to iron out rich, elderly widows and make-off with their money.

(Charlie has had many parallels in real life: the most startling is perhaps Hendrik de Jong, known as the 'Top Hatted Slayer' owing to his predilection for morning-dress, who married his victims and then bashed their faces in with his bare fists. De Jong operated in the States and was never caught: disappeared without a trace while all the ports were watched and the police patrolled the streets: he was never seen again.)

In Charlie's case it is implied that an accident in childhood (fall from a bicycle and injury to the head) is the cause of his insanity. It is doubtful, however, that he is a certifiable case, and he himself has another explanation for his activities—the pressure of life itself—as he pleads for sympathy, for understanding, in an impassioned, tortured speech to Teresa Wright over the uneaten plates of ice-cream in the horrible tatty restaurant he has dragged her into. But the weight of hatred and bitterness inside him are too much for her to bear—the adolescent without experience, who has suffered from

no more than the boredom of small-town Sunday afternoons, enormous family meals and too much candy: she can neither sympathize nor understand, and so the poor, disordered, unhappy mind starts to plan her murder—carbon monoxide, a broken tread on the stairs; even when the death of another suspect ensures his safety, he cannot stop, must make completely sure: he has no confidence in human loyalty any more.

So to his death on the railway-line and the magnificent, ironical closing-scene, with the memorial to his memory being unveiled and the clergyman's solemn epitaph: 'The kindest, finest, most unselfish man we have ever known': while the niece weeps beside her new boy-friend on the steps and THE END flickers up across the screen.

Does the small town return now to its sleepy, everyday round in smug triumph, and do the members of the audience return, too, to their safe, 'normal,' humdrum homes, as oblivious as their prototypes in the film, to the menace underlying the surface of life, the stealthy terror which Alfred Hitchcock has surely attempted to show, under the guise of melodrama, so many times? In *Shadow of a Doubt* he seems to have despaired a little: the 'decent, ordinary, everyday folk' are spared the final knowledge of what has been in their midst; perhaps it's better that they shouldn't know, because they would not, in any case, understand. But Hitchcock's sojourn in the States—in the land of cookies and mothers, of enormous sentimental gestures across floodlit hoardings, of the American dream and the muddled, democratic ideal—has sharpened his sense of satire, and it cannot be an accident that the members of his representative normal family are individually so obtuse and boring.

Mention of democracy brings me to an examination of *Lifeboat*, Hitchcock's only real war-film—although in *Saboteur*, in a speech by Otto Kruger, he gave us the specious fascist philosophy of a fifth-columnist.

Lifeboat is not outwardly a political film, though there is a Communist among the characters and the story is by John Steinbeck. Several survivors from a torpedoed liner are brought together in a lifeboat on the open sea and suddenly the captain of the Nazi submarine that has torpedoed them is hauled on board. His advent starts an argument: should he be thrown back into the sea or not? Those in favour of this step are overruled, because to do so would be not only inhuman but undemocratic.

The Nazi is therefore allowed to live, despite the vehement protests of the Communist stoker: dark-faced, scowling he-man John Hodiak. For a time he shares their trials in perfect harmony, and even comes in useful (having been in civilian life a surgeon) for cutting off William Bendix's leg, which had become gangrened as the result of an injury. From this to persuading Bendix, when delirious, to throw

himself overboard (and helping him do so with a slight push) was only a step.

The Nazi now proceeds methodically with a plan to murder the other survivors one by one. He has concealed his perfect knowledge of English and the presence of extra food and water on his person; he has also a hidden compass: the others were apparently too democratic to search him thoroughly. A sudden storm springing up gives him complete command of the boat: owing to his extra nourishment, he is the only one with strength enough to row for hours on end without stopping. The democrats are by now so much under his spell that some of them are even prepared to play German songs to him on the mouth-organ.

But the discovery of the concealed rations, the fact that he is rowing them steadily into enemy waters, and his blatant admission of Bendix's murder, makes them rise against him at last: he is battered to death with an oar and flung over the side.

Yet at the close of the film another Nazi is hauled aboard and the same process seems about to start all over again, despite the lesson just learned: 'Why, he's only a child!' a woman exclaims sympathetically, and even the appearance of a pistol in the 'child's' hand only leads to its being harmlessly knocked aside. 'Decency,' 'democracy,' 'humanity' triumph once more, and this new Nazi is still alive as the film ends.

Such an ending—like that of *Shadow of a Doubt*—is of necessity equivocal: each cinema-goer may read into it what he likes—an indictment, a plea for total war, a fundamental faith in humane man's inevitable triumph despite the callousness and cunning of his enemy.

I believe the film, when first shown, almost caused a diplomatic incident. The Americans complained that the democrats were made to look completely silly. There seemed, also, to be an opinion that the Nazi was portrayed as a superman: far superior in strength and intelligence to his opponents.

I don't agree at all. The Nazi was portrayed as a completely despicable character: lying, treacherous, brutal and servile by turns. Plausible, certainly: very plausible: the puzzled, ingratiating smile, the big, brutal body deferentially bent, while the cunning, tortuous brain schemed on behind the façade of acceptance and comradeship in a tight corner.

Nor were the democrats made to look especially idiotic: no more so than the citizens of those democratic countries who allowed 'Herr' Hitler to commit his barbarities in peace-time with no more than a mild, reproachful protest.

But after such a reception of a fine and sincere film, containing so many brilliant oblique truths, one can well understand that Alfred

Hitchcock turns to making a picture in which the mad pass themselves off as the sane.

Is the subject symbolical? I leave that to filmgoers to decide when *Spellbound* is shown. It may be that I have read a meaning of my own into the work of Alfred Hitchcock; if so, I am sorry, and I am prepared to apologize to Mr. Hitchcock immediately.

★

Iago

By EDITH SITWELL

(from work in progress)
To Arthur Waley and Beryl de Zoete

LUDOVICI, apostrophizing Iago, the 'Spartan dog,' cried:

'More fell than Anguish, Hunger, or the Sea': and almost all commentators have written of Iago's 'greatness'—Swinburne saying that 'Desdemona was between the devil and the deep sea.' There he is right, but Mr. Wilson Knight speaks with equal truth when he calls Iago 'The spirit of negation.'*

Iago appears in a shrunken shape, with a dulled and hooded eye, as the first tempter appeared in Eden. With the exception of two earth-shaking sentences, and one speech of great beauty in which his voice has taken on the sound of Othello's, Iago never speaks 'above a mortal mouth.' For the rest, there is in his verbal intercourse with others, the terrible 'deadness' that Dr. Bradley noted in the *feeling* of Iago.

He is a subterranean devil. . . . His voice comes to us muffled by the earth of the world, and of his nature. It comes to us from underground, like that of the 'old mole' that Hamlet knew. That is why it sounds so small. But it is none the less deadly. Iago is a million miles beneath the surface of our nature. Though ineffably tainted by the world's evil, he is yet so shut off from the world of ordinary men—he who is yet shaping their lives—that he cannot reach them by any words save those with a jet of poison in them. Though he can overthrow them with a touch, it hardly seems to be *his* touch.

He cannot express himself. 'Do not weep, do not weep! Alas the day!' (Act IV. Scene II) he says to Desdemona, after the scene when she first realizes that night is falling.

* *The Wheel of Fire.*

Indeed, he does not need her tears. They give him no particular pleasure: if anything, they disturb him in his intellectual pride at what he has done.

In one gigantic phrase (as Bradley and other commentators have pointed out), Iago acknowledges the race from which he has sprung —his birthplace, and home.

In answer to Othello's:

> I looke downe towards his feet; but that's a fable:
> If that thou beest a divell, I cannot kill thee.

comes Iago's

> I bleed, sir, but not kill'd.
>
> Act V. Scene II.

