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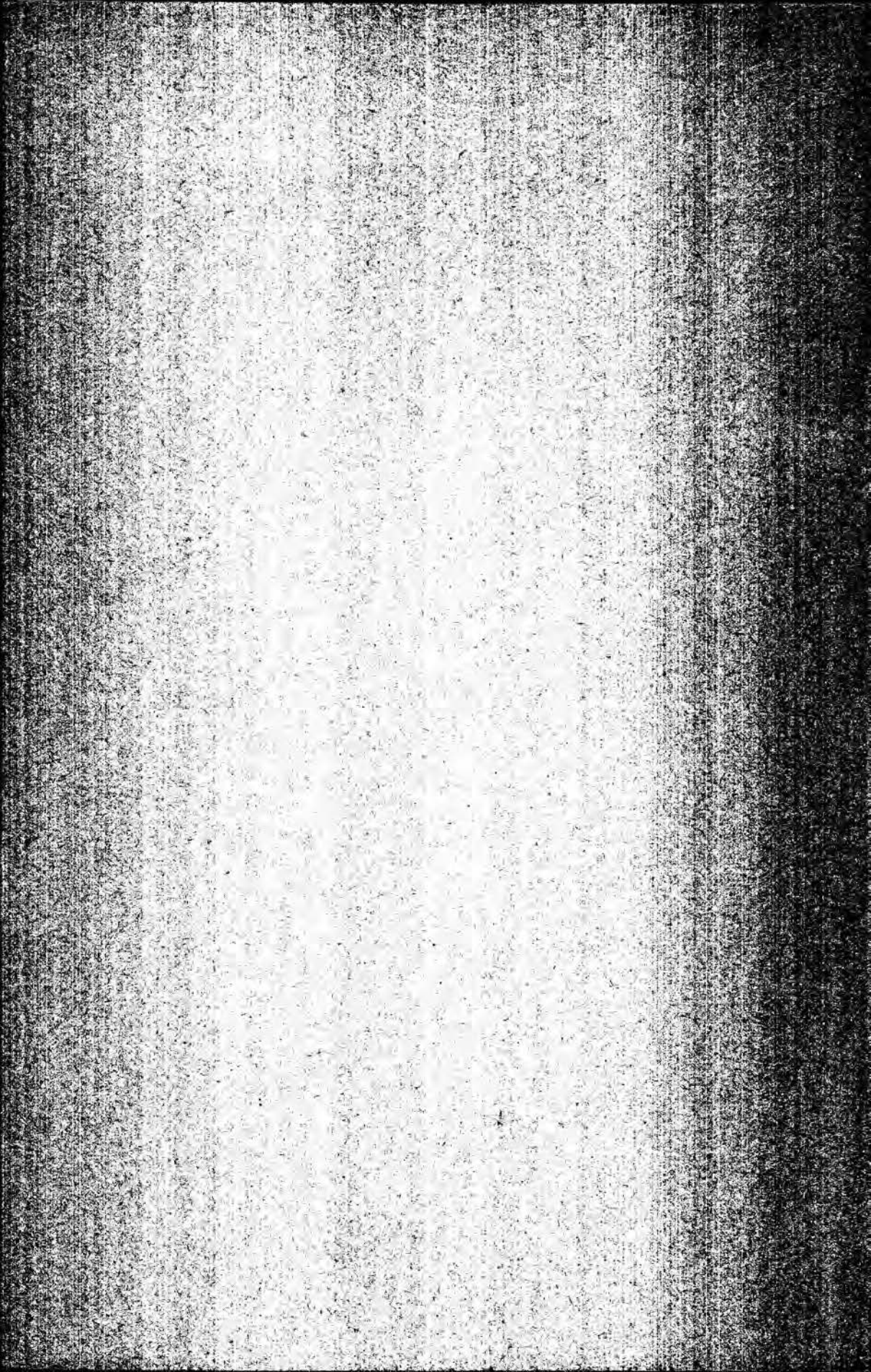
Hena MAES-JELINEK

CRITICISM OF SOCIETY  
IN THE ENGLISH NOVEL  
BETWEEN THE WARS



1970

Société d'Éditions « Les Belles Lettres »  
95, boulevard Raspail, Paris (VI<sup>e</sup>)





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Conformément au règlement de la « Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres », le présent ouvrage a été examiné par une commission technique composée de M. J. WEISGERBER, professeur à l'Université Libre de Bruxelles, M<sup>lle</sup> I. SIMON, M. M. RUTTEN et M. A. NIVELLE, professeurs à l'Université de Liège. M<sup>lle</sup> SIMON en a assuré la révision et a surveillé la correction des épreuves.

L'auteur leur exprime ici toute sa reconnaissance, ainsi qu'à M. M. DELBOUILLE, président de la Commission des publications.

*It is a pleasure to acknowledge my debt to Professor Irène Simon. Not only was she the prime mover of this book, but she has been untiring in her help at every stage of its development. My debt to Professor Simon is too great for adequate acknowledgement. I can only express my gratitude and say I could not have done without her.*



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## FOREWORD

The main concern of this study is the artist's vision of society: its major theme is the relation between the individual and society resulting from the impact of social and political upheavals on individual life. By criticism of society I mean the novelist's awareness of the social reality and of the individual's response to it; the writers I deal with all proved alive to the changes that were taking place in English society between the two World Wars. Though the social attitudes of the inter-war years as well as the writers' response to them were shaped by lasting and complex influences, such as trends in philosophy and science, the two Wars stand out as determining factors in the development of the novel: the consequences of the First were explored by most writers in the Twenties, whereas in the following decade the novelists felt compelled to voice the anxiety aroused by the threat of another conflict and to warn against its possible effects. After the First World War many writers felt keenly the social disruption: the old standards, which were thought to have made this suicidal War possible, were distrusted; the code of behaviour and the moral values of the older generation were openly criticized for having led to bankruptcy. Disparagement of authority increased the individual's sense of isolation, his insecurity, his disgust or fear. Even the search for pleasure so widely satirized in the Twenties was the expression of a cynicism born of despair. The ensuing disengagement of the individual from his environment became a major theme in the novel: his isolation was at once a cause for resentment and the source of his fierce individualism.

Even before the decade was over, it was felt that social disorder and moral laxity were hastening the decline of Western civilization, whose weaknesses had already been revealed by the War. In the Thirties the influence of economic distress and political confusion on individual life stimulated the novelists' sense of responsibility; aestheticism gave way to commitment. The threat of war and the pressure of political ideologies urged them to express



the individual's sense of insecurity and to expose the traps of political orthodoxy and dictatorship, though, unfortunately, this was sometimes done to the detriment of art. Many searched for a way to salvation but could not conceal their own pessimism about the chances of regeneration. The novel of the Twenties described the collapse of the old world and the rejection by the individual of the meaningless standards which thwarted his freedom. In the Thirties the novelists described men's striving after social harmony and found that, henceforth, no ideal could reconcile the good of the community with that of the individual. Instead, new loyalties were asserting themselves which threatened to restrict individual thought and action and even tended towards the complete annihilation of the self.

The two different trends of thought briefly indicated above will appear from the analysis of individual works. My major purpose is to show how the novelists of the inter-war period responded personally to similar circumstances. Thus, though a sense of man's isolation lies at the root of D.H. Lawrence's and Virginia Woolf's vision of the social reality, their description of the individual's relation with the circumambient world was inspired by dissimilar conceptions of the essence of life and produced widely differing interpretations of human relationships. Most novelists of the Twenties were urged to experiment with form in order to convey their personal outlook on a disrupted world. In this respect, Firbank and Gerhardie, though not among the greater novelists of the decade, were forerunners and models for Huxley and Waugh, the best satirists of the period and the most eloquent interpreters of its mood. Wyndham Lewis dissociated himself from the other novelists of the Twenties; he called himself "the Enemy" not only of society as he saw it but also of his fellow-writers, with whom he had more in common than he would acknowledge, yet whom he held responsible for debasing Western civilization.

It is misleading to identify the work of any of these authors with one decade rather than another. Waugh, for example, wrote his best satires in the Thirties, though these evoke the spirit of the Twenties more than that of the period in which they were written; this is also true of most of Anthony Powell's pre-war novels. On the whole, however, the novelists of the Twenties who were still writing in the following decade began to take an increasing interest

in moral values, in the need for achievement and in the possibility of redeeming society through individual or collective action, or both. Huxley and Myers are representatives of that development, though the latter's work is mostly associated with the Thirties, precisely because his best novels, published in that decade, reflect the heightened sense of responsibility of the writer. Orwell, Isherwood and Warner definitely belong to the Thirties and were directly or indirectly involved in Left-wing politics in that period. The political commitment of intellectuals and writers a few years before the Second World War is an important component of the literary background of the decade, but except for Orwell's novels, and to a lesser extent Myers's, it had little immediate influence on fiction. However, the development of Orwell and Isherwood as writers is so closely linked with their personal life that their work cannot be fully understood apart from it. The attitude of other Left-wing intellectuals will also be discussed in the chapter on Orwell in order to bring out his own views on the main problems of the time.

Inevitably, the writers I deal with had to be treated differently depending on their personal approach to the novel, the significance of social criticism in their work and their importance as artists. Some of the novels analysed here were written before the First World War or after the Second. Indeed, it was necessary to present the work of some writers as a whole and to trace the origin or the continuity of their vision. The introductory chapter of this study is a brief survey of the war novels published in the Twenties and Thirties, because these works throw light on the transition from a stable world to one of chaos and confusion. The last chapter ends with a commentary on Powell's *Music of Time*. Though this sequence was started after the Second World War, Powell's attempt to revive the inter-war period and to recapture its social moods and trends, testifies to its enduring interest for the novelist today.



## THE IMPACT OF THE WAR

If, therefore, war should ever come between these two countries [Great Britain and Germany], which Heaven forbid! it will not, I think, be due to irresistible natural laws, it will be due to the want of human wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

The impact of the First World War on English society cannot be over-estimated. In 1914 most English people saw it as a war in defence of Democracy; they looked upon it either as a possible source of regeneration or as a rallying of forces that would eventually contribute to the building up of new social structures. Only a minority, it seems, saw it as a dreadful cataclysm. To all, however, it brought only disappointment, suffering and bitterness. The transition from patriotic enthusiasm to disenchantment and its remoter effects is recorded in many war novels. There is no equivalent in fiction to the poetry written at the beginning of the War by Rupert Brooke and Julian Grenfell, because most war novels were not published until the late Twenties,<sup>2</sup> when their authors had digested their experience. The unanimity of their response is, therefore, all the more striking. Some novelists merely described life at the front; others also examined the causes of the conflict and the reaction of the English public to it. But all were urged to protest against militarism and to reveal the truth about war to those who could not possibly imagine its horrors. Even those writers who were enthusiastic about the War when it broke out explained how their attitude changed into one of disgust. For instance, until he died in action in 1917 T.E. Hulme thought that war was necessary and said so, but at the same time he expressed his reluctance to fight.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bonar LAW, in a Speech in the House of Commons, November 27, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> C.E. Montague's *Disenchantment* is an exception: it was published in 1922. Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End* appeared between 1924 and 1928, but Ford did not fight in the War.

<sup>3</sup> "Why We Are in Favour of this War," in *Further Speculations*, Minneapolis, 1955, p. 186.

When trying to account for the Englishman's readiness to answer the "call to duty" at the beginning of the War, most novelists ascribe it to the Kiplingesque idealism that was gaining ground in the first years of the century. Lady Ottoline Morrell writes that military frenzy had overtaken England as early as 1909,<sup>1</sup> while H.M. Tomlinson states that in January 1914 "most people [had] got war on the brain."<sup>2</sup> There reigned in England, and for that matter everywhere in Europe, a climate of opinion which held war as either necessary or inevitable. Yet people did not really believe it could ever happen and were taken aback when war actually broke out. This contradiction reflects the uncertainty, the mixture of fear and excitement which prevailed at the time. Still, currents of opinion are not so easily clarified, for they are made of many complex elements. Thus an important pacifist movement had developed in the nineteenth century, and many people in England believed that they were now too civilized to make war. On the other hand, there was much social unrest and an undercurrent of violence in the pre-war years due to a rising agitation among the working classes, to the suffragette movement and to the passionate controversy about the Irish question. The War created a convenient diversion and momentarily put an end to all expressions of discontent.

Among the people who protested against the War from the first and foresaw the full horror of it were Lady Ottoline Morrell, Bertrand Russell and D.H. Lawrence. To Lady Ottoline and her pacifist friends, courage meant resistance to collective war hysteria and to the "myths and falsehoods" of a distorted patriotism. Both Lady Ottoline and Bertrand Russell felt frustrated at not being able to serve England, but they were also distressed that a majority among the English should be prepared to suffer yet also to present acts of cruelty and intolerance as a sacred duty for the sake of a mysterious primitive emotion. D.H. Lawrence, who in 1914 was closely associated with them, voiced the most passionate protest against war; the most eloquent expression of his rage and despair is to be found in the chapter entitled "The Nightmare" in *Kangaroo*. In his "war letters" fury and harsh contempt for

<sup>1</sup> See *Ottoline, The Early Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell*, ed. by R. Gathorne-Hardy, London, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> H.L. TOMLINSON. *All Our Yesterdays*, Leipzig, 1930, p. 14.

humanity alternate with the most poignant distress.<sup>1</sup> Lawrence saw that the call to war appealed to false ideals which would eventually conduce to disappointment and cynicism. Characteristically, it was with the living he was concerned, with the survivors, who would come back from the War "inwardly lost."

The war novels are mainly about the officer class and their experience at the front. One must remember that until after the Second World War the bulk of English literature was written by, and about, the middle and the upper-middle classes.<sup>2</sup> Two notable exceptions, Frederic Manning's *Her Privates We* (1930) and David Jones's *In Parenthesis* (1937), describe the ordeal of the private soldier. Unlike most war novels, they are not anti-war books, and they are free from the self-pity and semi-hysterical denunciation which sometimes mar the other war testimonies. Though very different in style, they both bring out the continuity and universality of the soldier's experience; both Manning and Jones relate their own vision to time-honoured war literature, namely Shakespeare's and Malory's. On the contrary, the other war novelists concentrate on the particular historical and social significance of the First World War as a trial. They consider themselves and their fellow-fighters as victims of the social system and debunk its obsolete and, in their eyes, deceptive values. They show that the smugness of the English, particularly among the middle class, their self-confidence as a nation and their often sentimental attachment to communal institutions made them blind to the real implications of the concepts of heroism and self-sacrifice.

Many war novelists look upon the public-school system as the institution that most contributed to produce a generation prepared to sacrifice itself for the sake of duty. They sharply criticize the rigid set of rules that made the young unfit to discriminate between the merely conventional and the essential. Tietjens, the martyr-hero

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, the letter he wrote to Lady Cynthia Asquith on January 31, 1915: "The War finished me: it was the spear through the side of all sorrows and hopes. . . . All the while, I swear, my soul lay in the tomb—not dead, but with a flat stone over it, a corpse, become corpse-cold." *The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, ed. by H.T. Moore, London, 1964, pp. 309-10.

<sup>2</sup> D.H. Lawrence is an exception, and much of his aggressiveness, as well as the public's reaction to his work, may be traced to this. In fact, his position as an outsider may account both for the view he takes of English society and for his reputation among many writers of the post-Second-World-War generation.

of Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy,<sup>1</sup> suffers all kinds of injustice rather than clear himself of false accusations, because "the vilest of all sins is to peach to the head-master."<sup>2</sup> In *The Loom of Youth* Alec Waugh writes that his generation "was being taught to blind itself to the higher issues."<sup>3</sup> Richard Aldington, whose *Death of a Hero* is, among other things, a harsh and bitter indictment of Victorian ethics and of the pre-war Establishment, denounces the public-school system and the compulsory O.T.C. training of the students as an organized sapping of truly vital values and a systematic preparation for death. The Kiplingesque idealism and strict respect for conventions instilled into the young made them prejudiced, lifeless, hypocritical individuals; but they never questioned their duty to the community, and at the beginning of the War they all responded to the demand made upon them by a frantic society. According to Siegfried Sassoon, "the exploitation of courage was the essential tragedy of the War."<sup>4</sup>

In *Death of a Hero* a British officer is heard addressing his soldiers in the following terms:

'You are the War generation. You were born to fight this War, and it's got to be won—we're determined you shall win it. So far as you are concerned as individuals, it doesn't matter a tinker's damn whether you are killed or not. Most probably you will be killed, most of you. So make up your minds to it.'<sup>5</sup>

These words forebode the doom not merely of the war generation but of English civilization as it was understood by nineteenth-century liberals, and the attitude which informs them denies the moral values of the humanist tradition in England. Tietjens, who represents a feudal and authoritarian tradition, knows well enough that this is not *his* war, and his experience at the front makes it all the clearer to him that the conception of gentlemanly behaviour he stands for is definitely out of date. But those who went to war, or supported it, out of a misconceived humanitarianism

<sup>1</sup> Ford Madox FORD, *Some Do Not* (1924), *No More Parades* (1925), *A Man Could Stand Up* (1926), *Last Post* (1928), Penguin Books, 1948.

<sup>2</sup> *No More Parades*, p. 231.

<sup>3</sup> Alec WAUGH, *The Loom of Youth* (1917), London, 1955, p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> Siegfried SASSOON, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928), London, 1960, p. 256.

<sup>5</sup> Richard ALDINGTON, *Death of a Hero* (1929), London, 1930, p. 259.



—and there were many—were disillusioned on every account.

The Battle of the Somme was for the English a turning point in the War and the mainspring of their disenchantment. The loss in human lives reached undreamt-of proportions. The soldiers began to feel that they were being sacrificed for nothing. They suspected they were the victims of politicians and of the authorities' mismanagement and incompetence, and felt only hatred and contempt for the people who sent them to the front but "fought their country's battle from armchairs."<sup>1</sup> Actually, the dispersion of the Allied troops lay at the root of their weakness; yet it was not until the last year of the War that the Allies agreed to a single command. Meanwhile, the much-praised heroism of the soldiers was the source of so much misery that it was becoming a meaningless word:

These immense sacrifices, this ocean of mental sufferings, were all undergone to further the private vanities of men who amidst these hugenesses of landscapes and forces appeared pygmies! ... They could die, they could be massacred, by the quarter million, in shambles. But that they should be massacred without jauntiness, without confidence, with depressed brows: without parade. ...<sup>2</sup>

The fighting conditions were disheartening: the Germans were stronger than expected, and the soldiers discovered that as human beings they were not different from themselves and just as courageous; no attack brought the English further than they were. In addition, the men were constantly worried by forms of petty militarism, by punishment out of proportion with the offence, not to mention executions by the British themselves for cowardice or desertion. The survivors were consumed with bitterness, a dreadful feeling of futility, a sense of waste and of impotence. Many wanted to die or simply thought it inconceivable that they should survive the War. Total disillusionment with humanity and its capacity for evil is the main theme of many war novels.

The spiritual crisis which caused the debunking of idealism was sharpened by the estrangement between soldiers and civilians,

<sup>1</sup> Siegfried SASSOON, *Siegfried's Journey, 1916-1920* (1945), London, 1945, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> Ford Madox FORD, *No More Parades*, p. 8.

which was itself responsible for the degradation of the national spirit. The soldiers who went on leave could not understand "the war madness that ran about everywhere looking for a pseudo-military outlet."<sup>1</sup> At the front there was the horror and endlessness of war, the debasement of human beings; but when they went home, they found that the civilians were worried about rations and did not want to hear about the fighting:

It wasn't possible to imagine oneself even hinting to them that the Somme Battle was—to put it mildly—an inhuman and beastly business. One had to behave nicely about it to them, keeping up a polite pretence that to have taken part in it was a glorious and acceptable adventure. . . . I felt that no explanation of mine could ever reach my elders—that they weren't capable of wanting to know the truth.<sup>2</sup>

Another source of humiliation for the soldiers on leave was the slight contempt of their women, who had retained their beauty and worth as individuals and felt the soldiers' sense of futility as a degradation. Both Tietjens and Winterbourne are relieved to go back to the front and the fellowship with their men; they also perceive that if they survive the War, they will be handicapped in comparison with those who have not served at the front or with the new generation. On the other hand, the civilians were hurt by the self-protective silence with which the soldiers met their lack of understanding, while the men on the home front resented the contempt of the fighters and hid their shame at not making the one sacrifice that mattered by being contemptuous in their turn. Even the forbearing Tietjens cannot refrain from bitterness at fighting for a nation who, out of misplaced pride, are prepared to immolate those from whom they demand victory:

Naturally, the civilian population wanted soldiers to be made to look like fools: and to be done in. They wanted the war won by men who would at the end be either humiliated or dead. Or both. Except, naturally, their own cousins or fiancées' relatives. That was what it came to. That was what it meant when important gentlemen said that they had rather the war were lost than that cavalry should gain any distinction in it!<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Robert GRAVES, *Goodbye to All That* (1929), London, 1931, p. 283.

<sup>2</sup> Siegfried SASSOON, *Siegfried's Journey*, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ford Madox FORD, *No More Parades*, pp. 236-7.

The First World War marked the beginning of England's decline as the world's greatest power. This was a major unforeseen consequence of the conflict which both civilians and soldiers had to face. A war of attrition could hardly gratify their patriotism. The older generation, who had sent their children to fight for their country, looked forward to a glorious issue, but to their suffering at having lost their sons was added their disappointment as citizens. Nor did the War bring forth the expected regeneration ; in fact, hatred and aggressiveness were prevalent emotions during the War, and many shrank in horror at their own capacity for barbarism. As to the young, their bitterness was enhanced by the feeling that their country was gaining nothing by the War and that their sacrifice was vain :

You, the war dead, I think you died in vain. I think you died for nothing, for a blast of wind, a blather, a humbug, a newspaper stunt, a politician's ramp. But at least you died.<sup>1</sup>

At the Peace Conference the delegates disagreed from the outset about how to treat Germany. Although hatred was still strong in England and America, the French were almost alone in uncompromisingly wishing to keep Germany down. The Big Four finally agreed on a compromise, but hardly anyone who took an interest in the Versailles Treaty was satisfied. Here again, the war novels voice the two trends of reaction to the Treaty. For some, the Allies were countenancing the "revenchard" spirit of the French and were too harsh on the German people, who after all, were not wholly responsible for the War and had suffered as much as the Allies. For others, if the Germans were not severely punished once and for all, they would think that they could provoke a world conflict with impunity.<sup>2</sup> In *Last Post* when Mark Tietjens hears of the terms of the Armistice, he decides that he will never speak again and he keeps his word. He considers that France was betrayed by her allies at the moment of triumph ; by refusing to occupy Berlin, the Allies were committing an intellectual sin :

Let them, too, know what it was to suffer as France had suffered. It was treachery enough not to have done that,

<sup>1</sup> Richard ALDINGTON, *Death of a Hero*, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> In *Contemporary Europe : a History* (1961) Stuart Hughes explains that the peace treaty was a failure because it was too much of a compromise. (French translation : *Histoire de l'Europe Contemporaine*, traduit de l'anglais par Marc BAUDOIX, Verviers, Marabout Université, p. 153.)

and the child unborn would suffer for it. . . . It was the worst disservice you could do your foes not to let them know that remorseless consequences follow determined actions. . . . If the Germans did not experience that in the sight of the world there was an end of Europe and the world. What was to hinder endless recurrences of what had happened near a place called Gemmenich on the fourth of August, 1914, at six o'clock in the morning? There was nothing to hinder it.<sup>1</sup>

According to Mark, "a world with England presenting the spectacle of moral cowardice would be a world on a lower plane."<sup>2</sup>

Not all war testimonies are works of art. Some writers cannot look back on their experience with detachment, and a few even go so far as to suggest that the War was meant to destroy them personally. Not so Tietjens, Ford's hero, who accepts the War very collectedly and is all the time sufficiently above the conflict to understand its true causes and to foresee its consequences. Though not exclusively a war novel, *Parade's End* offers the most eloquent vision of the War and of its meaning for the ruling class, for England and its traditions. Even before the War Tietjens is aware that social and political tensions threaten the secure and ordered world of the Georgian upper class. At the end of the War the aristocratic tradition he stands for and the values of his class have been destroyed or have become meaningless. Ford presents an England doomed to lose its power as a result of the decline of its governing class. His tetralogy illustrates the deterioration of the national spirit in England and the decay of standards quickened and brought to light by the War.

Tietjens is a Tory gentleman born and bred, extremely conscious of the privileges and the duties of his position. His experiences are not always plausible because too many catastrophes and trials are piled on him, while his wife, Sylvia, is too incredibly bad. A good and noble person, he is also intelligent and capable, but he allows himself to be cheated by everyone; on the professional plane he is considered unsound because too brilliant, although he shows neither the initiative nor the boldness which gave power to his class and to England. Also, he lacks the intransigency

<sup>1</sup> Ford Madox FORD, *Last Post*, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

required from the man of action: as an officer, he is too humane with his men; he is punished for indiscipline and ends the War shamefully, leading a convoy of prisoners. Tietjens is a tragic symbol of the decline of the English aristocracy and a significant figure in the transformation of English society. He refuses to sanction the increasing corruption of the people of his class, yet he is too gentlemanly to denounce it. He remains imprisoned in his rigid code of honour until he has suffered all indignities and acknowledges at last the incongruity of the accepted rules in the new social reality. He then decides to live according to his own conscience and agrees that "if a ruling class loses the capacity to rule—or the desire!—it should abdicate from its privileges and get underground."<sup>1</sup> Groby, the Tietjens manor, is let to American *nouveaux riches*. In spite of his protest, they cut down the ancient yew-tree, a symbol of Old England, showing thereby that the values Tietjens stands for can no longer be taken seriously.

The abdication of responsibility by the ruling class brought to light the obsolescence and inadequacy of the social framework; it intensified the sense of insecurity created by the War itself. Not only Ford Madox Ford but Siegfried Sassoon in *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* and even Aldington evoke the pre-war world with nostalgia and lament over the disappearance of its peacefulness,<sup>2</sup> which they contrast with the post-war restlessness and disenchantment. What the war novels make clear is how serenity—which was partly based on unawareness—gave way to a sense of insecurity, how man lost faith in man, in his country and in God, how he made life itself the supreme value and how the individual became more important than society. This new outlook was to inform the literature of the inter-war period and to induce novelists to search for new ways of describing man's fate in a changing society. Naturally, the War was not the sole cause of literary renewal; a reaction against established forms and attitudes had begun to take shape before 1914, but in this as in other matters the War was a catalyst.

The First World War haunts many novels of the inter-war period. The theme of the returned soldier who cannot adapt

<sup>1</sup> Ford Madox Ford, *Last Post*, p. 486.

<sup>2</sup> The contrast between this sense of security, which was never recovered, and the confusion and anxiety which prevailed between the Wars, is admirably rendered by Orwell in *Coming Up for Air*.



himself to civilian life was treated by widely differing writers like Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway* and Isherwood in *The Memorial*. The impact of the War on the younger generation is a major theme in the satire and social comedy of the Twenties and Thirties. These interpret the young people's disenchantment and cynicism, and render the atmosphere of forced gaiety and anxiety which prevailed in the post-war decade. The young were eager for life and wanted to be free of the old restraints. The break between old and young, which was one cause among others of the deterioration of the community spirit, resulted from the young people's contempt for the inadequacy of the established rules of conduct and way of life. They also accused the old of having mismanaged the War, of having resorted to moral blackmail by instilling into them false concepts of patriotism and heroism; indirectly, they accused the old of being responsible for the one million dead and the two million wounded of the British Empire. On the other hand, the young who had missed the War envied the returned soldier his experiences at the front. These contradictory feelings together with their disillusion about humanity as a whole lay at the root of neurosis among the younger generation. They were "inwardly lost," living in an age in which traditions were being overthrown and all values questioned. The typical hero in the satire of the Twenties is an innocent and clever young man who is convinced of the futility of war but also of life in peacetime; he is a thwarted idealist, often a romantic who refuses to acknowledge it and becomes a cynic out of a sense of frustration. It is no accident that the best interpreters of his dilemma were themselves young men who had missed the War: Huxley, who was unfit for service, and Waugh, who was too young. Their novels trace the spiritual development of the post-war generation: their confusion, disillusionment and cynicism in the face of a crumbling world, and then, very often, their search for meaning and security through religious conversion or commitment to a political cause.

## D.H. LAWRENCE

The final aim of every living thing, creature, or being is the full achievement of itself.<sup>1</sup>

Criticism of society is a major theme in Lawrence's work. Yet his purpose is not, as Lionel Trilling put it, "the investigation of reality beginning in the social field."<sup>2</sup> True, Lawrence's novels reveal his awareness and understanding of the nature of society. He has left some remarkable portraits of the English and the cosmopolitan intelligentsia, with whom he was acquainted during and after the First World War. Such chapters as "Crème de Menthe" or "Gudrun in the Pompadour" in *Women in Love* expose the vulgarity, pettiness and amorality of artistic coteries. Some of the aimless and disenchanting characters in *Aaron's Rod* would not have been out of place in Huxley's or Waugh's satires. The social gatherings described in *Women in Love* and in *Aaron's Rod* are ferocious sketches of the futility of country-house life while the realistic description of life in a small provincial town in *The Lost Girl* and the impossibility for the heroine to come to terms with her environment testify to Lawrence's awareness of social conditions in any milieu. But however true and significant these descriptions of the social scene and its protagonists, they are not the essential aspect of Lawrence's criticism of society. Nor is the social field the context in relation to which individual behaviour is interpreted.

Lawrence's view of society is subordinate to his conception of man as one of the many manifestations of life, a fragment of the living universe. He criticizes all that thwarts the "sheer, instinctive life" of the individual. His novels create a new and original pattern of the highlights of existence, which closely follows the rhythm of life itself with its alternate moments of unfulfilment

<sup>1</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *Phoenix. The Posthumous Papers of D.H. Lawrence*, London, 1961, p. 408.

