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ADDRESSES TO
THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION
BY

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I

Keats in his Letters

Margaret Willy

In a letter Keats wrote home from one of his walking tours he described passing through a wretched suburb of Belfast; and hearing there what was for him the most loathsome of all noises: "worse than the bagpipes," he said, "than the laugh of a monkey, the chatter of women, the scream of a macaw: I mean, the sound of a shuttle." And later, staying in Winchester, he rejoiced because there was "not one loom, or anything like manufacturing . . . in the whole city." We can only surmise what he would have said to his England after nearly a century-and-a-half of industrialism—to the noise of our giant machines, threatening more and more to drown the voice of individual man, to turn the inventor from master into slave.

But, in its essentials, was Keats's age very different from our own? Listen to an extract from a letter he wrote to his elder brother George in America:

> There are many madmen in the country, I have no doubt, who would like to be beheaded on Tower Hill, merely because of the sake of *éclat*; there are many men who, like Hunt, from a principle of taste, would like to see things go on better; there are many, like Sir F. Burdett, who like to sit at the head of political dinners—but there are none prepared to suffer in obscurity for their country. The motives of our worst men are interest, and of our best vanity; we have no Milton or Algernon Sidney. Governors, in these days, lose the title of man in exchange for that of Diplomat or Minister. We breathe a sort of official atmosphere. All the departments of the Government have strayed far from simplicity, which is the greatest of strength. . . . A man now entitled Chancellor has the same honour paid him whether he be a hog or a Lord Bacon. No

> sensation is created by greatness, but by the number of Orders a man has at his buttonhole. Notwithstanding the noise the Liberals make in favour of Napoleon, I cannot but think he has done more harm to the life of Liberty than any one else could have done. . . . The worst thing he has taught them is, how to organize their monstrous armies. The Emperor Alexander, it is said, intends to divide his Empire, as did Dioclesian, creating two Czars besides himself, and continuing supreme monarch of the whole. Should he do so, and they, for a series of years, keep peaceable among themselves, Russia may spread her conquest even to China. I think it a very likely thing that China may fall of itself; Turkey certainly will. Meanwhile European North Russia will hold its horn against the rest of Europe, intriguing constantly with France. Dilke, whom you know to be a Godwin-perfectibility man, pleases himself with the idea that America will be the country to take up the human intellect where England leaves off.

And so on. "We breathe a sort of official atmosphere"; the organizer of "monstrous armies," who in the name of freedom "has done more harm to the life of liberty than anyone else could have done"; Russia holding her "horn against the rest of Europe"; Dilke, the "perfectibility man." It all has an awful familiarity; the great dictators—Napoleon and Hitler; Godwin and Karl Marx, the perfectibility men.

The world has not changed much after all, in the past hundred-and-thirty years. Some of the main bogeys that confront of us—officialdom, power fanatics menacing world peace and freedom, the ideologists shouting and brandishing their panaceas—also confronted Keats in his day. That "barbarous age," as he called it, in which a man needed the fine point taken off his soul to be fit for it at all, needed as positive a faith for living as our own does.

It is Keats in his Letters, far more than Keats as the poet of *Endymion, Hyperion,* and the *Odes,* who shows us this faith: one not learned parrot-wise, through megaphones and textbook manifestoes, but hammered painfully out of personal experience; proved, as he puts it, on his pulses. "Nothing ever becomes real," Keats declared, "till it is experienced: even a proverb is no proverb till your life has illustrated it." Not only did this creed of his give him a scale of values by

which to measure the topsy-turvydom, social and political, of his day. It was the anchor which enabled him, before he was twenty-five, to face unflinchingly the great problems of existence that are always with us: the problem of apparently senseless suffering; of the strong preying on the weaker—the hawk on the robin, the robin on the worm; of love, and of death, both of which so deeply affected himself. Because he is concerned with universal things; because the voice in these letters proclaims the permanence of men's private experience over political fashions—of the individual heart and imagination over all the 'systems' under the sun—I believe that Keats has an especially bracing and tonic value for us to-day. Not only do these magnificent letters of his give an unrivalled self-portrait of genius, of the inner workings of the poetic nature; they show us a very remarkable human being—a man, in the fullest sense of the word.

What was the essence of Keats's faith—so individual and independent a one—the secret of his precocious wisdom and maturity of vision? I know that just at present humility is at a discount. Never could there have been a less general belief than that the meek shall inherit the earth. Nevertheless, I believe that to come back at intervals to Keats's Letters—each time finding a little more truth in them, as one does in Shakespeare—is to be more convinced that the root of his strength was humility.

This much-abused word requires definition. Too often it is taken to mean a Uriah Heep-like servility: a willingness, either out of timidity or some mistaken notion of virtue, to make oneself a human doormat. This was one of the things that Keats's humility most certainly was *not*. To realize it, we have only to read him writing to Bailey about the *Edinburgh Magazine* reviewer: "If he should go to such lengths with me as he has done with Hunt, I must infallibly call him to account, if he be a human being, and appears in squares and theatres, where we might 'possibly meet'"; or to his publisher, about the *Quarterly's* savage attack on himself. "Praise or blame," he wrote, "has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own works. My own domestic criticism has

given me pain without comparison beyond what *Blackwood* or the *Quarterly* could inflict: and also when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary reperception of what is fine." These are not the words of a man who has been seriously disturbed or thrown off his balance; still less of one "snuffed out by an article"—the absurd fable maliciously propagated by Byron, and later strengthened by the well-intentioned but misleading championship of Brown and Shelley. Keats was certain of his own genius, and of what he was trying to do, with the quiet assurance that has no need to raise its voice in blustering assertiveness or self-justification. "I have no doubt of success in a course of years," he said, "if I persevere." The only thing that had power to disturb him personally was any doubts within himself about his poetry; and these, he confessed to George, were steadily diminishing. He had complete faith in that creative genius which must work out its salvation in him; and, with it, the courage of that faith. Writing *Endymion*, he refused to stay on the shore, "pipe a silly pipe," and take "tea and comfortable advice." Leaping headlong into the sea, he made his own acquaintance with the rocks and quicksands: the best way to become a swimmer—or a poet. Quite simply and calmly, without braggadocio, he could affirm: "I think I shall be among the English poets after my death"; to which Arnold added the tribute which would have pleased Keats most: "He is; he is with Shakespeare."

With this quiet confidence in his powers went a healthy disregard both for the "drawling of the bluestocking literary world," and for the vulgarity of the "thousand jabberers about books and pictures." To Keats, public favour seemed a "cloying treacle on the wings of independence"; and his views about it were frequently touched with the pugnacity we should expect from the boy who had been known at school for his "terrier-like resoluteness of character"; whose friends had imagined a military career for him; and who had administered a sound thrashing to a Hampstead butcher unwise enough to beat a small boy in his presence. He wrote to Reynolds:

> I have not the slightest feel of humility towards the public, or to anything in existence but the Eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty, and the memory of great men. . . . I cannot help looking upon [the public] as an enemy . . . which I cannot address without feelings of hostility. If I write a Preface in a supple or subdued style, it will not be in character with me as a public speaker.

And again:

> I never wrote a single line of poetry with the least shadow of public thought. . . . I hate a mawkish popularity. I cannot be subdued before them.

To such spirited independence as this, envy, abuse, and ridicule were only "stimulants to further exertion." When Keats wrote to Hunt, "It is a disgrace to fail even in a huge attempt," he did not mean failure in the eyes of the critics. "Just so much as I am humbled by the genius above my grasp, am I exalted and look with hate and contempt upon the literary world. A drummer-boy who holds out his hand familiarly to a field-marshal—that drummer-boy with me is the good word and favour of the public." No, if Keats should fail in the end, it would be by the standards of his own mercilessly uncompromising self-criticism.

But we notice one thing. It was public opinion alone towards which Keats refused to be humble—to bow and scrape for crumbs of praise or be cast down by repeated attacks. Towards other things—the Genius of Poetry within him, the "Truth of the Imagination," the "Eternal Being," or by whatever name he chose to call it—his submission was endless. "My greatest elevations of soul," he said, "leave me every time more humbled." There is all the difference in the world between natural spirit and arrogance. There was no room in Keats for arrogance, either as a poet or as a man. "If I fail," he wrote to Taylor, "I have, I am sure, many friends who will attribute any change in my life and temper to humbleness rather than pride—to a cowering under the wings of great poets, rather than to a bitterness that I am not appreciated." And again: "All I hope is, that I may not lose all interest in human affairs—that the solitary indifference I feel for

applause, even from the finest spirits, will not blunt any acuteness of vision I may have." There could have been few men more constantly vigilant for any hardening of spiritual arteries, blunting of susceptibilities, or closed mind in himself; less tainted with what he called "Richardson self-satisfaction," or willing to rest on his oars as an artist or as a human being. Perhaps most clearly of all do we see this quality in the disarming candour, yet dignity, of his Preface to *Endymion*: no effort to excuse himself or beg for leniency, but a simple and courageous acknowledgment of his own limitations and hope to grow beyond them. In the writing of *Endymion*, there was more than "great inexperience, immaturity," that ferment of soul between boyhood and manhood. It was written out of that which has no care for self, the personal hurts and disappointment and hostility to be sustained: mindless of the "turmoil and anxiety," as he wrote to Haydon, and ready to sacrifice "all that is called comfort and to die in six hours" for the sake of the thing it creates.

So we see that Keats's humility was not to be equated with a meek subservience to the world's verdict upon him. What, then, really was it? To me, it seems that it lay in an openness and flexibility of outlook peculiar to himself—an *accepting* attitude towards all experience. "The only way of strengthening one's intellect," he declared, "is to make up one's mind about nothing." The Virtuous Philosophers, the Men of Character like his friend Dilke, make up their minds, form theories, take sides. "They never begin upon a subject they have not pre-resolved upon . . . want to hammer their nail into you, and if you turn the point, they still think you wrong." Dilke, said Keats, would never come upon a truth as long as he lived. For himself, he confessed he never cared to be in the right: resolutely refusing, on the one hand, to be bullied into the philosophy of some one with a palpable design upon him; and, on the other, to force his personal opinions into unwilling ears and win converts. "I do not think myself more in the right than other people, and that nothing in this world is proveable. . . . I have not one idea of the truth of my speculations." How very refreshing that is! Standing apart from the Men of Character, the Virtuous Philosophers,

the Perfectibility Men, he—the Chameleon Poet—patiently submitted himself to receive with an open mind all that should happen to him, all that went on around him. Instead of classifying, dividing experience into neat watertight compartments, and affixing labels, Keats's mind remained "a thoroughfare for all thoughts—not a select party." For all the shrill lyricism of certain other poets on the subject of Liberty (with a capital), I think that Keats has more of value to say about it: about *real* freedom—that of the man who looks at life without the blinkers of ready-made philosophies, continually enlarging and modifying his beliefs by the light of his own experience. It is the only way to grow; it was, in him, a supreme realism of spirit.

This quiet independence of judgment, mental elasticity, and receptiveness, the wise tolerance so remarkable in so young a man, is epitomized by Keats's great idea of *Negative Capability*. By this he meant a capacity for "being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason": a virtue rare indeed in some one "young, and writing at random," as Keats avowed himself, "straining after particles of light in the midst of a great darkness." Again and again, in his own worries or those of his friends, it would have been easier and more consoling by far to snatch at, and cling to, some convenient simplification of life already provided for him. Instead, in the midst of strident voices all asserting their knowledge, Keats had the courage to say, in effect: "I do not know. At this stage I do not understand. But in time, if I have patience and keep an open mind, I shall." He could remain what he called "content with half-knowledge"—resting in the faith that the circle of his illumination would widen as his spirit grew. For this reason, he could for the most part view with detachment, and comparative disinterestedness, what—he wrote to Reynolds—"may be called more particularly heart-vexations." For him human life resembled a large mansion of many apartments. Moving through each—from the Infant, or Thoughtless Chamber, to the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, there discovering the fact of human misery; and then on again, all the while growing in knowledge and vision—he would come by

degrees to completer understanding of what now pained or puzzled him. This was Keats's belief, which fortified him through so many disasters: the perpetual nagging of money matters; the long illness and death of a beloved brother; premonitions, and then the certainty, of his own, robbing him of his fulfilment in love and in poetry at a single blow. It was a creed which brought him near, before his last sickness finally swamped him, to the achievement of his ideal: that equanimity—the very opposite of complacency, the sin of the arrogant or insensitive—which could "envisage circumstance all calm"; look out with complete detachment on the world of mice and men and the robin with his worm, seeing it sanely and seeing it whole.

It is this "wise passiveness," in Wordsworth's phrase, that gives Keats's attitude to life and creative activity so much in common with that of another poet: Rainer Maria Rilke. He, too, believed that if a man waited in patience and faith the knowledge, or inspiration, would come of its own accord when he was ready for it. "It is not I," he wrote, "that have said the magic word; God says it when it is time; and it is meet for me only to be patient and suffer my depths trustingly." It is most illuminating to compare certain other passages from the letters of Keats and of Rilke. Take, for instance, Keats writing to Reynolds in 1818—having described himself, elsewhere, as one long "addicted to passiveness." He says:

> It seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the bee. . . . It is more noble to sit like Jove than to fly like Mercury; let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey, bee-like buzzing here and there for a knowledge of what is to be arrived at; but let us open our leaves like a flower, and be passive and receptive, budding patiently under the eye of Apollo.

That is Keats. Now listen to Rilke, speaking of being "in a quiet communion with life, receptive as a cup"; kneeling down and standing up in the motions of prayer, barely expecting the gift of poetry—and being then "suddenly filled to the brim"; of a circle of earth lying fallow, and a peasant's

observation to him: "'*C'est la terre en repos.*' So beautiful, you see, can repose be, and so does it look beside work. Not at all disquieting, but giving you the feeling of a profound confidence and the anticipation of a great time to come." And Rilke says: "I will make an angel out of each [experience] and let myself be overpowered by him, and force him to bend me to his will." Not, you notice—"I will overpower *him*, bend him to *my* will!"

Always the emphasis was on the receiving: the image of the vessel waiting to be filled, of the earth lying fallow for the seed, the flower opening its petals for the bee; the passive consciousness that listens for "the ringing in the silence." How similar in spirit Keats and Rilke were! Listen, again, to Rilke on indolence: "I have often asked myself whether those days on which we are forced to be indolent are not just the ones we pass in profoundest activity? Whether all our doing, when it comes later, is not only the last reverberation of a great movement which takes place in us on those days of inaction. At any rate, it is very important to be inactive with confidence, with surrender, if possible with gladness. The days when our hands do not move are so uncommonly quiet that it is scarcely possible to live through them without hearing a great deal." Keats, too, knew how to drain the last drop from his idle moods: to be idle in a way that made it as much a creative activity as sitting down to write poetry. Writing to George of that state when "the passions are all asleep . . . the fibres of the brain are relaxed, in common with the rest of the body," he described it as mere laziness; I should call it *creative* laziness. No one could enjoy more fruitfully than he the deliciousness of "a doze upon a sofa," pondering on and distilling the essence from a page of great poetry. No one knew better that "a nap upon clover" could engender "ethereal finger-pointing."

Even in something like their reactions to the sea, Keats and Rilke were in sympathy. "When weary thoughts come to me," wrote Rilke, "the sea drowns them with its great wide murmurs, purifies me with its syllables, and lays a rhythm in me upon all that is bewildered and confused." And Keats, haunted by the passage from *Lear*: "The sea . . . a mighty

minstrel . . . to make such a one as you forget almost the tempest cares of life. I have found in the ocean's music more than the passion of Timotheus, an enjoyment not to be put into words; and, 'though inland far I be,' I now hear the voice most audibly."

The slow maturing of his understanding, the "very gradual ripening," as he called it—natural as the evolution of the seed through leaf and flower to fruition—was to Keats all part of the process of Soul-making. It was in this process that he found the only satisfying explanation of the enigma of human suffering—of which, all his life, he was constantly and agonizedly aware: it was the natural obverse of what he called his "yearning passion for the beautiful." Brooding over why women should have cancers, why men should suffer, Keats was to the end one of those for whom

> The miseries of the world
> Are misery, and will not let them rest.

But in his doctrine of waiting, of patient receptivity and acceptance, the sorrows of existence fell naturally into their place in the pattern. Early on, Keats was writing to Haydon: "I must think that difficulties nerve the spirit of a man," and telling Bailey how, when he heard of any misfortune having befallen another, his first thought was: "Well, it cannot be helped: he will have the pleasure of trying the resources of his spirit." Keats's own was a temperament that responded to the challenge of real ills; shrinking back, he confessed, only before the imaginary ones. Again and again he returns to his ideas about the reasons for suffering and adversity, exploring further and developing them at greater length as time went on. Quoting Byron, "Knowledge is sorrow," he capped it with his own observation, that "Sorrow is wisdom."

It is, however, in the long journal-letter to his brother and sister-in-law, dated April 15, 1819, that Keats expounds most fully and clearly his conception of the world as a vale, not of tears, but of Soul-Making. He wrote:

> I will call the *world* a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read—I will call the *human heart* the

> *horn Book* read in that School—and I will call the *Child able to read, the Soul* made from that *School* and its *horn book.* Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains is to school an Intelligence and make it a Soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways. Not merely is the Heart a Hornbook, it is the Mind's Bible, it is the Mind's experience, it is the text from which the Mind or Intelligence sucks its identity.

In the short time he was in this place where the heart must feel and suffer in order to grow, Keats himself had ample opportunity to practise his doctrine of soul-making.

But if suffering played its inevitable and necessary part in man's experience, and a large one in Keats's own, happiness, too, had its place. Keats was, he wrote to George in America, as happy for himself as a man could be. Certainly he was endowed with an abounding capacity for what he called "gorging the honey of life": tasting it in spirit and senses, heart and mind, as keenly as he tasted on his tongue that nectarine of which he wrote to Dilke. With eyes realistic rather than disillusioned, he knew that happiness could not last; especially for one who, like himself, was prone to fits of sudden, violent, and often reasonless melancholy. He neither counted on happiness nor, like so many, looked for it as his right. "This is the world," said Keats, hearing of a friend's trouble. "We cannot expect to give away many hours to pleasure; circumstances are like clouds, continually gathering and bursting; while we are laughing, the seed of trouble is put into the wide arable land of events; while we are laughing, it sprouts, it grows, and suddenly bears a poisonous fruit, which we must pluck." For this reason, Keats savoured his happiness the more fully and eagerly when it came; took it with both hands, looking neither before nor after the richness of the present hour; for soon, no doubt, as he wryly observed, he would again be "drinking bitters." "Nothing startles me," he declared, "beyond the moment. The setting sun will always set me to rights, or if a sparrow were before my window, I take part in its existence, and pick about the gravel." That is a philosophy of happiness, the happiness of the moment, which is the peculiar privilege of the poet.

Contemplating a bird or a blade of grass in his back yard, he is let into the mystery of things; participates so intensely in all creation that he loses himself in it, "has no self—is everything and nothing . . . enjoys light and shade . . . lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated . . . has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen"; "has no identity . . . is continually . . . filling some other body."

That was Keats's conception of the poetic nature: that was himself. Poetry was, for him, less an absorbing pursuit than a whole way of life: as necessary to his inner being as food and drink were to his body. "I look," he cried, "upon fine phrases like a lover"; and, reading Shakespeare: "I cannot exist without poetry—without eternal poetry." For our knowledge of the immense part played by Shakespeare in Keats's thinking, feeling, and living, we are indebted to Mr Middleton Murry. His brilliant *Keats and Shakespeare* is one of the most exciting and profound essays in contemporary criticism. More than Spenser or Milton, Shakespeare is the pervading presence through all the pages of Keats's Letters—sometimes directly, at others implicitly, by almost unconscious reference: the symbol of the poetic highest and—on various occasions we find it—somehow the cementer of Keats's warmest personal relationships. He writes of Shakespeare constantly to his friends. How good would it be, says he to Reynolds, to celebrate Shakespeare's birthday by receiving letters from his brother and his friend. And again, each reading a page of Shakespeare, every Sunday at ten, would bring George in America and himself in England closer in sympathy and in presence.

This bond in Keats's mind between Shakespeare and those dearest to him is a significant one. For Shakespeare was the link between the only two certainties in which Keats wholeheartedly believed: "the holiness of the heart's affections, and the truth of Imagination." These two guiding stars of his were the richest source of his happiness. He lived the high life of the imagination as others live that of the cloister. "My imagination," he wrote to Shelley, "is a monastery, and I am its monk." Like a monk, he recognized the rules and

observances of his life: acknowledging nothing as true or valid until it had been hailed by this inner voice which was the sole arbiter of all his judgments and actions. Obeying no external code or set of beliefs, he trusted these intuitive recognitions as implicitly as others trust their conscience. Perhaps, in a sense, it was the same thing, called by a different name. At any rate, Keats declared that "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth, whether it existed before or not." The beauty and truth thus recognized were for him—in art, at all events—capable of "making all disagreeables evaporate." *Endymion* had been "the regular stepping of the imagination towards a truth"; and so was every other one of his poems or conclusions about the nature of living. He thought with his imagination, as well as feeling with it.

Then there was that other beacon certainty of his—"the holiness of the heart's affections." "I could not live," said Keats, "without the love of my friends." And to that it might be added that *they* would have been inestimably the poorer without his. Probably few men of letters have been more gifted than Keats was with a genius for human relationships; with so warm and generous a capacity for affection, or so rich a diversity of friends. Hunt and Rice, Dilke and Woodhouse, Bailey and Haydon, Haslam and Taylor, Reynolds, Brown, and Severn—these are some to whom his correspondence remains as a living testament of friendship. Its signatures —"Yours eternally," "Your sincere friend and brother" (to Bailey), "Your everlasting friend," were no romantic hyperbole: they came as sincerely from the heart as all that Keats wrote and did. We can see it in his endless concern for his friends' happiness and welfare: ready as he was to commiserate in a trouble or illness, or spontaneously to rejoice in a happiness. Far from being the prickly and temperamental genius, like Haydon or Hazlitt, always taking offence or giving it, he had, he said, "long made up [his] mind to take for granted the genuine-heartedness of [his] friends, notwithstanding any temporary ambiguousness in their behaviour or their tongues." He had a rare tact and sympathy in patching up the frequent quarrels between the redoubtable Haydon and all the men upset by his bitter tongue. It was on these

occasions that Keats's maturity in dealings with his fellow-men comes out so clearly; his wise shrewdness in assessing and accepting them for what they were. "What occasions the greater part of the world's quarrels?" he wrote to Bailey, who was smarting after an encounter with Haydon, "Simply this: two minds meet, and do not understand each other in time to prevent any shock or surprise at the conduct of either party. As soon as I had known Haydon three days, I had got enough of his character not to have been surprised at such a letter as he has hurt you with. Nor, when I knew it, was it a principle with me to drop his acquaintance." True, after Haydon's casualness over repaying a loan, when Keats was desperately short of money, Keats wrote to George that their friendship was at an end. Yet only a month later he was writing to Haydon as warmly as ever, and entering sympathetically into his misfortunes. "Men should bear with each other," he said to Bailey. "There lives not the man who may not be cut up, aye, lashed to pieces, on his weakest side. The best of men have but a portion of good in them—a kind of spiritual yeast in their frames, which creates the ferment of existence." Keats took men, and life, as he found them; and —until the torments of his last illness consumed him—was reconciled to both. In his friends' quarrels, as in life, he refused to take sides, knowing their faults could not daunt his affection for them, nor his loyalty. "The sure way, Bailey, is first to know a man's faults, and then be passive. If, after that, he insensibly draws you towards him, then you have no power to break the link." We are back again at that underlying and all-pervading principle of passiveness: the inability to disobey the voice of instinct and intuition, whether in determining the choice of a friend or in the recognition of truth.

But the relationship that had the most profound effect on Keats, as a man and a poet, was, of course, his love for Fanny Brawne. Up to the time of his meeting her, he had often expressed his complete independence of any need for women; his strength and satisfaction in his solitude, with "the roaring of the wind" for his wife, and the stars through the window-panes his children. He was sure he had not, he wrote to Bailey in another mood, a "right feeling towards women."

Disappointed in his early idealistic conceptions of them, he found himself suspicious, uncomfortable in their company, painfully aware of their indifference to "Mister John Keats, five feet high." More contemptuously he wrote to George: "The generality of women appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a sugar-plum than my time." Even after he was in love, a sense of the ridiculousness of lovers mocked him. "A man in love I do think cuts the sorriest figure in the world; queer, when I know a poor fool to be really in pain about it, I could burst out laughing in his face. His pathetic visage becomes irresistible." We can sense there, I think, a deal of self-impatience with a steadily growing bondage.

After his first encounter with Fanny Brawne, and his immediate enslavement, Keats had realized that his imagined immunity had been an illusory one. As so often with those of passionate natures who loudly proclaim such independence, his self-sufficiency had been a form of unconscious cowardice. "I never knew before," he wrote to Fanny, "what such a love as you have made me feel, was; I did not believe in it; my Fancy was afraid of it, lest it should burn me up." Another time he wrote: "I love you too much to venture to Hampstead, I feel it is not paying a visit but venturing into a fire." His intuitive fear of love had not been mistaken. For one of Keats's temperament, and in his circumstances, love of a woman *was* a fire which finally consumed him.

One of the things that Keats had always prized most was his independence. After he had met Fanny Brawne he wrote to Taylor, his publisher, "I equally dislike the favour of the public with the love of a woman. They are both a cloying treacle to the wings of independence." To Fanny herself he cried, out of this most terrible and relentless of all human enslavements: "I have never known any unalloy'd Happiness for many days together: the death or sickness of some one has always spoilt my hours—and now when none such troubles oppress me, it is you must confess very hard that another sort of pain should haunt me. Ask yourself, my love, whether you are not very cruel to have so entrammelled me, so destroyed my freedom." For some, love liberates the powers. For Keats, naturally of a passionately possessive nature which was

immeasurably aggravated by his disease, it utterly destroyed that prized mental and imaginative freedom of his. He could no longer so much as go for a walk, taking a book with him, without seeing her haunt every page. He could not even settle to the mere copying of verses without having to write to her first, in a vain effort to exorcise her image. "I can think of nothing else." . . . "You absorb me in spite of myself—you alone." . . . "I feel myself at your mercy." . . . "I love you ever and ever and without reserve." . . . "I cannot exist without you. I am forgetful of everything but seeing you again—my life seems to stop there—I see no further. You have absorbed me . . . ravish'd me away by a Power I cannot resist; and yet I could resist till I saw you." This is the complete possession of one human being by another; a misery out of which, on the one hand, Keats demanded:

> "Withhold no atom's atom, or I die,"

and agonized, on the other:

> "Where shall I learn to get my peace again?"

He never did regain it. He had plunged too far into that involuntary self-surrender whose creed was love, and she, "its only tenet."

Would it have been better for Keats's happiness and peace, and for his poetry, if he had never met Fanny Brawne? It is a question that is often asked or hinted. It seems clear that for his peace, even perhaps for his length of life, he would have been better off without this tormenting passion; and equally clear that for his poetry, and his fullness as a human being, he was incomparably the richer for it. As for happiness, who is to judge of that but Keats himself? He wrote to Fanny of the "love which has so long been my pleasure and my torment"; and only he could say which outweighed the other. In this tumult of conflicting emotions, swift alternations between adoration and resentment, joy and despair, sometimes the pleasure would be uppermost, sometimes the pain. The answer changed with the fluctuations of his mood—and, even more, of his health—from day to day; even in the same

letter—as when the jealous fear that Fanny might be "a little inclined to the Cressid," goes side by side with exaltation in the love that was "as much a wonder . . . as a delight."

As Keats's health grew worse, there is no doubt that the pain engulfed and finally drowned the early ecstasies and exaltations. Forbidden even poetry, his antidote until now against these miseries and misgivings, there was nothing left for his mind to do but to brood on them. Greedy for his love, and tormented by an agony of approaching loss, Keats bombarded Fanny Brawne with demands for her absorption in himself as complete as his in her—even that she should allow herself no happiness in sympathy with his own misery; with recriminations for her natural gaiety and high spirits; and with suspicions of her infidelity with Brown, and others, which probably had no basis but the fancies of his fevered imagination. "I appeal to you by the blood of that Christ you believe in: Do not write to me if you have done anything this month which it would have pained me to have seen. . . . If you have done so I wish this coming night may be my last." . . . "A person in health as you are can have no conception of the horrors that nerves and a temper like mine go through. . . . I am sickened at the brute world which you are smiling with. . . . I am glad there is such a thing as the grave —I am sure I shall never have any rest till I get there." The transformation from the sane and spirited personality of even a year earlier is terrible to witness; as are those last letters written to Brown on the voyage out to Italy. "The thought of leaving Miss Brawne is beyond everything horrible—the sense of darkness coming over me—I eternally see her figure eternally vanishing. . . . We cannot be created for this sort of suffering." "The persuasion that I shall see her no more will kill me. . . . Everything I have in my trunks that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear. . . . My dear Brown, for my sake, be her advocate for ever."

Yet even in one of these last letters—terrible to me as Gerard Manley Hopkins's last "winter-world" sonnets are terrible—Keats could say to Fanny Brawne: "'Tis certain I would rather be writing to you this morning, notwithstanding the alloy of grief in such an occupation, than enjoy any other

pleasure, with health to boot, unconnected with you." And, earlier, when he was still in reasonable health and hope of recovery: "At all events, I myself know this much, that I consider it no mean happiness to have loved you thus far—if it is to be no further I shall not be unthankful—if I am to recover, the day of my recovery shall see me by your side from which nothing shall separate me."

For this reason, I think it is as absurd to blame Fanny Brawne for Keats's death as it is to accuse the *Quarterly* reviewer. She and his future with her, were his prime incentives for living, not dying: the goal to which all his will for recovery spurred him. "Illness is a long lane, but I see you at the end of it, and shall mend my pace as well as possible." It was not Fanny Brawne's fault that, when Keats met and fell in love with her, he was already a doomed man. I believe that she was a sincere and warm-hearted girl, high-spirited and fond of admiration (she was, after all, only just seventeen when Keats met her), but deeply devoted to him to the extent of her capacity for attachment. But whatever she was, however she might have behaved, she would have aroused the same jealous agonies in Keats, from the very nature of his temperament and his disease. It was these which played upon each other in a vicious circle—physical suffering increasing his mental torment, and vice versa—that could only have ended as it did: fatally. It was the supreme irony that, as he wrote to Brown, "The very thing which I want to live most for will be a great occasion of my death."

As Houghton says, "Keats might have lived longer if he had lived less." This applies as much to his poetry as to his love. The fever of creative activity, the nagging fear of missing his poetic, as well as his personal, fulfilment—of dying "before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain"—were with him day and night. No whit less than his passion for Fanny Brawne were they instrumental in shortening his life. "If I should die," he wrote to her, "I have left no immortal work behind me—nothing to make my friends proud of my memory. . . . Now you divide with this . . . 'last infirmity of noble minds' all my reflection." He could no more take urgent medical advice to abstain from the "too great excitement of poetry"—

from reading or from writing it—than he could cease loving her. It was not in Keats's nature, nor indeed in his power, to temper with caution his enthusiasms, his aspirations, or even his sufferings. The imaginative tempo and pressure at which he lived were necessities of his nature. The poet of *Endymion*, who had leapt headlong into the sea without waiting for comfortable advice, was incapable of curbing his capacity for living—of switching it down at will to an abstemious half-pressure.

Since the day Keats wrote: "O for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts!" I think he has very often been misunderstood. By "sensations," what I believe he meant was arriving at truth through feeling, rather than through the intellect: *not*, as some have supposed, mere sensuous pleasure, or even emotionalism, for its own sake. For him, the heart was the mind's Bible. His, as we have seen, was the intuitive rather than the reasoned approach to life: the proving of truth on the pulses rather than in the brain—in other words, heart-logic and soul-logic, instead of just plain logic! It is what I should call "feeling thought": thinking with the heart and imagination, and feeling with the mind.

That is what I believe Keats meant by "a life of sensations rather than of thoughts." Nevertheless, what a capacity he had for the simple, uncomplicated delights of the senses in their own right! There was the nectarine of which he wrote to Dilke: "Good God, how fine! It went down soft, pulpy, slushy, oozy—melting down [his] throat like a large beatified strawberry"; or the fruit in his sister Fanny's garden, where he would like, he said, "to promenade . . . apple-tasting, pear-tasting, plum-judging, apricot-nibbling, pear-scrunching, nectarine-sucking, and melon-carving." Among his happiest and most carefree letters are some of those written to Fanny Keats, still at school and living with her guardian, Richard Abbey. "O there is nothing like fine weather," he cried, "and health, and Books, and a fine country, and a contented Mind, and diligent habit of reading and thinking . . . and, please heaven, a little claret wine cool out of a cellar a mile deep." We can almost see him stretching himself and basking deliciously in the sun of these delights. "I adore fine weather

as the greatest blessing I can have. Give me books, fruit, French wine, and fine weather, and a little music out of doors . . . and I can pass a summer very quietly without caring much about fat Louis, fat Regent, or the Duke of Wellington." Each time, we notice, the wine is an ingredient of happiness: especially claret. "How I like claret!" he wrote to George. "When I can get claret, I must drink it. 'Tis the only palate affair I am at all sensual in. . . . It fills one's mouth with a gushing freshness, then goes down cool and feverless. . . . Other wines of a heavy and spirituous nature transform a man into a Silenus; this makes him a Hermes, and gives a woman the soul and immortality of an Ariadne, for whom Bacchus always kept a good cellar of claret." Here speaks the creator of that

> . . . beaker full of the warm south,
> Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
> With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
> And purple-stained mouth.

But in those letters to Fanny Keats, we notice that it is books, as well as fruit; a "diligent habit of reading and thinking," as well as claret and sunshine, that Keats lists among his delights. Early on, with his usual vigilance of self-criticism, he had perceived the dangers of that "delicious languor" in his temperament; realizing how easily it could degenerate into a cloying enervation of mind and spirit. Regretfully, then, he made his decision for austerity. "I have been hovering for some time," he wrote to Taylor in the spring of 1818, "between an exquisite sense of the luxurious, and a love for philosophy: were I calculated for the former, I should be glad. But as I am not, I shall turn all my soul to the latter." This was the first stage in his movement away from pure sensuousness, from the lushness of Spenser and his own *Endymion*. Wholeheartedly he plunged into study, his reading ranging from Dante and Ariosto, in the originals, to Burton's *Anatomy*. He saw his road lie then through "application, study, and thought." The second stage was his renunciation of sensuous delights for

> . . . a nobler life
> Where I may find the agony, the strife
> Of human hearts.

From intellectual and philosophical excursions he was travelling towards another and more difficult kind of knowledge. It is epitomized by his desire to revolutionize the contemporary drama—the interplay of flesh-and-blood characters and human passions; and by his remark that "Wonders are no wonders to me. I am more at home amongst men and women. I would rather read Chaucer than Ariosto."