Dr. Bradley writes: 'He is saying, "You see, he is right, I am a devil."'

But it goes even further than that. He seems surprised, almost, at that one signal proof that he is man as well as devil: his blood.

This gigantic avowal is equalled by the earlier

> I am your owne for ever——
>
> Act III. Scene IV.

echoing the still more appalling words of Othello's:

> I am bound to thee for ever.
>
> Act III. Scene III.

Othello saw in those words no particular significance. Now, as Iago echoed that avowal, Othello, going through the door, did not hear the words telling him that through the rest of eternity they will be companions in Hell, as tormented and tormentor—that Othello has come down to Iago, and that Iago is attached to him as the serpent is to the heel of the first man.

Before these world-shaking acknowledgments of Iago's devilship, there has been a subterranean hint of the race from which he sprang:

Othello: O misery!
Iago: Poore and Content is rich, and rich enough,
But riches finelesse is as poore as Winter
To him that ever feares he shall be poore.
Good heaven, the Soules of all my Tribe defend
From jealousie.

Act III. Scene III.

Here, perhaps, he is saying that the devils are not so forsaken by Heaven as Othello—not so forsaken that Heaven will not defend them from the worst of all miseries.

Once, and once only, Iago speaks with the voice of a free man:

> Not Poppy, nor Mandragora,
> Nor all the drowsy Syrups of the world
> Shall ever medicine thee to that sweete sleepe
> Which thou ow'dst yesterday.
>
> Act III. Scene III.

This, in its profound beauty, its heart-shaking simplicity, is almost like a foreshadowing of Othello's

> O! now, for ever,
> Farewell the Tranquil minde; farewell Content!
> Farewell the plumed Troope and the bigge Warres
> That made Ambition Virtue! Oh farewell.
> Farewell the neighing Steed, and the shrill Trumpe,
> The Spirit-stirring Drum, the eare-piercing Fife,
> The Royall banner, and all Quality,
> Pride, Pomp, and Circumstance of glorious Warre.
> And, O you mortall Engines, whose rude throates
> The immortal Jove's dread Clamours counterfeit,
> Farewell! Othello's Occupation's gone.
>
> Act III. Scene III.

In the speech of Iago, there was no exultation,—only the freedom of one whose task is done. A human voice is speaking: for once Iago has understood suffering, and the blood which has given him the semblance of a living being, voices itself.

In nearly all other passages, even in

> Witnesse, you ever-burning Lights above!
> You Elements, that clip us round about!
> Witnesse, that heere Iago doth give up
> The execution of his wit, hands, heart,
> To wrong'd Othello's service.
>
> Act III. Scene III.

—his speech is shrunken and bloodless, like the slough cast by a snake.

Once he is frightened—when Othello warns him:

> If thou dost slander her and torture me,
> Never pray more; Abandon all remorse;
> On Horror's head Horrors accummulate;

Doe deeds to make Heaven weepe, all Earth amaz'd;
For nothing canst thou to damnation adde
Greater than that.

Act III. Scene III.

Then Iago's speech becomes a dirty, small, and fluttering thing, like a poisonous insect:

O Grace! O Heaven forgive me!
Are you a man? Have you a Soule? Or Sense?
God be wi' you; take mine office. O wretched Foole
That liv'st to make thine Honesty a Vice.
O monstrous world! Take note, take note, O world!
To be direct and honest is not safe,
I thanke you for this profit; and from hence
Ile love no friend; sith love breeds such offence.

Act III. Scene III.

It is through the very deadness of his speech that his creator expresses him.

He scarcely cares whom he injures, so long as an injury is done, and by his hand. In the first scene of the play, he says:

Call up her father;
Rouse him, make after him, poyson his delight,
Proclaime him in the streets, Incense her kinseman,
And, though he in a fertile Clymate dwell,
Plague him with Flyes, though that his joy be joy,
Yet throw such changes of vexation on't
As it may loose some colour.

'*Plague him with flyes.*' Indeed, he lives in a world of flies.

What is this hell, this world of flies, which he inhabits as the devil of his own pain?* Is it pride—as almost every critic has held? Is pride his element, his climate, and his eternity?

If, of that which this heart of mine is feeling, one drop were to fall into hell, hell itself would become all life eternal . . .

*'*Plague him with flyes.*' Jean Wierus, disciple of Agrippa, gives the following names as being among the Powers and Principalities of Hell:

Beelzebub. Supreme Chief of the Infernal Court and Empire, and Founder of the Order of the Fly.

Leonard. Grand Master of the Sabbath, Knight of the Fly.

Chamos. Knight of the Fly.

and several others.

(Jean Wierus: "Des Prestiges des Démons: Cinq Livres de l'imposture et tromperie des diables, des enchantements et sorcellerie. Faits français par Jacques Grévin de Clermont. Paris 1569.")

Thus spoke St. Catherine of Genoa. . . . The 'life eternal' is union with God. . . . One drop from the deadness of Iago, would raise all hell to the rebellion against God.

For Iago does not feel (as Bradley has pointed out) . . . I would add the suggestion that this may be one reason why he wishes to injure mankind, which possesses the power to feel, to suffer—that power which he lacks.

For he must be first in everything—and to lack anything, even the power of feeling, is to be inferior.

Roderigo says to him, of Othello,

> Thou toldst me thou didst hold him in thy hate.

and Iago replies:

> Despise me if I doe not.

To be despised, is Death.

Iago is, perhaps, too far under the earth for hatred. . . . But pride, he tells himself, must surely give him *some* feeling: he owes it to his pride to hate.

And he is filled with an immeasurable contempt: but this is scarcely a *feeling*. To Roderigo, he says (Act I. Scene III)

> What sayst thou, noble heart?

And by the very fact of applying the words to that despised being, he tells us what is his opinion of a noble heart.

He has a curiosity to see what will be the movements under pain, of these extraordinary beings of an alien world—beings who have passions, nobilities, and are ruled by a power that is not that of the will.

Sometimes he even tries to emulate their feelings, the speech born from these,—as when he pretends to himself, and to Emilia, that he knows jealousy (but even then the pretence breaks down, and we see the face behind the mask: it is that of Pride),—or as when, in the first scene, he says

> Though I doe hate him, as I hate hell-pains.

But here, we feel that he is disguising from us that those pains are his climate—he is used to them, is a native of them; they do not touch him as they would those who have hearts to be consumed. He would, indeed, hardly know the difference between those pains and the pleasures of Heaven. For he is not a damned soul. He is a devil.

He lives by the will—that self-will which, the saints tell us, cause our perpetual separation from God.

'Vertue! a figge! tis in ourselves that we are thus, or thus. Our Bodies are our Gardens, to the which our wills are gardiners: so that if wee will plant Nettles or sowe Lettice, set Hyssope, and weed up Time, Supply it with one Gender of Hearbes or distract it with many, either to have it sterred with idleness or manured with Industry, why the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the balance* of our lives had not one scale of Reason to poyse another of Sensuality, the blood and baseness of our Natures would conduct us to most preposterous Conclusions; but wee have reason to coole our raging Motions, our carnall Stings, our unbitted Lusts, whereof I take this that you call Love, to be a Sect or Seyen.'

Act I. Scene III.

He seems, in his curiosity, to be asking for information about this strange stirring in the being.