<sup>2</sup> LIONEL TRILLING, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," in *Forms of Modern Fiction*, ed. by William Van O'Connor, Bloomington, 1962, p. 150.



and self-realization. This intense life outside the pale of society brings out by contrast the futility of existing as a mere "social being." Lawrence's "heroes" do not seek fulfilment in harmony with society but by drawing away from it. The experience which gives rise to the significant moments of life is the man-woman relationship. For Lawrence, the nature of these relations determines the character of civilization, and he probes into those trends in modern society which mould the essential being of men and women and influence their attitude towards one another. Though he wrote several novels in the Twenties, a period when he became increasingly preoccupied with his responsibility towards his fellow-men and with reforming society, his best novels, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, were published during the War. These works bring to light the changes that were taking place in English society and point with prophetic insight to later developments. The collapse of traditional attitudes and ways of life after the First World War and the breakdown of values were not the immediate result of people's experience in the War. Rather, this experience made people aware of the changes which had been preparing for a very long time: the shock of the War precipitated a revolution already simmering in the nineteenth century. It is extraordinary that while the change was only beginning to be felt, Lawrence should have been tracing its effects and exploring its consequences, not in limited areas but in all fields of human experience. He is the first modern English writer to have analysed with such perspicacity the deeper trends of contemporary civilization.

The theme of Lawrence's art is Life: Life as a powerful urge pervading the universe, a dark, unknown force stirring every part of the physical creation; Life in its manifold aspects, immanent, spontaneous, irresistible, the prime mover of the natural world, the vital stream which cannot be thwarted without tragical effects. Man must remain in touch with the living cosmos and fulfil himself in harmony with it. From his very first novels Lawrence expressed this connection of man with the universe and defined him as one natural phenomenon among others. In *The White Peacock* Annable, a "whole man," forsakes society in order to live "naturally," like an animal. In *The Trespasser* "amidst the journeying of oceans and clouds and the circling flight of heavy spheres, lost to sight in the sky, Sigmund and Helena, two grains of life in the vast movement, were travelling a moment side

by side."<sup>1</sup> The often quoted passage at the beginning of *The Rainbow* is a wonderful rendering of the connexion of the Brangwen men with the earth. Tom Brangwen is particularly alive to it:

He must admit that he was only fragmentary, something incomplete and subject. There were the stars in the dark heaven travelling, the whole host passing by on some eternal voyage. So he sat small and submissive to the greater ordering.<sup>2</sup>

Birkin expresses the same view in *Women in Love*; though he sounds more didactic, he is seeking his own way and at the same time trying to convince Gerald, who is utterly hostile to his "theories":

After all, what is mankind but just one expression of the incomprehensible. And if mankind passes away, it will only mean that this particular expression is completed and done.<sup>3</sup>

Birkin also wants to be carried along with the flux of life: in a fit of disgust at the mental sterility of the people with whom he is spending the week-end, he rolls naked on the earth; then, he lies amid the flowers to purify himself from these people's deadening influence, and he responds to the contact with the living earth. Similarly, Gudrun experiences a moment of ecstasy when her dance in the field connects her with nature. Aaron also "perceives in clairvoyance that our own life is only a fragment of the shell of life."<sup>4</sup> In Mexico Kate, the heroine of *The Plumed Serpent*, feels the powerful and mysterious impact of the earth. The men whom she sees dancing in the square look like "burning flames of life," and their rituals serve to vivify their union with the physical world. "She was attracted, almost fascinated by the strange nuclear power of the men in the circle. It was like a dark glowing, vivid nucleus of new life."<sup>5</sup>

If man is only one manifestation among others of the vast stream of life, then his ultimate being, that part of him which is one with the essential principle of life, is impersonal. Man is

<sup>1</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *The Trespasser*, Penguin Books, 1960, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *The Rainbow*, London, 1934, p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *Women in Love*, London, 1930, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *Aaron's Rod*, London, 1929, p. 277.

<sup>5</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *The Plumed Serpent*, London, 1930, p. 130.

thus necessarily dethroned from his prominent position as the reasonable being who dominates the living creation. This does not mean that he is reduced to a mere animal but that, as a living being, his place in the universe is relative to that of other living phenomena. It does not mean either that man has no individuality, for in their ways of expressing the vital principle all men are different just as all flowers and trees are different, and men are different from women in their essential being—"separate," "other" are the words Lawrence uses—yet partake of the same life and grow from the same centre. The individual who remains true to his own nature, to his own separate self, realizes himself either in communion with another individual or with a group of men. But it is mainly through physical love that man can merge in the greater flow of life: perfect balance between man and woman, who are like two poles attracting and repulsing each other like two stars in the firmament, is the path to communion with the vital world. In *The Rainbow* Tom and Lydia Brangwen achieve such a union:

There on the farm with her, he lived through a mystery of life and death and creation, strange profound ecstasies and incommunicable satisfactions, of which the rest of the world knew nothing. (p. 95)

Anna and Will also commune with the living universe at the beginning of their marriage, when neither of them tries to dominate the other:

As they lay close together, complete and beyond the touch of time or change, it was as if they were at the very centre of all the slow wheeling of space and the rapid agitation of life, deep, deep inside them all, at the centre where there is utter radiance, and eternal being, and the silence absorbed in praise: the steady core of all movements, the unawakened sleep of all wakefulness. (p. 135)

This fulfilment is denied their daughter Ursula, at least in her affair with Strebensky, whom she destroys as a man. But she knows that one day she will come to life, and the novel ends on the vision of her awakening:

And again came the vivid reality of acorns in February lying on the floor of a wood with their shell burst and discarded

and the kernel issued naked to put itself forth. She was the naked, clear kernel thrusting forth the clear, powerful shoot, and the world was a bygone winter, discarded. (p. 466)

Since the infinite is impersonal, love and the sexual marriage which are a threshold to it must necessarily take place on an impersonal level, transcend personality, thrive beyond it.<sup>1</sup> This is most clearly expressed in *Women in Love* when Birkin tries to convince Ursula that in the creative marriage he wants to achieve with her they should meet in the impersonal flow of life:

There is a final me which is stark and impersonal and beyond responsibility. So there is a final you. And it is there I would want to meet you—not in the emotional, loving plane—but there beyond, where there is no speech, and no terms of agreement. There we are two stark, unknown beings, two utterly strange creatures, I would want to approach you and you me. And there could be no obligation, because there is no standard for action there, because no understanding has been reaped from that plane. It is quite inhuman,—so there is no calling to book, in any form whatsoever—because one is outside the pale of all that is accepted, and nothing known applies. One can only follow the impulse, taking that which lies in front, and responsible for nothing, asked for nothing, giving nothing, only each taking according to the primal desire. (p. 151)

Birkin insists that this coming together must be spontaneous, impulsive:

I want us to be together without bothering about ourselves—to be really together because we *are* together, as if it were a phenomenon, not a thing we have to maintain by our own effort. (p. 262)

When Ursula and Birkin at last achieve this union, it is a

perfect passing away for both of them, and at the same time the most intolerable accession into being, the marvellous fullness of immediate gratification, overwhelming, outflooding

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence distinguishes between personality and individuality. Personality is "that which is transmitted from the person to his audience: the transmissible effect of a man." To Lawrence personality is detestable because it is the incarnation of an ideal: man as he wants to be and as he wants to appear to others. Individuality is the real self of man, in its "singleness" and "otherness": man as an incarnate, untranslatable "mystery." See "Democracy" in *Selected Essays*, Penguin Books, 1960, p. 90.

from the source of the deepest life-force, the darkest, deepest, strangest life-source of the human body. (p. 331)

It is clear, then, that love is not an end in itself, not a fulfilment but a means to it, a "functional process." Like everything that partakes of life, love is only a constituent, not a whole:

Love is perhaps an eternal part of life. But it is only a part. And when it is treated as if it were a whole, it becomes a disease, a vast white strangling octopus. All things are relative, and have their sacredness in their true relation to all other things.<sup>1</sup>

However important as a generator of life, the sexual marriage is not the only reality.<sup>2</sup> Lawrence insists on its value because he believes in its power to regenerate life and because it is so often despised. According to him, the physical union generates a blood-knowledge which, in human relationships at least, is far superior to mind-knowledge. So Tom Brangwen, who did not understand his wife's foreign nature, "knew her, he knew her meaning without understanding."<sup>3</sup> But again physical consciousness is not everything. If it is paramount or an end in itself, it becomes degrading. Looking at an African statuette which to Birkin is "pure culture in sensation, culture in the physical consciousness, really ultimate *physical* consciousness, mindless, utterly sensual,"<sup>4</sup> Gerald is repelled, while Birkin himself is forced to agree that sensuality alone cannot fulfil man.

The notion of balance is central in Lawrence's vision of the cosmos. Life is a fight in which destructive and creative forces preponderate by turns, but ultimately counterbalance each other in the greater flux of life. Lawrence describes the difficult struggle which leads to moments of union between opposite forces; he explores situations at all levels of human experience in which

<sup>1</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *Kangaroo*, Penguin Books, 1960, p. 361.

<sup>2</sup> "There must be marriage of body in body, and of spirit in spirit, and Two-in-One. And the marriage in the body must not deny the marriage in the spirit, for that is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; and the marriage in the spirit shall not deny the marriage in the body, for that is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. But the two must be for ever reconciled, even if they must exist on occasions apart one from the other." (*Phoenix*, p. 475)

<sup>3</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *The Rainbow*, p. 87.

<sup>4</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *Women in Love*, p. 81.



balance is either attained or fails to be realized. There must be balance between male and female in man's own nature as there must be balance in him between the two forms of consciousness :

Let us accept our destiny. Man *can't* live by instinct because he's got a mind. . . . Man has a mind ; and ideas, so it is just puerile to sigh for innocence and naïve spontaneity. . . . You've got to marry the pair of them [emotions and the mind]. Apart, they are no good.<sup>1</sup>

In the same way, balance is, or rather should be, the essence of all human relationships and of life in society. It is, in fact, the touchstone of Lawrence's criticism of society, for, ultimately, the root of all evil lies in man's failure to achieve balance. Harmony, the natural polarity of complementary elements, such are the properties of life in all its aspects. It is therefore understandable that Lawrence should revolt against any way of life that breaks the harmony of the natural world. The importance he grants to the physical universe makes him reject any form of behaviour that derives exclusively from reason. Moreover, his conception of the universe and the relative place he assigns in it to man necessarily upset traditional standards of conduct and the generally accepted ideal of happiness. As we shall see, Lawrence's novels question, then reject, the contemporary way of life because it is contrary to what he calls "the vast, unexplored morality of life itself."<sup>2</sup>

*The White Peacock* (1911) is mainly an attempt to capture the beauty of the natural world and the warmth of personal relations. Man and nature partake of the same source of vital energy, though man, preoccupied with his own fate, is often unaware of it and denies the true life in him. We may wonder to what extent Lawrence was conscious that he was giving expression to the philosophy of life which was to become the essence of his artistic achievement, namely that man, a manifestation of life, must commune with the natural universe while fulfilling himself as a human being. He did not yet illustrate it in complex human attitudes, for Annable's simple motto "be a good animal" could hardly lead to fulfilment. But man's communion with nature appears nowhere so spontaneous, so instinctive, so natural as in *The White*

<sup>1</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *Assorted Articles*, London, 1932, pp. 205-6.

<sup>2</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *Phoenix*, p. 419.

*Peacock* and in *Sons and Lovers*. One of its most beautiful expressions is the elegy for the death of Annable, the man who had returned to nature. The novel is full of the magic which the country held for the young Lawrence, who was to describe it repeatedly in his work. The mines are already an integral part of the landscape, though the old ways of life and work subsist. Industrialism is only beginning to loom large; it has not yet superseded agriculture and marred the English country-side. Lawrence does not criticize it yet; on the contrary, he takes the pits as a natural part of his surroundings:

As you walk past Selsby, the pit stands up against the West, with beautiful tapering chimneys marked in black against the swim of sunset, and the headstocks etched with tall significance on the brightness. Then the houses are squat in rows of shadow at the foot of these high monuments.<sup>1</sup>

Some critics consider *The White Peacock* mainly as a picture of English provincial life at the beginning of this century. But it is more than that: Lawrence tackles the themes he was to develop later, though these are not fully worked out, which may account for a certain confusion in the purpose of the novel. This is particularly true of his treatment of the growing ascendancy of woman in the family and in society, and of the destruction of a man by a woman who refuses to take him as he is and tries to make him "better." The main theme of the novel is that of personal relationships in a declining agricultural community. When the book opens, man and nature are still perfectly integrated in the same flow of life, although the valley is losing its former vitality. Mr. Saxton is the unquestioned master of the farm; he is full of vigour and of human warmth, and he comforts Cyril when the latter escapes from the frustrating gentility of his own home. However, even at Strelley Mill the joy and comfort of life indulged in by the men is sometimes thwarted by the excessive religiousness of the women. Moreover, their way of life is threatened and cannot be preserved much longer. The farms are being gnawed away, and agricultural England is disintegrating. Industry is not responsible: the gentry have not yet become industrial magnates, but they have

<sup>1</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *The White Peacock*, Penguin Books, 1954, p. 25.



lost reverence for the traditional work of the land, and it is they who eventually drive out the farmers. The latter lose faith in agriculture as it is practised in England. Besides the men in the Saxton family are beginning to feel the oppressiveness of traditions which have become conventionalized and hamper the renewal of life. That is why the father is glad to emigrate to Canada, to a young country where life is still full of promise. George is tempted to go with him, but life on a farm no longer gratifies him; he has lost the blind contentment he used to derive from his work. It even seems that having been knocked out by the gamekeeper makes him lose confidence in his physical self. At the same time Lettie awakens dissatisfaction in him:

"Here you can't live as you like—in any way or circumstance. You're like a bit out of those coloured marble mosaics in the hall, you have to fit in your own set, fit into your own pattern, because you're put there from the first. But you don't want to be like a bit fixed of a mosaic—you want to fuse into life, and melt and mix with the rest of folk, to have some things burned out of you." (p. 92)

At the beginning of the novel George is arrogantly self-satisfied, a young man enjoying the full force of his body. Work and comfort seem enough for him. Lettie admires his body, the life it radiates, but she calls him a primitive man, a "fine animal." He is in love with her, and she makes him vaguely aware of a higher and more refined existence. She tempts him with her refinement and her culture, then leaves him for another man. Much is made of Lettie's beauty, of her intelligence and her charm. She is a capricious and tempting woman whom men find it difficult to resist. But she is afraid of life, and though she likes to think she is unconventional, she is always checking her spontaneity, particularly when she feels it might give the impression that she is yielding a part of herself. She attracts George by "vending him visions" of an exquisite life, in which pictures, music and dancing the minuet are all-important. Her indulgence in "culture" is often futile, the more so as she uses it as an easy means to impress George or to appeal to his sentimentality. In fact, George is capable of responding to the real thing, to what appears to him to have some relation to life, but he refuses to be impressed by a form of refinement which is often a mere token of conventionality and respectability. In this respect, Lettie is strongly influenced by her

mother, who regards life in terms of what is allowed and what is forbidden. She enforces in her home the kind of respectability of which the piano is the unfailing symbol. Significantly, the novel starts with Cyril leaving the free and genial atmosphere of the farm to come home and find his mother playing a Victorian melody on the piano. She is the first example in Lawrence's fiction of the self-righteous woman who cannot take her husband as he is and destroys him morally. The father, "a frivolous, rather vulgar character, but plausible, having a good deal of charm," (p. 52) is the first of many men whose vitality is thwarted by their wives.

Lettie's respect for social conventions determines her fate. Though she seems to be very self-confident and tries to assert herself by assuming an independent attitude, she is rather unstable. She doesn't know what she wants: she isn't deeply in love with either George or Leslie, but she is at least physically attracted to George and at the same time afraid of the power he would have over her if she responded to him. Cyril is right when he tells him (too late): "she'd have been glad if you'd done as you wanted with her." (p. 256) But George lacks confidence; he is awkward in his effort to win Lettie and, what is more important, he denies the life in him because he is unable to give it purpose. When Lettie makes him lose his self-complacency, he becomes aware that physical consciousness is not enough. He rejects the form of culture Lettie offers him, but he is incapable as yet of realizing himself by other means or even of conceiving clearly what self-realization involves. Yet he knows that this would give him assurance, the will to win Lettie and the possibility to overcome her reticences. When he does become conscious of himself and gains assurance, he has an inkling of the way to completeness through physical and mental consciousness. But this also makes him aware of the mess he has made of his life, and this understanding leads to his downfall.

Opposed to George is Leslie Tempest, the mine-owner, a rather pale forerunner of Gerald Crich. He has no life in him, only manners and a puerile sensitiveness. Characteristically, when Lettie accepts him, he tells her: "You'll make a fine wife, Lettie, able to entertain, and all that." (p. 119) When Lettie chooses him, she knows that she is rejecting life for the "world," for a brilliant and refined but shallow existence. Yet the choice is not between life and non-life but between non-life and life-to-be-

realized provided she could bring George to it. Neither he nor Leslie offers her the security of a manly attitude. She keeps hesitating even after she is engaged to Leslie, who wins her in the end not through his strength but through his weakness after an accident. By leaving her the initiative, both men deny their manhood and encourage her to dominate them. They are at least partly responsible for the ascendancy Lettie gains over them.

The rejection of George by Lettie is the turning point in the novel. George marries Meg, and for a short time he is fairly happy with her. He prospers financially and acquires an ease which makes him quite acceptable in any social circle. But his marriage soon breaks down, for Meg is warm but uneducated and apparently unteachable, and George, who after his break with Lettie had renounced the life of the mind, becomes increasingly dissatisfied. Lawrence makes it clear that for someone who has had a glimpse of another kind of fulfilment, the life of the senses is not enough: Annable, with whom the senses take precedence of the mind, is also profoundly unhappy. As soon as Meg becomes a mother, she turns to her children and starts despising George; he becomes aware of the aimlessness of his life and takes to drink:

Meg was secure in her high maternity; she was mistress and sole authority. George, as father, was first servant; as an indifferent father, she humiliated him and was hostile to his wishes. (p. 354)

George tries to give his life some purpose by devoting himself to socialism, but he soon realizes that socialism cannot be a substitute for real living. He loses interest and becomes more aimless than ever. Meanwhile, he has kept in touch with Lettie, who insists on interfering in his life. Lettie's marriage has not fulfilled her either. From the very beginning, she asserts herself as the mother-figure. Leslie loses his self-confidence and becomes unquestioningly submitted to her. Unconsciously perhaps, she enjoys making a show of his submission, and he is rather pathetic in his appeal to her tenderness. Marriage has transformed Lettie into an all-powerful character, a brilliant and fascinating female who, like the peacock described by Annable as the symbol of woman's vanity, enjoys dominating man. Both George and Leslie are under her spell:

As she turned laughing to the two men, she let her cloak slide over her white shoulder and fall with silk splendour

of a peacock's gorgeous blue over the arm of the large settee. There she stood, with her white hand upon the peacock of her cloak, where it tumbled against her dull orange dress. She knew her own splendour, and she drew up her throat laughing and brilliant with triumph. (pp. 330-1)

Yet, because she is herself dissatisfied, Lettie still wants something from George. She has apparently learned little from experience: she wishes to enjoy pleasant social relations with brilliant talk and music to cover her inner failure, but George cannot accept this alternative to a real relationship.

Ten years after they have gone their own ways it is obvious that none of the young people (except Emily) is going to be fulfilled. When George loses Lettie, he also loses what Lawrence calls later "a deep sense of purposive, creative activity."<sup>1</sup> Leslie is successful as an industrial magnate, the first advocate in Lawrence's novels of "machinery which will do the work of men" (p. 381) and the first agent of a transformation that will bring death in the valley. But emotionally, he is a child who willingly accepts and even rejoices in the domination of his wife. So that both George, who was full of life and virility, and Leslie, who has always been effeminate and emotionally dependent, fail to fulfil themselves. Their wives find relief in self-abnegation for their children and rely on them alone for their emotional life. However, Meg never forgives George for not yielding to her, while Lettie realizes that her independence from her husband, her activities as a modern woman and her indulgence in culture do not make up for her lack of a rich emotional life.

The cause of this sterility and waste of life is made clear in a chapter in which Annable and Cyril bring out the meaning of the novel by using the white peacock as the symbol of woman's pride and vanity. Annable is a Cambridge-educated man who became a curate and married Lady Crystabel. She was in love with him physically until she grew tired of him and "got souly." He was humiliated by her, and when he left her, he returned to nature to live as a good animal. Annable seeing a peacock on a stone angel in the graveyard exclaims:

<sup>1</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE. *Fantasia of the Unconscious*. London, 1961, p. 106.

' The proud fool!—look at it! Perched on an angel too, as if it were a pedestal for vanity. That's the soul of a woman—or it's the devil.'

' A woman to the end, I tell you, all vanity and screech and defilement.' (p. 198)

However, after many years of bitterness at the humiliation he suffered from her, he laments when he hears that Lady Crystabel is dead and acknowledges that she wasn't entirely to blame. That is why Cyril suggests they call her a white peacock. Most men in the novel suffer from the humiliation imposed on them by women who despise their virility, sometimes because they are afraid of it. All of them, except Leslie, are deeply connected with the earth and resist the will of women to impose on them an "idealism" which kills life. The women are attached to religion as men are attached to the earth. They act according to principles which have their source in a religious and cultural tradition that used to be vital but has been gradually severed from life. Mrs. Saxton kills all joy of living, and she brings up her children to believe that the slightest event in their life is a trial to their soul, by which she destroys their self-confidence. Cyril, like Paul in *Sons and Lovers*, recoils from Emily's soul-worship:

' You have always your soul in your eyes, such an earnest, troublesome soul'. . . . Troublesome shadows are always crowding across your eyes, and you cherish them. You think the flesh of the apple is nothing, nothing. You only care for the eternal pips. Why don't you snatch your apple and eat it, and throw the core away?' (p. 97)

Mrs. Beardsall and Lettie are less concerned with the soul but they are equally influenced by the Christian idealism which characterizes society. They associate the Church with an ideal of culture and sophistication which alienates them increasingly from the vitality of nature, whose manifestation in man they consider as vulgar. Hence the conflict in Lettie when she is attracted by life and love, for while denying them she longs for them. Culture, that is intellectual and artistic achievement, is often considered by the female characters as an alternative to real life and, as such, rejected by Lawrence. He criticizes the role of religion, more particularly of the Christian ideal, which has raised woman on a pedestal through exaggerated reverence for maternity.



The supremacy of woman in the home deprives man of his natural authority and woman of her belief in man. Even Emily, who has found happiness away from the "torture of strange, complex modern life," is the mistress, "quiet and self-assured, [Tom] her rejoiced husband and servant." Mrs. Beardsall, Lettie, Meg, and Gertie are "white peacocks" just as much as Lady Crystabel. They illustrate the growing ascendancy of woman in modern society as a result of the humiliation they have inflicted on man by despising his manhood, but also as a result of man's incapacity or unwillingness to resist the violation. Long after he wrote *The White Peacock*, Lawrence explained this process in a passage of *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, which is an appropriate comment on Lettie and Leslie's relationship :

Now in what we call the natural mode, man has his positivity in the volitional centres, and woman in the sympathetic. In fulfilling the Christian love ideal, however, men have reversed this. Man has assumed the gentle, all-sympathetic role, and woman has become the energetic party, with the authority in her hands. The male is the sensitive, sympathetic nature, the woman the active, effective, authoritative. . . . The woman is now the initiator, man the responder. . . . And in certain periods, such as the present, the majority of men concur in regarding woman as the source of life, the first term in creation : woman the mother, the prime being. And the whole polarity shifts over. Man still remains the doer and thinker. But he is also in the service of emotional and procreative woman. (pp. 94-95)

In a way, George's downfall and degradation through drink is a refusal to yield to the Christian love ideal and to submit to Meg or Lettie. He is confused, degraded, but as he drifts towards death, he also drifts beyond the reach of woman's influence and out of a situation which he never fully understood. He rightly tells Cyril,

'I am born a generation too soon—I wasn't ripe enough when I came. I wanted something I hadn't got. I'm something short. . . . I came too soon ; or I wanted something that would ha' made me grow fierce.' (p. 371)

George lacks the mental consciousness which, if linked with physical consciousness, would have made him a complete being, capable of fully assuming his responsibilities and of asserting



himself. In Lawrence's first novel the hero fails for want of understanding and of mind-consciousness, whereas in his later work, he is destroyed by an excess of both either in himself or in his partner.

George's downfall is a misleading conclusion, the more so as it might be interpreted as a consequence of his refusal to give in to Christian idealism. In fact, it follows from Lettie's rejection and results mainly from his incapacity to answer a need which he cannot even clearly define. Lawrence had evidently been struck by the degeneracy of man through drink; such disintegration is exemplified twice in the story. But whereas he seems to sympathize with Lettie and Cyril's father and stresses the responsibility of their mother, he arouses little sympathy for George. The latter's downfall is the more humiliating as he is not a man for whom drink is the only answer. He does try to understand what he lacks, he does try to find a purpose, and after rejecting what Lawrence himself criticizes, he is left with no other way out but drink. However, this flaw in the novel does not obscure Lawrence's vision, his passion for all that partakes of life, whether in nature or in human beings, which he opposes to non-life, idealism and a will-to-power which kills the free expression of man. *The White Peacock* forebodes man's complete alienation from nature and the development of a matriarchal society in England.

In *Sons and Lovers* (1913) nature takes on a new significance: it is a responsive environment in which man perceives an echo of his moral state. Once during a quarrel Morel locks his wife out in the garden. After the first moment of revolt Mrs. Morel, who is pregnant, finds peace in the quietness of the evening:

Mrs. Morel leaned on the garden gate, looking out, and she lost herself awhile. She did not know what she thought. Except for a slight feeling of sickness, and her consciousness in the child, herself melted out like scent into the shiny, pale air. After a time the child, too, melted with her in the mixing-pot of moonlight, and she rested with the hills and lilies and houses, all swum together in a kind of swoon.<sup>1</sup>

This immersion with her child in the darkness is a source of comfort to her, whereas when he sleeps in an open field Morel

<sup>1</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *Sons and Lovers*, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 35.

feels queer and shrinks physically as he shrinks morally. Flowers are the major natural element in the novel; they are an important witness in all the love scenes between Paul and his mother, Miriam, or Clara. It even seems that the characters' attitude to flowers is the same as their attitude to people. Miriam worships them as she worships Paul. Paul and his mother take them for what they are and derive much joy from them. Clara refuses to pick them because she says it kills them, but after her love-making with Paul she is glad to accept them as a tribute to her womanhood. In their passionate love-making Paul and Clara commune with nature, are lost in the Infinite, gaining a strength which establishes them firmly in their own separateness and in the belief in life which ultimately saves them :

After such an evening they were both very still, having known the immensity of passion. . . . It was for each of them an initiation and a satisfaction. To know their own nothingness, to know the tremendous living flood which carried them always, gave them rest within themselves. If so great a magnificent power could overwhelm them, identify them altogether with itself, so that they knew they were only grains in the tremendous heave that lifted every grass-blade its little height, and every tree, and living thing, then why fret about themselves? They could let themselves be carried by life, and they felt a sort of peace each in the other. There was a verification, which they had had together. Nothing could nullify it, nothing could take it away; it was almost their belief in life. (pp. 430-1)

When Paul is fulfilled through passion, he never feels alone with Clara, but they are swept along with the whole universe in a great flame of life. On the other hand, when his mother dies, Paul is alienated from nature as he is from life.

Willey Farm and the home of the Morels are both typical of the changing economic structure of England. Willey Farm is pleasant, warm and brimming with life, but it is unprofitable and overrun by rabbits, a sign of the decay of agricultural England. The Morel home illustrates the living conditions created by the invasion of industrialism. But the mining community is still rural, and if any criticism of industrialism is implied in *Sons and Lovers*, it is obviously not intended as a deliberate condemnation of the system. Lawrence does not criticize the kind of work the miners

do. Rather the contrary! The only reference to industrialism is when Paul Morel-Lawrence feels threatened by it:

Already he was a prisoner of industrialism. Large sunflowers stared over the old red wall of the garden opposite, looking in their jolly way down on the women who were hurrying with something for dinner. The valley was full of corn, brightening in the sun. Two collieries, among the fields, waved their small white plumes of steam. Far off on the hills were the woods of Annesley, dark and fascinating. Already his heart went down. He was being taken into bondage. His freedom in the beloved home valley was going now. (p. 114)

Lawrence merely expresses here the fear of an extremely sensitive boy, forced to look for a job when he has no particular qualifications, and his reluctance to enter the cold, efficient world of business. These feelings are due to the lack of confidence, the humiliation and the uncertainty which the search for a job induces in an adolescent. Lawrence did not yet bear industrialism any definite grudge, for once his hatred was aroused, he was sharp enough in his denunciation. Compare with the following scene Ursula's impression in *The Rainbow* of a small mining town as a "formless, squalid mass" and of its colliery as "the great machine which has taken us all captives":

'What a pity there is a coal-pit where it is so pretty!' said Clara.