Increasingly, as time went on, Keats was fired by one great aspiration: "to do the world some good." He would, he wrote to Reynolds, "jump down Aetna for any great public good," and spoke of the "glory of dying for a great human purpose." His particular contribution to humanity lay, he knew, through his poetry; believing as he did that a fine writer was the world's "most genuine being," and that fine writing was, next to fine doing, "the top thing in the world." When he went tramping with Brown "over heath and rock and river," and up to his knees in bog, he delighted in becoming for the time what he called a "mere creature of rivers, lakes, and mountains": in climbing Skiddaw before breakfast, with the air making him feel as if he were going to a tournament; exploring Meg Merrilies' country, and talking to old men who had known Burns; sleeping on the mud floors of shepherds' huts, and drinking from roadside springs. Yet for all his young man's gusto in these adventures, and in the wonders of the countryside, these were not Keats's main purpose in going. His reason, he said, was to enlarge the scope of his experience, his vision of life, through seeing the way other men lived: to "strengthen his reach in poetry." He found scenery fine—but human nature finer. "The sward is richer for the tread of a real nervous English foot; the eagle's nest is finer, for the mountaineer having looked into it."

Perhaps the thing that strikes us more than anything else, in reading these letters of Keats to his friends, is the rich many-sidedness of his personality; that duality that was in the circumstances of his life also, making him exclaim: "I have not been well treated by the world, and yet I have, capitally well." His material misfortunes of poverty were offset by the love and generosity of his many friends; his enormous capacity for enjoyment went a long way to compensate him

for his intense physical and mental sufferings. And in just the same way, his nature was one that seemed to complement and ideally to balance itself; so that no form of experience ever precluded his savouring its opposite—rather, it heightened his delight in the other side of the coin. For instance, it seems to me that Keats knew how to practise so successfully the art of being alone, simply because his genius for friendship gave him so many opportunities for enjoying theatres, book-talk, drinking, laughing, and punning in good company. It was because of those that he could write to George, "I am content to be alone," and find his solitude "sublime." Then again, I think it was through having a mind and body naturally active and vigorous that Keats could realize the better the wisdom of inactivity and of passiveness —the secret of sitting still. Valuing the joys of his senses so keenly heightened by sheer contrast, I feel, his pleasure in intellectual pursuits. There is no contradiction, for me, in the passage about the nectarine coming from the same person as the remark: "I can have no enjoyment in the world but the continual drinking of knowledge"; for Keats's knowledge was heart-, soul-, and sense-knowledge, as well as mind-knowledge. Because for long periods together he gave himself up to intense concentration and mental discipline, his sense of fun when he relaxed was the more spontaneous; so that, out of a sheer overflow of spirits, he could write pages of exuberant nonsense to George's wife in America, and pun with an outrageous abandon out-Lambing Lamb himself.' "I have seen everything but the wind," he wrote absurdly to Rice from Teignmouth, "and that, they say, becomes visible by taking a dose of acorns, or sleeping one night in a hog-trough with your tail to the *sow-sow-west*." Because he knew how to be so light-heartedly happy, and with such intensities of happiness, Keats knew also the melancholy which is the inevitable price for those heights. Yet even this, he believed, need not be wasted: "Glut thy sorrow on the morning rose . . . or on the wealth of globèd peonies."

This was not a duality that divided, but balanced, integrated, and completed Keats's personality. "I look upon fine phrases like a lover," he had written. He might well have added that

that was also the way he looked on life: on the world of men and women, of books and solitude and nature, of the high life of the imagination—on all the experience of the human heart and mind and senses and spirit. "How does the poet speak to men with power," asked Carlyle, "but by being still more of a man than they?" How true that was of John Keats! With Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Browning, above all other English poets, he takes his place as the full human being, the complete man.

II

What does Art create?

Joyce Cary

THESE are times when all creative power in man is doubted. Scientific determinism, in various forms, penetrates everywhere. People talk of the dialectic, the process. Even Croce, who insists upon the unique character of each work of art, has thrown his majestic philosophy into the form of a dialectic. For him, art is intuition, imagination, which is, however, to be known only in expression. Thus, language is art, and art begets action, history, which becomes, of course, the subject of a new art.

There is much truth in this philosophy of the spirit, itself a work of art. Obviously, art produces ideas, and the ideas beget action. Out of Hegel's philosophy we have had two revolutions, the Nazi and the Marxist.

But we are told that neither was created; they are both stages in a process; and the argument for determinism goes very deep. Even if we deny progress in the sense of any improvement in general happiness we have to admit a direction in human affairs. The dialectic of Prudhon and Hegel and Marx may be a misleading methodology, a paper scheme, a set of bags in which facts are jammed regardless of their true form; but like most philosophical notions, which distort truth to suit the shape of an idea, it does possess a truth.

There is a direction in human affairs; I mean a change, or, at least, a tendency, which is irreversible. Nowadays, all rulers are demagogues. They all propose the same objects, the liberty and enrichment of the people; the good life for the masses.

This process, of course, is largely one of diffusion. The

potential quality of social life is not improved from what it was a thousand or two thousand years ago. Lady Murasaki of tenth-century Japan was not less civilized than Jane Austen, and both would have found themselves in good company with Virginia Woolf. Fine manners, high civilization, was probably not much different, in essence, at the courts of Crete and perhaps Babylon, from that of the old régime in France. Man is an individual soul, a unique person, but he is born into society. Society is the condition of his being. And the permanent elements of that society, the relationships, the needs, the passions, are constant and subject to very little diversity. Thus, every possible kind of society must emerge in a very few centuries; and the highest types can be expected to resemble each other.

Art, too, shows no power of surpassing its triumphs; the great masters from Homer onward are still among the greatest, and they have long ago exhausted all possible combinations of a material limited to a few primary colours, sounds, words, and emotions. Art, it is said, can only repeat itself, vulgarize itself, and cook up old material in new forms for popular consumption. It cannot originate.

But a process of diffusion is still a process. It goes one way, and it has all the appearance of an automatic and irresistible force. It produces continuous revolution, war, political experiment, and confusion throughout the world, and laughs at peace conferences. And art shows the same development in breadth; it becomes popular for reproduction in films, in broadcasting, and on the gramophone; it effects the same revolutions in tastes; it shows the same disorder, excitement, the same violent conflict of schools and theories; it also attacks and destroys authority.

There is a much more subtle and interesting piece of evidence for the process in art. It is said that a nation only knows itself in the arts, that it forms an idea of itself as a people only from its artists. This, I think, is true. It is simply an aspect in conceptual knowledge generally; the knowledge by which every single child is obliged to organize its own existence. It has to form an idea of the world in order to live in it with reasonable security; and, in fact, as we can see,

nature has given every child a very strong desire to comprehend its world, if it is only a nursery floor and the character of a single household.

And the grown man forms his more extended ideas of the world from education and reading. He has to do so. He has to discover the nature of the historic occasion in order to act. It is from the arts of a period—the books, the newspapers, memoirs, paintings—that we form the conception of history, and separate periods in history. The mid-eighteenth century, the late eighteenth century, the Regency, the early Victorian Age, each of these phrases calls up the picture of a time. But the significant part is that these pictures of an age were not presented to the age itself.

The early Victorians, for instance, did not see themselves as a homogeneous period. Dickens and Thackeray detested each other's notion of society; Surtees, in a book like Mr Sponge, gave a third and totally different picture. The newspapers were in fierce conflict. And to all these writers and their contemporaries the world seemed, as it does to us to-day, a turmoil of unrelated events, a wild confusion of innovation and decay. It is only long afterwards that we, looking back, see any relation between these different pictures, and form a distinct idea of this period as a period.

The same is true of the later Victorian age, when Swinburne, Ruskin, Whistler, Matthew Arnold, co-existed; or of a time so recent as that between the wars. We are only now beginning to see that writers as different as Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence, the early Huxley and the early Waugh, complement each other.

Now this fact, that the artists of a time, all unknowingly, without any guiding idea, any general principle, each following, as he thinks, his own native genius in his own way, should yet compose a picture, of which the different parts form a whole, is very powerful evidence for a process in art.

It means, for instance, that the writers of this present moment, without any will of their own, are yet co-operating, or to speak more exactly, being forced to co-operate, on a single ideal production. So that a future generation, by merely reading a few lines of a poem or a novel, by looking at

a picture, or hearing some music, will say at once "mid-twentieth century."

The explanation of this phenomenon would be simply that art does not create anything, but that history controls art, because it offers to the artist the reasons and motives for his activity, and the matter for his work. And it is already admitted that art is an integral part of history.

Finally, we might look at the theory of genius. This is usually founded on such stories as the invention of Kubla Khan in an opium dream. Genius, inspiration, is regarded as a mysterious power that flowers in a man independently of his own efforts. Mozart composes at six. Keats is a great poet at twenty. Hume writes a decisive work of philosophy at twenty-two. Is genius, in fact, a creator, or merely an outlet by which the world soul, the world mind, expresses itself?

The latter idea, of course, is, roughly speaking, the view of Hegelians and neo-Hegelians. It is difficult, in fact, for any of this school to believe in any true creativity in the artist. The dialectic theory always moves towards automatism; it makes the artist the tool of a development.

In the Hegelian and Marxian view, history is like a tree that grows from seed, and artists are merely the leaf buds which, no doubt, imagine themselves in spring pregnant with new life, but, after all, produce only the same leaves. The tree needs leaves in order to breathe the air and the sun, in order to grow, but it makes its leaves. They cannot change either their own activity or the form of the tree. In short, they are not free creators.

This belief is very strongly held nowadays. And thousands assume it who have not put it into words. It fits in with modern psychology of the unconscious, modern critical theory, the general distrust of metaphysics, the immense reaction against all theories of man as a soul or free and responsible spirit.

The determinists have a very strong case, and I don't believe a word of it. I suggest that an artist does have freedom, and that he does create. That is to say, he makes something new and unique, something that was not in the world before, which

would not have gone into the world at all except by the work of that individual person.

To begin at the beginning, art cannot exhaust its material, because the substance of art is not material, it is feeling. The artist does not create matter; he uses symbols to provoke experience. And though it is true that the primary elements in any art—colours, sound, words—are strictly limited, the feelings that belong to these colours and sounds are personal and indivisible.

Feeling cannot be weighed or analysed. It is impossible for any person to say, "I feel exactly the same as you do," for no person on earth can prove it; and the most careless inquiry shows, in fact, that no two persons' feelings, much less their character as a whole, are exactly or even closely similar. And as the variations of character in the person are infinite, so they are in works of art, which are also characters of emotion and sense. The work of art is always unique. It must be unique for this very reason, that feelings, being personal and indivisible, cannot be exactly communicated. You cannot hand a feeling to another, like a book. You can only translate your feelings into words, sounds, colours—into symbols—and the symbols, as we saw, are limited by their own nature.

They are limited in expression and exactness. By the very reason that they carry emotion, they are never precise.

Thus a man cannot even express the whole of his feeling even to himself, much less communicate it. He is for the most part alone with his feelings, and can never impart them. For his one and only means of communicating experience is art, and that art works by a process of recreation in another mind. But even before that passage there is a more important and much profounder gap in communication, which is the objectivity of the symbol, the means of expression.

I said that a child, in order to conduct its life, must form a conception of the world. This it does by a selection from experience. It learns to pick out what is significant, or what seems to be significant, such as the tones of its mother's or nurse's voices, their looks and movements, from what is indifferent, like those of a stranger. It forms an idea of what is safe or dangerous, possible or impossible, what should

happen and what is irregular. And the important point is that this experience, to adults as well as children, is always objective. It is over against the 'I' that examines and selects.

You may say with Croce and other idealists that the experience becomes part of the child; it enters into him as intuition before he can know it; that the world, in short, only exists in states of mind. But we need not trouble about arguments intended to avoid dualism, a purely philosophic and logical problem to which we can and must find our own answers. All I am declaring now is something which is, in fact, acknowledged by Croce himself in another part of his æsthetic, that the work of art, as a thing, a composition of symbols, is a deliberate construction created by the artist, to communicate his ideas, out of a material, an experience, which stands to be examined.

I do not mind if some Crocean likes to argue that this material is already expressed, is already a mass of percepts. The important point is that somewhere in the act of creation this gap occurs, that somewhere the artist, like the child, looks outward upon an objective world of experience and asks himself, What does it mean? I perfectly agree that this experience has, in the first place, been direct, it has been felt; but for the artist's purpose it must be contemplated. It is, no doubt, contemplated as memory, a highly complex mass of conscious and unconscious impressions.

Tolstoy, in his diary, describes himself as sitting for a long time, trying to decide the real nature of his experience in order to describe it, until he is half mad with the problem. What he was really trying to do was to invent adequate symbols for a complex mass of feelings and ideas. But the point is that he has to make the effort. Every artist has to make that effort, a true creative effort. What is more, he usually makes half a dozen attempts to find the nearest expression. The procedure, therefore, is a comparison between the expressed form, the written phrase, the painted shape, and an emotion or conceptual emotion, which is objective, which stands to be re-examined.

Therefore, even at this level, my argument is that the artist is not only creator, but he is obliged to create. For art is not

the flower of a world experience. It is a created vehicle of individual experience, intended to communicate that individual experience to some other person. If Coleridge composed in a dream, he was still Coleridge, and his art was no less creative than that art of any of us who, in a dream, have composed, and not only composed but altered our composition, our very dream, to suit our ideas of what the dream should represent to us.

It is, of course, precisely this separation from his own experience which makes men—obliges man—to be free, that is, in the only true sense of freedom, to be creative. A plant or an insect, governed totally by reactions, by instinct, which is part of a process which arranges every moment of its life, is simply a living atom of experience, a nerve end. It is a bit of its environment. It cannot make mistakes. It is utterly secure from failure, folly, despair, every kind of misfortune, so long as its environment does not change.

But animals, and especially man, for some reason are detached from their surroundings, their experience. They are not part of an environment. They are obliged to study it as something alien and exterior to themselves, if only to manage their own relations with it. They can, in consequence, both control, to a certain extent, those relations and even the environment itself, and they can also make enormous and disastrous mistakes about it and about themselves. They can create, in fact, every kind of misery as well as every kind of delight, and may well destroy themselves in the end.

How then, you may ask, do the artists of a period unconsciously reveal a coherent situation? How far does art create history?

Men act upon their ideas, and the artist makes ideas. He sums up experience, his own experience, in a significant form. That expression is largely contemporary. Therefore, the artist belongs to his time, to history, and writes for his time. Thus it is not surprising that the artists of any time create related works. They are painting the same landscapes. But their different paintings, though of the same objects, carry different effects. A Corot and a Monet may be contemporary, but they are utterly different in result. Dickens and Bulwer Lytton

showed the same time, but Dickens had a far more powerful effect in history. His influence on the great Russians was immense, and through them on the art that produced a revolution. It is impossible to calculate the power, direct, and especially indirect, of art in history. And this effect is creative; it is personal. Imagine French history without Voltaire and Rousseau.

It is true, of course, as I said, that history has a movement, apparently of its own; that in spite of the greatest artists, the greatest statesmen, it takes a certain course. But that course is not like the flow of a canal—regular and smooth. We can compare it more easily to the growth of a child, from the naïve barbarism of the nursery, towards maturity. In that development, as we know, the inborn nature of the child, the heredity, gives the power and inclination. It is intelligent or stupid, quick or slow, receptive or inventive, a little conservative or a little liberal. It tends to enterprise, or it tends to contemplation. This, of course, is the roughest description.

The character of the simplest child is very complex and full of potentiality which is never realized, or realized only by accident. But that is the point. The child is subject in its growth to every kind of influence, designed and undesigned. Education, especially the education of its home, every experience, its chance meetings, its friends, its reading, go to what is called the formation of its character. That is to say, it forms ideas from all this experience upon which it directs its conduct. So that it remains intelligent and ambitious, but its career, according to its development, may be anything between that of a successful man of business, a rising bureaucrat, a bishop, or a communist agitator. The great organizing and reforming saints of the world, and the great soldiers and conquerors, the great destroyers, grew on the same tree. But they had different educations, different opportunities. Thus, as history is a history of men, so it can be twisted aside in its growth by what men do to it. It grows, but its character at any time is a compound of heredity, the given elements, and their form of expression.

As for the growth itself, the direction, that is often imputed to some mysterious activity called the Life Force. This is a

conception as empty and meaningless as words like 'being' and 'essence.' Force and life are both abstractions, and two abstractions do not make a thing. Life means something or somebody, with definite, and I should say, fixed, character, this and not that, and the force of such a character is merely the character in action.

Now the character of the world, as we know it, is essentially experience, phenomena. And all the primary elements of art and knowledge are feelings. Colour is a feeling. Sound is a feeling. All the given elements of social life—love, hate, and fear—are feelings. And feelings take place only in what we call a person. So that the fundamental character of the living universe is personal. No doubt it has a body as well as a soul; that is only to say once more that it has a character as well as a characteristic activity, and that they are two necessary parts of the same whole. But we are now considering the activity.

We have seen that it is, and apparently it has to be, creative. Every child has to create its own idea of the world—how to conduct its own life, how to obtain security, how to realize its ambitions. We hear a good deal about the will to live, but this again is an abstraction. The will to live is, in fact, a will to a certain kind of experience, and it seems that, in mankind, it seeks always richness of experience. The child has an enormous zest for experience of every kind, and seeks to satisfy it by every possible means. But, in fact, it is never satisfied. It demands novelty. And as it grows, so does the desire of novelty grow. The grown man is even more easily bored than the child. He cannot bear even the greatest and most exciting work of art twice over in the same day, the most brilliant piece of wit can only raise a smile once within the same hour.

Thus we have as a primary character of humanity an ambition for rich and new experience that is never satisfied. And it is precisely this ambition which gives a direction to art and to history.

This, then, is the source of direction, of what is called process. It is not in any material development, in any automatic dialectic of mysterious forces. It is in human nature, in the individual. It is not the environment which rules the

man, but humanity which creates environment. And it creates it for the satisfaction of its nature, its ambition, its hunger for experience.

Demagogues all over the world play upon that hunger, offering satisfactions which are described as material. But, in fact, material satisfactions, merely sensuous pleasures, are a very small part of the enjoyment even of the poorest and most primitive people. The most part of their material equipment of life everywhere is simply a means to some kind of emotional satisfaction. Wireless sets, cars, furniture, are not desired for their own sakes but because they open new pleasures to the senses and the mind.

Every dictator understands very well that man cannot be satisfied with material possessions. That is why he uses what is called propaganda to play upon feelings, upon patriotism, self-respect, pride, ambition, hope, fear, love. And he excites, or tries to excite, these feelings by various arts. He tries often to compel the artists to create the feelings that he believes most valuable to the State. For even if in Russia he subscribes to the process—the Marxian dialectic—he knows very well that man lives by faith, by hope, that these are not material things. They cannot be sustained by any amount of food and plumbing.

So we see that, even in countries where the whole tenet of individual creation is denied, every kind of effort is made, by education and threats, to control the artist creator. That is to say, the creative power of art is recognized and feared. And what is feared is the creation of something very difficult to control—a feeling, a faith.

And this is, in the final consideration, what art creates. The work of art, like language itself, is merely a means of provoking an emotion, and it is by this emotional vitality that men find life worth living. No amount of material prosperity will persuade a man or a race to go on enduring the insecurity, the toil of existence, without faith, that is, a conviction in his profoundest feelings that existence is worth while. That conviction, of course, is the birthright of every child. He has a natural faith. Why, then, does art need to recreate for mankind something that belongs to him from the

beginning? Why does every religion use all the means that art affords to it, music, poetry, rhetoric, dramatic ritual, narrative, fable, to excite in its followers emotions appropriate to its dogmas?

The reason, I think, in both cases, is partly in the nature of the concept, partly in the character of mankind. The concept, or, let us say, the created thing, the work of art, the composition of mere words, notes, colours, is in itself material. It is simply a collection of symbols of various degrees of complexity. And it tends always to fall into inexpressiveness. For a certain effort of attention, of sympathy, is required of the reader or listener in order to be affected.

But a man, as he grows older, moves in a world almost entirely created for him by art. He sees nothing but concepts. And these concepts are so familiar to him that they tend to lose all emotional significance. To a small child, the flight of a bird, the movement of a cat, come like miracles of beauty. A grown man does not see the miracle but only a concept, a swallow catching flies, a gull following a ship, the cat walking across the room.

Dead concepts convey no excitement, no thrill of feeling. Life, as we know, for many quite young people becomes so flat, so dead, that they seem to exist merely for lack of energy and will to shoot themselves.

We all remember Mill's confession, that at one period in his life, when he was twenty, he found life utterly intolerable. He was brilliant, successful, surrounded by admiring friends. He had a purpose in life, as he says himself, to be a reformer of the world, and he had the highest hopes of achievement. Yet all at once he fell into such frustration and misery that he wished he was dead. And this state of wretchedness continued for months. He existed, as he says, only by habit. All the books he had enjoyed meant nothing to him. He was in the state which medieval doctors called accidie, profound apathy of the soul. And what saved him, in the end, was, firstly, a passage of Marmontel's, where he describes his father's death and how, at sixteen, he took up the support of his family; and secondly, more profoundly, Wordsworth's poetry.

That is, Wordsworth opened his eyes once more to beauty,

and his feelings to love, the joy of life. How was this done? Wordsworth, by his art, broke through the conceptual crust and gave Mill a direct experience of those feelings, such as he had not had since childhood.

That is what the artist tries to do, and what he does. We know how much Wordsworth thought about technique, how he studied to get away from the stale expressions which had lost their power and to find new ones, which, by their novelty as well as their simplicity, would carry the primitive emotion—his art, that is, was conscious and deliberate. He said, "This is my material, my experience, my feelings, and my idea of life. How shall I give others the same experience?"

And Wordsworth, as we know, sought to convey much more than the simple emotional moment. He wished to give that experience as part of a general faith, a coherent feeling and conviction about the nature of universal life. All great artists have tried to do that. They seek to answer the question: "What is real, what is true, what is the meaning of life?" They create fabrics of art, in which the whole of reality, as they feel it, is harmonized for the comprehension of the soul. By comprehension, I don't mean, of course, merely a conceptual notion—Mill had that when he wanted to die—I mean a comprehensive experience of mind and feeling in which both are satisfied.

Of course, no great artist, not even Dante, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, or Tolstoy, has achieved a final picture. That is impossible. There is no final picture any more than there is any final religion. A great religion is a great product of art, meant to give men richness and power of life, but it needs a ceaseless recreation, a ceaseless reform, or it will die like all created things. The penalty of freedom is creation, and without a ceaseless creative effort all things die. We say often that the very fabric of the world, of this room, is maintained by nothing else than a continual act of the imagination.

Therefore we say that, in the final resort, what art creates and recreates in every generation is life; I mean life as a joyful and significant experience. Without the arts, the continuous effort of artists, recreating and revealing, men and nations would very quickly die from mere disgust at the boring and

meaningless repetition of trivial accidents which life would seem.

On the other hand, it is precisely this continuous effort of new creation, of new ideas, which keeps the world in a turmoil and threatens always to shake civilization to pieces. Art, in fact, as the creative activity that keeps the spirit alive, that for ever fights against everything that stultifies and kills the spirit, for the creation against the created thing, is by its very nature subversive. It disturbs; it awakes. It is the natural enemy of all dogmatic assertion, all State machines. And all established powers, all Governments, academies, Churches, hate it and fear it. It stands for liberty. It threatens their power.

That is why, of course, dictators try to make sure that the power of creative art shall at least not oppose them.

Can these efforts succeed, for instance, in Russia? I think that freedom of production is essential to the artist, that to restrict him will destroy his essential power of giving significance and value to life. To command an artist to work to rule is to take away his function, which is to go behind the rule, to deal with the man not primarily as a citizen of this or that State, but a living soul in what is called eternity. I mean by that the region of values, the timeless society of active and responsible real beings.

An artist cannot by any power be forbidden to use his imagination, and genius is infinitely more subtle than any bureaucrat, than any dogmatist, in its influence upon minds. The choice before a dictator is to make original art its bitter and cunning enemy, or to kill it, which means to kill or crush the artists. And that means, in the end, to cripple and destroy the life of the people, to turn it back upon a lower manner of existence, to stultify it. As we see already, that is the effect of much milder forms of censorship than the Russian.

So far, of course, censorship is successful. A man, by deliberate oppression, can be turned into a beast, and so can a nation. But history shows how extremely dangerous such nations are to their rulers. That is to say, dictatorships, like all authoritative and dogmatic institutions, invariably provoke hatred, and the hatred explodes the more violently and the more cruelly in direct proportion with the degree of authority

assumed. The French terror, the anti-clerical laws in France, the savageness of the Spanish war, are proof among thousands. Already Russia has had its purges, and it will certainly have more—that is to say, party revolutions.

The fact that mankind as a whole seeks not happiness nor peace, but richness and depth of life, is no automatic guarantee of what we call progress, even towards that richness. No doubt, if civilization were destroyed the human soul would begin at once to build a new one; it would take the same direction as before. But any specific civilization, at any time, is always precarious. It is always under the pressure of change, and if it resists all change it will be smashed; if it changes too quickly it will fall to pieces. It depends for its continuing life in change, in development, on the creative originality of highly fallible genius. Consider the effect of Ruskin on Gandhi, of Gandhi's special ideas in India, and India upon the whole East, upon a thousand million people. Consider what is owed of good and evil to Rousseau and Napoleon, Tolstoy and Lenin, men of power to work on the spirit of man, and therefore both necessary and dangerous.

III

English Poetry of To-day

The Right Hon. Viscount Samuel, G.C.B., G.B.E., D.C.L., LL.D.

THE P.E.N. Club, not long ago, appointed a special committee to consider "the present deplorable situation in which, owing to lack of demand for poetry, poets are experiencing great difficulty in finding publishers for their work." And in the P.E.N. News of June 1950, under the heading "The Crisis in Poetry," appears the following:

> It is, we suppose, a commonplace that there is a crisis in poetry, not only in England, but in most parts of the world. Apart from works of a few famous poets, whose reputation was made some time ago, there is so little demand for poetry that publishers cannot risk the publication of poems in book form.

I attended a meeting of the Club a few weeks ago, at which the situation was discussed and various possible expedients to meet it were considered. It was suggested that perhaps poetry reading by the poets themselves might be organized, recital fees paid, and arrangements made by established lecture agencies. It was suggested also that the P.E.N. Club itself might appoint an editorial board to make selections for publication. The possibility was mentioned of some form of public subsidy. The discussion was, as was intended, conducted mostly by the writers themselves, and I noticed that all of these took for granted that the poems which were being written and seeking publication were such as many people would wish to read or to hear, if only they knew of them and

were given opportunities; or, if they did not wish, they ought to do so, and could be educated and induced by suitable methods.

That assumption on the part of the writers was very natural. Yet it may not be well-founded. It may be that the publishers do not publish because the great majority of the educated literary public do not, in fact, wish to read poetry of the kind that has been predominant now for a number of years, and I think it would be worth while to seek the reasons for such an attitude, and to consider whether it would not be justified.

The reasons, I suggest, are to be found, first, in the style of much modernist poetry, and secondly, in its general tone and purpose.

I would cite several examples, but do not propose to give the names of the writers, for I do not desire to engage either in applause or in condemnation of individual poets, or to try to assess their comparative merits. It is not for me to arrogate to myself the rôle of an *arbiter elegantiarum*. I am only concerned to illustrate tendencies. And I do not suggest that such defects as may be found are universal in present-day poetry. A considerable number of writers are free from them, but unhappily they are almost submerged by a greater number, who give to present-day poetry its predominant character.

The first examples I take from the anthology *Modern Verse*: 1900–1940, published by the Oxford University Press in the World's Classics series. The poems are arranged according to date. I have read the selection with close attention, and with warm and renewed appreciation of many of those belonging to the earlier years; but, approaching the end, my enthusiasm gradually faded, and the last pages evoked quite a different feeling. Except for one fine, sensitive poem by Mr Stephen Spender, the final pages appear to me to be barren of merit. Here are the opening and concluding lines of the last poem but one. It is entitled "Against Anger."

> The boy asking—in a swing travelling to the moon
> through curled ice of the spinney frozen with flowers—
> "The bery old man in the moon, does he wear a beret?"

Next when I kill them in my heart for harms
I think they do me, and when next am raging,
this remembering, let it save
my mind from the hell-go-round of the grievance-ridden,
save the fool turkey-cock into love.

And the last poem, entitled "Out of the Sighs," begins with these lines:

Out of the sighs a little comes,
But not of grief, for I have knocked down that
Before the agony; the spirit grows,
Forgets, and cries;
A little comes, is tasted and found good:
All could not disappoint;
There must, be praised, some certainty,
If not loving well, then not,
And that is true after perpetual defeat.

In a later anthology in the Penguin Poets, *Contemporary Verse*, edited by Kenneth Allott, published in 1950, appear these two poems, both written, I may mention, by leaders of the modernist movement. The first, "Inscription I," begins:

Here cries chisel-parted stone
High, dry and wingless.

In hollow warning like the moon
Her own appearing ghost.

and ends:

These had a resonance, it seems
An engram, as a leaf
Is mottled in its fall.
They cut them square, as though they did not feel.
And finding nature, left a line,
Line upon line, a pale and crooked line
The shadowless wall people

Good grooves for lichen spores and chance connections.

The second is called " A Grief Ago," and begins:

A grief ago,
She who was who I hold, the fats and flower,
Or, water-lammed, from the scythe-sided thorn,
Hell wind and sea,
A stem cementing, wrestled up the tower,
Rose maid and male,
Or, masted venus, through the paddler's bowl
Sailed up the sun:

It ends:

The night is near,
A nitric shape that leaps her, time and acid;
I tell her this: before the suncock cast
Her bone to fire.
Let her inhale her dead, through seed and solid
Draw in their seas,
So cross her hand with their grave gipsy eyes,
And close her fist.

A new quarterly magazine, with the title of *Nine*, has lately been established by a group of young writers with a serious aim. They seek to provide a platform for writers of promise with a view to fostering a revival of poetry, and they appeal for a wide support. Such an enterprise should arouse all our sympathies. I wondered whether this would be the movement for the release of poetry from its present handicaps, which we could all gratefully support. But having begun to read the third number, my hopes were somewhat dashed. Here, for example, is the first stanza of the first poem:

luminous tendril of celestial wish
(whying diminutive bright deathlessness
to these my not themselves believing eyes
adventuring, enormous nowhere from)

querying affirmation; virginal

immediacy of precision: more
and perfectly more most ethereal
silence through twilight's mystery made flesh—

dreamslender exquisite white firstful flame

—new moon! as (by a miracle of your
sweet innocence refuted) clumsy some
dull cowardice called a world vanishes,

teach disappearing also me the keen
illimitable secret of begin

And here is the opening of the second poem, entitled "Quoting an also Private Thought":

Some speak of things we know, as new;
And you, of things unknown as things forgot.

A similar coral invades the apple, dyed
Inside as by infusion of the rind,

Or the poem that chanced to be prose,
Disclosing the signature in an interior,

Mathematician's parenthesis—
Astute device quite different from the autograph.

However, it is right to say that a number of poems of a very different quality followed, making the magazine as a whole well worth while, and I was glad to rank myself among its subscribers.

Mr Arthur Waley, in one of the prefaces to his admirable translations of the Chinese poets, tells a story of Po Chu'i, generally regarded as the greatest of them, that "he was in the habit of reading his poems to an old peasant woman and altering any expression which she could not understand." "The most striking characteristic of his poetry," he says, "is its verbal simplicity. . . . The poems of his contemporaries were mere elegant diversions which enabled the scholar to display his erudition or the literary juggler his dexterity." I

am inclined to suspect that some of the present modernists may have adopted the practice of reading their drafts to some person of average education and intelligence and then, if there were any lines that he *did* understand, those are the ones that they would hasten to strike out.

Many appeals from different quarters and in different periods have been made for clarity in literature. We may go back again to the Chinese, to wise old Confucius, who said that, after all, " the whole end of speech is to be understood." A French writer has said that " Clarity is the supreme courtesy of whoever wields a pen " (*la souveraine politesse*). In a sentence often quoted from Keats's Letters, he wrote " If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all "; and, again, he wrote, " Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle or amaze it with itself, but with its subject." The same idea has been expressed in another way by Matthew Arnold, in his *Essays in Criticism*: " The difference between genuine poetry and the poetry of Dryden, Pope, and all their school, is briefly this: their poetry is conceived and composed in their wits, genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul." And this, I think, is the essence of the whole matter.

But poets of the school which we are now discussing do not appreciate this. They allow words to predominate over ideas, over sincere feeling. They write in a teasing, puzzling, highly compressed style, full of subtle hints and recondite allusions. They do not realize that clever word-catching is one thing and fine poetry is another, and that the two do not go together. A woman poet of not long ago wrote these fine lines; I found them in an anthology of poems of 1932:

> I struggle for a single line
> To measure an emotion by:
> A wild bird, effortless, takes wing
> And writes a poem across the sky.

There are many causes for this trend. Some writers appear to mistake obscurity for profundity. G. H. Lewes spoke of

"Those who, because their thought is so muddy that they cannot see its shallow bottom, fancy themselves profound."

Some have wrestled so intensively and so long with their ideas that they do not realize the state of confusedness into which they have worked themselves.

> I scarcely understand my own intent;
> But, silkworm-like, so long within have wrought
> That I am lost in my own web of thought.

It was Dryden who said that.

Some merely follow the literary fashion of the hour. Whoever looks at the past history of English literature cannot fail to notice that fashions in poetry change as quickly and are as dominant while they last as the changes in the fashions of women's dress. I remember a drawing in *Punch* in which a lady in a milliner's shop is being offered a hat in the preposterous style that was then in vogue, and says to the assistant, "But this would make me look completely ridiculous." She replies, "Madam, you would look ridiculous if you didn't look ridiculous." So it is with a great deal of present-day poetry.

Sometimes the cause seems to be merely a deliberate defiance of ordinary opinion. It is not a question of 'supreme courtesy' to the reader, but the opposite. It is as though the poet said, "I do not care a scrap for you or your wishes, or even your comfort. I will not adapt myself to you—it is for you to adapt yourself to me. My ideas are so valuable, my words so revealing, that it is your business to bend all the energies of your mind to discovering what the ideas are, and what the words mean. If you do not, the loss is yours." To this the reader may reply, "I have painfully puzzled out a good many of your involved, contorted verses, in the hope of finding something that would make the trouble worth while. Very rarely have I done so. I find in your writing none of the delight I have been accustomed to find in the English poets, nor even anything to arouse a momentary interest; but only an acute annoyance. If I want mental exercise of that kind, I prefer to do crossword puzzles." To this the poet answers, "That merely shows that you are a typical Philistine;

perhaps congenitally stupid, possibly superannuated or even gaga; with a mind closed to anything new, incapable of recognizing brilliance when you see it. The fault is yours. You are a bad reader." The reader may answer, very humbly, "It is quite possible that all that is true. But is it not also possible, as an alternative, that you are a bad poet? At all times and in all countries there have been plenty of bad poets, who are unaware of the prime requirements of fine poetry. Is not that possible too?" The poet answers, "No, that is not possible."