Once, he almost believes (coldly and curiously) that he himself feels this stirring:

> . . . That Cassio loves her, I do well beleev it;
> That she loves him, 'tis apt, and of great credite;
> The Moore (howbeit that I endure him not)
> Is of a constant, loving, noble Nature;
> And I dare thinke he'le prove to Desdemona
> A most deare husband. Now, I doe love her too;
> Not out of absolute lust—(though peradventure
> I stand accountant for as great a sinne)—
> But partly led to dyet my Revenge,
> For that I doe suspect the lusty Moore
> Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof
> Doth like a poisonous Minerall gnaw my Inwards;
> And nothing can, or shall content my Soule
> Till I am eeven'd with him, wife for wife;
> Or failing so, yet that I put the Moore
> At least into a Jealousie so strong
> That Judgment cannot cure.
>
> Act II. Scene I.

To him, the destruction of Hell is always cold—that of a poisonous mineral—is never that of fire, since fire purifies:

> The Moore already changes with my poysons
> Dangerous conceites are in their Natures poysons
> Which at the first, are scarce found to distaste,

* 'balance.' In the 1632 folio, it is 'braine.'

But with a little act upon the blood,
Burne like the Mines of Sulphure.

Act III. Scene III.

Even at that moment when his pride tells him there is a stirring in his nature, 'not out of absolute lust' he does not know feeling.

When Othello, in the midst of his torture, falls into a coma, following the words 'Confess Handkerchief—O divell!' (Act IV. Scene I) Iago says:

'How is it, Generall? Have you not hurt your head?' and Othello, from his mine of sulphur, replies 'Dost thou mocke me?'

Iago is honestly surprised by the question.

I mocke you? No, my heaven.

For how should he understand the agony of the soul?

Yet he knows there is a difference between himself and the common humanity that feels that 'sect or seyen' of lust that they call love; he realizes even, in a numb way, that they do not recognize it is only a freak of nature, a sport of that greater parent.

Cassio : She is a most exquisite Lady.
Iago : And Ile warrant her, full of Game.
Cassio : Indeed she is a most fresh and delicate Creature.
Iago : What an eye she has! methinks it sounds a parley of provocation.
Cassio : An inviting eye, and yet methinks modest.
Iago : And when she speakes, is it not an Alarum to love?
Cassio : She is indeed perfection.

Act II. Scene III.

This difference between their point of view was, perhaps, the

. . . daily beauty in his life
which makes me ugly.

Act V. Scene I.

—and the reason why Cassio must die.

For at one moment, Iago had thought it would not be worth while to kill Cassio. If he lived or died would be indifferent to Iago, who is not a murderer for the sake of murder, but an intellectual following his philosophical tenets to their logical conclusion.

Though in the trade of warre I have slaine men,
Yet doe I hold it very stuffe o' the conscience
To doe no countriv'd murder. I lacke iniquitie
Sometimes to doe me service.

This is his one fault, perhaps, according to his own tenets, his one failure to serve his god, himself.

Iago sees himself as good as any man. (For does he not follow the tenets of his religion, evolved from his own nature?) Or, at any rate, he believes that the 'good heaven' may 'the souls of all my tribe defend.' Like the fallen angels, he tells himself that he has a right to heaven. But he is not a fallen being . . . he has never known either the Paradise of the first man, or the heaven of the angels.

When Cassio is drunk (Act II. Scene III) he says to Iago:

'Well, God's above all; and there be soules must be saved, and there be soules must not be saved.'

Iago, amused, answers:

'It's true, good lieutenant.'

Cassio : For mine owne part—no offence to the Generall
nor any man of quality—I hope to be saved.
Iago : And so doe I too, lieutenant.
Cassio : Ay! but by your leave, not before me; the lieutenant
is to be saved before the Ancient.

This speech, with its reminder of injuries that Iago claimed to have suffered, and the suggestion that Iago might not be first in heaven (as he was first in hell) acted on Iago like the poison from the mines of sulphur. Remembered at the moment of decision, it determined Iago that Cassio must die. Those words came from a being whom Iago despised, but who had been put before him and had reminded him of that preferment.

To Montana, who had been watching Cassio, he said:

You see this fellow that is gone before;
He is a soldier fit to stand by Caesar
And give direction: and doe but see his vice;
Tis to his vertue a good Equinox,
The one as long as the other; tis pity of him.
Act II. Scene III.

For he, Iago, has no vice. To have a vice would be to sink below the strength of his will. Pride is the virtue of the devils: and to be a villain in the ordinary sense is beneath the dignity of the Princes of Hell.

Indeed, to bring about his own ends, Iago can even assume a virtue:

How poore are they that have not Patience

he says to Roderigo (Act II. Scene III). And his own patience is endless.

'His creed,' says Bradley, 'for he is no sceptic, he has a definite creed, is that absolute egoism is the only natural and proper attitude, and that conscience or honour or any other kind of regard for others is an absurdity.'

'O villainous!' (he exclaims, when Roderigo threatens to drown himself because of his unrequited passion for Desdemona). 'I have looked upon the world for four times seven years; and since I could distinguish betwixt a benefit and an injury, I never found a man that knew how to love himselfe. Ere I would say I would drowne my selfe for the love of a Gynney Hen, I would change my humanity with a Baboone.'

It is to be noted here, that whilst most men would say 'Since I could distinguish right from wrong,' Iago says, 'distinguish benefit from injury.'

And yet, for all his self-love, this creature who, in spite of his shrunken speech, has what Baudelaire called 'la vraie grandeur des pariahs,' in order to bring about damnation in the world, is willing to forfeit his own life. He scarcely cares. 'In more than one way,' said St. Augustine, 'do men sacrifice to the rebellious angels.'

As commentators have pointed out, Iago is perfectly honest in many of his speeches about himself. 'Men should be what they seem,' he says to Cassio. Iago is what he seems: but nobody will believe him. It is impossible that a man should impute such a character to himself, did it exist. Iago says to Othello: 'My Lord, you know I love you.' He does not say: 'I love you.' . . . And there must have been laughter in Hell at those words.

Sometimes, however, as all writers on Shakespeare have discerned, Iago looks from behind a grave mask, swearing 'By Janus,' and smiling to think we do not see the two faces of the god who is his patron and pattern—the god of the door, the gateway. . . . We know whither that door led, in Othello's case. . . . But Iago's speech, as I have said already, is no mask. 'The degree and nature of a man's sensibility,' said Nietzsche, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, 'extends to the highest altitude of his spirit.'—Iago's did not. He is slow and sluggish as the serpent. When he speaks in verse, there is scarcely a beat or pulse, excepting when he is speaking of himself. The movement of the verse is horizontal, never vertical.

In spite of this pulselessness, the caesura is at times so deep that we feel we are looking down into a chasm of Hell.

> I am glad of it; for now I shall have reason
> To show the Love and Duty that I beare you
> With franker spirit; therefore, as I am bound,
> Receive it from me; I speake not yet of proofe.
> Looke to your wife; observe her well with Cassio;

Weare your eyes thus, not jealious nor Secure:
I would not have your free and Noble Nature
Out of selfe-Bounty, be abus'd; look to't.

Act III. Scene III.

Down to 'abused' all the caesuras are equal,—moderately long,—the ordinary breaks of speech. But with that word, we look down into a hell-chasm,—but only for a moment. The pause, though of that depth, is scarcely longer than the others.

After this speech, for a while, the pauses are less deep, and are quick, as if Iago were covering up something,—as in

He thought twas witchcraft; but I am much to blame.

In the following lines,

I hope you will consider what is spoke,
Comes from my Love. But I do see y'are moov'd.

—after the huddled movement of the first line, comes, in the second, another deep chasm,—that, perhaps, of the Hell from which Iago was born. That dulled speech of his causes him to repeat 'I see y'are moov'd' twice again within the space of nine lines.

. . . . .

How strangely must Iago and Desdemona have looked into each other's eyes.