'Do you think so?' he answered. 'You see, I am so used to it I should miss it. No; and I like the pits here and there. I like the rows of trucks, and the headstocks, and the steam in the daytime, and the lights at night. When I was a boy, I always thought a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night was a pit, with its steam, and its lights, and the burning bank—and I thought the Lord was always at the pit-top.' (p. 389)

The first part of *Sons and Lovers* throws light on the richness of religion and tradition as sources of fulfilment but also on their oppressive influence on the community. The conflict which arises between Paul Morel's parents very soon after their marriage and degenerates into a lifelong struggle does not merely result from the incompatibility of their characters; it originates in the collision

of two forces deeply rooted in English communal life : its vitality and its puritanism. Mrs. Morel had been attracted by the warmth and the pleasantness of her husband. He was a miner ignorant of the life of the mind but full of gaiety and joy of living, while she " loved ideas and was considered intellectual " :

She was a puritan, like her father, high-minded, and really stern. Therefore the dusky, golden softness of this man's sensuous flame of life, that flowed off his flesh like the flame from a candle, not baffled and gripped into incandescence by thought and spirit as her life was, seemed to her something wonderful, beyond her. (p. 18)

After a few months of marriage, Mrs. Morel realizes that she has been deceived by her husband about what he owns, and she cannot forgive him the lie. Gradually, she comes to despise him, and he starts neglecting her. She no longer thinks him noble but shallow, as if he were all pleasantness and joy of living but had no backbone :

There began a battle between husband and wife—a fearful, bloody battle that ended only with the death of one. She fought to make him undertake his own responsibilities, to make him fulfil his obligations. But he was too different from her. His nature was purely sensuous, and she strove to make him moral, religious. She tried to force him to face things. He could not endure it—it drove him out of his mind. (p. 23)

Instead of asserting his authority in the house through sheer common sense and acceptance of his responsibilities, Morel takes refuge in the pub and withdraws from the family life, while she ceases to care for him :

Nevertheless, she still continued to strive with him. She still had her high moral sense, inherited from generations of Puritans. It was now a religious instinct, and she was almost a fanatic with him, because she loved him, or had loved him. If he sinned, she tortured him. If he drank, and lied, was often a poltroon, sometimes a knave, she wielded the lash unmercifully. . . . She could not be content with the little he might be ; she would have him the much that he ought to be. So, in seeking to make him nobler than he could be, she destroyed him. (p. 25)

Paul Morel was born at a time when his parents had already started to quarrel. As a child, he seems to feel the discord between his parents and to be aware of his mother's suffering. The chapters dealing with Paul Morel's childhood are unparalleled for their psychological insight into a child's feelings and for their penetration into the causes which bring about the deterioration of a husband-wife relationship, but also as a social document. This is because Lawrence treats seriously the child's feelings and the circumstances which prompted them. He does not dismiss them as adults so often do when they have outgrown a particular situation. The emotional life of the Morels was exceptional because, as a miner's wife, Mrs. Morel was probably exceptional. But their living conditions were similar to those of any miner's family: the smallness of the house, in which privacy is hardly possible, makes co-existence more difficult. On the other hand, when all is well, an atmosphere of warmth and closeness makes it very congenial.

The period while the children are growing up is on the whole a period of suffering for the mother. Yet, she never forgets her grudge against the father, she never forgives him, never has a kind or tender impulse towards him. She cannot help hardening against him when she is offended; his vulgar manners, which she can never ignore, irritate her and destroy her feeling for him as surely as a serious failing:

Immediately he had finished tea he rose with alacrity to go out. It was this alacrity, this haste to be gone which so sickened Mrs. Morel. As she heard him sousing heartily in cold water, heard the eager scratch of the steel comb on the side of the bowl, as he wetted his hair, she closed her eyes in disgust. As he bent over, lacing his boots, there was a certain vulgar gusto in his movement that divided him from the reserved, watchful rest of the family. He always ran away from the battle with himself. Even in his own heart's privacy, he excused himself. (p. 57)

In spite of Lawrence's bias towards his mother, Mrs. Morel appears as a hard, unbending woman who leaves her husband no chance. Morel is humiliated, and he is ashamed of the pain he inflicts. It is true that he is afraid of his wife, rather a coward, perhaps because her superiority makes him take it for granted that he is no match for her. He refuses to acknowledge his faults

because he has the impression that she is indifferent to what *he* feels, and he is mortified by the fact that she always proves the stronger of the two. That is why he tries to mask his weakness and to assert his authority brutally when he knows he is wrong. On the other hand, the kind of community they live in has nothing to offer except hard work and the pub. To a woman, it offers nothing but the chapel.

According to some critics, Lawrence attempted in *Sons and Lovers* to make up for *The White Peacock*, in which, they say, the mother is presented unfavourably. Actually, Lawrence's attitude is ambivalent in both novels. *Sons and Lovers* is a homage to his mother; yet, judging by his own standards, her portrait in the novel is not wholly favourable. The hero sympathizes with her, but the pathetic casting off of the father from the family circle shows to what extent and how early as an adult Lawrence had fathomed the nature of the conflict between his parents. Mrs. Morel is both admirable and life-destroying, breaking her husband's spirit and inflicting a psychological wound on her sons. For when she is finally disappointed in Morel, she turns to her children with eagerness, and her love is at the same time deep and terribly exacting. By turning to her children for love, Mrs. Morel compels them to share in her sufferings, not intentionally, but inevitably. They cannot help noticing their father's alination. The extraordinary intensity of her love and their natural response make them acutely conscious of whatever she feels. Years after writing *Sons and Lovers* Lawrence criticized that attitude in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*:

It is despicable for any one parent to accept a child's sympathy against the other parent. And the one who receives the sympathy is always more contemptible than the one who is hated. (p. 93)

In the Morel family the children's sympathy for their mother makes them extremely sensitive and mature at an untimely age. On the other hand, Mrs. Morel imparts to them her vitality and strength. She experiences with her sons an intimacy at once enriching and frustrating for the boys. William's death is a terrible blow to her, and for a few months she becomes indifferent to the rest of the family until Paul himself becomes dangerously ill:



He grew worse and the crisis approached. One night he tossed into consciousness in the ghastly, sickly feeling of dissolution, when all the cells in the body seem in intense irritability to be breaking down, and consciousness makes a last flare of struggle, like madness.

'I s'll die, mother!', he cried, heaving for breath on the pillow.

She lifted him up, crying in a small voice:

'Oh, my son—my son!'

That brought him to. He realised her. His whole will rose up and arrested him. He put his head on her breast, and took ease of her for love. (p. 175)

This scene has often been interpreted as a typical manifestation of oedipal love. John Middleton-Murry writes:

It is terribly poignant, and terribly wrong. Almost better that a boy should die than have such an effort forced upon him by such means.<sup>1</sup>

What means can one expect a mother to use in such circumstances except her love? Isn't it perfectly natural for a mother who has just lost a son and is on the point of losing another, to appeal desperately to the latter's love for her, which, she feels, is her ultimate resort to make him *will* to live. Paul is indeed young to be appealed to in that way, but they are already so intimate, so conscious of each other's feelings, so attentive to each other's joys and sufferings, that this is merely an extreme manifestation of their love in a moment of crisis. The appeal is to her child, whether boy or girl; there is nothing incestuous in it. The incest motive is present in *Sons and Lovers* and very important, but it seems to me that it is usually absent from the scenes of great dramatic intensity, precisely because the poignancy of such scenes divests them of any ambiguity and makes them stand out in all innocence. The incest motive develops later and is a source of conflict between Paul and his mother when he falls in love with Miriam. Yet, the real cause of this conflict is not merely his incapacity to love a girl because of his mother. The conflict arises because Miriam cannot love him unreservedly, just as she cannot have normal relations with other people. The confusion she arouses

<sup>1</sup> JOHN MIDDLETON-MURRY, *Son of Woman*, London, 1932, p. 30.

in the young man's soul, added to the emotional entanglement produced by the intensity of his love for his mother and to the latter's disapproval of Miriam, makes him relate the two problems, but to say that Mrs. Morel prevents him from loving Miriam is to oversimplify.

Miriam and Paul are about fifteen when they meet. The boy is struck at once by her romanticism, her passionate nature, the earnestness with which everything in her life is made a source of fulfilment or a trial to the soul. Miriam is constantly reminded by her mother of the religious significance of the smallest action or event. She sometimes resents her mother's meekness and doctrine of "the other cheek," but she allows herself to be moulded by them. Paul likes to work on Willey Farm with the boys. He soon discovers their over-sensitiveness and gentleness under their apparent coarseness. At first, the religious intensity which prevails in their home and fascinates him counterbalances happily the influence of his mother, particularly in his work. For Mrs. Morel is not really interested in his painting but in himself and in what he will achieve. She makes him "quietly determined, patient, dogged, unwearied," whereas Mrs. Leivers and her children "make him glow to his work." As he becomes more intimate with Miriam, Paul is both stimulated by her deep emotional nature and repelled by the eagerness with which she drives the most ordinary feeling up to an emotional pitch. He is the more thankful then for the wholesome nature of his mother.

In her record of D.H. Lawrence's early life Jessie Chambers, "E.T.," the original of Miriam, has given a very interesting account of their activities during their adolescent years. Their life centered around the Congregational chapel and the literary society so that religion was the source of intellectual and spiritual accomplishment. It remained so even after Lawrence started to question the orthodox creed: religion and the excellent sermons they heard at the Congregational chapel were always favourite subjects of discussion with Miriam and the other members of her family. However, whereas E.T. stresses the influence of religion on their intellectual training, Lawrence shows its cramping influence on Miriam. She cannot enjoy life because she cannot take it as it is but always raises it to an abstract plane, whether intellectual or spiritual, and Paul resents her earnest, joyless ecstasies: "I'm so damned spiritual with you always!" (p. 232) A significant passage in the novel

shows how Miriam, denying the physical aspect of life, subtly distorts the simplicity and openness of their relationship :

Miriam was exceedingly sensitive, as her mother had always been. The slightest grossness made her recoil almost in anguish. Her brothers were brutal, but never coarse in speech. The men did all the discussing of farm matters outside. But, perhaps, because of the continual business of birth and begetting which goes on upon every farm, Miriam was the more hypersensitive to the matter, and her blood was chastened almost to disgust of the faintest suggestion of such intercourse. Paul took his pitch from her, and their intimacy went on in an utterly blanced and chaste fashion. It could never be mentioned that the mare was in foal. (p. 201)

When they can no longer deny even to themselves that they are falling in love, Miriam is full of shame at the idea of wanting Paul, while he, taking his clue from her, is always abstract with her and starts to recoil from her physically. Paul hates her for making him despise himself and lose his ease and naturalness. He is also humiliated, for it is evident from the beginning that Miriam considers any physical relation with Paul as a " sacrifice " on her part. Here is the real source of the conflict between Paul and Miriam and *not* in Mrs. Morel's intervention. Mrs. Morel is jealous because " Miriam is one of those who will want to suck a man's soul till he has none of his own left. " (p. 237) She realizes that her son is tormented, and she cannot forgive Miriam for making him suffer. It could be objected to this that Paul is incapable of arousing physical desire in Miriam because of his immoderate love for his mother. Yet, it is clear that his affair with Clara is wholly successful. One therefore gets the impression that if he had met a woman who could have gratified him both physically and spiritually, his mother couldn't have stopped him.<sup>1</sup> When Miriam eventually accepts to make love, " she submits religiously to the sacrifice. " (p. 347) They seldom reach the " impersonality of passion " in their love-making ; Paul is always left with a sense of failure and death. He is right when he says that her purity is

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Morel says herself : " If he had made up his mind, nothing on earth could alter him. " (p. 342) Moreover, Paul's neglect of his mother when he is taken up with another woman makes it clear that she is not the real obstacle to his love affairs.

more like nullity, for she is neither ignorant of sex nor innocent. Once she tells Paul: "All my life Mother said to me, 'there is one thing in marriage that is always dreadful, but you have to bear it.' And I believed it." (p. 355) Miriam confesses here the true reason of her frigidity or of her distorted attitude towards physical love, and, in a way, she acknowledges her failure, though she attributes it to her religious upbringing and the influence of her mother. Paul's mother is also a Puritan, but she has known physical passion and remembers it proudly even after her husband has become a complete stranger to her.

All through the ups and downs of their relationship and even after their final parting Miriam is confident that in the end Paul will come back to her and will gladly resume their soul intimacy. She despises the man in him and always refers to his virility as to the child in him. Paul is terribly hurt when he realizes that she has always thought so while she showed him such reverence. Because she has the key to his soul and because she is the only one who really understands his work, she believes that the spirituality of her love is her surest warrant, that what she calls "the best in him" will triumph. Mark Spilka makes a very interesting point when he compares Miriam to Hermione Rodice. He sees in her "a decided forerunner of those feminine creatures of intellect and will whom Lawrence would later deplore as spiritual vampires."<sup>1</sup> It is indeed the abstract nature of her love for Paul and her belief that their love must be primarily spiritual and idealistic which leads Miriam to discomfiture; it leads to her sexual failure, and in the end that failure entails a spiritual defeat as well. Lawrence asserts implicitly but clearly the interdependence between physical and spiritual fulfilment.

Mrs. Morel accepts more easily Paul's relationship with Clara, because Paul goes to her for passion only. From the start, she realizes that Clara is not big enough for her son, and she feels sorry for her. Clara, with her grudge against men and her desire to be independent, is a wounded woman who has never known real passion with her husband and whose aggressiveness towards

<sup>1</sup> Mark SPILKA, *The Love Ethic of D.H. Lawrence*, Bloomington, 1957, p. 68. My interpretation of the problem of love in *Sons and Lovers* owes much to Mark Spilka's study.

men is self-protective. But again, if Paul and Clara fail to achieve a successful relationship, it is not at bottom because of Mrs. Morel. Their passion is purely sensual; it cannot last because he wants her to be something that she cannot be, and she is soon dissatisfied because she realizes that she has no hold over the vital part in him. She does not even know what this vital part is, which proves her own shortcoming. So their love disintegrates, but she has at least gained assurance from her experience with Paul. She goes back to her husband, mollified, for after all she has failed to make Paul really love her.

As Paul and Clara's passion subsides, Paul comes back to his mother. When he hears that she suffers from an incurable disease, he gives free course to the obsessive quality of his love for her. To insist on Miriam's and Clara's responsibility for their own failure with Paul is not to deny the exceptional nature of his love for his mother. It is to recognize that neither Miriam nor Clara can outdo Mrs. Morel because she is superior to them. Indeed, when Paul says that he can never really love another woman while she lives, it is partly because of the abnormal intensity of his love for her, but also because he has never met a woman who could match her. When the children are young, they all share their life with her, do things for her, tell her everything, look up to her as to the remarkable woman she is. She has none of the cramping spirituality of Miriam, and she is frankly enthusiastic about life and man's participation in it. On their way home from Willey Farm, she is struck by Mr. Leivers's vitality and by Mrs. Leivers's plaintive gentleness, and exclaims:

'Now *wouldn't* I help that man! *Wouldn't* I see to the fowls and the young stock! And *I'd* learn to milk, and *I'd* talk with him, and *I'd* plan with him, my word, if I were his wife, the farm would be run, I know!' (p. 160)

However, after the death of William, her life "roots itself in Paul"; the excess of her love for him, their dependence on each other for life and the emptiness of her existence without him, make him dote on his mother with the attentiveness of a lover rather than a son's, and this makes conflict inevitable when he is drawn to another woman. Once Mrs. Morel gets particularly worked up against Miriam, and when Paul tells her that he doesn't love



Miriam but merely likes to talk with her, Mrs. Morel asks him what they share that she couldn't share as well :

' You're old, Mother, and we're young. '

He only meant that the interests of *her* age were not the interests of his. But he realized the moment he had spoken that he had said the wrong thing.

' Yes, I know it well—I am old. And therefore I may stand aside ; I have nothing more to do with you. You only want me to wait on you—the rest is for Miriam. '

He could not bear it. Instinctively he realized that he was life to her. And, after all, she was the chief thing to him, the only supreme thing.

' You know it isn't, Mother, you know it isn't ! '

She was moved to pity by his cry.

' It looks a great deal like it, ' she said, half putting aside her despair.

' No, Mother—I really *don't* love her. I talk to her, but I want to come home to you. '

He had taken off his collar and tie, and rose, bare-throated, to go to bed. As he stooped to kiss his mother, she threw her arms round his neck, hid her face on his shoulder, and cried, in a whimpering voice, so unlike her own that he writhed in agony :

' I can't bear it. I could let another woman—but not her. She'd leave me no room, not a bit of room— — '

And immediately he hated Miriam bitterly.

' And I've never—you know, Paul—I've never had a husband—not really— — '

He stroked his mother's hair, and his mouth was on her throat.

' And she exults so in taking you from me—she's not like ordinary girls. '

' Well, I don't love her, Mother, ' he murmured, bowing his head and hiding his eyes on her shoulder in misery. His mother kissed him a long, fervent kiss.

' My boy ! ' she said, in a voice trembling with passionate love. Without knowing, he gently stroked her face.

' There, ' said his mother, now go to bed. You'll be so tired in the morning. ' As she was speaking she heard her husband coming. ' There's your father—now go. ' Suddenly she looked at him almost as if in fear. ' Perhaps I'm selfish. If you want her, take her, my boy. '

His mother looked so strange. Paul kissed her, trembling.

' Ha—Mother ! ' he said softly.

Morel came in, walking unevenly. His hat was over one corner of his eye. He balanced in the doorway.



'At your mischief again?' he said venomously.  
Mrs. Morel's emotion turned into sudden hate of the drunkard who had come in thus upon her. (pp. 261-2)

Here Mrs. Morel's jealousy and the extravagance of her love are manifestly oedipal; the scene suggests, as Lawrence explains later in *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*, that the incest-motive has its origin in the dissatisfaction of a parent unsuccessfully married. As we have suggested earlier, the failure of Paul's relationship with Miriam is not due to Mrs. Morel. Yet there is something incestuous in the mother-son relationship: Mrs. Morel obviously expects Paul to compensate for her unhappy marriage, and, therefore, Miriam becomes the enemy. Henceforward, Paul's love for his mother becomes a source of annihilation, the "quick of the trouble," because she is made the ideal to which his own life is sacrificed. During the last months of her life he really behaves like a lover to her, and he feels that he is drifting towards spiritual death as she drifts towards physical death. Yet the harrowing situation, made more tragic yet by her unflinching will to hold on to life, invests their relationship with a new innocence and a dramatic intensity which culminates in her death. Though he does not want to die, Paul is pulled towards death by his overpowering, obsessive, destructive love for his mother:

His mother had really supported his life. He had loved her; they two had, in fact, faced the world together. Now she was gone, and for ever behind him was the gap in life, the tear in the veil, through which his life seemed to drift slowly as if he were drawn towards death. He wanted someone of their own free initiative to help him. The lesser things began to let go from him, for fear of this big thing, the lapse towards death, following in the wake of his beloved. (p. 495)

For weeks he is prostrate, overwhelmed with despair. He stands completely alone, having finally parted with Clara and Miriam, but he does not follow his mother into the night, he turns to life:

But no, he would not give in. Turning sharply, he walked towards the city's phosphorescence. His fists were shut, his mouth set fast. He would not take that direction, to the darkness, to follow her. He walked towards the faintly humming, glowing town quickly. (p. 511)

Paul's will to live, his implicit assertion of his belief in life derive from his experience with his mother and with Clara. If his mother has had a sterilizing influence because of her excessive love, she has also imparted to him her wonderful vitality. From Clara he has received the baptism of life which made a man of him. These combined influences eventually give him the strength to resist death and to start life as a full-grown man. Paul has known three forms of love which in their different ways have contributed to his making. But all three of them are unsatisfactory: they lead ultimately to a cleavage in man's sensibility and can be a source of weakening for his manhood. In their own ways, Miriam, Clara, and above all Mrs. Morel, point to the female characters in Lawrence's later novels whose possessive love is a source of destruction and disintegration in society. My opinion that Miriam and Clara share with Mrs. Morel the responsibility for the inner split in Paul, may seem to contradict Lawrence's own explanation of the novel to Garnett,<sup>1</sup> which is often taken literally by critics and is their main guide to interpretation. One should remember Lawrence's advice: "Never trust the artist, trust the tale." Indeed, *Sons and Lovers* gives ample evidence of an artistic exploration deeper than Lawrence's understanding of his own situation as expressed to Garnett at the time. Moreover, there is no real contradiction but rather a qualification since the mother does not fight against a woman who could make her son happy but against a woman who offers an incomplete and distorted relationship.

*Sons and Lovers* contains implicitly the major problems and attitudes that Lawrence explores more fully in his later novels. The influence of women on Paul's life and Mrs. Morel's destruction of her husband as well as her powerful impact on her sons show to what extent women interfere in the direction of man's existence:

Now she had two sons in the world. She could think of two places, great centres of industry, and feel that she had put a man in each of them, that these men would work out what she wanted. (p. 127)

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence explains that by keeping the soul of her sons, the mother provokes a split in them. Letter to Edward Garnett, 14 Nov., 1912. *The Letters of D.H. Lawrence*, edited by Aldous Huxley, London, 1956, pp. 76-77.

As in *The White Peacock*, Lawrence describes the part played by religion in the annihilation of the human personality. On the other hand, religion is presented here also as a factor of intellectual fulfilment and spiritual richness. Even Mrs. Leivers' and Miriam's intense spirituality are in a way beneficial. If in real life Lawrence became an agnostic, he did not lose his religious intensity: it characterizes most of his work. Lawrence's first two novels exemplify the twofold influence of the Puritan tradition. In some of its aspects this tradition goes back to the early days of puritanism, when the Puritans developed a strong individualism and an unrelenting preoccupation with morals as a result of their sense of personal responsibility towards God. This is constantly felt in the attitude of Mrs. Beardsall, Mrs. Leivers and particularly Mrs. Morel, who fights obstinately to make her husband "better." A man like Walter Morel, who is a product of another tradition in English life, namely of the vitality which comes from a constant participation in the life of the community, but who lacks the self-control, the self-reliance and the self-righteousness characteristic of the Puritan middle class, is made to lose faith in himself and destroyed as a human being. Miriam's habit of spiritualizing or idealizing the most natural human impulses while ignoring the life of the body also has its source in puritanism. The emphasis on morals in the Puritan way of life had received a new impetus in the nineteenth century. But morality also came to be associated with prosperity, which was a convenient way of accounting for material success and gave the individual an additional reason for wanting to improve himself in order to achieve financial independence. It is to this aspect of the Puritan tradition that Lawrence attributes the materialism of the lower middle class and the individual's ambition to rise in the world, which destroyed community life in England.<sup>1</sup>

The greatest achievement in *Sons and Lovers* is the exploration of a complex emotional situation. It stresses the importance of the mother-figure, its destructiveness as well as the sterility of woman's idealism. Yet, she is not finally responsible for her

<sup>1</sup> In his essay "Nottingham and the Mining Country-side" Lawrence explains that in his childhood the miners still formed an intimate community in which "the physical, instinctive, and intuitional contact between men [was] very highly developed." But when they came home, they had to contend with the nagging materialism of their wives. See *Phoenix*, p. 136.

partner's loss of manhood. If Walter Morel is destroyed, he is as guilty as his wife because he is a coward who would not stand by what he is. Woman asserts her supremacy, but man is free to accept it or reject it. Women take the lead because men are not strong enough morally, yet they secretly desire to keep faith in men. This may not be true of Miriam, who wants to be the mistress of Paul's soul, but Clara is glad in the end to submit to her husband and to serve him. Even Mrs. Morel, who is undeniably the moral authority in the household, acknowledges very subtly the man in Morel in the way she serves him, and the family is expected to do the same. Mrs. Morel is also glad to serve her sons because they are men. Woman is gaining ascendancy, but she does not yet take her supremacy for granted.

In *The Rainbow* (1915) the desire of women to turn to the world "where men moved dominant and creative" (p. 2) is a much more deeply felt ambition. Lawrence describes the relationships between husband and wife over three generations and unmistakably associates the accession of women to a new kind of freedom with the collapse of community life. Witness the chasm between Lydia and her grand-daughter Ursula and the consequences of their attitude on the people around them. The introduction to the Brangwen family portraying the men "facing inwards to the teeming life of creation" (p. 3) conveys a feeling of permanency and social stability through the men's attachment to the earth. They have no desire to change, and their contentment is the surest warrant of the stability of their way of life. It is true that while the husband "looked out at the back at sky and harvest and beast and land," his wife

looked from the front of her house towards the activity of man in the world at large, she strained her eyes to see what man had done in fighting outwards to knowledge, she strained to hear how he uttered himself in his conquest, her deepest desire hung on the battle that she heard, far off being waged on the edge of the unknown. She also wanted to know, and to be of the fighting host. (p. 3)

Such desires were still too inarticulate and too vague to arouse restlessness or any kind of action. The continuity in the Brangwen family is further preserved by Lydia Lensky. She makes her

husband conscious of what he is, gives him confidence and brings their marriage to its full consummation: "She waited for him to meet her, not to bow before her and serve her. She wanted his active participation, not his submission." (p. 86) When they find each other after a period of hesitation and difficulty and are transfigured by their love, their child Anna feels the strength and security of their union and is at peace between them.

She looked from one to the other, and she saw them established for her safety, and she was free. She played between the pillar of fire and the pillar of cloud in confidence, having the assurance on her right hand and the assurance on her left. (p. 88)

Though life at the Marsh is obviously a factor of social well-being and safety, Tom and Lydia find their fulfilment in each other alone, and their relations with the community is not explored or even shown in the novel.

The second generation of Brangwens is unable to preserve the peaceful security of Tom and Lydia. As a girl, Anna wants to escape the potent intimacy of her parents, but when she mixes with other people, she cannot stand their "thinness" and comes home "diminished," "belittled." She wants some sort of ratification of the spirit, and this, of course, her parents cannot give her:

She tried to discuss people, she wanted to know what was meant. But her father became uneasy. He did not want to have things dragged into consciousness. (p. 96)

She is momentarily appeased by her passion for her cousin Will, but after the first raptures of her union with him she returns to the outside world, fiercer in her determination to escape the dark power of the blood. Will has the obscure, passionate soul of the Brangwens and prefers "things he cannot understand with the mind." (p. 154) She resists his dark power and jeers at his inclination for the mysterious, the unknown:

He did not care about himself as a human being. He did not attach any vital importance to his life in the drafting office, or his life among men. The verity was his connection with Anna and his connection with the Church, his real



being lay in dark, emotional experience of the Infinite, the Absolute. (p. 148)

This exasperates Anna for whom *thought* is more important than this dark, instinctive intuition of the world, and she is furious with Will for his total neglect of the mind. Their life together alternates between love and conflict, fierce battles and periods of perfect bliss. In no other novel has Lawrence embodied so successfully his conception of the dual nature of marriage. Anna emerges victorious, as it seems woman usually does, except in the case of Birkin and Ursula or Constance Chatterley and Mellors. Neither Will nor Anna develops harmoniously or reaches the kind of perfection symbolized by the rainbow, the harmonious fusion of the seen and the unseen: in spirit Will is "uncreated"; he is aware of his limitations, of "some folded centres of darkness which would never develop and unfold whilst he was alive in the body." (p. 223) Anna's soul finds no utterance. Yet, in time they achieve some kind of fulfilment. Their love becomes mere sensuality "violent and extreme as death," and their intense physical communion allows them to find themselves. Anna is enriched by her successive pregnancies. As to Will,

his intimate life was so violently active, that it set another man free in him. And this new man turned with interest to public life, to see what part he could take in it. This would give him scope for new activity, activity of a kind for which he was now created and released. He wanted to be unanimous with the whole of purposive mankind. (p. 223)

Obviously, Lawrence thinks that physical gratification can be a source of creative energy and stimulate man to activities that will establish his position among other men. The second generation find their way through many joys and sufferings, but their achievement, valuable as it is in itself, is necessarily more limited than that of the first generation or of Ursula in the third. If Tom Brangwen missed some kind of spiritual fulfilment, he was not aware of it and was content for most of his life with his marriage to Lydia. He comes to a crisis when Anna gets married, because he cannot bear losing her; he wants the "further, the creative life" with the girl. But this is the sudden realization by a middle-aged



man, married to a wife older than himself and tired, that youth escapes him and that there is no return. He shows no regret for the way his life has been spent, and the main impression remains that he and his wife were fully gratified and that their existence together was a lasting achievement. It is not so with Will Brangwen, who in spite of his social advancement and the satisfaction he and his wife have known, is seen by Birkin in *Women in Love* as a

strange, inexplicable, almost patternless collection of passions and desires and suppressions and traditions and mechanical ideas, all cast unfused and disunited into the slender, bright-faced man of nearly fifty, who was as unresolved now as he was at twenty, and as uncreated. (p. 268)

This failure to reach harmony in middle age is due to his and his wife's incapacity to unite body and soul. They are not alone responsible for it. Tom Brangwen had a natural support in his connection with the land and in the tradition of an agricultural community in which he and his wife were integrated. It is not so with Will Brangwen, who finds no pleasure in the work he does at the office and must discover other sources of joy and satisfaction—in his wood-carving and his night-school venture. At the same time he contends with a wife who wants to assert herself, although her aspirations are somewhat ill-defined. She does not try to meet him on equal terms as her mother had done with her husband; she asserts her will and denies him as master of the household. Actually, she stands half-way between Lydia and Ursula; her life marks a transition which points to woman's emancipation and her supremacy in society. Moreover, other traditional values lose their significance. Will Brangwen is also deprived of the support of the Church. The Cathedral had been to him a means of reaching the Absolute. But this is another illusion which Anna destroys, drawing his attention to life outside the church. He still loves it but "for what it tried to represent rather than for that which it did represent." In the same way, his daughter Ursula, who from childhood responds to him subtly "out of her conscious darkness" and is sensitive to the sensual power of the Brangwens, craves as a girl for "some spirituality and stateliness." Her passionate nature finds an outlet in a mystic and visionary religion and in her love for a remote, non-human Christ, but the impact of every-day life is too strong,

and she fails to reconcile the two. "The confusing of the spirit world with the material world, in her own soul, degraded her." (p. 270)

Ursula is freer and much more articulate than her mother. As a child, she loves her father passionately. The conflict which at moments tears her parents does not escape her; she never experiences the sense of security which Anna had felt between Tom and Lydia, so that very early she wishes to escape from home, a feeling which in spite of her aspirations Anna never experienced. The latter's repeated maternities are distasteful to Ursula, who soon learns to despise motherhood as a form of fulfilment. Since she goes to school in Nottingham, she rises above the level of village life and achieves the old dream of the Brangwen women to belong to the world of knowledge and creative activity. Thus the process of emancipation is accomplished. But the new consciousness of women is not only a coming to life. Something else has died that she might live, and her freedom is also the outcome of a slow disintegration. Ursula learns at her own expense that the world she so much craves to enter is far colder and more cruel than the warm and, to her, enchanting atmosphere of the past in her grandmother's home. She insists on taking a job as a teacher much against her father's will and immediately comes into contact with a hard reality. The school is a prison in which she must renounce her individuality. Moreover, she is disappointed in her experience of college, from which she had expected so much. At first, learning is a source of joy, but when the glamour has worn off, she realizes that "the professors are no priests initiated into the deep mysteries of life and knowledge." College becomes

a second-hand dealer's shop, and one bought an equipment for an examination. This was only a little side-show to the factories of the town. Gradually the perception stole into her. This was no religious retreat, no seclusion of pure learning. It was a little apprentice-shop where one was further equipped for making money. The college itself was a little, slovenly laboratory for the factory. . . . All the while it was a sham store, a sham warehouse, with a single motive of material gain, and no productivity. It pretended to exist by the religious virtue of knowledge. But the religious virtue of knowledge was become a flunkey to the god of material success. (pp. 410-11)

Ursula's passionate youth is spent in repeated endeavours to find herself and to discover some mystery in life, to reach some kind of fulfilment not clearly defined to herself until the end of the novel. She is too one-sided, giving expression now to the spiritual now to the sensual in her. She feels she must take her place in the working world, but she is appalled at its callousness, repelled by the stress on material life so different from the contempt in which it was held in her own home. "Everything went to produce vulgar things, to encumber material life." (p. 411) She has received from the Brangwens that impetus towards a fuller life which marks them all. But the world which makes the emancipation of woman possible is ugly and cold; its sterility suggests death rather than life. The industrial town Ursula visits "has no meeting place, no centre, no artery, no organic formation." (p. 326) The men who live in such a place cannot give it life because they are themselves enslaved by the machine. Winifred, who submits to the machine deliberately, almost cynically, is aware of its power:

It is the same everywhere. It is the office, or the shop or the business that gets the man, the woman gets the bit the shop can't digest. What is he at home, a man? He is a meaningless lump—a standing machine, a machine out of work. (p. 329)

Ursula realizes the full impact of industrialism and becomes utterly repelled by it:

She looked out of the window and saw the proud, demon-like colliery with her wheels twinkling in the heavens, the formless, squalid mass of the town lying aside. It was the squalid heap of side-shows. The pit was the main show, the *raison d'être* of all.

