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THE PERSONAL PRINCIPLE

D. S. SAVAGE

THE PERSONAL PRINCIPLE

STUDIES IN MODERN POETRY

ROUTLEDGE LONDON

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PREFACE

IF THE THEME OF THIS BOOK COULD BE EXPRESSED IN ONE WORD, that word would be Wholeness or Integrity, I am -not concerned here with criticism as an exercise performed, within certain conventionally-prescribed limitations, upon a "subject" called "Literature". I am using criticism as the most convenient, for the moment, of many possible approaches to the issues which confront the sentient mind in our time. Those issues present themselves to me in a literary guise—and, of course, they *are* literary issues—because of the peculiar bent of my mind and the direction of my interests. All the same, the word "Literature" is a mere abstraction. In any work of literature we face not only issues of art, but of life-attitude, of religion, of morality, of politics, and our response has not only aesthetic but religious, moral and political implications.

The attempted integrity or wholeness of my approach lies in the refusal to isolate any of these aspects from each other. Life is a whole, and though we may for convenience split it up into categories, we must not be misled into accepting as a reality what is meant only as a convenience. Where I part company from the general run of critics who assert that literature has extra-literary implications—and whose activity as critics consists in dealing with these implications to the exclusion of the literary work itself—is in my perception and affirmation that these implications are to be found gathered together in the work considered as a work of art, and appraised from a strictly aesthetic point view.

I have no sympathy with either academicism or dilettantism. As I have said, "Literature" is not a "subject". Nor is it an

amusement. It is our endeavour to realize the essential nature of our experience of life and to present that realization to ourselves and others. For me personally the practice of literature is bound up with a certain way of responding to life. However, my desire is not to confuse the boundary between the two but rather to define it. Literature and,life must *face* each other, determinedly and unflinchingly. From the writer's total response to life will arise his concrete artistic achievement, and out of that will emerge the implications as reflected in his thought and activity. Upon the degree of integrity and livingness of that response depends the character and structure of the concrete work of art, and the corresponding character of its implications in the realm of thought and activity.

Part One of this book is concerned with establishing the general background of movements and ideas against which the achievement of the six modern poets considered in Part Two must be considered. (The reader is not obliged to read this book in the given order, since each essay is complete in itself.) In Part Two an attempt is made to grasp in outline the total significance of each writer dealt with: that is to say, to assess his artistic achievement and from this to move to a consideration of the structure of his thought, for the sake of the light this casts upon the life-attitude which lies behind his work as an artist. The inter-relationship of life-attitude and art, the form taken by the work of art under the influence of the attitude to life, is then brought out. It will be apparent that my larger intention is to indicate, through the method of examining these particular writers, the outlines of a valid creative attitude for the modern poet—and not only the poet! I say "attitude" rather than anything more abstract, but it is obvious that such an attitude contains within itself, besides a theory of the nature of art, quite coherent religious, philo-

sophical and sociological implications. The structure of the poetic mind—and the extent to which each of these poets approaches or falls away from that structure—should begin to manifest itself from this examination. It is an organization of mind to which some attitudes and ideas are favourable, and others quite definitely hostile, as I have tried to show. Is there any particular reason why we should be concerned with "the poetic mind"? Has the poetic mind any particular virtue—apart from its ability to produce poetry? The affirmation that there is, and that it very definitely has, is fundamental to the ensuing discussion.

Some of the essays in this book have appeared serially in *The Adelphi, Horizon, Now, The Nineteenth Century & After* and *Transformation,* and I would like to make grateful acknowledgment here to the editors of those periodicals for their encouragement.

D. S. S.

DRY DRAYTON,
December 1943.

Part One

I THE PERSONAL PRINCIPLE

(1) *ROMANTICISM AND CLASSICISM*

IT IS NOW A QUARTER OF A CENTURY SINCE T. E. HULME DELIVERED his notorious pronunciamento to the effect that "after a hundred years of Romanticism we are in for a classical revival", and followed this up with an attempted demonstration of the superiority for the artist of a classical attitude. Since that time the romantic-classical controversy has been waged with fluctuating vehemence by nearly all the important literary critics of our day, in spite of which we seem to have got no nearer to any resolution of the question. Most of the protagonists—T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, Middleton Murry, Herbert Read—have intimated or proclaimed the bias in their sympathies towards one or other of the two factions. Perhaps this explains why the question has never been satisfactorily dealt with. Professor Grierson made an impartial, academic contribution—lacking, however, in fundamental insight into the complexity of the problem; while Logan Pearsall Smith, in w*ords and Idioms,* has presented us with a useful piece of research into the philological aspect of the terms "classical" and "romantic". In spite of this irresolute state of affairs, I am convinced that beneath the controversy lies a reality of some importance; of an importance more than merely literary, or dependent upon one's personal temperament. The whole subject needs to be approached organically, and not in isolation. As I see it, that is, such controversy as has proceeded since Hulme's time is mainly of symptomatic significance. The whole thing goes much deeper than the artist's preference for one or the other personal "attitude".

In spite of the general confusion over the significance of the terms "romantic" and "classical", gleams of insight into the question have been shown by most of the critics who have

dealt with it, although their diagnoses have been spoiled by personal preferences and a partisan attitude. They have either insisted that all art must be classical or that it must be romantic, but the truth is that classical and romantic are critical formulations of comparatively recent origin, possessing only a relative and not an absolute significance. To state that, in the last analysis, the difference between the two attitudes is one of temperament, and to trace the lineage of romanticism to Plato (as Professor Grierson does) and that of classicism to Aristotle, not only cuts the ground away from the feet of the romantic-classical protagonists, but prevents us from understanding the relevance of the antithesis at all. The alternations from one movement to the other, although doubtless resting, like everything else, upon an eternal principle, have a primarily historical significance, and thus are related to the life of society. When considering this problem, then, we must refrain from a personal bias to one side or the other, and consider it, not in a narrow literary sense, but in a broader aspect which takes in the whole life of man and the relationship of literature to society.

The dictionary definition of the "classical" is simply that which is standard, first-rate [1]; but in current usage it has come in great measure to be associated in a kind of superior opposition to what is "romantic". Wyndham Lewis's approach to the matter, for example, is given in his own words thus:

> "I always think of something very *solid,* and I believe it is a sensation I share with many people, when the term 'classic' is employed, and of something very dishevelled, ethereal and misty, when the term 'romantic' is made use of.—All compact of common sense, built squarely upon Aristotelian premises that make for permanence—something of such a public nature that all eyes may see it equally—something of such a universal nature that to all times it would appear equal and the same—such is what the word *classic* conjures up. But at *romantic* all that falls to pieces.

[1] Thus *Hyperion,* a " romantic " poem, would be nevertheless a " classic ".

There is nothing but a drifting dust, a kaleidoscope of un-directed particles, which no logical pattern holds together, or only a very feeble one." [1]

Such is Mr Lewis's attempt at definition, and to illustrate his idea he compares, as representing the classical, "a couplet of Moliere, a bird-chorus of Aristophanes, a fragment of Sophocles", with, as illustrations of the romantic, "a 'soupire etouffee de Weber', the 'Fire, Light and Speed' of J. M. W. Turner, or the *De Profundis* of Oscar Wilde". This is well enough, but it is a comparison of the first-rate of one alleged genre with the third-rate of another, and when Mr Lewis goes on to assent in the tracing back of the ancestry of classicism to Aristotle and of romanticism to Plato he becomes involved in confusion which does not resolve itself into coherence when he is led to admit Shakespeare as a romantic against the classical Racine. No: the truth is that the terms in the hands of Mr Lewis and his followers are, as he nearly admits, "strictly unusable".

The confusions into which Mr Lewis is led in his pursuit of classicism are amusing. Remarking that the "destruction of the flesh in order to exalt the spirit" is a characteristic of the romantic mind, he goes on to enquire, tentatively: "Would it be possible to say, I wonder, merely as a means of reaching some concrete understanding upon the correct application of these terms, that (without at all involving any religious issue) the term *classical* should stand *rather than not* for the body, and the term 'romantic' stand rather than not for 'the soul'? Or instead of flesh and spirit, let us put concrete and psychical (matter and mind). ..." It is only later, in his rather tortuous attempt at pinning down these slippery terms, that he comes close to the reality: "But the 'classical' is never the personal: that is the next thing to put down as one of the major qualifications for 'classical' honours. The much abused word 'impersonal' qualifies what is to be recognized as classical as much as does the word public (in contradiction to private)." And a little later on we get this barrage of definitions: "The 'classical'

[1] *Men Without Art.*

has a physiognomy of sorts, then: it has a solid aspect rather than a gaseous: it is liable to incline rather to the side of Aristotle than to the side of Plato: to be of a public rather than of a private character: to be objective rather than subjective: to incline to action rather than dream: to belong to the sensuous side rather than to the ascetic: to be redolent of common sense rather than of metaphysic: to be universal rather than idiomatic: to lean upon the intellect rather than upon the bowels and nerves." And, later still: ". . . one of the pre-eminently 'classical' attributes is *an indifference to originality.* Indeed, in the classical artist, originality would be a fault. He is given, he is served out, with all he is supposed to require for his task: not his to reason why, but to 'get on with the job' 'The (classical artist's) preoccupation with form is not, as with those whom Bacon describes, due to disregard of matter and worth of subject, but to the fact that *the matter is given to him by his age,* has for him the weight and worth it possesses for his audience.' He is tied hand and foot therefore to the values of his patrons. Their morals are his morals; it is the *Weltanschauung* that perforce he holds in common with them that is his subject-matter."

There is, then, some recognition here that the terms romantic and classical have a social connotation. Mr Lewis's confusion arises from the fact that while recognizing this to some extent, he persists in accentuating the necessity for a classical *attitude* on the part of the modern artist. Yet if he is right in saying that a classical art is that which accepts and depends upon the common values of the society of the time, it ought to be apparent to him that a classical art of that kind in our time is impossible. The modern artist cannot take his values from contemporary society, because that society lacks all coherent standards and values. This it is which explains the artist's isolation from society. In his isolation he is forced to depend upon what values he can find within himself, and this makes a "classical" art impossible. If he persists in yearning for a revival of classicism, he must recognize that this depends, not upon his, the artist's, attitude, but upon a change in society itself.

Herbert Read, in his introduction to *Surrealism,* a symposium published in 1936, takes the romantic stance and identifies the surrealist movement with romanticism.

> "So long [he says] as romanticism and classicism were considered as alternative attitudes, rival camps, professions of faith, an interminable struggle was in prospect, with the critics as profiteers. But what in effect Surrealism claims to do is to resolve the conflict—not, as I formerly hoped, by establishing a synthesis which I was prepared to call 'reason' or 'humanism'—but by liquidating classicism, by showing its complete irrelevance, its *anaesthetic* effect, its contradiction of the creative impulse. Classicism, let it be stated without further preface, represents for us now, and has always repre-[1] sented, the forces of oppression. Classicism is the intellectual counterpart of political tyranny. It was so in the ancient world and in the mediaeval empires; it was renewed to express the dictatorships of the Renaissance and has ever since been the official creed of capitalism. Wherever the blood of martyrs stains the ground, there you will find a doric column or perhaps a statue of Minerva. . . .
>
> [u]. . . The fallacy we are discussing is logical in its origin. It is a sophism by means of which two terms are conceived as dialectical opposites whereas actually they represent types of action and reaction . . . 'classic' and 'romantic' do not represent such a contradiction. They correspond rather to the husk and the seed, the shell and the kernel. There is a principle of life, of creation, of liberation and that is the romantic spirit; there is a principle of order, of control and of repression, and that is the classical spirit. Naturally there is some purpose in the latter principle—the instincts are curbed in the interest of some particular ideal or set of values; but on analysis it always resolves into the defence of some particular structure of society, the perpetuation of the rule of some particular class. To identify romanticism with revolt as Grierson does is true enough as a historical generalization; but it merely destroys the values involved if such revolt is conceived in purely literary or academic terms. It would

be much nearer the truth to identify romanticism with the artist and classicism with society; classicism being the political concept of art to which the artist is expected to conform."

Here we have another glimpse of the social connotation of these terms, but Mr Read's outlook is spoiled for me by too exaggerated a predilection for one of these antithetical principles—which he takes so far, indeed, as to destroy the antithesis. Yet they are anthitheses . Even if we accept romanticism as the principle of creation and liberation, and classicism as the principle of order and control, either in art itself or in society, we see the mutual dependence of these principles. " Romantic'' emotion needs the "classical" discipline of intellect; " romantic'' content needs the "classical" discipline of form. A complete man, a complete work of art, require the harmonious interaction of these principles, nor is there any reason why the principles should be at war. It is interesting that, while Mr Read favours surrealism, Mr Lewis should formulate a defence of satire: both exclusive and limited categories which restrict art.

The truth, however, lies neither with romanticism nor classicism, but with art itself, which transcends these definitions and yet contains them. The quarrel proceeding between the romantics and the classicists is finally irrelevant. It signifies a division which has occurred in life and art. The need is not for an accentuation of this division, but for a reconcilement on a higher level.

As an analogy, one might take the not altogether dissimilar division which has occurred in religion between the apparently opposed principles of Catholicism and Protestantism. One might take the former to represent the collective, the formal, the general elements of religion, and the latter, the individual, the emotional, the personal. One might, as a controversialist, claim the supremacy of the one, or of the other, and take the historical development of the one out of the other to demonstrate their perpetual opposition. Yet the fact is that each contains elements which are necessary to the integrity of religion. They are halves, broken away from what should be

an organic unity, and what was once, indeed, actually so; for when mediaeval Catholicism was in its flower, it contained within itself in equilibrium the latent principle of individuality which was later to break out into the revolution of Protestant individualism. Life, in fact, develops by this dialectical process of division, maladjustment and strife, and reintegration upon another level. The resolution towards which religion moves is not the reabsorption of individual "Protestantism" into the Catholic collective, but a new harmony in which all that Protestant individualism has fought for and gained—personal integrity and liberty of conscience—becomes, in freedom, embodied in a free collective which is both "Catholic" and "Protestant". Exactly the same is the case with romanticism and classicism, as I shall try to show.

If we are to take our stand (fallaciously) upon either of the arbitrarily opposed principles of classic-Catholic or romantic-Protestant, we must, logically, attempt to show the eternal permanence of these principles. Yet they are not permanent. They are historical developments. The Catholic-Protestant antithesis developed from the unity-in-diversity of the early Church, to which such an antithesis would have been completely unintelligible. Romanticism and classicism as terms of criticism are of very recent origin, dating back scarcely a century and a half. It is, then, *historically* that the division must primarily be considered. We are led to consider the relationship of literature to society.

(2) *BARD, ARTIFICER, POET*

I think that Mr Read is wrong in identifying the principle of "life, of creation, of liberation" with romanticism; but his error is mainly terminological, and he evidently does not grasp the historical character of the romantic-classic antithesis. He does, however, hit upon an important truth when he identifies what he calls the romantic spirit with the artist and the classic spirit with society, only his terminology is inaccurate and reflects a certain imprecision of thought. There is, indeed, such a "principle of life, of creation, of liberation", but it is an eternal,

not an historical manifestation; and it is, too, complemented, or completed, by an opposite principle: of "order, control, and repression", or, as I should say, of petrifaction, conventionality, rigidity. The spirit of creativeness, which is an inward, organically expanding power, I would identify with the inner creative life of the personality; and the hardening, ossifying, conventionalizing process, which seizes upon that life at its extremity or periphery and converts the living organism to a dead value, I would identify with the conventional, artificial life of society. This primary, organic principle is completely prior to any romantic-classic division, and is to be seen in its full power in the work of any great artist, which combines elements of imagination and of intellect in perfect harmony. In the classical artist, who takes his values from society, the element of intellect is predominant, and feeling is excluded, while in the romantic, who is in individualistic revolt against society, or in poetic isolation from it, feeling predominates, but in each case there is an absence of true and complete equilibrium. The example of Shakespeare may be illuminating: he is the great stumbling-block to any coherent formulation of classic or romantic ideology. T. E. Hulme claims Shakespeare as a hero of classicism, while Herbert Read stakes out a contrary claim on him for romanticism. Wyndham Lewis, however, regretfully waives the rights of the classicist on Shakespeare, and in doing so surely goes a very long way towards justifying our rejection of his aesthetics. Yet surely, to anyone but a partisan of either faction in this controversy, it is evident enough that Shakespeare eludes such classification because he stands above division and creates a unity from his given elements of imagination and intellect. In Shakespeare, also, we find the completely satisfactory reconciliation of the personal with the social, in the marvellous succession of dramatic poems in which the poet's interior anonymous personality attains universality in its objectification in the particular *dramatis personae* bodied forth out of its exhaustless creative vitality. As Coleridge put it:

"In Shakespeare's *Poems* the creative power and the

> intellectual energy wrestle as in a war embrace. Each in its excess of strength seems threaten the extinction of the other. At length, in the drama, they were reconciled, and fought each with its shield before the breast of the other. Or like two rapid streams, that, at their first meeting within narrow and rocky banks, mutually strive to repel each other, and intermix reluctantly, and in tumult; but soon finding a wider channel and more yielding shores, blend, and dilate, and flow on in one current, and with one voice."

In Shakespeare, romanticism and classicism were inchoate, held in solution. It was when personality became divided, personal and social values separated and divided from themselves, that there developed on the one hand a conventional classicism and, in reaction from that, on the other, an individualistic romanticism. Yet neither romanticism nor classicism has the last word, and already these categories seem outmoded.

Ludwig Lewisohn, in the Introduction to his *History of American Literature,* asserts that the history of letters, which is "the deepest and most significant part of the history of civilization", reveals three types of the poetic mind, each of which corresponds to a phase and to an epoch of human development. Allowing for chronological confusion, he continues, it remains true that there are three types of the poetic mind which, corresponding to three phases of particular civilizations as well as to three phases of civilization as a whole, may usefully be called the bard, the artificer and the poet. The bard is the earliest articulate man, the voice of the tribe, inspired by the surge of group emotion which chooses to speak through him. In periods of peace and stability the bard tended to become the artificer, the entertainer, looking for subjects from without, selecting his matter and presenting it and adorning it in a fashion to please his hearers. The artificer may be of every degree of refinement and sophistication, but his distinguishing mark is the fact that he fulfils always a recognized social function, choosing his subjects from without and striving to please or edify his public. Of the creative spirit or eternal poet, Lewisohn writes, examples have arisen "whenever in an

age or land authority was broken or transcended, personality emerged, literature became scripture and first-hand experience could project a vision which was to remould and save the world". This poet starts not with a group passion or with a subject chosen from without but from an inner fact of his individual consciousness, and out of that consciousness, which is both perceiver and thing perceived, both container and content, there arises the impassioned need for the release and the communication of experience:

> "Out of his experience, out of suffering and vision he rebuilds the world; he needs to wring its secret from it for his own release and for the salvation of his fellows. He is the poet, whether his outer form be novel, play or lyric, whom the thoughtful and instructed modern reader seeks out to experience for him, to interpret for him, to illuminate and to guide him, to face for him the inscrutable from which all older and once apparently certain messages have fallen silent."

If Lewisohn's categories are valid, their acceptance would settle for ever the romantic-classic disputations. The classically minded critic would be seen as one who is concerned with defending the values of the artificer; with the social values rather than the personal ones. The contradiction in which the classicist is involved, of course, is that all values are personal in origin. They can never *originate* in society. Every human value has its source, first of all, in the heart, mind or soul of some particular individual, where it is unique, particular, and free. The unique, personal work or idea is then given to the world and socialized: that is, an abstraction is taken from it and from all similar unique, particular, concrete works, and from this abstraction is distilled the general, abstract, social value. An indifference to originality, says Wyndham Lewis, is the hall-mark of the classical artist. It is the hall-mark, according to Lewisohn, of the "artificer". Yet if the artist is to be indifferent to originality, from whence are new values to enter the world, from whence will human life be reinvigorated and renewed? Mr Lewis has a low view of the artist and of art itself, it would seem, and it is therefore hardly

surprising to find that he regards art as a *game*. Mr Lewis's virtue, both as critic and practitioner, is that he plays this game intelligently and seriously, but there is inevitably a hoi-lowness at the centre of all his work. His attitude is a negative one throughout, a fact which is revealed not only by his defence of satire but by such symptoms as his favourite self-dramatization as "The Enemy". Negatives may be useful and valuable, but only in so far as they help to formulate positives, upon which they are, in any case, dependent.

One of the most illuminating descriptions of the interior genesis of values that I have encountered is contained in a brief article by the Russian critic M. O. Gerschenzon entitled "On Human Values" which, selected from his *Correspondence from Corner to Corner* written in conjunction with the poet V. Ivanov, was published in *The European Quarterly* for May 1934. In this article Gerschenzon traces the birth of every "general", "objective" value to some original, personal creative act on the part of an individual, and shows how the results of this act, given to the world, become hardened, abstract and tyrannous:

> ". . . All that is objective has its birth in some individual, and at first belongs solely to that individual. Of whatever kind a value may be, its biography invariably presents the same three phases through which Napoleon passed. At first it is nothing to the world, then it is a soldier and a leader in war, and finally it appears as a ruler. And, like Napoleon in Ajaccio, a value is free and truthful only in its childhood, when, born in obscurity, it plays, grows, and suffers in freedom, without drawing upon itself the covetous looks of anyone. *Hamlet* flourished in all the fullness of its truth only once—in Shakespeare, as the Sistine Madonna did in Raphael. Then the world drew the flourishing value into the turmoil of its life. In the world its fullness was wanted by no one. The world suspected in the value the original power placed in it by the creator, and wished to make use of that power for its own needs; its attitude to the power was .one of covetousness, and covetousness is always concrete.

"For this reason a value when in general use always alters its character. It is divided into special powers—into particular meanings, which do not contain its fullness, and are therefore without its essentials. As people do not want an oak tree in its natural state, but sawn up into parts, so a value is acceptable only when its entity is broken up—when it is a multiform advantage. Finally the advantage becomes a generally recognized value, and is crowned for its kingdom. The crowned value is cold and stern. In course of time it becomes completely petrified, and is converted into a fetish. In its features there is no longer any trace of that free, unhidden power which at one time animated its face. It has been the servant of so many passions both high and low. One man wanted one thing and another something else. It was complaisant to all. For each man it confirmed his false, his subjective truth. Now as an autocrat it dictates to the world laws of its own, paying no heed to the entreaties of individuals. That which had been living and personal, that in which had raced and throbbed the hot blood of one man, now becomes an idol demanding the sacrifice of those very living and personal elements which had been the cause of its own birth. . . .

"Besides the fetish values, concrete and palpable, there are also vampire values, those styled abstract, which occupy a kind of judicial position in the kingdom of values. They are immaterial and invisible. They are formed by abstractions taken from concrete values, for in the spiritual world the law of cohesion acts just in the same way as in the physical, where evaporated water accumulates in clouds.

"From many 'Hamlets' and 'Sistine Madonnas' there has arisen by way of abstraction a general value—Art. In the same way they have all come into being: Ownership and Morality, Church and Religion, Nationality, Culture, and so many, many more. . • .."

What Gerschenzon only hints at, the fact that the ossification and generalization of values is essentially a socializing process, needs to be made **more explicit.** It is not exactly true to say

that society is necessarily tyrannical, nor is it exactly true to imply that since all values originate within the creative individual mind, the individual can be considered as a self-existent monad. Within man himself there is both a collective and an individual principle; personality flowers through the harmonious adjustment of these principles. Not only must Shakespeare use the English language, a collective heritage from a collective communal past, but his use of it is in part conditioned by the use made of it by former writers and by contemporaries, while his own individuality is conditioned by the impact upon it of the life of his time. Which, even so, must be thought of, not as something completely exterior and impersonal, but as a collective manifestation of the lives of many individual persons bound together within life's organic continuity. We think of the writing of poetry, for example, as an intensely individual activity. So it is; and yet at the same time it is completely communal. Throughout human existence there is this perpetual and inviolable indwelling of the individual within the community and of the community within the individual. Yet because our lives are lived to a great extent upon an exterior level and are subject to the intrusion of so many extraneous factors, and because there is constantly at work this process of abstraction from the particular to the general, from the organic to the mechanical, from the personal to the social, the equilibrium between individual and collective suffers continual disturbance. Classicism in literature appears when a high degree of equilibrium has been reached within society, when (interior) culture and (exterior) civilization have become synonymous, and civilization begins to usurp the place of culture.

(3) *FROM CULTURE TO CIVILIZATION*

If culture is the flowering of the aristocratic principle of life, civilization, which is bred out of culture, is the assertion of the democratic principle, the principle of the herd. The process of exteriorization which occurs, so well described by Gerschenzon, within culture, is essentially a process of democratization. The

human community does not, of course, subsist in flat uniformity, it is hierarchical in structure. Culture gives way to civilization when the values created in spiritual freedom by the minority of "originals" percolate down to the utilitarian level of the "copies". This process is almost identical with that of the socialization of personal values which Gerschenzon insists on, for the herd-man *is* "society", social man; not an "original" but a "copy", as Coleridge has it. That is to say, his make-up is mechanical rather than organic, he contains so little of personal originality that, inevitably, he is led to draw his values from outside himself. In this way the mass-mind is created, conventions are formed and obeyed, the achievements of culture are transformed into the values of civilization. Civilization, which is the dead-end growth of culture, is also its antithesis. It is significant, therefore, that the present age, in which civilization has reached a state of complexity never before known, is both completely "democratic" (in the sense in which totalitarianism itself is democratic, i.e. founded on mass-values) and entirely oblivious to cultural standards.

This process of the transformation of culture into civilization can be seen continuously at work in modern times, from the Renaissance to our own day when, beginning from an unprecedented cultural flowering, there has been a gradual elimination of culture and its replacement by, or transformation into, exterior civilization, a process illustrated and epitomized by the position of the artist within society and by the varying conceptions of his function and the function of his art. Yet here we are faced with an extremely curious paradox. Concurrent with the elimination of art from the framework of society, there has proceeded no corresponding de-valuation of the status of the artist. Even though the mass-mind, society as a whole, continues to be oblivious to cultural values and to the artist himself, that section of the community which is still sensitive to other than utilitarian values has come to see the artist in an entirely new light. So that while the mighty, complex civilization of our day has no place for its own spiritual progenitors, but has evolved a crude, trashy, transient machine-culture for the daily needs of its labouring or idle masses, so

also (as Lewisohn says) "human life, in brief, has made more and more for the appearance of the creative spirit, the poet who is neither bard nor artificer". Socially, the modern artist's position is anomalous. Yet, while his impact upon society at large is inconsiderable, he has achieved, among the minority which still cares for spiritual values, a greatly enhanced significance; and this is bound up with the transformation of literature into "scripture" pointed out by Ludwig Lewisohn.

(4) *PERSONALITY AND SOCIETY*

If literature is "the core and spirit of both history and philosophy", the history of literature will be a kind of interior reflection of history as a whole, and indeed this is what it is. The mind and spirit of an age survive mainly in its literary expression, through books. Literature thus provides an index! to the spiritual condition of a society. It does so, of course,] incidentally: this is to consider it objectively, without reference to qualitative considerations.

Literature, then, will reveal the relationship existing at any given time between "personality" and "society", interior and exterior influences, culture and civilization. It will do so in a dual manner: (1) inwardly, in the interior development of the art itself as an expression of personal creativeness more or less modified by social pressure; and (2) outwardly, in the history of the relationship of the general corpus of literature, and particularly of original, creative literature, to the social body.

The creative writer contains within himself not only the principle of personality but the principle of society. In his work we may study the interfusion of these principles. Generally speaking, creativeness favours and is favoured by a delicate equilibrium of these interior principles (which will be affected by the conditions obtaining in the writer's environment); an equilibrium in which the social principle is secondary to, and usable by, the personal principle. Society can be favourable to the liberation of personal creativeness or can suppress it; when society gets out of hand and sets itself up as a primary principle —when it dictates to personality—art will suffer. I think that

the history of English literature since Elizabethan times bears out this contention: that romanticism and classicism are expressions taken by literature in response to the pressure of society upon the individual person. This corresponds with the passage from culture to civilization. It is when the values of civilization, as opposed to culture, are in the ascendant that literary forms will be subjected to a pressure resulting in their idiosyncratic, one-sided development.

The flowering of poetry and drama in Elizabethan times was a part of the humanistic flowering of the Renaissance, and it was favoured by the primacy of cultural values. With the passage of time, culture became transformed into civilization, a process marked by the development of literature through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries up to our own time. The progress of civilization is marked by the expansion of the social structure, its increasing complexity, from the rudimentary forms of the sixteenth century to the mechanical centralization of the twentieth. In Shakespeare's time, we may say, the individual was in a real sense the centre of society: the social framework could be said to radiate from a centre in personal life. With the progress of civilization the centre has been shifted until the exterior structure of society no longer relates directly to the individual person. It has become externally centred upon itself, and the individual integrated into its structure, not as a person, but as an object. Personal creativeness is thus isolated from the social structure, thrust outside and refused social forms and sanctions: the isolated position of the modern artist is symbolic of the isolation of the personal principle itself.

During the Middle Ages, the individual personality was subject to the organization of society to a considerable degree, but in a peculiar manner. Society was held together in a rigid hierarchy which was both secular and ecclesiastical, and although the framework of society was rudimentary, the individual was integrated, not of course into a concrete exterior collective but into an abstract exterior system. This did not suppress personal creativeness so much as prevent it from taking a markedly individualistic form. Moreover, the spiritual

genius of the Middle Ages chose to express itself in religious rather than artistic forms. Where it was expressed artistically, as in the great cathedrals, the resulting work was both ecclesiastical and communal in character. The Renaissance was both an economic and a cultural liberation of individuality from the restraints of mediaevalism. It therefore contained within itself the seeds of both culture and civilization. Art was released from its subservience to the Church and enabled to develop according to an impetus of its own. The interesting thing is that, although there had been a secular literature in England before the sixteenth century, such literature was self-consciously profane. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* were merely stories, novels in verse; poetry up to Elizabethan times, when not the pastime of cultured aristocrats, was essentially the domain of the artificer, and this was so because the individual's soul, his spiritual destiny, wets in the keeping of the Church; it had not yet been taken over by him as a personal responsibility. It was precisely when the authority of the Church was questioned and the individual situated at the centre of existence, that imaginative literature developed, that literature became scripture. Shakespeare's work is distinguishable from Chaucer's (for example) chiefly by this fact: that in Shakespeare's work we touch the workings of a living soul. In Chaucer we touch a man who is predominantly a social being. There is not the same intensity of impact at all. This, quite apart from the question of archaism, is why Shakespeare is still alive for us, is still read and performed, while Chaucer is left unread except by students of literature and social historians.

Since the sixteenth century British history has been that of the constant progress of civilization, the continual expansion of the social structure and the spreading of civilized values. The history of our literature reflects this quite unequivocally. The interior developments within literature whereby artistic revolutions were brought about have a social significance no less than the objective position of "literature" (and the status of the writer) in relation to society at large.

Let us take the literature of the eighteenth century, **the** period of Augustinian classicism. At this period society **had**

reached a high degree of outward homogeneity. Common values permeated the entire social structure; the growth of the city made possible a predominantly urban mode of existence for the upper and middle classes, with an attendant social life centring around the Court but not rigidly bound to it. In this society the writer was completely at home; his values were society's, and society's values were his own. This is to be seen in the close connection that held between the literary and the social career. Success in literature, on one's purely literary merits, was practically synonymous with social success. The writer might legitimately, therefore, set out on a literary career with social ambitions. He would not deliberately have to adapt himself to the taste of the time, because he was almost certain to share it. Dr Johnson's much quoted remark that no one but a fool wrote except for money reflects this state of cultural homogeneity. One has only to transpose the application of this remark to our own time to see the vast gulf that exists between the conditions of eighteenth- and of twentieth-century England. Other conditions, too, were favourable to the socialization of literature. The life of the time was not only homogeneous but compact. It was therefore possible for a certain identification to obtain between private and public values. The man of letters today is, virtually, a specialist: at least he is driven in upon his experience as a private individual. The vast complexity of the modern social structure and the specialized nature of political problems and issues make politics, too, a specialist's concern. This was not at all the case in Dryden's, Pope's or Johnson's day, when the man of letters was almost invariably a political pamphleteer, a man of the world and a self-conscious citizen. Johnson in his essays ranges over the entire field of religion, literature, manners, ethics and politics, as they presented themselves to the intelligent man of his time. There was neither need nor excuse for specialization. Life was a whole, and demanded to be comprehended as such. The literary personality, which has since then become divided into its several components, was a unity.

This situation, which derived from the shifting of the centre of cultural gravity from personality to society, from the tern-

porary adjustment of the values of culture to a point where they coincided with the emergent values of civilization, had its consequences, necessarily, upon the inner nature of art. The price paid for social incorporation was the interior socialization of literature. The man of letters, who was completely and harmoniously a man of society (and if his adjustment was not so harmonious he had perforce to cramp himself accordingly), carried his social personality to the making of his work. This resulted in a certain loss of personal originality and of creative force. Possibly no period before or after the eighteenth century has fostered work which so clearly bears the signature of the Zeitgeist, which "dates" so markedly. The almost incredible uniformity of style achieved by the eighteenth-century poets, the absolute sovereignty of the heroic couplet, strongly suggests the socialization of personality. So does the prevalence of the art form of satire, essentially a social form. In the eighteenth century the law of the conservation of cultural energy seems to have applied remarkably consistently: when spread equally over the whole of the social body it is not found so concentratedly in any minority of individuals.

When at a time of rising civilization society is homogeneous and there is a blending of the personal with the official (as distinct from the rigid exclusion of personality from officialism in our own time), the man of letters will have both personal and social, official and unofficial, affiliations. Implicated in social, semi-personal, semi-official relationships, he will tend to express himself in a way which reflects his implication in society. In society one must not wear one's heart on one's sleeve, must not be embarrassingly profound and personal, but one must on the other hand be amusing, shrewd, and mentally agile. The "wit" is in demand, the "enthusiast" thrust into outer darkness. Extensive social affiliations mould the mind in this manner, and where poetry is a social accomplishment, results in a poetry of wit, a series of entertaining epistles and epigrams, and so forth, written for the after-dinner delectation of one's intimates and superiors, in the manner of Swift. The poetry of feeling, of emotion, which today, other things being equal, we are inclined to place a higher value on, is a product

of loneliness, and loneliness is one of the consequences for the individual of a non-homogeneous, disrupted communal life.

This state of balance, which developed from the growing emergence of civilization out of culture, could not remain stable. Civilization was bound to overtake culture, to demand an ever-increasing degree of socialization of the personality, an ever-increasing subservience of private creativeness to public conventionalism. And this is what actually took place. The production of poetry weakened and fell off towards the close of the century. Academic conventions had taken a death-grip on poetry which could only be shaken off by a revolution.

It is a commonplace of literary history that Wordsworth and Coleridge were in revolt against the outworn academic, stereotyped diction of the latterday Augustans, but there was more to their revolt than a simple literary reaction. At all times the poet needs to make contact with some reality with which he can in a measure identify himself and from which he can draw assurance and strength for the work of creation. In the eighteenth century this need was supplied (whether adequately or inadequately is not at present the point) by the homogeneous character of the social organism in which he was implicated, which was still an organism and not yet entirely a mechanism. By the nineteenth century this cultural cohesion had partially been dispersed, civilization was replacing culture, blatantly with the first beginnings of machine production and all its concomitants, more subtly with the dissolution of the social pattern based upon the supremacy of a leisured and cultured aristocracy. The romantic movement was born out of two impulses: dissatisfaction with the intrinsic values of classicism, a desire to probe more deeply into being than the social conventionalism of classicism allowed (a dissatisfaction foreshadowed by writers such as Edward Young, author of *Night Thoughts,* with his *Reflections on Original Composition,* and foreshadowed also, perhaps, by the spiritual *malaise* of the poets of the latter part of the eighteenth century —Cowper, Collins, Gray, Smart—who all suffered from milder or less mild forms of melancholia and insanity); and a corresponding desire for the reinvigoration of the idiom of verse.

And these impulses were given strength and emphasis by the actual situation of the poet, his increasing alienation from the social life of the time, his lack of harmony with his environment. From the beginnings of the nineteenth century literature was ceasing to be quite so completely a social possession, was ceasing to be official and beginning to be individualistic, unofficial, even subversive. From this time, with the rise of the middle classes upon the impetus of the industrial revolution and the spread of bourgeois values throughout society, dates the artist's increasing isolation from the community and, indeed, his hostility towards its current values. In the bourgeois the artist had found his enemy, his antithesis. And what the bourgeois represented was simply the values of "civilization".

It would be an exaggeration to say that the classicism of the eighteenth century was a retrograde movement, a stepping-back to the literary attitude of the pre-Renaissance; yet one feels tempted to assert that Pope, Dryden and Swift had more in common with, say, Chaucer, Hawes and Skelton than with the poets of the age of Shakespeare, except that their universe was more restricted and more artificial than that of the earlier poets, and their language showed a correspondingly curbed vitality. (The vitality is there, in Swift especially, but it is more cerebral and less sensuous.) The romantic movement, stepping out of the social radius, centred itself upon the individual personality and his unique experience, yet it still felt the attraction of society, and consequently the poetic impulse issued frequently enough in a hybrid form. The long poem, didactic, historical, narrative, is the typical product of the poetic artificer, and up to the nineteenth century the long poem was the standard poetic form for the serious and ambitious poet. The romantic poets continued to make use of this convention, but they infused it with a new feeling. Keats's narratives are hybrids of this kind, and Shelley's. Although not completely socially-conventional, they are still not thoroughly individual-personal. And this reflects the position of these poets in their relationship to their time. It is interesting that both Keats and Coleridge, in their diverse ways, were enthusiastic students of Shakespeare. The romantic movement, one might

almost say, drew its nourishment from this source, but where in Shakespeare the personal-social antithesis is completely and harmoniously resolved, in the work of the romantics it is the personal, idiosyncratic element that is emphasized at the expense of the other. Shakespeare, for example, had an undoubted predilection for ghosts, fairies, witches and magicians, but he used these personages as elements in a completely credible pattern, as he did his occasional themes of violence and crime. It is typical of both the classical movement and the romantic that the former should have eliminated the fanciful and the fantastic almost entirely from their work, while the latter should have seized upon it and allowed it to predominate in theirs. In this way we have not only Coleridge's *Christabel* and *Ancient Mariner,* but Shelley's voluminous fantasies, Moore's and Southey's interminable exoticisms, and the beginnings of the diabolism which was later to be so marked a characteristic of the neo-romantics, who provided Professor Mario Praz with such an abundance of material for *The Romantic Agony,* This diabolism had a dual root, but on the literary side, without a doubt, it represented a strenuous if superficial attempt to restore to poetry the magical element which had so long been lacking.