'For,' as Jeremy Taylor said of a gaze, 'as from the eyes of some persons, there shoots forth an evil influence, and some have an evil eye and are infectious, some look truthfully as a friendly planet, and innocent as flowers.'

Desdemona, this young being who said of her hand

It yet has felt no age nor knowne no sorrows

Act III. Scene IV.

—she whose 'sins' were 'loves she bore' Othello; she who was 'a child to chiding,' and who must go into the darkness alone,—saw no treachery in Iago.

'An eye,' said Jeremy Taylor, 'that dwells too long upon a starre must be refreshed with lesser beauties, and strengthened with greens and looking glasses, lest the sight become amazed with too great a splendour.'

The beauty is no less, but the ineffable drooping swan-like dying music of Desdemona is in contrast to the planetary magnificence of Othello's gait in verse:

I cannot weepe, nor answer have I none
But what should go by water. . . .

and

Sing all a greene willough shall be my garland

—these are in the same tones.

It is the wind.

—a dropping and dying fall, bringing memories of sweetness. Yes. It is the wind. Only that, and as swiftly gone. Her words were always few, and always had the sound of a wind among trees.

Sometimes the very sound of her voice will bring a faint echo of that of her beloved Othello:

Othello : Ah, Desdemona; away, away, away!
Desdemona : Alas, the heavy day!—Why do you weepe.

An echo, more than a rhyme; and one deep in her heart, as the echoing sound lies deep in the line.

Two Poems

By LAWRENCE DURRELL

BLIND HOMER

A WINTER night again, and the moon
Loosely inks in the marbles and retires.

The six pines whistle and stretch, and there
Eastward the loaded brush of morning pauses

Where the few Grecian stars sink and revive
Each night in glittering baths of sound.

Now to the winter each has given up
Deciduous stuff, the snakeskin and the antler,

Cast skin of poetry and the grape.

Blind Homer the lizards still sup the heat
From the rocks, and still the spring,

Noiseless as coins on hair repeats
Her diphthong after diphthong endlessly,

Exchange a glance with one whose art
Conspires with introspection against loneliness.

This February 1946, pulse normal, nerves at rest:
Heir to a like disorder, only lately grown

Much more uncertain of his gift with words,
By this plate of olives, this dry inkwell.

RODINI

WINDLESS plane-trees above Rodini
To the pencil or the eye are tempters

Where of late trees have become ears in leaf,
Curved for the cicada's first monotony

Hollow the comb, mellow the sweetness,
Amber the honey-spoil

In these windless unechoing valleys
The mind slips like a chisel-hand

Touching the surfaces of the clement blue
Yet must not damage the solitary Turk

Gathering his team and singing, in whose brain
The same disorder and the loneliness—

The what-we-have-in-common of us all
Is there enough perhaps to found a world?

Then, of what you said once, the passing
Of something on the road beyond the tombstones

Reflecting on dark hair with its sudden theft
Of blue from the darkness of violets

And below the nape of the neck a mole
All mixed in this odourless waterclock of hours.

So one is grateful, yes, to the ancient Greeks
For the invention of time, the lustration of penitents

Not so much for what they were
But for where we lie under the windless planes.

Poem

By TERENCE TILLER

SLOWLY the roses bleed into the water,
a wound, a garlanded mouth, in every stem;
a languid sweetness turning rich and bitter
—the last of Rome.

Fragile and wistful as the weather, caught
naked and cold in flowers, with the grace
of virgin dancers, is the apricot
in our blue glass.

Barbarian slaves: the grounds where roses grow
are wild and thorny in their flaunting weeds;
where, stripped for wind, the flowering trees bow to
their green brides.

Oh trees in your arms lulling the wind;
roses written by the sun, your open lips:
to what imperial splendour are you bound,
and by what steps?

Crushed in the beauty and the liquid noose,
you dance the apricot, draw the slow breath
of roses dying like Petronius
a seemly death.

From a Cyprus Diary

By LAURIE LEE

I

Now we set out on a three-day tour of the mountain forests, aiming to push right through to Paphos, on the west coast. I had a new guide, a blond drawling forester named Fuller. He was a man of opinions, a collector of prejudices, with an intimate knowledge of trees, a love of all flora, and a supreme contempt for most other forms of life.

As we drove again through the plain, westward, harvesting was in full swing. The shimmering red air, drifting above the ground,

sliced through the stalks of the wild flowers so that their blooms seemed afloat on dancing water. Summer was advancing like a military band, the sides of the hills reverberated with the heat and the white cap on Troödos was almost gone.

We climbed up the Solea Valley: brown earth, bushes of lavender, poplars, rock roses, with Troödos gliding close above our heads. In the mountain village of Kalopanayotis we stopped to eat. Here were steep roofs of curry-coloured hills, terraced with vines and olives, streams bubbling in the valley bottom, sulphur-springs issuing from the rocks, and low clouds breaking on the distant peaks. The cottages had flat roofs, thatched with mud and brush. A slapping and shouting of women among the stones of the stream revealed the village washing place. The shouting was a warning to the men, for no men must approach the women when defenceless at their scrubbing.

In Kalopanayotis there was an old church, which we visited. Its walls and ceiling were smothered with murals, scenes from the scriptures and from the lives of the saints—old, flaking, but still vivid. On a mattress before the altar lay a paralyzed man, his eyes fixed in a green stare upon the glittering star-burst ikon. He had come as a pilgrim, borne in a cart from Kyrenia, and here he would be cured.

In a vestry room nearby lay the old priest, dying. He lay on a small iron bed, a chaplet of beads in his hand, his long beard combed and spry. His room was full of women and little girls, chattering and feeding him with gruel. He greeted us with ghostly merriment, cackling in a faraway whisper and shaking his beads at us. He drew us on to his bed and talked at length about war, wild goats, food and death.

As I came out of his room I heard a sound in the air, and, looking up, saw a black swan stretched out in flight, winging its way down the valley. Strange and memorable it was, this black cross of throbbing feathers, flying among these steep terraced hills where there were no ponds or lakes.

We climbed now on a long mounting coil of khaki road which disappeared into the clouds above us like an Indian rope trick. The road was narrow and new built, blasted along the edges of precipices, shored up with stones and timbers. It followed an intestinal course, hugging the twisting face of a dozen valleys, leading us all ways through a maze of rocky vistas.

We were climbing into the forest, and into a new world. A few hours back, in the bubbling heat of the plain, we were in the Mediterranean: now we were among the ghosts of the North—steep crags of dark trees drifting with mist and gleaming with fine cold rain,

range upon range of spiky conifers scraping a leaden sky, valleys so deep you could not see their depths though you could hear the roaring of water far down among the boulders. It was a landscape for the horn of the hunter, for beards and goats' eyes and the pine-cone smells of mythology.

The trees grew dense and fine, and in pockets of sunlight they lit up with a blue-green radiance like fountains of salt sea spray. There were many varieties: cedar, fir, larch, red-trunked arbutus, golden oak, cypress, juniper, aleppo pine and wild olive. There were also many bushes of broad-leafed storax, whose yellow berries are a death trap for eels. Throw a handful of these berries into a stream and the eels go mad and you can hook them out with a stick.