How terrible it was! There was a horrible fascination in it—human bodies and lives subjected in slavery to that symmetric monster of the colliery. (p. 329)

*The Rainbow* is the first novel in which Lawrence overtly criticizes industrialism by stressing its dehumanizing and deadening influence as well as its share of responsibility in the breakdown of the community and the degradation of the individual. The disintegration is not sudden. We have been made to expect it through the gradual disappearance of stable elements to which the

individual can look for support. Already at the beginning of the novel, we have an inkling of what is coming when we realize that Tom Brangwen finds little around him to satisfy him: "He wanted something to get hold of, to pull himself out, but there was nothing." (p. 19) He finds relief in drink until he meets Lydia, on whose foreignness Lawrence insists as on an element of regeneration. But though Tom would not have "the reality of Cossethay and Ilkeston," he does not protest either against the community as it is or against the invasion of the country by the mines, rather the contrary:

As they drove home from town, the farmers of the land met the blackened colliers trooping from the pit-mouth. As they gathered the harvest, the west wind brought a faint, sulphureous smell of pit-refuse burning. As they pulled the turnips in November, the sharp clink-clink-clink-clink of empty trucks shunting on the line, vibrated in their hearts with the fact of other activity going on beyond them. (p. 7)

When industrialism first set in, there was a sort of communion between the farmers and the miners, until gradually men became mechanized and lost their grip on life. By a sort of reciprocity man, who felt great in his discovery of the machine, could no longer do without it and became the instrument of the encroaching monster. Thus after two generations Ursula finds herself in a much more complex environment than Tom, and her attempt to fit in happily is the more difficult to carry out. However, she knows it is her individual self that matters, and she is aware that the plenitude of her own life will bring her nearer to the greater plenitude of the Infinite. So that when she asks Strebensky: "'What do you do for yourself?'" and he answers: "'I belong to the nation and must do my duty by the nation,'" she is struck by the futility of his life, by his nullity as an individual. "'It seems to me as if you weren't anybody—as if there weren't anybody there where you are. Are you anybody really? You seem like nothing to me.'" (pp. 292-3) This is after all no insult to Strebensky because, for him, there is *no* individual self to be realized:

At the bottom of his heart, his self, the soul that aspired and had true hope of self-effectuation lay as dead, stillborn, a dead weight in his womb. What was he, to hold important his personal connection? What did a man matter personally?

He was just a brick in the whole great social fabric, the nation, the modern humanity. His personal movements were small, and entirely subsidiary. The whole form must be ensured, not ruptured for any personal reason whatsoever, since no personal reason could justify such a breaking. What did personal intimacy matter? One had to fill one's place in the whole, the great scheme of man's elaborate civilization, that was all. The Whole mattered—but the unit, the person, had no importance, except as he represented the Whole.

... To his own intrinsic life, he was dead. And he could not rise from the dead. His soul lay in the tomb. His life lay in the established order of things. He had his five senses too. They were to be gratified. Apart from this, he represented the great, established, extant Idea of life, and as this he was important and beyond question. (p. 308)

This complete abdication of the self to society or to the nation entails a further dislocation of the group, which becomes a mere aggregate of people not held together by any vital link; the community is no longer an organic whole, and its purposive justification has been swallowed by the new god, the machine. Strebensky's attitude might have been acceptable two hundred years ago, when serving the group could still give meaning to the life of individuals. By clinging to an ideal which has lost its significance, he can only ruin his own self. That is why he becomes so utterly helpless:

He could not see, it was not born in him to see that the highest good of the community as it stands is no longer the highest good of even the average individual. (p. 308)

By the highest good modern society means material prosperity. Man now serves the community by contributing to its material welfare, for the latter prevails over everything else, and in a humanitarian society it is assumed that everybody has the same rights to it. This entails equality on a money basis, which Ursula vehemently rejects:

I hate it that anybody is my equal who has the same amount of money as I have. I *know* I am better than all of them. I hate them. They are not my equals. I hate equality on a money basis. It is the equality of dirt. (p. 435)



This is an important point in Lawrence's attitude towards democracy in contemporary society. According to him, the notion of equality is irrelevant since all men are different in their individuality. Strebensky feels righteous and noble because he believes in the equality of men, but he takes no account of the intrinsic being of man and he is unable to buttress up his convictions. This convinces Ursula that he is shallow and lacks manliness. She destroys him as a man in the sexual union because through this she eventually seeks "to be one with the Infinite, to enter the mystery of the Unknown," and this is a quest in which he is unable to meet her and to satisfy her.

At the beginning of her relationship with Strebensky Ursula has not yet received the intimation of a communion with the Infinite and merely wants "to assert her indomitable gorgeous self," whereas he tries to assert himself as a male :

It was a magnificent self-assertion on the part of both of them, he asserted himself before her, he felt himself infinitely male and infinitely irresistible. She asserted herself before him, she knew herself infinitely desirable and hence infinitely strong. And after all what could either of them get from such a passion but a sense of his or her own maximum self, in contradistinction to all the rest of life? Wherein was something finite and sad, for the human soul at its maximum wants a sense of the Infinite. (pp. 284-5)

Thus, instead of fusing with the greater flux of life and losing herself in the Infinite, Ursula, like Strebensky, isolates herself from the rest of life. In the contest which opposes them Ursula wins because, as she very well knows, there is nothing but deadness and sterility behind Strebensky's pleasant appearance. She tests him a first time and destroys him in a strange communion with the moon. Some time later in college she has an intimation of the real purpose of life :

Suddenly in her mind the world gleamed strangely, with an intense light, like the nucleus of the creature under the microscope. Suddenly she had passed away into an intensely-gleaming light of knowledge. She could not understand what it all was. She only knew that it was not limited mechanical energy, nor mere purpose of self-preservation and self-assertion. It was a consummation, a being infinite. Self was a oneness with the infinite. To



be oneself was a supreme, gleaming triumph of infinity.  
(pp. 416-17)

She does not experience this with Strebensky, although with him she knows the extreme ecstasy of passion. Her momentary fulfilment is opposed to the utter lack of significance of the society in which they live. Even Strebensky realizes that their union is only possible outside the ordinary social sphere :

To make public their connection would be to put it in range with all the things that nullified him, and from which he was for the moment entirely dissociated. (p. 427)

In Rouen the absoluteness of the Cathedral, its permanency, make her aware of the failure of her relationship with Strebensky, and she longs again for self-realization in the Infinite. From that moment, their affair deteriorates. Strebensky is once more put to the test and utterly destroyed in a fantastic moonlight scene. Ursula understands that both Strebensky and herself are responsible for their failure : she realizes that her *will*, which made her want a man " according to her own desire, " destroyed the man who depended on her for life but had no real self to resist her when she attempted to dominate and to triumph over him. Their experience is fairly similar to that of Gudrun and Gerald in *Women in Love*. However, Ursula emerges a new woman from the experience ; she is purified, ready for a new life, feeling that ugliness and corruption will be replaced by " a world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven. " (p. 467) The novel shows the ugliness of industrialism, its disintegrating action and the annihilation of the man who serves it. But the rainbow, uniting the visible reality with the unknown, the seen and the unseen, also becomes a symbol of hope in the possibility of transcending the corruption of the world by remaining true to life itself.

Lawrence's vision in *The Rainbow* embraces a long period of development in the history of English society. In *Sons and Lovers* he threw light on the cultural environment from which he sprang and criticized its stifling character. In *The Rainbow* he is more detached and can afford to be more sympathetic. He has gone far beyond the English rural community, which he now tries to

understand and to view in a much larger perspective. He discovers society through men-women relationships because these are to him the nucleus of civilization. They are based on the sexual union, which Lawrence regards as a very important source either of social harmony or of disintegration. For the first generation of Brangwens it is definitely regenerating, for they still live in close connection and in harmony with the natural, non-human world. They are still secure in their traditional way of life and unaware of the latent revolution in their community, though at the beginning of his life as an adult and just before he dies Tom is dissatisfied with an environment which shows signs of tiredness and uneasiness. Still, he takes it for granted and does not question its essential values. The conflict starts with the second generation, who no longer take as a matter of course traditionally sure institutions like religion and work: they question their significance or cease to believe in them altogether. Through the severance of man from the living cosmos, through the loss of security incurred by the negation of religious faith, through the mechanization of work in which man can no longer realize himself, Lawrence shows the collapse of community life into chaos and the subsequent loss for man of any valuable support. Man is now faced with very complex problems which he finds it the more difficult to solve as his divorce from life provokes a split in himself. He is torn between the demands made on him by the mechanized "idealistic" world and that part of him which still wants the old connection with the universe. Lawrence condemns the new generation, personified in Strebensky, who sacrifice their individuality to the mass and serve society in order to fill the gap left by the absence of real life. Their annihilation by the group can only generate death-in-life.

Since the community no longer conduces to a life-giving integrated existence, man must find in himself the means to self-realization. To Lawrence the only salvation lies in the individual, who is responsible for his own being and can re-establish the connection with the natural world through personal relationships, more particularly through sexual passion. Yet personal relationships are now also modified by the emancipation of women and by their growing ambition to be the equals of men or even to "possess" men instead of being their natural complement. The coming to consciousness of women leads to their complete freedom. However, when they gain freedom, they find themselves in the

same position as men, in the same cold, inhuman world, and must face the same difficulties to realize themselves. In *The Rainbow* Lawrence stresses the responsibility of women for the imposition of thought and ideal in all fields of experience, and he shows that this has led both men and women to a predicament which now requires that they rebuild their relationships on a new, harmonious basis. This will be the more difficult as women have not tried to assert their individuality in conjunction with men, but in separateness, through disengagement from their dependence on them. So that instead of working out a relationship on a basis of equality and interdependence, their meeting is a duel in which one tries to dominate the other. Throughout his work Lawrence describes marriage as a contest in which the victory of woman breaks the natural balance which should exist between her and her husband. Only rarely do they achieve a harmonious union: in *Women in Love* Birkin and Ursula attain that perfect, though very precarious, balance, a pure equilibrium like two stars.

If *The Rainbow* is the chronicle of a civilization, *Women in Love* (1920) draws a picture of society at a definite point in the course of its development. Whereas *The Rainbow* was the story of a world in revolution, *Women in Love* records the consequences of the change, describes what society has become, and seeks a way out of its sterilizing grip. It renders the individual's lonely struggle towards salvation as an effort to infuse a new meaning into personal and social relationships.

The novel starts with a discussion about marriage between Ursula and Gudrun. A significant gap separates the sisters from the previous generation at the same age. When Anna was young, she had hardly any alternative to marriage and children. But an emancipated woman need not marry, and when she does, marriage is not an end but an experience which, she hopes, will change her life and enrich it. Ursula and Gudrun rather despise marriage, particularly as a means to social position and stability. On the other hand, they are frightened at their own independence, though they would never acknowledge it. They are highly expectant of some kind of fulfilment, which for all their emancipation they cannot get by themselves. Here then are two modern girls, bold and exacting, not afraid to reject traditionally accepted attitudes about

which they do not genuinely feel,<sup>1</sup> yet inwardly unsure of themselves. Even Hermione Roddice, "a woman of the new school," rich, apparently self-confident, associated with "all that [is] highest, whether in society or in thought or in public action, or even in art," even she is extremely vulnerable, much more so than Gudrun and Ursula, because she has no natural self-sufficiency and hides the void in her with her "aesthetic knowledge, and culture and world-visions and disinterestedness." (p. 17) None of the characters in *Women in Love*, not even those who belong to a social class which has kept its privileges and a relative stability, are able to give meaning to their life in their social milieu. Most of them feel isolated, dissatisfied with what their environment can offer. Except for Birkin and later Ursula, they all represent a negative attitude which frustrates them and destroys them. The early scenes depict the characters in a few masterly strokes: Ursula's extreme sensitiveness, Gudrun's fiery assertiveness, the ease and impressive fitness of Gerald and Hermione as public figures who yet reveal some inward shortcoming.

Gerald's and Birkin's reactions towards the bride and bridegroom's race around the church introduce the reader to the conflicting views of life illustrated in the novel. Gerald is shocked at what he considers a breach of the accepted standards of behaviour, whereas Birkin approves and even thinks it a masterpiece of good form because the young people have acted spontaneously: "I should like [people] to like the purely individual thing in themselves, which makes them act in singleness. And they only like to do the collective thing." (p. 34) In the class-room scene Lawrence sketches with remarkable vigour Birkin's quick response to life, his fierce opposition to Hermione's intellectualism, and Ursula's genuine effort to find her way. Hermione, who advocates spontaneity, is rebuked by Birkin, who has been her lover for some years and knows that she rates mental knowledge above everything: "'To know, that is your all, that is your life. You have only this, this knowledge.'" (p. 41) Lawrence has pictured in Hermione the modern woman who is eager to assert herself as an emancipated self-sufficient person and is not content to limit her intellectual capacity to the activity of the mind, but tries to control all the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Gudrun: "'I get no feeling whatever from the thought of bearing children.'" p. 9.

aspects of her life through her intellect. The supremacy of the mind over the body brings a complete break between the two, so that the body, which is constantly ruled by the sterilizing mind-consciousness, becomes incapable of impulsiveness and instinctive living. This reduction of all life and all natural functions to a process of thought is bitterly attacked by Birkin :

Knowledge means everything to you. Even your animalism, you want it in your head. You don't want to *be* an animal, you want to observe your own animal functions, to get a mental thrill out of them. It is all purely secondary—and more decadent than the most hide-bound intellectualism. What is it but the worst and last form of intellectualism, this love of yours for passion and the animal instincts? Passion and the instincts—you want them hard enough, but through your head—in your consciousness. It all takes place in your head, under that skull of yours. Only you won't be conscious of what *actually* is. (p. 43)

For Lawrence, however, the annihilation of instinctive life is not due so much to an excess as to a distortion of the function of the mind: "Not because they have too much mind, but too little." (p. 45) It is due to a limited, false vision which concentrates people's attention on one or two elements only while neglecting all the others. That is why Birkin cannot believe that Hermione is sincere when she insists on the value of passion without being passionate :

'Your passion is a lie. . . . It isn't passion at all, it is your *will*. It's your bullying will. You want to clutch things and have them in your power. And why? Because you haven't got any real body, any dark sensual body of life. You have no sensuality. You have only your will and your conceit of consciousness, and your lust for power, to *know*.' (p. 43)

Lawrence hardly does justice to Hermione, and his condemnation appears the more arbitrary as he does not really show Hermione's failure to respond to life; we are simply asked to accept the truth of Birkin's denunciations. By criticizing Hermione's lust for power, he condemns the Anglo-Saxon type of society, in which woman dominates and tries to maintain her ascendancy. In Gudrun also there is "a body of cold power"; she is seen by Gerald as "a dangerous, hostile spirit, that could stand undiminished and unabated." (p. 126) This insistent female *will* is not peculiar to emancipated or intellectual women; all



Anglo-Saxon women exert it because their men have yielded to the ideal of the mother-figure though they resent it. In *Aaron's Rod* Lottie also thinks it is her divine right that her husband should yield to her. So does Carlota in *The Plumed Serpent*, who associates matrimonial love to the Christian ideal of love and charity and is tragically defeated. Though they are mostly unaware of it, these women use love as a pretext for blackmailing their husbands into submission.

The dominance of will and idea, which Lawrence embodies in Hermione, is not merely a factor of destruction in men-women relationships. By controlling all human activities, the mind directs life and thus destroys its spontaneous flow. Ideas and ideals become the fixed principles of man's existence: "Men have reached the point where, in further fulfilling their ideals, they break down the living integrity of their being and fall into sheer mechanical materialism. They become automatic units entirely determined by mechanical law."<sup>1</sup> This process finds its ultimate meaning in the destruction of Gerald; it gathers deeper significance as it is contrasted with Birkin's and Ursula's efforts to escape from its deadly influence. When in the class-room scene Birkin tells Ursula that he wants knowledge in the blood "when the mind and the known world is drowned in darkness," (p. 44) he is still uncertain himself of what he wants. His affair with Hermione is at a dead end, but he cannot break away from her definitely because he does not yet know how to give expression in his every-day life to his belief in the blood. Lawrence creates the impression that Birkin is groping for his way, gradually rejecting what seems to him meaningless until he distinctly perceives the kind of union he wants with Ursula. The author himself seems to be finding his way along with the character. It is through Birkin's progress towards salvation that Lawrence conveys most eloquently his conception of life as a perpetual fight and reveals life's potentialities, its capacity for self-renewal. In his communion with nature after Hermione has tried to kill him, Birkin feels weary of the old ethic, of human beings and of humanity as a whole. Mankind is a dead tree, and most people have no significance, "their insides are full of bitter, corrupt ash." (p. 130)

<sup>1</sup> "Democracy," in *Selected Essays*, p. 94.



Critics have remarked on Lawrence's hatred of humanity. Dan Jacobson,<sup>1</sup> for instance, writes that this hatred springs from motives which Lawrence does not understand and is unable to make effective in his art, particularly in *Women in Love*. As a matter of fact, Birkin's feelings for humanity are fairly representative of Lawrence's own ambivalence. His hatred of humanity is, more than anything, an expression of despair. It seldom goes without a desire to save men, which is itself a confession of love. It seems to me that it was precisely Lawrence's tragedy as an artist that he could not leave men alone but must try to save them from themselves, a fact which accounts for the partial failure of his "didactic" novels. This contradictory attitude is a salient feature of *Women in Love*, in which even before he is quite sure of the success of his relationship with Ursula, Birkin craves for a man-to-man relationship that would serve as a basis for a new society. But the first step towards renewal is to acknowledge frankly that "the old ideals are dead." Birkin sees no hope of fulfilment except in his union with a woman. After breaking with Hermione, he escapes death-in-life through his marriage with Ursula:

The passion of gratitude with which he received her into his soul, the extreme, unthinkable gladness of knowing himself living and fit to unite with her, he, who was so nearly dead, who was so near to being gone with the rest of his race down the slope of mechanical death, could never be understood by her. He worshipped her as age worships youth, he gloried in her, because in his one grain of faith, he was young as she, he was her proper mate. This marriage with her was his resurrection and his life. (pp. 200-201)

Their sexual marriage is a life-enhancing experience which saves them both from despair, a rebirth after their experience of death-in-life. There is nothing final about their coming together; the harmony between them is obviously fragile, but it is based on their openness to life, on their determination to hope and to explore new modes of being.

<sup>1</sup> D. JACOBSON, "D.H. Lawrence and Modern Society," *Journal of Contemporary History*, II, 2 (1967), 87.

The kind of union Birkin and Ursula achieve is impossible between Gerald and Gudrun. The latter is too assertive, self-conscious, and unwilling to give herself, and Gerald is incapable of any deep and real relationship :

He would not make any pure relationship with any other soul. He could not. Marriage was not the committing of himself into a relationship with Gudrun. It was a committing of himself in acceptance of the established world, he would accept the established order, in which he did not livingly believe, and he would retreat to the underworld for his life. (p. 373)

Neither can Gerald accept the "Blutbrüderschaft" that Birkin so much wants to establish between them. While his father is dying, he absolutely refuses to sympathize with him; his fear of death makes him reject any connection with the old man. Gerald has no inner reserves, and his fear to face his own emptiness makes him shun the reality of death as well as the reality of life. At difficult moments he is convinced that by keeping to conventions, by remaining resolutely faithful to the accepted outward forms of life, he can be master of his own destiny. But when Birkin asks him "Wherein does life centre for you?" he answers :

'I don't know—that's what I want somebody to tell me. As far as I can make out, it doesn't centre at all. It is artificially held *together* by the social mechanism.' (p. 59)

Ursula says of him :

'He'll have to die soon, when he's made every possible improvement, and there will be nothing more to improve. He's got *go* anyhow.'

'Where does his *go* go to?' Gudrun asks.

'It goes in applying the latest appliances.' (pp. 49-50)

Gerald, the energetic, enterprising, socially successful young man, whose life "just doesn't centre," is summed up in the episode in which Ursula and Gudrun see him impose his will on a young Arab mare full of untamed life. She is terrified by the noise of a locomotive at a railway crossing, but Gerald forces her to face the passing trucks. The mare is wounded and Gudrun faints when she sees Gerald pressing his spurs in the very wound. When she recovers and Gerald rides away, she is

as if numbed in her mind by the sense of indomitable, soft weight of the man, bearing down into the living body of

the horse : the strong indomitable thighs of the blond man clenching the palpitating body of the mare into pure control ; a sort of soft white magnetic domination from the loins and thighs and calves, enclosing, and encompassing the mare heavily into unutterable subordination, soft blood-subordination, terrible. (pp. 116-17)

Gerald subdues the animal with his strong will-to-power and his cruelty ; he reduces the life in her to make her serve him, and because he masters life, he believes in his efficiency and purposiveness. Yet he cannot deal with life, he can only kill it. He himself admits : " ' We're all of us [the Criches] curiously bad at living. We can do things—but we can't get on with life at all. ' " (p. 214) Why this incapacity, this inner void, this lack of independence in emotional matters ? Gerald is the masculine counterpart of Hermione, but whereas Hermione exerts her power on individuals, Gerald transforms it into an executive capacity which affects people indirectly and on a much wider scale. Gerald has gradually taken command of his father's business and has reorganized it on a new basis of efficiency meant to replace the humanitarianism of his father. His purpose is

to extend over the earth a great and perfect system in which the will of man ran smooth and unthwarted, timeless, a Godhead in process. (p. 239)

Gerald is determined to subject matter, to reduce it to his will, and in order to do so, he needs instruments, a " godlike medium, " a great and perfect machine. That is why he insists on the pure instrumentality of mankind, his own included :

The sufferings and feelings of individuals did not matter in the least. They were mere conditions like the weather. What mattered was the pure instrumentality of the individual. As a man as of a knife : does it cut well ? Nothing else mattered. (p. 233)

As Birkin puts it, he " conducts his business successfully ignoring the demands of the soul. " (p. 211) Whether men are high or low in the social organization is meaningless provided they are in their appropriate, useful place :

He knew that position and authority were the right thing in the world, and it was useless to cant about it. They were the right thing for the simple reason that they were functionally necessary. They were not the be-all and the

end-all. It was like being part of a machine. He himself happened to be a controlling central part, the masses of men were the parts variously controlled. This was merely as it happened. (p. 238)

So Gerald attempts to bring harmony in industry and in society, by which he means practical organization, a process to which the miners submit. They are gradually destroyed as they become more mechanized, but they are glad to belong to such a powerful system :

There was a new world, a new order, strict, terrible, inhuman, but satisfying in its very destructiveness. . . . Gerald was just ahead of them in giving them what they wanted, this participation in a great and perfect system that subjected life to pure mathematical principles. This was a sort of freedom, the sort they really wanted. It was the first step in undoing, the first great phase of chaos, the substitution of the mechanical principle for the organic, the destruction of the organic purpose, the organic unity, and the subordination of every organic unit to the great mechanical purpose. It was pure organic disintegration and pure mechanical organisation. This is the first and finest state of chaos. (p. 242)

If the workers are satisfied with Gerald's instrumentalism, it is not merely because the efficiency of his system appeals to them. In any case, they can no longer stand his father's humanitarianism. They prefer the frank indifference of the son and his admission of their social difference to the necessarily false benevolence of the father, who wished to maintain the illusion that he was one with the men and that they were all equal. As a matter of fact, Lawrence criticizes the father as much as the son, because Thomas Crich's love, charity, and pity merely serve to mask his failure to give his life a real meaning. He too wanted to impose his will, but he would not admit it frankly, and he tried to compensate for it with lofty feelings ; he did not care whether people were deceived or not by his apparent goodness so long as they gratified his need to prove to himself that he led a purposeful existence. He even abstained from clarifying his feelings towards his wife and thought of her all his life as a wonderful snow-flower, though he was compelled to transform his hostility towards her into pity to be able to consider her as the ideal wife. Like Gerald, his father triumphed in the world, but his vitality was destroyed, "bled from within."

To seek refuge in love and charity or in any form of idealism conceals an actual void and lack of organic life and is even more distasteful to Lawrence than the mechanization of man. Indeed, any form of idealism whatsoever is a form of mechanization since it springs from the intellect and the will, not from the soul.

In spite of Gerald's repudiation of his father's principles, the latter still represents a certain tradition, an established order which he, Gerald, cannot inherit since he has revolutionized it. He has denied the principles of his father, which were real, notwithstanding the spuriousness of their motives. When his father dies, he feels that he is losing ground, that he is not ready to assume his role as a leading member of the community, because he has nothing to offer as a uniting principle :

The whole unifying idea of mankind seemed to be dying with his father, the centralizing force that had held the whole together seemed to collapse with his father, the parts seemed ready to go asunder in terrible disintegration. Gerald was as if left on board of a ship that was going asunder beneath his feet, he was in charge of a vessel whose timbers were all coming apart. (p. 231)

Gerald's realization that the social order disintegrates coincides with a period in his life when he has reached his aim and feels purposeless. Having finally succeeded, he is horrified at his own emptiness. He has destroyed organic life by submitting it to mechanization, and now the void in him makes him aware of the consequences : " He knew that all his life he had been wrenching at the frame of life to break it apart. And now, with something of the terror of a destructive child, he saw himself on the point of inheriting his own destruction." (p. 232) When Gerald is no longer convinced that he is playing a useful part in organized society, he loses everything, the very meaning of his life, as his father would have lost his " *raison d'être* " if he had been denied the opportunity of being charitable. The organization of industry, which has made Gerald a superior " functional " being, becomes an instrument of destruction : Gerald destroys himself consciously, serving the god he has helped to create.

When he first becomes aware of the meaninglessness of his life, Gerald seeks refuge in work, in intellectual activity, in his friendship with Birkin, and in women. But these forms of escape fail to redeem him, so that his association with a woman like



Gudrun seems to offer a way out towards salvation. From the first their relationship is a kind of contest; although there is something fatal about their meeting and mutual attraction, Gudrun knows that they will never be together. She is soon dissatisfied because she realizes that Gerald only wants sensual gratification. Yet, she is hardly capable of giving him anything else, because she is always on the defensive, afraid to betray herself, unwilling to give herself whole, meeting him only as the victim or the victor in moments of great physical passion. They fail to come together because they both refuse to face life responsibly. Since work, marriage, and friendship have become meaningless, they acknowledge the prevailing nothingness and turn with a vengeance to their own self-destruction, rather than attempt, like Birkin and Ursula, to test the value of a new faith. Yet both Gerald and Birkin start from a dead end; they both feel let down, disappointed and free to engage in a new course of life.

'What am I to do at all, then?' came Gerald's voice.

'What you like. What am I to do myself?' ...