The significance of the romantic revival lies in its indication of a widening gulf between the private values represented by the poet and the public values represented by society. If we take the poet, the creative writer, to represent the forces of personal creativeness which are found in every human personality, we can deduce the human situation itself at that particular time; we can lay our finger upon that which shaped the character of the epoch and conditioned the mentality of the age. Under the stress of the gradual and inevitable secession of the values of personality from the social values, of the poet from his public, a tension was set up which had its peculiar consequences both for personal existence and for society. On the one side, the original, creative personality broke away from its social affiliations and began tentatively to centre existence within itself, to become more or less at war with "society"; while on the

other side the multitude of social beings, of "copies", who, unable to find values within themselves, are dependent upon acceptance of and conformity to external values, were given over to the dominion of a society detached from its organic centre, proceeding on a momentum of its own under an impersonal, mechanical impetus. "All harmony", Coleridge once said, "is founded on a relation to rest—on relative rest. Take a metallic plate, and strew sand on it; sound an harmonic chord over the sand, and the grains will whirl about in circles, and other geometrical figures, all, as it were, depending on some point of sand relatively at rest. Sound a discord, and every grain will whisk about without any order at all, in no figures, and with no points of rest. . . . The clerisy of a nation, that is, its learned men, whether poets, or philosophers, or scholars, are these points of relative rest. There could be no order, no harmony of the whole, without them." The society of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, then, resembles the sand which dances chaotically at the sounding of a discord. Separating itself from the interior values represented by its "clerisy", it has no points of relative rest, no order, no coherence, no hierarchy of values. We have *seen,* in the social body of this period, the progressive deterioration of the cultural situation. It is interesting to find Coleridge's remark, on another occasion (oddly enough, I find, only eleven days later—it is the next entry in his book of *Table Talk)*—that . . . "there have been three silent revolutions in England:—first, when the professions fell off from the Church; secondly, when literature fell off from the professions; and, thirdly, when the press fell off from literature".[1] To the significance of that brief paragraph I will return.

That the romantic movement had a clear social significance is evident. But it was not powerful enough, because not general enough, to be effective as a social force; effective, that is, in bringing society itself to a new centrality. Society was set upon a certain irrevocable mechanical course, and it would have taken more than the literary efforts of a few poets and

[1] A latterday Coleridge might have something to say about a further silent revolution—when the mass-newspaper fell off from the press.

philosophers to sidetrack it. "Let the great world roll for ever," intoned Tennyson," down the ringing grooves of change." And of course it did so, at least throughout Tennyson's lifetime. The brief identification of the earlier romantics with the politics of the French Revolution has significance here, and so has their later repudiation (in certain cases) of their early beliefs. For what was the Revolution, after its first fervour, but a bourgeois revolution, its values the anti-cultural values of civilization, of the "enlightened reason"? Revolutions never initiate a new centrality but always follow up a tendency already in being, taking in a sense the line of least resistance. They are symptoms of a deteriorative process, a release not of conscious creative forces but of unconscious and destructive ones. We must recognize the historical necessity of the revolution, but must also be able to stand over and above it in order to make a judgment of value. And from this viewpoint the French Revolution marks a further stage in the ascendancy of civilization, a further stage in the de-socialization of culture. With the French Revolution the democratic principle, hand in hand with the principle of civilization, gains vast tracts of new territory. But democracy is still not completely triumphant, culture is still not completely annihilated. It is left for a second revolution, the world-totalitarian revolution which achieved its first victory in twentieth-century Russia, to implement this movement of democratic herd values allied with the values of civilization, and to enthrone the values of the herd over the individual while simultaneously harnessing "art" and "literature", for the first time, to the service of the ideals of the triumphant collectivist State.

Perhaps I should emphasize once more the fact that I am taking art and culture as symbols of the interior creativeness of human personality; that for me their present significance is in the fact that their condition epitomizes the essential position of the personal values. Possibly this can be brought out a little more clearly if we associate the position of art and literature with that of religion, which is also a projection of the inner life of the personality; although, like literature, it is subject to the invasion of the life of the collective. Parallel with the

de-socialization of literature there has proceeded a similar de-socialization of religion. With the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, religion as a social influence has declined to a position of wholly unprecedented powerlessness and ineffectuality. The religious values (which, in the case of Christianity, *are* the values of personality) have been increasingly isolated in the detached personal existence, increasingly denied social expression, while the world of social relations has separated itself from the religious values in order to claim its autonomous validity.

What was really happening within the society of the nineteenth century, that era of optimism and progress? Simply this: that the expanding external framework of society, with its human content severed from its personal centrality (symbolized by its relation to its "points of relative rest"), was proceeding, under its own momentum, to its present goal of totalitarian collectivism. In rejecting an obedience to morality (which necessarily has its centre in the individual) it had accepted the exterior obedience to the dictates of economics, to the centrality of the exterior structure of social relationships, all of which were placed, in a kind of false sovereignty, over the human being. This is essentially the burden of the economic doctrine of *laisser-faire*—"Look after the money and the men will look after themselves". The bourgeois spirit, the spirit of "civilization", speaks in these words. It is the mass, the herd, with its consuming anxiety for the morrow, its preoccupation with outer life, with the things of the body, and its obliviousness to the needs of the soul; with its absence of inner life, its superficiality, its conventionalism and timidity; its fear of "being" and its greed for "life".

If the work of the first romantics reflects the relationship between personality and society, this is equally the case with the poets of the latter part of the century. Tennyson and Browning were remarkable in that they succeeded in effecting some reconciliation in themselves between the personal and the social values. They belonged sufficiently to the bourgeois society of their time to share to some extent its values. As poets and as personalities they are, however, less interesting,

less original, than Coleridge or Keats or Shelley. Their poetry suffered from a diffuseness, a lack of concentration, and at their worst they are intolerable. Coleridge sometimes versified, not very brilliantly, on political themes, but it is hard to imagine Keats, Shelley or Coleridge descending to Tennyson's lowest level of jingling jingoism. During the lifetime of these poets the rift between personal and public values was widening rapidly, and this is reflected, it appears to me, in the attenuation of the idiom of verse noticeable in their work. In Tennyson it is smooth, languid, enervated, and although his verse has its moments of acute nostalgic sensitivity, this enervation of idiom matches an inner *malaise,* a spiritual fatigue, a weary ennui which finds perfect expression in some of his lyrics. Browning impresses us somewhat differently. Where Tennyson is the sad lion, Browning is the gruff but playful bear of the Victorian literary zoological gardens. There is plenty of animal vigour in his work, but here again it is a vigour detached from any markedly acute sensitiveness. The medium of verse in the hands of these two eminent and esteemed practitioners became, in the one case, thinned, in the other coarsened, as they stretched it out, like a membrane, between the poles of their private and public selves.

Tennyson was the last considerable poet to effect a reconciliation between private and public values. His popularity as the laureate of the middle classes testifies to his success in performing this feat; the over-refinement of the texture of his verse testifies to the expense at which the feat was effected. With Tennyson, however, the tenuous membrane attaching personal values to the values of society seems to reach tearing-point.

The Victorian poetic age closes with Swinburne, who, working with the attenuated medium passed on to him by his predecessors, sharing to a certain extent the values of his time, failed to make contact with society. His social self was almost entirely undeveloped. Romanticism in him is not merely ripe but rotten. To infuse any vigour into it at all he had to take it to a point where it became completely perverted. Unable to make any gesture of solidarity with the social values of his time, he was forced into violent (or vociferous) opposition to

those values. In this he foreshadowed the minor poets of the *fin-de-sibcle.* Where the bourgeois was smugly pious, Swinburne was daringly iconoclastic; where it was conservative, revolutionary; where philistine, aesthetic, and so on. Swinburne at times impresses one as something of a verbal genius. But a purely verbal one. His dexterity is tremendous. Yet all his brilliance of surface covers, at bottom, a hollowness. Swinburne, one feels, might have been a very considerable poet, given one of two alternative conditions: an acceptable place in a culturally homogeneous society, or a strong inward sense of personal drama and destiny. The second was a fundamental lack which, perhaps, nothing outside himself could have more than modified: unlike Baudelaire, whom he so much admired, he was constitutionally unable to find an interior personal meaning; while even Baudelaire is to be suspected, forgivably enough, of the deliberate working-up of such a sense of inner drama. Nor was it within Swinburne's power to command the first alternative.

With the *fin-de-siecle,* so far as social recognition is concerned, the good ship *Poetry* goes down with all hands. The poets of the eighteen-nineties hardly even aspired to affiliations with the society of their time. Yet their very defiance of the bourgeoisie, their deliberate violation of bourgeois standards, their bohemian amoralism, their piquant diabolism or picturesque Catholicism, their dandyism and cult of the aesthete, all these reflect, at the very least, an awareness of the standards of the outer world. Here, where recognition of social standards is reduced almost to a minimum (before its complete obliteration), here we find also the final, dying efflorescence of romanticism; a romanticism without vitality, a hothouse orchid, no longer drawing inspiration from Nature but from the unnatural; romanticism on its death-bed, the death-rattle in its throat, touching up with rouge its yellow cheeks—an image that would have appealed to the poets of the time. *Le poete maudit*—Dowson, Johnson, Davidson, Wilde—staggers forlornly from the social scene, and the curtain falls on a prospect of waste streets, gasworks, railway termini, factory roofs and back-to-back slum tenements: civilization triumphant.

(5) *PRIVATE AND PUBLIC*

Let us leave the narrow field of poetry for a time in order to take in a view of literature as a whole. The poet is always a somewhat erratic phenomenon, perhaps, and it is doubtful whether he has ever really satisfactorily come to terms with his world. With the man-of-letters, the novelist, and so on, we are on easier ground. Where the poet will pursue his path in spite of obstacles, is often isolated from effective contact with his age (although always modified by it himself), the man-of-letters generally is more inclined to keep in touch with the standards of his society. The poet, even at his most " classical", seldom caters for a well-defined social need. The man-of-letters regards it as his function to do so. The very forms of expression he utilizes are determined, often enough, by the demands of his time. And his frequent association with the machinery of literary production and dissemination brings him at times into direct touch with a public whose character is often quite clearly defined, and with whom his relationship is a reciprocal one.

The literary man, in my terminology, as distinct from the poet (is it necessary to say that both are sometimes to be found in the same person?), is one who embraces literature as a profession, who estimates the chances, either of success or of survival, in material terms, and devotes himself, wholly or partially, to the task of earning a living at the trade of writing. Scott was such a writer when, as Lockhart states, "His first and last worldly ambition was himself to be the founder of a distinct branch of the clan Scott; he desired to plant a lasting root, and dreamt not of lasting fame, but of long-distant generations rejoicing in the name of 'Scott of Abbotsford'. By this idea all his reveries, all his aspirations, all his plans and efforts were overshadowed and controlled." Yet the man-of-letters is distinct from the mere journalist, at least as much so as from the poet. He has his own integrity to maintain, and the dignity of his calling.

The man-of-letters of the eighteenth century is typified by such figures as Steele and Addison and, even more particularly, by Johnson, who was poet, scholar and lexicographer, novelist,

journalist, essayist and pamphleteer. In Johnson, private and public values met and converged, yet it cannot be said that he was simply a creature of his time. He carried the inner values of morality and personal integrity, as he understood them, into the society in which he found himself. Johnson's remarks on the nature of the writer's relationship to the financial aspect of his calling have already been mentioned, and it has been suggested that such views, as put forward by a writer of such complete and uncompromising integrity, could hardly have survived the eighteenth century. The identification of literary with social success, by the time of Tennyson, was already beginning to be outdated. A dual nature was beginning to manifest within literature itself, and the literary personality, as represented by writers like Johnson, was undergoing a fissure in its being. The pressure of the debased social standards of the time produced, in the work of the nineteenth-century writer, what can only be described as a *softening* of content, a substantial deterioration particularly marked in those two figures, poet and novelist, who dominated the mid-period of the century: Tennyson and Dickens.[1] Like Tennyson, Dickens was able to accept the social standards of his time; his humanitarian radicalism itself implied such an acceptance. He supplied the great middle classes with the kind of literature they wanted, and it is inevitable that his work should reveal much of the middle-class sensibility. While with Dickens literary and social success might appear to have been synonymous, in fact the pressure of society was definitely beginning to have a deleterious effect upon the quality of literature. To the close of the century the novel retained its intimate relationship to the mind of the age, and it expresses, accordingly, that mind's degeneration.[2] The

[1] **Both these writers were much moved by their own work. Dickens, at his desk, is said to have laughed and wept over the joys and sufferings of his characters. Tennyson, while thunderously declaiming his poems, would seize and twist in his large, powerful hands some object such as a scarf or a pair of lady's gloves, and it is related how, on one occasion, asked to recite aboard the yacht of a titled lady, he grasped his hostess's hands and treated them, sublimely unconscious, in a similar manner.**

[2] **For a description of the vulgarization of the novel since the time of the industrial revolution see *Fiction and the Reading Public'*, by Q. D. Leavis.**

decline of popular taste from the beginning of the century to its close was truly remarkable. A century which began with Scott, Byron and Jane Austen, which in its middle period fostered Dickens and Thackeray, concluded with Kipling, Hall Caine, Rider Haggard, Marie Corelli and Mrs Humphry Ward. It is true that during the latter part of the century there emerged also Hardy, Meredith, Henry James; but with these writers we strike upon the beginnings of the fissure between the private and the public values in literature as a whole. The fact remains that while, at the beginning of the century, it was such a writer as Scott who represented for the general reader the values of literature, at the close of the century and indeed up to the present time this office was and is performed by writers of an altogether inferior order. "Literature" for the ordinary educated person of our time means the novels of John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett and J. B. Priestley (for the slightly less well educated it means Warwick Deeping and Gilbert Frankau), and not, shall we say, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Paul Valery or T. S. Eliot. The situation thus arising has been clearly brought out by F. R. Leavis in his pamphlet *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture.* Even until quite late in the last century it was possible for the novelist of integrity to bridge the gap—with some sacrifices—between his own values and those of his readers. Both Hardy and Henry James serialized their work in the popular magazines and were accepted on the same level as Mrs Humphry Ward and Henry Seton Merriman, although they were not accorded the popularity of these latter. Hardy's career as a novelist was a continual struggle against prejudice and hostility. James, who could afford to disregard the demands of the larger public, succeeded only in gradually isolating himself from it, until at the last he can have had comparatively few readers. ("Who *was* this Mr James ?" queried the lady of her mentor, being shepherded reverently through James's beautiful old house at Rye.)

The epoch of these writers, who still held some sort of a balance between the personal and the social worlds, terminated with the War of 1914, and the world that emerged from that catastrophe was to see the final division of the literary per-

sonality. A new type of waiter was emerging, the artist who had severed relations finally with the bourgeoisie, who had ceased to identify himself with them even to the extent of feeling hostility. Such writers, the prototypes of the distinctively modern artist, were Joyce, Proust, Kafka and many others. Emancipated from any external obedience to the demands of the values of society, they were able—indeed, compelled—to search for their values within themselves, to make their work the transcript of such inward seeking, unaffected by the demands of a demoralized public taste. It is in the isolated writers of the twentieth century that Lewisohn's evocation of the artist as "creative spirit" finds embodiment, and in their work that literature truly becomes, in a special sense, "scripture". Since 1918 the division into private and public literature has become almost absolute. We may assert with complete confidence that since that date all the genuinely significant writers are to be found within the influential radius of this minority of creative spirits who no longer share, or make any pretence of sharing, the values of society at large.

This situation is not the consequence, as conventional critics sometimes suggest, of any particular arrogance or "scorn of the common man". It is not the artist who has deserted society, but society which has fallen away from the values of personal creativeness which the artist represents. The experimental quality of such artists' work is sometimes pointed to as a result of their arrogant individualism, but the truth is that where their work is markedly unconventional and eccentric it is so as it has inevitably developed under the influence of the cultural situation. Working, as regards the larger world, in a kind of vacuum; writing not for society as a whole but for that ideal society which is contained within the personal principle and which is reflected to some degree in that disparate cosmos of the de-classed *intelligenzia,* the artist has been free (and it is for him to decide whether his freedom is a boon or a burden) to develop his work according to its own interior laws and necessities, irrespective of ultimately irrelevant external pressure.

It is noteworthy that cultural deterioration, the driving out of culture by civilization, should have been most conspicuous

in the British Isles. It is precisely in England, where the fabric of civilization was first allowed to develop under its own impetus and to detach itself from the inner life of the community, that culture has become most palpably overriden, prostituted, and all but obliterated. It is true enough that this is a process which has been at work for the past two centuries throughout the entire West, yet it was initiated and pre-acted in this " cradle of industry".

In this context of the supersession of culture by civilization, the case of Russia is perhaps, by antithesis, the most revealing. Russia, insulated from contact with the strong current of European culture, remained mediaeval and feudal for long after the West. Neither spiritually nor culturally did she experience the Renaissance. Russian literature hardly begins until the nineteenth century, with Gogol and Pushkin. And then, the most backward of the Christian nations in the development of civilization, in the mid-nineteenth century when England could reach no higher than Dickens and Browning, she produced and fostered that efflorescence of creativeness which issued in the great Russian novel, in the work of Tolstoy, of Dostoevsky, of Turgenev, Chekhov, and in the hardly less important works of the critics and philosophers (Soloviev, Rozanov, etc., etc.) whose work continued well into the twentieth century. Russia by herself gives the He to those who hold to the prevalent illusion that civilization *precedes* culture. The work of the greatest Russians, and, in particular, of Dostoevsky, is clearly "scriptural" in the sense in which I have been using that word. So far in Russia there had not arisen that gulf between the private and the public values which was to isolate the artist and subject art to the evolution which we have known in the West, through classicism and romanticism to the present situation of cultural isolation. The division between culture and civilization in Russia did not proceed by organic evolution: given Russia's backwardness in relation to the rest of Europe this would have been impossible. It proceeded mechanically and catastrophically. Russia caught up with, and overpassed, the West in one catastrophic movement, her values were overturned, as it were, in one moment. With the Revolution her

phase of culture was eclipsed and passed into the blackest night; civilization, the masses, mechanization, were enthroned, literature "collectivized" and harnessed to the political aims of the State, independent creative writers silenced or exiled, and the efforts of the new generation of writers directed and supervised by a political bureaucracy.[1]

One aspect of the modern creative writer's work should be emphasized: its unofficial, subversive quality. As the gap between civilization and culture, between ourselves as persons and our external society, enlarges, the quality of literature is seen to be more and more personal, to repudiate all affiliations with the official world of actuality. Unable to move easily and superficially among an external world which is stabilized by an acceptable convention (and to be sufficiently acceptable the convention must have some *reality* about it), the sincere artist is forced to examine every aspect of experience, to approach it originally. He can take nothing for granted. Of every one of his values this is true. He can no longer rely on any external authority—indeed, there *is* no external authority,

[1] **" The October revolution gave a magnificent impetus to all types of Soviet art. The bureaucratic reaction, on the contrary, has stilled artistic creation with a totalitarian hand. Nothing surprising here I Art is basically a function of the nerves and demands complete sincerity. Even the art of the court of absolute monarchies was based on idealization but not on falsification. The official art of the Soviet Union—and there is no other over there—resembles totalitarian justice, that is to say, it is based on lies and deceit. The goal of justice, as of art, is to exalt the ' leader ', to fabricate an heroic myth. Human history has never seen anything to equal this in scope and impudence. . . . The style of present-day official Soviet painting is called ' socialist realism ' The name itself has evidently been invented by some high functionary in the department of the arts. This ' realism ' consists in the imitation of provincial daguerreotypes of the third quarter of the last century; the ' socialist' character apparently consists in representing, in the manner of pretentious photography, events which never took place. It is impossible to read Soviet verse and prose without physical disgust, mixed with horror, or to look at reproductions of paintings and sculpture in which functionaries armed with pens, brushes and scissors, under the supervision of functionaries armed with Mausers, glorify the 'great' and ' brilliant' leaders, actually devoid of the least spark of genius or greatness."—Leon Trotsky : " Art and Politics ", *Partisan Review,* Aug.-Sept. 1938.**

(6) *ARTIST AND AUDIENCE*

There is a sense of time, which is a sense of mutation, of change, of fashion; and there is also a sense of eternity, which, not necessarily static and immobile, for it may be highly dynamic, is a sense of permanence, of perpetuity. Turning over the yellow and spotted leaves of some dusty Volume on a bookstall, we may find the imprint of the Zeitgeist no less in the style and substance of the work than in the book's binding and typography. But there are certain writers whose work transcends and overcomes this uniformity of the Zeitgeist, whose words strike on our minds with that same livingness, modernity even, as the living, suffering human face emerging out of a line of firm, curled mouths, modelled chins and Roman noses, with their laurel wreaths, their blank eyes, their wigs, chains, gowns and other impersonal paraphernalia of their time. It is this vertical quality of eternality which breaks up the monotonous successiveness of history and brings one age close to another, in spirit, annihilating the intervening periods. And it is this quality which preserves certain works of the past when their contemporaries have been long forgotten.

So far from our "classics" being works which bear most clearly the imprint of their society and time (as Wyndham Lewis's definition of the classical artist would seem to imply: the classical artist being the one who "is served out [by his society] with all he is supposed to require for his task"), the case is quite otherwise. They survive, not by virtue of the coat and breeches, but by virtue of the organic human body within them. Not by what is peculiar to their transitory time, but by what, although completely rooted in that time and growing out of it, is universal.

But what is this quality which is "universal"? I suggest that it is nothing else than the completely *personal,* the *original,* as opposed to the conventional, the second-hand. It is work which is filled with a personal, original, creative quality which survives and finds a response in other times than its own. It is those elements which are conventional, in other words social rather than personal, which serve to obfuscate the texture of

the work in which they appear, to cast over it a dusty "period" glaze; and serve, consequently, to relegate it to the region of the corrupt and the transitional. Now, history goes to show that personal, original, creative work is favoured by a situation in which the values of society are subordinated to the values of personality; that when culture becomes socialized, becomes the property of the many, who appropriate it for interested purposes of their own, original creativeness becomes constricted. If this is the case, we should expect the flourishing of creativeness to occur in the world where the tyranny of the social collective was the least marked, where the individual creative spirit was the least, implicitly, expected to conform to conventions laid down for him from outside, and where he necessarily had to rely upon the inner values discovered through free, unique personal experience. These inner values, I suggest, are likely to be the true, eternal ones. The work which is constructed with them will persist, and will speak to that which is eternal in each age through that which is uncorrupt and eternal in itself.

It is this originality, this inability to fall comfortably back upon external standards, which is the mark of the distinctively modern writer. The effect of his isolation from the larger society has been to thrust him entirely upon the inner values of personality, which, consequently, he has had to use as the ground of his creative activity. Thus while his isolated social position has undoubtedly had for him its severe disadvantages, it has at least had the immeasurable advantage of permitting him to develop his work subject to nothing but its own inherent necessities. This statement is subject to one qualification: the absence of complete social contact is, of course, itself a negative, inverted determining social factor in his development. It must be admitted that the artist needs an audience, needs the satisfaction of effective contact with the community. But equally he needs the freedom to develop his creativeness according to inward necessity and without the least compulsion of exterior standards.

The present position of art in its relationship to society is transitory. It cannot persist, if only because of the powerful modifying forces operating already within the social structure

itself. But whatever may be the outlook for the creative writer within society, one thing must be perfectly clear, that it is identical with the outlook for the values of personal creativeness in general—with the outlook for the human being as such. We have reached a point in the progress of civilization in which those values have been almost completely exiled from the world of social relationships. Civilization's apotheosis, totalitarianism, which is everywhere becoming an actuality, represents the final displacement of personal values within society. This is signified by the status of art and of religion within the totalitarian structure. Henceforth the personal values have no official sanction at all. Officialdom, which has always been the enemy of creativeness, is at last victorious. Civilization triumphant is the triumph of society over personality, of the collective over the individual. But with this situation civilization reaches its extreme limit of development. A dead end is reached, and a reversal of values must sooner or later, catastrophically or otherwise, occur.

I am convinced that that strange social, psychological, economic, political phenomenon commonly referred to as totalitarianism cannot be other than a transitory state. In erecting itself upon an exterior, non-human centrality it foredooms itself to destruction. It brings about the final separation between the impersonal world of social relationships (economically and structurally determined) and the personal world of the human community. The isolation of the creative writer merely anticipates the isolation of the human community as a whole. The exteriorizing process of civilization, which developed first of all from the needs and desires of mass social man (Coleridge's "copies", the herd), has been carried to a point where it has completely overpassed the human qualities of this social man, where it recognizes no creature but the robot. But man, even social, collective man, is at bottom, nevertheless, *not* a robot. Though a "copy", and not an original, he is nevertheless human, and has human needs and impulses. And these needs and impulses are positively violated by the mechanical structure of a civilization which has detached itself from all human obedience.

The human community itself, quite apart from its self-constructed environment, has, I believe, a divinely ordered organic structure. This structure, this organism, is a hierarchical whole. If we could take away all exterior modifying influences, and, particularly, the modifying influence of natural necessity (typified by the powerful compulsive force of economics), so that the organic community could fall into its true shape, so that its real interior structure could be made apparent, we should find that the multitude of "copies" would gravitate towards, and seek the influence of, the comparatively few "originals". In other words, where the distinctively human qualities were the most powerful, where originality and creativeness shone the most brightly and disseminated the most pulsing warmth, there would the "copies" gravitate to reflect the benign light and to share among themselves the gratifying heat. "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." I speak now, of course, of the purely human community, which in its pure form has never, probably, existed on this earth, and, we may conjecture, may never do so. Nevertheless, behind the barrier of exterior society, behind the artificial and mechanical hierarchies (of power, wealth, prestige and so forth) which hide and obstruct the real, but too often invisible, organic hierarchies (of spiritual power, wisdom, creativeness), this community is really existent, is a *fact.* And we may provide, in the exterior world, conditions which are either favourable or distinctly unfavourable to the emergence of this true community. Now the central power of this true community of human beings is personality, personal creativeness. Through this it coheres and is given unity, and through this alone. Consequently, the artist, the "creative spirit", is given a central place in its life.

The world has now reached a state at which all the values of civilization, all the exterior mechanical values, by separating themselves from the human community and the values of personality upon which that true community is grounded, and by perpetuating themselves according to their own mechanical necessities, have forced a complete cleavage between them-

selves and the values of personality. This is a new and unprecedented situation. On the one hand we see the exterior values, detached from the interior ones. On the other, the interior ones, similarly detached. As a consequence, we are faced with a perfectly lucid revelation of the nature, character and structure of each. We can, if we choose, take our stand upon one of two alternatives: (1) we can attempt to effect a reconciliation of these two worlds by merging in some manner the values of culture with those of civilization. This, however, if priority is given to the values of civilization, is only to exacerbate the division. The result must be to force the personal values further outside the framework of mechanical society. On the other hand (and if we sufficiently respect the absolute value of personality, this will be our choice), we can (2) take our stand uncompromisingly on the inner values of personality, and demand the subordination of the exterior structure to the centrality of the individual human person.

The dilemma is foreshadowed by the predicament of the artist. It would, surely, be an immeasurable loss if, in the new social synthesis which the future probably holds for us, all that has been gained in the artist's period of immersion in the interior values of personality were to be thrown aside, and there were to be permitted a retrograde movement towards social ascendancy—ascendancy of the collective, the public, over the personal and the private. For there is no likelihood of this taking us back, shall we say, to the position of culture in Dr Johnson's time, or the time of the Elizabethans. This is so for several reasons, hinging upon the tremendous development of outward civilization since the eighteenth century. Instead of a homogeneous society to which he must pay court, with a standard of values which he himself is able to accept, the writer faces a heterogeneous, disparate collective. It is this which makes complete nonsense of the modern classicist's position, although Mr T. S. Eliot, for example, ingeniously solves the dilemma by wishing upon society an improbable return to a classical Christian orthodoxy.

What is the composition of the modern writer's audience? One thing is perfectly apparent: that where writers in the

past wrote for a well-defined *class* of reader, the writer of today is read, not by any class or clique, but by individual persons, in the strictest sense. Although in one sense the modern writer has the smallest audience, in another he has the largest, since it is drawn from individual persons quite irrespective of exterior distinctions. There is today a vast literate public for printed matter. This public is composed for the most part of the "herd", the collective of a machine society. Yet it is from among this "herd" that there arise those individuals who are unable to accept the mechanical standards of that society and, irrespective of economic or social status, demand the very best from the original creative minds of their time, yes, and of past times. The modern writer does not address any external "public". He speaks to that ideal audience which is within himself, "that reflected regiment he catches sight of as he stands at a certain unique angle in the mirror-maze, and sees an image of himself endlessly duplicated in whichever direction he turns", as Glyn Jones so describes the perfect audience for the poet,[1] and then, behold! he finds a real duplication of that ideal audience among certain of the individuals within society. And that audience is the audience of—what? It is no other than the audience of *the classless society.* The modern artist and his reader represent no less than this, a community existing within the social structure, which is yet not *of* that structure, which is not founded upon or sanctioned by an economic or social differentiation at all, but solely upon the inner values of personality. It is this same audience that has, of course, ideally, been addressed by writers of the past. But at no previous time has that *ideal* audience begun actually to purge itself of its impure elements, to emerge as an express reality. The relationship of the artist to this ideal, yet actually existent audience, is, I repeat, a foreshadowing of the classless society of the future.

The new social synthesis, then, that I envisage, will be the complete antithesis of totalitarianism, although it is likely enough that only on the other side of totalitarianism will it be able to emerge. The economically classless society is now

[1] Glyn Jones : *Poems* (" Sketch of the Author ").

by no means merely a dream. It is increasingly likely to become an actuality in the not very distant future, and indeed it may be the positive mission of totalitarianism to bring about this antecedent economic levelling which will have to precede a cultural integration. To aim merely at the achievement, now, of the "classless society", however, in the sense in which the term is used by many socialists, is not nearly enough, particularly as it may arrive mechanically and quite independent of human volition and thus without regard for the human values. The totalitarian society can quite easily be classless (or the classless society can quite easily be totalitarian), yet totalitarianism, humanly and culturally speaking, is valueless. The social-cultural synthesis required is one which, grounded upon the centrality of the human person, moulds its structure in conformity to the requirements of the organic human community itself, and does not, contrarily, extrude a rigid and pre-determined exterior structure of mechanism into the organic community and thus disorganize and misshape it.

Yet what has all this to do with the writer's relationship to society, with the relationship between culture and civilization? Culture and the values of culture are, I repeat, founded completely and irrevocably upon personal creativeness. For an effective—that is, free and creative—solution to be found to the dilemma of the antithesis between culture and civilization, there must be a recognition of the absolute necessity of ordering society around the values of personality instead of allowing the reverse process to occur, the fitting of the organic community of persons into the rigid framework of a mechanically developed social structure.

The creative writer is not a special case. He is not an inhuman oddity. He epitomizes the human person and the essential creativeness which distinguishes him as such. The position in society of the creative writer is nothing more or less than an index to the position of personal creativeness in general. That is one reason why literature and art are so important.

The "classless society", when it comes, will be valueless, and indeed inimical to culture, unless it is humanly centrified,

unless it does in fact bring into general realization that relationship of person to person which is to be seen in the relationship of the modern writer to his audience, and. which represents the replacement of "society" by "community". The values of personality and of the personal life must have a central, sovereign position, and the external structure of society be made subsidiary to the demands of these values. If, then, the relationship of the modern artist to his audience foreshadows the ideal of the classless society, the artist's position, in relation to the question of social change, should be unambiguous.

Many socialists, nursing the vision of the classless society, are inclined to suggest to the writer that he should surrender his isolated position and "get into touch with the working class" in order to produce a new literature which will express the "desires and aspirations of the struggling masses of humanity", and so on and so forth. It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that such doctrines are essentially vicious and anti-creative—that they are totalitarian in tendency. They are, moreover, based upon a class view of society, not a classless view. Their basic error is the assumption that in the life of the toiling masses the classless life of the future is realized now. Nothing, on reflection, could be more absurd. The toiling masses as such are entirely class-bound and require more than anything to be liberated from that bondage, to be made free members of a classless community. It is social change which is the issue, not artistic change. To suggest that the artist should adapt himself to the masses is to ask that he commit artistic suicide. The masses must adapt themselves, as individuals, to the artist—to the values represented, that is, by the creative personality. Finally, it resolves to this: is the artist to receive orders from a political bureaucracy, regarded as the fount of wisdom and inspiration, or is the artist himself to be regarded as the source of values, and the politician, etc., merely the recipient or disseminator of same? To demand that art shall receive its values from society is to demand an impossibility. Values originate from within, they do not appear magically from without. In a society lacking

all values, all standards, it is the function of the artist, of the original, creative human being, to discover, realize and manifest values and standards.

(7) *"AXEL'S CASTLE", THE IVORY TOWER, "THE TIMES", AND "NEW WRITING IN EUROPE"*

The anomalies and contradictions into which even intelligent writers on this subject can be led are well exemplified by-Mr Edmund Wilson, whose book of criticism, *Axels Castle,* has had a considerable vogue both in America and in England. This book is a study of some of the most significant modern writers, and for his purposes Mr Wilson treats at considerable length of the work of James Joyce, Marcel Proust, W. B. Yeats, Paul Valery, T. S. Eliot. The book may be read as a lucid and interesting introduction to the work of these authors. And yet it seems to purport to be something a little more radical than that. Throughout the book there runs, beneath the overtone of respectful admiration (for these, after all, are the best modern writers Mr Wilson knows of), a curious, hesitant undertone of disapproval. The key to the critical part of the book lies in the title, which relates to an essay included in the volume on Villiers de L'Isle Adam, whose novel *Axel* is taken as foreshadowing the attitude of the modern writers under discussion. That attitude, it is suggested, is the attitude of the isolated, sensitive aesthete, dwelling apart in his Ivory Tower, remote from the common world of human affairs and cultivating his sensations and his ego in a sterile solitude. "As for living," de L'Isle Adam's hero contemptuously exclaims, "our servants will do that for us." And this, it is implied, is essentially the attitude to "life" of Yeats, Joyce, Eliot, Valery, etc. The attitude conveyed by this book of criticism repays scrutiny, for it is a fairly common one. In his postscript, Mr Wilson tentatively suggests that the writers he has been discussing represent a temporary, isolated, individualistic attitude which, being essentially morbid, unhealthy or unnatural, must soon disappear, giving place, it is hazarded, to a literature with more complete and vigorously

healthy social and natural affiliations. Yet nowhere does Mr Wilson fully develop this theme; it is as if he were aware that his material scarcely warrants it. Consequently his book falls between two stools. It would really stand quite well as a descriptive commentary on the work of certain important modern writers. Yet the puritan social conscience of the American author influences him to attempt to harness his culture-heroes to the chariot of civilization—or rather, since they refuse to be so harnessed, to imply the need for such a harnessing of future artists. Without realizing it, then, and in spite, possibly, of his better judgment, Mr Wilson, on balance, comes out on the side of society as against the artist, on the side of civilization against culture. It is, consequently, not very surprising to find in his more recent works a developing interest in Marxism, a theory which is concerned with culture only as an annexe to civilization: a "superstructure" founded on the basic reality of economic relationships.

The tension between social and artistic values finds expression in a variety of ways, not least in the divided minds of certain would-be critics of literature in whom the values of society have been permitted to overshadow those of art, and who are consequently inclined, to a greater degree than Mr Wilson, to demand the writer's submission of his work to purely social criteria. In the case of the more specifically bourgeois critic, the *litterateur* who is identified with his middle-class social background, this tension is liable to express itself when broken in the form of vindictive attacks upon writers of the *avant-garde* for their "unintelligibility", "freakishness", and lack of respect for "tradition", etc. etc. Such an outburst was the now notorious leading article published in the London *Times* for 25th March 1941, entitled "The Eclipse of the Highbrow". In this article, certain unspecified modern writers and artists were characterized as "impatient, self-indulgent, intolerant and touchy" and possessed of "a weak and arrogant contempt for the common man". This *Times* article sees modern art and literature as works of "clever triviality" operating on "the level of esoteric parlour games", and purports to condemn the modern artist by standard

virtues "such as endurance, unselfishness and discipline", the virtues of the conservative empire-builder who represents, no doubt, the *Times'* conventionalized ideal public. (Or are these, significantly, since this is a war-time article, the soldierly virtues?) A not dissimilar frame of mind has been given expression in America by writers such as Archibald MacLeish and Van Wyck Brooks,[1] the former of whom has written a pamphlet attacking *avant-garde* writers as "The Irresponsibles"—irresponsible, of course, in a social and political sense (Mr MacLeish holds an official position as Librarian to the Library of Congress in Washington); while the latter, in a lecture entitled "Primary Literature and Coterie Literature", has condemned modern writers for failure to bridge the gap between private and public values in the manner of Dostoevsky, Whitman, Victor Hugo and Ibsen. Like the *Times* critic, Brooks extols certain public, social virtues for the edification of the artist: "the great themes (for the writer) are those by virtue of which the race has risen, courage, justice, mercy, honour and love". As the *Partisan Review* has pointed out, the trend of such critical diatribes is towards an American (and in the case of the *Times* writer, an English) equivalent of Russian totalitarian *Kulturbolschewismus.*[2]

So much for the definitely hostile social critic of modern movements in literature. The attitude of the Left critics, as we have seen in the case of Mr Edmund Wilson, is slightly different, yet finally their social bias is equally destructive of artistic values. If Mr Wilson, an intelligent and sensitive critic, can commit himself to the extent discernible in *Axel's Castle,* what will not the average *litterateur* perpetrate in the name of social values! The socialist literary movement of recent years has been particularly productive of such commonplace "revolutionary" critics who, from the standpoint of politicians, calmly lay down laws and norms for the procedure of the creative mind. America has fostered, as is perhaps to

[1] Vide *Partisan Review,* issues of 1941-42.

[2] The contemporary equivalents of the so-called " primary " writers are such personages as H. G. Wells, Bernard Shaw, J. B. Priestley ; but even this class of writers is disappearing.

be expected, more than England of such devotees of the "prolet-cult", who follow the line of the doctrinaires of the Russian Revolution with their insistence that writing shall be propagandist, that it shall serve the needs and interests of the proletarian State (but here it is a social "class", whose essence is enshrined in a political party). Such a frame of mind is a formidable one, because it is attractively superficial and can easily become widespread. There are many more incipient and actual politicians in contemporary society than there are potential or actual artists, and this particular attitude towards the artist has, for the social mind, advantages and satisfactions of its own.

Spawned somewhat inelegantly out of this confusion was the now obsolescent Leftist literary movement of the nineteen-thirties. A spokesman of this movement, Mr John Lehmann, recently published a short book entitled *New Writing in Europe,* in which he declared his intentions as follows:

> "My aim in this book is to review what has been one of the most interesting developments in our literature for many years: the growth, during the early nineteen-thirties, of a group of poets and prose-writers who were conscious of great social, political and moral changes going on around them, and who became increasingly convinced that it was their business to communicate their vision of this process, not merely to the so-called highbrow intellectual public to which their predecessors had addressed themselves, but to the widest possible circles of ordinary people engaged in the daily struggle for existence."