Fuller expanded in the forest, sniffing the air like a stag. This was his territory, and there was six hundred square miles of it. Until recently it had been practically unknown, impassable save to the native shepherds, but the new roads, built mainly under Fuller's supervision, had opened up hundreds of miles of these once shut valleys. Fuller grew garrulous and dreamy among his trees. He bid me keep a look out for the wild goat, the moufflon, a creature with curled horns which had once lived here in great numbers, but had since been so hunted by the shepherds that it was now most rare. He showed me the corkscrew pines, dwarfed, twisted, tangled in knots through having been cropped by the goats when young. He took me among the cedars, scraping the soil with his hands and pointing to the green seedlings already showing. The cedar seeds itself every five years, and up till now the goat had seen to it that very few survived. Now, however, with the clearing of the flocks, here was a new and lusty generation that would thrive. Full grown, these cedars are magnificent, as prolific and mighty as those of Lebanon. The cedar forests of Troödos have been the treasure troves of conquerors for three thousand years. Both Turk and Venetian stripped them to build their ships of war. And the Chittim wood of the Old Testament, used to build Solomon's Temple, was cut from the ancestral trunks of these cedars at which we were now looking.

All through that afternoon we journeyed along the narrow, twisting road, poised above shelving slopes that dropped for a thousand feet. We reached the snow line, and stared close into the white face of Mt. Olympus. The black spikes of the pine trees detached into flocks of ravens that tumbled in the air and swooped and croaked over the shining peak of snow. In sudden bright sunlight the shadows of these birds, racing and dipping over the drifts, showed up as black and clean-cut as the flying birds themselves. The air was full of their movements and metallic hoarseness, sharp as the rocks uncovered by the thaw. I walked under the trees and picked up a handful of

this cold strange snow, flecked over with pine-needles like ermine. I sucked its flavour of roots and resin and felt it burn my mouth with its sudden shock of winter.

We went on, working our way westward. Clouds dragged and tore themselves into long scarves beneath us, they piled up in the valley bottoms or went plunging in great silent avalanches down the steep hillsides. We stopped on a wooden bridge that spanned two precipices: I couldn't look down, but my eye went out to a dozen horizons that rose in green ridges, one above the other, hard and clear in the stormy air. Upon the peak of one of these, far off, I saw a temple, and below it the white walls of a monastery.

'That is Kykko,' said Fuller.

We arrived there in the late afternoon, and the Abbot took us to his private cell and fed us. As a cell it was not austere, in fact it was crowded with human vanities—lace-backed chairs, polished tables, floral-edged mirrors, and a bed smothered with cushions and rich rugs. The white walls were hung thick with hand-coloured photographs, mainly of the Abbot himself—among his brethren, among his roses, reading, praying, posed with a moufflon. After a long and obscure exchange of civilities, the Abbot called in a boy to sing to us. The boy's face shone pink with mountain air, and his dark curls were as tight and formal as those of a Greek statue. He rested his hands on the back of a chair, and smiled, and looked at the ceiling. Then he sang: a most sweet and strange song, hot-blooded and with a melody not of the western world.

The boy sang in Greek, but here is a rough translation of the words, which I took down:

> 'Gabriel, overwhelmed, cried unto Thee;
> "Mother of Christ, O the beauty of your virginity,
> And the great brilliance of your ignorance!"
> But what description worthy of you shall *I* offer?
> What shall I name thee?
> I am at a loss and confused.
> Therefore, as I have been instructed, I cry to you;
> "Hail, Full of Grace!"'

The old Abbot listened with closed eyes, rocking in his chair and nodding his shaggy head. At the end of the song he sighed, slapped the boy on his behind, and bade him be off.

We sat talking merrily with the Abbot while coffee, wine and cigarettes circulated among us. The old man's eyes sparkled with mirth and worldly good humour. We talked of politics, prices, goats, and the work of the monastery. Kykko was rich, and the sources of its wealth various and peculiar. The Abbot fumbled under his robes and produced a small glass phial which he uncorked and

held to his nose. Then he leaned towards me and poured out a few drops of thin oily liquid on to the back of my hand. I sniffed it and was immediately drowsed by a scent that was a distillation of all summers.

In spacious gardens above the monastery the monks grew thousands of roses; they gathered the blossoms and distilled them, and sold the rich scent to merchants from Cairo, Beirut and Istambul.

'This,' said the Abbot, indicating the phial in the palm of his hand, 'is an acre of flowers.'

But when asked its worth he just clicked his teeth.

The monks of Kykko, within the ancient pattern of their community raised in these clouds, were purveyors to most of the sensory appetites. Beside their acres of musky roses, for which they had an oriental affection, they possessed large vineyards and were the makers of strong sweet wines. In their time they were also the largest shepherds of Troödos, having a mixed flock of over five thousand sheep and goats—though these had now been bought up and cleared by the Administration.

Diligent husbandmen though they were, I would not suggest they neglected the tastes of the spirit. To these they devoted themselves with equal energy and skill. Our long and somewhat fleshly conversation, touching as it did, and sometimes lewdly, upon the opportunities for delight still present in the modern world, was often turned by the old Abbot into serious lamentations over the state of man, his division of faith and his confusion of loyalties.

This conversation was brought to an unhurried close by the tolling of a bell, the signal for prayers. We rose and walked through the white arched galleries that ran in irregular flights above the courtyard. The chime of the bell, cracked and melancholy, sent a dim gold echo rolling over the tiled roofs and up the wooded hillside. Monks hurried in twos and threes across the courtyard, solemn, patriarchical, splendidly bearded and trailing long cassocks. Presently, from the tiny chapel, there came a sound of rough male voices chanting in unison, and the ringing of little bells. The low sun powdered the pine trees with pale gold; a bright moon appeared suddenly, stuck to the sky like a piece of lemon peel. The air drew cold, and it was time to go.

We spent that night in the Government Forest Station of Stavros, among sparkling moonlit pines breathing of snow and wolves, of Sibelius and Siberia, of anywhere but the Mediterranean.

II

We were in a wild part of the forest now, a sinister, roadless area of sealed and secretive valleys. The very trees here seemed ageless

and alien, growing in dark rough groups, twisted, hoary, lifted out of legend. There were whole hillsides of blackened stumps that told a violent tale. For these were the marks of the shepherds, men who had not taken kindly to the loss of their flocks. In protest they had come out at night with pitchpine torches and set the forest on fire; they had left the hills in a sheet of flame, and there were many peaks, now, that stood brown and bare among the pines, like patches of mange on the hide of a black pig. Many shepherds, having made this gesture, escaped to other valleys and lived as outlaws. There were also seven murderers running uncaught in this part of the forest. Steep and trackless, it was an ideal hideout. At night they would steal into the villages for food, or their wives would carry bread to a rendezvous. Nobody gave them away, though there were rewards for their capture: fear on the one hand, village loyalty on the other, kept them safe.

I heard much of Midas, a legendary figure around Stavros, who had stabbed a man in a fit of jealousy and taken to the woods seven years ago. He was still free. Many had seen him, but no one would give him up. They described him as a small but powerful man, bearded, slung about with cartridge belts and carrying always two guns. The forest guards were terrified of him.

One such guard came up to Stavros to see Fuller. He had come to talk about ordinary matters, but it was known that he had stumbled upon Midas only a week before, and Fuller taxed him with it. The man would admit nothing. In his smiling, rather contemptuous way, Fuller teased him, calling him a coward, a sheep, a crawling eel, a fat-bellied woman. In the end the fellow wept.

'But Midas is a shooting man!' he kept saying, miserably. 'I look after the trees, I do not look for Midas.'

It was obvious that the forest guards were more fugitive from Midas than he from them. It was equally obvious that Midas indulged his sense of humour, whiling away the tedium of exile by tracking the poor guards down and scaring their shirts off. As an outlaw he was well organized, and he had friends. Nothing short of a military expedition would ever capture the man.