We have as an outcome this 'crisis in poetry.' No publisher, even those who have shown themselves very well disposed to young writers, will continue to face a loss which experience shows is certain, through the impossibility of finding, among our fifty million of population, sufficient purchasers for the few hundred copies needed to cover the expense of printing and binding.

There is a second cause for the failure. So far I have been discussing style: there is also the question of tone and purpose. It has been taken almost as an axiom that the purpose of art is simply to reflect the character of the age. Times of social confusion, it is said, make for confused art. "This is an ugly age; let us write ugly poetry in order to help to show how ugly it is." Then the other arts, music, painting, sculpture, follow suit.

It is said also that this is a miserable age; the artist therefore should be a devotee of misery. I remember a competition in one of the weekly newspapers for suggestions for new proverbs. Among them was one: "Better to revel in misery than never to revel at all." Or as some anonymous writer has said, "How do you know that this life isn't another world's hell?" So we find that those born into an age so regarded fall into an attitude well described as "bombastic self-pity."

In the first place, if this is a true description of our own age—and as to that I shall have something to say in a minute—I suggest that the moral to be drawn would be precisely the opposite. It is the business of the artist not to add to and perpetuate the faults of an age, but rather to give it virtues

that it lacks. Art should not merely follow, accept, and reflect; it should be a pioneer, to lead and inspire. As Romain Rolland says, "C'est le rôle de l'artiste de créer le soleil, lorsqu'il n'y en a pas." In politics there is, I think, no more contemptible maxim than this:

> When vice prevails, and impious men bear sway,
> The post of honour is a private station.

Then, above all, is the moment when right-minded, honourable men should leap into the public arena and strike a blow for piety and virtue. If the age is what you say, then the worst of all doctrines is the doctrine of 'Detachment,' so attractive to Mr Aldous Huxley.

But is this a true description of our modern civilization? Unquestionably it still remains often at a low standard. It has been disgraced by two vast wars, of unprecedented destructiveness. All round us we see the stupid, the nasty, the sordid, squalid, vicious. And it is, of course, right to attend to the things that are wrong. What is not wrong demands no action. We accept health, or innocence, as a matter of course. It is to sickness, or crime, that we have to devote our attention. So we find, for example, the London evening papers, column after column, full of reports of accidents, crimes, disasters, the news of conflicts and dangers, floods, conflagrations, earthquakes—all over the world. But this is not a fair picture of the daily life of this community or of any other community.

One of the leaders of the group of young writers who publish *Nine*, to which I have referred, writes an article of which these are the opening words. "In an age when meanness, envy and spite have become the mainspring of politics, public morals and (alas!) criticism. . . ." I say nothing as to criticism, but so far as politics and public morals are concerned, I assert that this is the merest travesty of the facts of the case. George Meredith speaks of the man who "thinks he knows the world from having sifted and sorted a lot of our dustbins; as the modern Realists imagine it's an exposition of positive human nature when they've pulled down our noses to the worst parts."

The age is indicted because, it is said, twice over mankind has indulged in an unrestrained orgy of war and slaughter. But it has not been mankind. It has been the governments and peoples of particular countries, Germany, Italy, Japan. The vast majority of mankind, taken unprepared by violent aggression, rose to the occasion, banded themselves together to defend their freedom, and at the cost of immense sacrifice and suffering, twice over, were victorious. Then, twice over, they made a sustained effort to create organizations which should stop or prevent such calamities. The efforts of the League of Nations failed, and the efforts of the United Nations have been brought nearly to futility. Again it has been not the age that is to be condemned, not mankind. Now once more the refusal of one country to co-operate —Russia—has been the cause; and the combined effort of over fifty nations to repel aggression in Korea has been the best vindication.

The pessimists say that a third world war is 'inevitable,' a word most dear to the Marxist, but one that should be eliminated from the vocabulary of politics. Nothing is inevitable, except the catastrophes of nature. All human doings are within the control of aggregates of individual human wills. It is said that this is the Age of the Atom Bomb. It may be so. On the other hand, it may be that the atom bomb will never be used again, just as poison gas, used in the First World War, for various reasons was never used in the Second.

A view of our civilization, to be true, must be comprehensive. If there is waste-land round our cities and waste-lives also, as Mr Eliot rightly and effectively reminds us; if there are slums, prisons, reformatories, asylums for the insane, these do not make up the towns. Are we to forget the schools, libraries, galleries, concert halls, research laboratories, parks and playing-fields, churches, cathedrals, universities? Are not these also features in our modern civilization? If there is confusion in religion, philosophy, morals, that is no new thing. When has there not been doubt and controversy? It may be that this age may yet become a great constructive epoch in philosophy and religion, as it is already in science.

If there are many people who are self-centred, selfish, inactive, impelled by 'spite and envy,' are there not also hundreds of voluntary organizations, trusts, associations, leagues, societies, thousands of institutes, clubs, committees in town and country, with hundreds of thousands of unpaid workers, labouring, week by week, year in, year out, to promote knowledge and science and art, good citizenship, and the welfare of the State? If there are criminals and scoundrels in our community, are there not also heroes and saints—plenty of them in the back streets and the cottages and everywhere else; perhaps more of them in these days than in any previous generation? If we live among perils and dangers, all the more should this not be a time when, in literature, each man should indulge merely, as Sir Desmond MacCarthy says, "in expressing his own private chaos"; or, to quote Mr Peter Leyland, "for a poet to mutter in a corner 'Somebody show me a new way to express futility.'"

Nevertheless, it is right to recognize and to applaud some services which during the last twenty or thirty years modernistic poetry has rendered. It has gone far to free our verse from the pretence and pomposity which often characterized it in the last century. Meredith's Sandra Belloni said that "poetry seems like talking on tiptoe." We need to have a firm foothold on hard earth. We find a wholesome tendency to deal with contemporary realities, in colloquial language, and to discard the superior self-conscious literary style that predominated in the greater part of the nineteenth century. We have benefited also by the use of free metres, easily fitting the sense and the mood. The modern poet has renewed the service rendered by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley in freeing English poetry from the domination of the heroic couplet imported from France—"a kind of thought-coop," as James Russell Lowell called it. And there has indeed been much originality. Perhaps too much stress has been laid on that. Originality should flow and not be consciously striven after. It consists, as FitzJames Stephen said, "in thinking for yourself and not in thinking unlike other people."

In one of the addresses to the English Association, printed

in *Literature and Life*, Professor de Sola Pinto has summed up in an impartial spirit the whole matter:

> Modernist poetry has now been a going concern in this country for about a quarter of a century. In that short period it has not produced anything great, if we measure greatness in terms of a Dante or a Shakespeare or even of a Pope or a Byron. But it has performed a work of destruction and creation which were essential if the art of poetry is to have a future in this country and is not to lapse into the condition of the hobby of a dying leisured class. It destroyed the academic pseudo-poetry which flourished, or rather vegetated, in the early twentieth century, and it created a considerable body of vital and valuable work, which, in spite of crudities and eccentricities, raised to an imaginative level our awareness of the sickness of society "the present sickness which is our nightmare." . . . Full awareness of this sickness on the imaginative as well as the intellectual level is possibly the first step towards recovery.

And all the time there has been a flow of poetry of a different kind, little touched by the modernist movement, mostly carrying on the earlier tradition. Any one of us could mention a number of poets who are giving us to-day some admirable verse, with charm and perceptive insight and descriptive power; though it must be admitted that it seldom possesses a vigorous vitality, and that little of it seems likely to prove memorable.

But I ask whether the time has not come when British literature may finally discard the negative destructive mood, sardonic and scornful, lamenting and deploring; whether this is not a time for constructive achievement—a time for greatness.

The poet should be something more than a writer of verses, just as the good philosopher must be more than a philosopher, the man of religion more than a theologian, the statesman more than a political leader. Each of these must have an element of the others, and all of them need to have a touch of the prophet. The great poet must be a thinker; and a thinker who takes pains to think rightly; who seeks first to get his foundations right, to get his mind clear about the basic

problems—of man and the universe, man and society, man and himself. His first need is to try to see our own age truly; to see it in the perspective of the march of history, to realize not only its pettiness but its elements of greatness; not merely to deplore its follies, but to overcome them. And if there are, for example, troublesome, irritating restrictions on liberties, let us set against that the great enlargement in the bounds of freedom which have characterized our times—the emancipation, intellectual and social, of women, the larger half of mankind; the liberation also, political and cultural, of the peoples of Asia and Africa, again numerically a half of the human race, who are now taking their place in the advance towards a civilization fully free. If the effects of modern science are sometimes to cramp individuality and to bring new perils, on the other hand remember how greatly it has raised the standards of health, increased productivity also in industry and agriculture, lessening brute toil and expanding the opportunities of leisure. If atomic energy may be put to terrible destructive uses, on the other hand, if there is no war, it may provide the people everywhere with mechanical power, abundant and cheap, bringing a degree of material well-being far beyond the most optimistic dreams of our ancestors.

More than that, modern science has revealed to every man a real universe far exceeding in intelligence and beauty, in majesty and glory, the vague imaginings of ancient theologians and mystics. Realize all this, and then the cloud of pessimism which has hung like a pall over the intellectual world may be dissipated. Then we may escape this harking back to the melancholy of the Stoics, who regarded life as something to be endured, not enjoyed. And then a new generation of better poets may arise, ready to show a little gratitude—for the gifts of life and mind, of sympathy and love, and the emotional response to beauty; a little courage, too, so that their poems should not die away in a moan, a groan, and a whimper; and a little reverence for the august, orderly universe of the stars and galaxies, and this earth, and the physical, intellectual, and moral life of Man.

Here will be found a thousand themes for poetry that can be truly great; epics of achievement, odes of beauty and

strength, lyrics and sonnets of happiness and joy, pæans of triumph, and psalms of piety, wonder, and awe. Let poetry make a fresh start along courses such as these, then music is likely to follow, and the other arts. Then, in style of literary presentment, we may recover something of "the noble directness and sunlit simplicity of Classical Greek." Then, here in England, we may recapture what Keats so finely called "the gusto of the Elizabethan voice." And, if so, then we shall hear no more of "a crisis in poetry." For the poet will speak once again to the heart and mind of the nation, will illuminate and inspire, and be crowned with honour and praise.

IV

James Elroy Flecker

Patric Dickinson

We have vanished, but not into night, though our
manhood we sold delight,
Neglecting the chances of fight, unfit for the spear
and the bow.
We are dead, but our living was great: we are
dumb, but a song of our State
Will roam in the desert and wait, with its burden of
long long ago,
Till a scholar from sea-bright lands unearth from
the years and the sands
Some image with beautiful hands, and know what
we want him to know.

Next morning we were in the Ionian Sea, and on coming up on deck I found the young Englishman waiting to show me his latest poem, beautifully written out on a large sheet of paper. It was *Pillage*, and I remember saying after I had read it, "But this is extraordinarily good for an amateur!" and his answering with one of his sardonic smiles, "Well, I'm not quite an amateur, you know."

That was June 1910: it was his first journey to the East and he met Helle Skiadaressi, soon to be his wife, on the boat. From Paris earlier on, he had written to his greatest friend Frank Savery, quoting a review from the *Morning Post*.

Says the *Morning Post* (March 31, 1910):
"Satiety, wantonness, fear of old age, and death, are characteristic of the joy of life in Mr Flecker's page. For not only do we feel sure that they are valiant affectations, but there is practical evidence in the beauty of some of its rhythms, images, and combinations of words that he has adopted them out of

fidelity to his time rather than to himself. The fantastic sonnets of Bathrolaire are full of joy, notwithstanding the words describing the horror and shame and sickliness. The humour of *The Ballad of Hampstead Heath* is possible only to healthy high spirits." Then it quotes Mr Judd. Not bad for a reviewer: of course I am inevitably blamed for wantonness, etc.; and the review on the whole is not very encouraging but it is better than most.

He then gives Frank Savery practical advice on what to write about his poetry. Here are some points from it:

Leave out the non-Christian part of it. This is not cowardice —but why worry—it don't come out in my verse particularly and is rather unimportant. Nobody is a Christian nowadays who could possibly want to read poetry.

Emphasize the fact that healthiness as opposed to decadence consists not in subject but in treatment and technique.

(*a*) in the directness, cleannness, and shapeliness of the images;

(*b*) in the strength of the versification;

(*c*) I think I ought to be a popular poet. For why? My poems, even if failures, are interesting, I think, because their subjects are varied and not badly chosen, and the treatment definite.

"Not quite an amateur." I do not propose to give any detailed account of Flecker's short life. He was born on November 5, 1884, and died on January 3, 1915. You will find some of the facts in Geraldine Hodgson's *Life*, published by Blackwell in 1925; and there is a most moving and vivid account of his brief married life with Helle Flecker (from which my extract was taken) in her book *Some Letters From Abroad*, published by Heinemann in 1930.

Like the Victorian poet Arthur Hugh Clough he came to Oxford a brilliant, precocious boy; a genius in a bottle tightly screwed down by an Evangelical Christian upbringing. Both poets were un-English, for they were wits; of the sardonic temperament. If they did not wear their hearts on their sleeves they certainly wore them on the French side of La Manche. Clough never entirely escaped from Dr Arnold; Flecker certainly did escape from Dr and Mrs Flecker. He was not

allowed to bring his closest Oxford friend Jack Beazley home, because Beazley was not a Christian. So he did not go home. Yet he loved the concept of home. He wrote in *From Grenoble*:

> I hate this glittering land where nothing stirs:
> I would go back, for I would see again
> Mountains less vast, a less abundant plain,
> The Northern Cliffs clean-swept with driven foam,
> And the rose-garden of my gracious home.

Opposite this quotation in the biography is a photograph of the rose-garden: it is that kind of biography. It goes on: "To the right of the rose-garden stood and still stand the elms of *November Eves*, one of the last four poems printed posthumously in *The Old Ships*."

> November Evenings! Damp and still
> They used to cloak Leckhampton hill,
> And lie down close on the grey plain,
> And dim the dripping window-pane,
> And send queer winds like Harlequins
> That seized our elms for violins
> And struck a note so sharp and low
> Even a child could feel the woe.
>
> Now fire chased shadow round the room;
> Tables and chairs grew vast in gloom:
> We crept about like mice, while Nurse
> Sat mending, solemn as a hearse,
> And even our learned eyes
> Half closed with choking memories.
>
> Is it the mist or the dead leaves,
> Or the dead men—November eves?

The Flecker children had a pet parrot in the nursery. One day it was found removed to the kitchen. Mrs Flecker asked why. Nurse Johnson replied: "Master Roy I *must* stand: the parrot I needn't."

> Now if you'd train a parrot, catch him young
> Whilst soft the mouth and tractable the tongue.

Old birds are fools: they dodder in their speech,
More eager to forget than you to teach;
They swear one curse, then gaze at you askance,
And all oblivion thickens in their glance.

No, Flecker's 'home' after Oxford was symbolic rather than actual. Here, as Mr Eliot remarks:

Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

And these lines may serve us well to define Flecker's attitude to his home. Most of his adult life was spent abroad. Home is where one starts from. He was a natural exile, a difficult combative fellow; a gay passionate "angry boy," who never conceived a jaunt well spent unless *all* was spent, and he found himself with empty pockets at the station and one train still to catch. His longing for home you can approximate to his passion for stillness. At the still centre of the turning world was home—not Dr and Mrs Flecker and difficulties over friends, money, conscience, and belief, but something in himself which he expressed in all the best of his poems. Something which is indeed unique; the quality which has preserved him.

From these fragmentary impressions, a little bewildering perhaps, let a clear, single image emerge:

And there's a hall in Bloomsbury
No more I dare to tread,
For all the stone men shout at me
And swear they are not dead;
And once I touched a broken girl
And knew that marble bled.

The *Morning Post* reviewer discerned in Flecker, beside the fear of death and old age, the element of joy: I think he might better have said gaiety: that gaiety, I mean, which Yeats so perfectly catches in a late poem called *Lapis Lazuli* in the line "Gaiety transfiguring all that dread."

Had Flecker the true quality of joy, he might have been a major poet: as it is, he has, refinedly, a passionate cold gaiety.

His elements are rare and fine, but they are small. I claim for him, therefore, a place in a remarkably select company: the first-rate minor—and of that company Thomas Gray springs to mind. I will not arbitrarily select others; let us say there are less than a dozen in English literature.

Perhaps this is the point at which I should say, also, that I am speaking of Flecker as a poet, and though I may refer to his two plays I shall not deal at all with his collected prose-pieces, nor his novel *The King of Alsander*, nor his Italian reader, nor his book on education, *The Grecians*.

I want to explore his contribution to English poetry. He was not much taken with the work of his contemporaries. He had admired Dowson; and Swinburne, who, he said:

> . . . took from Shelley's lips
> The kiss of poetry . . .
>
> Who sings upon Parnassus? He is dead,
> The God to whom be prayers, not praises, said,
> The sea-born, the Ionian. There is one—
> But he dreams deeper than the oaks of Clun.
> (May Summer keep his maids and meadows glad:
> They hear no more the pipe of the Shropshire Lad!)
> And our Tyrtaeus? Strange that such a name
> Already fades upon the mist of fame
> With the smoke of Eastern armies. But the third
> Still knows the dreadful meaning of a word.
> His gown is black and crimson: mystery
> Veils all his speech, so wonderful is he.

—Swinburne, Housman, Kipling, Yeats (whose last poems he never lived to see)—and he also admired de la Mare. In 1914 he wrote to Harold Munro:

> I like Ezra Pound as a joke—but, good God, they take him seriously. . . . *I'm not a reactionary, but I believe in building on tradition and in the novelty coming from the inspiration,* not —as with the Futurists—from an exterior formlessness which is damned easy to achieve, (I do futurists at 5*s.* or 10*s.* 6*d.* a page according to length of line).

"I believe in building on tradition and in the novelty coming from the inspiration."

In September 1911 a poem of his appeared in the *English Review*. It was called *The Dying Patriot*:

Day breaks on England down the Kentish hills,
Singing in the silence of the meadow-footing rills,
Day of my dreams, O day!
I saw them march from Dover, long ago,
With a silver cross before them, singing low,
Monks of Rome from their home where the blue seas break in foam,
Augustine with his feet of snow.

Noon strikes on England, noon on Oxford town,
—Beauty she was statue cold—there's blood upon her gown:
Noon of my dreams, O noon!
Proud and godly kings had built her, long ago
With her towers and tombs and statues all arow,
With her fair and floral air and the love that lingers there,
And the streets where the great men go.

Evening on the olden, the golden sea of Wales,
When the first star shivers and the last wave pales:
O evening dreams!
There's a house that Britons walked in, long ago,
Where now the springs of ocean fall and flow,
And the dead robed in red and sea-lilies overhead
Sway when the long winds blow.

Sleep not my country: though night is here, afar
Your children of the morning are clamorous for war:
Fire in the night, O dreams!
Though she send you as she sent you, long ago,
South to desert, east to ocean, west to snow,
West of these out to seas colder than the Hebrides I must go
Where the fleet of stars is anchored and the young Star-captains glow.

[*faintly*]
The sun, I shall never see the sun:
No, friend; was this well done?
[*He sways back into the river. Three o'clock sounds.*]

Yes, it is from a scene in his first play, *Don Juan.* The poem is spoken by Lord Framlingham, who is P.M. Don Juan has shot him to prevent the outbreak of war. In a letter to Mr Cooper, Flecker wrote:

> I never thought of the metre of the Dying Patriot, and how can I explain it? . . . as for the meaning, I was surprised the E. R. took that poem instead of other poems from the *Don Juan* play, which I sent on, as it is a little obscure. The patriot has been shot, and, as he dies, very mistily he thinks of England from E. to W. Dover suggests Augustine to him—its most important connexion in English History. Oxford is in the middle of England—and the blood is suggested by his own blood and is a piece of mental wandering, quite in keeping dramatically but, I admit puzzling out of its context. "Floral air" is, after all, a very ordinary expression for sweet or flower-scented air, and you can smell it in the Lime Walk of Trinity Quad any spring day. "Feet of snow"—I'd forgotten—just symbolic of the purity of Augustine's fervour—and mind you he was probably bare-foot. Surely you know the legend of the drowned lands off Wales—or rather the fact that large parts of Carnarvon Bay were submerged. The Patriot is dying in London at night and thinks of the parts of the Empire that are at sunrise. The chill of death suggests to his wandering fancies the Hebrides and the cold seas: for you see, the poem is dramatic and not lyrical.

I must apologize for choosing as my first instance a poem so familiar and giving at length an exposition so obvious. The point to take is, of course, the first. "I never thought of the metre of the Dying Patriot" in conjuction with "building on tradition and the novelty coming from the inspiration." I think one of the basic proofs of poetic genius—I do not say 'great' or imply any category or quality—is the constancy of a poet's imagery. The *verse-writer* is full of pomp and circumstance, the *poet* is at the centre of his system, and his images are constant as planets.

To enlarge upon this I must embark on a hazardous

scientific expedition, for I want to liken the true poetic condition to the living organism, from the physicist's point of view.

I will say that the element of poetry is like entropy. Entropy is the measure of the unavailability of a system's thermal energy for conversion into mechanical work, i.e., it is a measure of living, of combat between motion and stillness. For the tendency of all matter is to reach a permanent state of thermo-dynamical equilibrium where nothing happens at all, that is 'maximum entropy' and that is 'death.'

The living organism avoids this state as long as possible by eating, drinking, breathing, or assimilating. That is its metabolism. Now every event in Nature means an increase of entropy in the part of the world where it is going on. Thus a living organism is continually increasing its entropy, and thus tends towards its maximum, its death. It can only keep alive by drawing from its environment negative entropy; the essential thing in metabolism is in freeing the organism from all the entropy it cannot help producing whilst alive.

It is, I have read, a fundamental law of physics that the natural tendency of things is to approach the chaotic state. "Thus, the device by which an organism maintains itself at a fairly high level of orderliness [= fairly low level of entropy] really consists in sucking orderliness from its environment."

Now may I try to apply that? *This 'element of poetry' is the measure of the unavailability of the poet's energy for conversion into mechanical work; i.e., writing poetry.* The metabolism which keeps at bay this tendency towards maximum poetic entropy is the imagination, and it is the imagination which is continually sucking new combinations of orderliness from its environment.

To put it even more simply, it is the negative entropy of the imagination which keeps the poetic element alive and in motion. The greatness of a poet lies in how widely his metabolism can transmute his poetic element into poems.

The death of his poetic element is what all poets fear, far more than corporal death. 'Divine fire' is no empty phrase. The essential thing in metabolism of the imagination is *in*

freeing the poet from all the entropy, the poetic element he cannot help producing whilst alive.

Now the strength of a poet's resistance is nowhere more evident than in the strength and originality of his rhythm. In our day look at the tremendous and continuous rhythmical development of W. B. Yeats, W. J. Turner, or Dylan Thomas; at the rhythmical decline of Sassoon; at the surrender after one brief struggle of Stephen Spender.

Now, just as these laws of thermo-dynamics are constant, so in combating them one finds that the imagination of a true poet chooses its weapons early and uses them with increasing daring and skill all his life. He has his battery of images. Why are the major poets so 'obvious'? Because they do get in the way at the most points of our sensibility; because they are imaginatively in a higher state of orderliness. Like the Ancient Mariner they stop one in three. It is interesting to note the progress of arrest. First, it is physical. He holds him with his skinny hand. Then, it is by power of the intellect, the will. He holds him with his glittering eye.

To apply our thesis to Flecker in particular: What we have noticed is a conflict between a desire for motion and a desire for either stillness or equilibrium. This is the profound and simple conflict of life with death. In Flecker more than in any other poet I know of, that actual conflict is the basis of his imagery. That his imagination could not apply it to great themes is why he is not a major poet: that his imagination did apply it to minor themes is why he is a perfect minor poet. I believe the instinctive apprehension by us of this element in his work is a great reason for our recognition of him as a true poet, even though an examination of his themes brings to light no profundity of thought, or great intensity of feeling. I do not intend to instance all the examples of this one conflict to be found in his work. It will be implicit in most of my quotations and is, I think, of great importance. The colour and clarity, the carven and polished excellence of his actual verses, is secondary to this one imaginative impulse, which at its best produced poems of a real rhythmical originality and beauty—poems as different from each other as *Epithalamion* and *The Pensive Prisoner.*

Flecker's power of resistance was twofold. It was lyrical and dramatic—a two-edged sword is beaten out upon one anvil. This metaphor is exact, I think; for the anvil is stillness, maximum entropy, death; and the hammer is the necessarily rhythmical (but not regular) beating down upon that stillness; the hammering out of the blade of his defence, "Toledo-wrought neither to break nor bend."

To return to Yeats's "Gaiety transfiguring all that dread," *gaiety* is the hammer, *dread* the anvil.

Flecker was, as he said, a confrère of the French Parnassian movement. "The French Parnassian has a tendency to use traditional forms and even to employ classical subjects. His desire in writing poetry is to create beauty and his inclination is towards a beauty *somewhat statuesque*. He is apt to be dramatic and objective rather than lyrical":

> . . . Now level on the land and cloudless red
> The sun's slow circle dips towards the dead.
> Night-hunted, all the monstrous flags are furled:
> The armies halt and round them halts the World.
>
> . . . Could I but steal that awful throne
> Ablaze with dreams and songs and stars
> Where sits Night, a man of stone,
> On the frozen mountain spars . . .
>
> . . . Till a scholar from sea-bright lands unearth
> from the years and the sands
> Some image with beautiful hands, and know
> what we want him to know.
>
> . . . And yet my words are music as thy waves,
> And like thy rocks shall down through time
> endure.

A beauty somewhat statuesque. "The Romantics in France as in England had done their powerful work and infinitely widened the scope and enriched the language of poetry. It remained for the Parnassians to raise the technique of their art to a height which should enable them to express the subtlest ideas in powerful and simple verse."

Now a great deal of time has been spent by Miss Hodgson

on a study of Flecker's influences: Paul Fort, Leconte de Lisle, Heredia, Moréas, etc. Anyone interested in this particular aspect of his horoscope should read the Epilogue to the *Life*. But the point about influences is this: that they are objective to the critical side of a poet, subjective to the creative. Flecker corrected his work and measured it against Parnassian themes and standards, but he wrote it out of his own guts, and what came out was transmuted inside himself. To say that because he wrote *Saadabad* he must have been reading the *Kasidah* of Burton, or that because he wrote *The Pensive Prisoner* he must have been reading Heredia is pointless. To look for hints and resemblances, nods and becks, winks and regurgitations, is a fascinating blind-alley in criticism: as witness Mr Eliot. Influences do not make a poet any more than a frame makes a picture; but the aptness of the influence or the frame is another matter. And in the case of a real poet, I think, his influences are inevitable; like his basic imagery they arrange themselves. It is when the influences are deliberately chosen against the poet's natural æsthetic, when they are fashionable, of the time and not the poet, that the ensuing writing is artificial; a sort of stuff as repulsive as 'processed cheese.'

Flecker was a great craftsman. "I do like Pierrot and his moon," he wrote in 1907, "and whatever I take up, from Tariff Reform to Carpentry, it is merely a huge jest with me, a little Dionysiac dance of my pen through statistics and such follies just to show I can do it. . . ." In the same year he noted *The Times* review of his book: "*Polished little poems*, rather pagan by a man who regrets having been at Oxford." His comment is: "It is death to acknowledge oneself an Oxford man." (Since he disliked his time at Cambridge even more, I imagine he regarded that as a fate worse than death —but that is by the way.)

He was indeed a most deliberate poet and corrected and re-corrected his poems to an intense degree.

> What babyish stuff English Literature is! Wild boy poets with insane ideas—Keats, Shelley, Swinburne. Shakespeare's great fault is childish stupidity, ranting, sentimental, moralist. Milton is the only *man* in our Literature outside the nineteenth century.

Most of you will know his poem *The Old Ships*; this is the first draft of it, inscribed "For Hellé, written on a Happy Day —July 13, 1913."

I have seen old ships sailing; still alive
On those blue waters lilied by the seas
That still can tell the caverned Cyclades
The charm that heartened Peleus to his dive
That day he left his town upon the coast
And drove right down across the darker swell,
His ivory body flitting like a Ghost
And past the holes where the eyeless fishes dwell
Found his young mother thronèd in her shell.
And all these ships were old,
Painted the mid-sea blue or deep sea green
And patterned with the vines and grapes in gold.
But I have seen,
Pointing her shadow gently to the West
And imaged fair upon her mirror bay
A ship a little older than the rest
And fading where she lay.
Who knows. In that old ship—but in that same
(Fished up beyond Phæacia, patched as new
and painted brighter blue)
With patient comrades sweating at the oar
That talkative, unskilful seaman came
From Troy's fire-crimson shore
And with loud lies about his Wooden Horse,
Wrapped in his eloquence, forgot his course.
It was so old a ship—who knows—who knows,
It was so beautiful—I watched in vain
To see its mast split open with a rose,
And all its timbers burst to leaf again.

I do not think I need quote the final version, for it must be one of the most familiar of his poems, but it is incredible how much the poem has developed in the meanwhile. Even in one wholly rejected section the line—

And past the holes where the eyeless fishes dwell

was turned to

Over the holes where blind flat fishes dwell.

Flecker never stopped working at his poems. What is remarkable is that the corrections were on the whole always improvements. Even his poems were never allowed to sink into a state of inertia. They went on living and growing inside him. It is salutary to read his comments upon his own poems, and lest I should begin to build a great card-house of theory on that Bloomsbury stanza from *Oak and Olive* I must keep in mind his note: "A jest after all in the good old manner. No, I wouldn't have it out of the volume, though of course it's very slight." And again, since theories must be tilted at always, do not imagine that Flecker wrote slowly and carefully. Of *Saadabad* he says, "It was written straight out and not a line revised." The sonnet *Areiya*, too, he says, was written in three minutes and never altered. These are the only two poems of direct individual passion he ever wrote.

It seems to me that Flecker, unlike most artists, was in a permanent state of level creativeness. There was for him no waiting for inspiration, and therefore, most wisely, he mistrusted the first outpouring of the spring; and strained off through finer and finer meshes the sediment which comes with the water; he strained off the earthiness and left his poems pure. There are very few lapses. His work was pure in its first sense of purified, by fire, as in a crucible, and then left to get cold: cold as the philosopher's stone.

The play between movement and stillness is only a variant of the play between heat and cold. Flecker was not a philosopher. His abandonment of the Christian belief left him believing, I think, only in the moment of death "with no before or after." He was constantly holding up the Medusa's head of his imagination in front of living moving things, and quite dispassionately watching what happened, what changed. He dreaded that the stone would bleed, yet hoped to disprove death if it did.

> Four great gates has the city of Damascus,
> And four Grand Wardens, on their spears reclining,
> All day long stand like tall stone men
> And sleep on the towers when the moon is shining.

It is in the intensity, the passionate apprehension of the moment, that his own lyric power lies (as all lyric power does): but for Flecker the moment is *only one kind of moment*: and with him this moment is also dramatic. It is not only the moment of the contemplation of a flower, it is the moment the flower is picked.

> For one night or the other night
> Will come the Gardener in white, and gathered flowers are dead, Yasmin.

Two poems will serve to illustrate this. The first, an intensely subtle dramatization, is a well-known one, *A ship, an isle, a sickle moon.*

> A ship, an isle, a sickle moon—
> With few but with how splendid stars
> The mirrors of the sea are strewn
> Between their silver bars!
>
> . . . . .
>
> An isle beside an isle she lay,
> The pale ship anchored in the bay,
> While in the young moon's port of gold
> A star-ship—as the mirrors told—
> Put forth its great and lonely light
> To the unreflecting Ocean, Night.
> And still, a ship upon her seas,
> The isle and the island cypresses
> Went sailing on without the gale:
> And still there moved the moon so pale,
> A crescent ship without a sail!

The drama is implicit. Where in Housman drama is explicit —cut throats, hangings, desertions, and deaths—here Flecker expresses a complex of human emotions; the more you consider this poem the more human it is, in a pure lyric form. The other poem, perhaps his masterpiece, brings all these qualities together. Where in the last poem the rhythm is a little mechanical, in this it is superbly original.

Stillness

When the words rustle no more,
And the last work's done,
When the bolt lies deep in the door,
And Fire, our Sun,
Falls on the dark-laned meadows of the floor;

When from the clock's last chime to the next chime
Silence beats his drum,
And Space with gaunt grey eyes and her brother Time
Wheeling and whispering come,
She with the mould of form and he with the loom of rhyme:

Then twittering out in the night my thought-birds flee,
I am emptied of all my dreams:
I only hear Earth turning, only see
Ether's long bankless streams,
And only know I should drown if you laid not your hand on me.

Do you remember the last scene but one of *Hassan*, where the fountain has run blood and the garden is left to the ghosts, and the Ghost of Pervaneh speaks to the Fountain Ghost?

PERVANEH: Tell us, O man of the Fountain, what shall we do?

FOUNTAIN GHOST: Nothing: you are dead.

PERVANEH: Shall we stay in this garden and be lovers still, and fly in the air and flit among the trees?

FOUNTAIN GHOST: As long as you remember what you suffered, you will stay near the house where your blood was shed.

PERVANEH: We will remember that ten thousand years.

FOUNTAIN GHOST: You have forgotten that you are a Spirit. The memories of the dead are thinner than their dreams.

PERVANEH: But you stay here, by the fountain.

FOUNTAIN GHOST: I created this fountain: what have you created in the world?

Flecker was a unique artist, a very serious person, an adult in his sense of saying that English literature was childish. "Well, I'm not quite an amateur, you know." He was outside his time not because he went to the East, but, by temperament an exile, a pilgrim, he was *on the move*:

> We are the Pilgrims, master; we shall go
> Always a little further: it may be
> Beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow,
> Across that angry or that glimmering sea,
>
> White on a throne or guarded in a cave
> There lives a prophet who can understand
> Why men were born. . . .

Flecker's pilgrimage was other. It was, so to speak, to find out "why men die"; to find out the difference between animate and inanimate. He was not a moralist nor a scientist; he was an æsthete, and those who live by æsthetics are not honoured in England. Though he appeared in Edward Marsh's first two anthologies, he was not a Georgian; though he was conditioned by his living in the East, he was not an orientalist. He hated the East, as you will find from his letters.