In order to give some idea of the type of mind at work in this book, I will extract a few passages (my italics throughout):

> "... During the 'thirties, an ever increasing number of writers in this country and abroad began to feel, in the face of what was happening in Europe—the attack on democratic and working-class rights, the suppression of free thought and the general drive against culture which included such incidents as the 'Burning of the Books' in Germany,—that creative

writers could hardly dissociate themselves from the general struggle against Fascism, the tide of which would end by swamping them as well. *Writers of middle-class background* such as the contributors to *New Country,* began to feel that Fascism was indeed the social decay, which they had devoted so much of their work to exposing, in monstrous and militant form. They felt that in order to communicate their vision of this fact as widely as possible, *they must abandon their habit of addressing themselves to a small elite, must write lucidly and without any paraphernalia of erudite allusions and private jokes. . . . They were moved to approach the working-classes and the broader masses of the people, in the belief that among them the real drama of our time was being played out,* and from them the only effective stand against the immediate danger and the only constructive hope for the future could come. *This naturally brought about a greater preoccupation of writers with politics,* and the inter-relation of writers all over the world with the international anti-Fascist movement, *the chief dynamo of which became the revolutionary Marxist parties,* forms an extremely fascinating study. Literary magazines of definite political colour began to appear, in which the problems of the writer and artist in the new situation were endlessly debated, and many of the best poems and stories of the new writers were published. . . .

". . . They are all of them realists, interested in rendering the life of the 'man in the street' as they see it, and not as wish-dreaming would like to make it. . . .

". . . Thus, from a combination of *urgent economic and political causes* on the one hand, and a natural development in the English language which had *little obvious connection* with them on the other hand, literature and the people began to move towards one another again. A new realism began to grow up, the aim of which was to create an image of life as it was, *not for the fortunate and protected few,* but for the millions who had to struggle for their living and bear the main brunt of all economic and social disturbances. . . ."

Among the many misconceptions which led to this literary

Leftism of the 'thirties one of the first was the myth of the Ivory Tower. The writers of the class of Joyce and Eliot, according to Mr Lehmann, addressed themselves to "a well-educated intelligentsia which had leisure for a great deal of cultural activity, knew the outstanding authors and artists of the past, could understand subtle allusions to erudite works and appreciate subtle refinements of feeling; to people who, *if they had not been to good schools and expensive universities, knew at least what they were like, and knew the life of country houses too, and how to behave at dinner when invited down for the week-end."* Here, indeed, we have the social, political mind at work on the problems of literature, with which it is quite incompetent to grapple. What a crass misconception of the function of art and of the artist is shown in those few lines! For, of course, the artist of any integrity does not "address himself" to any such public. The process of creation, with an artist, comes first, and the question of communication afterwards. It is not for the artist to distort what he has to say to suit the needs of lazy-minded or ill-educated readers, even if their lazy-mindedness or lack of education have a sociological origin. (In this case the obvious remedy is a social one.) The present writer, to whom the work of such writers as Eliot and Joyce has meant a good deal, and who is only too well acquainted with "the daily struggle for existence", could put his hand on his heart and swear that he has not the faintest idea, except at second-hand, of what good schools and expensive universities are like, and that he would not have the least idea of how to behave in the unlikely event of being invited down to a country house for the week-end.

The proletarianization of literature, the attempt to bridge the gap between writer and public by what is in effect a debasement of literary standards to the level of the comprehension of the uneducated masses, is a backward and not a forward step. It is intrinsically an anti-cultural attitude, the accompaniment, in the literary sphere, of the externalizing process, the rigid subordination of personal life to collective existence which is the distinguishing feature of communist or fascist totalitarianism. From the equivocal attitude of Edmund Wilson in

AxeVs Castle it is only a step or two to the more popular level of Mr Lehmann, and from thence it is an easy slide to the "RAPP-ism" of the Soviet Bureaucracy. Such an attitude to literature really means the surrender of all that has been gained by the great writers of the last hundred years—it is a betrayal of culture, of humanity, a real *trahison des clercs.* Why, indeed, should the proletarian collective be held as more worthy as a standard for hterature than the bourgeois collective? I can see no reason at all, although I can discern a suggestive factor in the identification of the bourgeois literary mind as represented so perfectly by Mr Lehmann with the herd standards of the proletariat. And this attitude I would link with that of the apologist for democratic bourgeois society like the *Times* leader-writer, and like Messrs MacLeish and Brooks, a society which is already beginning to change into some kind of functional state.

(8) *SIN AND FREEDOM*

When Coleridge made the remark which I have already quoted, that . . . "there have been three silent revolutions in England:—first, when the professions fell off from the Church; secondly, when literature fell off from the professions; and, thirdly, when the press fell off from literature", he was without doubt thinking of the process as a deteriorative one, which, as a descent from unity to disunity, it undoubtedly is. In passing, however, we might reflect that this passage from unity to disunity is omnipresent throughout human existence. It is the very type of both personal and racial life, and as such it is a pattern whose origin we are led to seek in "first life": in the myth of man's original fall from innocence into experience through an act of sin. Now the original fall of man, which we may take to be the archetype of all such articulations of primary simplicity into a secondary complexity, may be viewed in two aspects: it is a paradox which represents itself to us in the first place as sin and in the second place as freedom. Man's disobedience of God was sin, but it was also a trying of freedom; and it is a point for theologians whether, if man

had not tried his freedom, it could have become a reality. It certainly would not have been an experienced reality, and one must conclude that it would have remained in the realm of the potential and the unrealized.

Adam lay ibounden,
Bounden in a bond ;
Four thousand winter
Thoght he not too long ;
And all was for an appil,
An appil that he tok,
As clerkes finden
Wreten in here book.
Ne hadde the appil taken ben,
The appil taken ben,
Ne hadde never our lady
A bene hevene quene.
Blessed be the time
That appil take was.
Therefore we moun singen
" *Deo gracias*"

Both sin and freedom (if the reader will accept my terminology) enter into the situation to which these "silent revolutions" have led us. Their effect has been disruption and dissipation of the wholeness of life; on the other hand, their effect has been to introduce new categories which make possible a clarification and purification of life. The point it is necessary to realize is that these revolutions were inherent and potential in an original unity: that their explication out of that unity has resulted in a disintegration which is at the same time an *articulation* of it. For the complexity to which the "fall" always leads is at once an articulation and a disintegration of the primary simplicity. And our task with regard to it is always that of reintegration upon a higher level: on a level which allows the retention and consolidation of all that has been gained through the explicatory process. In this it is analogous with God's purpose of redemption, through His Son, of the fallen world of man. There is, at any rate, no return to the primary simplicity. That would be an endeavour, while still in sin, to go back on freedom.

Regarding the matter in its positive aspect, for the pro-

fessions to fall off from the Church means at once a liberation of the Church and a liberation of the professions, a liberation to follow the laws of their own autonomous existence; for literature to fall off from the professions means a similar liberty, a liberty for literature to realize its own essential nature in freedom from professional compulsions. For the press to fall off from literature implies a social cleavage in which civilization, separating itself from culture, breaks off from culture that social element which it can now adapt to its own utilitarian purposes. And this leaves literature, as the product of the creative mind, in a position of yet greater freedom to develop according to its own interior demands. In this way poetry has been purged of all inessential elements; we no longer suppose that poetry should edify and instruct, or merely amuse. We are beginning to see what poetry in its inner nature *is.* And the extraneous elements which have been purged from poetry can fall into their proper place in the varieties of prose literature.

Yet "literature" is only an abstraction which we make from the particular work, which in itself is essentially a projection of the movement of its maker's mind. Strictly speaking, it is not "literature" but the creative mind, which is free to develop according to its own inner necessities. The state of literature reflects the condition of the creative mind, of which it is a projection. The creative mind, then, has reached a situation in which it is no longer subject to the restrictions of exterior limitations. It is faced with the responsibility of *operating in freedom.* And while there is a sense in which this has always been the responsibility of the creative mind, it is only now, for the first time, that the obligation is becoming perfectly explicit.

The replacement of culture by civilization, the transformation of culture-values into utilitarian "life"-values, is a working out of exterior elements from human life. Consequently, the process of modern history has been a process of *exteriorization.* This exteriorization (in which man himself is finally made into a unit in the social mechanism) reaches its conclusion in that final state of civilization which we know today as "totalitarianism". But with totalitarianism—total civilization—the exter-

iorizing process is exhausted. Any further movement, apart from a movement of sheer disintegration, can only be an inward one, a reversal of the historical movement which has brought us to our present position. The human community has given itself over to an exterior, peripheral impulse, and in carrying the results of that impulse to their extreme limit has reached a position where those exterior elements (hitherto latent in the community) can be ejected from the communal organism. They are no longer psychic factors, as it were; they have been exteriorized physically, and, once concretely projected, the inner soul of the community has freed itself of them. Its life may now move in inward freedom instead of outward compulsion.

In the social organization of the Middle Ages, at the dawn of the period of so-called modern history, there was an integration of the values of culture with those of civilization, which was expressed in the social character of cultural creativeness. Yet the inner life of man, his creativeness, cannot be said to have been free. It was stabilized harmoniously, but it was subject to exterior social restraint. The soul of man was in the keeping of the Church, a hierarchy in which interior and exterior values were inextricably entangled. In this integration, *both free creativeness and the exterior structure of civilization were latent,* each conditioned by the other, neither existing in its own sovereignty, or allowed to operate according to the necessities inherent in its own nature. The development of modern history represents a fissure in the integral being of the mediaeval synthesis, out of which pure culture (spiritual freedom) and pure civilization (material necessity) have been allowed to develop, each according to the dictates of its inherent potentialities, both being aspects of the life of humanity. The dialectic of this process, and of the interaction between the values of each, I have tried to explain. Freed from obedience to the inner life of man in his relationship to God, civilization has detached itself therefrom and developed itself externally to its utmost limits, a development which has resulted in the mechanistic robot-society of our own day. But contrarily, the opposite principle, that of personal creativeness, of spiritual

freedom, has likewise obeyed its interior dynamic, and has been enabled to develop itself in independence of the external standards of society.

Once the process of civilization has been taken to its antinomy, there is no further development left open to it. "Civilization", except in so far as it can be utilized in the service of culture, can now be ejected from the community's organism. The free human community can now emerge, can centre itself upon its own inner destiny in the manner foreshadowed by the relationship of the modern artist to his audience. In such a community the original creative mind is placed in a central position.

I do not want to make a hard-and-fast distinction between the creative and the non-creative minds, between "originals" and "copies". It is fairly obvious that creative capacity varies from person to person, and that within the individual it is not a constant quality. In this life every single individual is called to creativeness and freedom, though it must be recognized that there are some who are capable of only the most limited response to this call. There is, however, nothing to justify an attitude of aloofness on the part of the self-styled "originals" as over against "copies", nothing to justify either a division into masters and servants or that kind of division postulated in Dostoevsky's parable of the Grand Inquisitor, where the "few" bear the burden of knowledge and responsibility for the sake of the irresponsible and ignorant "many". Freedom, although the most priceless of gifts, is also a burden, and rather than accept a burden which sometimes seems intolerable, many individuals will seek some means of evading it. Nevertheless, the acceptance of the freedom of creativeness is the primary obligation laid upon the artist in the modern world, and the refusal of freedom is analogous to a return to the "primal simplicity", which is impossible: a going-back on life and a repudiation of experience.

All the various tactics of escape from the burden and responsibilities of freedom have a common pattern in that they represent an endeavour to shift the centre of existence from within to without. The individual seeks to replace his own interior centrality by an obedience to an authority outside himself.

Politicised, the attempt of the artist to interpret his position in the light of social values, to integrate himself externally within the body of society, is an attempt to avoid the responsibility of inward creativeness by placing the origin of values in the social collective. In the last resort this means that instead of the artist being a creator of values, this function is delegated to the politician, who sets the standard by which the artist has to work. In the case of the artist in a capitalist society who attempts to interpret his function in the light of socialist doctrine, it is the political theorist who is exalted to the position of arbiter of values, but the political theorist gives place to the more sinister figure of the political boss when, with the conquest of power, the doctrine in question becomes translated, or mistranslated, into concrete terms. Art can only be impoverished when its pattern is cut according to the requirements of the politician. Two kinds of art-product only are required in the politician's idea of society: propaganda and entertainment. There is no room for that essential art which is scriptural in character, for that takes us beyond the materialistic values of collective existence.

Neo-classicism represents a similar desire to acknowledge values and standards external to the individual, but the dilemma of the modern classicist lies in the fact that there are today no commonly accepted standards which he can acknowledge and embody in his work. In a sense it can be said that the real classical writers of today are the commercial best-sellers, who write to satisfy a widespread popular demand. The attempt of the serious writer to adopt the classical attitude can only result in self-contradiction and artistic stultification. The classicist who tries to throw himself back upon the accepted values of the past is in but a slightly better position. The classicist who embraces Christian Orthodoxy with the intent of restoring a homogeneity to society through a universal return to the Church merely replaces the politician by the priest, who, though less harmful to creativeness, is equally impotent as a source of values. There is, indeed, little likelihood of a universal return to Orthodoxy, understood in the old, formal, conventional sense: no likelihood of a universal, traditional accept-

ance of Catholic Christianity with its external authority. That old kind of external authority, symbolized by the Pope with his dreaded power of excommunication, is gone for ever. Christianity itself is eternally true, but Christianity will have to be positively re-created within the lives of individuals in terms of personal experience, and this means going forward into creative freedom, not retreating into the shell of a broken though stately and reassuring authority in the endeavour to avoid freedom.

In speaking of the scriptural character of modern literature and in insisting upon the acceptance by the artist of the responsibilities of freedom to develop according to the interior dictates of his nature, I am far from supposing that the result will be immediately edifying in the sense that from it can be directly drawn laws and norms for the regulation of average human conduct. Literature is scriptural in the sense that through it there is a communion between writer and reader in which the writer, searching for meaning in the chiaroscuro of private experience, communicates the resultant pattern to the reader, who may then make use of this pattern, appropriating it to himself, to discover some aspect of his own personal meaning. The responsibility is always with the reader, the individual, to appropriate that which is valuable and to reject that which is useless. And only that which he makes his own, drawing it into the very substance of his being, can be of any use to him. It may be said of truth in general that, however objectively true it be, however I may genuflect before it, it is not truly truth until it becomes *my* truth, my intimate personal possession. It is this which makes meaningless a merely external acceptance of Catholic Christianity.

Christianity (say) may contain the essential truth about existence, but this truth is of no account to me if my attitude towards it is merely one of empty acknowledgment. My discovery of this truth cannot be merely an appropriation of the "end"—The Truth; it must lie in the interior experience of truth both as means and end. Although I may have exteriorly appropriated all the Truth, so that it is all at the end of my tongue or my pen, only so much of it is genuinely mine as I

have realized inwardly, that is to say, creatively. The truth that is not concretely realized through the creative movement of the mind does not count for truth in the spiritual world, however objectively True it may be. I veritably believe that there is more merit in error that is the outcome of a personal and dynamic search for truth than in the Truth which is the outcome of no such dynamic movement—which is merely "somebody else's" truth. There is no virtue in arresting the dynamic movement of a mind which is falling into error through the personal pursuit of meaning, following a living impulsion of its own, and in proposing a static acceptance of a Truth which is exterior to the movement of that mind, for that Truth will turn out to be a greater falsity than the error which was being pursued. The impulse must exhaust itself, reach its uttermost limit, and the error must work itself out, if there is no possibility of leading the dynamic movement of the mind into a living discovery of truth: then only is the ground cleared for the inward realization of truth.

In the free movement of the creative mind, error and incompleteness work themselves out as that mind organizes itself upon its own interior propulsion; if they are strong enough they lay hold of the movement of that mind and disintegrate it. The result, in the case of a writer whose work is scripture in the sense we have been discussing, is clearly discernible in his work. The presence of error, even the total and all-pervading presence of error, does not invalidate its *nature* as scripture, though it does lower its *value.* But it must not be overlooked that scripture may have a negative value as well as a positive one. In taking one tendency and carrying that to a conclusion, a writer may be said to exteriorize or explicate it in the same way that certain elements are exteriorized through the movement of history in the life of society. Having been thus exteriorized it can the more easily be rejected.

In the Middle Ages, when a sacred and a secular literature existed side by side, it was the sacred literature which stood at the centre of men's lives. But this sacred literature, understood as immutable and fixed, remained static, while secular literature dynamically developed outside it. This development

was accompanied by a movement of human life away from the static authority of the Church, and man's life drew away from its religious centre and became completely secular. Human life, in fact, overflowed the limits of the Church, burst its narrow walls. But with the virtual abolition of the distinction between sacred and secular literature arose the paradox that secular literature itself began to take upon itself something of the character of sacred literature. Religion, no longer confined to the rule of the Church, extended its sphere to that of life as a whole, the entire boundary between the sacred and the secular began to be dissolved. I do not, of course, suggest that both life and literature became more holy; only that the area of religion, apparently radically diminished, was in fact potentially, if only potentially, tremendously enlarged. The fact that today we have reached an extremity of secularism suggests to me that we have reached a new point of departure for religion. Having reached the outer limit of a vast spiral, we are ready for an inward, centripetal volition.

Just as all activity which does not come within the categories of livelihood or diversion must of necessity be directly related towards one end, which I will call by the orthodox term, Salvation, so all literature that is not written either for money or for amusement is Scripture. There is no possibility of denying this* for if the possibility of salvation and the need for scripture are denied, then all literary activity whatsoever must be either a trade or a game.

But if there is more in human existence than livelihood and diversion, the responsibilities of literature and its central importance in human life are at once evident. With the withdrawal of many extraneous elements from the inner life of humanity, with the clarification of the writer's position in relationship to society—a position which will become increasingly evident as the historical processes now at work in society run themselves out—we may well expect serious literature to become even more self-consciously scriptural in character, and in this it will reflect the character of human **life,** which itself will become more personal. "Literature" as such may suffer a drastic curtailment as society becomes

once again homogeneous and closely knit, a hierarchically ordered community of persons who are able to find within the texture of their own lives the satisfactions which today are purveyed vicariously and abstractly through the indirect communications of the printed word. The writer as we know him may disappear (I except from this prognostication the essential poet only), finding his true function as one of "the clerisy" whose relation to the rest of society may well be more direct, immediate and concrete than in the past. The end will be a return to the beginning, but a return enriched with all that has been experienced in the interregnum, a return to a complexity no longer disparate but reintegrated into a higher unity. To conclude with another quotation from Gerschenzon:

> ". . . A long road still lies before humanity. Lutheran Christianity, the republic and socialism are only half the task. The personal must again become the perfectly personal—just as much so as when it was born. But the past will not have gone by in vain. Man will return to his beginning a new creature; for his subjectiveness, having become a general and objective value, will there, at the summit, after many years unfold the flower of its eternal truth.
>
> "Here takes place a kind of reverse philogeny: after reaching the summit the movement, now no longer the same, turns back stage by stage, on the very same way by which it ascended. Every revolution, therefore, is a revival of the past: the monarchy is again replaced by a single chamber, by parliament; the parliamentary system makes way for a still earlier form—for federalism, and so on, right back to the starting-point. But the old forms are now animated by another spirit. The commune, as it arose, was meagre, chaotic and exclusive, but at its decline it was well-organized, and full of significance for the people.
>
> "The starting-point to which everything must return is personality. In it is contained all the fullness so far needed by man. Centuries will pass, faith will again become simple

and personal; work—a joyous, personal creation; possession—an intimate intercourse with the thing possessed; but faith, work and possession will be immutable and sacred in personality, and beyond it they will be immeasurably enriched, like the ear of corn which has grown from a grain. The problem is that the personal should become the perfectly personal, and should yet survive as the general; that man in his every manifestation should know God, as Mary did, as one with his child."

II POETRY AND NATURE (A Footnote to "The Personal Principle")

ONE WAY, AND NOT THE LEAST SUGGESTIVE, OF LOOKING AT THE development of modern history is to regard it from the aspect of main's changing relationship with the natural world. Modern history begins with the Renaissance, a period of an unparalleled accession of individuality and individual creativeness, leaving its mark upon Elizabethan England in the amazing proliferation of poetry of which the drama of Shakespeare is the purest flower. But the Renaissance had its roots in the Middle Ages. Nicolas Berdyaev, in *The Meaning of History,* has some illuminating remarks to make upon the subject of mediaeval Christian asceticism, which he sees as a struggle for the liberation of the human image from submergence in the inner life of nature. In its struggle for liberation from its elemental bonds, the human consciousness was forced to objectify nature and thus to prepare the way for its eventual mechanization. Modern history is a record of this process of separation and mechanization, with all its concomitants, a process which has left an unmistakable impression upon culture. It does, however, appear that for a brief time before the rise of Baconian science there was a period in which conditions conspired to make possible a free play of creative power within the human personality which had discovered itself as superior to, without as yet being positively estranged from, its natural elements. But from sixteenth-century humanism, through seventeenth-century puritan individualism and eighteenth-century rationalism the process of estrangement is at work.

This process manifests itself collectively in man's increasing control over the secrets of the organic world and the increasing de-naturalization of the individual's environment. Thus while Elizabethan civilization is still rudimentary and personal,

succeeding centuries see a progressive subordination of nature to the world of man, of countryside to the city, of particularity to standardization, until in our own time the structure of civilization has virtually severed itself from its organic foundations.

A parallel indication of man's alienation from natural sources is given in his attitude towards the natural element in his own composition. From the sixteenth century to the twentieth there has in fact been a peculiar accentuation of puritanism and sexual prudery. We are accustomed to contrast the lewdness of Restoration comedy with the strait-laced Victorian attitude towards sexual matters, but are inclined to overlook that it is distinguishable in its turn from the open, gusty coarseness we find in Elizabethan drama by a certain titillating depravity which depends for its very effectiveness upon the violation of semi-puritan standards which it entails.

Graphs could be drawn from various points to illustrate the effects upon society and culture of this progressive estrangement, and whether traced through philosophy, science, painting, drama or the novel they would follow a similar curve. Here I want to relate the process to the history of poetry, and for this purpose my thesis is that since Shakespeare the history of English poetry is one of a gradual impoverishment of the medium of verse, and that this impoverishment is intimately connected with man's alienation from his natural sources.

To assert that there has been such an impoverishment of the medium of verse is not at all the same thing, of course, as to say that every individual poet since the time of Shakespeare has written a little worse than his predecessors. Certain results have been achieved within the impoverished, or refined, medium which we might never have seen had both the poetic consciousness and the idiom of verse retained their original sensuous density and vitality. What has in fact occurred is that each succeeding poet has been forced involuntarily and unconsciously into a position where complete poetic creativeness becomes increasingly circumscribed—where the possibilities of bringing into play the forces of his entire being become increasingly more difficult, both by virtue of the pressure exerted upon the poet as a craftsman through the

limitations of the idiom which he receives from his predecessors and contemporaries, and the commensurate influence which his total situation exerts directly upon the formation of his personality. So that while Tennyson and Swinburne have to work within a more abstract and attenuated poetic idiom than Milton or Donne, it is obvious that they themselves perpetuate and help to formulate the idiom from the necessities of their human situation, and that the commerce between man and medium is reciprocal.

Granted then that this attenuation of the idiom of poetry is a fact, it is interesting to trace out its lineage and its roots in the cultural situation, although nothing more than the briefest consideration of the matter will be attempted here. We have glanced at the situation of the Elizabethan poet, a situation which permitted in poetry that combination of physical immediacy with a high degree of cerebral articulation which causes Mr Eliot to describe the directly following period of the Metaphysical poets as one in which the intellect was "immediately at the tips of the senses". Certainly, behind the word-structures of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Webster, Donne, one feels the active presence, not only of a brain, but of a physique. To this quality of *immediacy* in poetry I shall return. But with time, as perception became increasingly intellectualized and abstract, idiom and diction were canalized and passed through a filter which eliminated what seemed gross and impure into a stream of increasing limpidity. The "elevation" of poetic diction which Milton instigated reached its culmination in the flowery poetic jargon current among versifiers towards the close of the eighteenth century.

With Marvell, following the Metaphysical poets with their sensuous fusion of conceit and imagery, begins the subordination of the sensuous element in poetry to the play of wit. There is nothing turbulent in Marvell, who deploys a neat, clever line in which passion is well controlled by intellect. In his poetry, exquisite as it is, there is a planing-down of surface, a diminution of physical impact by the tendency to smooth the cragginess of individual words over into neatly scissored phrases. In Marvell, too, the natural world is

appropriately enough an Arcadia of hayfields and neatly planned gardens:

> See how the arched earth does here
> Rise in a perfect hemisphere !
> The 9tiifest compass could not strike
> A line more circular and like,
> Nor softest pencil draw a brow
> So equal as this hill does bow ;
> It seems as for a model laid,
> And that the world by it was made.

The fact that English verse satire virtually began with Marvell (for the practice of satire predicates a conventionalized, urban polite society) points out his affinities with the later age of Dryden, Pope and Swift, who also subjugated the more rugged elements of verse to the play of wit, smoothing down the surface texture of the verse to the admired, "correct" polish. It is instructive to compare Donne's Satires in their original form with the versions made by Pope. Donne's idiosyncrasy is an organic quality, Pope's regularity is both abstract and mechanical. Thus Donne writes (in *Satyre II)*:

> But hee is worst, who (beggarly) doth chaw
> Other wits fruits, and in his ravenous maw
> Rankly digested, doth those things out-spue,
> As his own things ; and they are his owne, 'tis true,
> For if one eate my meate, though it be knowne
> The meate was mine, th'excrement is his owne.

But when Pope "versifies" it (with breath-taking aplomb), it is smoothed down to this:

> Wretched indeed ! But far more wretched yet
> Is he who makes his meal on others' wit :
> 'Tis changed, no doubt, from what it was before ;
> His rank digestion makes it wit no more :
> Sense, pass'd through him, no longer is the same ;
> For food digested takes another name.

Pope's version reveals how too squeamish a refinement results in a sensuous impoverishment of the actual verse-texture. In Donne, the words seem to have been chewed over physically. In Pope, the verse has been refined of its physical grossness in its passage through the versifier's more civilized mentality,

and concreteness of epithet is readily sacrificed for a conceit and an epigram.

But this brings us to an important point. Superficially, we can consider the evolution of the relationship between human consciousness and the world of nature as it affects poetry in two ways—the measure in which such relationship determines the subject-matter of verse, and the way in which it affects its form and texture. Actually it is not much easier to separate the two aspects than it is to disentangle the two interfused elements within the poem itself.

Poetry is made with words. But what are words? Certainly they are more than abstract ciphers, an algebra of analytical communication. Words are very mysterious entities which seem to have an organic connection with the human psyche. The English language was not constructed theoretically by a corpus of learned grammarians, hallmarked and passed out for public circulation by a royal proclamation. It was brought elementally to laboured birth out of man's profound need for articulation and communion—a dual communion, both between man and man and (to simplify the rather complex psychical exchange) between man and the external world. It seems to be a primary need of the human psyche to find through language a series of mind-gestures which exactly and satisfactorily correspond to the disequilibrium caused through the impact of the "objective" world upon the subjective consciousness, and which, at need, will actually evoke it. This is not strictly a mental, cerebral relationship, but rather one of the complete organism, the body-mind. Language perpetually passes through the slow mill of the common mind. At its roots our tongue bears the impression of the sensitive and muscular hands which thumbed it manually into shape and correspondence with an environment of earth, mud, straw, stone, rain and wind, the blood of men and beasts. This sense of physical immediacy is the most notable thing in very early English verse, and it is found too in Chaucer and Skelton. It is essentially a folk-quality, born of the common experience of feudal humanity, at one with the particular, idiosyncratic environment of the natural world.

A poem, somebody has said, is a complex word. Similarly, a word is an elementary poem. And if we separate the apparent constituents of aesthetic experience, we shall find that its physical quality, what I have called the quality of *immediacy* is one of its most important elements. As A. E. Housman pointed out in his well-known lecture, the completely satisfying poem affects us with a palpable physical impact, although it may modify our awareness in other ways as well. It is this physical, or physiological, quality which is so characteristic a feature of Elizabethan poetry. With the Metaphysical poets it becomes somewhat cerebrized, and later still the cerebral element comes to predominate over the physiological, although, it is hardly necessary to say, this latter element can never be eliminated completely, and even in the age when trousers were referred to as "unmentionables", there was actually a man, etc., beneath the trousers.

It may appear somewhat fanciful to associate the gradual refinement and abstraction of the medium of verse with man's altering relationship to nature. But nature, which provides us with the material basis of our being, in which to some extent we are incorporated, is precisely the realm of the tangible, the concrete and the particular, and the further we move both in our individual consciousness and in the extension of our civilization from this concrete source, the more simplified and abstract becomes our mode of perception, and the more mechanical. The human product of a perfectly de-naturalized environment, say the hypothetical result of some kind of Huxleyan parthenogenesis conditioned altogether within a laboratory civilization of electrical energy and glass tiles, would be lacking almost completely in what we call aesthetic apprehension, because the features necessary for the education of the senses would be absent. By opposition, the richly sentient culture of certain primitive tribes has a real connection with their intimate responsiveness to natural rhythms and their participation within "the inner life of nature".

As it happens, a study of the history of poetry in England shows us clearly that when consciousness was showing signs of too prolonged and exhausting an intellectualization, individual

poets have felt a strong inward urge towards a reinvigoration of both medium and consciousness through a communion with the organic world. Is it not significant that Wordsworth, in endeavouring to break through the sterile conventions of an outworn mode—to accomplish what seemed a specifically poetic revolution—should have found it necessary in so doing deliberately to seek nourishment and inspiration for his purpose in a personal communion with nature? Indeed, the whole move ment of romanticism was bound up with a new organic awareness of nature, but the romantic impulse, vigorous at its source, petered out into a sometimes hysterical flamboyance because it failed to connect with and influence society at large, remaining a literary peculiarity. Even Keats's new-found richness—or lushness—of vocabulary sprang in part from a vital romanticism of sex. When a late Victorian poet arises with an equally luscious and passionate awareness of the organic world, allied to a keen and masculine intellect, he feels himself so alien to the poetic currents of his time that he is forced to forge for himself in isolation an entirely personal idiom and prosody, which yet is much closer to the folk-tongue them the literary idiom which he rejected. And after Hopkins, the desperate attempt of D. H. Lawrence to centre himself experientially within the depths of the living cosmos, driven by the need to recover not merely an invigoration of language but primarily of being, is full of meaning both for poetry and civilization.

Some kind of homogeneity of society is essential for a vital flourishing of art, a free interchange between the folk-consciousness in which language is born and nourished, and the more sophisticated consciousness of the educated. Now that literature has become completely unofficial and there is no longer any but a vestigial folk-life, the poet is more free to penetrate into an organic relationship with reality, and perhaps to foreshadow a new wholeness of human living.

None but the exceedingly naive speak any longer with optimism of a creative synthesis of art and society within the framework of the "machine age". On the subject of the intractability of the de-naturalized modern environment as poetic material it is hardly necessary to speak here. While the

poet himself is implicated in urban-industrial experience there is an evident necessity for him to bring that experience within the radius of his poetic powers, but there is no obligation upon the poet to meet industrialism half-way. That the poet is unhappy in a de-naturalized environment is abundantly illustrated by the circumlocutions of modern poets in their attempts to skirt round the tract which T. S. Elot explored in *The Waste Land;* in Yeats's aristocraticism and romanticism of swords, tapestries and towers; in Robert Graves's time-travelling which makes him write, as well as historical novels, historical poems with their imagery drawn from pre-industrial sources; in Harold Monro's *poesie des brefs departs.* And Mr Eliot, the acknowledged poet *par excellence* of the "modern experience", illustrates himself the progress of the poetic mind through the waste land of the modern consciousness, dying of drouth and suffering from febrile hallucinations, through a deliberate mediaevalism into an attempted reinvigoration through a rediscovery of the natural world.

Part *Two*

I THE AESTHETICISM OF W. B. YEATS

> The intellect of man is forced to choose
> Perfection of the life, or of the work,
> And if it take the second must refuse
> A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark. . . .

(i)

NO QUESTION IS OF GREATER MOMENT FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF modern poetry than that of the relationship of art to life. The various schools and movements of the last hundred years have all been conditioned in one way or another by the disparity existing between the poet's private world and the public world in which he is situated as a social being and which, with the expansion of mechanical civilization, has increasingly separated itself from the private and personal values. In this way all later movements may be *seen* as offshoots of the Romantic Revival, which was the initial movement of the creative mind in its attempt deliberately to dissociate itself from the realm of collective values and to centre itself upon the personal life of the individual. After the romantics the movement known in France as Symbolism took the personalistic revolution a stage further, purifying poetry of the social and moralistic elements within romanticism, and in doing this it helped to clarify the essential nature of poetry. But symbolism in turn led to the weakened, inverted romanticism of aestheticism. And it is from the point of view of aestheticism that we must consider the career of W. B. Yeats.

The symbolists attempted to purge poetry of all that was foreign to it, to concentrate upon essentials, and this meant the exclusion from art of those elements which in life had receded into the realm of the general, the commonplace. Thus the symbolists tended to repudiate outer actuality, which they

identified with bourgeois civilization, and, retiring into themselves, to concentrate upon their own experience, which became more and more private and personal. The symbolists, if by that word we mean principally the poets Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarme, were not led by their ideas to a repudiation of life, i.e. of experience. But in their search for an ideal Beauty lying behind the world of appearances their grip on actual life was weakened, and this made it easier for successors to turn away from actuality altogether and to preoccupy themselves with dreams. All art is rooted in experience. The flaw in symbolism, which helped to make possible its utilization by the exponents of aestheticism, was its imperfect realization of this truth and its too intense endeavour to break outside the limits of life, its over-specialization and the reactionary tendency which made it concentrate too exclusively upon the exotic, the bizarre. Symbolism and aestheticism must not, however, be confused. The first is a doctrine of art, springing from artistic practice; the second derives from theory and tends to become an attitude to life—a very different thing. Yet it is not hard to see how this doctrine of art lent itself to the less austere and integral gospel of aestheticism which, as a way of apprehending life rather than a way of writing poetry, involved a turning away from actuality and a concentration upon certain elements in life which were considered to be superior to the rest.

As is well enough known, Yeats began his career in a literary environment heavily saturated with the aestheticism of Pater, of Wilde, and of the lesser figures of the eighteen-nineties, the dominant influences upon his mind being those of Pater and Villiers de L'Isle Adam, *Axel* being one of his "sacred books". Of the three main threads which ran together through his life and thought, each deriving from a common source: that is, aestheticism, nationalism, and occultism, it is the first which may most profitably be taken as the key to his development. Yeats absorbed certain of the doctrines of symbolism (as preached by Mallarme) through the medium of Arthur Symonds, who called him "the chief representative of that movement in our country". Nevertheless, symbolism meant something quite different to the English followers than to their French masters.

Baudelaire, Verlaine and Mallarme were not aesthetes; they were poets, seekers after reality, visionaries, and the practice of their art was rooted in, although it was an attempt to transcend, experience. It had a religious quality about it, and was in a sense the culmination of a mystical way of life, of apprehension. The aesthetes, however, who took over and adapted for their own uses the doctrines of symbolism, lacked this intense seriousness. They were dilettantes, and interested less in the ardours of artistic creation than in the use to which artistic precepts could be put in the alleviation of living. The elements in life which aestheticism took to be superior to the others were its poetic elements, and therefore when they took to creative work their art was a reflection of a reflection. Dream and decoration were characteristics of their work because dream and decoration were what they sought for in life. Where the practice of poetry for Mallarme implied a mystical vision of life, for Yeats it meant a turning away from life and the making of poetry out of moods and dreams, while his "mysticism", so far from being inherent in his artistic practice, was imported from outside in the form of the alien paraphernalia of theosophy, magic and the rest.

Art can never be divorced entirely from life, from experience, although it can concentrate on certain limited aspects of life and disregard others. The serious artist cannot afford not to take life seriously. For, although art is the creation of a superior world—superior to that of commonplace existence—it must take its elements from life. It is not so much the creation of an ideal world remote from life as the record of the perception of an organic and meaningful order within the disparate universe of day-to-day experience. The life of the poet is thus in the nature of a religious discipline, in which the whole personality engages, to find forms within which experience can be held in organic wholeness, where it becomes illuminated with meaning. Life and art thus become united and yet separate, each dwelling within the other. Art grows from life, and in return illuminates it. Yet they remain distinct, and for their continued existence the boundaries between each must be clearly preserved.

The aesthetes obliterated this distinction. They wanted life

to be art—in other words, they wanted a Me purged of all its coarse, vulgar, trivial elements. Accordingly they turned away in life from all its inartistic elements. Where the poet's primary impulse may be said to be a "religious" one, the attempt to grapple with experience and to find order and significance in it, and his artistic impulse only secondary, a continuation of the same impulse—the desire to embody and transmit his vision—the aesthetes made a religion out of art. They inverted the order of the creative mind and replaced the dynamic "religious" principle at the centre by the static "artistic" principle and relegated the "religious" principle to the periphery, where it became immobilized and nullified.

It was such a doctrine of aestheticism, to which the symbolists were already pointing the way, that Yeats came to accept. His difference from his fellow-aesthetes of the 'nineties is shown by his combination of aestheticism with apparently alien factors—with Irish nationalism and occult supernaturalism. Where the aestheticism of many of the minor poets of that time, with its colourful bohemian diabolism, shows a reaction from bourgeois social and moral standards, Yeats's attitude appears as remarkably pure of such taints. Yeats did not become an aesthete only through circumstances, his aestheticism derived straight from a central detachment. And he remained an aesthete throughout his life.

Poets are commonly of two kinds, or of intermixtures of those kinds. There are those creative spirits whose work is a process of self-revelation and self-realization, who proceed from an inner impulse working through their personal experience, through which experience is formulated and compelled into organic patterns. Their work is a personal, dynamic activity deriving from personal necessity, their impulse is essentially spiritual. And there are those men of talent whose work, deriving from a much weaker inner impulse, is much more impersonal, miscellaneous, exterior in character. These latter writers are they who, less vehemently original, are able to share to a much greater extent than the former the values of the society in which they are brought up. In a culturally homogeneous society they will be quite at home, and busy writing

the long narratives or pastorals or didactic poems which their society demands. Their main preoccupation will be with the mechanics of their craft, their subject-matter will be readily available, dictated to them by the conventions of their age. And their religious life will be adequately cared for by the current orthodoxy. Yet what happens to writers of this kind in a culturally *disrupted* society—those, in particular, who, through the nature of their gift and mental inclination, remain writers of verse? Deprived on the one hand of that cultural give-and-take between poet and public which sustains the classical poet, and on the other hand lacking that fiery inner dynamism which distinguishes the original poet, the creative mind, will they not easily drift towards the acceptance of such doctrines as the aestheticism of the f*in-de-siecle,* the doctrines of art for art's sake? This, it seems to me, was the position of Yeats. Essentially a non-dynamic mind, he was saved from dissipation or vulgarization of his gifts by the narrowness of his interests and the strictness of his devotion to his craft. Inwardly he lacked the visionary intensity of the creative spirit, and his art developed peripherally, unaccompanied by any very interesting inward, personal development.