From this hill-station of Stavros we planned to drive down to Soli, on the coast, and from there round the western shores to Paphos. We came down the valleys that mellowed from wizened pine to bright green almonds and soapy cherries. It was a beautiful bright morning, quivering with dragonflies and lizards. It gave me a strong feeling of boyhood to be among these natural and unkempt woods, I looked for men in buckskin and fleeces, for boars and stags in flight from spinning arrows, I strained my ears for the yelping of fox-cubs, I sniffed for wild honey.

Some miles down the valley we came upon an old crumbling village, laid out on a cleared slope and wrapped in sweet-smelling smoke. Women were burning charcoal under mounds of earth, and the smoke hung over the valley in slender throbbing veils. We stopped here, and climbed up among the houses. The whole village turned out to greet us, they came crowding down on to one of the sunlit terraces, tables were carried out under the fig trees and spread with wine, bread, goats-cheese, nuts, raisins and dried fish. The men, in white woollen sweaters and high leather boots, gathered close around us, and the women grouped themselves at a discreet but ever decreasing distance away. Children crawled naked on the ground and black pigs ran snuffling hither and thither.

As we drank and nibbled our sharp-flavoured snacks, the talk grew merry. Soon an old man began to sing, and another to dance. Sweating and laughing, they showed themselves off; the tide of excitement rose, and the dark faces of the women glowed and grinned under the fig leaves.

'We'll get them to do the dagger dance,' said Fuller. 'Sort of thing you'd like.'

But no, they couldn't; there was no music. I offered to play for them, so they brought me a violin. It was presumptuous of me, for the intervals of their scale are peculiar and subtle, almost impossible for the western ear to grasp. But they indulged me. A man leaned low and hummed the tune into my face. It came to me in gusts of wine and garlic. He repeated it several times until I was able to give back the ghost of it. Then, while I played, they danced, and the crowd grew denser, clapping its many hands.

There were two men in the dance, also a handkerchief and a dagger. The dagger was driven up to its hilt in the ground, and the two men, each holding to a corner of the handkerchief, skipped round it. Suddenly one of the men began to bend backwards, down, down, his mouth wide open, his throat muscles working. At the extremity of his bend he gripped the dagger in his teeth and drew it slowly from the ground. There was a loud shout at this.

Now the man with the dagger circled the other, panting, wary and wild. He held the dagger in the air, he flashed it in the sun, then he stabbed the other hard in the breast. There was a long hissing of breath, shouts rose rapturously from every throat, and the screams of the women flew up sharply together like a flock of startled birds. The stabbed one fell heavily on his back, kicked in the dust, and lay still. The other crouched over him and with dagger reversed cut a vein in his ankle and blew to loosen the skin. Then he began to draw long rippling lines down the prone man's body, weaving his hand to the music. Down the breast and loins, down the stiffened legs, the hilt of the dagger drew a pattern of savage

cuts. In dumb show, to the sighs and howls of the crowd, the murderer skinned his victim, and the dance ended.

The whole significance of this dance was something I never gathered, but it was peculiar to these hills. Here the men were shepherds, and the sons of generations of shepherds. Their songs and dances had all this flavour, as had the games of the children—a flavour of hunting, feud and blood.

After the dance a young man took me to see the school. He was the village teacher, a youth of extraordinary intelligence whose talk swung rapidly between the extremes of enthusiasm and despair. His children escaped him, they slipped through his fingers, they ran all ways into the woods like wild pigs. In this primitive, poverty-stricken village the young man stood out strangely like a pearl among peas.

The school was a shack, nothing more. Through the planks of the warped wooden walls the sun came streaming in, through holes in the mud roof you could see the sky. There were a few broken slates on the desks, and a map of sand in a tray showing the seven peaks of Troödos. But there were also dozens of exquisite clay models scattered about the room, fashioned by the children, figures of Greek mythology—minotaurs, gods and goddesses, winged horses, furies. The teacher described their histories to me in a way that must have shaken the children to their very bones. The legends came from his mouth in a stream of passionate nostalgia, fierce and hopeless. When he spoke of modern Greece his eyelashes glittered with tears.

Walking back from the school, among a litter of rocks and thorns, I looked in at several of the cottages. They were museums of poverty: single rooms crowded with old beds, floors of earth crawling with ants, and all the food hung from the ceilings against the rats. I found the dagger man crouching in the doorway of a tiny hovel. He scrambled to his feet and with a courteous gesture invited me inside. His old wife was chopping onions on the mat; his youngest child lay on a bed, arching itself rigidly upon its heels and the crown of its head. All the time I was there it remained in this posture, horribly reminiscent of the dance, bent like a bow and rolling its glazed eyes. It was two years old, an idiot, deaf and dumb.

The cottages, with their mud and brush roofs, were all alike. Each had a little shack outside, thatched with sticks, which held chickens or small black pigs. There were tree trunks hollowed out to invite wild bees. But the stockades of thorn, built for the goat-flocks, were empty.

For the lives of these shepherds were changing. The clearing of their flocks from the forest had left their village with a sinister, rootless air. Some of the men had settled down to new work as foresters or

charcoal-burners. But the only hope for the majority lay in farming, and there was no farm-land in these hills. The village, in fact, was dead, and its last days had come. The Government was planning to move all the families to a lowland site on the western coast, where they would be given fields and taught to farm. Such a thing had not happened in Cyprus before, and it would be a tricky venture.

We left the village to its last days; we left the hills to their mists and dragonflies; we drove down past the copper mines of Skourriositta and came to a wide bay leaping with fresh cool winds. Here lay the wheatfields to which the village might eventually be moved. It seemed a paradise.

Further round the bay we arrived at Polis, a Turkish village, where we ate kid roasted on spits, and then watched two men digging a well. A small bucket came up on a rope, full of earth, and the man down in the ground was happy; he was out of the sun, and the clay was cool with water under his feet. He sang.

Wandering among the gardens we picked green almonds, and ate them. They were sharp and sweet, their flesh milky. We saw women slapping dough on a wooden trough, preparing to bake bread. We saw, in a backyard, a curious, mad, patchwork factory, built of petrol cans, which they used for extracting turpentine and pitch from pine logs. The men of Polis chewed the black pitch like gum; it was also chewed by the lovers, who turned it into an erotic game, passing the stuff intimately from mouth to mouth.

From Polis we drove up over the white stone hills towards Paphos, stopping at villages on the way. They were villages of limestone, surrounded by terraced vineyards. Girls by the side of the road were gathering mulberry leaves for silkworms; as they reached among the branches the green flowers of the tree fell into their shining hair. Others had gathered armfuls of mimosa and were sitting on doorsteps making wreaths for the May Day festival.

We went into a farmyard to look at one of the stone vats in which they tread the vines. There was a large earthen bread-oven in the yard from which issued a succession of eerie grunts and groans. Presently an old man clambered out and greeted us with a sad air. He gazed at us glumly with wet black eyes, then kicked the ground with his boot. Then he began to speak, and in a rising fury told us a tale that shook every hair on his body.

'What does he say?' I asked helplessly.

Fuller fingered his chin and gazed without expression into the distance.

'He says the soldiers have been here and stolen all the stones from his terrace and left his daughter in a miserable condition.'

The old man waited for this translation, looked at me sharply for

my reaction, kicked again savagely at the ground, then climbed back into his bread-oven.

Before entering Paphos we called at the Monastery of Saint Neophytos, which stands near a limestone cliff. In 1159, Neophytos, then a young man, came and cut himself a hole in this cliff and lived in it for the rest of his life. The Monastery nearby was founded in his honour.