To return to the lyrics: critics point to the environment to explain his clarity, his glitter. Regard his ability to speak nine languages, they say, to dig into the poetry of the Middle East, no wonder he was different from the Georgian poets; regard his passion for contemporary French poetry, too—all these have had their effect upon his verse. One sometimes gets an impression of the insular poets and critics appealing, like Test cricketers, but against the *brilliance* of the light. What distinguishes Flecker from the rest of his contemporaries is the concentration, the self-conscious ruthlessness of his art.

"What have you created in the world?"

Flecker created lyric poetry. I have already suggested wherein I think its uniqueness lies. The success or failure in each individual creation does not concern us here. He was, in many ways, the last poet of the nineteenth century, the successor to Ernest Dowson in his attitude towards art. But his wit saved him from being precious, as it saved him from the 'coal-tar-soap' healthiness which pervaded so much of the poetry of his time.

Flecker will never be an influence either in actual matter or manner upon English poetry. In principle, like a law of physics, he will always be an influence (or ought to be an influence) upon any serious poet. For he is a very complete poet. And his theory of poetry sprang from his poetry, in the same way as did Wordsworth's.

Flecker, like Firbank, was an exotic, a fantastic:

> .... And such rich jams meticulously jarred
> As God's own prophet eats in paradise.

He could delight in describing a tram:

> The great and solemn-gliding tram,
> Love's still-mysterious car,
> Has many a light of gold and white,
> And a single dark red star.

I do not suppose for a moment he expected you to take that seriously, but this most certainly is serious:

> Behind, the plain's floor rocks: the armies come:
> The rose-round lips blow battle horns: the drum
> Booms oriental measure. Earth exults.
> And still behind, the tottering catapults
> Pulled by slow slaves, grey backs with crimson lines,
> Roll resolutely west. And still behind,
> Down the canal's hibiscus-shaded marge
> The glossy mules draw on the cedar barge,
> Railed silver, blue-silk-curtained, which within
> Bears the Commander, the old Mandarin,
> Who never left his palace-gates before,
> But hath grown blind reading great books on war.

That extract from *Taoping* also gives you much of Flecker's quality: a vivid, practical, gay sort of imagination delighting in the absurd.

By now I feel I have, in rather a discursive fashion, given you an impression of Herman Elroy Flecker, who changed his name and his ideas at Oxford; and I would like to end with a poem written there and first published in a kind of broadsheet he and his friend Jack Beazley produced in Eights week. This poem is called *Oxford Canal* and it is, I think, the first poem he wrote in which the whole of his poetic element was used. As you will see, it contains—and this for this first time—everything I have been talking about.

Oxford Canal

When you have wearied of the valiant spires of this County Town,
Of its wide white streets and glistening museums, and black monastic walls,
Of its red motors and lumbering trams, and self-sufficient people,
I will take you walking with me to a place you have not seen—
Half town and half country—the land of the Canal.
It is dearer to me than the antique town: I love it more than the rounded hills:
Straightest, sublimest of rivers is the long Canal.
I have observed great storms and trembled: I have wept for fear of the dark.
But nothing makes me so afraid as the clear water of this idle canal on a summer's noon.
Do you see the great telephone poles down in the water, how every wire is distinct?
If a body fell into the canal it would rest entangled in those wires for ever, between earth and air.
For the water is as deep as the stars are high.
One day I was thinking how if a man fell from that lofty pole
He would rush through the water towards me till his image was scattered by his splash,
When suddenly a train rushed by: the brazen dome of the engine flashed: the long white carriages roared;
The sun veiled himself for a moment, the signals loomed in fog;
A savage woman screamed at me from a barge: little children began to cry;
The untidy landscape rose to life; a sawmill started;

A cart rattled down to the wharf, and workmen clanged over the
iron footbridge;
A beautiful old man nodded from the first storey window of a
square red house,
And a pretty girl came out to hang up clothes in a small delightful
garden.
O strange motion in the suburb of a county town: slow regular
movement of the dance of death!
Men and not phantoms are these that move in light.
Forgotten they live, and forgotten die.

*

V

Children in English Literature

Dorothy Margaret Stuart

THOUGH children occupy only a patch in that great Field full of Folk which is English literature, their patch is neither a small nor a poor one. Our poets, the great and the less great, our essayists and novelists, have written more upon the theme of childhood than the men of letters in any other country: and not only upon childhood in general—there are many childish figures dispersed over their works, some as stiff as the swaddled chrysalids on a monumental brass, others from the first moment they appear not merely alive but immortal. Whether treated conventionally or naturally, their number is many and their variety almost infinite. Now they are used to stress the moral of an allegory, now to heighten comedy or deepen pathos: they have parts to play in miracles and interludes, they sometimes help to unfold the plot of a tale. By turns they are admonished and exhorted; they are sung to sleep with immemorial lullabies, lured to laughter with skipping rhymes, apostrophized in the most extravagant language of courtly compliment, and—when they die young—lamented in elegies almost as lovely as any in the world.

Few of the children in medieval literature detach themselves very clearly from that teeming tapestry of people. The two-year-old Pearl, so deeply mourned by her poet-father, stands poised on the borderline between truth and fable, where the actual child merges into the vision of the "maid of grace," and the "lyttel quene" melts into the symbolic image of shining virginity. The babies of Chaucer's Grisildis are puppets, his little St Hugh is hardly more boylike than little Paul Dombey. But if the children are wooden, their mothers are not. Even the "ugly sergeant" sent to bear away the

infants of the much-enduring Grisildis might have been melted by her cries: and when the small martyr of Lincoln was laid dead before the high altar,

> His mooder swownynge by his beeré lay:
> Unnethé myght the peplé that was there
> This newé Rachel bryngé fro his bere.

These pictures suggest a personal memory. Was it thus that the mother of "little Loys my son" lamented him? Loys as we see him (for the first and last time) in the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* is a real boy, importuning his over-worked father to demonstrate the use of that mysterious object. It is a fascinating fancy that Chaucer's Loys and Shakespeare's Hamnet may be sporting together in what Francis Thompson called the "nurseries of Heaven."

In spite of the undeniable stiffness of most of these very early boys and girls, we find here and there, in interlude, carol, or cradle-song, small creatures that leap suddenly into life. The infant Saviour begs to be danced up and down:

> Mary, moder, I pray ye
> Take me up onlofte
> And in thyne arme
> Thowe lappe me warme
> And daunce me now full ofte:
> & yf I wepe
> & wyll not slepe,
> Then synyg, By by, lully, lulley.

In the miracle-plays Isaac is always a convincing, likeable boy. There is a touch of Sophoclean irony in the Brome *Abraham and Isaac* (familiar to many of us through its inclusion in the English Association's *Book of Short Plays*) when Isaac shows an innocent eagerness to accompany his father to the fatal hill, stoutly shouldering a bundle of faggots for the sacrifice as they go; and there is real pathos in his words to Abraham as the climax draws near:

> When I am dead, then pray for me—
> But, good father—tell my mother nothing—
> Say that I am in another country dwelling.

But the ram is already in the thicket, and the audience knows that it is there: otherwise the tension would become unbearable. When all danger is past and the patriarch gives the command, "Homeward fast let us go," Isaac responds joyfully:

> By my faith, Father, thereto I grant—
> I had never so good a will to go home
> And speak with my dear mother.

Langland and Lydgate each casts a backward glance over his shoulder at the boy he had once been. With Long Will it is a characteristically gloomy glance, focused upon the time when his father and his friends sent him to school till he "wist witterly what Holy Writ meaned"; and moving thence to the later—yet still all too early stage—when the death of his powerful patrons robbed the tall, dreamy youth of all hopes of preferment and left him no alternative but to become a poor chantry priest of Paul's. With Lydgate the retrospect is free from sadness—if not from shame. He confesses that he ran, "Like a young colt without a bridle"; that he broke into gardens and robbed apple-trees, jangled, japed, mocked his elders. He hated getting up and going to bed with equal vehemence, and preferred playing with cherry-stones to kneeling in church. It was a curious beginning for the future author of a rhymed manual of good behaviour. Or was it?

The peculiar clogging and thickening process which accompanied the change-over from the Plantagenet to the Tudor period showed itself in the field of letters no less than in the adjacent domains of architecture and art. Few babies are to be seen anywhere, hardly any little girls, not many small boys. There is, however, one small boy who in himself atones for the stodginess pervading the early Tudor scene—little Dick in John Heywood's "very merry interlude," the *Play of the Wether*. When the merchant begs Jupiter that, in the interests of sea-borne commerce, the waves shall be calm, when the ranger wants a strong wind to blow down the timber which is his as a windfall, when the gentlewoman wants temperate weather for her complexion's sake, the schoolboy wants snow—and lots of it. "All my pleasure," he says,

is in catching of birds.
And making snowballs and throwing the same.

He explains that there were a hundred boys met together who, hearing of the various suppliants who were to ask the Father of the Gods for such weather as pleased them most individually, resolved to make him their messenger:

Upon agreement with a great voice
"Send little Dick," cried all the boys.

When he learns that he and his fellows shall take their turn with the rest in having their prayer granted, little Dick shows very good feeling. He wishes to make some acknowledgment of Jupiter's kindness. "Godfather God," says he,

"I will do somewhat for you again,
—Ye may hap to have a bird or twain,
And I promise you, if any snow come,
When I make my snowballs you shall have some."

Sir Thomas More, in one of his less familiar English works, gives an attractive picture of a small boy who might be little Dick's twin-brother. It is a personification in the morality manner but it is none the less lively for that.

I am called Childhood: in play is all my mind,
To cast a quoit, a cok-stele and a ball.
A top I can set and drive it in its kind;
But would to God those hateful bookés all
Were in a fyer burned to powder small;
Then might I lead my life always in play.

When the transition is accomplished and the Tudor age moves towards its golden zenith, children multiply both in literature and in art. Shakespeare must have been a close and keen observer of quite small babies, as well as of boys and girls of larger growth. We catch the midnight wailing of an infant in the famous Dogberry and Verges scene—in Act III of *Much Ado About Nothing*. The two old men are instructing the Watch in their duties. "If you hear a child cry in the night," says Verges, "you must call to the nurse and bid her still it."

"How," asks one of the watchmen, "how if the nurse be asleep and will not hear us?"

"Why, then," cries Dogberry; "depart in peace and let the child wake her with its crying—for the ewe that will not hear her lamb when it baes will never answer a calf when it bleats." The 'muling and puking' baby which begins the Seven Ages of Man is hardly an attractive specimen, but in Sonnet 143 we find something very different, and as we read we realize that the "divine Williams" is in action, not casually or perfunctorily, but consciously and at concert pitch:

Lo as a careful housewife runs to catch
One of her feather'd creatures broke away,
Sets down her babe and makes all swift despatch
In pursuit of the thing she would have stay;
Whilst her neglected child holds her in chase,
Cries to catch her whose busy care is bent
To follow that which flies before her face,
Not prizing her poor infant's discontent:
So runn'st thou after that which runs from thee
Whilst I, thy babe, chase thee afar behind.

Was it Mary Arden Shakespeare, with one of her younger children in pursuit, was it Ann Hathaway Shakespeare, with Susannah or one of the twins, stumbling after her, that impressed indelibly upon the sensitive plate of William Shakespeare's mind that image of a housewife, a hen, and a small child? It must surely have been either his mother or his wife.

Upon nursery discipline his views were far in advance of his age, an age that endorsed King Solomon's more savage pronouncements on that subject, and which regarded Horace's Orbilius as a pattern to all instructors of youth. "Those that do teach young babes," says Desdemona, "do it with gentle means and easy tasks," but this was not the universal practice in Elizabeth's England; nor were there many of those mild fathers who:

. . . bound up the threatening twigs of birch
Only to stick it in their children's sight
For terror, not for use.

Companionable parents there must have been: otherwise the

audience would have been affronted by the improbability when Leontes and Polixenes discuss their respective small sons. When the King of Sicilia asks his friend if he is as fond of his young prince "as we do seem to be of ours," the King of Bohemia answers:

> If at home, Sir,
> He's all my exercise, my mirth, my matter,
> Now my sworn friend, and then mine enemy:
> My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all:
> He makes a July day short as December.

Mamilius is the most carefully studied of Shakespeare's small boys. We see him from several angles, through the eyes of several observers. We are reminded of his valiant spirit not only by his father's comment when he is pining away after his mother's disgrace; not only by his demeanour when the ladies-in-waiting want to "kiss him hard and speak to him as if he were a baby still"; but also by the fragment of dialogue between him and Polixenes before the shadows begin to deepen upon the court of Sicily. Ready to 'play shop,' the King asks his son:

> Mine honest friend,
> Will you take eggs for money?

But Mamilius, probably with a movement of the hand towards the 'muzzled' dagger at his girdle, answers stoutly:

> No, my lord; I'll fight.

Side by side with this valour there exists that love of the gruesome and mysterious found in most intelligent children. We have Hermione's word for it that he was "powerful" at "frighting her with his sprites"; and no spinner of creepy stories ever began one of them more effectively than the small Prince with his low-whispered "There was a man dwelt by a churchyard."

Other boys in Shakespeare are good as far as they go: William Page, stammering over his Latin accidence under the twin goads of his mother and his dominie: Macduff's son, apostrophizing Macbeth's hireling assassin as a "shag-haired villain": the obvious example

> . . . with shining morning face
> Creeping like snail unwillingly to school:

and he who, when school is "broke up,"

> Hurries towards his home and sporting place:

but it must be confessed that the pretty pathos of Prince Arthur in *King John* suggests rather the lace collar of Little Lord Fauntleroy than the furred doublet of an Angevin prince.

With the possible exception of Miranda, as seen in retrospect through the eyes of her father, Prospero, Shakespeare's small girls are slightly conventional and unconvincing. At the first glance Hermia and Helena, warbling one song, sewing one sampler, seem hardly more lifelike than the stiff figures wrought by their industrious "needls." It is not until they grow up, are bewitched by Puck, and fall to railing at each other, that we become conscious that of the two pretty children Hermia was both the smaller in stature, and the fiercer in temper. "She was a vixen when she went to school," declares Helena: and it is improbable that she exaggerated.

It may be that one reason why the boys in Elizabethan drama are so vividly realized is each playwright's knowledge that for such parts plenty of well-trained boy-actors were always available—and not for such parts only: did not young Salathiel Pavy act "old men so duly" that Ben Jonson imagined the Fates cutting his thread asunder under the impression that he was an old man himself? Less familiar, and less mannered, are Ben Jonson's epitaphs on his infant daughter Mary and his seven-year-old son Benjamin. To Benjamin's shade the sorrowing father exclaims:

> Farewell, thou son of my right hand and joy!
> My sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy.
> Seven years thou wert lent to me. I thee pay
> Exacted by thy fate on the just day.
> Rest in soft peace: and, asked, say "Here doth lie
> Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry."

This was the child of whom, on the day of his death from the

plague, his father had a vision "with the mark of a bloody cross upon his forehead," Ben the elder being then in the country with Robert Cotton and William Camden. He told them about the apparition before the news came from London that the boy was dead.

It seems to have been about this time that the idea of infancy first became associated with the corals, bells, rattles, and little playthings of the kind enumerated by Jonson in the *Dedication* of Venetia Digby's cradle:

> . . . rattles, timbrels, toys
> Take little infants with their noise,
> Are properest gifts to girls and boys
> of light expense:
> Their corals, whistles and prime coats,
> Their painted masks, their paper boats
> With sails of silk.

The convention was long-lived. Pope bids us:

> Behold the child by nature's kindly law
> Pleased with a rattle, tickled by a straw,

and Lamb, in his touching lament *On a Dead Child*, introduces the silver bells, the coral, and the whistle—and so, by implication, the rattle, to which all these were often attached.

During the greater part of the Augustan age the literary approach to children was stiff, sententious, and conventional; and it is instructive to compare Herrick's famous grace:

> Here a little child I stand,
> Holding up my either hand.
> Cold as puddocks though they be
> Here I lift them up to Thee.

with Matthew Prior's equally famous lines to Lady Margaret Cavendish-Harley, his "noble, lovely little Peggy," or Horace Walpole's to the five-year-old Lady Anne Fitzpatrick, beginning:

> Oh nymph compared with whose young bloom
> Hebe herself's an ancient fright.

But the pendulum swung—pendulums always swing. William

Cowper was only fifteen years younger than Thomas Gray: Gray was one of the pioneers of the Romantic Revival: and yet the difference between the *Ode on the Distant Prospect of Eton College* and the lines *On the Receipt of his Mother's Picture out of Norfolk* is the difference between the pomposity of the Augustans and the tender simplicity of the Lake Poets: only the use of the heroic couplet and the occasional intrusion of a rotund phrase remind us that we are not yet in the age of the great early Romantics. The transition makes itself felt in such passages as this:

> Where once we dwelt our name is heard no more:
> Children not thine have trod my nursery floor;
> And where the gardener Robin day by day
> Drew me to school along the public way,
> Delighted with my bauble coach, and wrapt
> In scarlet mantle warm and velvet-capt,
> 'Tis now become a history little known
> That once we called the pastoral house our own:

and then one lovely image follows another—the nightly visit of his mother to his bedside, that she might know him "safe and warmly laid"; the "fragrant waters" with which she washed his cheeks: the child himself, when playing with her "vesture's tissued flowers,"

> The violet, the pink, and jessamine,
> he pricked them into paper with a pin.

It is almost a relief to turn to the young ruffians who wrangle and rail in the moral ditties of Dr Isaac Watts, or to the even more repellent young prigs who there vaunt their own virtues. Perhaps the worst of all Dr Watts's young persons is he who utters to this purpose in the lines

Against Pride in Clothes

> How proud we are! How fond to shew
> Our clothes, and call them rich and new—
> When the poor sheep and silkworm wore
> That very clothing long before!
> The tulip and the butterfly
> Appear in gayer coats than I.

Let me be dressed fine as I will
Flies, worms and flowers exceed me still.

There is a peculiar mystical quality about the children in Blake's *Songs of Innocence*; even the little chimney-sweep and the little Negro partake of it. They belong to that fourth dimension in which his pictured prophets and archangels have their being; only in *Holy Thursday* are there girls and boys who cast shadows and make an audible clatter with their shoes —as they go up the aisle of St Paul's Cathedral,

. . . their innocent faces clean,
The children—walking two by two—in red and blue
and green.

'Didactic' is perhaps too harsh a word to apply to the songs of Blake, though a passionate moral purpose is implicit in all of them; but there is no doubt as to the edification aimed at by that charming pair of sisters, Jane and Ann Taylor. Their desire was to elevate, to admonish, and to instruct: and yet they brought to bear upon the world of the nursery a clear, natural light, neither dimmed by a savage theology nor stained with such unearthly tints as never were seen on sea or shore. Much sympathy has rightly been bestowed upon Miss Edgeworth's badly mishandled Rosamund—the unfortunate child twice punished for her desire to possess the purple jar in the chemist's window—once by disillusionment on finding that the jar itself was of plain glass, and once by being deprived of a new pair of shoes; but I suggest that our compassion might be shared between Rosamund and the hardly less unlucky Eliza in Jane and Ann Taylor's poem. Eliza missed the treat of going to see an Air Balloon because:

She a woeful case was in
For want of just a single pin.

In vain her eager eyes she brings
To every darksome crack:
There was not one! And yet her things
Were dropping off her back.
She cut her pincushion in two—
But no! not one had slidden through.

At last as—hunting on the floor—
Over a crack she lay
The carriage rattled to the door—
Then rattled fast away:
And poor Eliza was not in
For lack of just a single pin!

"And the moral of that is"—no, not, as you might suppose, that buttons and hooks should be kept in good repair, but that Eliza did very wrong when she left a pin wedged in a rotten board, instead of retrieving it and sticking it in her pincushion.

About the time that the two Taylors, Mrs Sherwood, Mrs Trimmer, and Maria Edgeworth were writing minor classics for the young, there was in course of evolution a school of poets whose attitude towards childhood marked a long step forward in the direction of the modern way of thinking. Few parents have ever been more approachable than Southey: it was indeed no small privilege to be able to address as 'dear Papa' the "onelie begetter" of the Three Bears! All the young life burgeoning about them stirred the poetical pulses of all the Lake Poets. Coleridge's waywardness prevented him from shining as a parent of the more solid and prudent sort: yet he wrote very pretty things to his children—and about them: his *Child's Evening Prayer*, for example, and his sonnet on the exciting moment when the nurse showed him the inexpressive countenance of his first-born. It was Wordsworth, however, who proved to be most preoccupied with what he called the Period of Childhood. Much might be said about the many ways in which this preoccupation is expressed: sometimes in vivid recollections of his own Lakeland boyhood; sometimes in metaphors, images, or whole passages scattered through his more philosophical works: sometimes in keenly percipient poems about his own children or the children of his friends—his daughter Dora, for example, and Hartley Coleridge, of whom he thought

. . . with many fears
Of what would be his lot in after years:

but only too often, it must be confessed, in rather dreary pro-

ductions of the *We Are Seven* type. The young Wordsworths had a more spartan upbringing than the young Southeys and Coleridges; and it was not only Little Cottage Girls who were badgered by the greatest of the Lake Poets with reiterated questionings. One cannot suppress a sense of sympathy with the five-year-old Edward Montague solemnly exhorted by Mr Wordsworth to explain why he preferred Kilve to Liswyn Farm.

> And three times to the child I said,
> "Why, Edward? Tell me why?"

Yet few poets have left more sane and fresh and (to borrow the current idiom) uninhibited pictures of their boyhood than Wordsworth gives us in *The Prelude*. Here was no sensitive plant, quivering and contracting at the rough and robust impact of a normal boyish environment. Here was a thoroughly natural, vigorous boy, boating, skating, nutting, birds'-nesting, by day, and then, as he tells us:

> Eager and never weary we pursued
> Our home amusements by the warm peat-fire
> At evening, when with pencil and smooth slate
> In square divisions parcelled out and all
> With crosses and with cyphers scribbled o'er
> We schemed and puzzled, head opposed to head,
> In strife too humble to be named in verse:
> Or round a naked table, snow-white deal,
> Cherry or maple, sat in close array
> And to the combat, loo or whist, led on
> A thick-ribbed army.

There is, too, something exquisitely piquant in the sight of the older, staider, graver Wordsworth glancing back over his shoulder at the little bowling-green beside the "gilt and splendid" tavern

> . . . nor did we want
> Refreshment, strawberries and mellow cream.
> There, when through half an afternoon we played
> On the smooth platform, whether skill prevailed
> Or happy blunder triumphed, bursts of glee
> Made all the mountains ring.

Yet now and then, amid what he calls "those fits of vulgar joy," the poet within him was quickening.

> . . . even then I felt
> Gleams like the flashing of a shield: the earth
> And common face of Nature spake to me
> Rememberable things.

And are not the poet, the philosopher, the parent, and the observer of infancy miraculously integrated in the great Immortality Ode?

In the matter of stark and penetrating sincerity few of us can feel any doubt that Shelley excels Byron: and it is, therefore, all the more puzzling that Byron's poetical utterances upon his separation from his daughter Ada should sound so much more convincing than Shelley's lamentations when Charles and Ianthe were denied him by Lord Eldon and the High Court of Chancery. Byron was always the arch-poseur, the self-dramatizer unashamed. It is perhaps unfortunate that among the feeblest of the early poems so cruelly castigated by the Scotch Reviewers should have been those in which the (half) English Bard depicted his youthful self revisiting Harrow:

> . . . the hills where we sported
> The streams where we swam and the fields where we fought
> The school, where loud-warned by the bell we resorted
> To pore o'er the precepts by pedagogues taught:

or else—even worse—

> dwelling in the Highland cave,
> Or roaming through the dusky wild,
> Or bounding o'er the dark blue wave.

Interest in Byron has lately revived, both as a romantic poet and as a flamboyantly romantic figure: but which of his recent critics could tell us with any degree of certainty where in his writings self-deception ends and self-revelation begins? There is a strong semblance of sincerity in the opening and the close of the third canto of *Childe Harold*; and if we obliterate from our memory all recollection of the noble

poet's conduct and deportment during the distressful and tumultous scenes preceding, and even attending, the birth of "Ada, sole daughter of his house and heart," we may be touched by his tardy and vain regrets:

> To aid thy mind's development—to watch
> Thy dawn of little joys—to sit and see
> Almost thy very growth—to view thee catch
> Knowledge of objects, wonders yet to thee!
> To hold thee lightly on a gentle knee,
> To print on thy soft cheek a parent's kiss—
> This, it would seem, was not reserved for me:
> Yet this was in my nature. As it is
> I know not what is there—but something like to this.

It may be that there were moments when Byron really envisaged himself in the rôle of a fond father, though towards Allegra, his daughter by Claire Clairmont, he evinced none of this yearning affection. He was at least a true prophet when he wrote for Ada's future reading:

> Yet though dull hate as duty should be taught
> I know that thou wilt love me.

Shelley, passionately resentful of the decree which reft from him his two children by Harriet Westbrook, was not able to voice his anger and sorrow in the eloquent yet effortless manner of Byron in circumstances not dissimilar. It was, perhaps, scarcely wise in him to choose the scampering anapæstic metre when thus apostrophizing little Willmouse, his son by Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin; but the effect is chilling in its artificiality:

> They have taken thy brother and sister dear,
> They have made them unfit for thee:
> They have withered the smile and dried the tear
> That should have been sacred to me:

and his lament for this engaging small boy, though plaintive and sweet, is somehow lacking in the authentic pang of poetry. His lines on Byron's Allegra (in *Julian and Maddalo*) are better than anything he ever wrote about any child of his own begetting.

Another very great writer of the same period presents us with a not dissimilar enigma. I mean Miss Austen. She has sometimes been reproached—perhaps more severely than she deserves to be—for a certain lack of sympathy with the very young: and it is true that she does not habitually show them in an attractive light. The small boys and girls in her novels are boisterous, exacting, petulant—even occasionally sly. That their elders are in the main answerable for these unamiable traits she makes perfectly clear; but it is strange that the injudicious elder and the spoiled child should appear so often in her pellucid page. Emma's nephews are not the sort of children with whom one would wish—or expect—to spend a pleasant Sunday afternoon: and one cannot forget Miss Austen's comment (in *Sense and Sensibility*) on the Dashwood infant "who gained on the affections of his grandfather by such attractions as are by no means unusual in children of two or three years old—an imperfect articulation, an earnest desire of having his own way, many cunning tricks, and a great deal of noise."

Yet—and here comes the enigma—to her own nieces and nephews 'Aunt Jane' was the most charming and companionable of playmates and confidantes. She has, moreover, shown in at least one instance that she possessed a fine and delicate understanding of child mentality, though the injudicious elder is still upon the scene—injudicious through lack and not through excess of sympathy. Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* was her creator's own favourite among her creations: some of us would prefer Anne Elliot, or Elizabeth Bennet, or Eleanor Dashwood, but authors are entitled to their personal predilections, and the "exceedingly timid and shy" ten-year-old, fresh from the noisy squalor of her Portsmouth home, and overwhelmed by the splendours of her new surroundings, is an endearing child when we first meet her in Chapter II. Her cousins, the Misses Bertram, "could not but hold her cheap when they found she had but two sashes and had never learned French": small wonder that her consciousness of misery was "increased by the idea of its being a wicked thing not to be happy." It must be a source of satisfaction to all right-minded persons to watch Fanny gradually coming in to

her own: and where in English fiction will you find a more likeable boy than her brother William? When as a midshipman he comes to Mansfield Park, what a gay glimpse he gives us of his sister and himself in their earlier years: "We used to jump about together many a time, did not we? When the hand-organ was in the street?"

The Waverley Novels are so little esteemed in these days that I hesitate to offer any examples of children as depicted by Walter Scott, though I should have liked to linger over Harry Bertram in *Guy Mannering*, the boy kidnapped by Dirk Hatteraick, the boy who looked so comical "swimming like a duck" after the ship from which he had been flung that even the ruffianly Hatteraick had not the heart to let him drown; or over "wee Davie," the son of the country postmistress in *The Antiquary*, reluctantly compelled (at the age of nine) to set off on pony-back with an important letter for delivery, "a leathern post-bag strapped across his shoulders, . . . a tear in his eye and a switch in his hand": but a generation has arisen that knows not Sir Walter, and I will content myself with observing how effectively he uses children as background figures in such scenes as Dandie Dinmont's farm and Sanders Mucklebackit's cottage.

When we turn to the two greatest Victorian novelists we become conscious of a contrast between them in the matter of their children, both the imaginary and the real. Thackeray was the most tender of fathers to his two daughters, and yet the little girls in his novels are (with the exception of Becky Sharp, who never was a little girl) more like animated dolls than real children—even to the detail of red cheeks and a smile. He does better with boys, but no better than Scott. Dickens, as we have been made reluctantly aware, did not shine in the rôle of 'papa,' and nothing could be more unlike *The Rose and the Ring* than the dull and didactic books he wrote for his young family: yet no one has excelled him in the difficult art of imaginative autobiography. If we compare *Esmond* with *Great Expectations* we shall surely reach the conclusion that in delineating the fears and fancies of a sensitive, solitary child he outstrips his rival by many furlongs. David Copperfield loses verisimilitude as he leaves

his self-recorded boyhood behind him. Esther Summerson, perhaps because she was a girl and Dickens saw in all good girls an idealized aquarelle of Mary Hogarth, is surely the most spankworthy child in English literature. Of little Paul and little Nell I forbear to speak: pink-and-white sugar does not charm the adult palate in these our days.

One would expect to find that, when the theme is a child, women handle it with a deeper emotion. It is not always so. No woman has ever written of babies with the almost maudlin ardour of Swinburne—that ardour of adoration which made him the wonder and the jest of the Wimbledon nursemaids in his later years; nor can I think of any poetess who has sung of little girls with the wistful yearning of Francis Thompson. And it is also a curious circumstance that four spinsters should have written of children as tenderly as any writer of prose or verse who was herself a mother. The four are, of course, Dorothy Wordsworth, Mary Lamb, Christina Rossetti, and Mary Coleridge.

There could hardly be a sharper contrast than that between Swinburne and Thompson, though the element of wonder is conspicuous in both. It is probably characteristic that Swinburne should have seen a baby as a rose—"a very rose of roses"—while Thompson saw the little Meynell girl as a snowflake, its brilliant and brittle whiteness thrown into relief by his own dark raiment. With Swinburne the approach is objective: the child is the thing, the whole thing, and his own function merely that of an adorer; with Thompson the poetic stimulus comes from the child's relationship with himself, and the constantly and deeply felt disparity between its innocence and his unworthiness.

To return to the spinsters. I have always wondered why Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, when editing the first Oxford Book of English Verse, should have renamed the *Parental Recollections* of Mary Lamb and given to that poem the terse caption, *A Child.* The true title is an element in its pathos, when we remember why neither Charles nor Mary ever had a child of his or her own to be "a plaything for an hour" or a comfort for "a grievèd soul," and that no "straggler into loving arms" or "climber-up of knees" was ever theirs unless by

tardy adoption. Dorothy Wordsworth, in the scanty gleanings that have been left to us, shows at every turn that softness and lightness of touch which William hardly ever achieves; and Christina Rossetti, whose brother, William Michael, considered that "in her youth she was certainly not fond of children," wrote in middle life that wonderful sequence of nursery lyrics, *Sing Song*. She herself gave it the sub-title of *A Nursery Rhyme Book*, but she is not uniformly successful in combining the simplicity and audacity characteristic of the authentic nursery-rhyme; none the less many of these miniature poems might have been sung to "any babe on any mother's knee," and some of them possess the folk-song quality of demanding to be danced to as well as sung: this little family group, for example:

> What does the bee do? Bring home honey.
> And what does Father do? Bring home money.
> And what does Mother do? Lay out the money.
> And what does Baby do? Eat up the honey.

In a very different mood—a mood more truly her own, devout and sorrowful—she wrote upon the death of her baby nephew, Michael Rossetti, the elegy from which these lines are quoted:

> Brief dawn and noon and setting time!
> One rapid-rounding moon has fled.
> A black eclipse before the prime
> Has swallowed up that shining head.
> Eternity holds up her looking-glass—
> The eclipse of time will pass,
> And all that lovely light
> Return to sight.

Though Christina Rossetti did not care greatly for the poetry of Milton, she was presumably acquainted with his *Lines on the death of a Fair Infant dying of a Cough*, that curious avuncular elegy in which pagan metaphor yields to Christian theology only in the tenth of its eleven stanzas. She is unlikely to have been consciously influenced by any of these lines, and yet at one point the seventeenth-century uncle joins hands with the nineteenth-century aunt. This is where Milton exclaims:

Could Heaven, for pity, thee so strictly doom?

and answers:

Oh, no! for something in thy face did shine
Above mortality, that showed thou wast divine.

There is neither paganism nor piety, but there is something deeper than pathos in the hushed, austere lines written by Robert Bridges upon a dead child—his own. With the trained eye of a doctor he sees all the implications of the perfect little body without fault or stain; and then he says:

To me, as I move thee now in the last sad duty
Dost thou with a turn or a gesture anon respond
Startling my fancy fond
With a chance attitude of the head, a freak of beauty.
So quiet! Doth the change content thee? Death,
whither hath he taken thee?
To a world, do I think, that rights the disasters of this?
The vision of which I miss
Who weep for the body and wish but to warm thee
and waken thee.

The fourth of the spinsters whom I mentioned just now is Mary Coleridge. As we might expect, in writing of the mind of a child she is both subtle and simple. Let me remind you of that haunting little piece, only eight lines long, entitled

At First

The grief of age is not the grief of youth;
A child is still a child, even in his grieving.
Yet his first sorrow is in very truth
Dark past believing.
When first he wanders forth in early Spring
Nor heeds among the flowers each gay newcomer,
When first he hates the happy birds that sing
The sun that shines in Summer.

And here we may mark another change in the literary attitude towards the young. Their sorrows are no longer regarded in a detached, almost smug, approving manner as probably well deserved and certainly cathartic—in any case, part of the price they have to pay for having been born in original sin. The

traditional and the modern point of view seem to meet in a sort of poetical confluence when Coventry Patmore stands by the bed of his sleeping son—the motherless child whom he had punished too severely for some small transgression—and is himself moved to tears by

> . . . the darkened eyelids, and their lashes yet
> From his late sobbing wet:

and you will remember the almost surrealist effect on Patmore's catalogue of the childish treasures assembled "on the table drawn beside his head":

> A box of counters and a red-vein'd stone,
> A piece of glass abraded by the beach,
> And six or seven shells,
> A bottle with bluebells,
> And two French copper coins. . . .

In Alice Meynell's essay describing one of her own small sons in moments of wrath—and remorse—we reach the turn of the road, a road which may conceivably lead us to some rather perilous places if we follow it to the very end!