Yeats's view of art as a religious surrogate is expressed in an essay, "William Blake and the Imagination", written in 1897, in which he says of Blake that

> ". . . He announced the religion of art, of which no man dreamed in the world he knew. ... In his time educated people believed that they amused themselves with books of imagination, but that they 'made their souls' by listening to sermons and by doing or by not doing certain things. When they had to explain why serious people like themselves honoured the great poets greatly, they were hard put to it for lack of good reasons. In our time we are agreed that we 'make our souls' out of some one of the great poets of ancient times, or out of Shelley or Wordsworth, or Goethe or Balzac, or Flaubert, or Count Tolstoy, in the books he wrote before he became a prophet and fell into a lesser order, or out of Mr Whistler's pictures, while we amuse ourselves,

or, at best, make a poorer sort of soul, by listening to sermons or by doing or by not doing certain things."

This is hardly an adequate representation of Blake, who, whatever he might have been, was certainly not cut to the shape of a 'nineties aesthete. Yet the passage is enlightening for its revelation of Yeats's completely impervious aestheticism, to which he seems to have felt a special impulse to attach the writings of mystics like Bohme, Blake and Swedenborg, using them as elements in a purely aesthetic scheme of his own.[1]

Lacking inner dynamism, the religious impulse to grasp hold of life and make it surrender its meaning, and lacking, by the exigencies of his situation, the classical artist's interest in a variety of outward expressions of life and his participation in an orthodox form of religious worship, Yeats, looking inwards, could see only a static universe of moods and dreams, and this he translated into his work. The repugnance to the world of actuality which aestheticism typifies severely limits the material and scope of art, and in the early Yeats this is restricted to a small range of dream-imagery used to convey a predominant, static emotion of world-weariness and ineffectual and objectless longing. "Dream" is itself a recurrent key-word. There is no need to give examples of this sort of writing, although "The Song of the Happy Shepherd" might be given as a good expression of Yeats's central theme:

The woods of Arcady are dead,
And over is their anticjue joy ;
Of old the world on dreaming fed ;
Gray Truth is now her painted toy ;
Yet still she turns her restless head :
But O, sick children of the world,
Of all the many changing things
In dreary dancing past us whirled,
To the cracked tune that Chronos sings,
Words alone are certain good. . . .

[1] There is a revealing account in the *Autobiographies* of how Yeats, wandering in a remote part of Ireland and discovering an old castle in a romantic spot, falls to thinking what an excellent retreat this would make for some esoteric religious order, and then begins to attempt the formulation of the rule and mysteries of some such order which could suitably make use of the castle. The inversion is characteristic.

Here we note—a significant inversion—that the world *feeds* on dreams, but merely *toys* with Truth.

Practice apart, Yeats's idea of the nature and function of poetry is formulated in certain essays written in the eighteen-nineties, from which it is apparent that he regards it as having no commerce with the world of experience, its task being to conjure up certain enchanted states of mind in which the mind is made aware of some bodiless, timeless reality. As he writes in "The Symbolism of Poetry":

> "The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols."

And he continues:

> "If people were to accept the theory that poetry moves us because of its symbolism, what change should one look for in the manner of our poetry? A return to the way of our fathers, a casting out of descriptions of nature for the sake of nature, of the moral law for the sake of the moral law, a casting out of all anecdotes and of that brooding over scientific opinion that so often extinguished the central flame in Tennyson, and of that vehemence that would make us do or not do certain things; or, in other words, we should come to understand that the beryl stone was enchanted by our fathers that it might unfold the pictures in its heart, and not to mirror our own excited faces, or the boughs waving outside the window. With this change of substance, this return to imagination, this understanding that the laws of art, which are the hidden laws of the world, can alone bind the imagination, would come a change of style, and we would cast out of serious poetry those energetic rhythms, as of a man running, which are the invention of the will with its eyes always on something to be done or undone; and we would seek out those wavering, meditative, organic rhythms, which are the

embodiment of the imagination, that neither desires nor hates, because it has done with time, and only wishes to gaze upon some reality, some beauty. . . ."

An aestheticism of this kind has a similar effect upon both art and life. As an essentially static attitude to life, an attitude which "has done with time", it fails to see meaning or purpose in everyday living, and therefore turns from this to preoccupy itself with that which lies outside the borders of normal human life. Thus Yeats's interest in dreams, in magic, in spiritualism, in astrology, in theosophy, in anything of a religiose or mystical flavour which did not, like true religion, invade and claim the right to transform the actual texture of existence. The texture of existence for Yeats remained, for this reason, commonplace.

In art, the same applies. To avoid a monotonous reiteration of the same mood and imagery, this attitude necessitates a continual search for subject-matter, and this it likewise tends to seek in that which is exotic and remote. Together with his early vein of dreamy sorrow and romantic longing to have "done with time", Yeats learned to exploit Irish legend, as later he was to exploit his own personal legend and Irish nationalist politics. But always his first interest in these things was as material for poetry.

The static nature of Yeats's life-attitude is revealed in his doctrine of the Mask, the need for the poet to cultivate a style, both in art and in life. He wrote in 1909 that "Style, personality—deliberately adopted and therefore a mask—is the only escape from the hot-faced bargainers and the money-changers". And: "There is a relation between discipline *kad* the theatrical sense. If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are and assume that second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept one from others. Active virtue as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a current code is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask. It is the condition of arduous, full life." And again, late in life, he writes in his diary: "... my character is so little myself that all my life it has thwarted me. It has affected my poems, my true self, no more than the character

of a dancer affects the movements of a dance." Throughout his work the negative and static quality of Yeats's personality is revealed. The famous undulating prose style derives directly from it. In his *Essays* we find, not an active, dynamic intellect driving towards some object, not a style which, subordinated to the power of thought, becomes tense, supple and directioned, a vehicle for meaning; but a meandering intermixture of speculation and reminiscence in which the style turns upon itself, becomes ornamental and florid. Everything is shadowy and vague, the ideas are powerless and do not grip, rhetoric and incantation flood the meaning. A similar vagueness and paucity is discovered in the *Autobiographies.* Where we might expect a delineation of the organic growth of an original personality, shaping itself through its manifold contacts with life, we are given a series of blurred impressions, an aesthetic drifting in which scene follows scene but statically and without development. Throughout the *Autobiographies,* Yeats, despite the information he gives about himself, remains a flat and shadowy figure.

(ii)

Yeats, as we have *seen,* made a "religion" of art, which means in effect that he neutralized religion. Religious activity is the dynamism of the soul in its efforts to comprehend ultimate or absolute truth, meaning and purpose, and to bring actual life into a relationship with them. This did not concern Yeats. The effort to bring actual life into the radius of the ultimate implies the possibility of correspondence between the supernatural and the natural worlds, through which the life of man is given meaning and purpose. It is therefore interesting to find, in Yeats, the predication of a supernatural realm, the world of Faery, of the "Ever Living", which, however, exists in an *antithetical* relationship to the world of humanity. This means that for him human life is lived in a closed circle, a purposeless efflorescence denied the significance which can be given it only by an integral relationship with the absolute, while the supernatural world is such another closed circle. This is a perfect theological justification for aestheticism!

There are certain inevitable consequences of such a view of the independence of the natural and supernatural spheres. Not only will the supernatural sphere be seen as the realm of the *inhuman,* but the natural will be de-spiritualized. In Yeats's poems and plays, mortals who have felt the attraction of the land of Faery wander about in a hopeless daze, fall into trances, or feel themselves to be under some accursed enchantment which turns life to ashes in their mouth.

Yeats's development from the poet of a monotonous dreamy twilight to the poet of the harsh and acrid light of day is to some extent involved with his changing attitude towards the supernatural. But basically his view remained the same, the alteration being one of emphasis. As a young man he dreamed and wrote about the inhuman world of Faery, and this naturally limited the scope of his art. In middle life he approached nearer humanity, but because of his view of the separation of the two worlds he wrote poetry of disenchantment, was not able to take human life seriously, and in his old age fell back on the de-spiritualized natural world and celebrated the brutal, sensual life of the blood. There is something inhuman, or soulless, about Yeats all the way through.

His concern with fairies was apparent from the start. A juvenile poem began:

> A man has the hope of heaven
> But soulless a fairy dies . . .

and an early poem, "The Stolen Child", has for refrain:

> Come away, O human child !
> To the waters and the wild
> With a faery, hand in hand,
> For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

In the early play, *The Land of Heart's Desire,* the theme is of a young woman who is wrapt away to the deathless but inhuman world of the faeries. And in the *Wanderings of Oisin* (1889) this legendary Irish hero who has lived three hundred years with Niamh his bride in the land of the immortals returns only by a mishap to find his years fall suddenly on him and himself condemned to drag out the rest of his

existence in a Christianized Ireland which has no place for the ancient heroes. *The Shadowy Waters,* the final version of which appeared in 1910, has a similar theme in that it represents the voyage of the life-rejecting poet and lover Forgael over the "waste seas" in search of an ideal happiness in that"u country at the end of the world Where no child's born but to outlive the moon ..." While he was writing in this vein, Yeats's language was decorative and languorous. But it was not an inexhaustible vein, and a poet of Yeats's artistic conscientiousness could not be content with endless repetition of himself. After *The Shadowy Waters* his verse began to show a more personal bitterness than that contained in the musical melancholy of the early poems. The rather fluent world-weariness gives place to a more acrid dissatisfaction with life. The poem "Adam's Curse" reveals a movement towards realism and away from a lofty, other-world romanticism,, and this trend is continued in *Responsibilities* (1914). The bitterness of disillusionment and waste of life runs through the prefatory verses to the latter collection, in which the poet, addressing his ancestors, requests:

> **Pardon that for a barren passion's sake,**
> **Although I have come close on forty-nine**
> **I have no child, I have nothing but a book,**
> **Nothing but that to prove your blood and mine.**

It is notable that in these volumes begins utterance occasioned by public events. And here too is the poem in which the poet speaks of the lying days of his youth when he swayed his leaves and flowers in the sun and now prays that he may "wither into the truth". In these poems generally the language is barer, more sinewy, the metaphors more exact:

> **. . . There's something ails our colt**
> **That must, as if it had not holy blood,**
> **Nor on Olympus leaped from cloud to cloud,**
> **Shiver under the lash, strain, sweat and jolt**
> **As though it dragged road metal. My curse on plays**
> **That have to be set up in fifty ways,**
> **On the day's war with every knave and dolt,**
> **Theatre business, management of men . . .**

and from this time on, it is to be observed, occurs the more

frequent wry and ironical use of broken rhythm and false rhyme.

The cause of this change of mood, subject-matter and style lay in Yeats's dissatisfaction with a poetry of dreams which reflected his dissatisfaction with dreams themselves. Yeats was growing older, the woman about whom he had woven his romantic fantasies appeared with time in a different perspective, he could now admit his to be "a barren passion". "Theatre business, management of men" had brought his idealistic visions of a national cultural renascence to the hard test of practical realization, and in writing for the stage he had had to adapt his style to the understanding of the theatre audience. And with all this he had come to be convinced of the wrongness of his own poetic method of the exclusion of what seemed non-essential from his search for Beauty. But that his attitude to life had indeed changed, or more truly that the perspective of his vision of the relationship of the ideal to the actual world had shifted, is made apparent in the fabular poem entitled "The Two Kings", in which the old theme of the human and the supernatural lover is taken up for the last time, but is given a new and significant twist. In this poem Edaine, the wife of King Eochaid, is tricked to a meeting-place where she is confronted by a supernatural being who claims her love on the grounds of pre-natal priority. In spite of all the spirit's arguments of the transitoriness of mortal love and the superiority of life among the immortals, Edaine rejects him and returns to her husband, to whom she recounts her adventure. Here, though the variance in emphasis which differentiates it from previous allegories is apparent, it should be noted that the alteration is merely one of emphasis: the situation remains basically the same. Edaine rejects the supernatural and chooses the human, but there is no suggestion that human life is anything more than merely mortal, that there is any mitigation of the absolute cleavage between natural and supernatural. The inference clearly is that Yeats has turned away from an impossible ideal for the sake of a reality known to be and accepted as unspiritual, and which is still, therefore, something less than human.

In "The Hour Before Dawn" the altered emphasis is brought out even more unmistakably. The beggar, "a cursing rogue with a merry face" who stumbles on a deep hollow where he finds a drinker with a tub of enchanted beer which will keep him asleep till the day of judgment when all phenomena will pass away, represents the acceptance of life; the drinker, whom he curses and pummels and flees from with prayers and curses on his lips, is an obvious symbol of rejection. The reversal here in Yeats's implied attitude to "dreams" is complete. But here again human life, whose values the poem implicitly decides for, is represented by a beggar, sensual humanity at its commonest level. To the same period belongs the poem "Beggar to Beggar Cried" which, foreshadowing Yeats's later "frenzied" manner, is also a fairly frank piece of self-revelation.

The volume in which Yeats approaches most nearly to the condition of humanity, in which there is some indication of an awareness of the pathos, irony and suffering within human existence, *The Wild Swans at Coole* is also that which marks Yeats's weakest level of creation. There is little dramatizing here, and less adventitious supernaturalism. The book conveys, as a whole, an impression of a cold, ashy sadness, the sadness of the unachieved and the unrealized; but this sadness is not fully faced and poetically overcome, and it lingers miasmally around the verge of the poems, where its effect is desolate and depressing. The total effect is only to show how far from a deep and rich human sympathy Yeats really is. His lack of grasp is reflected in a technical laxity, and some of the poems, "The People", "The Dawn", "The Sad Shepherd", "Presences", "Broken Dreams" and others, are garrulous and prosy, while such didactic pieces as "The Phases of the Moon" and "Ego Dominus Tuus" suffer from a flatness where all is on the surface, mere dissertation. The movement towards a deeper sympathy with and a greater honesty of approach to human Me is partial only, and is not a success, nor is it surprising to find in such a poem as "The Collar-bone of a Hare", to me a strangely unpleasing and distasteful poem, what amounts to a confession of inhumanity. The slightly " touched"

irresponsibility of this, the half-idiotic cackle at the "old bitter world where they marry in churches", is not pretty, particularly in the reminiscential, old-mannish context of the book.

Yeats was not happy with humanity: he refused to suffer. Nor did any miracle occur to alter his approach and cause him to accept human life in a far deeper sense than he had ever done hitherto. Instead, after the hesitations of *The Wild Swans at Coole,* he made a sudden and decisive movement towards entrenching himself in his old supernatural-natural dualism. "Ego Dominus Tuus" and "The Phases of the Moon", besides the prose essay *Per Arnica Silentiae Lunae,* had shown his gropings towards some kind of private esoteric system, and now in the years after the Great War, in the early days of his marriage, there came the ideas and inspirations which were to result in the work eventually published under the title, *A Vision.*

Yeats himself described the system expounded in this book as a construction which enabled him to purge his poetry of explanation and abstraction and to find a simplicity he had previously sought in vain. The system itself is entirely peculiar to Yeats, it is doubtful whether it would be of use to any other person. The theses upon which it is built are all put forward as *a priori* arguments; the entire construction is arbitrary and seems to have no nexus in real existence. The material upon which it is based purports to have been supplied by "spirits", and it is entirely in keeping that when Yeats, as he says, offered to spend the rest of his life explaining and piecing together the material they gave him, they should have replied, "No, we have come to give you metaphors for poetry". It seems clear that the purpose of this peculiar and ingenious system in relation to Yeats was purely functional. Yeats's static aestheticism precluded him from the living pursuit of truth within experience. Truth was of no interest to him, he wanted either material for poetry or material for that which would provide the pre-conditions for poetry, in this case an idiosyncratic, self-sufficient system which, cutting arbitrarily across all living currents of thought, would enshrine his own feelings about life and justify his concentration upon his deep and narrow vein of poetry. "Some will ask", he wrote in *A Vision,* "whether I

believe in the actual existence of my circuits of sun and moon. . . . To such a question I can but answer that if sometimes, overwhelmed by miracle as all men must be when in the midst of it, I have taken such periods literally, my reason has soon recovered; and now that the system stands out clearly in my imagination I regard them as stylistic arrangements of experience comparable to the cubes in the drawing of Wyndham Lewis and to the ovoids in the sculpture of Brancusi. They have helped me to hold in a single thought reality and justice."

The system here expounded confirms Yeats's fast division between natural and supernatural, with the difference that here the "supernatural" as spiritual reality is virtually eliminated, existing only as a blind power driving the wheel of birth and rebirth in which man and the cosmos are involved. The system is rigidly deterministic. Man, according to it, is an inert substance caught up in a cyclic mechanism of successive incarnations in which he passes from pure subjectivity to pure objectivity, the tension between which poles of being determines fate, life and character. Human life exists for no purpose beyond its own mere being, nor is there seemingly any escape from the wheel. The static, deterministic nature of the cosmic process precludes progress of any kind, even individual striving. Thus, by implication, moral effort is redundant, both as operating within the personal life and as directed towards the maintenance of the equilibrium of society. The individual is freed from all responsibility, since everything is regulated automatically by the cosmic mechanism, and there is no possibility of really changing or improving things. While war, famine, destruction of civilizations, are all inevitable and preordained, this is cancelled out by the inevitability of renewal and reconstruction, so that catastrophes are not to be taken very seriously and may, indeed, be accepted with rejoicing as providing a little interest and excitement in the tedium of a prearranged existence. There is obviously no place for the humane emotions, love, pity and the rest. All the individual can do is to accept the life thus thrust upon him and, since there is really no alternative, exult in it. Vitality becomes a value in its own right.

It will be seen how such a system fitted in with Yeats's predilections, and how it helped to make possible the attitude to life of hard, scornful acceptance out of which the poems in *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair* drew their origin. Freed from all uncertainties he could go on to that celebration of blind, passionate, aimless life out of which some of his most magnificent verse arose:

> I am content to live it all again
> And yet again, if it be life to pitch
> Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,
> A blind man battering blind men ;
> Or into that most fecund ditch of all,
> The folly that man does
> Or must suffer, if he woos
> A proud woman not kindred of his soul.
>
> I am content to follow to its source
> Every event in action or in thought;
> Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot !
> When such as I cast out remorse
> So great a sweetness flows into the breast
> We must laugh and we must sing,
> We are blest by everything,
> Everything we look upon is blest.

(iii)

Yeats's poetry has received a greater degree of recognition than that of any other modern British poet. Therefore no harm will be done if for a moment we refuse to be hypnotized by his reputation and probe more critically into the nature of his achievement than current valuations might seem to encourage. And that there are unsatisfactory features about his poetry seems to me apparent.

The sense of dissatisfaction with the poetry of Yeats—to speak from my own experience—is faint at the first but increases after familiarity, when the mind has recovered from its first bedazzlement and begins to grope after a permanent relationship, to find a place for it in its life. And Yeats's poetry, it seems to me, is one which, though it compels our admiration,

contains an element (or the'absence of such) which prevents us from finding a place for it close to our heart. It is too remote, both too characteristic and too impersonal; it is, again, for want of a better word, too inhuman. We can live with a speaking or a singing voice, but not with a bellow or shriek pitched violently or ecstatically beyond the range of the human ear. This inhumanness is not a feature of the later verse only. It runs throughout Yeats's work. I have never been able to think of Yeats's work in the abstract or to read a number of poems concretely without receiving the impression of a sort of ghostly shining phosphorescence, and this impression puzzled me for a long time until I began to see its origin and meaning. It is this peculiar quality which imparts an atmosphere of unreality to his work. This unrealness is very noticeable in the early poetry:

> **You need but lift a pearl-pale hand,**
> **And bind up your long hair and sigh ;**
> **And all men's hearts must burn and beat;**
> **And candle-like foam on the dim sand,**
> **And stars climbing the dew-dropping sky,**
> **Live but to light your passing feet.**

This is very delightful; but nothing could be falser, more exaggerated, more out of touch with life. We are able to accept the poem only if we accept the poet's premises and permit ourselves to enter into his dream. Now although as Yeats developed he left behind this dim world of dreams and began to incorporate more of concrete imagery into his verse, and although a dreamy vagueness of mood gave place to the sharpness of disenchantment and bitterness or a kind of ironical joy, nevertheless he retained his ineradicable tendency to exaggerated statement the effect of which was necessarily to place his poetry at a remove from human life and sympathy. Even in his middle period his love-poetry is born out of a dramatic attitude rather than out of an honest relationship to experience. This exaggeration and over-heightening, this indulgence in dramatics, is exemplified by the repeated use of hyperbolic phrases and of resounding words whose effect is to inflate the meaning. Some of Yeats's favourite words of his later period, "passionate", "rage", "turbulent", "frenzy",

"murderous", "agony", "miraculous", "bitter", "blind", "wild", he overworked no less than, during his early period, he overworked words like "dim", "dreams", "pale", "desolate", "sorrow" and the rest. Yeats carries off his use of these words, and the over-dramatic attitude implied in that use, in his later verse no less successfully than in his earlier work; but they do not ring any truer to the perceptive ear. As with the early poems, one must grant the poet his own ground, which means here entering the remote world of reminiscence and reverie which he has built up around his lonely ego, before one is able to accept his work. Yeats's art persuades us to do so. But his is a world which we cannot endure, or interest ourselves in, for long. Yeats's pattern of experience is provincial not only thematically but spiritually, and while we can force it into temporary relationship with our own we cannot truly make it ours.

This hyperbolism of Yeats which on familiarity becomes wearisome and hollow, and which sometimes leads him into tremendous, nonsensical asseverations, finds a counterpart in his lack of contemporaneity, itself a grave fault in any poet when, as nearly always, it signifies a poverty of observation which in turn reflects an incapability before the fullness of experience. On Yeats's part it is certain that it does reflect an inability to overcome and bring into the scope of his art more than a strictly limited range of experience, namely, that which lends itself to a stylized "dramatic" treatment. It is not necessary to suppose that no modern poem can be regarded as valid unless it contains repeated references to pylons, gasworks or grain-elevators to realize the truth that we live in a world which is full of these and similar things, that these therefore constitute much of the background of our experience, and that in mastering experience and translating it into the terms of poetry we are bound to use the images with which experience presents us. Yeats ignores the contemporary scene, which means that he ignores much of his own experience, and when he attempts at times to incorporate a contemporary reference into his verse requiring the exploitation of modern imagery the result is not fortunate. Modern war, for instance,

is hardly presented adequately to the imagination in his otherwise admirable poem "Lapis Lazuli", when he writes:

> **For everybody knows or else should know**
> **That if nothing drastic is done**
> **Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out,**
> **Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in**
> **Until the town lie beaten flat.**

Yeats is much happier in the same poem when he is describing an antique work of art:

> **Two Chinamen, behind them a third,**
> **Are carved in lapis lazuli,**
> **Over them flies a long-legged bird,**
> **A symbol of longevity ;**
> **The third, doubtless a serving man,**
> **Carries a musical instrument.**
>
> **Every discoloration of the stone,**
> **Every accidental crack or dent,**
> **Seems a water-course or an avalanche,**
> **Or lofty slope where it still snows**
> **Though doubtless plum or cherry-branch**
> **Sweetens the little half-way house**
> **Those Chinamen climb towards, and I**
> **Delight to imagine them seated there. . . .**

And might it not also be possible to view Yeats's attachment to an idiosyncratic use of mechanical verse-metres in the light of his insensibility to those rhythmical currents in the life of our time which have been influential in determining the subtler verse-forms of more sensitively contemporary poets? Yeats's complete absence of discrimination in his response to contemporary work—*vide* the unfortunate *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*—seems to bear this out.

The substance of the poems in *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair,* superficially so impressively full, dwindles on acquaintance and investigation to a very small residue. Yeats's exploitation of his personality and of his personal history is consciously dramatic. The resounding dramatic *effect* achieved, there is very little to hold on to. The poem sequence which gives its title to *The Tower* opens effectively enough, and

the second section promises to unfold the poem well, with:

> I pace upon the battlements and stare
> On the foundations of a house, or where
> Tree, like a sooty finger, starts from the earth ;
> And send imagination forth
> Under the day's declining beam, and call
> Images ,and memories
> From ruin or from ancient trees,
> For I would ask a question of them all.

But thereafter, instead of a fulfilment of the expectancy aroused in these opening lines, we have—a descent to anecdote:

> Beyond that ridge lived Mrs French, and once
> When every silver candlestick or sconce
> Lit up the dark mahogany and the wine,
> A serving man that could divine
> That most respected lady's every wish,
> Ran and with the garden shears
> Clipped an insolent farmer's ears
> And brought them in a little covered dish.

And the poem continues in such a reminiscential, rambling, inconsequent manner, only held together by the poet's rhythmical and rhetorical skill.

The poems in these two volumes, indeed, bear out the implications of attitude made in such a poem as "The Hour Before Dawn". Here sensual human life is celebrated: but a life which, when detached from all intercourse with spiritual meaning, is regarded as an aimless and meaningless prolifera-tion. Yeats's creed consists in the not very interesting or subtle exaltation of brute vitality:

> "Whatever stands in field or flood,
> Bird, beast, fish or man,
> Mare or stallion, cock or hen,
> Stands in God's unchanging eye
> In all the vigour of its blood ;
> In that faith I live or die."

In choosing "perfection of the work" in false opposition to "perfection of the life", Yeats, through his artistic devoted-ness, was able to develop his poetry without developing at the

same time a wider and deeper insight into life, and his early other-worldliness, springing from a defect of deep and warm humanity, being too rarefied and phantasmal, found its level in the blood, lust and mud of the last poems. For Yeats there is no human mean between the supernatural and the bestial, the inhuman purity of the moon and the animal ragings of the blood. The culmination of this tendency is to be seen in Yeats's last works, *A Full Moon in March* and the *Last Poems and Plays.* In the play which gives its title to the former volume, the virginal Queen, "whose emblem is the moon", promises to give herself to whatever man can move her by his song. A swineherd, dressed in "foul rags" and with hair "more foul and ragged than" his rags, and with "scratched foul flesh", comes to sing before her:

> " I tended swine, when I first heard your name.
> I rolled among the dung of swine and laughed.
> What do I know of beauty ? "

And when the Queen asks what she gains if, proclaiming his song the best, she leaves her throne for his sake, he answers:

> " A song—the night of love,
> An ignorant forest and the dung of swine,"

adding to himself:

> " She shall bring forth her farrow in the dung."

Insulted, the Queen has the swineherd beheaded. The severed head being brought to her, she takes it in her hands and dances, pressing her lips to the lips of the head. In the *Last Poems and Plays* we have the glorification of violence and war, the celebration of sexuality, the same inner emptiness revealed either in an expression of a sense of personal futility or in the insistence upon a hysterical and nihilistic exultation. In certain of the poems, "Why Should Not Old Men Be Mad?", "Are You Content?", "What Then?", Yeats questions himself, but then drowns any conceivable reply with a randy ballad or a ballad of violence, a political lampoon or a marching song. "Come swish around my pretty punk" and "What shall I do for pretty girls Now my old bawd is dead" alternate with

"The Ghost of Roger Casement Is beating on the door" and "The Roaring Tinker if you like, But Mannion is my name, And I beat up the common sort And think it is no shame". In "The Circus Animals' Desertion" the poet speaks of his search for a theme, enumerates half regretfully, half ironically, his earlier use of legendary subjects, and concludes:

> Now that my ladder's gone,
> I must lie down where all the ladders start,
> In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart . . .

while in "The Spur" he confesses:

> You think it horrible that lust and rage
> Should dance attention on my old age ;
> They were not such a plague when I was young ;
> What else have I to spur me into song ?

Certain of these last poems have a barbaric beauty and splendour, although it is a splendour of desolation and emptiness, and an inhuman beauty. But what are we to think of a poet who, with all his occasional impressiveness, is in one moment capable of such a descent into banality as the following:

> Irish poets, learn your trade,
> Sing whatever is well made,
> Scorn the sort now growing up
> All out of shape from toe to top,
> Their unremembering hearts and heads
> Base-born products of base beds.
> Sing the peasantry, and then
> Hard-riding country gentlemen,
> The holiness of monks, and after
> Porter-drinkers' randy laughter ;
> Sing the lords and ladies gay
> That were beaten into the clay
> Through seven heroic centuries ;
> Cast your mind on other days
> That we in coming days may be
> Still the indomitable Irishry.

The indomitable Irishry! It is one of the enigmas of Yeats as a poet that he should be capable of mixing real tragic grandeur with such fatal vulgarity and commonplaceness. Whatever may be the conventional verdict on his work, it is certain that at its

centre is a hollowness which time is bound increasingly to reveal.

(iv)

Other things apart, Yeats is a demonstration of the superficiality of the "romantic-classical" antithesis as commonly applied to poetry. On the surface, there has never been a more "romantic" poet than Yeats, with his self-dramatization, his dandyism, his exaggerated emotionalism (springing from an inner coldness: one thinks of his impossible love and his marriage in middle age) and the rest. Yet, probing beneath the surface, we find a contradictory conservatism and reliance upon outward conditions. The qualities and conditions which Yeats admired are all qualities and conditions of a stable, hierarchical social order in which poetry and the poet would have their recognized official places. As Mr MacNeice says in his study of Yeats: "His desire for a creed and for poetry whose imagery, as well as ideas, is based on that creed, is in tune with his desire for schools of poetry. In spite of his Romantic genealogy he had a Roman liking for the poet in a formal niche; poets were to be members of a priesthood, handing down their mysteries to their successors, and conferring with one another when they wished to develop or modify their ritual." This is nothing if not retrogressive. The fact that he regarded the poet's function as ideally a public (i.e. impersonal) one is shown in several of his remarks about his own poetry during his later life, and by his reversion to the "bard" in his ballad-writing on Irish political themes.

We cannot understand Yeats until we realize that his inner attitude was quite static; his philosophy, his politics, his life and his work were all shaped by this fact. Custom and ceremony are the conditions he exalts when he writes, in "A Prayer for My Daughter", of the perquisites of the good life. His "romantic" peculiarities were developed only as a substitute for that acceptable external framework of convention and custom which, given him by a different society, a different age, would have proved him indubitably a "classical" artist. Yeats flaunts his "personality", but in reality is an extremely im-

personal artist; his personality is a "mask", a dramatic convenience for the writing of verse; true personality is not idiosyncratic but anonymous, and does not flaunt itself. Yeats did not place any high value upon the personal qualities and upon human personality itself. He evaded Christianity, which exalts and enshrines the values of human personality (and which brings the supernatural down into the natural), and it is not therefore surprising to find that he took great pride in his ancestry, his family, the nation of his birth. The fact that he toyed with fascism in his later years and took a keen interest in eugenics (racial purity) is but another revelation of his anti-personalism. In default of a principle of personal dynamism within himself, and of such a stable classical order and accepted orthodoxy, Yeats assembled a homemade, gimcrack order and "religious" system out of the exotic fragments he found here and there beyond the borders of commonplace life; thus his apparent romanticism. An artificer or bard, without a context, without standards he could accept from outside and without an inner spiritual pressure directed upon life, he turned inwards to centre his attention upon art, he became an aesthete, and there resulted the development which is revealed in his work: a development in a vacuum.

II THE ORTHODOXY OF T. S. ELIOT

I seem to note a roman profile bland,
I hear the drone from out the cactus-land :
That must be the poet of the Hollow Men :
The lips seem bursting with a deep Amen.

WYNDHAM LEWIS : *One Way Song.*

(i)

THE REPUTATION OF T. S. ELIOT IS NOW SO WELL ESTABLISHED that there is little need here for preliminary eulogy or appreciation. Mr Eliot is certainly one of the most significant poets of the last two decades, and his work has made an indelible impression on the minds of the more sensitive among his contemporaries, while his influence on both the practice and theory of poetry has been enormous If there is any danger it is not of undervaluing or neglecting Mr Eliot's achievement, but of allowing it that too static respect which we accord to the conventionally accepted value. It may be almost axiomatic that Eliot's work provides us with an example of modern poetry at its highest level, but there is a need, from time to time, for a critical estimation which disregards axioms and comes to its subject with a fresh vision. Mr Eliot's considerable reputation was earned first of all by his earlier work, and I may as well begin by saying that I see this writer's development as a poet to fall into two distinct parts. As I see it there is a qualitative difference between his earlier and his later work which, though few critics have thought it worth while to comment on, is surely, granting Eliot's importance, of some considerable significance.

Eliot's poetry and his prose writing have developed side by side?) An early poetry of concentrated poetic value was accompanied by a fastidiously tasteful and sometimes slightly precious aesthetic criticism. But as he has grown older, the moralist in Eliot has developed somewhat at the expense of the aesthete.

With his conversion to Anglo-Catholicism a pronouncedly religiose strain begins to be heard both in the prose and in the poems. From *The Waste Land* (1922) and *The Hollow Men* (1925) it is something of a jump to the contemplative tones of *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and the succeeding poems. But while Eliot's later verse is interesting up to a point it lacks the integrity and the astringent personal quality of the earlier poems. To put it unequivocally, I see Eliot's poetic career from about 1925 as one of deterioration, if one can thus describe a process so sharply and clearly defined as the break between the one half of his work and the other.

(Eliot's early poems, up to and including *The Hollow Men,* are unique in our literatures But besides being in itself a unique and valid achievement, which is of course its central and pivotal importance, his work of this period has meaning for literature as a whole, hats meaning in relation to the continuity of the tradition of English poetry. Following the romantic movement of the early nineteenth century, and the enervated neo-romanticism of Tennyson, Browning and Swinburne, the pre-Raphaelites, and the poets of the *Jin-de-si&cle,* poetry as a whole, the idiom of verse which was shared by all the poets writing at that time, had ebbed to a low-watermark of flaccidity and nervelessness which it would be difficult to parallel from any period of English history. For the injection of a new and invigorating current, the renewal and tautening of this idiom, we are indebted in large measure to Mr Eliot's practice, following upon that of Ezra Pound; a practice which drew its strength from an acquaintance with contemporary French poetry, which had escaped the English dissolution in large measure, and from a by-passing of the English neo-romantic currents which made possible a fresh contact with English poetry of the most vigorous period. It needed just such a cosmopolitan American poet as Mr Eliot, with his unique gifts, to do this job of work, a job of work which could only have been done, of course, through actual creative achievement. As an American, ELIot was sufficiently detached from the provincialism into which English poetry Had declined, arid sufficiently in touch both with alien currents

and with the older tradition of English verse, to do what was so badly needed. He brought content and form together to provide contemporary Britain with a new and vivid poetry of what has aptly been called "the modern experience". In these poems the city-world of latterday industrial civilization with its psychological uncertainties and spiritual ennui is given exactly adequate expression. Lacking this idiom and this spiritual outlook, which were Eliot's contributions to poetry, English poets were tending either to revert to balladry and conventionalism, like Watson, Kipling and Bridges, or to evade "the modern experience", to sidetrack it in the manner of Flecker and the Georgians. Eliot rejected both academicism and pomposity, and the quiet, sardonic, penetratingly realistic attitude he took and expressed, at first affronting the literate public, soon captured the imagination of his younger readers and, more than any other single influence, helped to bring poetry back to a serious confrontation of the actual world of daily experience.

This world of Eliot's is sharply and acridly *there,* intensely personal, intensely realized, particular and immediate. His descriptions are vividly unforgettable:

> **Among the smoke and fog of a December afternoon**
> **You have the scene arrange itself—as it will seem to do—**
> **With " I have saved this afternoon for you " ;**
> **And four wax candles in the darkened room,**
> **Four rings of light upon the ceiling overhead,**
> **An atmosphere of Juliet's tomb**
> **Prepared for all the things to be said, or left unsaid.**
> **We have been, let us say, to hear the latest Pole**
> **Transmit the Preludes, through his hair and finger-tips.**
> **" So intimate, this Chopin, that I think his soul**
> **Should be resurrected only among friends**
> **Some two or three, who will not touch the bloom**
> **That is rubbed and questioned in the concert room."**
> **—And so the conversation slips**
> **Among velleities and carefully caught regrets**
> **Through attenuated tones of violins**
> **Mingled with remote cornets**
> **And begins * . .**

So begins the *Portrait of a Lady.* And from this and other

poems of that period one remembers the recurrent novel and startling phrases and evocations:

> **Let us go then, you and I,**
> **When the evening is spread out against the sky**
> **Like a patient etherised upon a table . . .**
>
> • • • • • •
>
> **Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets**
> **And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes**
> **Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows ? . . .**

And if this is "period-poetry", evoking the emotional quality of an unrecapturable past day, it is period-poetry of the most valuable kind, in which the emotional atmosphere is transformed into something permanent.

Superficially, we may say that the difference apparent between the early poems and the later is one of *environment.* Whereas Eliot first became recognized for his uniquely personal presentment of the squalor and decay of the industrial metropolis and its soiled and banal humanity: whereas he was the acutely perceptive poet of "The damp souls of housemaids / Sprouting despondently at area gates", of "the hands / That are raising dingy shades / In a thousand furnished rooms" and the like, in the later poems this environment is passed over, like a disreputable associate of a misspent youth, for the rarer atmosphere of religious meditation and contemplation. But where the world of the early poems carries real and intense conviction, the atmosphere of the later verse, because of its intellectuat rather than sensuous nature, fails' to impose its reality sharply and definitely upon the reader's perceptions. The later verse, contemplative and refined, is lifted from the graphic presentment of actuality, and the poet's mind begins to work less concretely: in fact, less poetically. From the particular, Eliot passes to the generalized, observation and evocation, and the attempt to grapple this to the concrete actuality of experience, to endow it with authentic life, results in the strained impotence of the generalized image. Where Eliot tries determinedly to achieve concreteness in certain of his poems without this expedient, the attempt will lead him

to the employment of archaic or biblical imagery, which is literary rather than actual: as in *A Song for Simeon:*

> Before the time of cords and scourges and lamentations
> Grant us thy peace.
> Before the stations of the mountain of desolation,
> Before the certain hour of maternal sorrow,
> Now at this birth season of decease,
> Let the Infant, the still unspeaking and unspoken Word,
> Grant Israel's consolation
> To one who has eighty years and no to-morrow. . . .

The loss of immediacy apparent in his later work, the substitution of the" contemplative abstraction for the evocative imagery, is to be seen such passage as this from" *Ashi Wednesday*:

> Because I know that time is always time
> And place is always and only place
> And what is actual is actual only for one time
> And only for one place
> I rejoice that things are as they are and
> I renounce the blessed face
> And renounce the voice
> Because I cannot hope to turn again
> Consequently I rejoice, having constructed something
> Upon which to rejoice. . . .