I went into the cave, which had several small chambers. The walls and ceiling were covered with paintings—they climbed like autumnal creepers about the cave's curved shell, figures in green, red, purple and gold, grouped in the subtle postures of the Byzantine style. One series, depicting the Passion of Christ, ran up the wall and across the ceiling; it was early thirteenth century, and in this cramped, ill-lit, uneven space its diversity was incredible. One panel, of Christ washing the Apostles' feet, had been retouched, but the original fervour of the artist still shone from its pattern of crouching figures, beards, hands and shoe-strings. Of all the religious painting I saw in Cyprus nothing moved me so much as these in this eggshell cave.

In the next cell, which I entered by a hole in the wall, I found a table and shelf cut from the rock, and the hermit's tomb, which he had hollowed out during his lifetime and in which pilgrims still stretch themselves for healing. There was also a wooden cupboard packed with the skulls and bones of the saint's apostles. The mixed bones were piled in a muddled heap, the skulls hung in line from a row of nails, like white cups on a dresser.

We spent that night in Paphos, drinking sweet sherry and walking the moon-bright streets.

III

Easter Monday, May 7th. To-day the festival was at its height —an orgy of roast-meat, hard-boiled eggs and sickly, death-smelling flowers. The heat was white and terrible, and we could do nothing. The streets of the capital, empty at noon, flaked and blistered and stank with sour wine and over-ripe goat-flesh. Ralph, George and Achmed the driver, met me in a café; and we sat there steaming, each with his own black halo of sharp and spinning flies.

It was May 7th, the war was near its end, Cyprus in the grip of the feast, and there was nothing we could do. So we decided to go out to the village of Lythrodondta, which lay in a hill-valley outside this frying-pan of a plain. We thought it might be cooler there. It was not. The sun rolled down between the steep iron rocks, and lay there, white and shaking, like a lake of mercury.

The village, *en fête*, packed the streets and squares; the shepherds with their straggling families came down from the hills; and in that tiny space the multitude gathered, each member of it bringing his own private blood-oven to add to the general heat and suffocation.

But the place was merry. All the long afternoon we played games, or walked up and down, or nibbled nuts from the stalls set up in the churchyard. There was meat roasted with onions, and puffs of dough fried in olive-oil. The mayor was drunk, and kept tumbling off the churchyard wall. And Nikos the farmer, led us back and forth among the wonders of the feast, going before us in his white shirt and leather boots, as proud and handsome-looking as Albert the Prince.

All this time, in the thick white dust of the churchyard, the village girls went round about scuffling and murmuring in a slow wide-moving circle, like a string of bright painted duck-decoys. Down-at-heel and beautiful, they shuffled along in their home-made, home-dyed dresses, a startling rainbow of shapes and colours, hit-or-miss, unstandardized.

Within the wide circle of the girls, the boys were wild and noisy, running and leaping upon one another's backs and riding each other like asses. The younger boys, with contraptions of keys, nails and match-powder, threw explosions and screams of confusion among the walking legs of the girls.

While these games were going forward, Nikos led me off up a gulley of cactus, and, with many mysterious passes of the hand before his eyes and mouth, promised me something special. Gradually the cacti began to disgorge waiting figures—youths and merry men. They gathered before me grinning white, sweat shone on their tight curls and bearded lips, and they welcomed me with capers.

Off we went up the gulley to the village edge. Every so often a man would stop and look at me closely, grinning; and then everyone would stop, and the man would slap his mouth with the back of his hand and roar with laughter, and then we'd go on again together.

We came at last to a stone-built yard which contained dust, goats, several sitting hens, and a dead mule. When Nikos saw the mule he stood as if crucified. He rolled his eyes and blew out his lips.

'Man!' he cried awfully, shocked and self-righteous for my sake. He fixed the owner with a terrible look, and his tongue broke into forks of indignation.

The owner, wide-eyed with apology and regret, made little mouse-like movements of his hands in an attempt to placate Nikos. Then he scampered across the yard, dived headlong among the flies and tugged at the mule by its ears. Mute, miserable, he pulled and struggled, demonstrating his helplessness to us all. So the men rallied to him, and the mule went through the wall and over the bank, sliding stiffly into the cacti like a gigantic wooden toy.

The nagging of Nikos flickered away, and everyone settled down to the purpose of our visit. The owner, whose name, from the anger of Nikos, I judged to be Theo, now took me by the arm. He slid his lips from his teeth in a sly grin and led me into the corner of the yard. Everyone followed. And there, built up against the wall, stood an extraordinary complication of petrol-tins and pipes, a twisted, tortuous machine throbbing with some infernal life of its own. Below it burned an oven, and the whole black tangled edifice steamed and bubbled, emitting ghastly vapours into the air. Now I understood the reasons for all this joy and secrecy: the thing was a backyard distillery.

Theo, looking more and more like a Stygian alchemist, crouched down in the corner and drew off some liquor into a small glass. He held it to the light, and we all said 'Ah!' The stuff in the glass seemed colourless; but right in the heart of it there was a *presence*, a sort of smoky unholy ghost which writhed and twisted and kept the whole drink in a state of supernatural agitation.

Theo parted his lips and looked at the sky. He closed his eyes, raised the glass, and paused. Then, with a sudden flick of his hand, the glass was empty.

'Ah!' said Theo, with a long soft sigh.

'Ah!' said the rest of us.

And then—I knew it—he was offering me a glassful. There it was in my hand, snaking and smoking, and all the men were standing around, smiling, with their heads tilted sideways, as though I were a child with a toffee-apple and they were a chorus of uncles.

Well, I thought, I had better not hesitate, nor seem loath, for this is a treat not given to everyone. Behind me I could hear the old still wheezing and steaming, and my brain sagged at the thought of the possible effects this mountain-brew might have upon me. Yet Theo seemed all right and he had smacked his down without a pause. So I closed my eyes and smacked mine down also.

I have often seen the antics of film-comics under these circumstances, and I overacted in the same way, but from helplessness. Tigers clawed at my throat, I swallowed long swords, bushfires raged from my breast to my belly, a red-hot axe split my head in two. The men before me took on a most strange appearance: they contracted together in a dark block, like pressed dates; they separated and grew tall, with furred edges, waving like larch trees as my eyes wept.

'Ah!' they said, towering above me.

'Oh!' I shuddered, shaking my sorry head.

'Gooday, Lavrendius, eh?' asked Nikos triumphantly. I was speechless, up to my throat in fire, and I sat down. Theo crept to the still and drew off more liquor. We sat in the shade of the wall, with our coats off, and the men drank in turn. I am surprised they lived. That brew, whatever its name, was a concentrated explosive.

After a few more rounds of the stuff, which I avoided by contortions of tact and bluff, some fell asleep, and others sang, and Theo became his dead mule and we rode him off through the cactus back into the village. The games in the churchyard were ending, but the girls were still circling round in the soft-soled dust, murmuring sleepily together. In this half-light they glowed even more brilliantly than in the sun, for then they were dusty, but now they were radiant, as though they had spent the day soaking up colours to give back in the twilight like a bracelet of fireflies.

At the coming of darkness Polis, our guide, hung a white sheet in the square and prepared for a film show. There were to be two films: one of Ralph's to introduce him to the village, and another of Indian peasants. Bell, the Information Officer, had also come to lecture on the films. The portable projector was set up on a wall and everybody gathered from their games and stalls, from their houses and café tables, and the square swarmed. On chairs, on the ground, they talked and waited, and the trees overhead shook with excited children.