'I can't tell you—I can't find my own way, let alone yours. ...' Birkin replied. (p. 108)

In spite of his pessimism, Birkin is determined to find a way out. He never gives up hope, never ceases to question or to explore the possibilities of life. In comparison, Gerald's attitude is entirely negative; he refuses to commit himself either to friendship or to real love because this would require from him an effort to achieve self-knowledge, which he dreads above everything else. Both he and Gudrun prefer to ignore the potential richness of marriage. In the conflict between them Gudrun is the strongest; Gerald has come to depend too heavily on her (like Strebensky on Ursula) to be able to subdue her. This dependency dates from the first time he went to her after his father's death and was comforted, but

a strange rent had been torn in him; like a victim that is torn open and given to the heavens, so he had been torn apart and given to Gudrun. (p. 471)

A third party stimulates their opposition and precipitates the crisis: Loerke, the Austrian sculptor, who exists as a "pure unconnected will" and for whom there is only work, i.e., the serving of industry, of the machine, through art. For Gudrun, who has reached a blind alley with Gerald, life offers no other discoveries:



there are no more *men only creatures* like Loerke, and it is with him that she wants to go further and know "unthinkable subtleties of sensation." She is thus apparently doomed to go on forever unsatisfied because she has made love and physical passion ends in themselves. As to Gerald, the white wonderful demon from the north, he walks to his death in the snow, a death by perfect cold, "a symbol of the universal dissolution into whiteness and snow." (p. 267) The process of disintegration and dissolution which has been going on all along reaches its climax in his death. His "ice-destruction" is the pendant to the sun-destruction symbolized by the small African statuette at Halliday's. This is what the complete separation between body and mind, mind-consciousness on the one hand and mindless sensuality on the other, leads to :

The white races, having the arctic north behind them, the vast abstraction of ice and snow, would fulfil a mystery of ice-destructive knowledge, snow-abstract annihilation. (p. 266)

In Gerald Lawrence has exemplified the incapacity of modern man to lead a purposeful life and form real human relationships. His tragedy is the tragedy of contemporary society. Birkin, who voices Lawrence's own conception of happiness, moves tentatively towards a fuller life as Gerald drifts towards death. But this death is a bitter thing to Birkin. He despairs because Gerald's death is meaningless like his life. "Those who die, and dying still can love, still believe, do not die." There is no sign, however, that Gerald has entered the deep mystery of death and will live further in it. There is nothing left of him except "the frozen carcase of a dead male." Above all, with Gerald vanishes Birkin's hope of ever forming a deep friendship with a man :

'Did you need Gerald?' Ursula asked one evening.

'Yes,' he said.

'Aren't I enough for you?' she asked.

'No,' he said. 'You are enough for me, as far as a woman is concerned. You are all women to me. But I wanted a man friend, as eternal as you and I are eternal.' (p. 507)

The novel ends with Birkin's asserting his need for a relationship with a man and a connection with the world of men, a theme which Lawrence explores more thoroughly in *Aaron's Rod* and in *Kangaroo*. In *Women in Love* the theme is secondary to the presentation of men-women relationships, though the fact that Lawrence

starts exploring it makes it clear that fulfilment does not lie in happiness as such but in continued investigation of the possibilities of life. Birkin is aware that the union he has successfully achieved with Ursula frees them as individuals but puts them outside the ordinary sphere of society: they have already left it symbolically by resigning from work immediately after their coming together, and they reject conventional marriage to meet on a much higher plane.

'But we want other people with us, don't we?'

'Why should we?' she asked

'Does it end with just our two selves?' he asked, ...

'You see, ... I always imagine our being really happy with some few other people—a little freedom with people.'

'Yes, one does want that. But it must *happen*. You can't do anything for it with your will. You always seem to think you can *force* the flowers to come out. People must love us because they love us—you can't *make* them.'

(p. 383)

This scene foreshadows many others of the same kind, though more cruel and reproachful, between Lilly and his wife, Somers and Harriet. However fulfilled a man may feel in his bond with a woman and however close with the universe, if he is segregated from his fellow-men, he is cut off from an essential part of life. Lawrence is led to acknowledge that the individual cannot live isolated from society or at least from a group, however small. Birkin's desire for brotherhood with Gerald is the beginning of his attempt to complement a man-woman relationship with a masculine friendship which must in its turn lead the individual to reintegration into a selected group. Eliseo Vivas concludes from this "that the religion of love failed to satisfy Birkin."<sup>1</sup> However, Birkin is not dissatisfied with what he has, he only wants something more. Having made clear man's predicament and shown how he could resist destruction, Lawrence could not fail to explore new developments in human relations. The very inconclusiveness of the novel is an illustration of his conception of life as "creative change."

An important aspect of *Women in Love* is the portrayal of the contemporary scene. Characteristically, the novel starts with the

<sup>1</sup> Eliseo VIVAS, *The Failure and the Triumph of Art*, London, 1961, p. 268.

assertion of woman's complete freedom and emancipation and of her contempt for traditional institutions. Woman's idealism and intellectualism applied to the simplest and most natural matters of life, her insistent will-to-power and her ascendancy are the starting points of Lawrence's investigation because they are the key-note of personal and social relations. The two couples presented in *Women in Love* exemplify man's destiny in contemporary society. He can be destroyed as Gerald is destroyed by being forced to acknowledge his own emptiness. He can also wander like Gudrun, forever divided and frustrated because of her incapacity to reconcile her intense sensuality with her sharp mind-consciousness, because also of her insatiable and destructive will-to-power. By contrast, the other couple seems the more successful. Yet, it would be erroneous to suppose that Birkin's attitude to life is presented by Lawrence as the only way in which society can be regenerated. "There isn't only one road," Birkin says. (p. 311) At this stage at least Lawrence is more concerned with exploring than with teaching, though the prophet is in sight. What matters here is not so much Birkin's fulfilment as his search for his own self, which makes this fulfilment possible. Lawrence presents man's predicament and suggests a way out, but salvation is necessarily a matter of individual response.

Through the experience of Gerald and Gudrun, of Birkin and Ursula, Lawrence explores the cultural trends which have contributed to transform English society from an organic whole reflecting the "Natural Order" in which all living beings stood in relation to God, into an organization which denies man the right to be himself and makes him a mere cog in the social machinery.

The conception of men as united to each other, and of all mankind as united to God, by mutual obligations arising from their relation to a common end, ceased to be impressed upon men's minds.<sup>1</sup>

The living relationship alluded to by Tawney is shown dying at the beginning of *The Rainbow*, when Tom Brangwen becomes estranged from the community in which he lives. The old

<sup>1</sup> R.H. TAWNEY, *The Acquisitive Society*, quoted by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 215.

hierarchical order is first replaced by paternalism, a system in which the pretence of a relationship is being substituted for a real bond between men. That the benevolent master does not really love nor wield power is obvious from the dissatisfaction of both master and workers in *Women in Love*. The master attempts to ignore his inner emptiness, and the workers, who despise him, lose the sense of obligation inherent in a real mutual relationship. Remembering that Gerald's father is a contemporary of Anna and Will Brangwen, one can discern in all three of them a desire to find an outlet for those aspirations which are frustrated by the absence of a real communion with other men and with the earth. Their children find themselves in a society in which all bonds between men have been loosened or distorted. This is the society which men like Gerald transform into a "game of chess," where men have become mere pawns with a particular function to fulfil. It is from this inhuman society that Birkin wants to escape. He alone is aware of the process which has destroyed the hierarchical order and replaced it by a society which denies men the freedom to be themselves. He alone understands that "the malady lies at the heart of man."<sup>1</sup> His disappointment in Gerald foreshadows Lawrence's own bitterness as it is illustrated in Lilly and Somers.

Lawrence had so far explored the individual's predicament in a society which failed to provide men with a stable and meaningful frame of life. But he could not rest satisfied with individual salvation out of a social context. Ursula says of Birkin: "He would always want to save the world," and this is what Lawrence himself felt compelled to do. His departure from England after the First World War marks the beginning of a new phase in his work; he started to explore other forms of human experience in which, so he hoped, the individual's self-realization might be related to a larger purpose shared by a community of men. The brotherhood to which Birkin aspired simply acknowledged each man's individuality and was to develop on terms of equality. In Lawrence's following novels it is modified into a leader-follower relationship and examined as a possible basis for a new type of society. Birkin had already asserted the inequality of men, i.e., their inequality in spirit, their otherness. In *Aaron's Rod* (1922)

<sup>1</sup> *Phoenix*, p. 406.

Lawrence insists even more on the intrinsic and central aloneness of man. By conventional standards, Aaron's foresaking of his wife is a callous desertion, and his refusal to submit to the mother of his children may be considered as evil. But when he realizes that his first duty is to keep his inner self intact, Aaron struggles to live according to a new apprehension of good and evil. The chapter in *Aaron's Rod* entitled "More Pillar of Salt," which records his last conversation with Lottie, is one of the best confrontations between two human beings who can never understand each other because one of them, at least, is animated with a blind negative will to oppose. This scene is better than similar confrontations between Birkin and Hermione or Somers and Harriet, because neither Aaron nor his wife can give a rational explanation of their attitude. With a rare insight into the feminine temperament Lawrence shows Lottie trying to exact submission from Aaron in accordance with her ideal of marriage. Aaron obeys an inner compulsion which he is as yet unable to define. But he has discovered the first truth: "to be alone, to be oneself, not to be driven or violated into something which is not oneself." (p. 136) He considers his marriage with Lottie as eternal, but he wants to be "life-rooted," "life-central," "life-living like the much-mooted Lily." It is not by accident that Lawrence's mouthpiece in the novel is called Lilly.

Lilly insists on the necessity for man to find himself and to stand alone before uniting with another being:

Everybody ought to stand by themselves in the first place—men and women as well. They can come together in the second place if they like. But nothing is any good unless each one stands alone intrinsically. (p. 96)

As if to confirm this, each time Aaron yields to a woman or gives himself away, he feels violated and becomes sick, or he is actually robbed, as in Italy, and feels that it is his own fault because he did not keep to himself. This insistence on man's singleness as a state of fulfilment implies a recognition of the spiritual difference of individuals. From the notion of difference one is naturally led to the notion of inequality. Birkin had explained to Hermione that men could not be compared:

But I, myself, who am myself, what have I to do with equality with any other man or woman? In the spirit I am as separate as one star is from another. as different in quality



or quantity. Establish a state on *that*. One man isn't any better than another, not because they are equal, but because they are intrinsically other, there is no term of comparison. The minute you begin to compare, one man is seen to be far better than another, all the inequality you can imagine is there by nature.<sup>1</sup>

Yet Lilly does compare when he tells Aaron that he has something that he, Aaron, hasn't got, and he is obviously convinced of his own superiority, like Somers, who, in *Kangaroo*, proclaims the *innate* difference between people, and advocates "an awakening of the old recognition of the aristocratic principle." Of course, this superiority of certain beings bears no relation to the conventional class-divisions, though ultimately it does lead to some kind of class-division on a spiritual basis. Like Birkin, Lilly is always ready to save people, and he usually gets snubbed for it. When Aaron falls ill, Lilly nurses him and takes good care of him, although they are almost strangers. From then on, there is between them a strange relationship that is always being questioned by one or the other, mainly because Aaron refuses to submit, though he would rather give in to Lilly, to the individual *man*, than to any social ideal or institution. Lilly says he wants him to be free, but he would receive no gift of friendship in equality, and he admits that he wants to have some power over Aaron :

Tanny says I want some power over them. What if I do? They don't care how much power the mob has over them, the nation, Lloyd George and Northcliffe and the police and money. They'll yield themselves up to that sort of power quickly enough, and immolate themselves *pro bono publico* by the million. And what's the *bonum publicum* but a mob power. Why can't they submit to a bit of healthy individual authority? (p. 102)

Lilly's wish to establish a relationship on the assumption of his natural authority derives from Lawrence's recognition of another deep urge besides love, the power-urge :

I told you there were two urges—two great life-urges, didn't I? There may be more. But it comes to me so strongly now that there are two: love and power. And we've been trying to work ourselves, at least as individuals,

<sup>1</sup> *Women in Love*, pp. 106-7.



from the love-urge exclusively, hating the power-urge and repressing it. And now I find we've got to accept the very thing we've hated. . . . We've got to accept the power-motive, accept it in deep responsibility. It is a great life-motive. . . . It is a vast dark source of life and strength in us now, waiting either to issue into true action, or to burst into cataclysm. Power—the power-urge. The will-to-power—but not in Nietzsche's sense. Not intellectual power. Not mental power. Not conscious will-power. Not even wisdom. But dark, living, fructifying power. . . . And of course there must be one who urges, and one who is impelled. Just as in love there is a beloved and a lover: the man is supposed to be the lover, the woman the beloved. Now in the urge of power, it is the reverse. The woman must submit, but deeply, deeply submit. Not to any foolish fixed authority, not to any foolish and arbitrary will. But to something deep, deeper. To the soul in its dark motion of power and pride. (pp. 310-11)

When we come to think of it, there is, in practice, little difference between Thomas Crich, who for a time had the colliers in his power because he loved them and was kind to them, and Lilly, who is kind to Jim Bricknell and Aaron because he wants power over them. Of course, Thomas Crich reveres the "idea" of love, whereas Lilly's power is supposed to be an expression of life and natural strength. That Lilly is referring to something different from the love of Thomas Crich for his men is made clear by what Lawrence says about such relationships in *Aaron's Rod* and elsewhere, but his presentation in the novel is not very convincing because Lilly's attempt to work out a new relationship with men is discussed instead of being presented directly. The same is true of Somers in *Kangaroo*, who talks about his aspirations but is reluctant to act up to them. The theme of *Aaron's Rod*, namely man's escape from the possessiveness and influence of woman in order to form a man-to-man relationship and to establish the nucleus of a new society, does not grow from a necessity inherent in the characters to work out their destiny. Moreover, Lilly is described, he is very seldom revealed dramatically as Birkin was. He does not substantiate his assumption that his soul is superior to Aaron's, which would justify the latter's submission and his own claim to leadership. This failure seems due to Lawrence's own lack of conviction, which prevented him from visualizing a situation in which Lilly's natural power to lead could be made manifest.

Lilly is too uncertain and apparently too respectful of other people's freedom to transform his ideas into a definite workable programme. The tentativeness of his position is also emphasized by the presentation of contradictory view-points. This is a technique often used by Lawrence, which testifies to his honesty in exploring attitudes and to the understanding with which as an artist he presents opinions of which he personally disapproves. He is also quick to perceive the flaw which in the standpoint he upholds might give rise to mockery or criticism. Lilly's attempts to exert power over people entail some sharp reactions: Jim Bricknell nearly knocks him out and both Aaron and Tanny resist him.

There is a contradiction between Lilly's conviction that he is fit to exercise authority and his refusal to assume responsibility for another man's life. Significantly, the last chapter, in which Aaron is prepared to yield to him, is entitled "Words," which suggests that the leader-follower relationship is easier to conceive and talk about than to put into practice. Lilly can only advise Aaron, at most be an example for him, for Aaron perceives in Lilly a "satisfying sense of centrality," a self-sufficiency which he, Aaron, lacks. Yet no more than Aaron has Lilly found the new quality of life he hoped to discover in Italy:

The verbal and the ostensible, the accursed mechanical ideal gains day by day over the spontaneous life-dynamic, so that Italy becomes as idea-bound and as automatic as England: just a business proposition. (p. 162)

In the casual unions and separations between the members of a London coterie Lilly sees "the world coming to pieces bit by bit." (p. 63) In Italy social disintegration is part of the general climate of violence which renders social intercourse even more futile. In England violence is "released into the general air" or it is talked about irresponsibly by artists and intellectuals who look forward to a "bloody revolution." In Italy Aaron faces actual violence in various forms until it forces him to a final break with his old self and with the old way of life. A bomb thrown by anarchists in a café destroys his flute: "The loss was for him symbolic. It chimed with something in his soul: the bomb, the smashed flute, the end ... that which was slowly breaking away had finally shattered at last." (pp. 297-300) Aaron must start anew and discover the centre of his life alone. When he asks Lilly: "Whom

shall I submit to?" the latter answers: "'Your soul will tell you.'" This answer is evasive, but it reasserts the one positive element which Lawrence makes real in the novel: "The only goal is the fulfilling of your own soul's active desire and suggestion." (p. 309)

In order to understand the social implications of the power-urge as defined by Lawrence, we must turn to his views on Western democracy. Lawrence always stresses the fact that he is not interested in politics, that he has a deep horror of them; they are no more to him than a country's housekeeping. He deliberately turns his back on the "politicization" of contemporary life, not ignoring it but rejecting democracy and socialism on the ground that they are dead ideals, "contrivances for the supplying of the lowest material needs of a people."<sup>1</sup> Democracy is based on the law of the "average," but, he says, the Average Man doesn't exist, it is a pure abstraction. It is true that all men have the same basic physical needs, and "the Average Man is the standard of material need in the human being," (p. 75) but there the equality stops. It seems that Lawrence deliberately misinterprets the democratic assertion that all men are equal, which does not mean that they are identical in their individual selves but that they should have the same rights and should be given the same opportunities. If Lawrence refuses to consider this aspect of democracy, it is because to him democracy as we know it standardizes man, denies his separateness and makes him a servant of the machine. This is the evil he senses in contemporary society, and he foresees the utter annihilation of all individual life, to which the present cult of sameness will inevitably lead. He did recognize that society should give every man the same means of gratifying his basic material needs and that thus far the "common unit" or the "average" must be taken into account by the state. But thus far only. For at a time when social and political theories were laying so much stress on the paramount importance of satisfying these basic needs, he feared the ultimate levelling in which concern with the necessities of life might result. Lawrence's insistence that men are fundamentally different from each other is a protest against a conception of democracy which tends to ignore man's essential nature. His keen sense of the

<sup>1</sup> "Democracy," in *Selected Essays*, p. 76.

sufferings entailed by a social or industrial organization that barely keeps people alive, and his sympathy for the hardships endured by the miners, for instance, sufficiently testify to his awareness that basic needs must be satisfied.

For Society or Democracy or any political State or Community exists not for the sake of the individual nor should ever exist for the sake of the individual, but simply to establish the Average, in order to make living together possible: that is, to make proper facilities for every man's clothing, feeding, housing himself, working, sleeping, mating, playing, according to his necessity as a common unit, an average. Everything beyond that common necessity depends on himself alone. (p. 76)

It is significant that among the prime necessities of life he does *not* include education. Nor does he believe, as we shall see, that general education as we conceive it can conduce to men's happiness or lead to fullness of living. He believes that true democracy will arise when men's material needs being satisfied, they realize that property is to be used, not to be possessed, and can free themselves from the load of possession and turn their attention to "everything" beyond the necessities of the Average Man. The life-purpose to which he exhorts the individual is

to come to his fullness of being by trusting his desire and his impulse, resisting the temptation to fall from spontaneous, single, pure being into materialism or automatism or mechanism. (p. 91)

As Lawrence himself admits, very few people are capable of achieving a high degree of human consciousness, of living dynamically from the Great Source. That is why he criticizes present systems of education which appeal to the mind only and ignore the deeper source in which all knowledge is rooted:

Education means leading out the individual nature in each man and woman to its true fullness. You can't do that by stimulating the mind. To pump education into the mind is fatal. That which sublimates from the dynamic consciousness into the mental consciousness has alone any value. This, in most individuals, is very little indeed. So that most individuals, under a wise government, would be most carefully protected from all vicious attempts to inject extraneous ideas into them. Every extraneous idea, which

has no root in the dynamic consciousness, is as dangerous as a nail driven into a young tree. For the mass of people, knowledge *must* be symbolical, mythical, dynamic. This means, you must have a higher, responsible conscious class : and then in varying degrees the lower classes, varying in their degree of consciousness. Symbols must be true from top to bottom. But the interpretation of the symbols must rest, degree after degree, in the higher, responsible, conscious classes.<sup>1</sup>

This passage indicates clearly enough that Lawrence's democracy is, in fact, an oligarchy based on the inequality of men as human beings and on the assumption that a few are naturally destined to rule. Lawrence objected to mass-education "through the mind" because he foresaw its consequences: it cuts people off from richer sources of culture and imposes an average pseudo-culture which is mainly information about facts. In *The Uses of Literacy* Richard Hoggart has described the process by which working-class culture is being debased and transformed into a poorer, classless culture. The popular writers, publicists and journalists who provide culture and entertainment for the masses, play more and more on the idea of equality, on the necessity to conform, and overwhelm the "common man" with their grotesque and dangerous flattery in order to sell their cheap literature. Any kind of authority is derided in order to soothe the sense of inferiority of the "little man." From the enormous amount of mass-publications to which they have access, the working classes derive bits of information which do not help them to use their judgment on important issues and which conceal the actual emptiness of such publications. Richard Hoggart criticizes this encouragement to uniformity and the appeal to a false sense of freedom, which are often mere claims to mediocrity and depreciate the intellectual gifts and self-discipline that contribute to the improvement of the individual's social position.

If tolerance is good, if to share the views of the group is good. . . . If, in addition, all men are free and equal, and life is constantly changing and progressing, then there must eventually follow a loss of a sense of order, of value, and of limits. . . . We arrive at a world of monstrous and swirling undifferentiation. This kind of undifferentiation can lead . . . to a world in which every kind of activity is

<sup>1</sup> *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, pp. 72-73.



finally made meaningless by being reduced to a counting of heads.<sup>1</sup>

This is exactly what Lawrence had foreseen, and in his concluding chapter Hoggart writes :

Most mass-entertainments are in the end what D.H. Lawrence described as 'anti-life' . . . they tend towards a view of the world in which progress is conceived as a seeking of material possessions, equality as moral levelling, and freedom as the ground for endless irresponsible pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

None the less, some of Lawrence's characters who act more or less as his mouthpieces envisage a situation in which "inferior beings" must renounce responsibility and commit their lives to the care of "superior beings." In a conversation with friends Lilly tells them :

'You've got to have a sort of slavery again. . . . I mean a real committal of the life-issue of inferior beings to the responsibility of a superior being . . . a voluntary acceptance. But once made it must be held fast by genuine power.'<sup>3</sup>

Pressed to say whether he is speaking seriously, Lilly answers that he could have said the very opposite with just as much fervour. Obviously, Lawrence did not want to commit himself, but the idea appealed to him and he must have felt that its social and political implications were worth considering.

Some critics have pointed out that the thought-adventure in *Kangaroo* (1923) is more or less independent of the richly evoked spirit of place peculiar to the Australian continent and bears no resemblance to the real political situation in Australia. It is true that the rivalry between socialists and fascists, which serves as a background to Lawrence's analysis of contemporary political ideologies, was a feature of European, rather than Australian, political life. But we should remember that Lawrence saw all Western civilization threatened with the same evil spirit and therefore subject to the same corruption. He presents the Australian way of life as completely dissociated from the spirit of the place : the

<sup>1</sup> Richard HOGGART, *The Uses of Literacy*, Penguin Books, 1960, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> *Aaron's Rod*, p. 294.



Australians are afraid of their continent and have not been able to invest their life with significance in harmony with the earth. Their life-mode originated in Europe but is now cut off from its traditions and has become meaningless, "a substitute for the real thing," like Sydney which "[is] all London without being London." (p. 25) Somers has come to Australia convinced that he is one of the *responsible* members of society; the distinction between "responsible" and "irresponsible," which is rooted in the European consciousness, is to him a distinction "in the very being." But the aristocratic principle is unknown in Australia. There is no real authority, no distinction between men: "nobody felt *better* than anyone else, or higher; only better-off." (p. 27) So that no one in particular feels responsible. All responsibility lies with the people; the "will of the people" is undisputed. Clearly then, the Australian fondness for the average appears as a very likely source of the mass-spirit on which both Kangaroo and Struthers count to carry out their revolution and which manifests itself with such violence in the mob-state described in the novel. Another feature of Australian life appears to Somers as a possible incentive to political adventure: the terrifying vacancy of its freedom. There is "no inner life, no high command, no interest in anything, finally." (p. 33) There is no "consecutive thread" in the life of the continent; it is all in bits like the life of its inhabitants, "just a series of disconnected, isolated moments." (p. 67) Such emptiness must eventually bring forth some kind of violent reaction. "'You can't face emptiness long.'" Jaz explains to Somers. "'You have to come back and do something to keep from being frightened at your own emptiness. . . . That's why most Australians have to fuss about something—politics, or horse-racing, or football.'" (pp. 226-7) However, the most important motive for political action illustrated in the novel is the transformation of love into an absolute, which is a consequence of Christian idealism and therefore as plausible a phenomenon in Australia as in Europe. The different themes developed in *Kangaroo* are not incongruous. The most serious objections to the novel are that the main characters hardly exist in their own right and that the issues it presents remain largely theoretical; yet, as we shall see, these issues are a necessary and logical part of Somers's analysis of Australian life.

Somers is presented at a period in his life when he feels he must reconsider his position in the world of men and his relations

with them. He believes that the same urge might inform his own life as well as his relationships with his wife and with other men; he calls this urge "the mystery of lordship . . . the mystic recognition of difference and innate priority." (p. 120) Somers definitely rejects the blood-brotherhood which Birkin longed for; he does not want "mates and equality and mingling," and he examines more seriously than Lilly did the possibility of actualizing the power-urge in his life. However, as with Lilly, his effort to enter into a new relationship with other men is undermined by his own contradictory feelings. These result partly from his unwillingness to commit himself, partly from other people's misunderstanding of what he wants. The contradiction is apparent from the beginning of the novel. Somers has come to Australia feeling that he

*must* fight out something with mankind yet . . . [that] he [must] send out a new shoot in the life of mankind. . . . 'I want to do something with living people somewhere, somehow, while I live on earth. I write, but I write alone. And I live alone. Without any connection whatever with the rest of men.' (pp. 77-79)

Yet he resents having neighbours, and, through most of the novel, we see him at once anxious to be united with other men in a common purpose and rejecting their many offers of friendship and common action. Harriet is quick to point out the contradiction to him: "'You *don't* like people. You always turn away from them and hate them.'" (p. 77) But it is not until he has been shocked into recognizing in Kangaroo the dangerous power of absolute love that he becomes aware of the gap between his dream and reality and that he relinquishes all desire "to save humanity or to help humanity or to have anything to do with humanity." (p. 293)

In spite of the development in Lawrence's thought, each stage of which is illustrated in a novel, the essential fact in human experience remains for him the union between man and woman. After Ursula, all the women in Lawrence's novels, except Connie Chatterley, ask: "'Why aren't I enough?'" Birkin needed Gerald; Lilly and Somers want to experience a new life-mode. But all are ultimately sure of one thing only: the reality and significance of their marriage, which is also the touchstone of their self-realization as individuals and of the nature of society. The central chapters in *Kangaroo* analyse—unfortunately in theoretical form—the

marriage between Harriet and Somers. She not only refuses to submit to him but also to believe in him as a world-saviour. In the end, by refusing to be ignored as a person and by forcing him to recognize that he depends on her, she makes him acknowledge his responsibility in failing to actualize the power-urge in personal relations while she also compels him unconsciously to define the first requirement of the religious mode of life to which he aspires :

He did not yet submit to the fact which he *half* knew : that before mankind would accept any man for a king, and before Harriet would ever accept him, Richard Lovat, as lord and master, he, the self-same Richard who was so strong on kingship, must open the doors of his soul and let in a dark Lord and Master for himself, the dark God he had sensed outside the door . . . let himself once admit a Master, the unspeakable god : and the rest would happen. (p. 196)

In *Kangaroo* Lawrence analyses the social motives which underlie the political movements of the Twenties. Although Somers is interested in the possibility of creating a new community of men on the basis of such movements, he makes it quite clear that he will never commit himself politically. And this is the source of the misunderstanding between himself and Callcott or Kangaroo. For these two never understand what is important in Somers's philosophy of life, nor that his quest is primarily religious. When Kangaroo expounds Somers's ideas and demands his approval, the latter feels compelled to acquiesce, though he is desperate when he realizes that his "ideas" are going to be exploited for political purposes. Moreover, Kangaroo distorts Somers's philosophy in such a way that it is bound to conduce to death instead of life. Somers refuses to collaborate with him or with Struthers, the socialist leader, because both make love an end in itself : to Kangaroo, love is the one source of inspiration of all creative activity ; Struthers makes solidarity, i.e. the new sacred social bond, an absolute. Kangaroo, who insists on the power of love, and Struthers, for whom communism is the logical outcome of love, represent the aspirations of modern man to a better life. But love as they see it is much too general and indiscriminate to be a spontaneous, creative emotion. It manifests itself in a desire to ensure the material well-being of the masses and contributes to make

money the only god, whereas Somers wants men to have a real passion for *living* and not for *having*. Moreover, although love is to Somers "the greatest thing between human beings, . . . when it is love, when it happens," (p. 220) it is also a relative thing: it *cannot* be an absolute "because of the inevitable necessity of each individual to react away from any other individual." (p. 220) Somers alludes here to the necessity of letting hate, also a natural phenomenon, express itself as freely as love. Lawrence had already shown that a mixture of hate and love is inherent in any human relationship: Birkin and Gerald, or even Birkin and Ursula, Lilly and Aaron, or Lilly and Tanny, experience that natural recoil from each other almost as often as they meet through love or friendship. This inevitable duality of feelings entails the constant renewal of a relationship: fulfilment is a dynamic process; it is never achieved once and for all. However, most men deny this recoil from the love-urge. They think love is the only urge or rather their only purpose, which once reached will automatically procure happiness for all. When people so insist on loving humanity, they come to hate everybody because to force any feeling is to kill it and to substitute for it some sort of opposite. To Lawrence, love of humanity is only a form of self-assertion, self-importance and malevolent bullying; as he explained in *Aaron's Rod*, the prime motive of political leaders is a dead ideal:

The ideal of love, the ideal that it is better to give than to receive, the ideal of liberty, the ideal of the brotherhood of man, the ideal of the sanctity of human life, the ideal of what we call goodness, charity, benevolence, public spiritedness, the ideal of sacrifice for a cause, the ideal of unity and unanimity—all the lot—all the whole beehive of ideals—has all got the modern bee-disease, and gone putrid, stinking.<sup>1</sup>

On the point of being trapped by Kangaroo, Somers experiences a fear that reminds him of the fear he had felt at being bullied during the War. Like Lilly, who keeps away from the crowd and gets himself "out of their horrible heap," Somers flies in horror from Kangaroo's attempt to blackmail him into love. The shock of recognizing that fear makes him recall his experiences in

<sup>1</sup> *Aaron's Rod*, p. 293.