But perhaps one may best present Eliot's poetic declension by contrasting the earlier *Preludes* with those short poems of his later period which follow upon the same structural pattern and appear in a certain manner to be their counterpart. The force and economy of phrasing of the brief *Preludes* entitle them to comparison with verse of the order of Shakespeare's songs. But compare this:

> The winter evening settles down
> With smell of steaks in passageways.
> Six o'clock.
> The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
> And now a gusty shower **wraps**
> The grimy scraps
> Of withered leaves about your **feet**
> **And newspapers from vacant** lots ;
> The showers **beat**
> **On** broken blinds and **chimney-pott,**

> And at the corner of the street
> A lonely cab-horse sweats and stamps.
> And then the lighting of the lamps,

with this:

> The wind sprang up at four o'clock
> The wind sprang up and broke the bells
> Swinging between life and death
> Here, in death's dream kingdom
> The waking echo of confusing strife
> Is it a dream or something else
> When the surface of the blackened river
> Is a face that sweats with tears ?
> I saw across the blackened river
> The camp fire shake with alien spears.
> Here, across death's other river
> The Tartar horsemen shake their spears.

where the loss of concrete imagery and emotional immediacy is so apparent as to require no comment.

Of the later poems, there remain the Choruses from *The Rock,* lines with a didactic import originally printed in the context of a propagandist pageant-play. Of these one can but say that they admirably serve their purpose; some of them are solemnly impressive; they have not the integral structure of *poems.* And lastly there is the sequence of long poems which begins with *Burnt Norton* and proceeds through *East Coker* and *The Dry Salvages* to *Little Gidding.*

It would be impossible to pretend that these poems are not, in their way, impressive achievements. They bear the marks of deep sincerity, of a mature intelligence and of experienced and conscientious craftsmanship. But despite all that has been claimed for them (and claimed, one finds it impossible not to conjecture, mainly on the strength of Mr Eliot's formidable reputation) they must be marked down as imperfectly realized summaries of experience, as poetic failures. The dominant emotions conveyed by the early poems are those of weariness, boredom, frastration, self-doubt and dissatisfaction, but these qualities are brought within the crystallizing range of the poet's craftsmanship and axe thereby mastered and transformed, made truly significant. The air of aridity, of weariness, which is exhaled by these later poems is marginal, is

not part of the substance of the poetry itself, but is unintentional, arising from qualities which the poet has failed to bring in subjection to his inspiration. Morality in Eliot's mind having replaced art as the potential transforming agent of experience, a function which it is quite incapable of performing, the result is that Eliot's career oddly resembles, to make a theological comparison, a fall from the reign of Grace to the rule of Law.

Of these later poems the most memorable, because most concretely conceived, is *East Coker.* But the poems share the common disadvantage of being little more than loosely connected philosophizings about the nature of reality and the value of experience, of which the poetry is ornamental rather than essential. Patches of imagery are stuck on, as it were, from outside, to give poetic verisimilitude to a skeleton of abstract intellectualism. There is a laboured straining after effect, as in the following examples of the generalized image:

> His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom,
> In the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard,
> In the smell of grapes on the autumn table,
> And the evening circle in the winter gaslight. . . .

> For most of us, there is only the unattended
> Moment, the moment in and out of time,
> The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
> The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
> Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
> That it is not heard at all . . .

where the catalogue effect would seem to arise from the poet's need to grope in several vague images after an effect which he has failed to achieve with one deep, incisive impression. One thinks involuntarily of the examples of concrete, particular imagery which were so admirable a feature of the early poems, of **lines** such as—

> I have seen eyes in the street
> Trying to peer through lighted hutters,
> **And** a crab one afternoon in a pool,
> An old crab with barnacles on his back,
> Gripped the end of a stick which I held him . . .

where the experience and the resultant image are particular, personal and definite. Long familiarity, in my own case at least, has not blurred this image or lessened its excitement.

It is a curiously notable fact that poets seem irresistibly impelled to give themselves away in their work: are driven, it seems, to make explicit not merely their inmost thoughts and emotions, which indeed they may effectively disguise, but their inner and private assessment of their own achievement. In *East Coker,* two passages are of considerable revelatory interest. The first is an attempted exercise on the pattern of the *Preludes:*

> What is the late November doing
> With the disturbance of the spring,
> And creatures of the summer heat,
> And snowdrops writhing under feet,
> And hollyhocks that aim too high
> Red into grey and tumble down
> Late roses filled with early snow. . . .

The second is the deliberately flat and prosaic commentary upon this passage, in which the poet's dissatisfaction with his craft is directly expressed:

> That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory :
> A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion,
> Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
> With words and meanings. The poetry doe9 not matter. . . .

And this is amplified, after yet another passage in "a worn-out poetical fashion", in section V of that poem:

> So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
> Twenty years largely wasted, the years of Pentre deux guerres—
> Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
> Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
> Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
> For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
> One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> Into the general mess of imprecision of feeling. . . .

It is possible to make too much of such " revelatory" passages,

but these at least tentatively suggest themselves as providing an enlightening self-commentary upon Eliot's progress as a poet.

(ii)

The prose writings of T. S. Eliot, whatever one thinks of their ultimate importance, are of interest for the sporadic Hght they cast upon the development of their author's attitude to literature.

The pivotal viewpoint of Eliot the literary critic may be said to be one of "Impersonalism", allied with a devotion to Tradition. Here are some key-passages from an early essay, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*:

> ". . . Tradition . . . cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order . . .
>
> "No poet, *m* axtist of any art has, his.complete .meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation oF his relation "to,the -dead.poets, and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. . . .
>
> "What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career.
>
> "What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality."

Eliot then makes his well-known comparison of the mind of the poet to a catalyst which, remaining unchanged itself, forms new compounds out of disparate elements:

> "The mind of the poet . . . may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates. . . .
>
> "Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things. . . .
>
> "The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living."

And, as he expresses it again in a somewhat later essay, *The Function of Criticism*:

> "I thought of literature then, as I think of it now . . . not as a collection of the writings of individuals, but as 'organic wholes', as systems in relation to which, and only in relation to which, individual works of literary art, and the works of individual artists, have their significance. There is accordingly something outside of the artist to which he owes allegiance, a devotion to which he must surrender and sacrifice himself in order to earn and to obtain his unique position."

In literature this attitude leads Mr Eliot towards the position of neo-classicism; in religion it leads naturally enough to Catholic orthodoxy. Since this attitude is grounded upon a certain definitive view of personality it may be as well to clarify that view before proceeding further.

Eliot's view of personality follows very closely indeed upon that of T. E. Hulme, a writer who has evidently had a great

influence upon his thought. And since Eliot's Orthodoxy would seem to be very similar to the rationalistic Catholicism of Hulme, it may be worth while to devote some little space to an elucidation of the viewpoint which these two writers hold in common on fundamental questions. Here, then, is Hulme on the nature of man:

> ". . . Put shortly, these are the two views then. One, that man is intrinsically good, spoilt by circumstance; and the other that he is intrinsically limited, but disciplined by order and tradition to something fairly decent. To the one party, man's nature is like a well, to the other like a bucket. The view which regards man as a well, a reservoir full of possibilities, I call the romantic; the one which regards him as a very finite and fixed creature, I call the classical."

And this is what Hulme has to say about classicism and religion:

> "It would be a mistake to identify the classical view with that of materialism. On the contrary, it is absolutely identical with the normal religious attitude. I should put it this way: that part of the fixed nature of man is the belief in the Deity. This should be as fixed and true for every man as belief in the existence of matter and in the objective world. It is parallel to appetite, the instinct of sex, and all the other fixed qualities. Now at certain times, by the use of either force or rhetoric, these instincts have been suppressed—in Florence under Savonarola, in Geneva under Calvin, and here under the roundheads. The inevitable result of such a process is that the repressed instinct bursts out again in some abnormal direction. Just as in the case of the other instincts, nature has her revenge. The instincts that find their right and proper outlet in religion must come out in some other way. You do not believe in a God, so you begin to believe that man is a god. You do not believe in Heaven, so you begin to believe in a heaven on earth. In other words you get romanticism. . . . Romanticism then . . . is spilt religion."

Taking the first statement, that upon the nature of man,

first, it should not be hard to see that Huhne's antithesis is a false one. Whom or what does Hulme mean by "man"? It should be apparent to one who has thought at all on the question that humanity is not composed of an undifferentiated mass of individuals, all alike as to gifts, capacities and potentialities. The human community is a hierarchy and there is a very considerable difference indeed between those members of it who are near the summit of the hierarchy and those who compose its base. To speak of the human "herd" in such terms as Hulme uses may be relatively correct. But it certainly does not apply to the rare individuals who create values, and are not merely the passive recipients of them in a socialized form. Nor is there such a simple division between only two opposed views of man. One need not believe that man is "intrinsically good and spoilt by circumstances" to see that the best among men have unplumbed potentialities. One can believe that our humanity is corrupt, and that it yet contains creative potentiality. And to speak of man as an extremely limited creature who can be "disciplined by order and tradition to something fairly decent" inevitably leads one to the question, From whence originate the order and tradition by which man can be thus disciplined? Hulme's view of faith also has, I suggest, nothing religious about it. A religious mind would not, for example, say that the belief in the Deity is "part of the fixed nature of man", but rather that the existence of God is an ultimate verity, and that man has a mind capable of apprehending this truth. Nor is it correct, as Hulme seems to suggest, that religions (such as Hulme's and Eliot's own Western Catholicism) spring ready-made into being, complete with fixed traditions and dogmas and an elaborate ecclesiastical structure which has only to be passively accepted by man in general. Quite otherwise. The impersonal and social paraphernalia of religious belief are the socialized end-products of what has begun as fluid, living personal faith and zeal. And just as the elaborate, formalized Catholic hierarchy of the Middle Ages was the end-product, so to speak (though still containing living personal force within itself) of the subversive, unofficial, dynamically personal community of Christians who formed the early Church,

so those collectivized values which we know as Tradition have their origin in the personal creative acts of original human beings. We do not find Dante, Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Beethoven, talking about "relating themselves to tradition" and so on. They make the tradition, giving birth to imperative spiritual urgencies stirring within themselves. And if they are so fortunate as to find a harmony between their own creative attitude and the world-view currently accepted by the society of their time, so much the better. All human values originate from within individual human beings. There is nowhere else for them to come from.

Hulme's decadent, rationalistic Catholicism which has no place for faith is like his art which has no place for creativeness. It is entirely symptomatic that Hulme attributes the "extraordinary efflorescence of verse in the Elizabethan period" to—the discovery of the medium of blank verse. "We shall not", he says, "get any new efflorescence of verse until we get a new technique, a new convention, to turn ourselves loose in." This academic attitude towards art which is so extraordinarily dense and unperceptive derives from an inability to admit any spiritual significance to the artist's creative acts. If the medium of blank verse was "discovered" by the Elizabethan poets, and if the efflorescence of verse of that period can be attributed to that discovery, it was discovered not through accident or through poking about impersonally with arid laboratory experiments but out of a superabundance of personal creativeness which violently forced its way into a new form. It is quite parochial and unrealistic to treat of poetry as though it were an activity entirely severed from the complex of personal-social forces in which it is conceived, to speak as though a new movement (Hulme of course wanted a "classical" movement) could arise upon merely a technical impetus, unrelated to the inner life of man. Eliot himself is in this respect a little more perceptive than Hulme, but his own criticism distinctly bears the mark of Hulme's academic and fragmentary approach.

The fragmentariness of Eliot's own outlook, its dislocated aspect, may be guessed at from a reading of his prose works as a whole, but it is in *After Strange Gods* (1934) that the

disunity of his approach to life and literature is made glaringly manifest, the more so because one feels that here an attempt is being made, through the association of "tradition" with "orthodoxy", to piece the fragments together.

This little book, which purports to be a study of the diabolical influence in modern literature, is far from being an impressive work. It is a patchwork of notions and prejudices enlivened with those occasional acute observations which we have learned to expect from Mr Eliot's pen. But so far from being a study of the "diabolical influence", it reveals no more than the most distant nodding acquaintance with the powers of darkness. The whole point and purport of the book is distinctly anomalous. Mr Eliot's concern seems to be to apply an external rule-of-thumb by which serious literature should be assessed; but then it transpires that he is not concerned with literary evaluations, that he is merely using the works of certain eminent authors to illustrate a moralistic point of view.

Let us briefly consider Mr Eliot's viewpoint with regard to tradition and orthodoxy as expressed in this book. "I wished simply", he says, "to indicate the connotation which the term *tradition* has for me, before proceeding to associate it with the concept of *orthodoxy*', which seems to me more fundamental (with its opposite, heterodoxy, for which I shall also use the term *heresy)* than the pair *classicism-romanticism* which is frequently used." He then appears to require that writers should be assessed from this point of view; that is, by their conformity or otherwise to orthodoxy and tradition.

Perhaps Mr Eliot's attitude may be clarified by the quotation of a passage from this book, on Thomas Hardy. "The work of the late Thomas Hardy", he says, "represents an interesting example of a powerful personality uncurbed by an *institutional attachment* or by *submission* to any *objective beliefs"* (my italics). What is the implication? That by an acceptance of Mr Eliot's panacea on Thomas Hardy's part, his work would have gained enormously in significance and value? Hardly that, perhaps. Yet what other conclusion is to be drawn from Eliot's contentions?

Of a similar character is Eliot's assessment of D. H. Lawrence.

What seems to him to be important is not the degree of imaginative insight which any given writer can bring to bear upon experience, but the degree to which he can be said to toe the line of an exterior orthodoxy. It is from this point of view that he condemns Lawrence. Now D. H. Lawrence may quite possibly have been, as I myself do in fact believe, on the wrong track altogether, and Mr Eliot may ultimately be quite right in his condemnation, but a writer of this quality demands at least something more than the frigid disapprobation of the moralist with his rule of thumb, and one cannot but feel that Eliot simply has not earned the right to his condemnation. He gets it by a short-cut. Disapproving strongly of Lawrence, as a moralist Eliot would seem as strongly to approve of James Joyce. "The most ethically orthodox of the more eminent writers of my time is Mr Joyce." This may, in a sense, be true enough; but what then? And why not G. K. Chesterton or Sheila Kaye-Smith? James Joyce may be "ethically orthodox" (though was he, as a matter of fact, a believer at all?). But for the consciousness of our time it is obviously Lawrence, not Joyce, who is of genuine religious significance. Lawrence was possessed by a fervid religiousness which, to be sure, was chaotic and undirected into *any form* of belief; and Eliot is justified in pointing this last fact out. Yet would Lawrence's significance have been deepened, or destroyed, by a mechanical "acceptance" of Mr Eliot's objective and institutional orthodoxy? However palpable his faults and errors, Lawrence had the courage and the personal integrity to live out his own personal pattern to the end. His meaning derives from that, and it is a living meaning, though a sad one. But if Lawrence presents us with the phenomenon of religiousness without a religion, surely in Joyce we can trace the opposite, the form of Catholicism without the religious spirit. Joyce, who is intellectually correct, a well-turned-out standard product of Catholic orthodoxy, whose intellectual machinery operates in the standard manner, passes Mr Eliot's muster, while Lawrence, a man filled with prophetic vision, is summarily cast into the outer darkness of his disapproval.

Both Lawrence and Hardy were men with a certain unique insight into reality, however warped or partial, which they pursued with heroic integrity. That is their value for us, and it is a real value, a real *religious* value. For what merit is there in the mechanical acceptance of an objective, i.e. socially approved, fabric of beliefs? If such acceptance is reached integrally and as the completion of a genuinely personal pattern—is reached out of an inner striving for truth—then it is a different matter. But then it is not " orthodoxy " which is attained, but something of which orthodoxy is only the shadow.

Mr Eliot manoeuvres delicately around this question of orthodoxy. ". . . While tradition, being a matter of good habits, is necessarily real only in a social group, orthodoxy exists whether realized in anyone's thought or not . . . as by Athanasius, orthodoxy may be upheld by one man against the world." Now this latter statement can only be defended by identifying *orthodoxy* with *truth.* It may in a certain sense be said that truth exists "whether realized in anyone's thought or not", that it may be "upheld by one mem against the world". But this cannot be said of orthodoxy, as such, which is not a personal but a social, collective matter. *Orthodox,* by definition, means "holding *correct* or the *currently accepted* opinions especially on religious doctrine, *not heretical or independent-minded or original*; *generally accepted* as right or true especially in theology, in harmony with what is *authoritatively established*, *approved, conventional"* (Concise Oxford Dictionary). How, then, can it be upheld by one man against the world? It is then not orthodoxy but something else, again, of which orthodoxy is only the shadow. Orthodoxy can be termed so only by an appeal to the collective opinion, if not of the present, then of the past, or of the future.

Now, the problem which Mr Eliot here raises and so summarily disposes of is one of supreme importance. The entire question of the position of creativeness and of the artist's responsibility and function is involved. But Mr Eliot evades the issue.

What was Mr Eliot's intention in writing *After Strange Gods?* "As for the small number of writers", he admits, "in this or

any other period who are worth taking seriously, I am very far from asserting that any of these is wholly 'orthodox', or even that it would be relevant to rank them according to degrees of orthodoxy." If that is so (as is indisputable), what is the point of his monograph? Is it the writer's first duty to undertake a personal, creative illumination of experienced reality, or is it to be orthodox, to submit to the external imposition of objective authority? This is a question which Mr Eliot evades, even deliberately evades, though it is fundamental to his outlook. If the writer is held to be a genuine creator of values, then what is the relevance of this dogmatic, moralistic approach to works of literature? It surely cannot be gainsaid that here we touch on a deep-seated equivocation in Eliot's thought. For you cannot have it both ways. You cannot admit the significance of the creative writer as an originator of values and at the same time demand his subservience to an external authority which claims to be the sole dispenser of values. And if you deny that it is the function of the creative writer to create values, you are then driven to the ultimately sterile position of regarding literature as merely a superior type of entertainment, a view which inevitably precludes it from being taken seriously, to its own detriment, and would certainly seem to preclude it from playing a part of any great moment in human affairs.

From this viewpoint, art cannot but be seen as an ornamental excrescence upon life, something set apart from man's painful and joyful exploration of his human condition. In which case one may well ask, in what region of life *is* man's crucial activity to be seen as taking place? If the reality of such crucial activity be admitted, wherever it occurs, shall we not expect to see it reflected in every sphere and especially in the sphere of art, where man is engaged in the task of presenting to himself a unified and clarified vision of experience? In reality, however, a view which denies creative significance to art is always found to be a view which denies creative significance to human activity as a whole. It is a view which sees no inherent meaning in human life and destiny, which ignores the reality in order to superimpose upon it a "symbolical"

pattern whereby "salvation" becomes one of a series of formal, stereotyped gestures rather than a living experience. It is not at bottom a religious view at all. When it takes a religious form, it is religious only in the social, collective, ecclesiastical sense, a religion without faith. That is why orthodoxy (as Mr Eliot propounds it), conformity to an institution, submission to a system of objective beliefs, is not for the artist, the creative spirit, at all. It is for the multitude of "copies", for social man, for the masses: indeed, it is largely their construction. The "original" human being embraces it, when he does so, by going back on his own originality: not from faith, but out of doubt and despair.

> We are the hollow men
> We are the stuffed men
> Leaning together
> Headpiece filled with straw. Alas !
> Our dried voices, when
> We whisper together
> Are quiet and meaningless
> As wind in dry grass
> Or rats' feet over broken glass
> In our dry cellar.
>
> Shape without form, shade without colour,
> Paralysed force, gesture without motion ;
> Those who have crossed
> With direct eyes, to death's other Kingdom
> Remember us—if at all—not as lost
> Violent souls, but only
> As the hollow men
> The stuffed men . . .

(iii)

T. S. Eliot is still quite commonly thought of as an individualistic, self-centred lyricist of the "Ivory Tower" genre, isolated from social currents and preoccupied with the minutiae of strictly private sensation. This is strange, for it is of course the precise opposite of the truth. Eliot is first and last, in orientation, a man of society, acutely conscious of the social problems of his day, with a pronouncedly democratic bias.

Wyndham Lewis is quite correct in pointing out this democratic bias of Eliot's. His constant emphasis of impersonal values at the expense of personal ones originates from this.

As a poet Eliot has never been very intimately personal—like D. H. Lawrence, for example. While the experience conveyed through the poems is genuine and deeply felt, it is presented nearly always in a social perspective. The experiencing mind of the early poems sees itself in its relationship to a squalid environment devoid of beauty and of spiritual meaning. Prufrock's obscure predicament is obviously a social one. Burbank with his Baedeker confronts the world of Bleistein with his cigar. And so on and so forth. *The Waste Land* (1922) is, structurally, almost completely conceived in social terms. It is true of course that it is the predicament of the individual which makes Eliot concern himself with society, but the fact remains that he sees the individual in perpetual relationship to society, past and present (but particularly past), and that he sees him as dependent upon it, just as he *sees,* as a critic, the writer's need to relate himself to tradition. This fundamentally collective, numerical, democratic outlook it is which gives him his distrust of "originality" and all the things associated with that term. One remembers his words on the subject: "The artist's concern with originality, certainly, may be considered as largely negative: he wishes only to avoid saying what has already been said as well as it can be . . . To assert that a work is 'original' should be very modest praise: it should be no more than to say that the work is not patently negligible."[1] And associated, of course, with this distrust of originality is his distrust of personality, his inability to conceive of the individual person as a real centre of creativeness, giving birth to real values, and the need to subordinate the individual to some superior collective principle —in the case of the man, to the Church, in the case of the poet, to tradition—and, for all I know to the contrary, in the case of the citizen, to the State

A suggestive light can be cast upon these attitudes of Eliot's if one disregards his carefully arranged and probably unconscious protective colouring, or camouflage, and considers

him against the background of his origin as a clear case of "Americanism". Eliot presents, however, unlike Whitman and Hart Crane, an Americanism in reverse, a reactive Americanism. Eliot is concerned to emphasize all those cultural values which have been left out of account in the American idea of civilization, which appear as mere excrescences upon the surface of American life. (It is not suggested that this in any way invalidates the worth of his achievement or even necessarily the truth of his ideas.) Like Henry James, who also, in the same way, became a naturalized British subject, Eliot has acquired the cosmopolitan view of Me: he is more European than the Europeans. (What native British poet of our day would have thought it worth while to declare himself, like Eliot, an Anglo-Catholic in religion, a royalist in politics and a traditionalist in literature?) Eliot is more scholarly, more self-consciously equipped with all the trappings of "culture", than any contemporary British poet, as one can see from the snobbish multilingual epigraphs to his verse and prose, the literary cross-references and the rest of the apparatus of cultural sophistication. One can think of only one other contemporary poet who resembles Eliot in this respect, and that is—another American—Ezra Pound, *il miglior fabbro.* And indeed, this over-exaggeration of accepted cultural values is a reactive fault to which the sensitive American is particularly prone. For what does it reveal but, essentially, an absence of creative self-confidence? The poet, as the product of an externalized and spiritually uprooted collective civilization, is entirely impotent to believe that any good can come out of his own inward being, as a child of the present age, and therefore he appeals to the assured, established and certified authority of the culture of the past. His poetic activity, for which the present-day world has little patience, he may justify to himself and others by appeal to the values of the collective of the past. This appeal is at once expressive of a distrust of the artist's function and, allied to this, of the individual's spiritual validity as a centre of creativeness. From this *distrust of the person* issue, first, Eliot's classicism and then, inevitably, his Catholicism. For, despite a superficially deceptive appearance of "minority"

snobbishness, these attitudes are, I must repeat, basically democratic. Their concern is always with the values of the collective, which are inevitably always impersonal ones. A foolproof impersonal system, of religion, social life and culture, is the desire and need of the individual whose faith in his own interior validity and in that of other men is, for whatever reason, weak. A vigorous and vehement personal creativeness has never been one of Eliot's notable qualities. As a poet he exhibits, with nervous sensitivity, a strong negative genius of restraint. As a critic he is sensitive and appreciative, prevaricative and niggling. As a thinker, while a certain quality of shrewdly perceptive common sense pervades his work, he shows no profundity and no coherent analytical power whatever. An admirably disciplined use of creative powers of the second order it is which has earned him his present deserved eminence.

From the viewpoint which Eliot has adopted and taken his stand on, the individual person, then, must be perpetually subordinated to the collective, personal values to impersonal ones. Authority resides outside the individual, who must not presume to stand alone: in every case he must form part of a pattern, and he must assess his activities from the point of view of the harmony of the pattern. This is a viewpoint which places the minimum of responsibility upon the individual and the minimum emphasis upon the individual's inner creativity. I would suggest that the effect on the individual who holds it cannot be other than to inhibit creativeness and induce inner sterility, if, indeed, the attitude itself does not originate in these very qualities.

I do not say that the two things which Mr Eliot desires, that is, a true sense of cultural continuity and a socially accepted orthodoxy, are undesirable things. On the contrary. Within such a framework the original individual should be able to give expression to his creative energies, perhaps more freely than where there is complete outward anarchy of values, while from a purely social point of view the advantage to the community through the enrichment of common life would be considerable. We need hardly fear that personal originality would be overcome or crushed under a socially approved structure of bejief,

thought and behaviour if that structure is a valid approximation to the structure of reality itself. It is the inverted, regressive, uncreative attitude of Eliot towards these things which is to be condemned, not the things themselves. The creative spirit must be strong enough not to hanker after an external system which will take the load of responsibility from off his shoulders, for the reason that if any such system is to arise it can only be as an outcome, an end-product, of original personal creative effort. The modern cirtist who longs impotently for a time when he can be released from interior struggle in order to take his values outwardly from external society only reveals his own inner bankruptcy. Authentic human existence depends, at the source, upon those creative "originals" whose task is to be a fountain and source of values for society, that is, for the multitude of echoing "copies". And their concern must be, not with the ultimate social consequence of creativeness, but with the immediate urgencies of creative activity itself.

III THE AMERICANISM OF HART CRANE

> To settle this question, I may well repeat what an American lady once said to me, smiling to indicate how nice was the distinction she drew. " Many of my countrymen ", she said, " mix up the categories. They give to purely technical achievements, for example, that same awe-struck attention which in France you keep for the creations of the mind, of art, and of faith."
>
> GEORGES DUHAMEL : *A Reply to my Critics.*

IT IS STRANGE THAT THE PECULIAR SIGNIFICANCE OF HART CRANE in the light of the modern poet's relationship to an industrial society has not been more generally recognized than it has. Crane is the unofficial laureate of modern America—although perhaps an America that is passing away. With important differences, he bore to the hustling, industrially expanding America of the 'twenties a relationship in some ways very similar to that of Mayakovsky towards revolutionary Russia of the same period. Like the Russian, Crane embraced his life and time feverishly and with open arms; he, also, was homosexual and suffered from a deep disharmony of his personal life, lived wildly and wretchedly, and died eventually by his own hand.

When his *Collected Poems* were belatedly published in London for the first time a few years ago they fell curiously flat, considering his reputation on the other side of the Atlantic. Yet Crane is an impressive poet, and his work bears the unmistakable stamp of genius. It possesses a largeness of theme together with a depth of feeling and delicacy of verbal manipulation and a confident power of execution which cannot be waved aside. He is, however, exceedingly "obscure" in a very real sense. And, with all its magnificence of rhetoric and subtlety of suggestion, his collected work appears fragmentary, the spars and wreckage of what we feel was intended to be a much larger design, an integrated whole. Towards the end he tended to write more and more wildly, and the overloading of his language

resulted sometimes in a merely muddled clogging and inflation of the verse. Poetically he must, judged by his own aspirations, be written down as a failure—if a glorious one—as he must, too, I suppose, in his life. But why, and how, was Hart Crane a failure? What was he trying to do, and what can we learn from his aspirations and achievements?

Crane's family background was that of prosperous middle-class American industrialism. His father was a factory-owner, and on both sides his family traditions were those of successful commercialism. He was a man of the cities, without palpable roots in any particular region or locality—and America is a vast country. In his adult life he moved aimlessly from place to place—New York, Cleveland, the Caribbean Isles, London, Paris, Mexico. His middle-class social background providing little opportunity or encouragement for the cultivation of artistic propensities, Crane early rejected it for the social vacuum, the underworld, inhabited by the writers and artists of the time. Both socially and regionally, therefore, Crane was rootless. He was particularly vulnerable to the impact of the impersonal world of modern experience. He worked in the dockyards as a riveter, he wrote advertising copy, he filled various petty positions in the literary-commercial hinterland, and finally, in the economic sense, he became frankly parasitic. It is because he was so completely at the mercy of his time that Crane is so interesting.

The accusation of "Americanism" implied by the quotation from Georges Duhamel above would of course not be adequate or just in the case of Crane, and needs some qualification. Crane was a poet, necessarily concerned with the interior values. His peculiarity was, however, that parallel with this concern there ran an uncritical, open-armed acceptance of the outward technical achievements of American civilization. While detesting the uncouth *commercial* spirit that animated the American scene, and while feeling intensely his own isolation, as an artist, from the whole life of his time, its spirit of *industrialism* he accepted unquestioningly. "The modern artist", he once wrote, "needs *gigantic assimilative capacities,*[1] emotion,—and

[1] My italics.

the greatest of *all*—vision. Potentially I feel myself quite fit to become a suitable Pindar for the dawn of the machine age, so-called." These words are important. It was upon this cross that Crane allowed himself to be crucified.

In his attitude towards the variegated phenomena of the contemporary scene, Crane provides an illuminating contrast as man and poet to his contemporary, T. S. Eliot. Eliot had published *The Waste Land* just as Crane was nearing the completion of one of his most important poems, *For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen,* a poem which attempted a poetic reconciliation of Helen as the "symbol of the abstract sense of beauty" and the scientific temper of the modern world in the person of the poet, Faustus. But whereas Eliot turned, pessimistically or nostalgically, to the past, emphasizing the importance of tradition and of the historical sense, Crane looked optimistically forward, although not in a naively materialistic manner only, to a new Utopian integration of life and culture.

When *The Waste Land* appeared, Crane wrote to a friend:

> "There is no one writing in English who cam command so much respect, to my mind, as Eliot. However, I take Eliot as a point of departure towards an almost complete reverse of direction. His pessimism is amply justified, in his own case. But I would apply as much of his erudition and technique as I can absorb towards a more positive, or (if I must put it so in a sceptical age) ecstatic goal."

As Mr Philip Horton himself says in his biography, *Hart Crane: The Life of an American Poet:*

> "The difference in temper between the two men was clearly indicated by the nature of their leading symbols: for Eliot the wasteland with its rubble of disintegrated values and desiccated spirits; for Crane the bridge with its hope of spiritual harmony and order above and beyond the acceptance of contemporary chaos."

That difference is illuminating in many respects—Crane, warring with an inward chaos, with a powerful but uneducated mind, projecting upon the world his need for an external order;

and Eliot, precise and intelligent, with an extremely orderly and disciplined mind, looking outward and seeing disharmony and disintegration. Here, however, I want to single out only the main point of divergence between these so strongly contrasted poets of the post-Great-War years—their attitudes towards the framework of technical civilization in which they found themselves.

For Crane, modern progress was a reality. Seeing the modern world, as it were, moving ahead without a corresponding spiritual or artistic advance, he regarded it as his poetic responsibility to catch up, to infuse external society, in the consciousness of man, with "positive poetic content". Eliot saw only an increased inward anarchy, a loosening of standards and decay of real values, accompanying the increased, hallucinatory, unreality of metropolitan life. Crane accepted the urban cyclorama joyously, ecstatically:

> O harp and altar, of the fury fused,
> (How could mere toil align thy choiring strings !)
> Terrific threshold of the prophet's pledge,
> Prayer of pariah, and the lover's cry,—
>
> Against the traffic lights that skim thy swift
> Unfractioned idiom, immaculate sigh of stars,
> Beading thy path—condense eternity :
> And we have seen night lifted in thine arms.

It is Brooklyn Bridge he is addressing in such terms. Contrast it with the familiar lines from *The Waste Land:*

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
> And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. . . .

The differences apparent from these two fragments in the entire style and approach of the two poets are sufficiently outstanding to need no comment.

Crane's attitude towards modern civilization and its dynamic factor, the machine, was not solely one of simple-minded adoration. It is best expressed, perhaps, in the words of Mr Horton

describing the philosophical opinions held by the small group of younger *avant-garde* writers of the 'twenties with which Crane was associated:

> "Munson's own contribution seems to have been the insistence upon a positive creative attitude towards the machine, rather than the negative one held by the older group, which rejected or evaded it. Briefly, he held that the spiritual life of man and his culture had now become dependent on three factors: man, nature, and the machine; that this had brought about an art of maladjustment rooted in a dangerous dualism; and that, finally, the only means of regaining an organic vital art lay in accepting the machine on the same level as nature, or, as he wrote, 'to put positive and glowing spiritual content into Machinery'. This was the dogma he had evolved and brought back with him from Dadaist Europe, and it was the section of his study suggesting ways and means of assimilating such new material as subject matter for poetry that Crane found so stimulating."

It was under the stimulus of such conceptions that Crane began to write his *Faustus and Helen,* and indeed his whole work is conditioned by them. In Mr Horton's words:

> "Carried away by . . . the sweeping conception of a spiritual union between man, nature and machine, both he and Munson seem to have had a Utopian vision of a new order of humanity about to arise."

What Crane was really trying to do, as a poet, was to give an inward, spiritual significance to the material, outward conditions of twentieth-century industrial civilization. He wanted to take the whole complex structure of American mechanized society into his soul and to give it back again endowed with the spiritual significance and meaning of his own personality. Also, no doubt, he desired to escape from the burden of his personal existence by a process of objectification. The attempt was heroic—and pathetic. When the prevailing American optimism received a serious set-back in the financial crisis of Crane's latter years, and most of Crane's literary associates turned for

their salvation to some form of social criticism, Crane rejected them and pursued his path in isolation. His tenacious fidelity to the aesthetic path he had chosen seems to suggest that his choice of it was rooted deeply in the division of his own nature. With that it is not necessary to deal now. It is enough to say that we should be grateful that one poet undertook such a task as this, if only for the lesson he leaves for others, but mostly for his charting of a realm which might otherwise have remained unexplored.

Crane regarded it as the main task of modern poetry to "absorb the machine, i.e. acclimatize it as naturally and casually as trees, cattle, galleons ..." and most of his verse was written with this precept well to the foreground. However, his poems are never *about* machines and machinery. They are *about* (if the word may be used at all) Crane's own experience. But into his own experience he tried to incorporate the whole of urban society and, in *The Bridge,* the history of the American nation. This last poem, his most ambitious effort, which in his own mind he seems to have associated with the *Paradiso* of Dante, he described while writing it as "A mystical synthesis of America" and "Symbol of our constructive future, our unique identity, in which is also included our scientific hopes and achievements of the future". I have said that Crane's poetry is obscure. It is as obscure as the poetry of the intensely isolated modern poet forced by his dislocation from society to cultivate deeply into his own private experience can well be. Yet the poetry he wanted to write, as the potentially great poet he knew himself to be, was public poetry. But the time of great public poetry is past. Crane was faced with two worlds, the inward private world of his own experience and the outward highly centralized world of mechanical civilization, and he wanted to reconcile the two. The bridge that he took as a symbol, symbolized just that reconciliation. It was that attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable that set up such a terrific tension in Crane's mind and drove him to stimulants and debaucheries, the need for which became more and more violent as his life went on, culminating in his nightmarish last days and that final leap from the stern of the s.s. *Orizaba,*

The evidence of that strain is to be found internally in his poems, and in the story of his life as told by Mr Horton. In its efforts to achieve a union between those two worlds Crane's mind thrust itself out beyond the limits of human possibility. The mind recoils—just as Crane's own mind recoiled after each intoxicating spell of inspiration. The ecstasy he achieved was very nearly a delirium:

> Let the same nameless gulf beleaguer us—
> Alike suspended from atrocious sums
> Built floor by floor on shafts of steel that grant
> The plummet heart, like Absalom, no stream.

At times, as in certain of the *Voyages,* his poetry achieves a sickening vertiginous quality—a real biliousness. And that, indeed, is a measure of his success.

The question of "obscurity" is a delicate one. Nearly all good modern poets are, or have been, accused of "obscurity", "unintelligibility" and the like by those who like their verse to be genteel and slightly sedative. In Crane's case there is generally some basis for this charge. When critics speak of "obscurity", however, they usually mean that the poem in question fails in its presumed task of intellectual communication. Most poetry is in the nature of a comment upon experience. Crane's, by this test, fails completely. His poems are entities in which is caught and transfused a vast complexity of experience: they hang, as it were, plummet-wise over the abyss between the inner world of the poet or reader and the outer world of extra-personal actuality which the poet strove so tenaciously to bring into poetic focus.

Crane wanted to be, felt himself potentially to be, a great poet—"the greatest singer of my generation". What are the distinguishing features of the "greatness" which we recognize in certain "great" poets of the past? In the- first place, it is a social quality. It is a capacity, belonging to a certain time and place, to dominate, *as a poet,* the society of that period. The "great" poet emerges as a social force, a focus of his society's strivings, yearnings, achievements and confusions. **For** the **production** of a great poet in this sense there must be an integration of personality and society, of the inner and

outer worlds, which modern society, with its top-heavy mechanical superstructure and its network of extra-human relationships, cannot afford.

Crane and Munson were wrong in their attempt to "accept the machine on the same level as nature . . . to put positive and glowing spiritual content into Machinery". Their response to " the firm entrenchment of machinery into our lives ", which, said Crane, had produced "a series of challenging new responsibilities for the poet", should have operated, not on the aesthetic but on the social level. Crane accepted without question the centralized, top-heavy industrial environment, tagging along behind the racketeers and financiers whose creation it all was. We cannot say he was "wrong" to do so in any condemnatory sense. But it seems unlikely that any poet writing since his death will follow, in this respect, where Crane led. In choosing Faustus for a symbol in his first lengthy poem he was, perhaps, writing more profoundly than he knew.

Acknowledgment is made to Messrs. John Lane The Bodley Head in respect of the above quotations from *The Collected Poems of Hart Crane.*

IV HAROLD MONRO: A STUDY IN INTEGRATION

AMONG THE POETS WRITING IN THE PERIOD WHICH CENTRES upon the First World War, Harold Monro occupies a position at once distinctive and isolated. In the terminology of the time, he is neither a "Georgian" nor yet a "Modern". Of Monro's Georgian contemporaries Mr T. S. Eliot has written that their work was static, that it "failed to show any very interesting development in the mind and experience of the author". This is not the case with Monro, whose work reveals a constant, if elusive, interior development. Nevertheless, Monro has received very little critical attention. To consider briefly his development, psychological and poetic, and to endeavour to show the parallelism discoverable therein in the spheres of what we may loosely term "life-attitude" and "technique" is the purpose of the present essay.