Polis lit his lamps and projected a square of yellow light on to the sheet and all eyes came to it in the darkness, and the talk died. A slow mounting silence grew over the village, a silence of far-off dogs, wailing infants, and the distant boom of a café wireless. Polis rustled with a tin of film, and the silence grew taut, unbearable. All senses were focused upon that sheet of light, that pale blank window, waiting for its revelation. My gaze travelled over the hushed square, I leaned against a tree and smoked and waited with them all. At that moment we were all united, it was a pause in all our lives. It was also the first pause I had had since I came to the island. I stood and listened to myself breathing, and I thought: 'You are in Cyprus, in the heart of a village. The dust under your feet is old in a foreign sea. This is an island whose hills have no memories for you. You are on a curve of the earth far from your home, and even the stars are different. Life here is home-made, pleasure is sharp and crude; there is not a piece of modern metal in the whole village. Why do you think it a good place to be? The young men of this village hate its very ground, and even you want to go home. But what use is it any of us wanting to go home? War and the world have made us homeless.' So we waited, and the blank screen shook its pale light on our faces, and the suspense grew terrible.

Suddenly a man came shouting down the street, running and following his voice quickly. The words of his cry, unintelligible to me, came back from each throat like a thousand echoes from a thousand caves.

Polis turned to me, majestic with the moment.

'The war is over!' he cried.

Bell dashed to the café wireless, and I stood chill. In a few minutes he returned to say it was true, official, the Germans had surrendered. He climbed up on the wall and made a speech, and the village clapped dryly. But to the old ones living in this valley, so seldom left and so seldom visited, what did it mean? It meant the end of a bad game, and they were glad. But the whole war had been to them a thing of unpronounceable names, and they had seen nothing of it. They would not have known there was a war but for the garrison soldiers who stole the stones from their terraces and left their daughters in miserable conditions. No, it was the talk of a stranger's quarrel that had bored them too long, and it was a good thing to be shot of it.

At last the screen flickered, the film began, and the people roared into life. This was something they understood, funny though it was. At the first film, 'Cornish Valley', they hooted with joy, they shouted at the chickens and horses, they were overcome by these peasants of Britain and their attempts to farm. The film brought them back to the land, away from all thoughts of wars or the end of wars, and when they saw a field or a plough they could not restrain their mirth. After all, were these Cornish farms anything but lush caricatures of farming as they knew it? And wasn't the plough the invention of Lythrodondta?

When the show was over and the sheet taken down, Nikos came through the crowd, waving his arms royally, and asked us all to go and eat with him. We gathered in a mob, Ralph, George, Achmed and sundry relations, and were all rather noisy. We walked up a cobbled street in the darkness, and guitars and fiddles followed us in gusts. Ralph and George had been sipping wines in various houses and were stepping gingerly like tender-footed cobs. Above, in the thick blue air, the moon shone pale and hot.

We were led by Nikos over a dark waste of gardens, through a courtyard of squawking fowls and into a room lit by a smoky lamp. We were aware of a sudden disappearance of women, and Nikos drew us with chairs to the table. We sat in a circle, with bottles of wine between us, and so began the long late evening of that long strange day.

Nikos poured wine, spoke warmly, and brought the dark room to our notice with a sweep of his arm. There was the usual high bed shining with brass and hung with laces. There were wedding photographs framed in tree-bark, a crucifix, a picture of Betty Grable, and an advertisement for sewing machines.

The house belonged to Nikos's sister, whose husband was away and whose youngest child lay asleep on the bed. The woman came in silence, with a shy smile, to lay forks and plates on the table. She

was plump, beautiful, and pregnant. Two other girls stood mute in the corner, feeding a stove. They were the betrothed of Jacobus and Demetrius, two young men in our party, and had been called in to serve with the cooking pots. Jacobus was a thin sharp Syrian with black wool hair and a Hitler moustache; Demetrius a blond and sweating Asiatic whose great mouth bubbled continually with drunken mirth. Throughout the evening neither of these swains addressed one word to their girls.

All over the world, now, people were celebrating or mourning the end of the war. And we sat in this small, smoky, goat-smelling room while the girls, moving like slaves, brought us pots full of macaroni and chunks of stewed meat. We drank and stuffed ourselves. Nikos talked without ceasing, and George dipped into the welter of spoken Greek, picking out isolated words like prunes, tasting them dryly and punning upon them. I shouted at Nikos all the Greek I knew, old tags from schoolbooks and phrases of classical grammar, I gave it him all and he was unabashed. Ralph, swaying with wine, directed long, loud Anglo-Saxon anecdotes into the moist grinning mask of Demetrius. And Jacobus, who had some English, grew fanciful and out-spoken, shouting us all down. We were his friends, yes. He would tell us something, yes. Cyprus did not belong to Britain, no, it was an old ship boarded by pirates, plundered, and anchored in poverty. One day, he said, we will throw these pirates into the sea, we will cut the cables of our island and sail it home to Greece.

Then Demetrius struck the table and laughed till he was nearly sick. 'Don't hark to Jacobus,' he said. 'Have some drink.'

Nikos, oblivious, in a dream of friendship, filled my glass and thumped me on the arm.

'Chirrup, Lavrendius!' he shouted.

I drank the wine, and it was rough and hot, like lava. 'Chirrup!' said Nikos again. '*Entaxe!*'

The girls brought more and more macaroni, boiling endless supplies to keep pace with our eating. Nikos, like a spring, filled all our glasses. He looked at me from eyes swimming with affection. He raised his glass up and down, he swung it in the air, he thumped me till I was blue. '*Entaxe*, Lavrendius!' he shouted. 'Taxi!' I answered, and poured my wine under the table, for I was full of it. 'No, Lavrendius, no,' he said, shaking his head. He filled my glass again, I poured it away, and so it went on.

Suddenly, like a visitation, came the wife of Nikos and stood behind his chair. Patient, exhausted, her grey face drawn, she hovered in his shadow. Nikos turned in his eyes, knowing she was there. Then he poured out more wine and threw his arm round my shoulder, gripping me like a cobra.

'Lavrendius, mine friend,' he said. Then he spoke long in Greek, laughing, drunk, showing off, holding me with his eyes.

'He says his woman has come,' explained Jacobus. 'He says she is waiting for him to speak. She has come with complaints in her mouth because he is happy. But she shall wait you see. She is his woman and she shall wait.'

The wife heard all this, but made no sound. She stood drooping and motionless, and her black eyes, piercingly anxious, did not leave her husband's back. He kept her there, and described her with bitter arrogance—her looks, her obedience, her complaints, her yearly labours. And she waited.

Finally he half closed his eyes, half turned his head, and spoke one sharp word.

'Neekos!' she began. Her voice was small, high and edgy. She spoke a string of stumbling sentences each of which seemed to fail in the middle from despair. The word 'Nikos', which was all I understood, made a sound drawn out with whimpering entreaty.

'She has been looking for him throughout the village,' said Jacobus. 'The children are sick with eating green almonds. The baby has cried for three hours. She does not want him to drink any more. She wants him to come home.'

Nikos threw a word over his shoulder, telling her to go away. She turned silently to the door, and drew the darkness about her like a rag, and disappeared.

Demetrius was sprawled on the bed now, snoring asleep, his arm thrown over the naked child. The girls squatted by the stove in the corner, their eyes upon us. We were all drunk, save myself, and I was sweating and cold.

We left the house and climbed into the car. Achmed seized the wheel like the horns of a bull, merry, babbling lustfully of girls. Nikos shook our hands and wept.

We drove back into Nicosia and it was midnight. The city was alight with the noise of celebration. Carloads of English went shouting through the streets and already there were flags sprouting from the roofs. I went to bed and lay unsleeping. My last days in Cyprus were almost come; soon I would fly up from this brown goat-skin island, and all its noise and smell would end, sharply, like turning off a light, so that nothing in it could be positively remembered. I lay damp in my sheets, and the tolling of bells filled the city. I thought of the film we had prepared; but I thought more of that film we could never make, of the things that could not be said.

And the church bells tolled all night, right into the dawn. I lay and listened, and it was like a funeral.