Once having asserted his rights as an individual, the child is not likely to allow himself to be replaced either upon a whipping-block for poetical castigation or upon a pedestal for poetical prettification. And it is instructive to observe how the attitude of his elders has been gradually, almost imperceptibly, yet radically readjusted to meet the change. We 'grown-ups' are not now so sure of ourselves as we might have been fifty, or sixty, or a hundred years ago. We are a little diffident sometimes—even a trifle apologetic. We have been convinced so often of error. Where once parents were beaten with whips for starving their children of affection, they are now chastised with scorpions for smothering them with it. They have the audacity (this applies particularly to mothers), they have the unpardonable audacity to be possessive! A more curious reversal of ideas has surely never taken place. It is now Papa and Mamma who should be seen and not heard, speak only when spoken to, and, if castigation be administered, kiss the rod. Nor do these unfortunate parents now feel assured that

their offspring have any reason to be obliged to them for the unsolicited and very doubtful boon of existence. It was otherwise in Victorian days: for the Victorian papa based his claim to filial duty upon the fact that but for him his sons and daughters would simply not have been. He stalks through life and literature, proud, pompous, tyrannical: and it does not matter whether we call him Dombey, or Moulton Barrett, or Pontifex, he is a bully—and he is also a bore. How disconcerted he would have been if he had had a prophetic glimpse of the time when the tables would be turned, and the age-old subjugation of the young by the elderly reversed!

Yet even in the 'sixties of the last century a small serpent of scepticism was rearing its ugly head. For proof of this statement I refer you to the fourth chapter of the third book of *Our Mutual Friend*. The scene is the Wilfers' house in Holloway: the occasion is the wedding anniversary of Mr and Mrs Wilfer. Mrs Wilfer is trying—in vain, as usual—to "crush, conclude and quell" her irrepressible daughter, Lavinia.

> "You incarnation of sauciness," said Mrs Wilfer, "Do you speak like that to me? On this day, of all days in the year? Pray do you know what would have become of you if I had not bestowed my hand upon R.W., your father, upon this day?"
>
> "No, Ma," replied Lavvy, "I really do not. And with the greatest respect for your abilities and information, I very much doubt if you do either!"

We have travelled very far from the lullaby and the carol, the miracle-play and the morality, the corals and the bells, and the cautionary tales: but at no stage of the journey are we likely to find ourselves in a literary world where no children appear. Many books written for their delight have reached the rank of classics: some of the boys and girls in these books are already candidates for immortality—Mrs Ewing's Jackanapes, E. Nesbit's Bastables, now entrancing a third generation, the attractive children in Kenneth Grahame's *Golden Age*. That lamented writer, E. M. Delafield, was at her best in depicting childhood, and her touch

was no less sure and deft in domestic comedy—the *Provincial Lady*, for example—than on the fringes of tragedy, as in *Nothing is Safe*. And where will you find more convincing small boys than in the novels of Angela Thirkell? The description of the preparatory-school boxing contests in *High Rising* is, I think, as good as anything of its kind in English fiction of the past fifty years.

If we leave the realm of prose and invade the field of modern verse (as I suppose we must) we shall find there some small figures that obstinately decline to be passed by: A. A. Milne's Christopher Robin, and Marian St John Adcock's Littlest One, for example. But I venture to confess that I am myself slightly happier in the society of Jan Struther's two-year-old Betsinda, dancing to the music of the gramophone:

> Then, as the tide of sound advances,
> With grave delight Betsinda dances.
>
> And round she turns on clumsy, sweet,
> Unrhythmical, enraptured feet.

Walter de la Mare, the most unearthly of English poets since Blake, is able—as Blake never was—to give to his imaginary children the form and substance of our common life. His boys and girls do cast shadows: they breathe, they move; but it is true that their experiences and emotions might very often be illustrated with the woodcuts made more than a hundred years ago to adorn such little books as *The Cowslip*, *The Daisy*, and *Original Poems for Infant Minds*. "Poor Henry" is a real boy: but we instinctively dress him in the short jacket, frilly collar, long trousers, and buckled shoes of 1804. You will remember what was the ordeal to which Poor Henry was subjected, and the ultimate reward foretold for him:

> Thick in its glass
> The physic stands:
> Poor Henry lifts
> Distracted hands.
>
> His round cheek wans
> In the candlelight
> To smell that smell
> To see that sight.

Finger and thumb
Clinch his small nose:
A gurgle—a gasp—
And down it goes.

Scowls Henry now
But mark that cheek
Sleek with the bloom
Of health—next week.

VI

Dumas's Debt to England

Angela Thirkell

It is an honour to be allowed to speak before the English Association and I also feel a certain emotion at standing here before you when I think of my father, J. W. Mackail, whose interest and support this Association had for so many years. I think it would give him great pleasure to know that I had been invited to speak here and I feel that any worthiness I have shown to deserve this honour comes mostly through him. Were he alive he would, I know, have been pleased to see his daughter here and would probably have said, with the very Scotch understatement that so many of you will remember, that the English Association had the root of the matter in them. I would like to thank you on his behalf for your kindness to his daughter.

When the invitation reached me my first impulse was to make any excuse and leave the country, for I do not really know anything about English literature from any scholarly standpoint. I love it, but research into the private life of Aphra Behn, or an enquiry into Addison's views on 'which' and 'that' as the relative pronoun (a subject, by the way, upon which the late J. L. Garvin often discoursed with vehemence) are not in my unscholarly line. The only subject of which I had a little knowledge was Alexander Dumas père, but he is French and was born so and will please himself, to borrow a phrase from that great woman Mrs Gamp. A suggestion was made that I might speak about what he owed to England. The obligation appears to me to be the other way round, but it is possible to make out some sort of case and this I have tried to do.

I must preface these remarks by saying strongly that one of

the chief difficulties of writing about Dumas is that one never knows when he is speaking the truth. It is also complicated by several facts: the first that he produced his works—one might almost say spawned them—with such rapidity that he seems to have lost count of a good many of them himself; the second that a good deal of ephemeral writing is possibly still buried in newspapers of the 'thirties, 'forties, and 'fifties; the third that, as he freely admitted, he made use of an enormous number of hacks and collaborators whose work has been at various times attributed to him, though I think it is fairly easy to tell the Grub Street pen from the master's even when he is writing more than usual in dressing-gown and slippers. Very roughly he produced some hundred and thirty novels, ranging from two to eleven volumes each, about sixty plays, twenty or thirty books of travel, and numberless odd articles.

As a granddaughter of the manse I must say that what Dumas owed to England he really owed to Scotland, for he, in common with all the romantic writers, drew a great deal of his inspiration from Walter Scott. I have not read any of the translations of Scott at that period, nor do I know how much English, if any, Dumas really knew. Maigron, in his exhaustive work on *The Historical Novel*, dealing mostly with the Romantic movement, says that Stendhal and Vigny spoke and read English easily, Mérimée "knew all languages by instinct," whatever that may mean, and Dumas, like Victor Hugo, worked over hack translations. Stendhal said of the translations of Scott that the publishers seemed to have used four translators for each book, three of whom at least knew no English. Hugo, who rewrote *Ivanhoe* for the feuilleton of the Conservateur Littéraire, does not seem to have realized that he was working over a poor and inadequate rendering. With the matchless gift of the French for misunderstanding English names, one translator renders Waverley-Honour as Weverley Sans Tache. Another translates the *Winter's Tale*, or *Conte d'Hiver*, as *Le Conte de M. Winter*. The self-named Bibliophile Jacob, who attributed to Sir Walter his own scenes from French history, scenes which I may say contain more 'tushery' than all the English romantic novels put together,

writes of Scott's *Château d'Abooswod*—a fine Gothic rendering probably inspired by *Ivanhoe*.

This romantic movement had begun as far back as 1820. Between that date and 1828 Victor Hugo and Lamartine, the first with his *Odes et Ballades*, the second with his *Méditations*, had laid the foundations of the revolutionary movement. Nodier was writing in the style of *le pittoresque*; Delacroix and his followers had broken away from the classical school of David and were violently painting historical subjects. There were also German influences. Dumas himself attempted a translation or adaptation of *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, but let it drop; wisely, as he knew little or no German and would only have put some one else's translation into mediocre Alexandrines, for he never mastered that verse, although he used it more than once. The academic pose of Hugo and Lamartine, revolutionaries though they were, had no appeal for Dumas who always worked for his own hand and never tried to have a circle of adorers, which indeed was unnecessary when the whole reading public was his adorer. Hugo and Lamartine tried to ignore this mortifying fact, but Casimir Delavigne, a romanticist who has also followed Scott in his *Louis XI*, founded, as all books about Louis XI must be, on *Quentin Durward*, said frankly, "I don't think much of that damned Dumas' work myself; but it makes people think mine not so good."

Dumas, though immensely successful in many kinds of writing for many years, has never held quite the literary position that he deserved; nor, I think, would he greatly have cared so long as his public was reading or seeing his work. To use a word of jargon he was a pure extrovert and his sense of theatre made life one long exciting melodrama to him in which Work, with a very large capital letter, was perhaps his greatest love. Again and again in his memoirs he writes with passion of Work, which was to him an ally, a religion, a comforter in illness, debt, fatigue, disappointment. The words which Schober addressed to Music, familiar to us through Schubert's setting, *Du holde Kunst*, gracious and blessed art, were what Dumas felt about work. And so did Sir Walter Scott feel, the great writer to whom Dumas and his contem-

poraries owed a debt which cannot be rated too highly. Scott too had that divine gusto for work—before the dark days when that noble gentleman had to sacrifice himself to work to redeem his honour. You will remember the description of the man—I cannot remember who it was—who looked every night at a lighted window in Edinburgh and saw the busy hand covering sheet after sheet, tossing each as it was finished on to the growing pile on the ground, never slacking till the stint, the night's task, was accomplished.

Another point in common between Sir Walter and Dumas: the gift of story-telling. I remember the late Lord Tweedsmuir, whose name as John Buchan lives among us, saying that all his life he had been in the habit of telling himself long serial stories when he was walking alone. To put the day's instalment on paper in the evening was his task. So had Dumas the passion for telling stories—*raconter*, as he says—and he might have said of himself, as Goethe did, that he was born with *l'art de confabuler—zu fabulieren.*

A good deal has been written about the impact of Walter Scott on French literature, and it should be added that his influence was also very strong on the school of French historians from whom Dumas borrowed, for like Molière he took what he needed wherever he found it. The study of history had made immense progress in France and probably schools of historical drama and novel would have sprung from it in any case, but the genius of Scott was influencing the historians almost as much as it was to influence the novel.

When *Ivanhoe* appeared (we must presume in a translation, for the French, then and always, very rightly consider no language but their own worth reading) Augustin Thierry wrote of it:

> Walter Scott had cast his eagle's glance over a period on which my whole thought had been directed for the past three years. With his habitual boldness of execution he had drawn Norman and Saxon on English ground, conqueror and conquered, each regarding the other with hatred a hundred and twenty years after the Conquest. He had drawn with a poet's pen the scene which I had been trying to reconstruct with the patience of a historian. I found that all that seemed truest in

> his work, the characterization of the epoch in which the events and people of his fiction moved, the political aspect of the state, the different manners of the races and their relations to one another; all these agreed with the general outline which I had been working out for myself. And I must confess that in spite of the doubts which are a necessary concomitant of any serious work, I found my zeal and confidence redoubled by the sanction that my cherished views received from a man whom I regard as the greatest master ever known of divining the essentials of history.

It may be said without exaggeration that French history, as well as French literature, derived to a great extent from Scott. Michelet as well as Victor Hugo, Guizot as well as Stendhal, Barante as well as Mérimée and Vigny are his followers. And without him Dumas could not have existed.

The historical succession goes even further back. Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen* preceded *Quentin Durward*, even as *Quentin Durward* and *Ivanhoe* preceded Vigny's *Cinq-Mars* (which I have never read because I am sure it is too dull for words), Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*, and Dumas's *Henri III et sa Cour*, the play which, produced in 1829, was the first great romantic success—though Hugo whose *Hernani* was not produced till 1830 managed to take the applause and still keeps the credit.

It is difficult now to imagine the sudden impact of Scott on the young literary world of Paris. Bliss was it that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven. Every kind of world was there to conquer. The middle ages and the years after them had suddenly burst upon the young men like a new world, thanks largely to Sir Walter; and there were also real revolutions going on, not too dangerous, where a youth of spirit could make himself thoroughly conspicuous. If we are to believe Dumas's account of his own doings in the Revolution of 1830, we can only conclude that Mr Charles Dickens, speaking through the mouth of Mr Jingle, also had the art of divining the essentials of history. "Epic poem—ten thousand lines—revolution of July—composed it on the spot—Mars by day, Apollo by night—bang the field-piece, twang the lyre." This mixture of historical history and current

history must have been an intoxication that we cannot understand, for our current history only depresses and the historical novel is a stepdaughter at present.

How much of Sir Walter Dumas had really read we shall never know. One biographer, Parigot, says that besides *Ivanhoe* he had read *The Abbot, Rob Roy, Quentin Durward, Chronicles of the Canongate,* and *Kenilworth.* Some kind of version of *Old Mortality* we know he must have seen, as he, with Frédéric Soulié, made a play on it, *Les Puritans d'Ecosse.* I have not read this work, but judging by another play of Dumas's with a Scottish setting—to which I will allude later —one cannot have missed much. It appears also that he had read *Richard en Palestine,* better known to us as *The Talisman,* for there is a remarkable resemblance between Saladin's words to Sir Kenneth at the oasis about the number of men he can summon by letting fly an arrow towards his tents, and a speech by the Saracen captive Yacoub in *Charles VII chez ses grands vassaux*—a pretty dull piece of Wardour Street melodrama, I may add. We have Dumas's own description of his reactions to *Ivanhoe.* He found the book on the whole rather barbarous and crude, but his theatrical feeling made him enthusiastic about the *mise en scène* of Cedric's rough wooden palace, the huge fire in the great hall, the chief and his household at one table, the appearance of Isaac the Jew. And more important than all these, the scene of the tournament at Ashby was his first introduction to chivalry and led him to Froissart, and so to the great French memoirists, Brantôme, L'Estoile, d'Aubigny, Dangeau, St Simon, Luynes and the later eighteenth century, in whose past he lived as if it were the present. It is characteristic of Dumas's living, creative, and modern genius—using modern in the sense that every epoch which he described became the present day to him, with passions common to human nature only lightly disguised by different clothes and conventions—that from Scott he took the vital part, the creation of characters that while living in their own century are of common humanity. Here there is a difference between him and Hugo and Vigny. All three drew inspiration from Scott, but while Dumas followed the spirit of Scott, making the characters more important than the back-

ground, however inspiring that background may be, Hugo and, to a lesser degree, Vigny are apt to concentrate on archæology. In *Notre Dame* the subject is not the ill-fated loves of Phébus and Esmeralda, it is Paris in the fifteenth century. Even Quasimodo is only a personality in so far as he may be looked upon as part of the cathedral; a gargoyle, a sculptured devil. The characters are all unreal until you consider them as part of the great plan of the cathedral and old Paris, and apart from it without existence. Dumas, following Scott with a clearer instinct, could make his old Paris bulk large and terrifying, as the Tolbooth bulks over *The Heart of Midlothian*. But, as Jenny Deans shines without effort among the stones of Edinburgh and the melodrama of her sister's betrayer, so do all Dumas's characters stand out the more strongly because of their background; not in spite of it. And in one way we may say that Dumas had affinities with Shakespeare, who seems to have drawn many of his romantic and historical characters by a kind of divine guesswork—I suppose inspiration is another name for it. Both these geniuses, without attempting to reconstruct scientificially or archæologically periods of history whose manners and civilization were different from their own, managed to make the spirit of the age develop itself through their observation of human nature, and by the very passions of the actors tell us something of what the age was like. As Thierry said, "They divine the essentials of history."

Dumas knew and admired his Scott in French. He also knew and admired his Shakespeare; but here again I do not know what the translations were like through which he came to know the Bard. That he admired him deeply is evident; but as a true Frenchman he could not, in spite of the whole surge of the romantic movement, bring himself wholly to approve Shakespeare's barbaric methods. Some faults of construction must be corrected; a shadow unity—to use a modern phrase—must exist and certain faults of taste must be dealt with. In collaboration with Paul Meurice—about whom I at present know nothing—he translated *Hamlet*, with improvements, and it was performed at the Théâtre-Historique, that rather ill-fated venture, in 1847. It is an interesting affair, all

in mediocre Alexandrines. Francisco and Bernardo are excised as irrelevant (and also doubtless needing salaries). The affairs of Norway do not appear at all. Osric is doubled by Guildenstern. The whole of the first scene, the appearance of the ghost to the guards, is cut. Laertes is already back from France. The player king and queen and villain are given names. The ghost says that the poison was put into his mouth, an ear being possibly not worthy of the heroic. In the last scene the ghost appears again to tidy up the ends. To Laertes he says that heaven will probably not be too hard on him: *prie et meurs* (Laertes dies). To the queen, who begs for pity, he says that her fault was only love and God loves those who love; that her faults are being washed away by her tears: *Espère et meurs* (the queen dies). To the king, who merely remarks, "Forgive me," he suddenly says there is no pardon, that hell has such terrors waiting for him as cannot be imagined: *Va, traître incestueux! va! désespère et meurs!* (the king dies).

Hamlet, who now has the stage entirely to himself, comes forward and says to the ghost—I translate freely owing to the exigencies of rhymed verse—

HAMLET: And I, poor orphan lingering here below
Must I yet breathe this air o'erfull of woe?
A tragic actor all against my will
I played my part, yet played it without skill.
For though, oh God, you wished but one to fall.
Through my own dullness I have killed them all.
What is the punishment that God will give?
What penalty, oh father?
GHOST: Thou shalt live.

And all very nice too!

In spite of its faintly ridiculous air the translation is competent—never more than that. Dumas was never really a poet—although he wrote a great deal of poetry, and is replted to have said that he would give two of his best plays to have been able to write *Marion Delorme*. His dramatic verse is very laborious and for once his own personality does not make itself felt. Only a man who found a fascination in attempting what other writers could not do would have made the essay. In no

way was he suited to the work. He had never the patience nor application to master the art of the Alexandrine, nor indeed of any other form of verse. He was too much of a genius to lend himself to the genius of Shakespeare. He disapproved of a good deal of what Shakespeare had done and re-arranged it as it should be. He called it translating, but it was adapting and adapting very freely. To be able to translate Shakespeare at all implies an unusual knowledge of his language. Dumas's English cannot have been much better than that of d'Artagnan's servant, Planchet, who could say, "My master, lord d'Artagnan." Every play with an English setting is full of ridiculous mistakes. How and where he got the translation of *Hamlet* I should very much like to know, and possibly some odd bit of reading or a footnote to a book may tell how much of it Dumas did himself, working as usual in shirtsleeves or dressing-gown, his food on a little table beside him, his door open to every friend or acquaintance who came to borrow money, even his furniture taken away by occasional mistresses who felt they had earned a wardrobe or a set of chairs. Or he may have farmed it out to some of the collaborators. One feels that what the translator did understand he translated very nicely. What he didn't understand he either mistranslated or—more commonly—omitted; and such of us as have been set in our youth the awful homework "Rewrite 'To be or not to be' in your own words" will deeply sympathize.

There is, I think, one other point in which Dumas may have benefited from his readings of Scott. In reading Dumas's novels one may observe that though his heroes and his heroines are always in and out of love and have sometimes outrageous amorous adventures, there is never—and I think I can safely use the word—never any touch of what I shall call nastiness. As Blaze de Bury so charmingly says of him:

> Les romans de Dumas ont cet avantage, qui devient de plus en plus rare, de prêter à la conversation. Ses types s'imposent à la mémoire, on en cause avant, on en cause après, on critique, on raille: ce Dumas, quel hableur! quel vantard! Mais au demeurant pas une femme n'en rougit.

I think I have read as much of Dumas as anyone alive, though not probably more than a half of what he has written, and I can wholly subscribe to M. de Bury's words. The mother of a minor English painter, long since dead, was wont to say of her son, "The worst of him is he can't be funny without he's nasty." Dumas could and did describe passion of every kind, not only in his novels but in his plays, but never "for the vice and viciousness of it," as a character in Miss Harriette Wilson's very bad novel, *Clara Gazul*, remarks. And how pleasant it would be if one could prove that M. Dumas *aîné* and Miss Wilson ever met in Paris, which might well have happened. I still hope that I may one day stumble on an account of a meeting between them—either could describe it with infinite humour and gusto—or between Miss Wilson and Prosper Mérimée, whose *Clara Gazul* she so unblushingly borrowed as a title for her book.

Every one was imitating Walter Scott, and Dumas among the foremost. Whatever faults the great Sir Walter may have had, it cannot be said that he ever wrote a word that was out of taste, or a scene that was in any way offending—for I cannot say the word 'offensive' in connexion with him. In fact, his delicacy of perception is considered by some to have been too scrupulous, as in the famous instance of St Ronan's Well, in which he bowdlerized Clara Mowbray's tragedy at the plea of Ballantyne. It was undoubtedly in Dumas's nature to be chivalrous about women—unless they made it clear that they wished it otherwise—but I think that his model, Scott, may also have influenced him.

But in one point Scott did not influence him. To those who love and admire Sir Walter, his lengthy prologues, his descriptions of scenery, are no barrier to enjoyment, they are merely *hors d'œuvres* to whet the appetite. To those who love Dumas, the pages, far, far too frequent in some of his novels, consisting of interminable one-line conversations, are obviously padding while the author thinks ahead for what he is going to say next; or else written to satisfy the printer who is clamouring for copy while the author has been amusing himself in other ways—all these are part of the game. Dumas at one time gravely developed a theory that Sir Walter made his intro-

ductory chapters so slow in order that the reader should be overjoyed when the story began to move and follow it with the more interest. As for himself, Dumas remarked, he preferred to make the beginning exciting as this would carry the reader over any dull parts that might come later. We need not believe either.

But let Dumas speak about Sir Walter for himself. Here are his own words about Sir Walter's death:

> The death of Scott affected me. Not that I had the honour of knowing the author of *Waverley* and *Ivanhoe*, but, as my readers may remember, his work had had a great influence on me when I first began to write. At first I had preferred Pigault-Lebrun to Walter Scott, even to Voltaire and Shakespeare, but I had learnt wisdom and not only had I read all his books [which I do not believe] but I had also tried to dramatize two of his works; the first with Soulié, the second alone.
>
> Walter Scott has no dramatic qualities. He excels in describing manners, customs, and people, but is completely incapable of dealing with the passions. With humours and clothes one can make a comedy, but passions are required to make a real play.
>
> The only dramatic novel is *Kenilworth*, for which reason it is the only one that has been successfully dramatized, and even then its success was largely due to the end where the public was shown the terrible sight of Amy Robsart's fall down the precipice. [This is the word.]
>
> But my work on Scott was not wasted; as one can only learn the structure of men by dissecting them, so can one only know the genius of authors by analysing them. My analysis of Walter Scott made me see the novel from a fresh point of view, and I resolved that what I needed was the same faithful reproduction of customs, dress, and character, with a livelier dialogue and deeper passions.

Self-analysis was not Dumas's forte, nor analysis of anyone else. How much better he did his work than this would let one suppose!

For all his admiration for Shakespeare and Sir Walter, Dumas was intelligent enough not to place any of his novels in England. His characters occasionally visit it, but return swiftly. How much he knew the country is doubtful. In one

volume of his *Causeries* he speaks of having been twice in England; and he gives a detailed account of a visit to Madame Tussaud and the Derby. But I would like to return to this later. I think England remained to him a good deal a *pays de fantaisie*, where one could make things happen even more improbable than the things one made happen in France. Somewhere he wrote:

> One thing that I cannot do is to write a book or a play about a place I have not seen. To write *Christine* I went to Fontainebleau [but not, we unkindly add, to Stockholm]; for *Henry III*, to Blois; for the *Mousquetaires*, I visited Bethune and Boulogne [but not, we gather, Portsmouth, London, or Hampton Court].

If we are to judge by his plays about England, he knew little or nothing about it and indeed writes like the stage Frenchman at times, almost reaching the heights of Hugo's sailor, Tom-Jim-Jack, or his famous allusion to the First of Forth, or the unlucky bugpipe in the *Travailleurs de la mer*. We may mention a few of these English plays. *Le Laird de Dumbiky* is a comedy about a Scottish gentleman from the county of Durham whose uncle, David MacMahon de Susquebaugh, gave hospitality to Charles II after the battle of Worcester. The plot turns on Dumbiky's efforts to marry an heiress on whom Buckingham, with of course Chiffinch and Jerningham, has designs (and indeed this part is faintly reminiscent of *Peveril of the Peak*, a book of which Sir Walter's lovers can only think with compassion). Luckily Mistress Nell Quinn (Nell Gwynn) turns out to be the child abandoned by gipsies on the bank of the Tweed and brought up by MacMahon de Susquebaugh, so we need not add that after some comic intrigue all goes well.

Richard Darlington had an immense success. May I tell the plot as briefly and clearly as possible and leave my audience to decide how truly English it is? Richard is the illegitimate son of a noble heiress, Caroline de Silva, and the public executioner Robertson Fildy (I suppose the name *is* possible), known generally as Mawbray. He is born in the house of Dr and Mistress Grey at Darlington, at which identical moment the outraged father, the Marquis de Silva, bangs at the door

and carries away his daughter in spite of her agonized cries of "*Oh, mon Robertson!*"

After twenty-six years (the unities are finely flouted throughout) Richard, who has been treated as a son by the doctor, is elected member for Darlington in spite of the machinations of Sir Stanson, discovers that he is not really the doctor's son and at once offers his hand to the doctor's daughter Jenny. His father, who has apparently been living peacefully at Darlington under the name of Mawbray when not engaged in his public duties, raises no objection. But Mistress Grey and Sir Stanson see in him the seeds of ambition and fear the worst.

Once arrived in London, Richard puts his wife in a house in the country and becomes involved in politics. He is patronized by the Marquis de Silva who, ignorant of his birth, offers him in marriage to Miss Wilmor who is, if you can follow this, the daughter of a rich nobleman who had married Caroline de Silva without knowing her previous misfortune. As the lady will bring a dowry of one hundred thousand pounds, Richard at once accepts and calls his steward and *âme damnée,* Tompson, to arrange for his wife to be abducted to France. As the reward of a timely political apostasy the King, acting we suppose on the advice of his ministers, gives Richard a patent to inherit the property of Miss Wilmor's father as well as the deeds of the earldom of Charlton in Devonshire. To Richard's annoyance he then finds that Mawbray has rescued Jenny from Tompson who was carrying her off to France (incidentally killing him), so Richard determines to kill her himself. He has very foolishly invited the Marquis de Silva to sign the marriage contract in his country house, whither Jenny has been taken for shelter by Mawbray. He finds her there and pushes her off the balcony down a precipice, little knowing that Mawbray has seen him do it. Mawbray then discloses himself in the double rôle of public executioner and Richard's father and Richard falls to the ground in a swoon. . . . What happened afterwards we are not told. A lurid commentary on English country life sometime in the eighteenth century—perhaps a little exaggerated—but much to the taste of the Parisian ground-

lings. It may be added that the production of the last scene caused a good deal of trouble to Dumas and his collaborator, Goubaux (about whom I know nothing). The question arose: how to get rid of Richard's first wife. Should she be poisoned?

"If we poison her," said Dumas, "what are we to do with the corpse? I know. The house shall be on the edge of a ravine with a river in it and Richard shall chuck his wife out of the window [*flanquera sa femme par la fenêtre*]."

"But my dear fellow," said Goubaux, "on the stage you don't throw a woman out of a window all of a sudden. It wouldn't do."

The argument raged. Suddenly Dumas saw light.

"Goubaux, you are right. Richard would have to drag his wife to the window and the public wouldn't like that. She would struggle, and when Richard was forcing her over the balcony the audience would see her legs, and then they would laugh, which is much worse than hissing. But there must be a way out."

The decencies and the success of the play were finally protected by Richard shutting himself and his wife outside on the balcony for a moment. When he reopens the shutters that he had closed behind them, Jenny has disappeared. It seems that the great actor Frédéric acted with such violence and sublimity that Mme Noblet, who was acting Jenny, uttered shrieks of real terror; so everything was a great success—but it was hardly a typical play of English life.

Frédéric also took with great success the part of Kean in Dumas's play of that name. Like all plays it probably acts far better than it reads, but except that Kean and the Prince Regent are in it, it might be about any actor, real or imaginary, at any time.

There is a play called *Halifax*, so dull that I could not read it, containing, as usual, characters with fantastic distortions of English names. There is also a play called *Katherine Howard*, in which Henry VIII's fifth wife, formerly the mistress of a lord called Ethelwood (this we suppose is a reminiscence of *Ivanhoe*) arranges with her lover that he shall drink a potion which will make him seem dead. (Do we here

trace the influence of Shakespeare?) Edith who has the key to the burial vault will secretly rescue him and then they will be able to go on living in sin very comfortably, as the English law will not let a man who is dead be recognized as alive (though here one feels they rather underestimated Henry VIII's opinion of the law). But just as all has gone well Henry, feeling that with Ethelwood dead he has more chance, offers Katherine not only his love but his crown. Katherine, a woman of business-like method, at once drops the key of Ethelwood's vault out of a window into the Thames. "What are you doing?" says Henry. "I am becoming a queen," says she. But we need hardly say that some one else—I really do not know who—has another key, by which means Ethelwood manages to appear in complete armour with closed helmet just as Katherine (whose other sins have by now found her out) is going to be executed, and disclose himself. After which Katherine goes to the scaffold supported by Cranmer and Sir Thomas More, doubtless finding death more peaceful than life at court. But I do not think we can say that Dumas is much indebted to England for this story; nor in this case England to him.

One striking analysis of the English I cannot omit. It occurs in I forget which of Dumas's really tenth-rate novels—possibly in *Le Capitaine Richard*:

> "The English," said the general, "are all exactly alike. Blue eyes, red hair, white skins and protruding jaws."
>
> "That is because of the *th*," said Roland seriously.
>
> "The *th*? What do you mean?"
>
> "What I say. You learnt English, general?"
>
> "Well, I tried to learn it."
>
> "Then your teacher must have told you that you pronounce *th* by putting your tongue against your front teeth. Well, as the English are always saying TH and in consequence pushing their front teeth outwards with their tongues, they all get an enlarged jaw, which, as you said just now, is one of the chief things one notices about them."

And, if I may divagate for a moment, I would like to draw your attention to a fine piece of translating, either in this book or in one equally bad. It is a French translation of Gretchen's

song in *Faust*, so well known again in Schubert's setting. The German is, as we all know,

Meine Ruh ist hin,
Mein Herz ist schwer;
Ich finde sie nimmer
Und nimmermehr,

which Dumas, or one of his hacks, finely translates as

Rien me console,
De son adieu,
Je deviens folle,
Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!

We may also note that very few English people appear in Dumas's novels. All the English nobles in the *Mousquetaires* series are really Frenchmen. Miladi, that bad and fascinating woman, was really, as Athos knew all too well, pure French and an escaped nun into the bargain, which may account for her curiously un-English title of Lady Clarick. Edmond Dantès, after his riches have made him Count of Monte Cristo, occasionally disguises himself as an Englishman, but we feel that only Dumas could have been taken in by him.

But this raises the question of where Dumas got his facts for the attempt to rescue Charles I in *Twenty Years After*, and d'Artagnan's kidnapping of Monk in *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*. When I say 'facts,' I do not mean that either of these remarkable events really took place, but Dumas does infuse into his characters and his landscapes and places an air of authenticity most unusual in his dealings with England. If Scott had been different he might have written parts of these episodes. Charles himself, the Parliamentary generals, the journey from Scotland to London, the faithful servant Parry, London on the snow-clad January morning, all carry complete conviction. So, later, do Monk's camp on the Tweed (of his rape in the box with breathing-holes in it we will say nothing) and Charles II's diplomatic reception of him at The Hague and the Restoration. As for the picture of Hampton Court and the lords and ladies on the canal or pacing the long walks by the river, when Raoul de Bragelonne (that depressing example of the *fils unique* so dear to the French heart with

a foot that a girl of twelve might have envied) comes as Louis XIV's ambassador to the King, it is the prettiest piece of English landscape in the world and as English as it can be. But where did Dumas discover England? From what book? What visit? Or did genius suddenly tell him what to write?

I can throw no light on it. For a moment I thought I had found the key. In one of his volumes of *Causeries*—which are mostly journalism, rather catch-penny, though with some authentic fire and impudence—Dumas describes at considerable length a visit to England in 1857, as the guest of a Franco-Indian nabob, with his son, the tardily but lovingly legitimized Alexandre *fils* whose growing fame so pleased his father, the son who treated that father as an equal or as a loved but sometimes troublesome child, who once said of him in a moment of exasperation that his father would stand up behind his own carriage if he could make people believe he had a black footman. According to Dumas's own account it all began with his having a few friends to dinner, including an American phrenologist, a Hungarian doctor, an Italian refugee, and a charming and rich Anglo-German East India merchant called Mr Young, marquis of Badaour. At the end of the feast Mr Young raised his glass and proposed the following toast: " Here's to the health of all present who will come with me next Wednesday to the Epsom races."

After honouring this toast, one of the guests remarked that during the races there would not be a room or a carriage left in London, but Mr Young, in true nabob style, had reserved two floors of the London Coffee House and instead of more curricles had secured a vehicle which would easily hold twelve. Dumas and his son at once accepted, with the idea of seeing not only an English race, but also the Manchester exhibition of articles produced in the United Kingdom; but as Dumas *père*, if we may believe a word he says, was only in England from Tuesday to Saturday (to avoid the English Sunday) and seems to have spent a great deal of time shopping as well as going to Madame Tussaud's, the Derby, and the Crystal Palace, we may be permitted to doubt whether he ever got as far as Manchester.

After a bad crossing which always made Dumas, an excellent

sailor, very hungry, and some refreshment at Dover which seems to have maintained the national character for bad coffee, he and his son arrived at the hotel. Alexandre the young went off to buy china and electro-plate, so he said, while his father took a cab to Madame Tussaud's which he wanted to visit to compare it with the Salon Curtius in Paris, where waxen celebrities, their coats too tight round the biceps and too loose at the elbows, had first won his provincial heart; nor was it to be forgotten that he had met Victor Hugo for the first time, not in the wax figure room, but in a room where a man was exhibiting a siren's skeleton for which he said he had refused 25,000 francs from the Government on the previous day. All of which may, or may not, be true.

At this period one paid two 'schellings' to see the pleasant models and four 'schellings' to see the Horrors; the Duke of Wellington and his camp bed being among the former, and Napoleon with *his* camp bed among the latter, which appeared to Dumas an effort at historical epigram on the part of Madame Tussaud.