There is still much confusion in the general mind on the question of the significance of a poem. Many casual readers of poetry (and today, apart from writers themselves, there are only casual readers) find it apparently impossible to grasp the truth that the significance of a poem lies in what it is rather than what it *says;* in the complex of statements of which it is composed rather than in any single abstracted overt statement. A moralistic attitude is not infrequently met with, which judges a poem's merit by the acceptability or otherwise of the poet's implied "attitude to life", and poems are rejected if they do not seem to conform to the reader's preconceived notion of what life is really like, or ought to be like within the terms of the mental pattern which he arbitrarily superimposes upon it. This is an attitude which tries to separate the "content" of the poem from its "form", but as this is impossible without destroying the reality of the poem, in which form and content are ultimately inseparable, aesthetic experience is foregone.

If this unity of form and content is what characterizes the

individual poem, it is not unreasonable to expect a corresponding integrality of the faculties in the mind of the poet which project themselves respectively into these aspects—i.e. imaginative or emotional power and technical dexterity. The interest of Harold Monro is that such an integral development is actually discoverable in his life and work.

Monro's verse lacks superficial brilliance and originality, and this may be a reason for his neglect. His best work, which Mr Eliot has pronounced to be "more nearly the real right thing than any of the poetry of a somewhat older generation than mine except Mr Yeats's, is in his last separate collection, entitled *The Earth for Sale* (1928), and in the sheaf of poems following which were published posthumously in the *Collected Poems* (1933). In his best poems, Monro writes simply and directly within the terms of common human experience. He has none of that intellectual agility which in some poets results in a poetry of wit: we receive the impression of a slow and dubious intellect which never jumps ahead of the concrete image. The emotional significance of Monro's work lies under the surface, and is not deliberately brought out. What Monro does do is to create a world, manifestly an honest reflection of the actual world, seen in the dark glass of his morose and lonely mind. "I feel always", writes Mr Eliot in his critical preface to the *Collected Poems,* "that the centre of his interest is never in the visible world at all, but in the spectres and the 'bad dreams' which live inside the skull, in the ceaseless question and answer of the tortured mind, or the unspoken question and answer between two human beings. To get inside his world takes some trouble, and it is not a happy or sunny world to stay in, but it is a world which we ought to visit." No, it is not a sunny world, but it is a *real* world. Monro's development may be seen in the light of his acceptance and mastery of this real interior world, parallel with a development from poetic mediocrity to valid and notable achievement.

In contrast, probably, with the majority of poets, who begin writing often in childhood or adolescence, Harold Monro presents a remarkable case of deferred maturity. In 1911, at the age of thirty-two, when he published his second book of poems,

Before Dawn, he still showed scant promise as a poet. (He afterwards chose to preserve only eleven of the fifty-three poems.) F. S. Flint, who contributes a biographical introduction to Monro's *Collected Poems,* says that the true story of his life was that of a romantic idealist gradually purging himself of his romanticism; and although *Before Dawn* contains nothing of real value, it is worthy of some attention for its exposure of the nature of that complaint in the form in which it affected Monro, and of its effects upon his writing.

Monro had already published a short prose work which shows the tendency of his thought at that time, called *Proposals for a Voluntary Nobility.* F. S. Flint tells us that, "At this period of his life, Harold Monro could never stay for long in any one place. He appears to have been a moody young man who brooded over himself, and, not liking what he found, imagined that he would discover something better under another sky. . . . There was a bleak side of him which he translated into a romantic idealism, one of the worst forms of self-deception, and the friendships he formed fostered this weakness." It is evident that the later Monro's morose familiar spirit (cf. "The Strange Companion" and "The Dark Staircase") was not an entire stranger to the earlier. His way of dealing with him, however, was not to accept the reality but to remove his eyes from this spectre who haunted the immediate and dismal Present in order to raise them towards a fictitious apotheosized Future. Not only is the divinized Future apostrophized again and again in these poems, but as if to place his attitude beyond question Monro gave his book the following implacable dedication:

> "I dedicate this book to those who, with me, are gazing in delight towards where on the horizon there shall be dawn.
>
> "Henceforth, together, humble though fearless, we must praise, worship, and obey the beautiful Future, which alone we may call God."

In these poems, Monro's inherent and striking naivety, only the honest acceptance of which could prepare the way for his final achievement, takes the inverted form of an unselfcritical

pretentiousness, a spurious elevation of thought expressed through its familiar verbal counterpart, a stilted and falsified elevation of diction. Nor is there anything of Monro's mature visual and tactual sensitivity. The verse is conventional, with a repetition of poetic archaisms such as "bewonderment", "wandereth", "in sooth", and a plentiful sprinkling of "thee" and "thou". The imagery is blurred and secondhand and shows no signs of contemporary awareness: it is not only that he fails to remark the existence of objects such as railway-trains and factory-chimneys, his observation as a whole is lacking in objective accuracy and particularity. Here are poems entitled "The Moon Worshippers", "Dawn of Womanhood", "To the Desired". And the poems are as insipidly commonplace, or worse, as their titles would lead one to expect.

Monro's mental condition, as well as his poetical vapidness, is shown in one of the poems about (typically) the return of King Arthur to found a new Chivalry:

> **. . . thus he came**
> **Out of the dark and legendary past**
> **Into the lovely Future. . . .**
>
> **Yea, in a vision of the dawn he saw**
> **The tree of the godlike Chivalry to come**
> **Burgeon and bloom, and, lifting up his head,**
> **Laughed, and that gentle laughter of his love**
> **Was wafted like the perfume of a flower**
> **Down all the shadowy pathways of the earth**
> **To generations of the yet unborn. . . .**

Occasionally in these early poems Monro's real world looms through, but when it does so its effect, as in "Two Visions" and "The Swamp", is hastily countermanded by the evocation of its idealistic corrective. In "The Swamp", for example, thirty-four stanzas describe the human situation in terms of a quagmire where humanity is being sucked under, while only in the last four does the poet hastily remember his creed, when:

> **My eager spirit breathlessly took wing**
> **Aloft into the crisp transparent air,**
> **Resolved itself immediately to bring**

> **Out of the drowsy habit of despair . . .**
>
> **Welcome the unaccustomed and the new,**
> **Wing the high spaces of the liquid blue**

—a solution which even Monro must have felt to be a little inadequate.

Monro's "romantic idealism", as Mr Flint calls it, appears, perhaps, a little startling at first, expressed in all the earnest credulity of his Dedication. Yet it is obvious enough that he is merely expressing with characteristic naivety an attitude which, disguised or modified in innumerable ways, is symptomatic of the popular modern consciousness, and whose prevalence helps to explain the alienation of poetry from the Hfe of our time. So expressed, the attitude cannot but appear as essentially rather ludicrous. Yet this rejection of life does not always seem to us ridiculous when presented in a more sophisticated manner and given an apparently respectable background of scientific thought, as it is for example in the liberal progressivism of Wells and Shaw, in Marxian socialism, in the Utopianism of popular scientists, and in various current heterodoxies such as the Evolutionism of Mr Gerald Heard. It is an attitude, however, quite foreign to the creative mind. Stripped of all evasions, it is one which refuses the vaidity of experience. In the guise of an exalted optimism, it masks a hopeless and irresponsible defeatism. Unable or unwilling to take on the redemptive burden of the present moment, it passes its problems on to a hypothetical future always receding. Unable to accomplish a particular concrete good here and now, it wanders to some universal and abstract good in prospect. Lacking courage to bring the present into sharp focus of vision, it rests contented with a blurred general vision of a non-existent future. To all of this the artistic conscience is irrevocably opposed, and indeed the very necessities of the work of artistic creativeness, which always deals in the concrete and the particular, force a precisely contrary attitude upon whoever has the patience to submit himself to the discipHne of art. It was this contrary attitude of clear, resigned and creative acceptance to which Monro eventually arrived. Coming face to face with the immediate

actuality of experience, the later Monro could, for example, write:

> The stupid hours die and then live again
> Winding their cogged and ticking flight of pain.
> Morning will come at last I fear, I know . . .

—a concrete expression which the earlier Monro would have been incapable of achieving not only because his artificial optimism will have prevented an acceptance of his unhappiness, but also because he will never have allowed himself to come closely enough to grips in consciousness with the immediate reality of the experience conveyed to project it afterwards into such a physically satisfying form of words.

Although Monro's relinquishment of this particular type of "romantic idealism" must have been a gradual process, it probably ceased to manifest itself blatantly in his verse before he had himself divested his conscious mind completely of this habit of thought, simply because an attitude of this kind, being essentially anti-poetic, would tend to be unconsciously excluded from his poetic activity when this activity ceased to be held m slavish subjection by it. And whatever the outward circumstances which may have helped to impress upon him the inadequacy of this frame of mind—his marriage, the running of a bookshop—it is certain that it was largely the discipline of verse to which his artistic scrupulousness kept him subject which forced upon him the saving necessity of responding creatively to the displeasing actuality which was his own inner-outer world of the present.

Monro's road to maturity and realization of his full powers as a poet lay through an acceptance of his limitations. The acceptance of his essential naivety and its expression in his poetry gives it a peculiarly individual quality, which is seen in the following example of his middle period:

> It is not difficult to die :
> You hold your breath and go to sleep ;
> Your skin turns white or grey or blue,
> And some of your relations weep.
>
> The cheerful clock without a pause
> Will finish your suspended day.
> That body you were building up
> Will suddenly be thrown away.

You turn your fingers to the ground,
Drop all the things you had to do :
It is the first time in your life
You'll cease completely to be you.

The nursery-rhyme quality of the lines gives them an almost absurdly childish effect, yet one of completely objective fidelity to fact and, through careful avoidance of overstatement, of pathos achieved without sentimentality.

Besides this flat simplicity of approach with its deflated diction, in his middle period Monro translated his disgust with what is, and longing for what might be, into more poetically comprehensible terms, and thus we get his innumerable week-end and railway-journey poems: poems expressing his longing, in one place, to be somewhere else. Poetically, of course, this device is far superior to the earlier chiliasm with its nebulous aspiration, because, as the distant and alluring seaside or the country cottage is a real feature of Monro's concrete experience, he is enabled to translate it into his verse in an image-sequence which is precise and forceful in impact. And the disguised emotion which is behind the words speaks to the reader with a strange and enigmatic duplicity. "Unanswered Question" of all his poems perhaps most clearly reveals the primary-impulse behind what Mr Eliot has called Monro's *poisie des brefs departs:*

Shall you and I leave everything behind,
Go westward walking,
Never again be conscious of the mind,
But walking, talking
Of flowers and birds and clouds, with no routine,
Not wonder ever again what consciousness may mean ? . . .

What is this but the longing of a distressed human consciousness for pure oblivion? A longing which the earlier Monro dis-honestly hid from himself, and whose profound melancholy is expressed most perfectly in those later poems such as "Sleeping by the Sea", "Midnight Lamentation" and "Bitter Sanctuary".

It is, indeed, in these poems, in which Monro frees himself from all unconscious psychological devices and writes from his dispassionate confrontation of immediate experience, that he

achieves his finest work. With Monro, technique is never obtrusive. Yet consider the consummate adequacy of diction and phrasing in this poem, "Too Near the Sea":

> No foam ;
> A trippling shallow tread ;
> The pebbles tingle on the beach,
> While, disentangled over head
> From clouds, the moonlight, carefully spread,
> Lays whiter sheets on my white bed.
>
> From haunted sleeplessness, in quivering dread,
> I wander through the sea-sound-empty-full
> Large sleeping room above that sea. My bed
> Felt like a raft; but now there is the pull
> Of dreary sea, toward the window drawing,
> Of every slight wave with its itch and drag
> Upward toward the tall lean windows clawing,
> And, sea-bemysteried, my senses flag.
> Yesterday and to-morrow will be waves
> Breaking in calm succession on to-day.
> Earth-life pales down to sea-foam. Flesh behaves
> Like sifted ashes.
> Cold slow ocean washes
> All round, and then it washes me away.

It is interesting to see just how explicit, in his verse, Monro's repudiation of his earlier attitude became. Romantic apotheosis of the Future gave way to a humble acceptance of the Present which was surely not fair removed from love, and in this reversal of attitude the Future became for Monro an object, not of fabified reverence and aspiration, but, logically enough, of dread. "The Earth for Sale" expresses this quite unequivocally:

> How perilous life will become on earth
> When the great breed of men has covered all . . .
>
> . . . Can special vision be required to see
> What few pale centuries will take us there,
> Where, at the barrier of the future, we
> Shall stand condemned, in serried ranks, and stare
> At Nothing—fearing Something may appear. . . .

But it is the fantastic (if not altogether successful) "Dream Exhibition of a Final World" which manifests most clearly

this later viewpoint, where a nightmare vision of the futile goal of the mechanical progress of Civilization is summoned up, beginning:

> The murky curtains roll apart. A gigantic Proscenium. Dawn.
> The purple lips of the Siren begin to twitch.
> Eastward, a giant arc-light reflects through my dream
> Glaringly, into a forest of chimneys.
> Heavy upon my chest the large gorilla squats,
> Holding, loosely, my throat . . .

and concluding, after a lengthy list of the horrors of dehumanization:

> I rise at the open window ; see real trees,
> Real fields, real men, real dogs, real—Oh, the Charabanc,
> Real; and there's the new, tall, factory chimney,
> Real: and there, his cart-load real with bricks
> The sawdust jerry-builder trolleys along the road,
> Real. And how shall I finally murder the vaunting gorilla ?
> How can I ever succeed in protecting life, life, from the dream ?

That any poet's claim to our attention rests first and last upon his mastery of words is a truism which cannot too emphatically be insisted upon. On the other hand, no one would assert that the writing of poetry was a matter of verbal manipulation detached from any deeper question of personal attitude and response to existence. The unsophisticated reader is right in his intuitive perception that the poem which moves him is engendered spiritually, the result of personal dynamism and not merely of detached, impersonal mechanical dexterity. What it is important to realize is the actual oneness of the emotional force with the technical mastery through which that force is concretized. Monro's development—the dual development of the poet from mediocrity to notable accomplishment, and of the man from dishonest romantic idealism to honest acceptance of life within the terms of actual human experience—illustrates this. Finally we are left with the elderly Monro, a man whom, superficially, it is possible to commiserate with as a disillusioned idealist. I personally prefer to see him as a man who tenaciously made himself into a true poet through the slow discarding of an unreal mental vision with which he deceived himself and

put the world poetically out of focus; or as a poet who, through fidelity to the needs of his craft, brought himself painfully into a valid relationship with reality. The point is that the apparent dualism is really a unity. Monro was a man who wrote good poems and thereby achieved a spiritual victory over falsity and illusion: achieving this victory, he wrote good poems.

V D. H. LAWRENCE: A STUDY IN DISSOLUTION

(i)

D. H. LAWRENCE is ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING, PUZZLING and unsatisfactory figures in modern letters. However we choose to regard him, there is something disturbing and elusive about the figure he presents to our minds. He wrote novels, stories, articles, books of travel and poems, and he has come to be regarded variously as a teacher, a prophet, an artist, and an original thinker. Yet into none of these categories does he fit comfortably, and it is not until we grasp the fact that Lawrence's works were so many stages of self-revelation, an extended autobiography referring all the time outward to the life-history of this particular human being: that the significance of Lawrence lay in his life rather than in his works: that we are able to begin to understand him.

There is a tendency in some quarters to insist, like Mr Aldous Huxley in his preface to Lawrence's *Letters,* that Lawrence was primarily an artist. Now while it is evidently true that had Lawrence not possessed very remarkable literary-powers he would have little claim upon our attention, there is also the consideration to bear in mind that, as one critic [1] has put it, "if he is treated as an artist, there is the hard fact to get around that all but a few of his poems and novels are lacking in some of the most prominent features usually associated with works of art". However that may be, Lawrence unquestionably owes his fame primarily to his work as novelist, essayist and poet. I shall begin my exegesis, therefore, with an examination of Lawrence's position *as an artist.* And I shall consider how his attitude to life and his ideas affected his art.

Lawrence was indeed an artist, but an artist of rather a

1 Mr William Troy.

special kind, I think an impure kind; and he allowed his art to be corrupted by extraneous elements. At the root of his failure as an artist is a confusion between "art" and "life". One of Lawrence's less critical adulators, Mr Richard Aldington, reveals this naively enough in his preface to Lawrence's *Last Poems*, where he contrasts Lawrence with James Joyce.

> "Now turn to Lawrence's work [he says]—how fluid, how personal, how imperfect, a series of inconclusive adventures only related because they all happened to the same man. There is nothing static about this—everything flows. There is perpetual intercourse with the Muse, but the progeny is as surprising to the parent as to anybody else. Lawrence's writing was not something outside himself, it was part of himself, it came out of his life and in turn fed his life. He adventured into himself in order to write, and by writing discovered himself. From the first sentence in *The White Peacock* to the last broken utterance:
>
> * Give me the moon at my feet,
> Set my feet upon the crescent like a Lord ! '
>
> written by a dying hand, all this mass of writing forms one immense autobiography. . . . Lawrence didn't much care whether his 'writing' was 'good' or 'bad'. He didn't admit that sort of distinction, the implication of a fixed standard. Even the standard must flow. Writing was just a part of living. Take it or leave it."

While it is true that Lawrence cannot be held altogether responsible for the obfuscations of his disciples, one cannot doubt that he was indeed the victim of some such confusion as is here betrayed. What seems to be claimed is that Lawrence was unique in discovering some new relationship between art and life. In fact, he only succeeded in impoverishing his art. His peculiar separateness, his detachment from the European literary background which makes him so isolated a literary figure, results from his rejection of the values of art, which in turn is associated with his rejection of the Western tradition itself, as religion, as culture, and as civilization.

(ii)

To consider Lawrence as an artist is to consider him, primarily, as a poet, a fact which not many writers about Lawrence seem to have realized. Lawrence's poetry, inevitably, is situated at the heart of his literary work, which, so to speak, branches off from this central stem. From his earliest writing-years to his death the continuity of his verse is unbroken. His career as artist and man is epitomized in it.

In poetry, however, Lawrence is no less of an anomaly than everywhere else. What is his position among the poets of his time? He fits in more than a little incongruously among the company. There seems, too, a generical difference between his poetry and that of his contemporaries. With a comparatively immense output of verse, he fails to make anything approaching the distinctive impression of W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, or such a poet as HaroldMonro, whom, in native talent, he obviously excelled. With many poets this lack of intensity might be the result of an unfortunate absence of selective discrimination, but this is not altogether so with Lawrence. If we attempt to select from Lawrence's work those poems which appear to be the most completely achieved unities, we are liable to receive a distinct impression that he is merely a second-rank poet. The thirty or forty poems which I personally would choose from Lawrence's mass of writing, poems which are, to me, aesthetically satisfying, in which form and content appear to have reached some mutual resolution, leave me with the unsatisfactory feeling of having captured the poet only to eliminate the man, and it is the man, in Lawrence's philosophy, who is important. It is the later poems which contain most of the specifically Lorenzian quality, and if I want to make my selection a representative one I shall have to include a large proportion of these, but the later verse I am not alone in finding hard to accept as poetry at all.

There is an obvious external, rule-of-thumb test by which we can measure the probable stature of a poet who also writes prose. Is the prose secondary to the poetry or is it given priority? With many poets we find a subsidiary critical activity,

bearing upon their problems as writers of verse. And this may- or may not go with a literary dilettantism issuing in some more or less respectable form of journalistic activity. Lawrence belonged with these no more than with those numerous writers of the second or third rank who begin a literary career with a volume or two of verse and later proceed to the more serious business of establishing a solid success through the constant production of works of a more popular character. His poetry became a repository for those semi-autobiographical miscellanea which were particularly suitable for condensed or abbreviated transcription; and that he regarded them as such is indicated by the unpublished autobiographical preface [1] to the *Collected Poems*\ which closes with the following observation:

> "Perhaps it may seem bad taste to write this so personal foreword. But since the poems are so often personal themselves, and hang together in a life, it is perhaps only fair to give the demon [i.e. his Muse] his body of mere man, as far as possible."

Lawrence was too casual, too unconcerned a craftsman to be a first-rate poet, in spite of his great natural gifts. This identical judgment has been passed on Lawrence by more than one fellow-poet, who has seen his verse as diffuse, lacking in artistic coherence and concentration, as resembling " notes for poems" and as "the outpouring of raw poetic material", and so on. This diffuseness of his work means that the single isolated poem appears as a somewhat elementary organism. It lacks complexity. Its relation to the poet's personal experience is direct, immediate and limited. The element of significant complexity, expressed through the various devices of the poet's art, is absent. (The symbolism of certain of the later poems is not poetic, but religious—it is esoteric and external,) Yet this simpleness of Lawrence's poetry must not be confused with that condensed simplicity which, as in some of our best English lyrics, may conceal depths of meaning. It is the simpleness of prose, a simpleness in which all is on the surface, two-dimensional, flat, lacking penetrative dimension.

[1] Posthumously printed in *Phoenix* (p. 251).

Suppose we take a well-known early poem of Lawrence's, " End of Another Home Holiday", to illustrate this. The poem, one of Lawrence's most successful, is a poignant expression of the state of mind of a young man torn between two worlds and two loyalties; but its references are too clearly personal to himself to enable it to achieve that quality of universal particularity which is found in all the most intense poetry. The young man is so clearly a particular young man, Bert Lawrence, and the poem so clearly a document in his private history, that when reading it we are unable to avoid relating it to all the other documents. Lawrence never succeeded in severing the umbilical cord between himself and his work, and the poems, therefore, instead of achieving wholeness, an organic unity with themselves, point always outward to an external centre in the history of their author, and this it is which makes them disintegral. Here is the poem:

When shall I see the half-moon sink again
Behind the black sycamore at the end of the garden ?
When will the scent of the dim white phlox
Creep up the wall to me, and in at my open window ?

Why is it, the long, slow stroke of the midnight bell
(Will it never finish the twelve ?)
Falls again and again on my heart with a heavy reproach ?

The moon-mist is over the village, out of the mist speaks the bell,
And all the little roofs of the village bow low, pitiful, beseeching, resigned.
—Speak, you my home ! What is it I don't do well ?

Ah home, suddenly I love you
As I hear the 9harp clean trot of a pony down the road,
Succeeding sharp little sounds dropping into silence
Clear upon the long-drawn hoarseness of a train across the valley.

The light has gone out, from under my mother's door.
That she should love me so !—
She, so lonely, greying now !
And I leaving her,
Bent on my pursuits ! . . . (etc.)

I select the beginning of this particular poem because it is a

fair example of Lawrence at his early best, where he is still concerned with problems of form, still writing "conventionally", as he would perhaps have said. In the later poems this concern is increasingly less evident. "They want me to have form, that means, they want me to have *their* pernicious, ossiferous, skin-and-grief form." But that Lawrence did not understand this question is shown by many of his remarks on poetry. For instance, in the preface to the *Collected Poems* already referred to he says, "It is not for technique these poems are altered: it is to say the real say"—as if the problem of technique were not exactly that: so to manipulate words that they are made to express just what is required of them. His division, too, of the *Collected Poems* into "Rhyming Poems" and "Unrhyming Poems" is not an artist's division. (It is interesting to note that rhyme was the main agent in holding together the form of the earlier poems.) Such symptoms reveal the fact that Lawrence as a poet had failed to think hard and deep upon the subject of his craft. Lawrence's distinctions between form and content belong, not to the poet's workshop, but to the Literature Lesson and the secondary-school classroom, as does his use of the terms "free verse", which he claimed to write himself, and "restricted verse". No poet who had really thought about his work could possibly have brought himself to use such superficial and misleading terminology.

To read on chronologically through the collected poems is to become aware of a gradual transformation in the nature of the poetry. The more superficially conventional poems, which sometimes read a little like Hardy, give place to others less formally restrained, until at the finish there is scarcely any serious attempt at formal integration. In the *Last Poems* we find the poems actually running into one another, such is the liquefaction of the medium. Fluidity could hardly be carried further. This transformation is paralleled by an alteration in the material of the verse, which becomes more flatly descriptive and didactic, more objective, external. Where the earlier poems do undoubtedly express a genuine vision of personal experience, the later ones are concerned with experience which is, in the lower sense, impersonal; which seems to relate hardly

at all to any significant interior personal drama, and are merely assembled out of external description and reflection. In subject, as well as in form, it is of importance to observe that the poems fall approximately into four chronological groups. There are the early poems of personal experience: of home, love, school: a group which includes the early dialect poems and such poems as "Love on the Farm", "Discord in Childhood", "Lilies in the Fire", "Scent of Irises", "Piano", and the memorable poems about the elementary school Lawrence taught in at Croydon. Into the second group fall the poems of private sexual experience, the poems included in *Look! We Have Come Through* and others. Here the poet's field of vision narrows, becomes limited, virtually, to the relations between man and woman. It is narrowed still further in the third section, which is that of *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* and the associated poems, where all else is displaced by the fluid animate universe of nature. And lastly there are the sardonic, irritated *Pansies* and *Nettles* and the other semi-didactic or descriptive and reflective verses of the final period, with the fluid sequence which falls into some sort of order around the sad and moving, but inconclusive and fragmentary, "Ship of Death".

In the last works, the effort to conform to some conventional idea of what poetry should be like is no longer made, while the Whitmanesque influence which permeates *Look! We Have Come Through* has also been eliminated. The flat, elementary character of the poetic structure becomes more marked, and the poems read as little more than hastily but brilliantly scribbled memoranda or footnotes to everyday life. There are many such pieces as "Bavarian Gentians":

Not every man had gentians in his house
in soft September, at slow, Sad Michaelmas.
Bavarian gentians, big and dark, only dark
darkening the day-time torch-like with the smoking blueness of
Pluto's gloom,
ribbed and torch-like, with their blaze of darkness spread blue
down flattening into points, flattened under the sweep of white day. . . .

It is sensitively done, we are really impressed with the visual presence of the gentians. But out of this diffuseness there

emerges little besides a rather pastel-like delineation of natural beauty. But the poem lacks inner significance, even when the writer adds, as some kind of an afterthought, it seems:

Reach me a gentian, give me a torch
let me guide myself with the blue, forked torch of this flower
down the darker and darker stairs, where blue is darkened on blueness. . . .

"Beautiful" language merely, tricked out with a "poetical" thought (and particularly language of a rather adventitious beauty—"smoking blueness of Pluto's gloom", etc.)—just does not make a poem.

Intensity and compression were never outstanding qualities of Lawrence's poetry. One may see his method clearly in this poem (*circa* 1916) of his middle period, "The Sea":

You, you are all unloving, loveless, you ;
Restless and lonely, shaken by your own moods,
You are celibate and single, scorning a comrade even,
Threshing your own passions with no woman for the threshing-floor,
Finishing your dreams for your own sake only,
Playing your great game around the world, alone,
Without playmate or helpmate, having no one to cherish,
No one to comfort, and refusing any comforter.

Not like the earth, the spouse all full of increase
Moiled over with the rearing of her many-mouthed young ;
You are single, you are fruitless, phosphorescent, cold and callous,
Naked of worship, of love or of adornment,
Scorning the panacea even of labour,
Sworn to a high and splendid purposelessness
Of brooding and delighting in the secret of life's goings,
Sea, only you are free, sophisticated. . . .

Something in the mood of this poem makes me associate it with some of the *Voyages* of Hart Crane. It is tempting to make a comparison between these two poets, and one has only to do so to see how limited is Lawrence's art. It is obvious that the tremendous superiority of the American poet inheres in his terrific power of compression and intensification. His vision is not limited to what is before him as an object of immediate, momentary perception; he seems to range backwards and forwards along his experience, choosing what is significant for his

creative purpose, and where Lawrence is confronted with a particular single experience only, and merely rhapsodizes or ruminates over it, Crane seems to draw, as it were, upon a totality of experiences, emotions, images, which he forges into a new and complete unity.

This freedom of mental movement among complexities of experience, the introduction of factors of experience into new and significant combinations, fused together by the power of imagination, is of the essence of poetry. Yet it is doubtful whether work of this order can be achieved without a whole-hearted and single-minded dedication to the demands of poetry and submission to its severe discipline, or at least without a refusal to allow any perversion or limitation of the practice of poetry by any intrusion of that which is not strictly proper to it.

Lawrence, regrettably, did not choose to make use of his talents in this way. He did not, consequently, ever bring those talents to fruition, did not ever completely realize himself as a poet; his career is one of dissipation rather than of gathering power. But his failure extends its roots into his life-attitude as a whole. His attitude towards art, which determined his artistic achievement, was conditioned by his attitude towards life.

(Hi)

Lawrence was not a critic, it is true. The *Studies in Classic American Literature* and the *Study of Thomas Hardy* are brilliant essays in intuitive psychology, not literary criticism. But as it happens he has, in the preface to the American edition (1920) of *New Poems}* left us what might be regarded as a sketchy manifesto in the Lorenzian aesthetics, an attempted justification of his poetic method.

In this preface, which in the present context is of quite unusual interest, a distinction is drawn between two kinds of poetry, that which Lawrence terms the "poetry of the before and after" and the "poetry of the immediate present", the latter being his own kind.

1 Printed in *Phoenix* (p. 218).

"The poetry of the beginning and the poetry of the end must have that exquisite finality, perfection, which belongs to all that is far off. It is in the realm of all that is perfect. It is of the nature of all that is complete and consummate. This completeness, this consummateness, the finality and the perfection are conveyed in exquisite form: the perfect symmetry, the rhythm which returns upon itself like a dance where the hands link and loosen and link for the supreme moment of the end. Perfected bygone moments, perfected moments in the glimmering futurity, these are the treasured gem-like lyrics of Shelley and Keats. . . .

"But there is another kind of poetry; the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present. In the immediate present there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are all flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon. There is no round, consummate moon on the face of running water, nor on the face of the unfinished tide. There are no gems of the living plasm. The living plasm vibrates unspeakably, it inhales the future, it exhales the past, it is the quick of both, and yet it is neither. There is no plasmic finality, nothing crystal, permanent. If we try to fix the living tissue, as the biologists fix it with formation, we have only a hardened bit of the past, the bygone life under our observation.

"Life, the ever-present, knows no finality, no finished crystallization. The perfect rose is only a running flame, emerging and flowing off, and never in any sense at rest, static, finished.

"Give me nothing fixed, set, static. Don't give me the infinite or the eternal: nothing of infinity, nothing of eternity. Give me the still, white seething, the incandescence and the coldness of the incarnate moment: the moment, the quick of all change and haste and opposition: the moment, the immediate present, the Now. . . .

"There is poetry of this immediate present, instant poetry, as well as poetry of the infinite past and the infinite future. The seething poetry of the incarnate Now is supreme, beyond even the everlasting gems of the before and after. In its

quivering momentaneity it surpasses the crystalline, pearl-hard jewels, the poems of the eternities. . . .

"From the foregoing it is obvious that the poetry of the instant present cannot have the same body or the same motion as the poetry of the before and after. It can never submit to the same conditions. It is never finished. There is no rhythm which returns upon itself, no serpent of eternity with its tail in its own mouth. There is no static perfection, none of that finality which we find so satisfying because we are so frightened. . . .

"All we can say is that free verse does *not* have the same nature as restricted verse. It is not of the nature of reminiscence . . . in free verse we look for the insurgent naked throb of the instant moment. . . .

"Such is the rare new poetry. One realm we have never conquered: the pure present. One great mystery of time is terra incognita to us: the instant . . . Poetry gave us the clue: free verse: Whitman. Now we know. . . .

"The ideal—what is the ideal ? A figment. An abstraction. A static abstraction, abstracted from life. It is a fragment of the before or the after. It is a crystallized aspiration, or a crystallized remembrance: crystallized, set, finished. It is a thing set apart, in the great storehouse of eternity, the storehouse of finished things.

"We do not speak of things crystallized and set apart. We speak of the instant, the immediate self, the very plasm of the self. We speak also of free verse."

These passages are extremely helpful to our understanding of Lawrence as a poet, because they fully account for the diffuseness and simpleness which we have seen to be a characteristic feature of his poems. Lawrence's distinctions between the "poetry of the instant present" and the "poetry of the eternities", between "free verse" and "restricted verse", are intrinsically worthless. The "poetry of the instant present" which is his own poetry is distinguished from the "poetry of the before and after", or the poetry of eternity (of which he unfortunately gives no examples), by its fluidity, its moment-

aneity. But this fluidity, spontaneity, momentaneity, has *nothing to do* with the quality of the poem as a poem. It is not an art-quality, and Lawrence's exaltation of it derives, clearly, not from art-values, with which he professed himself to be unconcerned, but from life-values. Yet a work of art (which every poem must be) can be assessed only by criteria which are properly applicable to it as a work of art, and not as something else. Lawrence's notion of the "poetry of the instant present" does not arise from the integral practice of poetry: it is an idea imported from outside, and its application to poetry results in distortion. Lawrence's claim that he was writing a new *hind* of poetry cannot for one moment be allowed. There are no such "kinds" of poetry, there are only individual poems which achieve varying degrees of poetic failure or success, which seem to us, that is, more valuable and significant, more capable of enriching our inner life, or less so. And Lawrence, by this standard, wrote poems which were not of the very highest order, and which tended as he developed to become less and less integral.

Lawrence's essential confusion stemmed from a persistent failure to discriminate between concepts of "life" and of "art", his refusal to allow art its due rights and to be himself the considerable artist which he potentially was. From this arises the unsatisfying quality of his work. "Life, the ever-present, knows no finality, no finished crystallization. The perfect rose is only a running flame, emerging and flowing off, and never in any sense at rest, static, finished", he writes, from a bias which is peculiarly his own, and draws the curious conclusion that art likewise must be unfinished and imperfect. Nothing could be more erroneous. That is nothing more than a plea for bad poetry. Lawrence's "poetry of the instant moment" is a fiction, there is no such poetry. The writing of verse necessarily partakes of the nature of reminiscence, of contemplation, is always detached from the "instant present" in the sense that it is the result of a creative discipline of the faculties which begins when the writer is alone, concentrated upon the work in hand, and when the life-experience of the man becomes material for the artist. The work of art must always be an

entity existing in detachment from the vital flow of primary life: it if a mental phenomenon, a construct of consciousness; and this applies, of course, as much to Lawrence's own work as to that of any other poet. Lawrence was thoroughly inconsistent in professing such ideas as his about "life" and continuing to practise a highly sophisticated form of artistic activity. "There is poetry of this immediate present, instant poetry, as well as poetry of the infinite past and the inhnite future. The seething poetry of the incarnate Now is supreme, beyond even the everlasting gems of the before and after. In its quivering momentaneity it surpasses the crystalline, pearl-hard jewels, the poems of the eternities. . . ." But such a poetry as this could only exist if the writing of it were coexistent with the living experience of the instant moment, which is manifestly ridiculous. "If we try to fix the living tissue, as the biologists fix it with formation," says Lawrence, "we have only a hardened bit of the past, the bygone life under our observation." But Lawrence himself, in the act of setting pen to paper, had already detached himself from this immediate moment of "life" and had, himself, "only a hardened bit of the past, the bygone life", under his observation. The only difference between Lawrence's practice and that of any other poet is that where the integral artist, unhampered by such a dogmatically fluid attitude to existence, does not feel obliged to restrict himself to one particular isolated moment of experience but allows his mind to range over unlimited complexities of experience, Lawrence restricted his mind to an arbitrarily selected fragment and endeavoured to transfer that directly into his art. Lawrence, exalting "the insurgent naked throb of the instant moment", "the seething poetry of the incarnate Now", to repeat his really atrocious jargon, is attempting to take a stand upon the immediate split-second of time in order to disavow all that is eternal, transcendent and absolute. It is because of this that his verse is attached documentally to the particular experience and fails to liberate itself from the circumstances which produced it, to become an integrated entity, a true work of art. It fails to organize itself upon a vertical centre. With this attitude, there can be no movement of the mind among complexi-

ties of experience, because, with its passing into the memory, experience becomes "hardened" and "lifeless", and therefore, according to Lawrence's notions, unsuitable as material for poetry. How utterly opposed is this attitude to that of the artist proper will appear from contrasting it with T. S. Eliot's description of the poet's mind as "a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together". Or, again, his statement that "a degree of heterogeneity of material compelled into unity by the operation of the poet's mind is omnipresent in poetry". And yet again: "When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience. . . ." All this is undoubtedly true, and perhaps it can now be seen a little more clearly precisely why Lawrence was an imperfect poet. There is no room for the "constant amalgamation of disparate experience" in a mind which deliberately refuses to liberate itself from the present instant moment of experience; which organizes itself upon an attitude of rejection of whatever is past as "dead" and "ossified" and attempts to balance itself upon the immediate split-second of consciousness.

The point I wish to establish is that Lawrence's practice of poetry was consistent with an attitude to experience which rejected all that is transcendent and absolute in favour of a vital, temporal fluidity. His practice as an artist was bound up with his religious attitude and his attitude to culture and civilization. These attitudes were, however, not positive but negative. They took their shape from Lawrence's purely reactive denial of, and opposition to, the entire tradition of which he was a product and a part.

(iv)

The progressive narrowing of focus and the dissolution of poetic integrality which are noticeable in the poems has its counterpart in Lawrence's work as a whole. If I were to adopt the more protracted and discursive method of examining Lawrence as a novelist instead of as a poet I should point out how the still apparent concern in the earlier novels *(Sons and*

Lovers, The Rainbow, Women in Love) with personal life and relationships, though with a strong tinge of eroticism, is gradually replaced by a more exclusive preoccupation with racial and sexual life *{The Plumed Serpent, Lady Chatterley's Lover, The Man who Died),* and how this is linked with Lawrence's abandonment of all that we understand by the spiritual heritage of the West and his turning to vital primitivism. In the continual allegory with which Lawrence's life presents us, his abandonment of his native land and turning to New Mexico had a middle stage which is represented in the sequence of his works by the novel *Kangaroo,* with its scene set in Australia, midway between the old and the new worlds. In this novel the "Nightmare" section, which deals with the protagonist's experience of the Great War, clearly marks a spiritual break, not only with the degenerate outward civilization of the West, but with the inner values of the old world. And in the later chapters of the book, the chapters describing "Richard Lovat Somers'" solitary meditations by the deserted Pacific seaboard, the rejection of the West is made quite unequivocal. Here it is all the values by which Christendom has lived and found its meaning that "Somers" cuts himself adrift from: "God", "Love", "Humanity", "Thought", "Meaning", "the Soul": all these are wearily turned aside from in the long monologues that occur towards the end of this book.[1]

Because Lawrence was not a thinker, was not concerned with facing life intellectually and extracting a system of ideas from his experience, the examination of his ideas about life is not made easy, and the ideas themselves are often seemingly contra-

[1] I mean the long passages which lie somewhere between these two paragraphs :

> " Now all he wanted was to cut himself clear. To be clear of humanity altogether, to be alone. To be clear of love, and pity, and hate. To be alone from it all. To cut himself finally clear from the last encircling arm of the octopus humanity. To turn to the old, dark gods, who had waited so long in the outer dark. . . .
>
> " Old dust and dirt of corpses : words and feelings. The decomposed body of the past whirling and choking us, language, love and meaning. When a man loses his soul he knows what a small, weary bit of clockwork it was. . . ."

dictory. Lawrence was a victim of life, and not in any sense a master of it, and the ideas and reflections which are thrown out in the course of his work are directly engendered from his own constantly changing personal situation. But in so far as Lawrence did preach a doctrine, there can be no doubt at all of its essential nature. His doctrine, submerged or breaking out into exhortation, is one of submission to and immersion within vital Life. Life, for Lawrence, is a supreme value, and everywhere in his work where the prophetic element enters he is found proclaiming his doctrine of self-surrender to the living process which bears us along, of refusal to isolate ourselves into a sterile, self-willed egoism, idealism, intellectualism. In savage reaction against the nullity of a world given over to physical and psychological mechanisms, Lawrence preached the gospel of livingness, of organism. The modern mind being so petrified in egoism, rootless intellectualism and sterile idealism, Lawrence, fiercely reactionary, put a premium on any kind of intense livingness. So far are we, in our run-down mechanical civilization, from authentic life, so stiffened into an inhibited, ossified deadness, that sheer uncontaminated vitality by contrast becomes almost an absolute value: the vitality which man shares with the creatures of the natural order, and which is to be found in its least contaminated form in that order.