England at the hand of those who tried "to break the independent soul in any man who would not hunt with the criminal mob." (p. 235) Actually, the chapter entitled "The Nightmare" is a recollection of Lawrence's own experience during the War. He explains how love of humanity led England to participate in the War because of men's wish to interfere and to sacrifice themselves to the ideal of love. It was a time when industrialism and commercialism in England became identified with patriotism and democracy. The English soul went under in the War; as a conscious, proud, adventurous, self-responsible soul, it was lost. "We all lost the war," says Lawrence, "perhaps Germany least." (p. 246) He explains that the spirit of the old London collapsed; the city ceased to be the heart of the world and debasement began, "the unspeakable baseness of the press and the public voice, the reign of that bloated ignominy *John Bull*." Individuals lost their integrity, and the world lost its manhood, though not for lack of courage to face death. As Lilly explains to Aaron, they always had death-courage, but not life-courage. It was easier to sacrifice oneself than to face one's own isolated soul and abide by its decision, because no man in possession of himself would want to fight and kill as they were forced to do. But having been compelled to serve a dead ideal, men realized that it *was* a dead ideal, and they felt they had been sold; they were humiliated. This is for Lawrence the origin of disillusionment, which characterized the Twenties, an attitude often described but rarely explained with such perspicacity. The younger generation realizing that love of humanity is not all love, but that it carries a good deal of bitterness under its mask, recoil from sympathy and would rather be frankly egoists. Unfortunately, they seem to go to the other extreme and reject all sympathy and deep emotion. Hence a feeling of emptiness even in the amusement they seek, which makes them uneasy and slightly frightens them. Now the older generation having been humiliated by being compelled to serve a dead ideal, they want some kind of revenge, and Somers sees Kangaroo, Struthers, and their political parties as representatives of the vengeful mob, which shows a recklessness comparable to that of the Russians and of the Irish at the time. According to Lawrence, the masses degenerate into mobs when the balance between the two great controlling influences—power and love—is broken. "All great mass uprisings are really acts of vengeance against the dominant consciousness of the day." (p. 331) In



*Kangaroo* the vengeful mass-spirit breaks loose in a violent row between "diggers" and socialists. *Kangaroo* is wounded and dies a victim of his own ideology.

As the political theme develops and Somers, increasingly aware of the "politicization" of life, rejects offers of personal friendship and of collaboration with *Kangaroo*, he is brought to define what he stands for. It is not "the tuppenny social world of present mankind" that attracts him, but "the genuine world, full of life and eternal creative surprises, including of course destructive surprises: since destruction is part of creation." (p. 167)

Somers did want the world. He did want to take it away from all the teeming human ants, human slaves, and all the successful, empty careerists. He wanted little that the present society can give. But the lovely other world that is in spite of the social man to-day: that he wanted, to clear it, to free it. Freedom! Not for this subnormal slavish humanity of democratic antics. But for the world itself, and the *Mutigen*. (p. 167)

And who are the "Mutigen," the manly? They are the men "who must of their own choice and will listen only to the living life that is a rising tide in their own being... listen for the injunctions, and give heed and know and speak and obey all they can... no matter what the rest of the world does." (p. 172) Somers himself is often weary of the fight in which his soul "buries its way to the intense knowledge of the dark god"; he shrinks from making clear to others what the dark god is. But when he has finally rejected *Kangaroo*, he formulates his credo more distinctly. "There is God. But forever dark, forever unrealisable... The God who is many gods to many men: all things to all men. The source of passions and strange motives." (pp. 294-5) Here again Somers asserts the dual character of life: "to be pure in heart, man must listen to the dark gods as to the white gods, to the call to blood-sacrifice as well as to the eucharist." (p. 296) In fact, Somers's belief in the god "that gives a man passion... blood-tenderness... and blood-pride" and to whom man must refer the sensual passion of love, is a reassertion of the faith in instinctive life professed by all Lawrentian characters. When he says that "man at his highest, is an individual, single, isolate, alone, in direct soul-communication with the unknown God, which prompts within him," (p. 332) he expresses the same

conception of man as Birkin. Nor is Lawrence's vision of the salvation of man different from what it was in *Women in Love* :

It is the individual alone who can save humanity alive. But the greatest of great individuals must have deep, throbbing roots down in the dark red soil of the living flesh of humanity. (p. 332)

What is new in *Kangaroo* is Lawrence's affirmation of the power-urge as the possible foundation of a new creed. But it should be noted that it is always asserted in contradistinction to what he is rejecting and that it often betrays weariness, as if this were the only possibility open to men in the circumstances :

What Richard wanted was some sort of a new show : a new recognition of the life-mystery, a departure from the dreariness of money-making, money-having, and money-spending. . . . It meant a new recognition of difference, . . . of one man meet for service and another man clean with glory, having the innate majesty of the purest *individual*, not the strongest instrument, like Napoleon. . . . The single soul that stands naked between the dark God and the dark-blooded masses of men. (p. 334)

We should also remember that for all his glorifying of the "dark god," Somers refuses "to give up the flag of our real civilized consciousness." : "'I'll give up the ideals . But not the aware, self-responsible, deep consciousness that we've gained. . . . I'm the enemy of this machine-civilization and this ideal civilization. But I'm not the enemy of the deep, self-responsible consciousness in man, which is what I mean by civilization.'" (p. 383)

Lawrence must have perceived very early that Australia, or rather that the Australians were uncongenial to the expression of his vision of life. At night Somers feels the glamour of the continent, "a kind of virgin sensual aloofness." Yet in the day-time "the profound Australian indifference" which is really "the disintegration of the social mankind back to its elements" makes the people uninteresting to him. It is only in the short period before his departure that he experiences strong feelings towards Australia, first of revulsion, then of love when he and Harriet delight in the Australian spring. But he still doesn't like the people. From the beginning it is clear that Somers, like Lilly, is above all concerned to find his own way, possibly to save individuals, but not to save a large group of men, precisely because the group or the mass are

to him horrible and soulless. Somers's refusal to commit himself implies a definite repudiation by Lawrence of the means offered to modern man to save himself. *Kangaroo* is hardly disguised autobiography. It describes Lawrence's attempt to relate the power-urge to the historical context of the Twenties. But the man who in the twentieth century wishes to actualize his urge for power and become a leader of men cannot be a leader of individuals, he is a leader of the mass, and this is inconsistent with Lawrence's belief in individual regeneration. Still, his idea of reconciling the urge for power with the political context of the time was far from inconsistent. His desire to find a solution in keeping with the terms offered to men, i.e., fascism or socialism, indicates the shrewdness of his insight into the contemporary social and political situation. Lawrence had a keen understanding of the disease of society: of the disillusion at having been forced to serve a meaningless ideal, and of the desire for revenge and for change which found an outlet in political ideologies.

Ultimately, the significance of *Kangaroo* lies in Lawrence's condemnation of the whole modern system of politics on the same grounds as he condemns the new structure of society. However, Lawrence's disapproval of modern politics was actually a rejection of the dominance of the mob. In *Culture and Society* Raymond Williams explains that fear of the masses and of the democratic system they want to establish comes from considering them as a mob displaying all the characteristics of the mob: "gullibility, fickleness, herd-prejudice, lowness of taste and habit. The masses on this evidence, formed the perpetual threat to culture. Mass-thinking, mass-suggestion, mass-prejudice would threaten to swamp considered individual thinking and feeling."<sup>1</sup> This is exactly Lawrence's view, though one must remember that he equates the masses with the mob partly because during the War he was a victim of the mob-spirit and perhaps also because he was badly treated by a "democratic government." His reactions to the mob-spirit are often excessive, but his experience of it made him foresee in what way that spirit would manifest itself once the masses gained ascendancy in politics. He not only saw

<sup>1</sup> Raymond WILLIAMS, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

what extreme forms the political theories of the post-war era would take when applied by the mob, he also realized that any government dominated by the mob-spirit would turn England into a sort of mob-democracy that merely counts votes and in which individuals are swamped by the vociferous crowd. The manifestations of the mob-spirit during the War made him all the more aware of such dangers and gave him a prophetic insight into the possible consequences of "government by the people for the people," which might easily bring about the destruction of the best men in society. This made him insist all the more on the intrinsic individuality of men, and if his protest was so loud, it is because he felt like a prophet crying in the wilderness. The shrill note which is often detected in that protest is a sign that Lawrence's experience was never completely digested. But his diagnosis of the "evils" of democracy and his prophetic view of the consequences of those "evils" for the individual, are none the less remarkable.

In spite of his Australian experience Lawrence did not give up the hope of being the prophet of a regenerated community. He made another experiment in an environment where man still felt reverence for the mystery of nature and was not cut off from the earth. In Mexico he was impressed by the real bond he felt to have existed between the earth and the ancient tribes, and he was aware of a communion between the people and the spirit of the place. This made him consider the country as an adequate setting for the revival of the dark gods by which men might be brought back to life from the *impasse* of sterility and death in which modern civilization had landed them. "We must take up the old, broken impulse that will connect us with the mystery of the cosmos again, now we are at the end of our tether," Ramon says in *The Plumed Serpent* (1926).<sup>1</sup> When Kate arrives at the Lake of Sayula, from which the new incarnation of the God Quetzalcoatl is said to have risen, she feels

the velvety dark flux from the earth, the delicate yet supreme life-breath in the inner air. Behind the fierce sun the dark eyes of a deeper sun were watching, and between the bluish ribs of the mountains a powerful heart was secretly beating, the heart of the earth. (p. 117)

<sup>1</sup> *The Plumed Serpent*, p. 147.

This is the place where Ramon wants to bring the old gods back to life and from where he hopes to start a religious movement that will shake the Mexicans out of their hopelessness. The first thing that strikes Kate is the irrational character of his creed :

All a confusion of contradictory gleams of meaning. Quetzalcoatl. But why not? Her Irish spirit was weary to death of definite meanings, and a God of one fixed purport. Gods should be irridescent, like the rainbow in the storm. . . . Gods die with men who have conceived them. But the god-stuff roars eternally, like the sea, with too vast a sound to be heard. Like the sea in storm, that beats against the rocks of living, stiffened men, slowly to destroy them. Or like the sea of the glimmering, ethereal plasm of the world, that bathes the feet and the knees of men as earthsap bathes the roots of trees. Ye must be born again. Even the gods must be born again. We must be born again. (p. 63)

Lawrence explains here the origin and purpose of the experience described in the novel. But the experience is that of two men who represent the Mexican people, one Indian, the other almost purely Spanish with a streak of Indian blood. We should not forget that in both *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent* the political, or religious, experience is lived through by people who belong either to Australia, or to Mexico. The European seeker, who expresses Lawrence's own reactions, is a spectator who contemplates commitment, or in the case of Kate goes so far as to actually try to take part in the experience, but finally rejects the political ideology or the kind of religious mode that is offered. However, in *Kangaroo* theories and political factions fail to convey the reality of Lawrence's vision; in *The Plumed Serpent* Lawrence does not preach, and the characters' creed informs their very lives. Moreover, the "strange darkly-irridescent beam of wonder, of magic" which arouses Kate's response to Mexico is substantiated by Lawrence's ability to convey the atmosphere of the place, an indispensable and powerful element in Ramon and Cipriano's venture.

Kate rejects the American way of life, its cult of the dollar, its automatism. She is repelled by her American friends' frantic activity, which they call "living," by their systematic search for sensations: for instance, they are determined to sit through a corrida in which she, Kate, sees nothing but "human cowardice and



beastliness, a smell of blood, a nauseous whiff of bursten bowels." (p. 16) She is glad to leave Mexico city, which has been corrupted by the intrusion of white civilization. "The white men brought no salvation to Mexico. On the contrary, they find themselves at last shut in the tomb along with their dead god and the conquered race." (p. 145) Kate is struck by the helplessness, the "profound unbelief that was fatal and demonish" in the Indians of Mexico city, and she thinks that "all the liberty, all the progress, all the socialism in the world would not help." (p. 55) By describing the squalor and corruption of Mexico City, Lawrence makes clear the failure of democracy to bring the Mexican people to consciousness. Socialism, born of Christian idealism, has completed the action started by the Christian conquerors: it has confirmed the Mexican Indians in their deadness instead of bringing them to life. The Indian must be brought face to face with a reality that he understands. As Ramon says, "Different peoples must have different Saviours, as they have different speech and different colour. But the manifestations are many." (p. 384)

Under the influence of Ramon and Don Cipriano Kate contemplates acceptance of the religion of Quetzalcoatl. But she does not abandon willingly her claim to homage, to feeling a queen and making her own will prevail, which are the privileges or (to Lawrence) the doom of the white woman. Her final decision to remain in Mexico indicates that she at last relinquishes her ego, that she is determined not to become a "grimalkin" like most modern women she knows, but to fulfil herself in her marriage with Cipriano. It is not submission in the ordinary sense of the word but an abandon of the self which makes her more potent in her womanhood. As an individual, she means nothing to him. She is but

the answer to his call, the sheath for his blade, the cloud to his lightning, the earth to his rain, the fuel to his fire. Alone she was nothing. Only as the pure female corresponding to his pure male did she signify. (p. 414)

Man and woman assume significance in relation to each other or to many other human beings, and the Morning Star which rises between them is their soul, the entrance to the innermost, the infinite. That is why their union transcends personality. Kate does not *know* Cipriano, she only feels instinctively what he is. This impersonal love which brings men and women into immediate

contact is the core of Ramon's religion. Carlota denies him the kind of love he wants, the sensual fulfilment of his soul, but his later marriage with Teresa marks the defeat of pity and charity and the defeat of the modern woman, who turns her love for her husband into will and never gives herself. Carlota accuses Ramon of merely wanting power, and it is true that as one of the " initiators of the Earth, " he feels he belongs to the natural aristocracy of the world. Like Somers, it isn't political power that Ramon is after but a dark mysterious force that distinguishes among men the representative of the living god, to which other men surrender their personal selves impulsively, without understanding, as they give up their ego when they surrender to the living flow of the universe. It should be noted that although Lawrence devotes so much space to the religious quest of Ramon and Cipriano, he describes the actual revolution led by the Quetzalcoatl movement in a single page, which shows his uneasiness at imagining a real mass action.

It is not without misgivings that Kate finally decides to remain in Mexico. Her attitude throughout the novel is one of alternative acceptance and rejection. As Keith Sagar rightly remarks, " she fights her own transformation every step of the way. " <sup>1</sup> Her hesitations are not merely due to her unwillingness to give up the prerogatives enjoyed by women in modern civilization: she questions the validity of Ramon's religion and stays in Mexico not because she is convinced that she is going to live under a system to which she agrees, but because of the personal ties she has formed. The last scene clearly indicates that her marriage with Cipriano is the only determinant. Whatever her doubts about Ramon and Cipriano's religious practices, Kate has finally convinced herself of one thing :

that the clue to all living and to all moving-on into new living lay in the vivid blood-relation between man and woman. A man and a woman in this togetherness were the clue to all present living and future possibility. Out of this clue of togetherness between a man and a woman, the whole of the new life arose. (p. 426)

<sup>1</sup> Keith SAGAR, *The Art of D.H. Lawrence*, Cambridge, 1966, p. 160.

This is remarkably close to the theme of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Indeed the final coming together of Kate and Cipriano is softer and more tender than the stark impersonality of their early sexual relations, though here again Lawrence stresses the precariousness of harmony in a man-woman relationship. There is nothing essentially new in Ramon's "message"; he pleads for the same return to life as Lilly and Somers advocate. What is new is the vision in which Lawrence has embodied his search for a new religion, i.e., for a new apprehension of life. He conveys so effectively the dark power of the Mexican country and the mysterious quality of living of the Indians that what the characters experience seems natural. Our grasp of that experience is intuitive rather than intellectual, for it is difficult to define exactly the elements which make it up: religion, mysticism, a deep sense of the mystery of the universe, attraction for, mixed with revulsion from, primitive people, their sensuality and their weirdness. Lawrence does not advocate a return of civilized man to primitive life. The only thing Kate shares with the Indians is the instinctive knowledge that they are all fragments of the same whole. In the end, she is confident that "a new germ, a new conception of human life . . . will arise from the fusion of the old blood-and-vertebrate consciousness with the white man's present mental-spiritual consciousness. The sinking of both beings, into a new being." (p. 444)

The important meaning that emerges from *The Plumed Serpent* is that men can reach fulfilment by following the impulse of the soul and living in full accord with the universe. "'All I want them to do,'" Ramon says, "'is to find the beginnings of the way to their own manhood, their own womanhood.'" (p. 225) It is true, as some critics have pointed out, that Ramon's religion cannot stand rational analysis, but it is precisely a violent reaction against a way of life essentially determined by reason. It does not claim consistency, it only claims impulsive life. Kate sees Ramon and Cipriano as "men face to face not with death and self-sacrifice, but with the life-issue." (p. 71) It is often alleged that, on the contrary, Ramon's religion glorifies death, killing and the complete subjugation of the many to a few chosen blood-aristocrats. Lawrence was accused of expressing theories which were essentially fascist. Graham Hough thinks that Lawrence was a fascist *avant la lettre* at a time when Mussolini was still a socialist and

Hitler nothing very much in the German army.<sup>1</sup> It must be remembered that though Lawrence died in 1930, thus eight years after Mussolini came to power, there isn't the least trace of admiration for Mussolini or for fascism as an organized party in his work. True, already in *Aaron's Rod* Lilly asserts the natural superiority of some men over others, though his position remains very ill-defined. In *Kangaroo* Somers's disgust with democracy leads him to a man who tries to establish a *régime de force* which obviously attracts him, though he ultimately rejects *Kangaroo* and his ideal uncompromisingly. Admittedly, Lawrence makes a mistake in *The Plumed Serpent* when he lets Ramon, Cipriano and even Kate participate or acquiesce in the murder of the peons who have tried to kill Ramon. To suggest that they should not be held responsible for their actions because they belong to the natural aristocracy of the earth, is to condone a dangerous indulgence in sin against life. The point, however, is not whether they can be excused or not, but that, by Lawrence's own standards, Kate's acquiescence is a breach against life and against art, because it makes her marriage to Cipriano questionable. Lawrence fails to realize where such acts can lead, a failure due to his inability to visualize the practical applications of some of his theories. Still, this one lapse from his belief in the sanctity of all life can hardly affect the character of his work as a whole. Lawrence was aware of forces in the human psyche which drove men to irrational forms of behaviour. These forces had been ignored or denied by a long tradition of rationalism, and men were now the more eager to give them expression :

They were weary of events, and weary of news and the newspapers, weary even of the things that are taught in education. Weary is the spirit of man with man's importunity. Of all things human, and humanly invented, we have had enough, they seemed to say. (pp. 278-9)

In *The Plumed Serpent* Lawrence proclaims the failure of white civilization and its modern by-products, liberalism, democracy, and socialism, to bring man to fulfilment. He makes clear the nature

<sup>1</sup> Graham Hough, *The Dark Sun*, Pelican Books, 1961, p. 277. It must be added, however, that Graham Hough believes that Lawrence would have turned away from fascism in action.

of the power-urge which was to have such a dreadful influence in the following decades. That he was himself fascinated and repelled is obvious in Kate's response to Ramon's religion. But his interest in the possible manifestations of the power-urge seems to have been exhausted in *The Plumed Serpent*. It does not reappear in his fiction, and he afterwards expressed his revulsion from the primitivism with which he had associated it. "Altogether I think of Mexico with a sort of nausea: not the friends, but the country itself. . . . I feel I never want to see an Indian or an "aboriginee" or anything in the savage line again."<sup>1</sup> Lawrence acknowledged that the religious myth which is accepted by Mexican peons cannot be taken seriously and without reservation by highly conscious individuals. What remains true and valid is the theme he develops in all his novels: the need for a living relationship between man and man, man and woman, men and the universe:

'I stand for the touch of bodily awareness between human beings and the touch of tenderness. And she is my mate. And it is a battle against the money, and the machine, and the insentient ideal of monkeyishness of the world.'<sup>2</sup>

This is the theme of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928): the belief that the only way to escape the deadness of the industrial world is through "tenderness." When Connie tells Mellors: "' Shall I tell you what you have that other men don't have, and will make the future? It's the courage of your own tenderness,'" (p. 290) she makes him aware of his value as a human being and of the significance of his life. Lawrence's meaning is made clear by the contrast between spiritual degeneration through love of money and the regeneration of individuals through sensual love. He is mainly concerned about England and the English; it is not by accident that he chose England for the setting of this novel, which expresses his despair and his love for his country:

England my England! But which is *my* England? The stately homes of England make good photographs, and create the illusion of a connection with the Elizabethans. The handsome old halls are there, from the days of Good

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Harry T. MOORE, *The Intelligent Heart*, London, 1955, p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Penguin Books, 1961, p. 292.



Queen Anne and Tom Jones. But smuts fall and blacken on the drab stucco, that has long ceased to be golden. And one by one, like the stately homes, they were abandoned. Now, they are being pulled down. As for the cottages of England—there they are—great plasterings of brick dwellings on the hopeless countryside. . . . One England blots out another. The mines had made the halls wealthy. Now they were blotting them out, as they had already blotted out the cottages. The industrial England blots out the agricultural England. One meaning blots out another. The new England blots out the old England. And the continuity is not organic, but mechanical. (pp. 162-3)

When describing the transformation of England, Lawrence insists on the complete servitude of men to the industrial system, on their reduction to inhuman creatures by the bitch-goddess, success or money. As Connie drives through Tevershall, she cannot help noticing that industry, promoted by man, now turns against him "with a will of its own," offering him only an underworld and a life "with utterly no beauty in it, no intuition."

Incarnate ugliness, and yet alive! What would become of them all? Perhaps with the passing of the coal they would disappear again, off the face of the earth. They had appeared out of nowhere in their thousands, when the coal had called for them. Perhaps they were only weird fauna of the coal-seams. Creatures of another reality, they were elementals, serving the elements of coal, as the metal-workers were elementals, serving the element of iron. Men but not men, but animas of coal and iron and clay. . . . Elemental creatures, weird and distorted, of the mineral world! They belonged to the coal, the iron, the clay, as fish belong to the sea and worms to dead wood. The animal of mineral disintegration! (p. 166)

These are the men whom Clifford Chatterley is proud to rule, though he doesn't call them men but objects, or animals who are responsible for the ugliness of their environment, or slaves who have been spoiled by a little education, one of the bad modern substitutes for a circus. Like Gerald Crich, Clifford denies the priority of the individual over industry or society, and asserts man's purpose as a functioning unit. The masses are to serve industry as he Clifford Chatterley serves the aristocracy; each plays the part assigned to him by fate. Clifford attaches much importance to his responsibility as an aristocrat, a ruler. He is

crippled in the lower part of his body, alive only in the mind, a man without warmth, responsible for the deadness and sterility of all who depend on him. His "cold and contactless assurance that he belongs to the ruling class" is a cold spirit of vanity which makes him pant after success. There lies precisely the irony of the situation, that such a man, who has only the appearance of strength with a hard shell and a soft inside, should be a ruler and preside over human destinies. There is no more affection or sympathy in his attitude towards his wife than towards society: "He was never really warm, nor even kind, only thoughtful, considerate, in a well-bred, cold sort of way!" (p. 74) Even before he was crippled in the War, sex was merely an accident, not really necessary to him, so that his lameness becomes a symbol of his incapacity to live fully, a symbol of "the deeper emotional or passional paralysis, of most men of his sort and class today."<sup>1</sup> His relationship with Connie is essentially mental. He and his wife live in their ideas and in his books, and Connie is aware that she loses touch with the substantial and vital world; yet it is not until she goes to pieces and becomes ill that she tries to react. She is really lost, for, before her marriage she was herself a modern woman, glad to enjoy her freedom; love was secondary to her and sex a sensation not worth the sacrifice of her freedom. When she loses interest in the writing of her husband, which is successful but devoid of meaning to her, she doesn't know where to turn. Her husband's friends are like him cold and dehumanized, believers in the mental life. Only Tommy Dukes expresses ideas akin to Lawrence's and diagnoses the disease from which all men in the group suffer: they have severed their connection with organic life and are like "quenched apples . . . fallen off the tree." But Tommy can only talk and criticize; he confesses to an incapacity to act on his ideas, so that his deliberate rejection of life is almost cynical. On the other hand, Connie's affair with Michaelis merely strengthens her conviction that she can expect nothing from the men of her generation; it is merely another encounter with selfishness and sterility.

What Connie feels is utterly lost on Clifford. He is not interested in her as a person, only in what she stands for. Indeed,

<sup>1</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *'A Propos of Lady Chatterley's Lover' and Other Essays*, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 124.

"people can be what they like and feel what they like and do what they like, strictly privately, so long as they keep the *form* of life intact, and the apparatus." (p. 187) He is not shocked at the idea of her having a child by another man; he does not even imagine that feelings might be involved. The only thing that matters is that she would bring an heir to Wragby. Yet, emotionally, Clifford depends on Connie entirely, as Gerald depended on Gudrun or Strebensky on Ursula:

'You are the great I-am! as far as life goes. You know that, don't you? I mean as far as I am concerned. I mean, but for you I am absolutely nothing. I live for your sake and your future. I am nothing to myself.' (p. 115)

Connie resents it all the more as he idealizes her at a time when they are utterly out of touch. Indeed, when Mrs. Bolton comes to nurse Clifford, the intimacy between the latter and his wife, which rested on his complete physical dependence upon her, comes to an end. At the same time, he becomes more intimate with Mrs. Bolton, an indication that human beings, whoever they are, are instruments in his life. As he is emotionally dependent on the woman who takes care of him, so, like Gerald Crich, he depends morally on industry to give meaning to his life. This moral dependence is illustrated in a small incident. His wheelchair, on which he puts an exaggerated strain, stops and will not take him further. Clifford refuses aid, but he is powerless and must accept to be pushed by Mellors. In a rage he exclaims: "'It's obvious I'm at everybody's mercy.'" He has just been asserting the superiority of the ruling classes, and he feels humiliated. But it is so only because he makes the machine and not himself responsible for what happens. His dependence on industry for life is further revealed in his capacity as a business man when Connie no longer nurses him nor takes part in his literary work and he takes a new interest in the mines:

And he seemed verily to be re-born. *Now* life came into him! He had been gradually dying, with Connie, in the isolated private life of the artist and the conscious being. . . . He simply felt the rush into him out of the coal, out of the pit. The very stale air of the colliery was better than oxygen to him. It gave him a sense of power, power. (p. 112)

When Connie leaves him for good, his keenness and business-acumen increase together with his emotional perversity. Like Gerald, he becomes a child emotionally, but a perverse child-man :

The wallowing in private emotion, the utter abasement of his manly self, seemed to lend him a second nature, cold, almost visionary, business-clever. In business he was quite inhuman. (p. 306)

While he might claim some sympathy because he is a cripple, we are gradually led to despise him and the social system he stands for. Clifford is a degenerate being, a sinner against life. Connie and Mellors transgress conventions and bourgeois morality, but they are true to life, and as they become more intimate, tenderness and kindness, the fruits of unselfish love, lay the foundations of a stable relationship.

Some critics<sup>1</sup> have interpreted the sexual relations between Connie and Mellors as sexual perversion. John Sparrow, in particular, analyses the passage in which Lawrence describes their "night of sensual passion," and he explains that Lawrence describes perverted sexual practices condemnable by the law. Sparrow's article<sup>2</sup> is distasteful and rather irrelevant because he discusses coldly, and renders much more suggestive than Lawrence does, a passage which cannot be dissociated from the book as a whole. He presents this passage as if it were an end in itself, whereas the form of sexual passion it suggests is only acceptable in art, as in life, when it is part of a process of mutual discovery and takes place between people who are also united by tenderness. John Sparrow says that in this description Lawrence fails to show his usual openness and frankness about sex, that he is covert and oblique and relies on clues and suggestions to convey his meaning, which to Sparrow indicates a "failure of integrity" and a "fundamental dishonesty." The "sheer sensuality" alluded to by Lawrence may be shocking to some readers, but its effect also depends on the spirit in which the passage is read. The method which Sparrow criticizes for its lack of openness—though he also writes that

<sup>1</sup> Among them Katherine Ann Porter and John Sparrow in a series of articles published in *Encounter* in 1960, 1961, and 1962.

<sup>2</sup> John SPARROW, "Regina vs Penguin Books Ltd, An Undisclosed Element in the Case," *Encounter*, February 1962, 35-43.

Lawrence's meaning is plain enough—is in fact tactful yet unre-served. Sparrow makes much of a sexual practice which Lawrence merely suggests, in spite of the fact that the emphasis in the passage under discussion is not on what takes place between Mellors and Connie, which is unimportant in itself, but on the effect their sexual relations have on Connie. Lawrence's purpose in accumulating scenes of sexual passion is to show how Connie is gradually brought to life. The climax she and Mellors reach in their sexual relations reveals to her the intensity of her passion and unsuspected aspects of sexual experience, which help her to understand her true nature. After her "visionary experience," when she sees Mellors washing in the backyard, Connie becomes aware of her body and of its lost vitality. At a moment when she is overwhelmed with emotion, contemplating "pure, sparky, fearless new life" in small chickens, she submits to the keeper, that is, to life and henceforth a remarkable change takes place in her. Indeed, none of Lawrence's heroines is so completely transformed by "phallic marriage" as Connie, who seems to lose in personality what she gains in "phallic consciousness." More than in any other novel, we have the impression that the characters are carried by forces which they cannot resist. It is the regenerating power of these forces that Lawrence wanted to assert, the conviction that tenderness and passion could destroy the spirit of industrial civilization. By making them the criteria of a purer and richer life, he presents a new moral attitude which transcends the conventional conceptions of good and evil and rests entirely on faithfulness to life. Lawrence thought that private sexual life influenced the life of society; he illustrated this belief in Clifford's sterility and in the deadness of the community he rules. Conversely, "phallic marriage" in relation with the living cosmos is a regenerator of society.