After seeing Madame Tussaud's he, like his son, wished to buy some china, but on the grand scale, for he had observed with interest that the English basin was as large as a pond—and those who remember the size of the basins abroad even as late as 1914 will see what he meant. Mr Daniel, the proprietor of a china shop at 129 Bond Street at the corner of Grosvenor Street, most handsomely insisted on his buying what he wanted at cost price, which led Dumas to wonder whether Scott or Byron would have met with equal gallantry in France.

There follows a charming description of Hyde Park at four o'clock on a May afternoon, with the women riding horses worth ten thousand francs, their flaxen fair or dark raven hair floating gracefully on their shoulders below large plumed hats fringed with lace, with dark eyes proud and passionate or blue eyes soft and languorous and necks like swans, stopping in their course to speak to some gentleman lounging at the railings and then, with a flick of the whip and a gesture of a little gloved hand, away to rejoin their party. Shakespeare, says Dumas, who has said everything, has painted his fair compatriots in a single line: "England is a nest of swans in the middle of a

large pond. . . . The place where they ride is called by *Punch*, he says, *le chemin pourri*, the Rotten Road, and near it is the statue to Arthur duck of Wellington. After which they went back to the London Coffee House in one of the rapid London cabs, its speed increased by the promise of a tip, a thing quite unknown in England—at which statement I must say my belief began to waver.

As for the lady who, not wishing to ride as far as the exit, leapt the barrier with the ease, courage, and insouciance of a jockey in a steeple-chase, we may think what we like.

This excursion was succeeded by a journey from Blackfriars to Blackwall on a public steamer, passing the dock where the Great Eastern was being built. Arrived at Blackwall, the nabob offered his friends a simple dinner consisting of the following:

> Turtle soup and clear soup.
>
> A first service of sixteen kinds of fish and seven relevés of meat.
>
> Eight entrées.
>
> A second service of six different kinds of game.
>
> Eighteen entremets, which included jellies, lobsters, mushroom patties, rice, and radishes.
>
> A dessert of every kind of fruit and conserve, the whole washed down by hock, sherry, champagne, madeira, port, claret, Chateau Margaux, Chateau dickens, Constance, and Tokay.

At ten o'clock they came back by railway and took cabs to see the illuminations in honour of Her Majesty's birthday, remarking with interest that so many of the fair frequenters of the Haymarket were French they might have imagined themselves in the old Palais Royal galleries of 1825. But Cremorne appeared extremely dull, and hence, shocking.

At last Derby Day dawned and at ten o'clock an immense vehicle holding at least ten people, hung with hampers containing *pâtés*, cold chicken, lobsters, claret, champagne, and ice, drew up at the hotel, drawn by four horses and conducted

by two postillions in top boots, white breeches, pink waistcoats, jackets, and caps. The coach set off at a gallop amid clouds of dust. The party, happily all male, protected themselves with gauze veils, blue, brown, or green.

There follows an account of the various vehicles: stage-coach, mail-coach, sociable, Braice (which I cannot identify), brougham (spelt right by a miracle), landau, landaulet, mail-phæton, dog-cart, whitechapel (mentioned by Trollope as a "light, stylish-looking cart"), fifty different kinds of tilbury, buggy, farm cart, brewer's dray, waggon, cab, omnibus, fly, post chaise, donkey chaise, sweep chaise and, of course, two profoundly misheard and miswritten vehicles, one the hansom patent safety, the other—on this I can offer no opinion whatever—the English carriage *par excellence*, the *mofredar*. And, he adds, from Vauxhall to Epsom there is a flood, a torrent of vehicles in which you need not only a coachman but a pilot who can face the waves of traffic, for each wave shrieks, grumbles, swears, yelps, sings, threatens, curses, jokes, with anything from four to twenty mouths.

At Morden the road was blocked by a stage-coach with four horses. One of the horses had fallen exhausted and could not be moved, while the crowd shouted "Bleed 'im," but the driver had laid a wager, the traces were cut, the third horse harnessed *en arbalète* in front of the others and the coach whirled on, leaving the fourth horse dead by the road.

The course at Epsom must have presented a brilliant and enchanting scene. The year was 1857, the month May, the celebrated mare Blink Bonny who had disappointed her backers at Newmarket was running and the odds against her had been at one time 1000 to 1. Against Blink Bonny—ably translated by Dumas as *Le joli clignoteur* though *clignoteuse* might have been more correct—were Adamas, Strathnaver (whose name, of course, Dumas got wrong), Tournament, and other runners up to the number of twenty or more, and her owner Mr W. I'Anson, who had consistently backed her, made an immense sum. But it was not so much the racing itself that interested our traveller as the astounding panorama of the Epsom Downs, where rich and poor, duchess and sweep, were in the roaring crowd. As soon as the race was over there

was a rush to where the carriages (without their horses) were waiting. As in Mr Wardle's carriage at the review at Chatham, hampers were unpacked, champagne corks flew, there was noise and excitement. Dumas and his son, both amateurs of human nature, took a leg of cold chicken in one hand and a piece of bread in the other and went to observe the Derby-day scene. In the following year, 1858, Frith's *Derby Day* was exhibited. Possibly the painter was among that crowd, noting the ladies in the carriages with the swells in attendance; the lively but *déclassé* ladies with their protectors just as Adelaide sat in Lord Welter's carriage a few years later when Lord Ascot was double-crossed by the jockey he had paid to pull his horse—you know your Ravenshoe; the booths and jugglers, the refreshment tents, the beggars; children who could hardly walk standing on their heads or climbing ladders that their fathers balanced on their noses; contortionists, little girls on stilts, Punch and Judy all in among the carriages and the silk dresses, the Aunt Sallies, the pickpockets, the shooting galleries. You will find it all in Frith's *Derby Day*, just as M. Dumas has set it down.

I cannot work on the heroic scale. I am untrained and ignorant; but I have an idle and mole-like passion for verifying details. The Derby seemed so real that I felt it could not be real, so I went to the pains of looking up *The Times* files for May 1857. It was all there: Blink Bonny, Adamas, Strathnaver, and the rest of the field. But as I read down the column what was my agreeable horror to find the description of the gipsies and mountebanks and jugglers, literally word for word as Dumas had described them and very well translated! Or was it the other way round? I cannot think that *The Times* racing correspondent would have wished, or needed, to take a page from an article by M. Alexandre Dumas not published till long afterwards. I am forced to the mortifying conclusion that M. Alexandre Dumas, a man of infinite resource, had 'lifted' this description bodily from *The Times*—and possibly never been to the Derby at all. There was no need for him to go. With his verve and imagination he could see a race as well from Paris as from the stand (or house, as he calls it, and my

French is not good enough to know whether the word *maison* is used for a stand). Why then cross the sea and have to drink English coffee? One can invent one's visit to Hyde Park and to Madame Tussaud's.

At this point I gave up the unequal struggle. There is *The Times* article; and there is my adored Dumas's article. All I want to know is, who translated it so well for him? for it is a remarkably brilliant and idiomatic version. I shall never know. But here, fully proved, is—I fear—Dumas's debt to England.

VII

The English Sailor in Fiction (Chaucer to Marryat)

J. G. Bullocke

ANY writer who deals with the sailor in literature cannot begin better than by acknowledging his debt to Commander C. N. Robinson. A more recent writer on the same subject, Professor Harold Watson, in his *Sailor in English Fiction and Drama*, has been at some pains to point out inaccuracies in *The British Tar*, though he has admitted that the professional knowledge brought to his task by Commander Robinson renders his book "a prerequisite to further study." The emphasis, however, should be differently placed. Such errors as Commander Robinson has perpetrated—and they are less serious than Professor Watson seems to suppose—are easily corrected by later scholars. His knowledge of the sea will not soon be found again combined with such a high degree of literary skill. The combination is a rare gift, and the Professor, for all his erudition, will be the more easily superseded.

The continuous history of the literary development of the sailor may be said to begin in the sixteenth century. The rise of a genuine Royal Navy; the development of the fighting ship from a round fort to a swiftly moving vessel armed with powerful and destructive guns; the gradual replacement of the old military officer by one with a real sea training; all these tended to produce a professional class of sailors whom literature could not afford to ignore. This was still more the case when popular interest was aroused by the explorations and discoveries in which the English seaman was now taking his part; by the 'travellers' tales,' which enthralled the ignorant and inspired the intellectual; and by the Spanish War with its

great popular appeal, its romantic exploits of Drake and his fellows, and its more tangible interest of captured treasure beyond the wildest dreams. The sailor became 'a type'; his employment 'a profession.' Previously, in the main, literature had been interested rather in the sea than in the sailor, who had followed one of a hundred trades not, on the whole, more remarkable than the other ninety-nine. A natural corollary to the general awakening of the sixteenth century was its interest in the man who was opening up the world for all to see; literature was bound to notice him, and the literary convention of the sailor began.

Yet there is a drawback to beginning our investigation in the sixteenth century, namely, that it omits one of the most vivid and human portraits of the sailor ever painted, that by Chaucer. Much has been written of it, all know it; yet it cannot be wholly omitted. Commander Robinson, moreover, has given a slightly false emphasis to his study of this character that needs a word of correction. "And certainly he was a good felawe," said Chaucer. To take this statement literally, as he has done, is to have one's leg pulled, though admittedly by the greatest of leg-pullers, for the distinction conferred by the poet, we find, was shared among others by the Summoner. No, the Shipman, though doubtless he had his virtues, was a tough. He was addicted to piracy, making his victims walk the plank, and he stole wine, though there was little necessity for him to do so, since sailors had the privilege of carrying their own. Chaucer's is a startlingly clear portrait, bold and finished as to detail. The Shipman's barge was called the *Maudelayne* and the Shipman might have come from Dartmouth. Is it chance that there are three references to a ship of this name in the Customs' House returns from Dartmouth—one in 1379, and two in 1386? He wore "a gown of falding to the knee," a rough, coarse cloth, worn by sailors in the West Country until comparatively lately. He carried a knife; sailors still do so. He was burnt brown; sailors still are. Best of all, he is responsible for the inception of the now time-honoured joke that sailors are unable to ride: "He rood upon a rouncy, as he couthe." A 'rouncy' is a pack-horse, so some horse coper had "seen him

coming." "As he couthe" speaks volumes: Many of these points will be found elaborated in an admirable essay by P. Q. Karkleek, published by the Chaucer Society—an essay well known to Chaucerian scholars, but deserving of more attention from students of the sea.

Chaucer's famous portrait of the Seaman has tended to obscure his other sea-piece, the description of the battle of Actium in *The Legend of Good Women*. Needless to say it has little to do with Actium, but is a spirited account of a typical medieval sea-fight:

> With grisly soun out goth the grete gonne,
> And heterly they hurtlen al at ones,
> And fro the top doun cometh the grete stones.
> In goth the grapenel so ful of crokes
> Among the ropes, and the shering-hokes.
> In with the polax presseth he and he;
> Behind the mast beginneth he to flee,
> And out agayne, and dryveth him over-borde;
> He stingeth him upon his speres orde;
> He rent the sail with hokes lyke a sythe;
> He bringeth the cuppe, and biddeth hem he blythe;
> He poureth pesen upon the hacches slider;
> With pottes ful of lym they goon togider;
> And thus the longe day in fight they spende
> Til, at the last, as every thing hath ende,
> Antony is shent, and put him to the flighte.

Descriptions of sea-fights, indeed, are comparatively frequent in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century literature, though seldom so lively as this one. Many of them will be found mentioned by Miss Anne Treneer in her *Sea in English Literature*, a book of considerable charm. Some will be sympathetically drawn to a vivid picture of sea-sick pilgrims from a manuscript in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, printed in Laird Clowes, 1343. But as a portrait of a medieval seaman Chaucer's delineation stands alone, except for the nautical characters in the Miracle plays, usually depicted as plain, blunt fellows. What is more we must wait till the sixteenth century for anything comparable.

From then onward, however, it is no longer a matter of

isolated presentations, but rather of continuous development. In Elizabethan times the sailor will be found depicted in four different kinds of literary work—in the 'Voyages,' in the drama, in romances and novels, and in poems. The roundest presentment will be found in the first-named. Hakluyt and Purchas attempt nothing in the way of character sketches, but no assiduous reader of their *Collections* can remain unaware of the general character of the Elizabethan seaman, and the man who emerges is free from the caricature and convention which often distort the picture in drama and fiction. The result is that the seaman appears more like an ordinary human being than is usually the case in literary productions; like ordinary folk, a mixture of vices and virtues, different though their predominating characteristics may be. On the one hand, brave, hardy, often of a generous spirit; pious after a fashion, and intensely patriotic; on the other hand, inclined to be mutinous, greedy for booty, hard, and occasionally even cruel—very like most men, but braver, and yet more callous: on the whole a breed that we have come to look on with respect and admiration, especially when we recollect that there were no Articles of War to hold him in check.

In the plays of the period, including those of the first half of the seventeenth century, the sailor is usually presented either on his own element at its stormiest, when he is held up as an object of admiration, or on shore, when he is an object of ridicule. He is on most occasions, however, whichever element he is favouring, remarkable for a certain blunt honesty. The tendency derives from the Miracle plays, and has to some degree persisted ever since. The famous *Hick Scorner* carries the *motif* into the sixteenth century. The fashion for storm scenes was begun by Shakespeare. The student may perhaps be disappointed that he has given us so little of the sailor. There is only one full-dress sailor-character —Antonio in *Twelfth Night*—and even he is somewhat Italianate in his friendships. For the rest, he affects the blunt honesty and directness of purpose noticed above, and the adoption of the convention by Shakespeare may well strengthen our belief in its reality. Antonio, arrested in "private brabble," resents the imputation of 'pirate.'

> Orsino, noble Sir,
> Be pleased that I shake off these names you give me:
> Antonio never yet was thief or pirate,
> Though I confess, on base and ground enough,
> Orsino's enemy.

The two storm scenes are brief, but unforgettable. That in *Pericles* is the less remarkable and finished. We cannot, as in *The Tempest*, perceive what the sailors are about; they are to "slack the bollins," but otherwise they take refuge in anathematizing the storm. It is an impressive moment, however, when Pericles remonstrates with the mariners for the proposal to throw overboard his "dead queen," and tells them, "That's your superstition." "Pardon us, Sir," replies the first sailor, "with us at sea it hath been still observed, and we are strong in custom." They have their way, but custom makes them a little premature, as subsequent events reveal. The storm in *Pericles* also contains one of Shakespeare's inexplicably fine, brief passages that seem to convey so much more than the mere words:

> The seaman's whistle
> Is, as a whisper in the ears of death,
> Unheard.

Of the first scene of *The Tempest* there is no need to say much, since all has been said. Its dramatic propriety is perfect; as a sea-piece it is accurate and picturesque. Commander Robinson has shown in some detail—and who more capable to do so—exactly what the boatswain was attempting to do, *i.e.*, to work the vessel off a lee shore. It might be noted, however, that his "Yare" is not a contraction of "Ye are to beware," but is derived from the Old English "gearu"—"ready." There is a tendency to try to prove Shakespeare to have been a lawyer, a gardener, a soldier, and a hundred other things, because of his knowledge of the technique of each business he describes. The first scene of *The Tempest* might similarly prove him a sailor. The storm scene will be found copied in other plays such as Fletcher's *Sea Voyage*, which, by its revival in Restoration times, caused a continuance of the tradition. It occurs again in Killigrew's *The Prisoners*, but the treatment is uniformly inferior.

That in other plays of the period the sailor is held up to ridicule should not be given too much emphasis, nor is it safe to generalize from this fact and conclude the Elizabethan and Jacobean sailor to have been a fool. He is not, after all, painted in any worse colours than the soldier and the citizen. The former is often shown as a braggart, and the latter as a miser; yet we do not assume that the Elizabethan soldier was invariably cowardly, nor the citizen covetous. Ben Jonson's theory of the 'humour,' moreover, gave an impetus to this style of character drawing; and, while we may conclude that such characters were founded on existing types, we must make ample allowance for what Professor Watson calls " the satirical purpose " of the 'humours' school. Thus unflattering pictures of seamen will not uncommonly be found, such as Captain Sea-gull in *Eastward Ho,* and Captains Otter and Shunfield in Jonson's *Silent Woman* and *Staple of News*—none of them a very impressive figure.

In comparison with the drama, Elizabethan fiction has little to offer. Its interest is more purely literary, and it is not sufficiently emancipated to present contemporary character. It depends almost entirely on incident; and even that is subject to elaborate conventions derived from Greek and other sources. Indeed, certain inevitable items reappear with almost depressing regularity. The shipwreck, the amorous captain, the seizure of the heroine by pirates, the reuniting of the lovers, and other such incidents, are part of a general stock-in-trade; and therefore it is hardly surprising if little light is shed on seafaring types. Revealing pages, however, are occasionally to be found in the works of such writers as Greene and Nash.

Elizabethan poetry dealing with the sailor is a useful counterblast to the play of the 'humours' school. Generally heroic and laudatory in intent, it is often chauvinistic and lacking in quality, though in the latter respect a different story could be told, if the subject were 'the sea,' and not 'the sailor.' Indeed, it is a matter for regret that the greatest Elizabethans have so little to say of the latter. One feels that the age of Drake should have produced a sea-epic; but presumably the very discoveries that should have inspired the epic produced also a sophistication that killed the impulse and

caused the epic poet to turn elsewhere for his subject. Spenser has given us some unforgettable sea-scapes, but they depict a calm sea, and we look in vain for the wanderings of an Elizabethan Odysseus or for the "surge and thunder" of an Homeric sea. None the less there are plenty of poems that indicate that the sailor, for all his faults, which others were fond of dwelling on, had caught the public imagination and made himself on honourable niche in the temple of his countrymen's hearts. Here, if anywhere, we discern that "idolatry of Neptune," which we know was an abiding irritant to the Elizabethan soldier. In innumerable ballads is the hard lot of the sailor bewailed, and his bravery extolled. *Grenville's Farewell* may be taken as an example. *The Winning of Cales* is one of the best of the 'blow the trumpet' school:

> Now bragging Spaniards take heed of your tayle,
> Dub-a-dub, Dub-a-dub, thus strike their drums:
> Tantara, tantara, the Englishman comes.

Vigorous at least. In a higher class altogether come Warner's *Albion* and Drayton's *Polyolbion*, both of which sing the glories of the sailors and adventurers. Fitz-Geoffrey's *Drake* strikes a note of intense sincerity and enthusiasm:

> Whom dead yet all men's thoughts alive do make,
> For who would think that Death could conquer Drake?

Fitz-Geoffrey might have been the writer of the sixteenth-century nautical epic, had he been cast in a larger mould; he had the attitude of mind. It would be easy to lengthen the list, but enough has been said to show that the age was not without its heroic conception of the sailor—a conception that extended into the seventeenth century.

It is not until the Restoration that any considerable change can be discerned in the delineation of the nautical character, but in the literature of that period a new sailor makes his appearance, a sailor who, in drama and fiction at least, becomes definitely a man set apart from the rest of humanity. It would be dangerous, as will be shown later, to generalize too freely from the plays and novels of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Their writers inherited the sailor of the 'humours

tradition, and fiction will naturally tend to the reproduction of a type. Thus we find the sailor was, in the romances and drama of these centuries, what the parson was to the Edwardian music-hall—something by no means the same as ordinary humanity, and possessing marked individual characteristics and peculiarities. None the less, on the principle that there is no smoke without fire, we must assume that some change came over the real sailor himself of which literature mirrors the reflection, even if it be unduly distorted. No doubt the coming of age, as it were, of the Royal Navy, was the fundamental cause of the change. The immense activities of the Commonwealth had produced a really complete sea force with its own machinery, self-reliant and independent of the mercantile marine. This Royal Navy began to think of itself as a close corporation. A seaman was always a seaman whether he was at sea or on land; and in order that the landsman might recognize him for what he was, and honour his profession, the seaman 'shivered his timbers' when ashore, brought his sea manners into the rustic cottage or the fashionable drawing-room, and talked perpetually in an incomprehensible nautical idiom. The landsman replied by respecting him on his own element and cheating him off it; and literature gives us a succession of Flips, Mizens, and Manlys. It should be particularly noticed that this tendency to the expression of ordinary, mundane matters in nautical idiom becomes, at this point, far more marked than was ever the case in earlier literature. In Elizabethan and Jacobean plays, nautical language is often confined to nautical matters, and not extended unduly to everyday concerns. The 'shiver-my-timbers' sailor is definitely a product of the Restoration, and it is unlikely that he is merely an exaggeration of a pre-existing literary type; the sailor himself must have contributed to the change.

The principal plays in which these changes will be found are Wycherley's *Plain Dealer*, Congreve's *Love for Love*, and Charles Shadwell's *Fair Quaker of Deal*, though there are, of course, numerous other plays exhibiting much the same tendencies. Many of them are dealt with by Professor Watson in his *Sailor in Fiction and Drama*. Captain Manly and Ben

Legend are hardly objects of respect to the land-lubbers with whom they come in contact, though the former is less 'salt' in his speech than the latter. Both are drawn as honest, blunt fellows, thereby inheriting the earlier tradition. This is particularly true of Captain Manly, whose 'plain dealing' forms the theme of the play, though his revenge on his false mistress would have done credit to an Italian princeling. Both he and Ben, however, are regarded by the other characters of the plays as something in the nature of curious monsters. "If the Captain be returned," says Olivia, "then shall I be pestered again with his boisterous sea-love; have my alcove smell like a cabin, my chamber perfumed with his tarpaulin Brandenburgh; and hear volleys of brandy-sighs enough to make a fog in one's room. Foh! I hate a lover that smells like Thames Street." Ben Legend is even less acceptable. He is "a great lubberly tarpaulin" to one character, and "a filthy creature that smells all of pitch and tar" to another. "To your element, fish, be mute," says his own father. His wooing exhibits the usual qualities of blunt straightforwardness expressed in nautical idiom; but Miss Prue prefers the more cunning and artificial boisterousness of Tattle, and Ben's charming proposal of marriage—that they shall "swing in a hammock together"—meets with the reply that he is a "great sea calf," and a "stinking tar-barrel." And, indeed, Ben, while he likes things "above board," and is not for "keeping anything under hatches," exhibits little sensibility, having forgotten his own brother Dick is dead, though the news had been sent him two years before.

At the same time, it is necessary to be on one's guard against generalizing too freely from these characters—and not only on account of the natural exaggeration of the dramatist. It must also be remembered that Wycherley and Congreve are dealing with the *beau monde*, with the world of wit and fashion, and that the intrusion into this magic circle of any alien body will necessarily be a cause of mirth. It is not only because they are sailors that Manly and Ben are the butts of cheats and wits; it is also because they are unable or, as with the former, unwilling, to adopt the conventions, fopperies, and insincerities of society. With Manly it is a matter for positive

congratulation, and Ben, next to Angelica, is actually the most attractive character in *Love for Love*. We must beware of accepting the verdicts of the other characters, for they express themselves so often on the subject that we may easily be misled into mistaking reiteration for truth, and so suppose that the opinions they utter are those of contemporary England in general. This is not necessarily the case; but it can readily be seen that any person not *au fait* with the manners of the polite world was as much a monster to its members as was the sailor. Miss Prue herself, chosen mate for Ben Legend, was straight from the country and had not been bred in polite manners. The company, in consequence, regard her as curiously as they do Ben himself. Indeed, she is referred to as a "land-monster" in apposition to the description of Ben as "sea-monster," and the opinion hazarded that the progeny of their union will be otters. While, therefore, Manly and Ben, and others like them, are plain, blunt, seamen, often speaking by choice in a nautical jargon and contemptuous of the landsman, and while we may admit the partial truth of the delineation, it is clear that we must not over-emphasize their peculiarities.

It is difficult to leave *Love for Love* without pointing out that Congreve has given us a prime example of the perils that beset the landsman who ventures to deal with maritime concerns. Ben Legend speaks thus to Prue in the third act: "For to speak one thing and to think just the contrary way is, as it were, to look one way and row another." It was a Sub-Lieutenant at the R.N. College, Greenwich, who pointed out to the writer that this is what most of us do who undertake that particular form of exercise!

While many of the tendencies described above may be seen in *The Fair Quaker of Deal*, this play demands separate consideration on account of the fact that it deals almost exclusively with the navy and its concerns. *The Plain Dealer*, indeed, gives us some insight into the differences and quarrels between the "tarpaulin"—born to the sea and having worked his way up from humble beginnings—and the gentleman. Captain Manly, from his social connexions, may be presumed to have been the latter by birth, though he has become the

former by choice—a remark that would appear to be equally true of Ben. Manly's contempt for the gentleman officer appears frequently in his conversation with his lieutenant. He would have him "tell the new officer, who bought his employment lately, that he is a coward," and is himself told by Oldfox that his broad sword makes him look unlike "one of our holiday captains now-a-days, with a bodkin by his side," but such matters will be found dealt with at full length in *The Fair Quaker*. In this play we have full-dress pictures of three captains, each of a different type—Flip, the tarpaulin, Mizen, the gentleman, and Worthy, who exhibits the vices of neither and the virtues of both. Flip, at the beginning of the play, expresses the utmost horror of the gentleman-captains who "must wear white linen, have field-beds, lie in Holland sheets," etc. "Oh, it was not so in the Dutch Wars. Then we valued ourselves upon wooden legs, and stumps of arms, and fought as if heaven and earth were coming together." He rails at all land-lubbers, regards all gentility as affectation, lodges at a bawdy-house, and entertains his men upon compulsion with drink and debauchery. Mizen, as may be supposed, is the exact opposite. He reverses the usual procedure; and, so far from using nautical idiom ashore, uses territorial idiom afloat—which is quite as ridiculous. His cabin is furnished as nicely as any "Town-lady's withdrawing room" or "Country-gentlewoman's closet." He keeps a visiting-day, and his lieutenants and warrant-officers are "nicely dressed and perfumed." He hopes, moreover, that he will soon educate the navy to his own standard of taste. Both portraits are exaggerated, of course, but no doubt founded on existing types. Together these officers are a pretty couple of knaves, and only Mizen can make one sympathize with Flip, and only Flip with Mizen. Perhaps one slightly prefers the latter since he shows one gleam of sense when he remarks that those who put on clean shirts every day can understand the affairs of the navy as well as those who wear them "till they are lousy." Between these two extremes comes Captain Worthy, the significance of whose character may easily be overlooked. He is described in the *dramatis personæ* as "a gentleman of *Honour*, *Sense*, and *Reputation*," and he gives the lie to those

who are too fond of generalization from odd types. There were more Captain Worthys in the navy of the time than might be supposed, and, though we must judge from his own remarks that his moral standard had hardly attained such a pitch of chastity as Dorcas Zeal was entitled to demand, yet in the welter of filth that Shadwell manages to introduce (though the play is less gaseous than *The Plain Dealer*) he stands out as a paragon of moral virtues, and no doubt performed his duties with zeal, moderation, and kindliness. He is clearly looked up to by the junior officers and by the seamen; and when Flip and Mizen are tricked and flouted, and promise to abandon their eccentricities and to model their future behaviour on that of Worthy, it is clearly a consummation devoutly to be wished. *The Fair Quaker* is also full of other interesting references to various aspects of the navy. We learn of the ways of pursers and chaplains, and a Marine officer tells us that it is " the old sots " that object to the new corps, and not " the young fellows." Considerations of space, however, forbid any further examination, but it should be pointed out again (Commander Robinson discovered the fact and Professor Watson repeats it) that Flip and Mizen are the links between the ' humours ' captains of Ben Jonson and the naval gallery of Smollett.

The sailor of the lower deck in this and other plays is less remarkably presented; his conversation savours of Wapping, and he often expresses his surprise at the odd world he finds himself in ashore. But more will be learnt about him in the pages of diarists and the like, of which that of Chaplain Teonge may well be taken as an example, while Pepys, it will be remembered, gives us one or two illuminating glimpses.

The curious may pursue their study of naval characters in the drama of the eighteenth century, but, on the whole, there is nothing much to be learnt from it. It decayed progressively into spectacle and pantomime, and such great dramatists as arose had little to offer of maritime interest. The conception of the sailor in plays of minor importance became more and more conventional and stiff, until finally he appears as the hero of a hundred musical plays. Breezy and amorous, patriotic and brave, he became a mere lay figure thrust on the stage to amuse

the frivolous and inspire the bellicose. In the meantime, as the novel developed to fill the deficiency caused by the decay of the drama, so it took over the duty of presenting nautical character and ceased to concern itself only with incident. The growth was slow, and Smollett was its first fine bloom, if that discontented Scotsman may be compared to anything so pleasing.

Professor Watson has pointed out how English prose fiction left the sea when the Elizabethan novel declined, and how the sailor reappeared as a hero in Kirkman and Head's *English Rogue*. Other works of the same kind began to appear in considerable number as the seventeenth century drew to a close, and were based on accounts of actual voyages.[1] They reach their culmination in Defoe, whose works certainly borrow incidents from real voyages, but also concern themselves to some extent with character. A certain type of incident had become stereotyped by this time, such as the storm at the beginning of the story as a result of which the hero becomes marooned. This was used unforgettably by Defoe in his *Robinson Crusoe*, and proved very useful to Swift in his disposals of Captain Gulliver. With his tendency to place more emphasis on character, Defoe might easily have anticipated Smollett; but the Bohemianism of his nature, and his love of everything disreputable, led him to write of the pirate and the slaver rather than of the naval hero of his age. Captain Singleton, his completest nautical hero, is supposed to have been based on Captain Kidd. In the book that bears his name we are merely carried through the paraphernalia of the pirate, though admittedly with all the skill and eye for detail that make Defoe's work so remarkable. On the whole, however, the student of nautical matters can only agree with Commander Robinson that, from this standpoint, Defoe " must be a lasting disappointment," especially when we consider what he might have done.

These omissions, however, Smollet was to repair. Everyone knows how he became a Surgeon's Mate, and went on the expedition to the West Indies commanded by Admiral

[1] Professor Watson has clearly demonstrated the extent to which *The English Rogue* borrows from Linschoten.

Vernon. *Roderick Random* was the fruit of this experience, and embodies some of the actual happenings of the campaign. The picture of the Royal Navy here presented is far from impressive. The conditions under which the lower deck exist are appalling; a high proportion of the officers are fools, knaves, or bullies; and the supreme direction is vacillating and ineffective. Contemporary opinion discounted much of what Smollett had to say regarding conditions at sea, but believed in his animadversions on Vernon's conduct as Commander-in-Chief. Had it done the reverse, it would, on the whole, have been nearer the truth. Without any whitewashing of Vernon, it can certainly be said that Smollett's criticisms are obtuse, and often based on a false or incomplete view of the siuation. His picture of conditions at sea was unfortunately much nearer reality. We must certainly bear in mind, however, in both connexions, two things: firstly, that Smollett was not dealing with the navy at its best. His was the navy of Mathews and Lestock, and Anson the reformer was still battling with storms in the Pacific. A cheeseparing policy had reduced the efficiency of the administration, and so sapped the effectiveness of the fleet. We must not, therefore, allow ourselves to apply Smollett's picture to the whole eighteenth century. Secondly, we must make some allowance for Smollett's own character. He was a hasty, vitriolic fellow, who threw about his corrosive acid without much consideration as to whom it would disfigure.

In assessing the value of Smollett's gallery of naval characters, moreover, attention must be paid to the fact that he is the inheritor of a literary tradition. Reference has already been made to *The Fair Quaker of Deal* as a link between Smollett and the Jacobean dramatists, and to the fact that during the eighteenth century the novel took over, as it were, the naval traditions of the drama. In *Roderick Random* Flip and Mizen make their reappearance in the shape of Captains Oakum and Whiffle. They have undergone some change, of course, particularly Oakum, who can hardly be imagined consorting with his men ashore on the same principles of familiarity as actuated Flip; his taste is more for the sick parade coupled with the energetic administrations of

the deferential Surgeon, Mackshane. None the less, all the uneducated brutality and conscious boorishness remain, and he would better merit the unpleasant appellations so freely bestowed upon poor Ben Legend. Captain Whiffle is the complete reincarnation of Mizen with some particularly unpleasant leanings so typical of his creator. This inherited literary tradition must again make us chary of generalization; we must make due allowance for it, and for the exaggeration of which Smollett in particular would be guilty. But when all is said and done, some truth-to-life will remain. It will be noticed with Smollet that the lower we get down the scale the better and more attractive the characters become. The Purser and Chaplain, both of them inherited from *The Fair Quaker,* are more negatively objectionable than Oakum and Whiffle; while Smollett's own peers are good fellows, in spite of Morgan's Celtic oddity. As for the common sailor, such as Jack Rattlin, he is a paragon of virtue. This tendency cannot be attributed entirely either to exaggeration or personal spite, and can be corroborated from other sources. Such writers as Ned Ward, whose *Wooden World Dissected* had been published some forty years earlier, and Barnaby Slush, are loud in their praises of the common sailor, whilst condemning wholesale (Ned Ward in particular) the officers who commanded him. At the same time, the navy of the eighteenth century, as Commander Robinson has observed, had plenty of good officers in it; and, as will be shown later, the literature of the latter half of the century begins to take some notice of them. The tendency to rate the officer so low is probably due to the large proportion of Flips and Mizens, Oakums and Whiffles, who found their way into it, particularly in the earlier half. But Captain Worthy was not without his successors; this may be seen in *Roderick Random* itself, where Tom Bowling is all that anyone could wish, and stands high in the estimation of the lower deck. Tom Bowlings were sometimes promoted, no doubt, even in the navy of the Austrian Succession War—witness the rapid advance of Edward Hawke. The nautical figures, moreover, of *Peregrine Pickle* are considerably mellowed. Commodore Trunnion, who does not confine his nautical idiom to speech, though an extreme

'humours' character in one way, is a kindly enough old buffer who, one cannot suppose, would ever have been guilty of the inhumanities of an Oakum. His insistence on making long tacks across the countryside, when he finds himself riding straight into the wind, and the unrelieved nautical metaphor of his speech, which extends even through a lengthy death-bed oration, are eccentricities that are endearing rather than otherwise. Able Seaman Pipes seems able to put up with him, anyhow; and, while noting his oddity, we should not forget to rate him as a gentleman by nature. His companion, too, Lieutenant Hatchway, is of the same breed. Smollett, moreover, like his greater contemporary, Fielding, was unable to draw a character in the round, and his oddities are thus very odd, and justify the remark of the latter—itself evidence of the continued existence of the consciously distinct nautical type in real life—that there were two kinds of flesh: one of seamen and another of landsmen. Their great contemporary novelist, Richardson, who might have drawn a rounder, less 'humorous' nautical character, was engulfed too deep in the prevailing sentimentality and too absorbed in the gushing admiration of the ladies, to interest himself in anything so rough and impolite. On the whole, therefore, we must admit the truth of a considerable portion of *Roderick Random*, but temper the impression received by remembering that Smollett did not see the navy at its best, and by giving due weight to the literary and personal influences exercising a bias towards exaggeration.