But no one reacts to such a situation as this in such a manner as Lawrence out of detachment from the situation itself. Lawrence himself was a product of the modern world, a product of this situation. The war he carried on with a false, abstract "spirituality", with egoistic "love", with mechanical intellectualism, was a war proceeding within his own being, just as his hatred for industrial civilization was inseparable from hatred for his own background. Many sensitive and generous spirits react to modern civilization in this way. But in Lawrence's case the reaction was part of an all-pervading "biologism". It was very far from being the reaction of one who sees in our civilization at its present stage a denial and frustration of culture and the life of the spirit. Rather, Lawrence lumped cultural values and spiritual existence together with mechanical industrialism, the true inward values of Christen-

dom with the degenerate, exteriorized end-product of those values. He reacted in the name of primary, biological vitality. And we must seek the source of this reaction in Lawrence's intimately personal life.

Now, at the very heart of Lawrence's work, early as well as late, is the question of sex. Before his attitude to life crystallized into any sort of formula, his preoccupation with sex was deeply evident. Sex and love, so intimately associated in human life, were beyond any shadow of doubt the central fixations around which Lawrence's mind continually revolved. The very titles of his books stress this preoccupation. In his novels, the essential problem of his characters is always the achievement of the perfectly satisfactory sexual fulfilment. This central theme of Lawrence's finds brilliant exposition in the *Fantasia of the Unconscious.* Even in his criticism, in *Thomas Hardy* and *Classic American Literature,* the sexual preoccupation takes the foreground.

Such an all-consuming preoccupation with sex, once more, does not originate from a state of sexual harmony. It is necessitated by intense disharmony. Just as it is the sick man to whom health appears as an absolute value, while to the comparatively normal individual it is a condition which may be taken for granted and used as the natural basis for other activity, in the same way it is the sexually denied and frustrated to whom the perfect sexual union appears as the *summum boraan* of existence. It is perfectly obvious, in Lawrence's case, how this sex-obsession (a phrase I dislike using, and which I do not intend in any censorious manner) was deeply rooted in his own private history, which is, of course, both by Lawrence himself and by others, amply documented. Lawrence's undoubted sense of sexual (or perhaps we should use the more comprehensive term, erotic) inadequacy, frustration, disharmony, clearly left him with a view of sexual-erotic union which exalts it to the very summit of human experience, the point at which life finds its meaning and fulfilment. But the conditioning circumstances which were at the root of this inhibition of his sexual life at the same time caused him to separate "sex" from "love", physical from spiritual life. Because of this separation, the

characters in Lawrence's novels develop, not according to spiritual, but according to "biological" patterns. Given the perfect erotic union his men and women are fulfilled, complete, whole. Denied this fulfilment they are sapped and destroyed at the sources of their being. Lawrence's explicit exaltation of the sexual union to the position of an absolute is to be found, to take merely one example, in the poem defiantly entitled "Manifesto":

Let them praise desire who will,
but only fulfilment will do,
real fulfilment, nothing short.
It is our ratification,
our heaven, as a matter of fact.
Immortality, the heaven, is only a projection of this strange but actual
fulfilment
here in the flesh. . . .

It is an inevitable consequence of such an outlook that it should severely restrict its possessor's vision of experience. Where the deepest significance of existence is *seen* to lie in the physical consummation of the sexual act (and that, very crudely, might be said to have been Lawrence's point of view, though his was a *mystique* of the flesh), the specifically human values, which are spiritual ones, are eliminated. Individuality comes to be regarded as a stony resistance to be dissolved in the warm primordial life of the blood. The complex human fullness of personal living is destroyed, and the focus of vision narrowed to the impersonal biological *process.* Hence Lawrence's explanation to Edward Garnett, quite early in his career, that as a novelist it was not persons as such that interested him, but the subtle vibrations of their essential, non-personal beings. Indeed, this is surely the central reason why Lawrence is so unsatisfactory a novelist. He thins down the scope of his art to comprehend, not the personal lives of his characters as human beings in the fullest sense of the word, but their existence as things, almost—immersed within, or alternatively isolated from, the "dark", "blood-dense", "inchoate" life-giving biological sensual stream. And it is the gradual accretion of notions and attitudes around this polar fixation which constitutes the life-attitude that finds expression in his formulated ideology,

such as it is, of "livingness", fluidity, relativity; which explains his anti-mechanistic outbursts and, most significant of all, his rejection of Christianity in favour of a synthetic, polytheistic paganism. It is this, so far as his poetry is concerned, which accounts for the descent we have noted from the relatively personal experience of the early poems to the impersonal natural world of the later. In the natural universe of animals, flowers, birds and fruit, Lawrence's obsession could find its fullest scope, for the natural world *is* the life-flow embodied. Let me simply illustrate my point with an extract from "Figs", though many another poem would do as well:

The fig- is a very secretive fruit.
As you see it standing growing, you feel at once it is symbolic
And it seems male.
But when you come to know it better, you agree with the Romans, it is female.

The Italians vulgarly say, it stands for the female part; the fig-fruit:
The fissure, the yoni,
The wonderful moist conductivity towards the centre.
Involved,
Inturned,
The flowering all inward and womb-fibrilled ;
And but one orifice. . . .

And so forth. Surely one may be forgiven if, allowing Lawrence's verbal brilliance and plastic sensitivity, one nevertheless finds only a very limited interest in the restricted life of appetite as presented by him on the printed page?

Out of this obsession, then, streamed Lawrence's heterogeneous assortment of values. To exalt sex in this manner leads naturally enough to the exaltation of physical being, and this leads to the formulation of a biological philosophy of existence in which all is subordinated to, merged within, the undifferentiated flux of life. Everything becomes relative, and therefore without significance, since everything has as much meaning as everything else. The distinctively human life of personal experience, personal relationships, is disintegrated into a stream of sensations. In the world into which such an outlook plunges us, there is no purpose, no stability, no values—no meaning, ultimately. And the intensely fluid nature of this

world is associated with the fluidity of the process of *time* which is its conditioning factor.

Such an attitude as this issues, in its negative aspect, in a horror of fixity, of anything which appears immutable, static, changeless. This it is which determined Lawrence's religious attitude, his attitude towards ultimate things, and it is this also which determined his attitude to art. Lawrence, indeed, would have nothing ultimate. Everything must be part of an apparently endless process. "Nothing is important but life. And for myself I can absolutely see life nowhere but in the living." This immersion of everything within an endless process makes it impossible for Lawrence to conceive of any transcendent Being or Principle, standing superior to the flux of "life", and making possible the vertical extension of a hierarchy of values. It leads him instead to a view of divine immanence, the pantheistic immanence of a multitude of unknowable "dark gods", who mysteriously come and go, and who seem to be identified with his own momentary moods and passions. And there are no qualitative degrees of raw "life", reduced to its lowest common denominator as mere undifferentiated vitality.

(v)

The connection between Lawrence's life-attitude, his aesthetic theory and his artistic practice, having been, as I hope, established, we can turn briefly to a further consideration of his practice. The substance of poetry is personal experience intensified or essentialized, formalized and projected through the medium of words. This being so, the attitude of the personality towards its experience must necessarily have everything to do with the form taken by poetic utterance. Lawrence's doctrine of immersion in the flowing stream of "life" means subjection of the personality and its experience to the flowing stream of time, and this in turn, translated into an attempted theory of aesthetics, produces in Lawrence's case a theory of the "poetry of the instant present", which is in fact merely an imperfect, limited poetry. The integral, inwardly centrified poem of the true poet (not the versifying

doctrinaire) we should expect to result from an attitude towards experience in which the mind organizes itself vertically, in a relationship to that which is transcendent, and is thus able to rise above immediate experience and to deal in wholes and complexities instead of merely in simple, dislocated fragments.

It will be easiest to comprehend this if we consider it entirely in terms of time. Lawrence himself has indicated this. Intuitively, in his distinction between the "poetry of the instant present" and the "poetry of eternity" he had grasped, and expressed with characteristic disregard of accepted and stereotyped terminology, a truth about the nature of poetry in his very rejection of it: its quality of perfection, permanence, eternity. Now, experience occurs within the conditions of time, which from the point of view of everyday living appears as a perpetual flow. Complete immersion in this flow (actually impossible to a human being) would be to subject the mind to a constant undifferentiated succession of "instant moments", each destructive of the preceding "instant moment". Hence Lawrence's reference to "a hardened bit of the past", which, superseded by the "living plasm" of the succeeding "instant moment", necessarily appears dead. The experiencing mind so immersed is engaged upon a perpetual process of disentanglement from the claims of the "dead" past, of annihilation, as it were, and rebirth. Lawrence's attitude to his writing as a whole reflects this temporal outlook: "One sheds one's sicknesses in books", he remarked; and, "As soon as I have a finished mental conception, a full idea even of myself, then dynamically I am dead".

Let the mind organize itself vertically, however—that is, in relation to a transcendent Being or Principle, and existence will cease to be at the mercy of an undifferentiated immanence, cease to be submerged within a fluid process with neither beginning nor end. A dimension of *value* will emerge, the lateral flow of life will be polarized by a vertical principle and categories of higher and lower will appear. And since a transcendent Being can hardly be other than One not subject to the flux of temporal progression, we shall be enabled to see time, in relation to Him, not as an endless stream, but simply as a

pattern of experience contained within eternity. Instead of maintaining a precarious balance upon a knife-edged present moment, the mind will be able to move without strain among complexities of experience, since there will be no reason for arbitrarily endowing any one fragment of experience with any greater or less validity than any other simply by reason of its place in a temporal sequence. This is in fact what happens with the vertically polarized mind of the artist. It is one of the chief symptoms of our cultural discontinuity that while in the past such a conception could be assimilated organically from the pervasive traditions of a Christian culture, the modern mind must struggle for this belief or must formulate some private, personal attitude which permits of such a vertical organization of experience. The integrity of a work of art, that quality which makes of it, instead of a mere psychological document, an organism, an entity, centred within itself, a complete unity and not a fragment, would appear to be bound up with an organization of the mind which models itself, not upon time, but upon timelessness, upon eternity. There is nothing outrageous or extraordinary about this. Any serious practising poet will find such an attitude forced upon him by the practice of his art, although he may lack the intellectual equipment to formulate it in philosophical terms. In a Christian culture (and the West is solely the creation of Christianity) this is a part of the pattern of existence. It is Lawrence's rejection of it that is extraordinary, and it was quite inevitable that his rejection should have coincided with his repudiation of the values of the West, and thus of Christianity, as a whole.

"Nothing of infinity, nothing of eternity", rhapsodized Lawrence. "Give me the still, white seething, the incandescence and the coldness of the incarnate moment: the moment, the quick of all change and haste and opposition: the moment, the immediate present, the Now." From such a submerged viewpoint, inevitably, the reality of the absolute and the transcendent is imperceptible. There is only to be discerned a reflected mental counter for the absolute, which then appears abstract, static and lifeless. To reject eternity, as fixed and dead, in favour of a vital temporal fluidity, is to obliterate values

and undermine, ultimately, all culture which depends upon a recognition of those values. If the criterion of everything is mere biological vitality, aesthetic, as all other standards, become irrelevant. Anything is as good as any other thing; the boundary between art and life is broken down and art becomes impoverished, like Lawrence's own, as does authentic interior personal life. This disintegrating effect is, in spite of his genius, noticeably at work in Lawrence, and that is why he is everywhere, even in his most superficially brilliant work, unsatisfying. And I should make it clear that by unsatisfying I do not mean merely aesthetically unsatisfying, as Lawrence himself might have interpreted the phrase, but fundamentally and in the deepest possible sense unsatisfying, unsatisfying to the soul, *because* of this lack of artistic integration. He fails in the artist's task of overcoming and transfiguring experience. Necessarily so, since he puts himself in an untenable position. In opposing "life" and "art", in applying, to the latter, criteria carried over (arbitrarily) from the former, he involved himself in a monstrous contradiction which could only logically have been resolved by a complete abdication of the artist and the dissolution of the mental consciousness in the raw, pulsing life of the senses.

Paradoxically, the devaluation or impoverishment of art, undertaken for the sake of "life", leads also to the impoverishment of life, since art is one of the prime creators of values whose function it is to introduce qualitative differentiations into life. Art must necessarily stand over and above what we may term man's mundane life, that is to say his mental-sensational life as it exists at its everyday level. Yet even at this level life is the product of cultural values. From this life, with its gradations of value, art takes the material for its organizations. But art does not, of course, stand above in proud isolation, a static, finished, crystalline world, and end complete, perfect and sufficient in itself. Art, although it is in a very real sense an end in itself, is nevertheless inevitably drawn down into life, into the flux of mundane living. The values which art has crystallized are absorbed back into "life", and mundane experience is enriched with new significance and meaning, given a new

qualitative intensity. This significance cannot be given to it by bad art, art corrupted by "life". Art cannot, therefore, be properly used as a medium for conveying "life". Life is what we are given, art is what we make out of what we are given; and art must not retrogressively dissolve back into primary life: it must go forward in obedience to its own centripetal laws and allow itself to be claimed by that secondary life, the distinctively human, personal, spiritual life of values.

Lawrence's view of life, his "biologism", which is a similarly retrogressive dissolution back into primary life, implies a refusal of spiritual values. It leads concurrently to the dissolution of personality and the dissolution of art. Lawrence was, of course, a considerable personality and a considerable artist, all that is valuable in his work is explained by these two facts. But his life-attitude, growing out of the compulsive personal situation of which he remained always a victim, led him to strike at the very foundations of personality and of art, and his attitude leads directly into a state of being where neither art nor personality exists.

VI THE STRANGE CASE OF W. H. AUDEN

Shut up talking, charming in the best suits to be had in town,
Lecturing on navigation while the ship is going down.

IN THE NINETEEN-THIRTIES ENGLISH LITERATURE WITNESSED A new phenomenon in the shape of a school of writers and poets who, discontented with the isolation of literature from social values and standards, attempted a reconciliation of poetry with society. At the bottom of their attitude was a retreat from the values of personality and the personal experience. For the suspect individualism" of their predecessors, which they tended to regard as a "defeatist'' retreat into the "Ivory Tower", they substituted a "social consciousness". For their pessimistic acceptance of present actuality they substituted an optimistic orientation towards the future. And for their predecessors' reliance on personal integrity supported by an appeal to literary tradition they substituted an appeal to social standards and doctrines—not so much to actually existent standards within society (although a search for a wide audience was a part of their programme) as to abstract social—revolutionary—theory.

Where poets of powerful personality, strong religious sense, and firm faith in the validity of their calling are able to oppose to the anti-poetic social values of their time the personal values drawn from their own valid existence, the poets of this new movement, whose sense of their own validity as individuals had been sapped by the prevalent anti-personal, anti-religious trend of current secular dogmas, had to search about for a seemingly valid social standpoint upon which to centre themselves for the purposes of poetic creativeness, to which they assigned a social **rather than** a **personal** value and function. It so happened that **at the time this group** of writers began to emerge they were **able to find such a** standpoint in the then growingly vigorous **body** of " revolutionary" social criticism, **and this,** in **certain cases,**

they associated with a popularized version of the principles of the new psychology.

Now it is a remarkable fact that although the farrago of beliefs of which communism is the sociological expression—that medley of notions deriving from eighteenth-century "enlightenment" and nineteenth-century evolutionism—springs directly out of the main tendency of the age and is part of the values of an ascendent material civilization, nevertheless, because of its theoretical and abstract nature, its non-embodiment within the actual institutions of society, it is able to present itself with a deceptively revolutionary appearance and to claim to provide a ground for the criticism, in the fullest sense of the word, of contemporary life. To the young poets of the early nineteen-thirties, uncertain of the intrinsic validity of their calling and unsteadily grounded in their personal experience, it offered a seductive compromise on the way to the full revolutionary integrity which is demanded of the true poet and which transcends and implicitly opposes the materialistic bourgeois principle of "civilization" from the antithetical spiritual, personal principle of "culture". By taking their stand upon a socialist criticism of society and making this central in their Me and thought they involved themselves in a fatal system of relativities arising from the fact that the socialist criticism is itself an expression of that very Zeitgeist of which the life of capitalistic society is another expression: socialism is a *bourgeois* criticism of *bourgeois* society, and indeed it reveals its nature by its appeal to the Future. Such a standpoint, however, seemed to have a fortuitous validity ten or twelve years ago. Today, now that there is no radical socialist or "progressive" criticism of the existing social order, the literary movement which identified itself with this criticism, too, has dissolved, and the Zeitgeist has found other forms in which to embody itself.

Of the poets of this movement the most interesting because the most directly susceptible to the social currents of the time is W. H. Auden. He was the first to make his mark as a poet, **and** although his work has features which sharply distinguish it from that of his contemporaries, he was from the beginning regarded as a leader and an influence. Being less lyrical than

that of either Stephen Spender or C. Day Lewis, his best-known contemporaries, his work carries a heavier burden of rational meaning, and his continual alternation between the psychological and the political points of view brings him nearer to the general mind of the time and further from the merely sectarian. And the process of disintegration noticeable in his work is coincident with the gradual disintegration and dispersal of the movement with which he was associated.

Auden reached the height of his achievement with his first two volumes, *Poems* (1930) and *The Orators* (1932). With these two books not only did he at once establish his reputation as a serious poet, but he became the centre of a cult.[1] A new star had arisen, it seemed, in the English sky. With his short verse-play *The Dance of Death* (1933), however, and *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1955), a dramatic extravaganza in comic-opera style, written in collaboration with Christopher Isherwood, it became apparent that Auden's talent was declining to the mediocre, and it began to seem as if the obscurity of the early work reflected, not mental complexity and a profound vision of society, but mental confusion. His second collection of poems, *Look, Stranger!* appeared in 1936, and confirmed the distrustful in their suspicion that Auden's tremendous reputation was an inflated one. The succession of plays and travel-books which followed did nothing to reassure them, and with his third volume of poems, *Another Time* (1940), and the long didactic poem *New Year Letter* (1941) it became clear that as a poet he had exhausted the impetus with which he began and was completely sterile.

Poems, his first and best volume of verse, is also his most individual work, and that which contains the most concretely realized vision of life, although this book itself contains disquieting signs of imaginative and technical poverty. Nevertheless, in *Poems* we have several indications of a genuinely poetic vision: a freshness of perception and a coherent attitude out of which a real and convincing world begins to take form. The language is tough and sinewy. Satire and moralism run

[1] See, for instance) a poem by Mr Charles Madge in *New Country* (1935).

through the verse, but their elements are combined and wholesome, while the landscape of industrial dereliction which is the background of the volume seems to be the result of authentic emotive observation.

Auden's preoccupations as revealed in *Poems* are curious. The book opens with a long "Charade" called *Paid on Both Sides,* which concerns a violent and meaningless family vendetta. At the start Auden's fascination with obscure conflict is brought out. This "Charade" is followed by thirty poems, in the very first of which a seemingly obscure question is asked:

> Will you turn a deaf ear
> To what they said on the shore,
> Interrogate their poises
> In their rich houses ;
>
> Of stork-legged heaven-reachers
> Of the compulsory touchers
> The sensitive amusers
> And masked amazers ?
>
> Yet wear no ruffian badge
> Nor lie behind the hedge
> Waiting with bombs of conspiracy
> In arm-pit secrecy ;
>
> Carry no talisman
> For germ or the abrupt pain
> Needing no concrete shelter
> Nor porcelain filter . . .

and so on, concluding:

> Remembering there is
> No recognized gift for this ;
> No income, no bounty,
> No promised country.
>
> But to see brave sent home
> Hermetically sealed with shame
> And cold's victorious wrestle
> With molten metal.
>
> A neutralizing peace
> And an average disgrace
> Are honour to discover
> For later other.

The language here is not only elliptical, it is also extremely private. This makes the poem at first rather puzzling, but the import seems to be a question as to whether the person addressed (probably the poet is speaking to himself) is prepared to fight in a hazardous and complicated battle, without weapons, for no very tangible reward except the honour of a later generation. This theme of conflict runs through nearly all the poems except those, mostly very obscure in meaning, whose theme is "love" and the psychological state of the individual. The conflict, the state of war, is disguised, and the poems are full of the idea of hidden feuds, spies, frontiers, conspirators:

> **Control of the passes was, he saw, the key**
> **To this new district, but who would get it ?**
> **He, the strained spy, had walked into the trap**
> **For a bogus guide, seduced with the old tricks. . . .**
>
> **(Poem XV.)**

But through the apparent confusion and the indulgence in mystification appear indications of an Enemy, or Adversary, working secretly through society. Of this "supreme Antagonist" he writes (Poem XXIX):

> **You talk to your admirers every day**
> **By silted harbours, derelict works,**
> **In strangled orchards, and the silent comb**
> **Where dogs have worried or a bird was shot.**
> **Order the ill that they attack at once :**
> **Visit the ports and, interrupting**
> **The leisurely conversation in the bar**
> **Within a stone's throw of the sunlit water,**
> **Beckon your chosen out. Summon**
> **Those handsome and diseased youngsters, those women**
> **Your solitary agents in the country parishes ;**
> **And mobilize the powerful forces latent**
> **In soils that make the farmer brutal**
> **In the infected sinus, and the eyes of stoats.**
> **Then, ready, start your rumour, soft**
> **But horrifying in its capacity to disgust**
> **Which, spreading magnified, shall come to be**
> **A polar peril, a prodigious alarm,**
> **Scattering the people, as torn-up paper**
> **Rags and utensils in a sudden gust,**
> **Sewed with immeasurable neurotic dread.**

Then the poet, abandoning the *supreme* Antagonist and turning to his *immediate* representatives, continues:

> Financier, leaving your little room
> Where the money is made but not spent,
> You'll need your typist and your boy no more ;
> The game is up for you and for the others,
> Who, thinking, pace in slippers on the lawns
> Of College Quad or Cathedral Close. . . .

We note here that the "Antagonist" talks to his "admirers" or followers among the scenery of industrial and rural dereliction, representing for Auden the outward expression of an inner disease. In league with the Antagonist are the ill, the "handsome and diseased youngsters"; and the effect of their activities is an "immeasurable neurotic dread". The Financier represents a doomed order, apparently in league with the Antagonist; and he and his kind are warned:

> It is later than you think ; nearer that day
> Far other than that distant afternoon
> Amid rustle of frocks and stamping feet
> They gave the prizes to the ruined boys.
> You cannot be away, then, no
> Not though you pack to leave within an hour,
> Escaping humming down arterial roads . . .

and their doom is:

> After some haunted migratory years
> To disintegrate on an instant in the explosion of mania
> Or lapse for ever into a classic fatigue.

Throughout the book the same psychopathological outlook is displayed. The conflict is a psychological rather than a political one, even though it seems to verge on the political. But the emphasis throughout is upon inner sickness expressed not only in outward, social disorder but in human behaviour—in invalidism, self-regard, insanity; and the remedy propounded is an inner change of the will from sickness to health: the forces of "death" must be expelled by the resurgent forces of "life". In the invocation which ends the book Auden, declaring himself "No man's enemy, forgiving all", asks:

Send to us power and light, a sovereign touch
Curing the intolerable neural itch,
The exhaustion of weaning, the liar's quinsy,
And the distortions of ingrown virginity. . . .

Publish each healer that in city lives
Or country houses at the end of drives ;
Harrow the house of the dead ; look shining at
New styles of architecture, a change of heart.

In Poem XXII, likewise, Auden begins with a vigorous description of external disorder:

Get there if you can and see the land you once were proud to own
Though the roads have almost vanished and the expresses never run :

Smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting wharves and choked canals,
Tramlines buckled, smashed trucks lying on their side across the rails. . . .

Then, after a prolonged indictment of certain middle-class types and a lament for the passing of "healers" like Lawrence, Blake and Homer Lane, the writer asks:

Have things gone too far already ? Are we done for ? Must we wait
Hearing doom's approaching footsteps regular down miles of straight. . .

Or, in friendly fireside circle, sit and listen for the crash
Meaning that the mob has realized something's up, and start to smash ;

Engine-drivers with their oil-cans, factory girls in overalls
Blowing sky-high monster stores, destroying intellectuals ?

The danger, it seems from this, is a proletarian insurrection. In order to avoid this, the middle class whom the poet is presumably addressing is urged to—

Shut up talking, charming in the best suits to be had in town,
Lecturing on navigation while the ship is going down.

Drop those priggish ways for ever, stop behaving like **a stone** :
Throw the bath-chairs right away, and learn to leave **ourselves** alone.

If we really want to live, we'd better start at once to try ;
If we don't, it doesn't matter, but we'd **better start to die.**

In this poem, therefore, besides his view of outer disorder as a symptom of inner sickness, which can be overcome by an effort of the will, the poet reveals his own situation to be that of a member of the middle classes whom he is exhorting. The position of the writer of this poem is far from that of the communist who, taking sides with the working class, exults in the anticipated overthrow of the bourgeoisie. Quite the reverse: he warns his fellows that a nightmare proletarian insurrection ("blowing sky-high monster stores, destroying intellectuals") is imminent *unless* they, the bourgeoisie, undergo something in the nature of a "change of heart". In the light of Auden's subsequent reputation as a "communist poet" it is as well to remember this.

But something other than this psychopathological outlook emerges from these poems, and that is, the *background* to this point of view. Poem III, again characteristically written in the exhortatory second person, is an address to the individual by what appears to be the Evolutionary Process or the Spirit of the Race. The individual thus addressed is an insignificant, weak figure—

> . . . the one whose part it is to lean,
> For whom it is not good to be alone.
> Laugh warmly turning shyly in the hall
> Or climb with bare knees the volcanic hill,
> Acquire that flick of wrist and after strain
> Relax in your darling's arms like a stone
> Remembering everything you can confess,
> Making the most of firelight, of hours of fuss . . .

while the race-spirit describes itself in this manner:

> But joy is mine not yours—to have come so far,
> Whose cleverest invention was lately fur ;
> Lizards my best once who took years to breed,
> Could not control the temperature of blood.
> To reach that shape for your face to assume,
> Pleasure to many and despair to some,
> I shifted ranges, lived epochs handicapped
> By climate, wars, or what the young men kept,
> Modified theories on the types of dross, *
> Altered desire and history of dress.

The individual is then admonished that he and his culture are merely transitory:

> **Think—Romans had a language in their day**
> **And ordered roads with it, but it had to die :**
> **Your culture can but leave—forgot as sure**
> **As place-names origins in favourite shire—**
> **Jottings for stories, some often-mentioned Jack,**
> **And references in letters to a private joke,**
> **Equipment rusting in unweeded lanes,**
> **Virtues still advertised on local lines . . .**

—that to refuse to change with the race-spirit's demands is to condemn himself to despairing and ineffectual isolation, that the race-spirit will "Select another form, perhaps your son". And the poem concludes, somewhat in the manner of Poem XXIX:

> **Do not imagine you can abdicate ;**
> **Before you reach the frontier you are caught;**
> **Others have tried it and will try again**
> **To finish that which they did not begin :**
> **Their fate must always be the same as yours,**
> **To suffer the loss they were afraid of, yes,**
> **Holders of one position, wrong for years.**

Here, then, is made apparent the significance which Auden ascribes to the individual—that of a transient link in an external process of continual change. It is a view which has had a considerable vogue. The morality to which it gives rise is a rather peculiar one. "Good" is harmony with the evolving Life-Force, or Spirit of History—a harmony which, translated to the social sphere, involves political revolutionism (the breaking up and liquefaction of all static patterns); while "evil" is a property of individuality as such, when it ceases to prostrate itself before the impersonal, or super-personal, demands of the more important collective and becomes isolated and self-regarding. There is nothing at all original about this: it is an outlook fully in accord with the trend of the times through rationalistic enlightenment and evolutionism with a vestigial trimming of Christianity to modern communism,[1] all of which help to

[1] —And beyond. Spengler would have nothing to say in opposition to this outlook.

form the background of Auden's mind, where Marx and Freud jostle with D. H. Lawrence, Shaw and Wells, to form that amalgam which is representative of the confused mental condition of the modern bourgeois intellectual. What is unusual about it in the present case is that here for the first time such notions should be accepted by a poet and given a pivotal position in his work, hostile as they are to everything for which poetry stands.

It is clear that with Auden we are not dealing with a strongly personal poet, projecting in his work a unique vision of experience. The negative personality shown in the weak " I " and the pronounced tendency to write in the second person, and the lack of emotional depth reflected in an absence of verbal power (compare Auden's haphazard use of dissonance with the deadly grimness of effect achieved by Wilfred Owen's use of this device), reveal him to be a "social" rather than a personal poet, and this is confirmed by his selection of subject and his attitude towards individuality. Auden's concern throughout is never with his personal experience; he does not deliberately approach life *through* his personal experience, but, leaving his own individuality on one side, he attempts to deal immediately with the larger life *outside* the individual. Throughout his work he is concerned to express a vision of society.

Auden's obsession with class, which makes him the bourgeois poet *par excellence* is a further consequence of his failure of personality. Unlike certain other poets of middle-class origin, he has not the personal power that would enable him to rise beyond and above class. A man of society, he is immersed in his social situation. Although he deeply distrusts the values of his class, he remains tied to it. His weakness as a poet derives from his lack of a sense of inner validity, that lack which expresses itself negatively in exhortation, satire and moralism. He cannot allow himself to be fully and unequivocally a poet, because, with an uneasy social conscience, he believes that the foundations of his social life as a member of the privileged classes are false, and this seems to him, as a social man, to invalidate the foundations of his experience. This self-distrust is supported by his view of the individual's subordination to the

collective, whether as biological organism or as political unit. Auden's weakness in this respect may be brought out by a comparison with his contemporary and friend, Louis MacNeice, a poet whose social situation is akin to Auden's, and whose work definitely reveals his awareness of the fact, but who is able, out of a deeper rootedness in personal life, to accept his situation, with as full a knowledge as Auden of its implications, and having accepted it, to go on writing integrally, centring himself within his personal experience and allowing his class-situation to fall into place at the periphery of his life and work. His poetry, for this reason, gains tremendously in integrality and concreteness of impact. The predominance of abstract, unpoetic elements found in Auden is avoided and the effect is one of greater honesty and integrity as well as greater assurance and power.

After *Poems* came *The Orators,* a work in which Auden clarifies his point of view. "What do you think", he asks in the opening "Address for a Prize Day", "about England, this country of ours where nobody is well?" And there follows a picture of some of the neurotic types, the introverts and the self-absorbed, associated with the "enemy", against whom Auden opposes the healthy and the sane. The question arises, however, of *who* are the neurotic and who are the healthy? How can the healthy distinguish themselves from the neurotic, from what source do they draw their health, how may they preserve themselves from the attacks of the "enemy", the dangers to which the neurotic have succumbed? and so on. Book II of *The Orators,* "Journal of an Airman", is a tortuous and fragmentary attempt, as it were, to find answers to these questions. The Airman represents an aloof, independent point of view which is at war with the "enemy". This "enemy" is never clearly defined, although it is apparently identifiable with conservative, middle-class ideas and ideals, while the Airman represents a viewpoint, not from another class, but from *within* the same class, which, however, has a quality of detachment from class-values. The Airman has no social affiliations except his allegiance to a group of friends who, like himself, live in the midst of the middle class, but do not share the

middle-class outlook. On the other hand, they are subject to enemy attack and corruption of their integrity from enemy infiltration. The Airman and his friends wage a hidden, ambiguous war on the "enemy" by means of practical jokes, and the Airman himself is engaged on planning a final, increasingly fantastic and insane *coup d'dtat.* (There is nothing strikingly "sane" about the Airman, incidentally.) At the close of the Journal, however, the Airman suddenly discovers that his whole approach has been mistaken, "progressively more and more complicated, instead of finally simple". The power of the enemy, he discovers, is "a function of our resistance", and the only way to destroy it is "self-destruction, the sacrifice of all resistance, reducing him to the state of a man trying to walk on a frictionless surface". "Conquest", he continues, "can only proceed by absorption of, i.e. infection by, the conquered." And the Journal ends with a cryptic note signifying the Airman's self-destruction.

Essentially, *The Orators* is an attempt to formulate or to express a private mythology which will reconcile the poet's hostility to middle-class society with his actual position as a member of it—a member who has neither the personal power to rise above the category of class nor the will to leave his own class and share the life of another. The popularity of Auden's work is undoubtedly due to this expression of this particular dilemma of the bourgeois intellectual. The reconciliation is effected through the postulation of a private community of friends existing in defiance of the larger social class to which they belong. Viewing society with reference to this private community, Auden is able to write with force and concreteness, since there is an accepted field of experience which he can exploit for poetic purposes. The "Six Odes" which conclude the volume represent some of his best work in verse; but it is work which, because of its limited and private background, is exceedingly parochial.

The contradictions of such an attitude—such as may be seen through the prevailing air of privacy and obscurity—are obvious enough. A radical criticism of middle-class manners and morals is not possible from a small group of persons within middle-class

society, sharing its life and opposing to it nothing stronger or more generally effective than a private fantasy. The obscurity of *The Orators,* its semi-private nature, its absence of unity and coherence, all point to this central confusion—central, because it is the *theme* of the book. A radical criticism of middle-class society and the individuals who compose it can only originate from a point of view which is outside that society: if it is a merely social criticism, then it must originate from the viewpoint of another class. If, however, it is to be both individual and social, it must be a vertical or religious criticism which is at once a criticism of all classes within society and of all individuals within each class, and this involves a self-criticism on the part of the critics themselves: they are under the common judgment. *The Orators* signally fails in its attempt to establish a valid point of view for the criticism of the way of life of a society. Auden's realization of this failure is perhaps signified by the suicide of the Airman. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that Auden's success so far has been conditional upon his maintaining such a critical attitude as the Airman represents towards the society in which he is involved. From this point of view, equivocal as it undoubtedly is, Auden has been able to address the bourgeoisie as from an independent, critical position, and thus to fuse the elements of didacticism and satire within his work and present them concretely through imagery drawn from particular private experience. His work to date therefore is characterized by its primarily psychopathological basis, its theme of conflict, its satirical-moral-exhortatory character, its private or parochial atmosphere, and its comparative particularity and concreteness of image and epithet, drawn from a realized social background. All these features, however, are derivatives of the central presupposition of the existence of such a private community as that prescribed in *The Orators,* with its common background, private understandings, shared mythology. With the disappearance or dissolution of such a private group and/or the realization of its inadequacy as a genuine ground for social criticism, these features may be expected to disappear. In fact, there is a sharp cleavage in Auden's work between the early writing based on the assump-

tion of the existence of the private group and the later writing which attempts to relate itself to society at large.

Auden, as we have seen, is not a poet of the personal experience. His theme is society. Accordingly while, within the boundaries of the field of experience made available by the postulation of the existence of the private group, he is able to be precise and particular at the price of obscurity, nevertheless, when he leaves this parochial viewpoint for a relationship with the larger society, he becomes lucid only at the cost of vagueness, diffusion and generalization. After the obvious contradictions and insufficiencies of *The Orators* he is still faced with the task of finding a tenable social attitude from which a criticism of middle-class society shall be possible. And in his next work, *The Dance of Death,* he finds this through a jettisoning of the psychopathological approach in favour of a purely external political one.

Auden's history as a writer is in one aspect that of a persistent but foredoomed attempt to effect some reconciliation between the outward or political and the inward or psychological aspects of his divided vision.[1] If, as the early writings assume, social disorder is the effect of inner neurosis, cannot a social transformation be effected through an inward change? This would mean an inward change on the part of individuals, but as Auden sees individuals as subordinate to the collective, it is not apparent from where they are to draw the spiritual energy for such an inner change. Auden's confusion here is paralleled by his confusion about "love". He is inclined to see in "love" the cure for human ills, yet by his uncritical accept-

[1] A contribution of Auden's to the symposium *Christianity and the Social Revolution,* published in 1935 (Gollancz, London), opens characteristically with a statement of this fundamental dichotomy : " Man is an organism with certain desires existing in an environment which fails to satisfy them fully. His theories about the universe are attempts, whether religious, scientific, philosophical or political, to explain or overcome this tension. If we regard the environment as static, then the problem is one of modifying our desires ; if we take the organism as static, one of modifying our environment. Religion and psychology begin with the first; science and politics with the second." The article makes no attempt at a resolution of this dichotomy, nor does Auden declare decisively in it either for one or for the other of the two opposed viewpoints.

ance of evolutionism is led to identify love in some manner with the biological life-force, thereby making it irrelevant as ethical, spiritual, individual power: "love" for Auden therefore remains a mere word, with nothing solid behind it.

In *The Orators,* the psychopathological outlook is maintained only by associating it with the private group. It cannot apply to bourgeois society as a whole. With the passing away of the immature, irresponsible attitude to life represented by the group, this outlook has to be abandoned. In his next work, *The Dance of Death,* we find Auden passing judgment on the middle class as a whole, from the exterior point of view of—the working class! It is now the entire middle class that Auden condemns—and condemns not only psychologically but politically, seeing their psychoneurotic behaviour as a consequence of their political situation. The Announcer opens the play with the statement: "We present to you this evening a picture of the decline of a class, of how its members dream of a new life, but secretly desire the old, for there is death inside them." Death is presented as a Dancer who leads the middle class from one futility to another in their efforts to escape from their spiritual impasse, until in his last desperate effort to "reach the very heart of Reality" he dies, and the proceedings are wound up with the apparition of Karl Marx as *deus ex machina* and the invasion of the stage by players from the auditorium, representing the proletariat, the Chorus singing:

> O Mr Marx, you've gathered
> All the material facts
> You know the economic
> Reasons for our acts.