*Lady Chatterley's Lover* is Lawrence's last desperate attempt to convince the English of the beauty and greatness of sexual love and to bring them to a healthier attitude in their sexual relations. Curiously enough, it completes the search for life described in his fiction as if he knew he would not write another novel. His vision of life is still basically the same, but it must be protected from the clutches of the apostles of death. There is no going further. Lawrence's previous novels all ended inconclusively because the end was actually the beginning of a new life, a new search. Mellors



can only say "we must rescue ourselves as best we can." (p. 299) Although his own rebirth makes him wish to teach people how to *live*, he is hardly prepared to do anything about it because, thinking of his union with Connie and of the coming child, he is afraid of the power of the world to kill life. Yet *Lady Chatterley's Lover* is a profession of faith in life, in the "inexhaustible, forever unfolding creative spark."<sup>1</sup> It presents in more extreme and more concrete terms the conflicts and the rebirth which were dramatized in *Women in Love*, and the contrast between the two modes of life open to man is sharper: the industrial world is uglier, but the relationship between Connie and Mellors is more tender and therefore perhaps less precarious than that between Birkin and Ursula. Both Gerald and Clifford believe in the functionalism of man; in Gerald, however, this belief is a candid manifestation of his attitude to life, whereas Clifford is a cynic who despises the workers' mediocre life. Like other men of his class, he does not sin against life in ignorance, he rejects it deliberately: "'It's much less complicated,'" (p. 42) one of his friends says. This lack of "life-courage" has transformed human beings into inhuman creatures. There is a sense of hopelessness and finality in the ugliness of Tevershall which makes it far worse than the mining towns evoked in Lawrence's earlier novels. The fact that Connie forsakes the sterility of a man who produces such ugliness and wilfully "negates the gladness of life," and that she rejects him for a rich passionate life invests the regenerating force of sexual relations with greater power. This does not prevent the sexual experience between Connie and Mellors from sometimes appearing as an end in itself; it becomes mere sensuality then, which, as Lawrence himself said, kills the beauty of the "phallic" union and deprives it of significance. This may be due to the frankness with which Lawrence describes the sexual act without relating it to the "beyond," to the mystery of cosmic life as he does in *Sons and Lovers* and even more so in *Women in Love*. Sexual relations are described for what they are. Birkin and Ursula, we remember, resigned from their position, i.e., from society, immediately after their coming together. Mellors is more realistic; he is at once self-assured and aware that the essence of his life must find utterance in ordinary social terms: "'I can't be just your male

<sup>1</sup> *Phoenix*, p. 219.

concubine, ' ' (p. 289) he tells Connie. The programme he adumbrates in his last letter to her is simply an exhortation to reject materialism. Only reverence for the sacredness of life and of sex as a manifestation of life can restore men to wholesome living. But again, unlike Lawrence's previous characters, Mellors is too pessimistic not to be convinced that his vision of a better world is Utopian. He is glad enough to be left in peace with Connie; in spite of everything, some people do preserve the flame of life:

All the bad times that have ever been, haven't been able to blow the crocus out: not even the love of women. So they won't be able to blow out my wanting you, nor the little glow there is between you and me. (p. 316)

The splendour of the resurrection of the body experienced by Connie testifies to Lawrence's faith in life, a faith which he expressed so poignantly at the end of *Apocalypse*:

For man, the vast marvel is to be alive. For man, as for flower and beast and bird, the supreme triumph is to be most vividly, most perfectly alive. Whatever the unborn and the dead may know, they cannot know the beauty, the marvel of being alive in the flesh. The dead may look after the afterwards. But the magnificent here and now of life in the flesh is ours, and ours alone, and ours only for a time. We ought to dance with rapture that we should be alive and in the flesh, and part of the living, incarnate cosmos.<sup>1</sup>

We sense in these words what a marvellous thing it is merely to be alive for a man who knows he is going to die! To the very end Lawrence proclaimed his faith in the act of living. In *The Man Who Died*, written shortly before his death, resurrection takes on a wider significance: in contrast with many Christians who tend to think only of the death of Christ, Lawrence insisted that Christ resurrected to Life, not to Death:

Church doctrine teaches the resurrection of the body; and if that doesn't mean the whole man, what does it mean? And if man is whole without a woman then I'm damned.<sup>2</sup>

Going to the wood before her "phallic marriage" to Mellors, Connie has an intuition of man's power to resurrect to life, and she associates that power with the words of the Gospel:

<sup>1</sup> D.H. LAWRENCE, *Apocalypse*, Hamburg, 1934, p. 220.

<sup>2</sup> *Collected Letters*, pp. 778-9.

'Ye must be born again! I believe in the resurrection of the body! Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it shall by no means bring forth. When the crocus cometh forth I too will emerge and see the sun!'<sup>1</sup>

In *The Man Who Died* Christ himself becomes the advocate of a new way of life based on the vital contact :

This is the great atonement, the being in touch. The grey sea and the rain, the wet narcissus and the woman I wait for, the invisible Isis and the unseen sun are all in touch, and at one. (p. 138)

Lawrence's last novel ends with the glorification of the one reality that inspires his whole work: the vital impulse which animates the universe and unites man and woman in a living relationship with the cosmos.

One of the most outstanding features of Lawrence's work is the homogeneity of the vision which inspires it. From *The White Peacock* to *Lady Chatterley's Lover* the theme of his novels remained essentially the same, though he emphasized different aspects of it. "The business of art," he wrote, "is to reveal the relation between man and his circumambient universe, at the living moment."<sup>2</sup> Lawrence describes the individual's modes of being and the deeper emotions aroused in him in his association with other individuals; these emotions motivate man's behaviour regardless of either moral or social conventions. The individual's failure in life is a failure to be himself instinctively and spontaneously; it is brought about by spiritual or emotional sterility. In Lawrence's novels tragedy is not the outcome of "transgression against the social code . . . as though the social code worked our irrevocable fate,"<sup>3</sup> but of transgression against life and against one's inner being. Life itself is the relation between human beings, particularly between man and woman; it is the expression of their changing and often conflicting streams of passion. This relation outweighs all others because it has the "four-dimensional quality of eternity

<sup>1</sup> *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Phoenix*, p. 527.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 420.

and perfection" by which man is made one with the living cosmos; it is the kernel of society and ultimately determines its character. Lawrence renders the uncertainty, the tentativeness, the impulses of love or hate, anger or tenderness, which characterize men-women relationships and make life a constant fight, and fulfilment a dynamic process, since balance and harmony are fragile and never final. They require courage and an unflinching belief in life. Lawrence was deeply shocked by what he called the death-courage of his contemporaries, their willingness to die, particularly in the War, which they seemed to find easier than the fight which real life demands. He attributed their death-courage to the fact that they turned love or patriotism into an ideal for which they were prepared to lay down their lives. This glorification of one emotion was in his eyes the very negation of life, one of the sources of destruction in the modern world.

Lawrence's view of life as a dynamic process is naturally hostile to all that is static and conventional in society. Indeed, those of his characters who really live and fight their way to fulfilment ignore the claims of society. Although this is irrelevant to Lawrence's purpose and to his art, it is worth mentioning, in view of his own insistence on individual freedom, that these characters are able to ignore the material aspect of life and that they live on the fringe of society. Those who are integrated and wish to serve society on its own terms are destroyed as human beings. Lawrence's indifference to the demands of society borders on anarchism. There is, indeed, a streak of anarchism in his work, which stands in contradiction with his "societal impulse." For if he inherited his individualism from his nonconformist ancestors, he also owed to them a deep sense of responsibility and a Puritan conscience, which drove him to "preach" and to tell people what to do.<sup>1</sup> This inclination is particularly obvious in *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo*, and *The Plumed Serpent*, in which he examines the consequences of individual behaviour for the individual himself and for the community as a whole, and explores the possibilities of a regenerating action in conjunction with a group of men. At this stage in the course of his work Lawrence defines his conception of

<sup>1</sup> In *Adventure in Consciousness, The Meaning of D.H. Lawrence's Religious Quest*, The Hague, 1964, George Panichas shows that Lawrence can be placed in the tradition of Puritan preaching.

the power-urge as an adequate basis for an organic community, in which each individual would assume responsibility according to his degree of consciousness. This renaissance of the "Chain of being" would naturally entail the submission of "inferior beings" to a highly conscious minority. "Anyone who is kind to man knows the fragmentariness of most men, and wants to arrange a society of power in which men fall naturally into a collective wholeness."<sup>1</sup> Yet Lawrence never made clear in his novels how his view of community life could be actualized. As *Kangaroo* and *The Plumed Serpent* clearly show, he was unable to visualize the practical framework of his "religion of the blood." At this stage Lawrence seems to be in an *impasse*, divided between his desire to reform the world and his revulsion—even in fiction—from the applications of his own theories, a fact which may account for his characters' reluctance to commit themselves to action.

Lawrence's insistence on the individual's freedom to act from his deeper emotions should not blind us to the moral character of his work. Indeed, "A thing isn't life just because somebody does it."<sup>2</sup> As David Gordon rightly says, "he wanted not only moral behaviour but moral feeling."<sup>3</sup> And moral feeling meant to Lawrence an instinctive adherence to life as well as a clear perception of what destroys it. He felt that most people were not even aware of the destructive power of the principles or ideals to which they were committed, and he exposed their confusion. The criticism implied in his first novels or explicitly stated in the later ones is not so much of social institutions or of the purposes exalted by society as of the individual's acceptance of them and responsibility for what they are. He had a prophetic insight into the evils that entailed the disintegration of society and reduced the individual to a mere unit in the collectivity. He was not content to satirize temporary social phenomena or the outward manifestations of the prevailing state of mind at a given period; he went to the heart of modern civilization, analysed its nature, and diagnosed its disease with extraordinary lucidity.

In his first novels Lawrence provides a remarkable picture of the final transformation of England from an agricultural into an

<sup>1</sup> *Apocalypse*, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> *Phoenix*, p. 529.

<sup>3</sup> David J. GORDON, *D.H. Lawrence as a Literary Critic*, New Haven, 1966, p. 132.



industrial country, and of the resulting collapse of community life. The industrialization of England had begun more than a century before. In *Culture and Society* Raymond Williams places Lawrence in a tradition of thinkers who, as early as the end of the eighteenth century, began to criticize industrialism and the democratic society to which it was giving rise. He points out that Lawrence condemns industrialism as a state of mind which, rather than industry as such, led to the ugliness of the industrial society. In "Nottingham and The Mining Countryside" Lawrence alludes to the influences that went to make up that state of mind: puritanism and materialism did much to prevent men from resisting mechanization. He makes women chiefly responsible for destroying instinctive life in men and for yielding to the "base forcing of all human energy into a competition of mere acquisition."<sup>1</sup> He shows to what extent puritanism conditions the feelings of women and moulds their attitude. They destroy the vital flame in men by compelling them to be excessively spiritual and by asserting the supremacy of the intellect over all other human faculties. They transform the religious impulse into something abstract and ideal, making an end of what was originally a means of achieving fulfilment in harmony with the universe. They also give in to the spirit of materialism, because material possessions are a token of achievement and success in life. Lawrence brings out the subtle and often ignored relation between religion and materialism. In his later work he brings to light another aspect of this relation by pointing to the influence of the Christian love ideal on the equalitarian conception of men and on the resulting sense of obligation to provide for their material welfare, which in its turn became an end in itself. He makes the love-ideal responsible for much that is evil in modern society. He sees democracy as the ultimate development of it, and he is strongly adverse to political democracy which, in his eyes, reduces all life to a grey sameness and denies the individual the right to realize himself according to his nature. From *Aaron's Rod* onwards, he shows in all his novels the failure of liberal democracy and of socialism to satisfy the deeper needs of man.

We have seen that in his description of what institutions or trends of thought thwart the individual's spontaneous mode of being, Lawrence makes woman largely responsible for imposing on

<sup>1</sup> *Phoenix*, p. 138.

man conventional forms of feeling and for making him lose his belief in his own vitality and manliness. He expresses his distaste for what he calls her "indomitable will-to-power" and dramatizes her struggle with man for the possession of his soul. His emphasis on the important part played by women in determining personal relations suggests that their attitude towards men is a pointer to the soundness of society at any given time. This is quite clear in *The Rainbow*, in which the change in women's attitude towards men as a result of their emancipation is parallel to the change in society. Throughout his novels Lawrence shows that the man-woman relationship is the axis of civilization, and he asserts his conviction that it is that relationship which must serve as a new foundation for a regenerated community. Men have gone dead in their relation to women, they must be brought to life with them and reintegrate the universal flow of life through sexual passion. Lawrence believes that healthy sexual relations are an important factor of social renaissance and that the integrity, the spontaneity, and the warmth which man is expected to show in these relations are a manifestation of the vital flame that will revive him in all fields of experience. One of his critics writes that it is irresponsible nonsense "to believe that once life has been found, all other problems that confront modern man—even the problems of the twenties, for those of our mid-century are more serious and more difficult—will solve themselves as a consequence."<sup>1</sup> Lawrence himself did not think that the regeneration he advocated would solve the problems of society: "As a novelist, I feel it is the change inside the individual which is my real concern. The great social change interests me and troubles me, but it is not my field. . . . My field is to know the feelings inside a man, and to make new feelings conscious."<sup>2</sup> Essentially, he believed in personal redemption and wholesome relations as a way of saving the individual from a system in which his self, his "otherness" was sacrificed to functionalism and to ideals which destroyed all instinctive life in him. He was also aware that this regeneration cut off man from the main social and political trends in contemporary life, and in his later novels he sought a way of reconciling his vision of

<sup>1</sup> Eliseo VIVAS, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> *Assorted Articles*, p. 98.

individual salvation with a doctrine of action. His failure to do so made him reassert more forcefully than ever his faith in tenderness and human warmth. His interpretation of the redeeming power of physical love remains the most challenging feature of his work. He was the first modern writer to describe the turmoils and the inconsistency of passion with such intensity and frankness and to disclose unsuspected or ignored aspects of the human personality. We must remember that he had published the best part of his fiction before the end of the First World War, i.e., before Virginia Woolf published her first novel and several years before Joyce published *Ulysses*. His novels convey a grim image of the modern world, but they also proclaim man's ineradicable wish to live. The gamekeeper, symbolically present in his first and in his last novel, testifies to the continuity of real life even in a diseased civilization.

## VIRGINIA WOOLF

Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another! for the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and fight,  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

(Matthew ARNOLD, *Dover Beach*)

In his introduction to *Society and Self in the Novel* Mark Schorer writes that "the problem of the novel has always been to distinguish between the self and society, and at the same time to find suitable structures that will present them together."<sup>1</sup> It is often denied that Virginia Woolf was concerned with this problem; a current opinion is that she neglected the social scene and was solely concerned with the individual. Actually, she presented the two in a new relationship. She reacted against the realistic novel and refused to assume that to describe the social context and the individual's relation to it was the only way of interpreting life. In contradistinction to the "materialists," who, she said, "laid an enormous stress upon the fabric of things,"<sup>2</sup> but neglected "life, human nature,"<sup>3</sup> she attempted to re-define the individual's relationship with his surrounding world and reversed the usual process of exploration by doing away with the external approach and going straight to what was essential to her: the inner life of human beings and the quality of their experience rather than experience as such.

The often-quoted passage in which Virginia Woolf describes life as a "luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding

<sup>1</sup> Mark SCHORER, *Society and Self in the Novel*, New York, 1956, p. viii.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia WOOLF, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," in *The Captain's Death Bed and Other Essays*, London, 1950, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

us from the beginning of consciousness to the end,"<sup>1</sup> is the key to her fiction. It is prompted by an approach to life which had been gaining ground since the beginning of the century: the new assumption was that perceptions, sensations, thoughts, feelings, what Virginia Woolf calls "the unknown and uncircumscribed spirit," are as real as the material reality which gives rise to them:

What is meant by 'reality'? It would seem to be something very erratic, very undependable—now to be found in a dusty road, now in a scrap of newspaper in the street, now a daffodil in the sun. It lights up a group in a room and stamps some casual saying. It overwhelms one walking home beneath the stars and makes the silent world more real than the world of speech—and then there it is again in an omnibus in the uproar of Piccadilly. Sometimes, too, it seems to dwell in shapes too far away for us to discern what their nature is. But whatever it touches, it fixes and makes permanent. That is what remains over when the skin of the day has been cast into the hedge; that is what is left of past time and of our loves and hates. Now the writer, as I think, has the chance to live more than other people in the presence of this reality.<sup>2</sup>

To deal with "reality" as Virginia Woolf understands it, requires a more perceptive investigation of the human personality in order to bring out a complexity which does not arise from the intricacy of situations but from the subtlety of feelings and intuitions. In "Phases of Fiction" she writes that "always more of life is being reclaimed and recognized."<sup>3</sup> Yet she is often accused of having limited instead of enlarging the material of fiction. Now, is that part of life which she reclaims, that new reality which the writer endeavours to catch, reconcilable with the interrelation between the individual and society? Does Virginia Woolf ignore the social world? Are her novels "essays about [herself],"<sup>4</sup> and does she explore the sensibilities of people who are never subjected to the crises inherent in all human lives? It is hard to imagine a character in fiction who would be completely cut off from society,

<sup>1</sup> Virginia WOOLF, *The Common Reader*, First Series, London, 1957, p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia WOOLF, *A Room of One's Own*, London, 1931, pp. 165-6.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia WOOLF, "Phases of Fiction," in *Granite and Rainbow*, London, 1958, p. 144.

<sup>4</sup> Virginia WOOLF, *A Writer's Diary*, London, 1959: "Have I the power of conveying the true reality? Or do I write essays about myself?" p. 57.



engrossed in thoughts exclusively about himself. One must distinguish between thoughts aroused by contact with the external world and thoughts which are purely self-centered. As Jean Guiguet writes, "le monologue intérieur — et la psychique qu'il prétend exprimer — est toujours lié à un contexte circonstanciel précis, dont il est en quelque sorte l'émanation."<sup>1</sup> The strictly lyrical is usually expressed in poetry. It is perhaps significant that Virginia Woolf seldom wrote poetry. But she thought that the novel must perform what poetry has always done: epitomize, present life in symbols, divested of superfluous external elements. This does not mean rejecting facts; she refines them by a process of abstraction and builds the novel on their significance. If her novels appear to have no bearing on the external reality, it is because she refuses to consider the surface of things as the main substance of human experience and tries to seize the movement of life under the surface. Her novels do not describe the data of experience but the emotions and sensations they give rise to. These emotions are fugitive and ephemeral; they can be aroused by the memory as well as by the anticipation of events. Hence the emotional content of an experience is not limited in time, and conversely, the whole experience of an individual can be apprehended in a moment. This is an important aspect of Virginia Woolf's work which is not directly relevant to this analysis but must be mentioned since it is paramount in her apprehension of life as a whole. Experience is thus not important in itself but only proportionally to one's capacity to transcend it and illuminate what is significant in it. Accordingly, its interpretation is entirely subjective:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions—trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; . . . Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight and incident scores upon the consciousness. Let us not take it for granted that life exists more fully in what is commonly thought big than in what is commonly thought small.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jean GUIGUET, *Virginia Woolf et son œuvre*, Paris, 1962, p. 732.

<sup>2</sup> *The Common Reader*, First Series, pp. 189-90.

The striking element in these words is the attempt to trace a pattern, to infer some kind of order and significance from a host of impressions apparently incongruous, as well as the fact that the act of living is as significant in the routine of everyday life as at moments of crises. While selecting those features in a character's life that are most likely to become impressed upon his consciousness and mould his inner life, Virginia Woolf does not ignore the social context, though, except in her first two novels, it is not presented directly but through the consciousness of the individual. But her characters are keenly aware of the surrounding world, and their effort to maintain a harmonious relationship with it, while preserving their personality intact, is a major theme in her novels. If in her early work the individual gives his life significance through supra-social values and by rejecting the ordinary social conventions, the characters in her later novels try to harmonize their own existence with their social environment, though they still seek to protect themselves from the excessive, and in their eyes unfair, demands of conventions and institutions set up by society. At all stages in her work Virginia Woolf attempted to reveal an inner reality feeding on the external world; the tragedy of man was precisely that he could never ignore the pressures of his environment.

Already in her first novel, *The Voyage Out* (1915), Virginia Woolf explores the nature of life and draws attention to the individual's need to assess the meaning of existence. The main characters are isolated in a small South American resort, but English society is represented by the English colony staying at the hotel of Santa Marina; they form a rigid and conventional circle beyond which sensitive individuals wish to move because they feel imprisoned in a society whose code of manners is for them meaningless. The plot is insignificant, and its incidents only serve to bring out the contrast between facts, events and appearances on the one hand, thoughts and feelings on the other, or between the reality of the "materialists" and that which the characters try to apprehend. The first part of the novel is devoted to the description of Rachel's ignorance and of the narrow-minded Victorian conventions of the milieu in which she has been brought up. By connecting Rachel's lifelessness with the education she has received, Virginia Woolf achieves a twofold aim: she criticizes the position of women and she condemns those who are attached to rigid social attitudes:

She had been educated as the majority of well-to-do girls in the last part of the nineteenth century were educated. Kindly doctors and gentle old professors had taught her the rudiments of about ten different branches of knowledge, but they would as soon have forced her to go through one piece of drudgery thoroughly as they would have told her that her hands were dirty. . . . There was no subject in the world which she knew accurately. . . . She would believe practically anything she was told, invent reasons for anything she said. . . . The most elementary idea of a system in modern life—none of this had been imparted to her by any of her professors and mistresses.<sup>1</sup>

Rachel knows nothing about "the facts of life":

She was of course brought up with excessive care, which as a child was for her health; as a girl and a young woman was for what it seems almost crude to call her morals. Until quite late, she had been completely ignorant that for women such things existed. (p. 32)

When Richard Dalloway kisses her, she can hardly get over the shock, and Helen is surprised to realize how genuine her bewilderment is, and how important the problem of women's education. Helen, a beautiful woman of forty, prefigures Mrs. Ramsay; she is the only woman in the novel whose intelligence and character have developed without the restraint imposed on women by their inferior position. She is straightforward, cultivated and able to think for herself. She hates sentimentality and domesticity and discourages "those habits of unselfishness and amiability founded upon insincerity which are put at so high a value in mixed households of men and women." (p. 143) She is of course a mouthpiece for Virginia Woolf's feminist views<sup>2</sup>:

If they [women] were properly educated I don't see why they shouldn't be much the same as men—as satisfactory I mean; though of course very different. The question is, how should one educate them? The present method seems to me abominable. The girl though twenty-four had never heard that men desired women, and until I explained it, did not know how children were born. Her ignorance upon other

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, London, 1929, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> These views are developed in such essays as *A Room of One's Own* and *Three Guineas*.

matters as important was complete. It seems to me not merely foolish but criminal to bring up people like that. Let alone the suffering to them, it explains why women are what they are—the wonder is they're not worse. (p. 110)

The position of women at the beginning of the twentieth century is one of the important sub-themes of the novel. The respect that even well-educated and very able women have for men is such that they find it natural that everything—their own education and life to begin with—should be sacrificed to men. Perhaps the main obstacle to be overcome before women can become the equals of men is their own unawareness of the inferiority of their position and their inability to stand for themselves :

It is the beginning of the twentieth century, and until a few years ago no woman had ever come out by herself and said things at all. There it was going on in the background, this curious, silent, unrepresented life. Of course we're always writing about women . . . but it's never come from women themselves. . . . It's the man's view that's represented. (p. 258)

Rachel sees life as "a light passing over the surface and vanishing . . . things as immense and desolate," (p. 145) but she acquires a willingness to discover the true nature of things and to determine her own position in the elusive flow of life. She and Terence are drawn together by their common desire to find out what is behind things. It is significant, however, that even before meeting the Dalloways and before the subsequent discussions with her aunt, Rachel hardly suffered from her isolation and her ignorance of the external world, because reality to her had always been what one thought and felt. So that when she comes into contact with the English colony of Santa Marina, her first reaction is to question her relationship with her new environment. Though she gains in self-assurance and articulateness, her experience of society does not fulfil her ; the complacent and conventional society she discovers can hardly help her in her search for truth and permanency. When the English residents come together at a picnic, Terence and Rachel observe them and are depressed by their superficial and insincere game :

They are not satisfactory ; they are ignoble, he thought. . . . Amiable and modest, respectable in many ways, lovable even

in their contentment and desire to be kind, how mediocre they all were, and capable of what insipid cruelty towards one another! . . . Yet these were the people with money, and to them rather than to others was given the management of the world. Put among them some one more vital, who cared for life or for beauty, and what an agony, what a waste would they inflict on him if he tried to share with them and not to scourge! (pp. 156-7)

In different ways Rachel, Helen and Terence evade the mediocrity of social intercourse. Rachel is only conscious of the complexity of life, of its misery and of the incapacity of people to communicate. She is inclined to think that people should live separate because they only bring out what is worst in each other. Helen resents their lack of sensitivity, their curiosity, and their intrusion upon other people's inner life. She is aware that life is more than the social intercourse which appears to play so big a part in people's existence :

The little jokes, the chatter, the inanities of the afternoon had shrivelled up before her eyes. Underneath the likings and spites, the comings together and partings, great things were happening—terrible things, because they were so great. Her sense of safety was shaken, as if beneath twigs and dead leaves she had seen the movement of a snake. It seemed to her that a moment's respite was allowed, a moment's make-believe, and then again the profound and reasonless law asserted itself, moulding them all to its liking, making and destroying. (pp. 321-2)

Her sense of the subjection of man to an irresistible destiny which shapes his life and is most often malevolent, makes her very anxious during their trip inland and gives her a foreboding of the coming catastrophe. Terence is also aware of a deeper and more significant flux of life under the uncertainty, the transitoriness, the chaos of appearances. But, unlike Helen, he believes that a certain order exists behind things, which it is sometimes possible to apprehend. And this belief in an ordered reality beneath the superficial turmoil of life reconciles him to the external world and to society. Rachel is not so easily convinced of the necessity to adapt herself to the outside world. She can hardly believe that this is a way of discovering the meaning of life. Her refusal to fit in, her ability to withdraw within herself and to ignore even Terence,



whom she loves, is a source of misunderstanding between them, for her attitude is not merely an expression of her grudge against society but also of her inability to communicate with people. The happiness she experiences through love does not silence her doubts about life. Moments of perfect bliss, when they are one and indivisible, alternate with moments of depression. Communication, which is the ultimate object of life and death, is from the start the main issue in Virginia Woolf's work. She sees human beings as solitary creatures trying to give their life some sense of continuity through unsatisfactory relationships. Intuition, more surely than words, can lead to understanding. That is why Terence, who voices the author's artistic aspirations, wants to write a novel about silence. Communication is a means of apprehending reality, of perceiving the pattern which emerges from the haphazard and apparently meaningless experiences of ordinary life. Even Rachel understands this shortly before her death in a moment of happy communion with Terence; she then experiences the peacefulness that comes from the apprehension of a superior reality :

That was the strange thing, that one did not know where one was going, or what one wanted, and followed blindly, suffering so much in secret, always unprepared and amazed and knowing nothing; but one thing led to another and by degrees something had formed itself out of nothing, and so one reached at last this calm, this quiet, this certainty, and it was this process that people called living. Perhaps, then, every one really knew as she knew now where they were going; and things formed themselves into a pattern not only for her; but for them, and in that pattern lay satisfaction and meaning. . . . So too, although she was going to marry him and to live with him for thirty, or forty, or fifty years, and to quarrel, and to be close to him, she was independent of him; she was independent of everything else. Nevertheless, as St John said, it was love that made her understand this, for she had never felt this independence, this calm, and this certainty until she fell in love with him, and perhaps this too was love. (pp. 384-6)

Love, like intuition, opens the way to understanding. But we should note that it is love and *not* marriage which reconciles the individual with life. On the contrary, marriage is clearly not a happy end but a compromise imposed by society. Rachel and

Terence pity Susan and Arthur when the latter fall in love and become engaged. When Terence realizes that he is in love with Rachel, his first reaction is horror at the idea of marriage, and he would like to say to her :

I worship you, but I loathe marriage, I hate its smugness, its safety, its compromise, and the thought of you interfering in my work, hindering me. (p. 298)

Rachel also has her doubts about marriage. Virginia Woolf's objection to marriage, apart from the change in character it entails in most people, is that it was considered as the only state in which a woman could reach fulfilment, as the only one that ensured her safety, whereas, in fact, it solved none of the problems of personality and only confirmed most women in their hypocritical submission to men. Consider the irony with which she describes Susan's joy when the latter becomes engaged :

Marriage, marriage, that was the right thing, the only thing, the solution required by every one she knew, and a great part of her meditations was spent in tracing every instance of discomfort, loneliness, ill-health, unsatisfied ambition, restlessness, eccentricity, taking things up and dropping them again, public speaking, and philanthropic activity on the part of men and particularly on the part of women to the fact that they wanted to marry, were trying to marry, and had not succeeded in getting married. If, as she was bound to own, these symptoms sometimes persisted after marriage, she could only ascribe them to the unhappy law of nature which decreed that there was only one Arthur Venning, and only one Susan who would marry him. (pp. 211-12)

Susan's sentimentality about marriage is the result of her false conception of life and of the insincerity imposed on women by conventions. In the same way, religion is to Susan a source of sentimental self-satisfaction. Attending a service at the hotel, Rachel is struck by the insincerity of the people around her. She becomes indignant at the whole show which priest and congregation alike seem to put up merely out of self-righteousness, and she feels a violent dislike of Christianity.

Rachel falls ill shortly after the party which celebrates her engagement and during which she achieves a new peace and understanding. Her illness brings home to Terence the fragility

of human happiness, the tragedy of life and the power of fate to strike blindly :

He had never realised before that underneath every action, underneath the life of every day, pain lies, quiescent, but ready to devour ; he seemed to be able to see suffering, as if it were a fire, curling up over the edges of all action, eating away the lives of men and women. . . . How did they dare to love each other, he wondered ; how had he himself dared to live as he had lived, rapidly and carelessly passing from one thing to another, loving Rachel as he had loved her ? Never again would he feel secure ; he would never believe in the stability of life, or forget what depths of pain lie beneath small happiness and feelings of content and safety. It seemed to him as he looked back that their happiness had never been so great as his pain was now. There had always been something imperfect in their happiness, something they had wanted and not been able to get. It had been fragmentary and incomplete. (pp. 420-1)

At the moment of Rachel's death, they both experience perfect happiness and achieve a union impossible in life. Each has overcome his solitude and is perfectly fused with the other. This moment of certainty is the consummation after the dissolution of appearances. It is an instant of ecstasy and respite, for life will soon go on for Terence in a world from which Rachel is absent ; already the others are absorbed in their own cares : Helen is thinking about her children in London, and St John is glad to resume a normal life at the hotel.