There is no space to examine Smollett's other writings that deal with the sea; on the whole they would be found to emphasize the tendencies noted above. His work to-day is underrated by the critics, and little read by the public. His influence on maritime literature, however, was profound, and *Roderick Random* set a literary fashion. Numerous writers, amongst whom 'Poet' Thompson in his *Sailors' Letters* is perhaps the most notable, present us with pictures of the sailor and views of his life that confirm the conclusions to be drawn from a study of Smollett himself. One gradual change may be observed: namely, that, on the whole, as the century advances, a larger proportion of pleasing naval officers is pre-

sented for the edification of the public. This may be partly due to romantic influences, but is by no means wholly so. After Anson's reforms, officers could no longer appear in the extraordinary dress often affected by them; discipline was tightened; the bully and the knave had less chance of distinguishing themselves; and successors of Captain Worthy tended to become more conspicuous. The ultimate result was to be a corps of naval officers that attracted the favourable notice of so acute an observer as Jane Austen, though Fanny Burney, judging from Captain Mirvan in *Evelina*, appears to have been less impressed. Captain Marryat, too, presents a high proportion of attractive, gentlemanly officers—a type, it should be repeated, that had never disappeared—as a study of eighteenth-century voyage narratives would abundantly show, even if the Tom Bowlings of Smollett are obscured by the Oakums, Mackshanes, and Crampleys. Too many novels appeared, especially during the last two decades of the century, to make it possible to deal with them here. A favourable view of naval officrs will be found in many of them, particularly in Lord Thornby's *The Disappointed Heir* (1796). They continue to talk in a nautical jargon, and many of the novels contain strictures on the administration. But, on the whole, the presentation of the navy becomes decidedly more pleasing, and even a novel so obviously based on Smollett as John Davis's *The Post-Captain* (1802) gives an atmosphere a good deal mellower.

In the novels of Captain Marryat this tendency is emphatically seen, though this remark is more true of his later works, such as *Peter Simple* and *Mr Midshipman Easy*, than of his earlier, for much of his earlier work was coloured and darkened by his own unfortunate experiences, and may be held to place an undue emphasis on the less pleasing aspects of life afloat. As a retired naval officer, Marryat wrote as a reformer, and there are those who profess the opinion that this detracts from the literary value of his work; but it is hard to see why what is a matter for praise in Dickens should be a matter for blame in Marryat. It is no more praiseworthy to reform a workhouse than to improve a midshipman's berth, to stigmatize the injustice of a penal system than to deplore

the brutality of a sea-captain, and, while Marryat's objects were of narrower scope than those of Dickens, they were similar in their nature. He was also, like his greater successor, sometimes successful in getting his reforms adopted: witness his own evidence to that effect in *Mr Midshipman Easy*. The truth is that his reforming bias detracts nothing from the value of his novels, particularly the later ones, the products of a more settled and contented mind. It is rather an element, or, indeed, the cause, of their greatness. For it is true to say that Marryat is not so much a great writer as an expert in maritime affairs with a ready and pleasing pen. As a novelist he is decidedly inferior to Smollett; he could no more draw a character in the round than could his great predecessor, and by the time he was writing he ought to have been able to do so. His characters are all very virtuous, or very objectionable, or very humorous. Captain Savage never suffers from a liver (or admirably controls his bile, if he does so); Captain Tartar is as consistently saturnine as the villain of a melodrama; and Carpenter Muddle appears to have no other subject of conversation than his "philosophy." No, Marryat is a pleasing writer rather than a great one, but, writing of the sea, he is dealing with something which he thoroughly understood and which few have the opportunity of understanding; fewer still can combine their knowledge with such considerable literary gifts as he possessed. It is true that he is over-fond of offering a page or two of rather sententious observations, but they at least come from the heart; on the other hand, the boatswain's story of this episode, and the lieutenant's narrative of that, are often mere padding, and consequently more serious literary blemishes.

Reference has already been made to the darker aspects of the picture insisted upon in Marryat's earlier works; on the whole he somewhat over-emphasized them—especially as it was inevitable that he should be identified with the hero of *Frank Mildmay*; and in so far as he used his novels as a medium for personal revenge, as distinct from reform, he spoiled their literary quality. The finest picture of the contemporary navy is probably to be found in his later books. Over these there shines a pleasing geniality that is curiously in contrast with

Smollett. Marryat was too charming a personality to allow himself to be permanently embittered, and his love for the sea and his profession was great and abiding. In his later novels we can see well enough the professional pride and teamwork that won Trafalgar. The midshipman's berth, while no place for a weakling—it could never be that—is very different from the descriptions of sixty or seventy years earlier. The officers, in most cases, are genial, considerate, ready to admit such faults and injustices as they are guilty of, and jealous for the well-being of their men. For the last-named, too, Marryat had every sympathy, and they are painted as good fellows, willing to perform their duties with devotion in return for reasonable treatment. That such they must have been is only too clear from the results which they achieved.

One cannot take leave of Marryat without a reference to Commander Robinson's painstaking researches. Readers of the *Mariner's Mirror* will remember the queries concerning Marryat's use of sea-terms that he has put forward from time to time—queries usually answered by himself, if at all.

Further evidence that the navy had undergone improvement can easily be found in the pages of Marryat's contemporaries who followed the tradition he had set, most notably in those of Captain Glascock and Captain Chamier. Both of them were men of great experience in sea affairs, though possessing less sustained literary powers. Both present us with pictures of the navy that have the same mellow quality as those of Marryat himself. It is not so much that the sailor has altered very greatly—indeed, Captain Glascock is very insistent that he has not. His officers, however, are, in the main, of a higher type. It is the treatment they administer which has improved, and this influence calls forth the seaman's most amiable qualities. It is impossible, moreover, to account for the improvement by accusing these writers of yielding to a sentimental or romantic bias. Captain Chamier, like Marryat, was not always happy in his professional experiences, and shows himself to be thoroughly alive to the evils of the Service, while Glascock writes with the specific object of correcting the intolerable sentimental presentation of the sailor that had become the vogue in the drama. There is no

escape from the conclusion that an improvement had really taken place. The multiplication of sailor-writers is itself evidence of a more educated type. The navy was deviating into civilization.

An unprejudiced confirmation of this fact is, moreover, given us by Jane Austen—no easy critic. It is difficult to understand why Commander Robinson professes disappointment with this lady for not giving us "a living, breathing, vital picture of the seaman of her time." This is but to say that Jane Austen was Jane Austen and not somebody else, and Commander Robinson himself goes on to observe that she was "devoid of poetry and lofty imagination." Even presuming this to be true, she has given us in her own line, and in her own way, a very intimate study of the naval officer on shore, and a civilian view of the navy that sharply contrasts with that of the Restoration dramatists. It is abundantly clear, moreover, that naval officers appealed to her, and that she admired the type; indeed, it is doubtful whether any class of person comes so well out of the pages of Jane Austen as does the naval officer, for all the "dry, sub-sarcastic manner" she employs, and if it be argued that affection for a much-loved brother caused her to take too favourable a view, the reply must surely be that Fanny Burney successfully resisted a similar temptation. Admiral Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, it is true, is not all that he ought to be, but this proves nothing except that all classes of society produce their black sheep. That Sir Walter Elliot in *Persuasion* offers the opinion that "the profession has its utility, but I should be sorry to see any friend of mine belonging to it," and goes on to explain that it is "the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction," is surely a compliment when one recollects the open contempt with which this character is regarded by his creator. Indeed, it is most remarkable that in *Persuasion* every fool speaks ill of the navy, and every person of sense speaks well of it. Louisa goes so far as to protest "she was convinced of sailors having more worth and warmth than any other set of men in England—that they only knew how to live, and they only deserved to be respected and loved." She may be acknowledged to be speaking as much with her heart

as her head, but we may suppose Anne Elliot would have agreed, and not only on account of Captain Wentworth. *Persuasion,* too, contains delightful *vignettes* of naval officers at Bath; discussions on the comfort of women on board ship; comments on the public ignorance of the navy and its work; and a delightful gallery of officers: Admiral Croft with his breezy geniality and dangerous driving; Captain Harville with his busy retirement; Captain Benwick, literary, complex, and full of sensibilities; and, above all, Captain Wentworth, of whom one need only say that he was accounted worthy of Anne. She, good, sensible girl, "gloried in being a sailor's wife," though she had to "pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance." Jane Austen herself is speaking here, and it does indeed seem that we have travelled far from Flip and Mizen, Oakum and Whiffle. Furthermore, confirmation of this can be found in the pages of Charlotte Yonge—for example, in *The Daisy Chain*—in the persons of Harry May and Alan Ernescliffe.[1] The improvement which we find in the officers naturally disseminated itself throughout the whole fleet, and under its influence, the post-Trafalgar sailor takes on a more modern appearance. But the nautical literature of the nineteenth and twentieth century awaits further study before it can be conveniently summarized, and here, therefore, we may properly end.

The class of literature that has been examined in this brief essay has been mainly drama and fiction. On the whole, they may be taken as reliable guides, though the mirror they hold up to the sailor is to some extent a distorting one, and allowance must invariably be made for the exaggeration which the dramatist and novelist must use to obtain their effect. The sailor is shown as a 'type,' which means that his character is seldom fully drawn. On the other hand, there is reason to believe that he 'played up' to this method of portrayal, particularly from Restoration times. A corrective can always be obtained by reference to the diaries, pamphlets, and voyage-

[1] For further examples see Mare and Percival, *Victorian Best-seller* (Harrap, 1947).

narratives which the scope of this essay has rendered it impossible to examine. The charitable listener, it is hoped, will attribute glaring omissions to lack of space rather than to ignorance of the material.

It is difficult to close without further reference to the absence in English literature of a great sea-epic. As a seafaring race the English can claim never to have been surpassed. They have produced a body of literature that can challenge comparison with that of any country that has existed. Why, therefore, have they not their Odyssey? Alfred Noyes has given us *Drake*, but it could not be pretended that it is an epic of the highest order. We have, at the moment, however, a Poet Laureate to whom the sea means something more than a week-end at Margate, or a bout of sickness between Calais and Dover. He has already given us some vivid pictures of it in his *Dauber* and written some unforgettable sea-lyrics. Can we not appeal to him to apply himself diligently to that butt of Malmsey, and find the inspiration that would fill the one great gap from which our literature suffers?

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VIII

New Directions in English Poetry, 1920-45

Hermann Peschmann

IN calling this talk *New Directions in English Poetry, 1920–45*, I do not set out to give a review of the poetry of the period. It will neglect perhaps the greatest poet of his time, W. B. Yeats. His development from Romantic Symbolist to objective realist followed the general trend of the time; he did not originate that trend—though at times he outstripped his mentors. It will neglect, too, the two Poets Laureate, though Masefield has claims to be considered the best poet of dramatic narrative we have had since Crabbe—his lyrics are mostly on a lower plane—and Bridges, the only poet since Pope who has put, in *The Testament of Beauty*, a systematized philosophy into verse and left it poetry. He is, too, our greatest classical metrist since Campion. It will enable me to pass over the decline and fall of the Romantic movement in its Georgian swan-song—though not all the Georgians (*e.g.*, Edward Thomas) were negligible. But none of these showed the *new* directions that English poetry was to take.

Dates are always awkward. There is no special virtue in 1920, save that it gives me a span of twenty-five years to talk about, and because in that year one important book of verse was published and another began to sell: the first was *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*; the second, the *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. But, actually, significant new directions had been taken in English verse some years earlier. Around 1910 both here and in America a little group calling themselves the "Imagists," gathered round Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, his wife H. D., and Amy Lowell, seeking to portray with exactitude the thing seen, *la chose vue*, and to divest it of any aura of sentimental emotionalism; not to divest it of

emotion, but of gush; to keep the emotion relevant, not blurred. It was a natural reaction to Romanticism that had become loose and uncontrolled; there was an almost exact parallel last century in France where Théophile Gautier and the Parnassians reacted against their predecessors. Ezra Pound's imitations of the Chinese are among the best Imagist verses—brief, moving epitaphs like:

Liu Ch'e

The rustling of the silk is discontinued,
Dust drifts over the court-yard,
There is no sound of footfall, and the leaves
Scurry into heaps and lie still,
And she the rejoicer of the heart is beneath them:

A wet leaf that clings to the threshold;

or epigrams like:

Fan-piece for her Imperial Lord

O fan of white silk,
clear as frost on the grass blade,
You also are laid aside.

Notice that " also."

I mention the Imagists because out of their dry casuality, their disillusionment and cynicism, and at the same time their precise imagery, was born the early work of T. S. Eliot—*Prufrock* (1917), *Poems* (1920)—and because, with Hopkins and Owen, his was the most important influence on poetry from 1920 to 1935, and, in certain channels, is still so to-day. I want to glance at each of these three in turn.

Wilfred Owen (1893–1918)—killed November 4, 1918—was the finest and most sensitive poet of the Great War. He was a fine technician—see his subtle use of assonance and half-rhymes (' para-rhymes ' he called them) in *Strange Meeting*—but, above all, note his honesty and his searching vision: he saw something of the true nature of war while the war was still on. That was rare. His sublime indignation is chastened and controlled by pity; Owen is more poignantly personal than Hardy on the subject of war.

Even his technical effects reinforce the general attitude: half-rhymes fall from a vowel of high pitch to one of low pitch, to indicate frustration, hopelessness, and disappointment, and forecast Eliot's further development of such devices for similar purposes. The first illustration of this, and, in my opinion, the finest poem of the Great War, one immensely influential in spreading Owen's technique of assonance and the muted rhyme, as well as of his doctrine that:

> . . . they who love the greater love
> Lay down their life, they do not hate,

was *Strange Meeting*:

> It seemed that out of battle I escaped
> Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
> Through granites which titanic wars had groined.
> Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
> Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
> Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
> With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
> Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.
> And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall,
> By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.
> With a thousand pains that vision's face was grained;
> Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
> And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
> "Strange friend," I said, " here is no cause to mourn."
> " None," said the other, " save the undone years,
> The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
> Was my life also; I went hunting wild
> After the wildest beauty in the world,
> Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
> But mocks the steady running of the hour,
> And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
> For by my glee might many men have laughed,
> And of my weeping something had been left,
> Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
> The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
> Now men will go content with what we spoiled.
> Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
> They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,
> None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.

Courage was mine, and I had mystery,
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery;
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot wheels
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.
I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now. . . ."

That was a new note in English poetry: its technique a development of the alliterative assonance of the fourteenth century; its spirit wholly new.

When men become disillusioned and bitter they have a sense of being betrayed. Inevitably, they question the values wherein they trusted. After the Great War there was a wholesale jettisoning of beliefs, religious and moral—as in D. H. Lawrence. But some, then, as now, wished to retain the reality and jettison only the false façade, the smugness and hypocrisy behind which religion and morals had been hidden. It was the groping back through shams to enduring values that contributed to the enormous popularity of the *Poems* of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–89)—poems written by this Jesuit priest between 1877 and 1889 and left in Bridges's desk for thirty years because Bridges lacked faith, first in the public's acceptance of these naked religious lyrics that speak so powerfully, and sometimes so agonizingly, of private religious feelings, and, secondly, because he feared for their technical 'queerness.'

But it was that technical complexity—by mere accident—that chimed with the mood of the time, itself so anxious to throw overboard the facility and simplicity of traditional rhyming measures. For good or ill, Hopkins became the chief technical influence of the next twenty years—but, unfortun-

ately, the great majority imitated his form without having the compelling urgency of his spiritual experience. We can only glance briefly at one who, I venture to think, will rank with the great poets of all time in our literature, and about whom much was magnificently said to this Association last year by Mr J. A. Chapman. If you would study the technical problems and terminology, both interesting, study them first, for preference, in the Author's Preface to the *Poems*; but first read the poems aloud "as I always wish to be read" as Hopkins said; and the main difficulties will largely disappear. His greatest works are his long narrative poem *The Wreck of the Deutschland*, and his Sonnets. Here is the first stanza of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*:

> Thou mastering me
> God! giver of breath and bread;
> World's strand, sway of the sea;
> Lord of living and dead;
> Thou hast bound bones and veins in me, fastened me flesh,
> And after it almost unmade, what with dread,
> Thy doing: and dost thou touch me afresh?
> Over again I feel thy finger and find thee.

Just note what Auden did with that in 1933, and you will realize what I mean by inadequate motivation for technique:

> Me, March, you do with your movements master and rock
> With wing-whirl, whale-wallow, silent budding of cell;
> Like a sea-god the Communist orator lands at the pier.

And here are two sonnets—both sonnets of agony. But this poet could write of religious ecstasy, too, and of the glories of nature ("There's the dearest freshness deep down things"), and I must leave you to redress the balance by reading for yourselves *The Windhover* and such a poem as *The Starlight Night* and *Hurrahing in Harvest*. Meanwhile I give you his *Poem 74* (*Poem 50* in the earlier edition):

> Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
> With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.

Why do sinners' ways prosper? and why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end?
Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost
Defeat, thwart me? Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes
Now, leavèd how thick! lacèd they are again
With fretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
Them; birds build—but not I build; no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.

Again we find Auden imitating with a poem beginning:

Sir, no man's enemy, forgiving all
But will his negative inversion, be prodigal.
(*Poem XXX*)

And secondly, *Carrion Comfort*, the poem that Hopkins said was " written in blood," opening:

Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee;
Not untwist—slack they may be—these last strands of man
In me or, most weary, cry *I can no more.* I can;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not choose not to be . . .

We pass to T. S. Eliot, and with him to a consideration of Symbolism: for nearly everything that is new in English poetry in the last twenty years falls under the heading of what C. M. Bowra so aptly calls the heritage of Symbolism; or to a combination of Symbolism and Naturalism.

Symbolism was a reaction against the rigidity imposed on French poetry by that neo-Classic school, the Parnassians. It pruned the worst extravagances of the Romantics but set poetry free from Classical restraint, and made the musical phrase of great importance in poetry (" All art approximates to music "). The intellect was not barred, but intellectualization was musically and symbolically organized in a way that has given us the great symphonies of ideas we get in Pound's *Cantos* and Eliot's *Four Quartets.*

But the Symbolists were not primarily interested in the

ideas of the mind, but in the expression of the whole personality—particularly in two ways. Firstly, in commingling the perceptions of one sense (a sight, touch, or smell) with those of another: in English Edith Sitwell, from *Façade* onwards, is our most brilliant exponent. Secondly, in releasing and giving symbolic expression to our subconscious impulses; at its extreme this leads to Surrealist poetry—never very successful in England, but at its best in the early work of David Gascoyne. When it 'organizes' these subconscious impulses and the resultant images, and combines them with ordinary, rationalized experience, we get that composite and very attractive type of poetry we find in Edith Sitwell, and pre-eminently, in Dylan Thomas: a poetry in which one moves without logical links from the realms of objectively shared common experience into the private domain of the poet's mind and its arbitrary symbols, without being always certain, at any given moment, in which one is! It is an experience with which we are very familiar in the work of Mr Eliot.

In Eliot's early poetry the despair and disillusion of a decade, of a generation that Gertrude Stein called "The Lost Generation," coalesced in *The Waste Land* (1922), rightly called "the document of an epoch." An almost stifled pity plays around the images of sordidity and frustration that he paints. Here is the opening of a love song unlike any other love song in English:

The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock

Let us go then, you and I,
Where the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table;
Let us go through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .
Oh, do not ask 'What is it?'
Let us go and make our visit.

And in *Preludes* we have his comment on this and all such scenes:

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

Already in *Gerontion* Mr Eliot sees the poet as "an old man in a dry month, waiting for rain"—the rain of spiritual sweetness and forgiveness he was to cry out for on behalf of his generation in *The Waste Land*; or the spring rain of memory he was to seek to flee from—the spring rain to be escaped because:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snows, feeding
A little life with dry tubers. . . .

or the healing rain so agonizingly invoked:

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. . . .
If there were water
And no rock
If there were rock
And also water
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock
If there were the sound of water only
Not the cicada
And dry grass singing
But sound of water over a rock
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
But there is no water.

We cannot here follow Eliot through his gradual spiritual evolution of *Ash Wednesday* and the later work, *Looking into the heart of light, the silence.* We are too near yet to the *Four Quartets* adequately to assess them; I shall simply say, without being able to predict their influence—which may yet be immense—that they are unquestionably the greatest religious poetic sequence since the seventeenth century and the most important single poem of our time. One of its first fruits is already, perhaps, to be discerned in Auden's quasi-mystical work, *For the Time Being.*

Yet the 'thirties represented something of a reaction to Symbolism, particularly to the obscurity and esqtericism of the private image which for many even to-day spoil *The Waste Land.* For after Eliot, what? MacNeice said, in reference to a line in that poem: "These fragments I have shored against my ruins," that Eliot's successors were more interested in tidying the ruins up. They accepted the picture of the Waste Land of modern existence as normality, and sought for the material and psychological, in contrast with Eliot's search for the spiritual, remedies for it. Broadly speaking, they found the answers in Freud and Marx. They glorified the machine age—if only the workers first controlled the machines.

> Tramlines and slagheaps, pieces of machinery,
> That was, and still is, my ideal scenery.

wrote Auden; from allusions in their poems, particularly in Spender's, they were dubbed "the pylon poets." To see their work in retrospect as a "poetry of statement"—*i.e.*, objective recordings of experience, on the analogy of the Imagists and Parnassians—mingled though the language still is with Freudian symbols and certain coterie allusions, is, perhaps, a fair assessment. They felt impotent under the approach of war—unless the Communist millenium arrived first. They feverishly proclaimed "the palpable love of man for man" but events gave them little cause to believe in it. Their sense of being at the end of an era is implicit in their poetry; so is their belief in the new one that is dawning. Here is Auden, at the end of *Poem XXIX*, prophesying the final phase:

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,
Who are born nurses, who live in shorts
Sleeping with people and playing fives.
Seekers after happiness, all who follow
The convolutions of your simple wish,
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:
The date was yours; the prey to fugues,
Irregular breathing and alternate ascendancies
After some haunted migratory years
To disintegrate on an instant in the explosion of mania
Or lapse for ever into a classic fatigue.

It was poems like that which drew from Empson his telling *Just a Smack at Auden.* Elsewhere, in the *Locksley Hall* metre, Auden admonishes us:

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.
(*Poem XXII*)

It had become a poetry of continual progress, of " get on, or get out."

Cecil Day Lewis, by 1938, in poems like *Newsreel, Bombers,* and *Overtures to Death,* warns us almost frantically of the war that is practically upon us. Let one beautiful love-lyric suffice:

In the Heart of Contemplation

In the heart of contemplation—
Admiring, say, the frost-flowers of the white lilac,
Or lark's song busily sifting like sand-crystals
Through the pleased hourglass an afternoon of summer,

Or your beauty, dearer to me than these—
Discreetly a whisper in the ear,
The glance of one passing my window recall me
From lark, lilac, you, grown suddenly strangers.

In the plump and pastoral valley
Of a leisure time, among the trees like seabirds
Asleep on a glass calm, one shadow moves—
The sly reminder of the forgotten appointment.
All the shining pleasures, born to be innocent,
Grow dark with a truant's guilt:
The day's high heart falls flat, the oaks tremble,
And the shadow sliding over your face divides us.

In the act of decision only,
In the hearts cleared for action like lovers naked
For love, this shadow vanishes: there alone
There is nothing between our lives for it to thrive on.
You and I with lilac, lark and oak-leafed
Valley are bound together
As in the astounded clarity before death.
Nothing is innocent now but to act for life's sake.

Stephen Spender was both the most mechanistic of the group and its greatest idealist. His poem, *The Express*, is by now too well known for me to read; I commend to you instead: *I think continually of those who are truly great*, or *After they have tired of the brilliance of cities*; but actually I shall read another because, again, it is the voice of the group—the same in 1930 as Day Lewis's in '38:

Poem XVIII

Who live under the shadow of a war
What can I do that matters?
My pen stops, and my laughter, dancing, stop
Or ride to a gap.

How often on the powerful crest of pride
I am shot with thought,
That halts the untamed horses of the blood,
The grip on good.

That moving whimpering and mating bear
Tunes to deaf ears:
Stuffed with the realer passions of the earth
Beneath this hearth.

And finally for this group, what will give you at once his music and his seriousness, his irony and his scholarship, and, distinguishing him sharply from the other three at that time, his intense individualism, here is Louis MacNeice's well-known *Song*:

The sunlight on the garden
Hardens and grows cold,
We cannot cage the minute
Within its nets of gold,
When all is told
We cannot beg for pardon.

Our freedom as free lances
Advances towards its end;
The earth compels, upon it
Sonnets and birds descend;
And soon, my friend,
We shall have no time for dances

The sky was good for flying
Defying the church bells
And every evil iron
Siren and what it tells:
The earth compels
We are dying, Egypt, dying.

And not expecting pardon,
Hardened in heart anew,
But glad to have sat under
Thunder and rain with you,
And grateful too
For sunlight on the garden.

MacNeice, whose danger is a certain facility, is nevertheless a very subtle metrist—as we shall see if we look at a poem like *Carrickfergus* or at this opening of *Bagpipe Music*. Note how —at least to the ears of a mere Englishman!—the bagpipes are

imitated in the rhythm; note, too, the disillusionment, the gay irony:

> It's no go the merry-go-round, it's no go the rickshaw,
> All we want is a limousine and a ticket for the peep-show.
> Their knickers are made of *crêpe-de-chine*, their shoes are made of python,
> Their halls are lined with tiger rugs and the walls with heads of bison. . . .

And there we must leave MacNeice and his decade.

With the war came new poetry. What little remained in our poets' minds of the Gospel according to St Marx and salvation through the Comintern scarcely survived the Russo-German pact of 1939. Poetry, seeing no longer any help beyond a man's personal fulfilment of his own potentiality, gave us the new subjectivism that fills our verse magazines and recent books of poetry. It is a poetry that concentrates on two things: Man's freedom; and, within that freedom, his responsibility. Sometimes that results in simple, unaffected love poetry, as in Anne Ridler's *Before Sleep* or *At Parting*; or in verse on some Christian theme as in David Gascoyne or Norman Nicholson, or the more mystical apprehension of reality in Lilian Bowes Lyon or Kathleen Raine. But one of the important movements in verse since the war is the so-called " Apocalyptic Movement "—a loose term linking together a few important poets, pre-eminent among them Henry Treece, writing verse of a highly ego-centric type, and varying from the simple lyric to the complex myth of existence, like Treece's *Unending Rosary* or Dylan Thomas's earlier sonnet-sequence at the end of *Twenty-five Poems*. These poets believe in the enduring quality of myth and the organic growth of man in soul, mind, and body: a poetry of integration, of wholeness, fused in poetic imagination. These are the " New Romantics "; they are highly personal, musical, evocative, or—what I take the term ' Apocalyptic ' really to mean—visionary. The complexities of their myths, their personal hammering out of their individual life problems and beliefs, can, obviously, not be entered into here; but a couple

of Treece's lyrics will illustrate their simpler verse: their organic, their elemental poetry, their ballad-like starkness. Here is *Pilgrim*, followed by a song from *Ivan Morgan and the Mermaid*:

Pilgrim

I step from a land no eye has seen
To a land no hand may ever hold;
My name with the sea's cold tears is green
My words are the wind's words graved in gold.

This scrip upon my back holds hearts
That saw their hero in a dream;
This staff is ward against the darts
That stiffen trout in silver stream.

So, pilgrim, continents I tread,
The cross-bones in my breast for rood,
Breaking the shepherd's dusty bread,
The brittle beech leaves in the wood.

Song

(From *Ivan Morgan and the Mermaid*)

The lute is silent in the hall
And nose on paws the great hound sleeps:
The chargers nod their drowsy heads
And lichen up the grey wall creeps.

No longer do the fire-brands burn,
The bird lies withered in his cage;
The sentry's head has turned to stone
And bearded falls the little page.

Treece, incidently, has written a book, *How I See Apocalypse*, but, as happens with such things, it is not so much an explanation of Apocalypticism as an explanation of Henry Treece—but very interesting.

The fountainhead of this type of verse is in Dylan Thomas, and a powerful influence on it is the theory and example of the later work of Edith Sitwell: the poems in her very fine volume, *The Song of the Cold*. I have already spoken of Mr Eliot's later work, and I unhesitatingly reaffirm my belief

that his is the dominant poetic genius of our time. But next to him I should say the most significant poetry to-day is being written by Edith Sitwell and Dylan Thomas.

Edith Sitwell's later work, with its heartache for our civilization, its chaos, and its attachment to ephemeral values, with its pity for humanity caught up and devoured by its atomic Frankenstein, by its scientific mechanization, would require a lecture to itself. Instead, I shall read you two poems: the first her Blitz poem, *Still falls the Rain*—and I do ask you to read its bitter and moving companion-piece, *Lullaby*; and the second, one of her own favourites, *Heart and Mind*. Both show her links with the organic quality of Apocalyptic verse; both are from *The Song of the Cold*:

Still falls the Rain

(The Raids, 1940. Night and Dawn)

Still falls the Rain—
Dark as the world of man, black as our loss—
Blind as the nineteen hundred and forty nails
Upon the Cross.

Still falls the Rain
With a sound like the pulse of the heart that is changed
to the hammer-beat
In the Potter's Field, and the sound of the impious feet
On the Tomb:
Still falls the Rain
In the Field of Blood where the small hopes breed and
the human brain
Nurtures its greed, that worm with the brow of Cain.

Still falls the Rain
At the feet of the Starved Man hung upon the Cross.
Christ that each day, each night, nails there, have mercy
on us—
On Dives and on Lazarus:
Under the Rain the sore and the gold are as one.

Still falls the Rain—
Still falls the Blood from the Starved Man's wounded Side:
He bears in his Heart all wounds,—those of the light that died,
The last faint spark
In the self-murdered heart, the wounds of the sad uncomprehending dark,
The wounds of the baited bear,—
The blind and weeping bear whom the keepers beat
On his helpless flesh . . . the tears of the hunted hare.

Still falls the Rain—
Then—O Ile leape up to my God: who pulles me doune—
See, see where Christ's blood streames in the firmament:
It flows from the Brow we nailed upon the tree
Deep to the dying, to the thirsting heart
That holds the fires of the world,—dark-smirched with pain
As Cæsar's laurel crown.

Then sounds the voice of One who like the heart of man
Was once a child who among beasts has lain—
"Still do I love, still shed my innocent light, my Blood, for thee."

Heart and Mind

Said the Lion to the Lioness—"When you are amber dust—
No more a raging fire like the heat of the Sun
(No liking but all lust)—
Remember still the flowering of the amber blood and bone
The rippling of bright muscles like a sea.
Remember the rose-prickles of bright paws
Though we shall mate no more
Till the fire of that sun the heart and the moon-cold bone are one."

Said the Skeleton lying upon the sands of Time—
'The great gold planet that is the morning heat of the Sun
Is greater than all gold, more powerful
Than the tawny body of a Lion that fire consumes
Like all that grows or leaps . . . so is the heart
More powerful than all dust. Once I was Hercules
Or Samson, strong as the pillars of the seas:
But the flames of the heart consumed me, and the mind
Is but a foolish wind.'

Said the Sun to the Moon—'When you are but a lonely white crone,
And I, a dead King in my golden armour somewhere in a dark wood,
Remember only this of our hopeless love
That never till Time is done
Will the fire of the heart and the fire of the mind be one.'

Turning to Dylan Thomas, we find the most striking characteristic of his poetry is his sense of just this organic integrity —using both words in their exact sense—of life. He feels himself a part of the life of the universe—not something that lives in a separate world, but a part of that world as much as Wordsworth conceived of his Lucy's being, "rolled round in Earth's diurnal course, with rocks, and stones, and trees." We see this very clearly from an early poem like "The force that through the green fuse drives the flower," or the opening stanzas of the first poem in his next volume, "I in my intricate image, stride on two levels." Here is "the green fuse" poem:

The force that through the green fuse drives the flower
Drives my green age; that blasts the roots of trees
Is my destroyer.
And I am dumb to tell the crooked rose
My youth is bent by the same wintry fever.

The force that drives the water through the rocks
Drives my red blood; that dries the mouthing streams
Turns mine to wax.
And I am dumb to mouth unto my veins
How at the mountain spring the same mouth sucks.

The hand that whirls the water in the pool
Stirs the quicksand; that ropes the blowing wind
Hauls my shroud sail.
And I am dumb to tell the hanging man
How of my clay is made the hangman's lime.

The lips of time leech to the fountain head;
Love drips and gathers, but the fallen blood
Shall calm her sores.
And I am dumb to tell a weather's wind
How time has ticked a heaven round the stars.

And I am dumb to tell the lover's tomb
How at my sheet goes the same crooked worm.

This organic quality of Dylan Thomas is very important, and, linked with his extraordinary flair for the musical word and phrase, and his almost complete unselfconsciousness, is the main source of his poetry's power and significance. I would draw attention to two things in Thomas's work. They may seem paradoxical but they are not contradictory; they both arise from just this sense of the organic unity of life, man sharing even in the creativeness of God. I mean his striking development as a religious poet; and his large concern—it would never be fair, I think, to call it an obsession—with sex, and the various aspects of sexual experience. For an example of his allusive, organic, religious verse one should look at "This bread I break was once the oat," or at his myth poem on the Fall, "Incarnate devil in a talking snake"; for his transmuted sexual imagery, at "The seed-at-zero shall not storm that town of ghosts, the trodden womb." All three are in *Twenty-five Poems*. I will conclude with readings from his last and by far his best book, *Deaths and Entrances*. The first poem shows that organic quality of his thought embracing not only all life but all death too—the necessary prelude to rebirth, continuity, and immortality. It, too, is a Blitz poem, but that is not important; it is called *A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London*. Notice especially its magnificent last stanza:

Never until the mankind making
Bird beast and flower
Fathering and all humbling darkness
Tells with silence the last light breaking
And the still hour
Is come of the sea tumbling in harness

And I must enter again the round
Zion of the water bead
And of the synagogue of the ear of corn
Shall I let pray the shadow of a sound
Or sow my salt seed
In the least valley of sackcloth to mourn

The majesty and burning of the child's death.
I shall not murder
The mankind of her going with a grave truth
Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath
With any further
Elegy of innocence and youth.

Deep with the first dead lies London's daughter,
Robed in the long friends,
The grains beyond age, the dark veins of her mother,
Secret by the unmourning water
Of the riding Thames.
After the first death, there is no other.

The second describes one of those agonies of desolation personified by the "Deaths" in the title of the book, and ends in one of his "Entrances" of liberation into the land of the spirit. It consists of two short quotations from a long poem, *A Winter's Tale*:

(*a*) . . . And burning then
In his firelit island ringed by the winged snow
And the dung hills white as wool and the hen
Roosts sleeping chill till the flame of the cock crow
Combs through the mantled yards and their morning men

Stumble out with their spades,
The cattle stirring, the mousing cat stepping shy,
The puffed birds hopping and hunting, the milk maids
Gentle in their clogs over the fallen sky,
And all the woken farm at its white trades,

He knelt, he wept, he prayed,
By the spit and the black pot in the log bright light
And the cup and the cut bread in the dancing shade,
In the muffled house, in the quick of night,
At the point of love, forsaken and afraid. . . .