Here, then, we have a decisive variance from the point of view represented in *The Orators.* An extremely parochial and obscure psychopathological criticism is replaced by an extremely oversimplified and generalized social criticism, expressed in a verse which is lucid and straightforward to the point of insipidity. The only point in common between the two, in fact, is a fundamental puerility.

In *The Dog Beneath the Skin* it is clear that the implied movement towards alignment with the working class to be seen in

The Dance of Death has been purely momentary and whimsical. Auden is incapable of moving outside the middle class, and in this second play the incoherencies and equivocations of his attitude to society are fully revealed. Like his first play, it is written in Revue style. The action, which is serio-comic, is sandwiched between long moralistic choruses. It is a series of episodes rather than a drama, each caricaturing some hypothetical aspect of a decadent bourgeois society. The play itself may be interpreted as a middle-class allegory. Francis, heir to the estate of Pressan Ambo, has disappeared some years prior to the opening of the action, and every year the village of Pressan send a young man to look for him, the reward of a successful quest being the hand of Francis's sister, Miss Iris Crewe of Honeypot Hall. Each searcher so fax has failed to return, and when the play opens the village have gathered to send off a new adventurer. A young man named Alan Norman (or Normal?) is chosen, and he sets off accompanied by a dog who has been living for some time among the villagers, but who is really Francis in disguise. They go through numerous adventures and finally, Francis discovering himself, return to Pressan to find the village gone fascist, with the young men in uniform, led by the vicar, while Iris Crewe is about to marry a munitions-maker. They are dismayed at the return of Francis, who denounces them, having known them for years from a "dog's-eye view" and found them "obscene, cruel, hypocritical, mean, vulgar"; "As a dog I learnt with what a mixture of fear, bullying, and condescending kindness you treat those whom you consider your inferiors, but on whom you are dependent for your pleasures. It's an awful shock to start seeing people from underneath." He continues: "Well, I am going to be a unit in the army of the other side." As he turns to go, Alan cries: "Francis! I'm coming with you!" Others join them and they leave. The Chorus speaks an Epilogue, requesting "Love" to—

> Enter and suffer
> Within the quarrel
> Be most at home,
> Among the sterile prove
> Your vigours, love . . ,

and exhorting the audience to—

Choose therefore that you may recover : both your charity and your place
Determining not this that we have lately witnessed : but another country
Where grace may grow outward and be given praise
Beauty and virtue be vivid there.

The final words of the play are a socialist slogan: "To each his need: from each his power."

What we have here, then, is a reversion to Auden's original psychologism, mixed with an unhappy smattering of the political. On the one hand there is the indication that Francis and Alan are about to join the "other side". But of what the "other side" is we are given the barest possible indication. It makes no appearance in the play, nor is its presence implicit in the characters of the two principal protagonists. On the other hand, the moralistic homilies of the Choruses would seem to assume the existence, not of two sides, but of humanity in general. In one of them the audience is exhorted to "Repent. Unite. Act." Francis and Alan are "decent" young men of the bourgeois class untainted by the corruption they see around themselves, their peregrinations the occasion for a display of a caricaturized version of the more blatant corruptions of modern (and incidentally mainly foreign) society. But against this corruption there is opposed no countermanding power, not even Karl Marx and the proletariat. There is only the normal, liberal "decentness" of Alan and Francis, from what source derived it is impossible to guess. There is no dramatic conflict in these "heroes", no inner struggle in which they are to be seen embodying the exhortations of the Chorus to "Repent, unite, act". They drift innocently through the scenes of vice, crime and insanity as onlookers, while all the sickness and disorder is externalized around them in the conduct of other two-dimensional puppet figures who are in any case past redemption. The whole thing is reminiscent of a performance of *Where the Rainbow Ends*—if this could be enacted against a background provided out of a book of Low's Cartoons. As in *The Dance of Death,* the puerility of Auden's interpreta-

tion of life is brought out with appalling clarity, divested of the obscurities which wrapped it up in the earlier books. In these two plays the private world of *Poems* and *The Orators* has been liquidated, indeed, only to reveal the ludicrously over-simplified outline of an unreal "public" world, which is indeed far more fantastic as a picture of actuality than anything in the earlier work, where the world depicted was at any rate the result of authentic personal observation. It may be seen from this how a premature attempt to be "public" and "social" defeats its own ends. The retreat from personal experience does not lead a writer into contact with the outer world of public events, which he may erroneously regard as more important than his own personal experience. It leads him into a private fantasy, the more fantastic as it purports to be objective and real. All Auden's work, founded on distrust of personality and the personal experience, is an attempted escape from personality into a real, objective social world, which in truth has no existence. As a result, instead of an increasing solidity founded upon an enlarging grasp of reality his work shows increasing tenuousness and fantasy: instead of a realization of experience it reveals a dissipation through poetic disintegration.

Evidence of this disintegration is already apparent in his second collection of poems, *Look, Stranger!* published in 1936. Like his two plays in their relation to *The Orators,* this volume, compared with the *Poems,* shows an increase of clarity with a diminution of poetic intensity. These poems are no longer exhortatory but ruminative. Having forfeited his critical position in relation to bourgeois society, Auden no longer sees life in terms of conflict, and as a satirist he has been disarmed by this fact. The entire scene has shifted from the landscape of the early poems into a generalized landscape of world-history. Having moved further still from his concrete experience of life, Auden writes now as an observer rather than as a participator, and the poems are curiously external amalgamations of description, commentary, moralizing, reflection. Leaving behind his private world of group-life with its public-school background and its fantasies of conflict, he has entered an unreal and vapid public world in which the particular is in every respect over-

shadowed by the blurred outlines of the general. Where, in the "Six Odes", for example, the writing is extremely private and local, with its personal references to the poet's friends, alluded to by their Christian names, its account of a school-team's victory in a football match, listing the names of the members of the teams, with its private dedications and the rest, now, in the poems in this book, he moves with one step from the parochial to the universal, but a universal which, since it is not brought into focus through the particular, is utterly unreal. Instead of writing, as previously, of "Wystan, Stephen, Christopher, all of you", he writes in the general person of Man,[1] and instead of his school football team he writes of the history of the race, of civilization. The poems, completely devoid of poetic concentration, are full of abstract, prosy theorizing:

And out of the turf the bones of war continue ;
" Know then, cousin, the major cause of our collapse
Was a distortion in the human plastic by luxury produced,

Never higher than in our time were the vital advantages ;
To matter entire, to the unbounded vigours of the instrument,
To all logical precision we were the rejoicing heirs.

But pompous, we assumed their power to be our own,
Believed machines to be our hearts' spontaneous fruit,
Taking our premises as shoppers take a tram.

While the disciplined love which alone could have employed these
engines
Seemed far too difficult and dull, and when hatred promised
A more immediate dividend, all of us hated. . . . "

All that can be said of such verse as this, where the thought could more appropriately be put in prose, is simply that it is redundant.

The technical qualities of the poems reflect the generalized quality of the mind behind them. The rugged individuality of the early poems gives place to a smooth mechanical dexterity.

[1] There is a strained attempt to assert private group-relationship, in some of the poems, with literary forebears ; *vide* the chummy references to " Wilfred " (Wilfred Owen) and " Kathy " (Katherine Mansfield) in Poem XVII.

The use of conventional and rigid verse-forms as moulds into which to pour a poetically undisciplined content of observation and reflection reveals the uncertainty of the impulse behind the verse. In place of the concrete fusion of thought and image in certain of the *Poems* we now have the repeated employment of the conceit—the *phrase* instead of the single word. But the most noticeable difference in these poems from the early work is the pervading atmosphere of passivity, something quite different from the brisk satirical aggressiveness of the *Poems,* a passivity which is shown in the lax, weary-wandering form and the enervated rhythm. The feeble beginnings of some of these poems reveal the poet's uncertain starting-point for his ruminations:

> Out on the lawn I lie in bed,
> Vega conspicuous overhead
>   In the windless nights of June ;
> Forests of green have done complete
> The day's activity ; my feet
>   Point to the rising moon.

There seems no reason why such tedious and mechanical writing should not go on for ever—in this case it continues for sixteen tireless stanzas. Poem XVII, which drags itself out over five pages, begins similarly with: "Here on the cropped grass of the narrow ridge I stand"; Poem X with: "Now from my window-sill I watch the night", and so on. There can be no feebler way of beginning a poem than this, no more obvious sign that, from the start, the poet is "manufacturing" but has nothing worth-while to communicate. With the disappearance of the private "enemy" myth, and with the generalized attempt at social comprehension, the effect is of a mournful, empty loneliness. The prevailing tone of the poems is vaguely elegiac, as of one mourning over the fate of humanity, although it is a mourning which has no depth or power.

Auden's subsequent history is one of continued deterioration. But this deterioration has its relationship to the political processes at work in society, and with the gradually altering position of the radical intelligenzia with whom Auden had affiliations. From *Poems* to *Look, Stranger!* Auden's history is one of

gradually diminishing hostility to the bourgeois social order, reflecting his changing relationship with his society, and expressed in the growing impoverishment of his work, which as we have seen is dependent upon the possibility of a radically critical point of view within society. *The Dog Beneath the Skin* may be regarded as the last work of Auden to be in any way *critical.* After it the process of inner dissolution becomes more rapid and more marked. And this reflects the dissolution of all radical critical opinion within society, in the face of world events.

Auden's acute sensitivity to the motions of the Zeitgeist has already been remarked upon. *The Dance of Death,* besides revealing Auden's passage from a concern with the small group to a concern with the larger society, also reflects the emergence at about the time it was written of a distinctively "Left" literary movement in Britain with strong affiliations to the "progressive" elements within middle-class society. These elements were at least strong enough to provide support for the West-end presentation of Auden's plays, and indeed, all through his career up to the present Auden has had a certain public whose basic assumptions about life and society he has been able to share, and whose dilemmas, fears and hopes he has been able to project in his work. With the disappearance of the subversive elements from his work after *The Dog Beneath the Skin,* there seem to have been no impediments to the acceptance of this "revolutionary" writer into the good graces of the bourgeois literary world, and Auden's acceptance, in 1936, of the King's Medal for Poetry, and the choice by the Book Society, in the following year, of his *Letters from Iceland* (written in conjunction with Louis MacNeice), seem to have indicated a certain lowering of barriers, a welcoming of the strayed sheep back into the fold. By 1937 the revolutionary or progressive sections of the middle class had undergone a certain modification of their "revolutionary" attitude, coincident with the rise of foreign fascism; domestic anti-capitalism became transmuted into international anti-fascism, and this resulted in an alignment of the "progressive" forces in British society with elements which previously would have been shunned and

sharply criticized as "reactionary", A radical, internal social criticism, in other words, virtually ceased to exist. Democratic bourgeois society itself became the common ground for a criticism of external evils. This situation was reflected in Auden's work. No longer critical of bourgeois society, he accepted the current alignment and already, in *Spain* (1937), is to be found expressing the typical view of the Spanish Civil War as the centre and focus of the human struggle for the "really better world". The conflict within bourgeois society has been externalized. There is no longer any ground or need for internal criticism. The struggle has been conveniently transferred to the Spanish battlefield, where, in Auden's words, "Our fever's menacing shapes are precise and alive". There must be "The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder" [1]—not, of course, of other human beings so much as of "our fever's menacing shapes" which seem, somehow, in the processes of history, surprisingly to have assumed human form. The time is urgent, for "time is short and History to the defeated May say Alas but cannot help or pardon". In such a manner as this Auden is enabled not only to reconcile himself to the society of which he is a member and accept its values but to fuse together the disparate components of his split vision. The psychological and the political are now seen to be two aspects of the one reality. Our (psychological) inner disease and evil has risen up to confront us in the personification of foreign fascism, to be exorcised (politically) with the help of a sufficiency of direct physical violence. It is not quite clear where "love" comes into this—perhaps it will arrive "to-morrow", together with "the poets exploding like bombs" and "the winter of perfect communion". For in this poem Auden splits life up into three air-tight compartments: "Yesterday"—the bustling world of the navigators, the theological feuds in the taverns, the classic lecture on the origin of Mankind. "To-morrow"—the rediscovery of romantic love, the hour of the pageant-master and the musician, the bicycle-races through the suburbs on summer evenings. But "Today"—the struggle.

This pattern of thought is even more comprehensively dis-

[1] Later changed to " the fact of murder ".

played in Auden's verse contributions to *Journey to a War,* a travel-book about war-time China published in 1939. In the long verse "Commentary" which concludes the book, Auden supplies the Chinese struggle against Japan with a whole justifying background of evolution and world history, seeing it as—

> . . . one sector and movement of the general war
> Between the dead and the unborn, the Real and the Pretended.

In this manner, political happenings in the outer world are utilized for the projection of the "social" individual's private fantasy. Irresponsibility could hardly reach an absurder, more reckless level—in the name of social responsibility.

In such wise has Auden, the social poet and at first the subversive critic of bourgeois society, come to a point of reconciliation with that society to which all along he has really belonged. But in doing so he has cut the ground from under his own feet. In *Poems* he had a theme—social criticism of a radical nature from a private point of view. In *Look, Stranger !,* deprived of this theme, he wrote mournfully optimistic elegies on the theme of Mankind. But these elegies, continued in *Spain* and *Journey to a War,* become more fantastic and self-contradictory as the bases of Auden humanistic attitude are gradually dissolved by the processes of history, culminating in the Second World War. Auden, the social poet, is deprived of a theme. And there comes about the eclectic search for "subjects" which is discernible in *Another Time* (1940) and the retreat into the private pseudo-mysticism of *New Year Letter* (1941).

The first sign of literal disintegration in Auden's poetry took the form of a fissure between the solemn and the farcical elements in his work. This is already to be seen in the disparity between the Choruses and the text of *The Dog Beneath the Skin.* In the early poems, as we know, seriousness and satire combined. But as Auden developed into the poet of the pontifical solemnity of *Look, Stranger!* that part of his talent which was displaced by the requirements of his new-found solemnity separated itself from the main stream of his writing and grew up independently and in a distorted form. An ominous interest in "light verse" was apparent as early as

1955 when Auden helped to edit an anthology called *The Poet's Tongue,* a work which was an endeavour to widen the boundaries of poetry to include nonsense rhymes, parodies and jokes. Later he began to write verse which was self-consciously "light" in character. And in 1937 he edited *The Oxford Book of Light Verse.* He became, in other words, a "light" verse specialist or expert. Now the whole point and charm of the humorous in life and in poetry lies in its occasional nature. It lights up momentarily within a context of seriousness and flickers out again leaving us diverted and refreshed. It is a part of life, and though a welcome and necessary part it is nevertheless only a small one. To separate this part, to isolate, emphasize and collect it, is therefore at once an absurd and a humourless procedure and one which is totally destructive of its effectiveness and its charm. *Another Time* has an entire section devoted to "Lighter Poems", the other divisions being "People and Places" and "Occasional Poems". This inner dividedness speaks for itself. The poems bear further evidence of dissolution in their own structure. Although a practised craftsman, Auden has still not succeeded in forging for himself an unmistakably personal style, in manifesting that quality of inner coherence which runs through the work of every genuine poet and stamps his work with his unmistakable and inimitable identity. In fact, his style here is less his own than in the earlier work. Throughout his career Auden has shown an imitativeness verging on plagiarism. In the *Poems* it is the impress of Owen that predominates, with those of Eliot, Riding and Graves—forgivable enough in a young poet. In *Look, Stranger!* the insipid neutral verse is sometimes twisted into an imitation of the manner of W. B. Yeats—Poem XXIV about "the six beggared cripples" being a particularly blatant imitation of Yeats's "Beggar to Beggar Cried". And in this third volume we find him writing in a mannered, "poetical" style which is flagrantly modelled upon the English translations of Rilke which we have had during the last ten years. A further stage in objectification is marked by the quest for subjects, the writing of poems *about* this, that and the other place, person or event. With the disappearance of the critical standpoint from

which in the early poems he satirized the world of bourgeois behaviour Auden has become completely acclimatized to the bourgeois world. Most depressing perhaps of all the signs of decadence in the book are the "Four Cabaret Songs for Miss Hedli Anderson". Here Auden writes in a manner indistinguishable from that of any capable American manufacturer of cabaret "hits":

> Some say that Love's a little boy
> And some say he's a bird,
> Some say he makes the world go round
> And some say that's absurd :
> But when I asked the man next door
> Who looked as if he knew,
> His wife was very cross indeed
> And said it wouldn't do. . . .

Very certainly, from one who has been widely acclaimed as the foremost English poet of his generation, this sort of thing will never, never do.

There is one very curious feature to be discerned in many of the poems in this book—and here the collection makes more pronounced a tendency to be seen in Auden's work from the first. Auden's writing is in a sense the result of an effort to *escape* from the personal. Is it, then, merely accidental that It should possess a disturbing undercurrent of nightmare and of weakness and weeping? In *Another Time* there is a deluge of weak, easy tears. From the fourth poem in the book, with its "storm of tears shed in the corner", there is an intermittent drizzle of lachrymose phrases.[1] One could willingly forgive this tearfulness if it were accepted by the poet and given undisguised and courageous expression—if it were overcome by the poetic imagination. But this is not the case. Explicitly Auden is the hopeful herald of a new age of the brotherhood of man; his misery is concealed, but nevertheless its dreary influence pervades his writing.

New Year Letter shows Auden's final abdication as a poet.

[1] e.g. O stand, stand at the window As the tears scald and start. . . . And his tears came tumbling down. . . . I'll stand on the pavement with tears rolling down. . . . Our tears well from a love We have never outgrown, etc. etc.

The moralist who has all along been predominant in his work now comes forward undisguised while the poet is set to work merely to give expression to his not very interesting utterances, Written in slapdash octosyllabic couplets, the work is entirely general and abstract, the poverty of imagery expressing the paucity of its experiential background. The form of the book reveals the disunity of the impulse behind it: a verse Letter of sixty-two pages, with twenty-five additional pages of sonnets, has a burden of eighty-one pages of notes and quotations. One example of Auden's method of working must suffice. Lines 100 to 110 of the Letter express a reflection on great men being "hunted out of life" by poverty, ugliness or ill-health. Turning to the Notes we find the source of this idea in a quotation from Kierkegaard (1). In other words, Auden thinks it necessary to versify at second-hand a thought which has already been adequately expressed by its originator. But this is not all. Besides making this thought the burden of several lines in the Letter, Auden makes it the theme of two distinct Sonnets—numbers X and XI—in the sequence entitled "The Quest" at the end of the book. Poetic poverty could hardly express itself more plainly than this. An examination of the ideas in this Letter, with its references to authors as multifarious as Spinoza, Boethius, Maritain, Pascal, Blake, Dante, Voltaire, Nietzsche and many others, merely suggests the reflection that Auden, in America, unable or unwilling to follow his "social" course to its conclusion and hymn the praises of the Allied War Effort in its heroic struggle for freedom, democracy and humanity, has retired into himself in order to do some belated reading.

A certain idea of and attitude towards Time is implicit in the materialistic theories of progress that have for some decades dominated popular thought. The wrenching of man away from his religious centre and his consequent movement upon the periphery of being which finds expression in a growing concern with outer things—the organization and utilization of Life—has been a severing of connections with eternity and a plunge into the disintegral stream of Time. But disconnected from eternity, Time, the present moment, becomes unreal. Life

itself becomes abstract and colourless. To compensate for the poverty of the present, men turn to the Future, thrusting the meaning and significance which is inherent in the present moment, and only there, into an impossible phantasmal state which is outside existence altogether. They then direct their hopes, activities and thoughts towards this mirage which continually recedes with their efforts to attain it. The Future being thus set up as an end or goal, Time is deified, and real life is sacrificed to this bloodless abstraction. Life is distorted, twisted out of shape, dissolved and dispersed as it is taken hold of by the abstract stream of a disintegral Time in its progress to an illusory Future.

In Auden there is a constant preoccupation with Time and Change. To the classical mind, time and change are the great enemies of life; to Auden, they are the friends, the gods whom he perpetually apostrophizes. Such a view of Time is of course implicit in all evolutionary theories and secular ideas of the Millennium.

But what is its effect on art? Poetry is concerned with the personal experience, and the personal experience is located in the *Now.* Poetry attempts the maximum realization and concretization in its presentation of the immediate experience. It presumes an anchoring, a stabilizing of the *Now,* of the successive *Nows* in which experience presents itself. But the attitude which removes the emphasis from the concreteness of the present in order to place it upon the abstract future means a diminution of the impact of the *Now,* means the dissolution of present experience into the generalized stream of life-in-general. It means abstractness and generalization, failure to realize experience, loss of vitality, disintegration and ultimate sterility. So it is with the poetry of W. H. Auden. Morbidly sensitive to the Zeitgeist, oriented towards an entirely fictitious Future, Auden has been caught along with the flow of events, the real poetic integrity he had to begin with dispersed, his moral standpoint confused and obliterated, his meaning, both as a poet and as a focus of thought and feeling for his time, rendered merely negative and symptomatic. After hardly more than a decade of activity he has already become a period-piece,

his works as out of date as last month's newspapers. "Time the refreshing river" has served him as it serves all its devotees. Many poets unconsciously write their own epitaphs. Auden himself wrote his when, in "A Communist to Others", he said, addressing (as usual) the bourgeoisie:

> **The future kissed you, called you king,**
> **Did she ? Deceiver !**
> **She's not in love with you at all,**
> **No feat of yours can make her fall,**
> **She will not answer to your call**
> **Like your retriever.**

APPENDIX "THE PERSONAL HERESY"

THIS WOULD SEEM AN APPROPRIATE PLACE FOR MAKING SOME comments on a book with the title of *The Personal Heresy.*[1] In his contributions to this volume Mr C. S. Lewis sets out to castigate the assumption that poetry is the "expression of personality", that through literature the reader is enabled to come into contact with the writers' personalities.

> "Poetry is widely believed to be the 'expression of personality': the end which we are supposed to pursue in reading it is a certain contact with the poet's soul; and 'Life' and 'Works' are simply two diverse expressions of this single quiddity. . . . Even dramatic poetry is tacitly assumed to be the expression of the poet's personality.
>
> ". . . In this paper I shall maintain that when we read poetry as poetry should be read, we have before us no representation which claims to be the poet, and frequently no representation of a *man,* a *character,* or a *personality* at all.
>
> ". . . A poet does what no one else can do . . . but he does not express his personality. His own personality is his starting-point, and his limitation. ... If he remains at his starting-point he is no poet: as long as he is (like the rest of us) a mere personality, all is still to do. It is his business, starting from his own mode of consciousness, whatever that may happen to be, to find that arrangement of public experiences, embodied in words, which will admit him (and incidentally us) to a new mode of consciousness. He proceeds partly by instinct, partly by following the tradition of his predecessors, but very largely by the method of triad and error; and the result, when it comes, is for him, no less than

[1] *The Personal Heresy: A Controversy.* By E. M. W. Tillyard and C. S. Lewis (Oxford University Press, 1959).

> for us, an acquisition, a voyage beyond the limits of his personal point of view, an annihilation of his own particular psychology rather than its assertion."

With this I find it difficult to disagree. We do not come into contact with the poet's personality when we read his poems any more than we come into contact with God when we contemplate His universe. But then, do we contact it any the less? The analogy seems to me a permissible one. God remains invisible and we perceive His creation, which is His creation and not His expression or embodiment. And in the same way when we read a poem we enter the poet's projected and stylized world of experiences and perceptions; his creation, and not his expression or embodiment. But we are surely entitled to see the imprint of the poet's personality—the organizing noumenon behind the phenomenal representation of the poem—within his work, stamping it with his unique image, no less than we see the image of God imprinted upon the divine creation.[1]

With this proviso we may accept Mr Lewis's proposition. But further on in the book he makes a change of ground which rouses our suspicions:

> "But there is yet another way in which the Personal Heresy offends against personality. ... I am referring to the growth of what may be called Poetolatry. Some time ago Matthew Arnold prophesied that poetry would come to replace religion; and the personal heretics have made this true in a sense which he probably did not foresee. Poetry has, naturally enough, not yet attempted the salvation of souls or the enlightenment of the understanding; but the cult of poetry is taking on some secondary religious characteristics—notably the worship of saints and the traffic in relics. Every teacher of English has had pupils to whom the study of literature

[1] V*ide,* e.g., W. R. Inge : "... I sometimes think that the analogy of a poet and his work—say Shakespeare and his plays—is the most helpful in forming an idea of the relation of God to the world " *(God and the Astronomers).*

> principally meant a series of acts of devotion to various dead men who wrote poetry. We have biographies of Keats and even (I believe) of D. H. Lawrence which are almost exercises in hagiography. We have even had such tangled trinities as 'Christ, Shakespeare, and Keats' proposed to us."

It will be seen how at this point an issue which is at bottom one of morality is substituted for one of critical theory. The matter raised here really has no bearing upon the previous discussion of personality in poetry. It has become a question of personality in life. The question whether, as a man, a poet is or is not a fitting object for veneration is a matter, one would think, which depended upon the personal qualities of the particular poet in question as a human being, and not on his mere existence as a poet. That Mr Lewis has a moral axe to grind seems clear from a subsequent paragraph where he speaks of the error of entertaining personal emotions towards dead poets which might more properly be directed towards living men and women. Morally, this sentiment is irreproachable: but I cannot see that it has much to do with the nature of poetry.

However, the relevance of such a moralistic point of view becomes clearer later on, when we perceive that it is one side of Mr Lewis's view of poetry, the other side being its technical aspect. For him, a poem is a dual entity: it falls naturally into two parts, one being the thing said, the other being the manner of saying it. The difference between form and content, for Mr Lewis, is parallel to the difference between technique and personality.

> "The reverence for 'great poets' [continues Mr Lewis] . . . is natural in periods when the art of poetry attracts great men. Every art, however, has its ups and downs. The schoolmaster was a slave in Rome and a potentate in Victorian England; the prostitute, an abject in the eighteenth century, was sometimes honoured in ancient Greece; the actor's profession in the last years of paganism reached depths from which it took centuries to recover. Similarly there are periods when poetry falls into inferior hands. Its practitioners, using their skill for trivial, perverse, or merely

> imbecile purposes, may nevertheless possess that skill in a high degree—may be 'greatly poetical'. There is then a danger that they will claim and enjoy that reverence and authority which are due only to great men using poetry."

Here, of course, Mr Lewis is still speaking as a moralist. (Incidentally, his comparison of poets with pedagogues, prostitutes and actors is singularly unconvincing. Why not with philosophers, musicians or sculptors? And then how would one distinguish the great man who *used* philosophy or music or sculpture from him who was merely "greatly philosophical", etc.?) However, it is plain enough that Mr Lewis separates personality from technique, that he regards the poet as a technician who may at times fill his verse-form with "good" content or "bad". And this separation of faculties is continued in his ensuing statements:

> ". . . But our answer to Naturalism is more than a plea of 'Not proven'. The rude, but inevitable, retort to Wordsworth's definition [of a poet] is 'go and look at a few poets'. Courtesy to our contemporaries must not forbid us to point out that a poet, an admitted and unmistakable poet, is sometimes (in certain periods, often) a man inferior to the majority in 'tenderness', 'enthusiasm', and 'knowledge of human nature'—not to speak of information, common-sense, fortitude and courtesy. The 'Dirty Twenties' of our own century produced poems which succeeded in communicating moods of boredom and nausea that have only an infinitesimal place in the life of a corrected and full-grown man. That they were poems, the fact of communication and the means by which it was effected, are, I take it, sufficient proof. But the experience communicated was certainly not that of spiritual supermen; if it truly reflected the personality of the poets, then the poets differed from the mass, if at all, only by defect."

Passing over the possibly significant antithesis here of "poetolatry", it is enough for the moment to comment on the confusion which Mr Lewis shows between personality and

experience. By stating that "the experience communicated was certainly not that of spiritual supermen" Mr Lewis implies that the person who happens to be a poet is responsible for choosing his own experience, which a moment's reflection will tell him is pretty silly. Human life presents us with a very limited choice as to our environment, and our moods and emotions themselves, which are to a large extent called forth by our reaction to our environment, are not altogether within our own control—though our attitude towards them is. But the moralist does not, or will not, understand that the presentation, shall we say, of disgust, or of squalor, in poetic terms is always a triumph of the poet's mind over the experience of disgust or squalor, and not merely an expression of them.

As a moralist, then, Mr Lewis is concerned with one aspect of the poem—the content, or the thing said. And to this he applies a moralistic criterion. It is not surprising, then, that, left with the other aspect of the poem on his hands, he reverts to an over-concern with "technique":

> " . . . In the first place, I believe poetry to be an art or skill . . . a skill or trained habit of using all the extra-logical elements of language—rhythm, vowel-music, onomatopoeia, associations, and what not—to convey the concrete reality of experiences. . . . By a poem we mean a composition which communicates more of the concrete and qualitative than our usual utterances do. A poet is a man who produces much composition more often and more successfully than the rest of us."

So far, excellent. But then Mr Lewis goes on to say this:

> " . . . but language must be about something. You cannot just 'say', you must say this or that. It is time, therefore, to set down what little I can about the content of poetry. . . . The truth seems to be that the number of things you can write poetry about is the same as the number of things you can talk about. Being a skill of utterance it can be used to utter almost anything; to draw attention to (though not, of course, to demonstrate) a fact, to tell lies, to tell admitted fictions, to describe your own real or feigned emotions, to make jokes.

> ". . . It follows that, in a certain sense, poetry is not an 'Art' at all. It is by art or skill that the poets contrive to utter concretely what they want to say; but the thing said is not 'Art'—it is something more like a remark. The skill which went to the utterance of it has all the privileges of art; it is exempt (like plumbing or boot-blacking) from moral and logical criticism, and it is best judged by fellow artists. To claim similar immunities for the thing said is a confusion. I will let the plumber tell me how culpable his predecessor was in allowing my scullery to get flooded; I will not let him decide *whether* it is flooded, still less whether it ought to be."

Mr Lewis then continues that there is an ambiguity in the expression "a great poet". The skill of concrete utterance can be used by anyone who can acquire it, and, while it is a very difficult one, it can be acquired by men whose general level of capacity is low, just the same as the various skills of, say, surgery, finance or chess. By a "great poet", therefore, we may mean either a man excelling others in all-round capability who uses his poetical skill for the utterance of great things, or we may mean merely a man who is greatly a poet, possessing this skill in a high degree.

> "A man may show himself greatly poetical by using all the resources of the art of utterance to communicate something that is of no general interest at all. I say of 'general* interest because many worthless experiences may be as *difficult* to convey in their concrete entirety as valuable ones, and their conveyance may therefore be of technical interest to other artists."

Yet is it true that such a clear division can be made between what is said in a poem and the manner of saying it? Are there indeed "great men" who are also poets, and poets who are merely "greatly poetical"? It is a pity that Mr Lewis does not furnish us with any examples to prove his point. Was Shakespeare a great man using poetry, or was he merely "greatly poetical", for instance? And what was Swinburne?

Supposing Swinburne was not a great man using poetry, but was merely "greatly poetical". And supposing (though perhaps Mr Lewis would not grant this) Shakespeare *was* a great man using poetry. How do these two writers compare, *as poets?* Try to compare them on purely "technical" grounds and you will see at once how any absolute distinction between form and content breaks down.

Mr Lewis concludes his final contribution to *The Personal Heresy,* appropriately enough, with this paragraph:

> "It will be seen that the tendency of my theory is, to some degree, to lower the status of the poet as poet. But this is because I think the only hope for poetry now lies in lowering his status. Unless he speedily returns to the workmanlike humility of his great predecessors and submits to the necessity of interesting and pleasing as a preliminary to doing anything else, the art of poetry will disappear from among us altogether."

In limiting poetry to its definition as an art or skill, and at the same time requiring the application of a moral criterion to its "subject-matter", Mr Lewis certainly "lowers the status of the poet". He lowers poetry to an impossible level, where one might well ask, what is the point of writing it? And it is small wonder that he emerges, at the end, with a conception of the poet as an "entertainer". In these contributions Mr Lewis reveals himself to be one of those numerous persons who, with the best of intentions and with excellent qualifications in other spheres, are hopelessly at sea when it comes to aesthetic questions, and who seem to feel an urge to "take it out of" art and artists in general for their own insusceptibility to all but the commonplace aesthetic experiences.

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14. ***transformation of culture into civilization.*** **See** ***The Meaning of History*** **by Nicolas Berdyaev : Epilogue : " The Will to Life and the Will to Culture ".**

47. ***totalitarianism.*** **The totalitarian attitude towards literature is more widespread than might be supposed, nor is it confined to the Left camp. The following is from an article in the December 1942 number of** ***Poetry: A Magazine of Verse,*** **an** ***avant-garde*** **periodical published in Chicago :**

". . . now as never before in our age the narrative poem has its great opportunity. The raw material for it is under our very eyes every day in the week. Someone said recently that even novels are a little pale beside true stories of survivors of torpedoed ships, tough defenders of desert outposts, and daring combat fliers in China, England, the Pacific islands, and over France. ***The Raft,*** **an excellent account at second-hand of the five weeks three men spent on a raft, landing at an atoll after a thousand miles, would have made, one feels, a moving narrative poem. There is magnificent material in every day's newspaper. There are the A.V.G.'s in China, the Midway battle, the raid on Tokio. There are the Commando raids on France like that at St. Nazaire, and the more recent raids by Rangers and Commandos at Dieppe. There are individuals like Finucane, Kelly; places like Cologne and Lidice ; ships like the** ***Ark Royal*** **and the PT boats. But the richness of the material need not be stressed ; everyone knows how tremendous it is. Much of it scarcely needs art's shaping, but all of it cries out for art's statement, lest any of it be forgotten. . . . The publication just now of narrative or ballad other than this sort is dangerous to poetry."**

Beside this fantastic rhapsody should be set the following, from the ***News Notes*** **published in the same issue of the same periodical:**

" An anthology to be known as ***War Poems of the United Nations*** **is being prepared by the League of American Writers. . . . An invitation is issued to all American poets ' to contribute such of their work as they believe useful to the war effort '. It is the League's intention to include poetry representing all of the United Nations, ' the countries which are invaded but not conquered—the Jugoslav guerrillas, the French underground ', the peoples of Latin-America, and the Italian, German and Spanish anti-Fascist writers. ' The only limitation in subject is that all poems must make their contribution to defeating the Axis—whether by attacking Fascism and its horrors, celebrating individual deeds of heroism, building morale and the spirit of resistance, crying**

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for action, fighting racial discrimination, or by any of the hundred other methods of aiding the war effort. . . .'"

81. *the humane emotions, love, pity and the rest.* See Yeats's remarks on war in his Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse.* Yeats's bellicosity (there are accounts of it elsewhere) was perhaps a compensation for a poor physique and low vitality. As Dorothy Wellesley wrote of him, " I do not suppose that Yeats ever knew a day of vigorous health, or physical vitality during all his long life. He once said to me : ' I have never had any physical energy '."

89. *his reversion to the bard.* See Yeats's *Letters on Poetry to Dorothy Wellesley* (O.U.P.). In one of these he writes : " If you have any body from the Foreign Office or its neighbourhood to dinner postpone dinner & both listen in & watch results. The last item is my Casement poem. The Foreign Office has forgotten its crimes." Of this poem he also wrote : " De Valera's newspaper gave me a long leader saying that for generations to come my poem will pour scorn on the forgers and their backers." What a glorious apotheosis for a modern poet's work ! In another letter Yeats remarks : " There has been an article upon my work in the *Yale Review* . . . it commends me above all other modern poets because my language is ' public '. That word which I had not thought of myself is a word I want."

108. *orthodoxy . . . is not for the artist, the creative spirit.* In J. W. N. Sullivan's *Beethoven* there is an instructive comparison between the mind of Beethoven and that of Bach, which bears on the question of orthodoxy here discussed.

113. *Mayakovsky.* That Mayakovsky was homosexual is a commonly accepted notion, and here I am only repeating the current view. Mr Stefan Schimanski, however, informs me definitely that there is no foundation for this supposition.

132. *some new relationship between art and life.* See *Tolstoi as Man and Artist* by Dmitri Merejkovski, p. 132 : " Literature to man, however deliberate, is as natural as singing to birds. Culture is not necessarily something at variance with, but educative of human nature. From an abstract point of view culture and nature are one, and he who quarrels with the artificiality of culture quarrels with the nature of man, and with the most divine and permanent force in it."

148. *narrowed to the impersonal biological process.* For remarks on biologism in general as a philosophy of life see Berdyaev's *The Destiny of Man,* pp. 29-30.

155. *seemingly valid social standpoint.* *Vide* an article by Stephen Spender in *New Verse* (Autumn 1938) : " I think that today there is a very real distrust amongst the younger writers, of the validity not only of their own experiences, but of the environment of their upbringing. [But surely their environment is a *part* of

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their experience ?] Thi9 explains the attractions of a movement like Mass Observation, it also explains the purely literary motives which may have played a part in making several writers of different nations join the International Brigade." As elsewhere in his writings, Mr Spender in this article is concerned to maintain contrary and opposed attitudes. He is anxious to defend the poet's right to take his stand within his personal experience, while at the same time insisting, as a political moralist, that only a socialist view of life can bring him into valid contact with "reality". See the rest of his article.

165. *Louis MacNeice, a poet whose social situation is akin to Auden' s.* Compare, e.g., Auden's Poem XXII : " Get there if you can . . ." with MacNeice's *Eclogue for Christmas.* Note particularly the attitude towards catastrophe :

" In the country they are still hunting, in the heavy shires
Greyness is on the fields and sunset like a line of pyres
Of barbarous heroes smoulders through the ancient air
Hazed with factory dust and, orange opposite, the moon's glare,
Goggling yokel-stubborn through the iron trees,
Jeers at the end of us, out bland ancestral ease ;
We shall go down like Palaeolithic man
Before some new Ice Age or Genghiz Khan. . . .
What will happen to us when the State takes down the manor wall,
When there is no more private shooting or fishing, when the trees are all cut down,
When faces are all dials and cannot smile or frown—
What will happen when the sniggering machine-guns in the hands of the young men
Are trained on every flat and club and beauty parlour and Father's den ?
What will happen when our civilization like a long pent balloon— ..."

179. *weakness and weeping.* Mr Hugh Gordon Porteus, reviewing *Looky Stranger I* and *The Ascent of F. 6* in *Twentieth Century Verse* at the time of their appearance said of the latter (apropos of Ransome, the " superman " hero of the play) : " Auden is obsessed with power as only a man of power can be." This statement is surely psychologically unsound in the extreme. Is it not the *weak* man who is likely to be obsessed with strength ? Mr Porteus has been habitually over-respectful to Auden in his criticism, and it is therefore significant that he should in the same article have dismissed *Look, Stranger !* as a " disappointing, time-marking book ". I have not seen his verdict on *Another Time,*

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