(*b*) And his nameless need bound him burning and lost
When cold as snow he would run the wended vales among

The rivers mouthed in night
And drown in the drifts of his need, and lie curled caught
In the always desiring centre of the white
Inhuman cradle and the bride bed forever sought
By the believer lost and the hurled outcast of light.

And finally, I commend to you his birthday poem—a magnificent thing that sings itself as one reads: the music and the rhythms are Hopkins's, but the voice is the authentic voice of Dylan Thomas—or, maybe, back in the seventeenth century, of that other Welshman, Thomas Traherne. He calls it *Poem in October*:

It was my thirtieth year to heaven
Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour wood
And the mussel pooled and the heron
Priested shore
The morning beckon
With water praying and call of seagull and rook
And the knock of sailing boats on the net webbed wall
Myself to set foot
That second
In the still sleeping town and set forth.

My birthday began with the water—
Birds and the birds of the winged trees flying my name
Above the farms and the white horses
And I rose
In rainy autumn
And walked abroad in a shower of all my days.
High tide and the heron dived when I took the road
Over the border
And the gates
Of the town closed as the town awoke.

A springful of larks in a rolling
Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling
Blackbirds and the sun of October
Summery
On the hill's shoulder,
Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly
Come in the morning where I wandered and listened
To the rain wringing
Wind blow cold
In the wood faraway under me.

Pale rain over the dwindling harbour
And over the sea wet church the size of a snail
With its horns through mist and the castle
Brown as owls
But all the gardens
Of spring and summer were blooming in the tall tales
Beyond the border and under the lark full cloud.
There could I marvel
My birthday
Away but the weather turned around.

It turned away from the blithe country
And down the other air and the blue altered sky
Streamed again a wonder of summer
With apples
Pears and red currants
And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's
Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother
Through the parables
Of sun light
And the legends of the green chapels.

And the twice told fields of infancy
That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart moved in mine
These were the woods the river and sea
Where a boy
In the listening
Summertime of the dead whispered the truth of his joy
To the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide.
And the mystery
Sang alive
Still in the water and the singingbirds.

And there could I marvel my birthday
Away but the weather turned around. And the true
Joy of the long dead child sang burning
In the sun.
It was my thirtieth
Year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon
Though the town below lay leaved with October blood.
O may my heart's truth
Still be sung
On this high hill in a year's turning.

I have read rather a lot of poetry to you instead of only speaking about it; and I was wondering if I ought to apologize for that. But I am not going to! Because that is how I feel poetry ought to be apprehended: by being read aloud, "Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart."

IX

The Wicked Baronet

W. G. Cassidy

ONE of the characters in the Savoy Opera *Ruddigore* says: "All baronets are bad!" In a sense that is right, because the action of *Ruddigore* is supposed to take place early in the nineteenth century when all baronets on the stage *were* bad. But the song about the witch's curse on the Murgatroyds of Ruddigore and the gallery with portraits of Wicked Baronets back to the days of James I are most misleading. It was not until the last years of the eighteenth century that the Wicked Baronet appeared, while he really flourished only in the nineteenth century.

When we look into the matter I think we shall find that the figure of the Wicked Baronet is not altogether unconnected with those ideas of happiness, equality, and liberty which were abroad about that time. As a starting-point, perhaps we may glance briefly at the works of Richard Cumberland (1732–1811), a successful dramatist who pioneered the later sentimental comedy. His best-known and most characteristic plays are *The Brothers* (1769), *The West Indian* (1771), and *The Fashionable Lover* (1772). In *The Brothers* we have the usurping brother and decadent gentry contrasted with the dispossessed brother and his band of sturdy sea-rovers, while in the opening scene we hear Fanny moralizing—"A good conscience in a coarse drugget is better than an aching heart in a silken gown." In *The West Indian* the contrast is between the impulsive but courageous and chivalrous young man from the West Indies and the somewhat unpleasant types into whose circle he falls in London.

The Fashionable Lover, which is purely domestic, includes a foreshadowing of the elements of those plays which later

flourished in the Victorian melodrama houses. There is Lord Abberville—misguided rather than wicked—who attempts to seduce the lovely Augusta Aubrey. He offers her his protection which he says will make her "the envy of all womankind, the mistress of my happiness." But she replies with spirit:

> "And murderer of my own. No, no, my Lord, I'll perish first; the last surviving orphan of a noble house, I'll not disgrace it; from these mean unfeeling people, who to the bounty of my ancestors owe all they have, I shall expect no mercy; but you, whom even pride might teach some virtue, you to tempt me, you with unmanly cunning to seduce distress yourself created, sinks you deeper in contempt than Heaven sinks me in poverty and shame."

And so she sweeps out into the cold, cold snow. Eventually, of course, all comes right. Augusta's father, long believed to have died, returns to London and denounces the dishonesty of the merchant in whose care he had left Augusta, but finally forgives him: "Now go and profit by this meeting: I will not expose you: learn of your fraternity a more honourable practice; and let integrity for ever remain the inseparable characteristic of an English merchant." The worthy young hero, Frank Tyrrel, wins the hand of Augusta, and Lord Abberville addresses him thus: "Oh, Frank, 'tis hard to speak the word, but you deserve her; yours is the road to happiness: I have been lost in error; but I shall trace your steps, and press to overtake you."

Here in Cumberland's work we have no sharp division of the characters into black and white and no emphasizing of the virtues of the common man. Augusta speaks with the proper pride of an eighteenth-century aristocrat: "I'll perish first; the last surviving orphan of a noble house, I'll not disgrace it." Cumberland, though admitting the virtues of the English merchant, *The West Indian*, and the honest sea-rover of *The Brothers*, was still very much an eighteenth-century man in his acceptance of the existing order. To sum him up: a sentimentalist with a few vague ideas, taken from Rousseau, of the freshness and vigour of life away from the artificial society of cities.

Tom Holcroft (1745–1809), a friend of William Godwin and Tom Paine, political theorist, member of the Society for Constitutional Information, was a man of very different mettle, by contemporary standards a dangerous fellow and one whom it was proper to indict for High Treason.

The son of poor parents who led a wandering life, he managed to educate himself, became a teacher, then an actor, and finally turned playwright. His first big success was the bright and actable comedy—one still worthy of production—*Follies of the Day,* adapted from *The Marriage of Figaro,* which he had attended night after night during a visit to Paris in 1784. The first of his own plays to show evident signs of his interest in political speculation and his belief in the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity was *The School for Arrogance* (1791). He spoke very clearly in the Epilogue:

> Such is the modern man of high-flown fashion!
> Such are the scions sprung from Runnymead!
> The richest soil, that bears the rankest weed!
> Potatoe-like, the sprouts are worthless found;
> And all that's good of them is underground.

Next came *The Road to Ruin* (November 1792) with its business-men who conceal the proverbial hearts of gold beneath gruff exteriors, its careless but essentially chivalrous young men, and its Mr Jingle-like character in Goldfinch. All its characters—good and bad alike—are middle-class, while there is implied criticism of Goldfinch's scorn of his hard-working father:

> HARRY: He was a useful member of society.
> GOLDFINCH: A gentleman like me a useful member of society!
> Bet the long odds, nobody ever heard of such a thing.

The whole play is good, actable stuff and well deserved its success. Holcroft, by the bye, is the one dramatist of his time who wrote natural idiomatic dialogue.

In the prologue he had some comment to make on the French Revolution:

. . . and every man is our brother:
And that all men, even poor negro men, have a right to be free; one as well as another!
Freedom at length, said he, like a torrent is spreading and swelling,
To sweep away pride and reach the most miserable dwelling:
To ease, happiness, art, science, wit and genius to give birth:
To fertilise a world, and renovate old earth.

In the same month—November 1792—Holcroft became a member of the Society for Constitutional Information, a group whose ideas were inspired by the French Revolution. Possibly no other fact tells us so much about the witch-hunt atmosphere of the year 1794 as the extraordinary resentment excited in the audiences at his play *Love's Frailties*, produced in February of that year, by the single line: " he was bred to the most useless, and often the most worthless, of all professions —that of a gentleman." With Thomas Hardy, the shoemaker, and other members of the Society for Constitutional Information, he was indicted for High Treason but honourably acquitted.

His next play, *The Deserted Daughter*, brought out in May 1795, was an effective acting piece with many elements appealing to audiences and containing several of the features of the Sentimental Comedy which the later melodrama writers used. There is Mordent—a gloomy unhappy man who for no very convincing reason has not acknowledged his first marriage, or Joanna, the daughter born of it. Act II, Scene 2, ends with this soliloquy:

> Man is ever bent on mischief!—With what infernal ardour do two armies prepare in the morning to exterminate each other before noon! Are they not wise? What is it but compressing the sum of evil within an hour which trembling cowardice would protract through an age?

The whole character has indeed been imported from Germany. The plot turns on the fact that Joanna has been betrayed into the house of a procuress and that Mordent, all unwitting, is actually helping one of his friends to set her up in Park Lane as a mistress. After her identity has been dis-

closed by a faithful Scots retainer, this passage occurs at the end of Act IV and is a foreshadowing of the true melodrama. (The numerous directions as well as the monologue should be read.)

> MORDENT: Misery of hell! And was that Joanna?. That my child? Celestial creature—And I the pit-digger?
> [*Pause—Despair*]
> [*Starting*]. I the pander? I cast her shrieking on the bed of infamy, and chain her in the arms of lust? Her father do this?
> [*Pause of fixed horror*]
> [*Starting from a profound trance of despondency*]. Fly! Summon the servants! Arm yourselves! Follow me to Park Lane!

It made a big appeal to the customers, who received it with the greatest delight and applause—until they learned the name of the author which had at first been withheld.

Audiences at all his plays were suspicious and alert to find matter for offence in remarks about privileged people. Some of his later plays were therefore presented under pen-names. He died in 1809, though not before he had had other successes and had also composed one of the earliest melodramas strictly so called. This was *The Tale of Mystery* (1802) with pages comprised solely of stage directions and frequent notes such as:

> Music expressive of horror.
> Confused music.
> Music loud and discordant.
> Music plays alarmingly, but *piano* when he enters and while he stays.

Although no Wicked Baronet is numbered among Holcroft's characters I have dwelt somewhat upon his work and career. This is for several reasons.

(1) Not only does his work contain the elements which later constituted the chief stock-in-trade of the writers for the Adelphi, the Old Vic, Sadler's Wells, Astley's, and the rest of the minor houses, but he

was, so far as I can ascertain, the only recognized dramatist of the patent houses of Drury Lane and Covent Garden who ever wrote a melodrama in the technical sense.

(2) His work illustrated the stirrings of political consciousness and beginnings of attack on privilege which undoubtedly contributed towards the evolution of the Wicked Baronet.

(3) The reception of the remark in *Love's Frailties* about the uselessness of gentlemen and the general suspicion of the public towards him after the indictment for High Treason show that the theatre-going public of the time, while it may have toyed with some vague ideas from Rousseau, did not seriously question the established order of the eighteenth century:

> "God bless the Squire and his relations
> And keep us in our proper stations."

Mrs Elizabeth Inchbald (1753–1821), actress, dramatist, and compiler of the important collections of plays—*British Theatre* (25 vols.), *Modern Theatre* (40 vols.), and *Farces* (7 vols.)—was another member of the group who made their reputations with sentimental comedies reflecting the popular ideas and fads of the day.

Yet other members were George Colman the Younger (1762–1836) and Thomas Morton (1764–1838).

Colman's *The Iron Chest* (1796) contains a Baronet—Sir Edward Mortimer—most anachronistically living in the reign of Edward IV. The character is an obvious importation from Germany—gloomy, fury-ridden, and fearful lest the story of his one crime be discovered. Oddly enough, instead of destroying the evidence he keeps it locked in The Iron Chest.

> "Oh, how will sin
> Engender sin! throw guilt upon the soul,
> And like a rock dashed on the troubled lake,
> 'Twill form its circles, round succeeding round."

In Colman's *Heir-at-Law* (1797) we witness the absurdities in the behaviour of a foolish bourgeois who inherits a title. Everything is righted when the Heir-at-Law returns to claim his inheritance. Nothing smacking of revolution there!

In *The Poor Gentleman* (1802) Colman directs his criticism not at privilege or the system but at foolish fashions; nevertheless, the Baronet, Sir Charles Cropland, does indulge in what was to become the favourite pastime of the Wicked Baronet —endeavouring to seduce an innocent maiden.

May I quote Emily's reply?

> What does reason tell me, Sir?—That vice is vice, however society may polish it; that seduction is still seduction, however fashion may sanction it; that intellect, speaking through simplicity like mine, has the force of virtue to strengthen it; while worldly sophistry must shrink from native truth, when it proclaims that he, who could break a father's heart, by heaping splendid infamy upon his child, is a villain. Let me pass you, Sir.

Most opportunely at this moment there enters Frederick, the hero.

> SIR CHARLES: What are you?
> FREDERICK: A man—so I am bound to protect females from brutality. You, it seems, assault them.

His weapon, he tells Sir Charles, is a knout: "A Russian cat-o'-nine-tails, to chastise a criminal; and I know no criminal who more richly deserves it than he who degrades manhood by offering violence to the amiable sex, which nature formed him to defend."

More interesting is *John Bull* (1803). Here we find a *Ruddigore*-like situation of Peregrine, the elder brother, disappearing from England, Simon, the younger brother, inheriting the Baronetcy and proving not exactly wicked but neglectful of his responsibilities. The whole attitude of Peregrine is undoubtedly aristocratic. He explains at first that he would never have reasserted his abandoned right, "had he not found a brother neglecting what no Englishman should neglect—justice and humanity to his inferiors," but when Frank, Simon's son, demonstrates that he really does intend to

marry Mary Thornborough, Peregrine says: "Then bless you both! And tho' I have passed so much of my life abroad, brother, English equity is dear to my heart. Respect the rights of honest John Bull, and our family concerns may be easily arranged."

Job, Mary's father, delivers the tag-line: "That's upright. I forgive you, young man, for what has passed; but no one deserves forgiveness, who refuses to make amends, when he has disturbed the happiness of an Englishman's fireside."

And that, I submit, very neatly sums up the situation in England in 1803. If one did not have one's own fireside one was nothing. One had rights only if one had the privilege of position or the privilege of property.

Thomas Morton's actable play *Speed the Plough*, first presented in 1800, long retained its popularity but is now known only to those who have made a study of the period. Yet it is the source of one of the best-known phrases in common use in our language: "What will Mrs Grundy say?" She does not actually appear on the stage. One knows her and realizes what an objectionable old busy-body she is only from comments made by the other characters. This is, of course, a very old theatrical trick, but one which always remains effective. Morton, knowing his theatre and his public, did not despise any of the tricks. Bluff farmer Ashfield is kindly, sensible, and honest, while his wife's first thought is always: "What will Mrs Grundy say?" The Baronet, Sir Philip Blandford, resembles Colman's Sir Edward Mortimer in being stern, gloomy, and fury-haunted. Emma, his daughter, is, of course, sweetly innocent and beautiful. At the end of the play she is engaged to be married to Henry, a youth who knows nothing of his parentage but who proves to be her cousin, a son of the brother whom Sir Philip thought he had killed twenty years before. Until the last scene, when he reveals his identity, this brother appears wrapped in a large cloak, and is known to hold a mortgage over the old castle. In fact, he has been throughout a sort of guardian angel to Sir Philip.

Everything ends happily. There is a tableau of the two brothers reconciled and all pairs of lovers united. One of the characters then steps forward and says: "If forgiveness be an

attribute which ennobles our nature, may we not hope to find pardon for our errors—*here*?" After such a plea, what could any audience do except applaud?

Some of the sentiments put into Henry's mouth have a really magnificent ring:

> Fear not for me—I shall not feel the piercing cold; for in that man, whose heart beats warmly for his fellow creatures, the blood circulates with freedom— My food shall be what few of the pampered sons of greatness can boast of, the luscious bread of independence; and the opiate, that brings me sleep, will be the recollection of the day passed in innocence.

And there is his retort to Sir Philip:

> You are in England sir, where the man who bears about him an upright heart, bears a charm too potent for tyranny to humble!

I have no doubt but that this was the sentiment referred to by an American visitor to London in 1805, quoted in Trevelyan's *Social History* at page 468:

> Enthusiastic applauses were bestowed by the Galleries this evening on this sentiment, that if a poor man had an honest heart there lived not one in England who had either the presumption or the power to oppress him. In this incident may be seen the active jealousy of liberty which exists even in the lowest orders of England.

Trevelyan comments:

> It is to be feared that the sentiment was unduly optimistic, but the fact that it could be applauded by the gallery is not without pleasant significance.

And here we may attempt briefly to summarize what we have observed in general of the work of Cumberland, Holcroft, Colman, Morton, and Mrs Inchbald. They were sentimental, they believed in the perfectibility of man, they associated the possession of privilege with an aristocratic recognition of duties towards inferiors, and while they drew many humble characters as attractive and worthy people yet they were sufficiently of the eighteenth century to resolve the complications of a plot by production of the Heir-at-Law or

the unexpected return of the elder brother of an erring Baronet. Sentiments about the worth of the ordinary citizen —not the common man—are plentiful. It is interesting to note —and most significant—that the plots of Holcroft's plays are quite as free from offence as are the plots of his contemporaries. We have noted already how suspicious the public was of anything in his plays savouring of criticism of the accepted order.

Now, during the eighteenth century, the wealthy middle class constituted an important part of the audiences, and it was to suit their tastes that the sentimental comedy evolved. A middle-class audience would have found nothing objectionable in the plays I have mentioned, and would indeed find somewhat flattering both the many references to integrity of English merchants and the many pictures of foolish and erring gentry.

II

During the early years of the nineteenth century, and particularly after the fall of Napoleon, the less educated and uneducated people began to improve in manners and in mind. One means of refinement which they sought was in the drama, but they loved sensational incident and broad humour. The minor theatres catered for this new public, and the hack writers who provided the plays took ideas both from the sentimental comedy and from Germany—notably from von Kotzebue. Kotzebue contributed much to the Wicked Baronet. The gloomy Baronets of the sentimental comedy—Sir Edward Mortimer and Sir Philip Blandford—came from him. Sir Walter Scott, who disapproved of Kotzebue, wrote severely:

> There is an affectation of attributing noble and virtuous sentiments to the persons least qualified by habit or education to entertain them; and of describing the higher and better educated classes as uniformly deficient in those feelings of liberality, generosity, and honour, which may be considered as proper to their situation in life. This contrast may be true in particular instances, and being used sparingly might afford a good moral lesson; but in spite of truth and probability, it has

been assumed upon all occasions by these authors as the groundwork of a sort of intellectual Jacobinism.

The earliest melodramas were romantic. Holcroft's *Tale of Mystery* (1802) was a trunk-and-hose show, its interior scenes within a castle and exterior scenes in rugged mountain country. Romanticism led to supernaturalism, of which the chief exponent was Monk Lewis. Then came the domestic melodrama. As I see it, this domestic melodrama was derived from the sentimental comedy. The long speeches were omitted, more incidents were introduced, the good people remained good, and the dubious characters became bad beyond all reclamation.

The earliest domestic melodrama whose complete text I have been able to find is John Baldwin Buckstone's *Luke the Labourer* (1826), a melodrama in two acts. Apart from some rather unexpected attempts at the true psychological character-drawing of Luke himself, this is a typical enough piece with scrappy dialogue, many stage directions, and frequent cues for music. It has an innocent maiden, a worthy farmer, a sailor who proves to be his long-lost son, the traditional band of gipsies without which no melodrama was complete, and the Wicked Squire. No nonsense here about repentance or the perfectibility of man. Squire Norton is bad and remains bad.

There are no elaborate speeches: the farmer's daughter merely says to the Wicked Squire: "Do not forget yourself; unhand me, sir, or I will call for help. Let me depart." In the scene following this we find her making her way home through the wood. Perhaps I may quote it as an illustration of the style:

> [CLARA *speaks*]: If I can but get home before the storm increases. That treacherous Squire—this is a sad world. [*A flash of lightning makes her start back.*] Bless me, what a flash! I must put my hands before my eyes; I was always afraid of lightning.
>
> [*A clap of thunder—Music—*LUKE *rushes forward and seizes her in his arms—she screams, and struggles with him—the Squire is taking her from him, when* PHILIP *re-enters—Lightning.*]

PHILIP: What, ship ahoy! Sheer off, there! [*He knocks* LUKE *down with his cudgel, who falls senseless; then grapples the Squire by the throat.*] Slip your cable, my girl, and stand out to sea! the lubbers shan't grapple you.

[*Thunder—exit* CLARA, *L.—the Squire struggles with* PHILIP, *and runs off, pursued by him, R.—The thunder continues, and the drop falls.*]

End of Act I

That is typical of the work of John Baldwin Buckstone (1802–79), author of the Adelphi melodramas.

A very famous melodrama whose text I have read is *Maria Marten, or; The Murder in the Red Barn.* Versions of this were done in the provinces before it appeared in London. The earliest London playbill for it in the Victoria and Albert Museum refers to a production at the Marylebone Theatre on April 6, 1840, but it probably had its metropolitan première before then. William Corder actually did murder Maria Marten in the Red Barn on May 18, 1827. His trial a year later, after Maria's mother had had three visions, aroused great interest. *The Times* devoted six columns to a report, and many ballads were published after his execution.

In the play William Corder is the Squire's son and behaves in the true style of a Wicked Squire.

[*First bars of Villain's music heard.* WILLIAM CORDER *enters. He looks round and leers at* MARIA. *Villain music grows louder.*]

CORDER [*tapping leggings with riding whip in a sinister way*]: Egad, that's the pretty girl who has occupied my thoughts so much since I've been here.

Acts II and III take place twelve months later. Maria has had a baby, which miraculously she has succeeded in having her family and neighbours accept as one she has taken in to nurse. William kills the baby with poison obtained from the gipsies. Then he and Maria go to the woods to bury the baby. When she becomes suspicious that its death may not have been merely from an illness, Corder murders her and buries her in the Red Barn. Twelve months pass, and Dame Marten, for the third time, dreams of the murder. Corder is arrested

and found guilty. In the condemned cell the ghost of Maria appears to him—and so to the scaffold with *tremolo* fiddles.

It is an artless affair—faithfully following the traditional story with some comic interludes added, but the script is lacking in construction and even in genuine drama. Its effectiveness would undoubtedly depend upon the actors and their ability to fill out into a show what is really only an outline. I think the actors of the time may have been exceptionally skilled at that. Their task would have been rendered easier because they, like the actors of the *commedia dell'arte*, always played the one type of part.

The usual pattern of a melodrama cast consisted of the Heavy Lead (*i.e.*, the Baronet or the Squire), the Heavy Father (usually the heroine's father), the Second Heavy Man (in Maria Marten, an old gipsy), the Juvenile Lead (the Hero), the Walking Gent (usually the hero's friend and confidant), several Utility Gents (whom Hollywood with greater precision but less kindliness would call "bit-part players"), the first, second and third low comedians, the Leading Lady, the Aristocratic Old Woman, the Character Old Woman, and the Chambermaid (the latter not necessarily a chambermaid, but being the Leading Lady's confidante and playing a *soubrette* part). They are all perennial characters of the popular theatre. One can recognize them in ancient Greek and Roman masks, in the *commedia dell'arte*, and in the products of Hollywood.

The atmosphere in which the Victorian melodramas were acted can be likened to-day only to Saturday afternoon at the local cinema when a Western with its 'goodies' and 'baddies' is being screened, or perhaps to a Christmas pantomime, with the young audience cheering the Principal Boy, warning the Dame of traps being contrived for her, and hissing the Demon.

In Victorian days, in a melodrama house, the mere appearance on the stage of the Heavy Man, with his silk hat and kid gloves, was the cue for hissing from the audience. The silk hat and kid gloves proclaimed him an aristocrat—either a Baronet or a Squire—and therefore wicked.

These domestic melodramas developed during the 'thirties and 'forties, and by the middle of the century were set. The

hack writers had borrowed from Scott during the romantic phase, and in the domestic phase they turned to Dickens. Audiences sobbed over little Nell and hissed Scrooge. From this it was but another step to depiction of all kinds of life —but mostly lower—known to the spectators. Broadsheets and the Newgate Calendar furnished other material. Sweeny Todd recommitted his crimes and Maria Marten nightly pursued her dismal career.

A contemporary account by Dickens entitled *The Amusements of the People*, published in *Household Words* of March 30, 1850, gives us both a picture of the audience and a picture of the traditional type of play which one would find in a melodrama theatre—The Adelphi, The Olympic, The Victoria, Sadler's Wells, Astley's, The Surrey, The City, The Britannia, and the rest. They catered for their public, these houses. There was no nonsense about art. They simply gave the cash customers what was wanted.

Dickens tells us that prices of admission were: Boxes 1*s.*, Pit 6*d.*, and Gallery 3*d.* The people in the enormous gallery were squeezed in in great discomfort. The people in the pit were "not very clean or sweet-savoured" but included some good-humoured young mechanics with their wives and babies. It begins to suggest the local cinema, doesn't it? But instead of the sweets and ices of to-day most members of the audience appeared to have—of all possible things!—"cold fried sole" and a variety of flat stone bottles of all portable sizes.

The play described by Dickens is *May Morning, or the Mystery of 1715, and the Murder.* The cast includes Sir George Elmore, a melancholy baronet, and his supposed son, "the Child of Mystery and the Man of Crime," who indulges in many vices, including the attempted abduction of May Morning herself—an attempt foiled by the cheerful sailor, Will Stanmore. There is the usual gipsy—this time a woman called Manuella, who pronounces mysterious rhymes about "the Child of Mystery and the Man of Crime" to a low trembling of fiddles.

Dickens's own little melodrama, *The Village Coquettes*, produced at St James's on December 6, 1836, tells of the

wicked Squire Norton who tries to seduce the village beauty and ruin her father. The father addresses the Squire thus:

> I care not for your long pedigree of ancestors—my forefathers made them all. Here, neighbours, friends! Hear this! Hear this! Your landlord, a high-born gentleman, entering the houses of you humble farmers, and tempting your daughters to destruction.

The *Cambridge History of English Literature* sums up the whole subject very neatly:

> Melodrama divides human nature into the entirely good and the entirely bad, the whole being bridged by an uncertain structure based on the possibility of reform (in minor personages only) by sudden conversion at a critical moment of the action. . . . It allies itself boldly with democrat against aristocrat. To be rich and well born is, almost inevitably, to be wicked; to be poor and humble is all but a guarantee of virtue.

This change of attitude between, say, 1800 and 1840 is noteworthy. We saw during our examination of the Sentimental Comedy that the typical pattern was for all to come well at the end, when the Heir-at-Law was produced, or when the elder brother returned and the younger brother acknowledged his erring ways. Forty years later the Baronet or Squire remained bad. There was no question of repentance and conversion. There was the black of aristocratic wickedness and the white of humble innocence. If *John Bull* is the typical play of 1800 and thereabouts, *Maria Marten* is the typical play of the 'thirties and 'forties.

We find the reason, I think, in the political history of the times. In 1800 the average audience accepted the world of the eighteenth century—that world of privilege based partly on birth and partly on wealth. By the 'thirties not only had the audiences changed but the outlook of the people had changed. There had been the wars with Napoleon during which the rich grew richer and the poor became more wretched. There was amazing industrial development laying the foundations of some fortunes and bringing bankruptcy to

others. Some of the new-rich intermarried with the landed aristocracy and shared their Tory politics. But many others, sprung from yeomen and the working class, and nonconformist in religion, had no love for aristocracy. Although they were making the new wealth of England, they had no share in the government and were jealous of the Tories. As is, of course, well known, the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832 resulted from an alliance between the Whigs and the wealthy middle class who wanted a share of political power for themselves but did not believe in the rights of man for all or in the desirability of universal suffrage.

These years had also been years of Mechanics' Institutes and adult education. Young mechanics might themselves, in turn, become wealthy manufacturers and employers of labour. There was nothing impossible in such hopes. They admired their financial superiors but, individualists to a man, believed that by hard work and fearing God they might attain the like success.

By way of illustration, may I quote from the introduction to a famous book—one which tells us a great deal about the Victorian belief in progress? It is *Self Help*, by Samuel Smiles, first published in 1859 but based upon a series of lectures delivered in 1844 to a self-improvement society organized by some young man "of the humblest rank." The lectures, Smiles points out, indicate that " their happiness and well-being as individuals in after life, must necessarily depend mainly upon themselves—upon their own diligent self-culture, self-discipline, and self-control—and, above all, on that honest and upright performance of individual duty which is the glory of manly character."

Reinhold Niebuhr, in the chapter on Privileged Classes in his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, points out that the English middle class of those times was proud of its property which, unlike the inheritance of the leisured class, sprang from character, industry, continence, and thrift. The middle class used the individualism of nineteenth-century political economy and the prudential virtues of Puritan Protestantism to give itself a sense of moral superiority over both the leisured class and the industrial worker.

It was in this middle-class atmosphere that the Victorian melodrama was developed, and flourished. The audiences accepted, without questioning, the characteristic middle-class virtues. It was but natural that the villains should come from the class whose privileges were based on birth. And so, nightly, the Wicked Baronet and the Wicked Squire, silk-hatted and be-gloved, entered to the strains of "villain's music" and leered upon the lovely Leading Lady. And the seduction to which they were so partial was, of course, a breach of that sexual continence characteristic of the single-minded young men who read Samuel Smiles. The Wicked Baronet, by the by, when the character was fully developed, had far more success with his seductions than those which we examined in the *Sentimental Comedy*. I have seen it suggested that it was the Baronet who was wicked on the stage because of traditions of the spectacular wickedness of the Restoration wit, Sir Charles Sedley, but I incline rather to think that the Baronet and Squire were chosen as representatives of the aristocracy because they were the junior members of the privileged classes, and the attackers were cautious.

Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately, for no doubt I have thereby been prevented from using a lot of time pleasantly enough but most unprofitably—I have been unable to obtain texts of other of the better-known melodrama writers—Isaac Pocock (1782–1835), Edward Fitzball (1792–1873), William Thomas Moncrieff (1794–1857), and Douglas William Jerrold (1803–57). It was Jerrold who wrote the famous *Black-ey'd Susan, or, All on the Downs*. And there was the later group —the fabulous Dion Boucicault, Henry Pettitt, Watts Phillips, who wrote *Lost in London*, and George R. Sims, who wrote *The Lights o' London* (1881).

> O cruel lamps of London, if tears your light could drown,
> Your victims' eyes would weep them, O Lights o' London Town.

But I have read enough about them to know that fundamentally they expressed the wickedness of the high-born and the goodness of the humble.

The work of T. W. Robertson (1829–71) undoubtedly fol-

lowed from the domestic melodrama. In his *Caste*, first performed at The Prince of Wales in 1867, we find a reasoned and calm statement of middle-class thought:

> Caste's all right. Caste is a good thing if it's not carried too far. It shuts the door on the pretentious and the vulgar; but it should open the door very wide for exceptional merit. Let brains break through the barriers, and what brains can break through, love may leap over.

The hissing by an audience at the Wicked Baronet in a melodrama house was merely an uninhibited expression of the same thought.

In 1894 Henry Arthur Jones put into his play, *The Masqueraders*, a wicked Baronet, Sir Brice Skene, "the choicest blackguard in Europe." But Sir Brice enjoys an income of £20,000 a year, and one of the incidents of the play is the buying of a kiss from a barmaid for £3000. Now that, I think, is significant. The classic figure of the Wicked Baronet had a splendid aristocratic unawareness of money and never bought a body—much less a kiss. Montague Slater, who supplied the introduction to the Bodley Head edition of *Maria Marten* (1928), suggests that when true popular melodrama declined and plays were written once more in the West End for export to the East End the villain took to commerce and had to buy his prey instead of exercising his former remarkable powers. That, of course, is quite plausible. But it seems to me that there was some vague idea abroad that the new phenomenon, the capitalist, was then the enemy of society. I think that Mr George Bernard Shaw might have so replied, if reminded that in the same year, 1894, he put a Wicked Baronet into *Mrs Warren's Profession*.

If one had the leisure and the opportunity of browsing among the play scripts in the Victoria and Albert Museum one would, I am sure, be able to trace all the links from the Wicked Baronets of the eighteen-thirties to the Wicked Oil Magnates, Wicked Chairmen of the Steel Trusts, and Wicked Armament Manufacturers, who began to appear during the period between the two World Wars of our century.

I emphasize the requirement, leisure—for in our time there is an added complication to the study of the relationship between the viewpoint of the playgoers and the nature of the plays. The Victorian melodrama houses kept their own hack writers, and the plays were produced especially for the audiences. In the Whitechapel theatre, for instance, it was always customary to have a kindly Jew among the characters. There is no such relationship of audience and show to-day. The cinema has taken the place formerly occupied by the melodrama house. Scores of audiences, therefore, on the one night see a show written, directed, and acted by people who have never had any personal contact with members of these audiences.

The product which eventually reaches the screen will have been affected by the current political thought and prejudices of the country in which it was made. This is illustrated vividly and amusingly by an article published in *The New Yorker* of February 21, 1948. Entitled *Onward and Upward with the Arts. Come in, Lassies!*, it deals with Hollywood and the Committee on un-American Activities. One script writer complained thus to the author:

> Can I help it if we are running out of villains? For years I've been writing scripts about a Boy-scout-type cowboy in love with a girl. Their fortune and happiness are threatened by a banker holding a mortgage over their heads, or by a big landowner, or by a crooked sheriff. Now they tell me that bankers are out. Anyone holding a mortgage is out. Crooked public officials are out. All I've got left is a cattle rustler. What the hell am I to do with a cattle rustler?

The mention of Lassie (the dog film star) in the title of the article refers to a remark made by an M.G.M. executive:

> We'd be in a hole if we didn't have Lassie. We like Lassie. We're sure of Lassie. Lassie can't go out and embarrass the studio. Katharine Hepburn goes out and makes a speech for Henry Wallace. Bang! We're in trouble. Lassie doesn't make speeches. Not Lassie, thank God.

The legend of the Wicked Baronet lasted throughout the reign of Victoria—the theatre is conservative—but towards

the end of the century it began to be mingled with references to wealth:

'It's the sime the whole world over,
It's the poor wot gets the blime,
And the rich wot 'as the pleasure.
Ain't it all a bleedin' shime.

During the reign of her son it became apparent that the world did not belong to the Lords and the Baronets and the Squires. Thereafter on the stage the aristocrat ceased to be wicked. He degenerated into the silly ass.