Although *The Voyage Out* was published in 1915, it looks forward to the post-war literature which inquires into the meaning of life and explores the new relation between the individual and society. The main characters ask the question that will be asked all through Virginia Woolf's work : What is Life ? The answer is to be found by moving away from a rigid social system towards a superior reality. The static world of appearances is being discarded in favour of a quest for a reality which is perhaps as yet not very clearly conceived. What is important here is the possibility of discovering some unity in life, the movement and the effort towards understanding and communion. The discovery of life is achieved through the discovery of the self. It does not entail a change in being, rather a coming to consciousness and to maturity

through the realization of one's nature. This is already a suggestion that people assert themselves by what they are, not by what they do. Most of the themes that Virginia Woolf was to develop in her later novels are hinted at: the solitariness of human beings and their anxious desire to communicate; the need to find a common ground of understanding between the individual and his environment, and to derive some significance or sense of permanency from the apparent chaos and fragmentariness of life; and finally, the exploration of the human personality, particularly that of women. The frustration of her female characters is linked up with their position in society, and their self-realization is achieved outside the social circle. Like Lawrence's heroines, they are lost, although in a different sense. The poor education they receive, the atmosphere of self-righteous devotion in which they are raised, the monotonous mediocrity of their existence, make them either inarticulate or awkward, submitted to a false ideal or dissatisfied and revolted, longing for equality with men but utterly inefficient. Helen alone is an example of well-balanced feminine personality, of what women might be if they were properly educated. She possesses the maturity and the assurance which come from the exercise of reason, from experience and understanding and, above all, from an uncompromising insistence on sincerity and truth and a rejection of all the false ideas and prejudices of the Victorian era. Her feminine qualities make the fight for the vote of women seem irrelevant. She might be saying with Matthew Arnold that "an increased spiritual activity, having for its characters increased sweetness, increased light, increased life, increased sympathy,—is an idea which the new democracy needs far more than the blessedness of the franchise, or the wonderfulness of its own industrial performance."<sup>1</sup> For if Virginia Woolf wanted women to have the same rights as men, she also wanted them to develop and to come to maturity according to their own nature, not by imitating men. She may ridicule the outdated sentimentality of Clarissa Dalloway, but she is even more ironical towards Evelyn Murgatroyd's desire to be a man and do great things. She is even slightly contemptuous of the life of action advocated by Richard Dalloway. For Virginia Woolf,

<sup>1</sup> Matthew ARNOLD, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. by R.H. Super, Ann Arbor, 1965, p. 109.

real life means receptivity to the external world. If society is severely criticized in *The Voyage Out*, it is because it benumbs that receptivity. However, the criticism we find in this novel is too often theoretical. Virginia Woolf does not yet reveal life in a flash, and, like Rachel, she is not certain that literature can "render the moment whole" as music can. Like other writers of the Twenties, she is filled with a sense of the tragic destiny of man. She finds assuagement in a communion which transcends life and death and gives rise to a feeling of peace unattainable in a world where "chaos is triumphant, things happening for no reason at all, and everyone groping about in illusion and ignorance." (p. 269)

If *Night and Day* (1919) is less pessimistic, it is nevertheless melancholy, for though the characters enjoy the prospect of a long life of discovery, they also know that communion will always alternate with solitariness and that happiness must always be created anew. The novel takes place shortly before the First World War, and Virginia Woolf describes with great care the life of the English upper-middle class at the time. She may give the impression that her aim is to give a picture of English society, but she portrays society only to contrast it more strikingly with the dream-world of Ralph and Katherine. When the novel opens, Katherine is playing hostess to eminent people who discuss literature with her parents. She is an accomplished young woman, beautiful, rich, fairly cultivated. She gives an impression of great self-assurance, and she seems highly suited to control and to command. Yet the very first time he meets her, Ralph notices that she does all this with the superficial part of her being, and though he will not know for a long time what her real preoccupations are, he is struck with the certainty that she is given to contemplation and that her self-control and her composure hide another, mysterious, personality. In fact, Katherine is not as happy as she might be. Though she enjoys a relative freedom and the confidence of her parents, she resents their dependence on her. She is divided between on the one hand her affection for her mother and the family devotion to literature, and on the other hand her desire to be free as Mary Datchet is free to have a life of her own. As her cousin rightly says of her, "she hasn't found herself yet."<sup>1</sup> Katherine feels

<sup>1</sup> Virginia WOOLF, *Night and Day*, London, 1930, p. 215.



she is a prisoner of her social duties; when she can escape, she studies mathematics or she dreams. The fact that she can only indulge her liking for mathematics in secret shows the pressure of social conventions on the life of a woman. Though this seems ridiculous now, it was real enough at the time. This pressure of society is better illustrated yet by the reaction of Katherine's family to the situation of her cousin, who lives with a woman without being married to her and has three children born out of wedlock. In different ways their attitude is typical of their refusal to consider a man's deeper feelings rather than his failure to conform to accepted standards. Katherine's aunt shows a complete lack of understanding. Mr. Hilbery thinks Cyril was wrong to sin against established conventions, but he refuses to examine the implications of the situation :

How superficially he smoothed these events into a semblance of decency which harmonized with his own view of life! He never wondered what Cyril had felt, nor did the hidden aspects of the case tempt him to examine into them. He merely seemed to realize, rather languidly, that Cyril had behaved in a way which was foolish, because other people did not behave in that way. (p. 111)

Mrs. Hilbery simply refuses to face the facts. Her indignation at Cyril's behaviour soon gives way to her wish to find some way of escape, a sudden illumination "which would show to the satisfaction of everybody that all had happened, miraculously but incontestably, for the best." (p. 124) As Katherine says, "Mrs. Hilbery's bulls always turned conveniently into cows at the critical moment." (p. 159) But now Katherine is irritated by her mother and aunts: "how they talked and moralized and made up stories to suit their own version of the becoming, and secretly praised their own devotion and tact." (p. 125) Katherine doesn't think Cyril's action either good or bad, merely a thing that has happened. She is depressed by the elder people's disregard of individual feelings, which makes them, perhaps unconsciously, hypocritical, insincere, and most of the time cruel. Yet Virginia Woolf's attitude towards a generation whose standards she obviously criticizes is ambiguous. The ambiguity may come from the fact that she recognizes that Victorian values were good for the Victorians but have lost their significance, a fact which most people refuse

to acknowledge. Through Mrs. Hilbery she expresses a certain nostalgia for better times and refers to them as "the period before things were hopeless." Katherine herself musing about her ancestors thinks that "their behaviour was often grotesquely irrational; their conventions monstrously absurd; and yet, as she brooded upon them, she felt so closely attached to them that it was useless to try to pass judgment upon them." (p. 115) Mrs. Hilbery asserts that "the women in her youth *were* and that's better than doing." (p. 117) For all her vagueness and dreaminess and her ability to ignore the ugly facts of life, Mrs. Hilbery is very good at solving problems and smoothing down the most difficult situations. She doesn't understand why her sister-in-law tells Katherine that it is no good being married unless you submit to your husband, because she is one of those women who get what they want without saying a word about it and without claiming credit for it.

Unless one is free from obligations towards others and emancipated in thought, truth towards oneself and towards others is impossible. That is why Katherine so much admires Mary and envies her, because she lives by herself and does the kind of work she likes, whereas she, Katherine, must always compromise. She has accepted William in a moment of pessimism, "a sudden conviction of the undeniable prose of life, a lapse of the illusion which sustains youth midway between heaven and earth, a desperate attempt to reconcile herself with facts." (p. 254) In another moment of pessimism when William implores her not to break off their engagement, she accepts to submit to marriage. But she knows that submission means treachery, that feelings are being confused with the demands of society on a girl of marriageable age, whereas she wants to fathom the true nature of her feelings, and until she really falls in love, she can only do so in the world of dreams:

If she had tried to analyse her impressions, she would have said that there dwelt the realities of appearances which figure in our world; so direct, powerful, and unimpeded were her sensations there, compared with those called forth in actual life. There dwelt the things one might have felt, had there been cause; the perfect happiness of which here we taste the fragment; the beauty seen here in flying glimpses only. No doubt much of the furniture of this world was drawn directly from the past, and even from the England of the Elizabethan age. However the embellishment of this imaginary world might change, two qualities were

constant in it. It was a place where feelings were liberated from the constraint which the real world puts upon them; and the process of awakening was always marked by resignation and a kind of stoical acceptance of facts. (p. 145)

There comes a moment when Katherine is despondent: she feels cut off from William by her lack of love and experiences the precariousness of her dream-world. But the example of Mary Datchet confessing to her with perfect sincerity "I'm in love with Ralph" encourages her to seek the truth:

She was ready to believe that some people are fortunate enough to reject, accept, resign, or lay down their lives at the bidding of traditional authority; she could envy them, but in her case the questions became phantoms directly she tried seriously to find an answer, which proved that the traditional answer would be of no use to her individually. . . . The only truth which she could discover was the truth of what she herself felt. . . . To seek a true feeling among the chaos of the unfeelings or half-feelings of life, to recognize it when found, and to accept the consequence of the discovery . . . is a pursuit which is alternately bewildering, debasing, and exalting. (pp. 329-31)

The last sentence is the key to the novel; it describes the quest which Katherine undertakes and which proves successful when she acknowledges that she loves Ralph.

Ralph's real life also takes place in the world of dreams. The facts he wants to escape are not imposed on him by conventions but by poverty. However, it should be mentioned that Virginia Woolf's conception of poverty is somewhat unrealistic. Ralph's home may be ugly and shabby, but it is difficult to imagine that the kind of life he is shown leading at home can be "dreary and sordid." This seems naive and unimaginative, as is Mrs. Ambrose's discovery at forty that the majority of people living in London are poor. Such criticism may be irrelevant because Virginia Woolf is not concerned with poverty as a social condition but with the fact that poverty is a source of suffering. Still, her vision of society is extremely limited: although poverty is a recurrent tragedy in her novels, it is obvious that she knows little about it. To her, the poor are mostly those who do not belong

to her class and resent its apparent futility when they come into contact with it. Doris Kilman in *Mrs. Dalloway* and Charles Tansley in *To the Lighthouse* also react in that way. Actually, Ralph's torments about his family and their circumstances never seem very real to the reader, and the interest concentrates on the reality of his dream-world and on his efforts to reconcile dream and outer reality. His meetings with Katherine often lead to disappointment because he finds it difficult to see in the real Katherine the person of his dreams. When he tells her that she is the sole inhabitant of his dream-world, he is momentarily overwhelmed with a sense of fulfilment aroused by her presence but very soon he is only conscious of a loss :

He had lost something in speaking to Katherine, for, after all, was the Katherine whom he loved the same as the real Katherine? She had transcended her entirely at moments: her skirt had blown, her feather waved, her voice spoken; yes, but how terrible sometimes the pause between the voice of one's dreams and the voice that comes from the object of one's dreams! He felt a mixture of disgust and pity at the figure cut by human beings when they try to carry out, in practice, what they have the power to conceive. (p. 319)

It is the same with Katherine when she endeavours to reconcile her two worlds :

As in her thought she was accustomed to complete freedom, why should she perpetually apply so different a standard to her behaviour in practice? Why, she reflected, should there be this perpetual disparity between the thought and the action, between the life of solitude and the life of society, this astonishing precipice on one side of which the soul was active and in broad daylight, on the other of which it was contemplative and dark as night. (p. 358)

Their first understanding comes from the fact that when they are together they can indulge their dreams. Love makes truth possible even in a world of appearances, and complete truth makes reconciliation of the dream-reality and of factual existence easier. Love can bring suffering, but it also unites, and it liberates the individual, "it is a soothing word when uttered by another, a riveting together of the shattered fragments of the world." (p. 512) Union is not

achieved without difficulty. Katherine and Ralph often find it hard to communicate, and, like Terence and Rachel's, their relationship is fragmentary. But they discover each other's reality through an understanding which makes them share the same vision of the world.<sup>1</sup>

The truth of Ralph's love for Katherine enables Mary to accept it without bitterness. Indeed, Mary, who represents a new type of woman, intelligent, free and working for a better world, whether in a suffrage office or a political society, acts throughout the novel as an agent of truth. Although Virginia Woolf is ironical towards the suffrage workers who take their task so seriously that they are blind to everything else, she makes it clear that through her renunciation of personal happiness Mary has conquered and reached a reality superior to the precarious happiness of lovers because it is "unimpaired by one's personal adventures, remote as the stars, unquenchable as they are." (p. 275) Katherine, who has exposed the insincerity of conventions and traditions and broken her engagement with William, is at first reluctant to marry Ralph and would be content to live with him. Her engagement to Ralph is not merely a compromise with conventions. Both Mary and Mrs. Hilbery have given marriage a new significance by their insistence on truth and sincerity. The attitude and the work of women like Mary are an instrument of regeneration in English society: their real achievement is to make it possible for women to be really themselves and to find a new basis for a true marriage relationship. Ralph and Katherine understand it and acknowledge Mary's triumph when they go to tell her of their engagement and see the light in her room:

It was a sign of triumph shining there for ever, not to be extinguished this side of the grave. . . . They stood for some moments, looking at the illuminated blinds, an expression to them both of something impersonal and serene in the mind of the woman within, working out her plans far into the night—her plans for the good of a world that none of them were ever to know. (p. 536)

<sup>1</sup> "Ralph began to draw little figures in the blank spaces, heads meant to resemble her head, blots fringed with flames meant to represent — perhaps the entire universe." (p. 516) When Katherine sees them, she simply says: "yes, the world looks something like that to me too." (p. 522)



By drawing a contrast between two generations and their conception of the relation between the individual and society, Virginia Woolf records a change in moral values. She does so with more subtlety than in *The Voyage Out*. In her first novel society was a background which it was not very difficult to ignore since after all it hardly impinged upon the characters' lives; in *Night and Day* society is real enough and must be resisted if personal happiness is to be achieved. Several critics have objected that the form of *Night and Day* is not suited to its subject.<sup>1</sup> True, because the social context is described in detail it may take the reader some time to realize that the purpose of the author is not merely to give a picture of society. But he soon understands that the description of the inner life of the main characters is equally important. As the plot develops, life in society is contrasted with the inner life, and the conflict which opposes the formalists to the "dreamers," society to the individual, appears as the real theme of the novel. Gradually, the Victorian world is rejected in spite of its solid virtues and advantages. The younger generation no longer believe that one can be fulfilled by "doing the right thing," or reading Scott, or ignoring the meaning of one's actions. They want to discover their deeper feelings and act accordingly. Virginia Woolf stresses the difficulty of discerning what one really feels in a society in which feelings hardly matter. She condemns the inadequacy of an outdated code of behaviour. The young can no longer comply with social habits; they want to live according to their own vision. But they are shown in relation to society. Whether they accept it, like William and Cassandra, or reject it, like Katherine and Ralph, or attempt to reform it, like Mary, their happiness depends on the possibility of reconciling the truth of feelings with the exigencies of society. Through their healthier attitude, they acquire freedom and regenerate personal and social relations. The author does not criticize Victorian values as such, she criticizes their survival and the fact that they are imposed on people for whom they have become meaningless. Thus, she does not object to marriage, provided it is founded on sincerity. The fusion of inner and outer reality is finally achieved through the

<sup>1</sup> Among them are D. Daiches, W. Holtby and James Hafley (see Bibliography).

characters' stubborn will to unravel the truth from the confusion of every-day life and the prejudices of the past. Ralph and Katherine know that their union is fragile, that communion will always alternate with solitariness: "Moments, fragments, a second of vision, and the flying waters, the winds dissipating and dissolving; then, too, the recollection from chaos, the return of security, the earth firm, superb and brilliant in the sun." (pp. 537-8) This alternation, this ebb and flow of life is the very nature of existence. Katherine and Ralph have learned in their quest for reality that "it's life that matters—the process of discovering—the everlasting and perpetual process, not the discovery itself at all." (p. 132)

The portrayal of society takes up an important part of *Night and Day*. This is because Virginia Woolf had not yet discovered the form which was to allow her to suggest the social environment of a character through his reaction to it instead of depicting it directly. As she reported in her diary from a conversation with John Maynard Keynes, "you must put it all in before you can leave out."<sup>1</sup> Of course, even in her early novels criticism of society is part of a necessary process by which the individual frees himself from an oppressive environment in order to enjoy his own vision of life. Indeed, her characters are fulfilled when, in short moments of bliss, they perceive life as a whole above the fragments and chaos of the apparent world. This is the vision of Mrs. Dalloway when at the end of her party she thinks of Septimus' death, sees her old neighbour going to bed, feels the presence in her house of Peter and Sally, and understands that the meaning of her life lies in "assembling" by bringing people together; and all this gives her "a moment whole." It is the vision of Lily Briscoe when she finally succeeds in completing her picture, or the perfect moment experienced by the characters in *The Waves* when they meet before Percival leaves for India: "Let us hold it for one moment . . . the globe whose walls are made of Percival, of youth and beauty, and something so deep sunk within us that we shall perhaps never make this moment out of one man again."<sup>2</sup> Virginia Woolf wants

<sup>1</sup> *A Writer's Diary*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia WOOLF, *The Waves*, London, 1933, p. 157.

to convey "life itself going on" and death itself, not the death of a person: she wants to convey the essence of experience or experiences stripped from their external circumstances. What is important is the faculty of the character to grasp the significance of experience, and this depends on the degree of consciousness he has achieved. It varies from the most ordinary sensations to the deepest process of thought. Sometimes her characters are what she calls "a sensibility." Their receptivity to the universe determines their "being." This seems to limit life to those who are capable of such consciousness. The characters in Virginia Woolf's novels who lack sensibility seem more real but only in the same way as the external world is real: they give an impression of concreteness and fixity, but they lack the power to discover the real purpose of life. Thus individuality depends on the capacity to apprehend the inner reality and to give meaning to one's experience in the world.

It is obvious that society, like any other field of experience, is part of the universe with which the individual comes into contact. That is why it is wrong to say that Virginia Woolf turns her back on society. She does not: society is one of the constituent parts of life and is important in so far as it affects the individual or as the individual is conscious of it. This conception of the function of society reflects the feeling of many individuals, whose vision of society does not correspond to the vision which society has of itself. By acknowledging the right of the individual to his own vision, Virginia Woolf was interpreting a state of mind which was to be fairly general in the Twenties. If the individual often wants to escape society, it is because it appears to him so chaotic that he feels he is alone in a world too confused to support him. That is why he believes that unity can only be achieved through personal effort and through communion with another individual, which alone stimulates belief in some kind of order transcending ordinary life. From the start, then, the interest of her novels shifts from the traditional centre, since she does not consider human beings living in society but society as one of the components of human existence. Even in *The Waves*, in which the process of abstraction is driven to its utmost limits and each character is a consciousness experiencing intense moments of existence, the impact of society is strong and shapes their life. Bernard loves it, and his sociability is one of the main characteristics of his personality; Rhoda is afraid

of it, and Louis, ashamed of his Australian accent and of his father, a banker in Brisbane, works hard to secure a respectable place in it. In *Orlando* Virginia Woolf shows her hero seeking life where it can be found: at court in the time of Elizabeth, in adventures in the seventeenth century, in "salons" and social intercourse in the eighteenth, in marriage in the nineteenth century and in the whirl of modern life in the twentieth. It is true that she seldom finds in society a satisfactory answer to the question: what is life? Society itself is not the true reality. It is, as we said, part of the field of experience in which that reality is apprehended. Hence society is secondary to "reality" in the same way as the character is secondary to it since he is himself a medium allowing the author to grasp life, love, nature, death, whatever that "reality" is. It is thus understandable that Virginia Woolf's characters should not seek fulfilment in society, that they should not be interested in improving it, hardly in judging it, except, as we have seen in her first two novels, when it deprives them of their vision. They are what they are, and their self-discovery only serves to define their own nature; it does not make them change their way of life or their mode of being. It only gives them depth and knowledge of themselves, which entails truthfulness in human relations and makes communication easier. Their moments of happiness do not arise from fulfilment through a change in themselves or their environment, but from the certainty that they are, and from other people's awareness of their gift of presence. Such is Mrs. Hilbery's conviction that the women of her generation were, or Peter Walsh's renewed love for Clarissa simply because she is, and the harmonizing "presence" of Mrs. Ramsay felt even after her death. This capacity for "being" stresses by comparison the futility of "action," through which characters were traditionally known in the novel. Moreover, the people who act, who run the world often impose conventions on individuals who want the freedom to be themselves.

Given the relationship between the individual and society in the novels of Virginia Woolf, it is easy to understand that society plays a more or less limited part depending on whether the emphasis is on the discovery of a personality, as in *Jacob's Room* (1922), or on society as a source of frustration or fulfilment, as in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). After criticizing in her first novels the deadening influence of Victorian society, she attempted to define

the human personality in a new perspective and to find the adequate form to render it. Except in *Mrs. Dalloway* and in her last novels, the image of society she conveys is only incidental.

The theme of *Jacob's Room* and of *Mrs. Dalloway* is the discovery of a personality and the discovery of life through that personality. In *Jacob's Room*, however, Virginia Woolf so refines the data of Jacob's experience that his environment is too fragmentary and superficial to carry much significance beyond what it contributes to the prismatic portrait of Jacob. In order to convey the movement of life, the author accumulates impressions too rapidly to create a coherent picture of Jacob's milieu. Nor is it her purpose to do so: she merely hints at the nature of Jacob's world, since, as she says, "one must follow hints" in order to understand people. "In any case, life is but a procession of shadows," Virginia Woolf writes, and she insists that it is impossible to have a "a profound, impartial, and absolutely just opinion of our fellow creatures."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, most characters in the novel are hardly more than shadows. Jacob's encounters with prostitutes, with dissipated artists and their models, or with the respectable middle class do suggest that London is unsatisfactory to a "free, venturesome, high-spirited" young man. But the city is chiefly the setting in which Jacob discovers both the ugliness and the beauty of life, women who lie, but also Clara, "a flawless mind, a candid nature." I cannot agree with Mr. Thackur that in *Jacob's Room* London is a symbol of a "perverted, corrupt, and diseased society" as well as of the "futility and barrenness of modern civilization."<sup>2</sup> Still less can I agree with his assertion that "In search of a better civilization, Jacob, like D.H. Lawrence who went away to Mexico, leaves London for Paris, Italy, and Greece."<sup>3</sup> The parallel with D.H. Lawrence is preposterous if we compare Lawrence's grievances against modern civilization with Jacob's. True, the latter writes to Bonamy: "I intend to come to Greece every year so long as I live. . . . It is the only chance I can see of protecting oneself from civilization," (p. 238) but this, Virginia Woolf adds, is "a clumsy saying." He does rank the ancient Greeks high above the moderns,

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room*, London, 1929, p. 115.

<sup>2</sup> N.C. THACKUR, *The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf*, London, 1965, pp. 46-47.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.



but his enthusiasm for their spirit is no more than a young man's love of freedom in reaction against frustrating conventions. At the time of his death, Jacob is only "beginning to think a great deal about the problems of civilization." (p. 244) Actually, Jacob is a young man full of promise who does sense that something is wrong with the world as it is. However, when his life is cut short by the War he is still too much absorbed with living intensely and loving—as the last glimpse we have of him shows—to be seriously concerned with the state of society. If Virginia Woolf really intended to expose the corruption of modern civilization, as Mr. Thackur suggests she did, she failed to do so. In fact, the conciseness with which she reports the War and the few disconnected impressions she records fail to convey even the reality of that tragedy. "Darkness drops like a knife over Greece" is not only meant literally, but probably alludes to the sudden eclipse of what Greece stands for in Jacob's life. The description of Jacob's room suggests how far the twentieth century has declined from the order and distinction of the eighteenth. Betty Flanders exclaiming "Such confusion everywhere!" no doubt refers to the state of the world as much as to Jacob's room. But these statements are too vague to express a real sense of the world's chaos. Only Bonamy's cry "Jacob! Jacob!" is an intimation of anguish and appeals to the reader's imagination to realize the full impact of the War on individual lives.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* the relation between the hero and society determines the life of the individual. Virginia Woolf wrote about it in her diary: "I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity; I want to criticize the social system, and to show it at work at its most intense." (p. 57) Here society is the setting in which life is apprehended, and it cannot be ignored except by rejecting life itself, which is what Septimus is forced to do. Many critics have overlooked the social criticism in *Mrs. Dalloway* because they think it unimportant compared with the universal values Virginia Woolf tries to convey. Admittedly, society is not the object of her exploration, but the characters succeed or fail in their quest for the "real" according to their capacity to give meaning to their life in society. Wondering about the meaning of her existence, Clarissa thinks:

But to go deeper, beneath what people said (and these judgements how superficial, how fragmentary they are!) in her own mind now, what did it mean to her, this thing she called life? Oh, it was very queer. Here was So-and-So in South Kensington; someone up in Bayswater; and somebody else, say, in Mayfair. And she felt quite continuously a sense of their existence; and she felt what a waste; and she felt what a pity; and she felt if only they could be brought together; so she did it. And it was an offering; to combine, to create.<sup>1</sup>

Clarissa Dalloway, the perfect hostess, whose house is a frequent meeting place for the London upper-middle class and aristocracy, is an ordinary woman in that she is not exceptionally intelligent, nor highly sensitive; her great gift is intuition, knowing people by instinct, and a consciousness of her potentialities and role in society. It is the averageness of her personality which makes her so much at home in society and explains the abdication of her own self to it. It made her prefer the safety of marriage with Richard Dalloway to the adventurous and intense joy of living she would have shared with Peter Walsh. Peter has always criticized her subjection to society, and when he sees her after a long absence, he is again struck by it:

The obvious thing to say of her was that she was worldly; cared too much for rank and society and getting on in the world—which was true in a sense, she admitted it to him. . . . What he would say was that she hated frumps, fogies, failures, like himself presumably; thought people had no right to slouch about with their hands in their pockets; must do something, be something; and those great swells, these duchesses, these hoary old countesses one met in her drawing-room, unspeakably remote as he felt them to be from anything that mattered a straw, stood for something real to her. . . . In all this there was a good deal of Dalloway, of course; a great deal of the public-spirited, British Empire, tariff-reform, governing-class spirit, which had grown on her, as it tends to. With twice his wits, she had to see things through his eyes—one of the tragedies of married life. With a mind of her own, she must always be quoting Richard—as if one couldn't know to a tittle what Richard thought by reading the *Morning Post* of a morning. (pp. 116-17).

<sup>1</sup> Virginia WOOLF, *Mrs. Dalloway*, London, 1933, p. 184.

But beside the social hostess there is another Clarissa; there is the woman

with that extraordinary gift for making a world of her own wherever she happened to be. She came into a room; she stood as he had often seen her, in a doorway with lots of people round her. But it was Clarissa one remembered. Not that she was striking; not beautiful at all; there was nothing picturesque about her; she never said anything specially clever; there she was. (p. 116)

Her gift for making her presence felt, for harmonizing and uniting, attracts Peter again in spite of his determination not to love her. And although Clarissa is always conscious in his presence that he criticizes her social attitude, his effect on her is to bring out her other self. She would not allow "perfect gentlemen" and snobs like Hugh Whitbread to be laughed at, but she loves Sally Seton, a rebel against society in her youth; she enjoys life immensely, is aware of everything around her and shares in it, but she always needs people to bring out her sense of the comedy of life. She is also a sceptic who senses the tragedy of humanity and the malevolence of fate towards human beings, and she tries to contribute her part to make life more pleasant and, when possible, mitigate its tragedy. And in spite of her public-spirited attitude, she has "none of that sense of moral virtue which is so repulsive in good women." (p. 119)

Although Clarissa has compromised with society, she is aware of evil forces in it, which she sees acting through Miss Kilman, the bitter and disillusioned teacher who tries to convert her daughter Elizabeth:

Love and religion! thought Clarissa. . . . How detestable. How detestable they are! For now that the body of Miss Kilman was not before her, it overwhelmed her—the idea. The cruellest things in the world, she thought, seeing them clumsy, hot, domineering; hypocritical, eavesdropping, jealous, infinitely cruel and unscrupulous, dressed in a mackintosh coat, on the landing; love and religion? Had she ever tried to convert anyone herself? Did she not wish everybody merely to be themselves? And she watched out of the window the old lady opposite climbing upstairs. Let her climb upstairs if she wanted to; let her stop; then let her, as Clarissa had often seen her, gain her bedroom, part her curtains and disappear again into the background. Somehow one respected that—that old woman looking out

of the window, quite unconscious that she was being watched. There was something solemn in it—but love and religion would destroy that, whatever it was, the privacy of the soul. (p. 191)

Whereas Clarissa feels that the evil power of conversion destroys the private vision, Rezia Smith realizes that this power is used by organized society to destroy individual freedom and eventually the individual himself :

Conversion feasts on the wills of the weakly, loving to impress, to impose, adoring her own features stamped on the face of the populace. At Hyde Park Corner on a tub she stands preaching ; shrouds herself in white and walks penitentially disguised as brotherly love through factories and parliaments ; offers help, but desires power ; smites out of her way roughly the dissentient, or dissatisfied ; bestows her blessing on those who, looking upward, catch submissively from her eyes the light of their own. This lady too (Rezia Warren Smith divined it) had her dwelling in Sir William's heart, though concealed, as she mostly is, under some plausible disguise ; some venerable name ; love, duty, self-sacrifice. How he would work—how toil to raise funds, propagate reforms, initiate institutions ! But conversion, fastidious Goddess, loves blood better than brick, and feasts most subtly on the human will. (pp. 151-2)

After their visit to Sir William Bradshaw Rezia, who had not hitherto understood what was the matter with her husband, becomes his ally, though an impotent one, against the representatives of proportion, order and conversion who drive Septimus to suicide. Septimus Smith suffers from war shock ; he is obsessed with visionary dreams of himself as a reformer of society. The beauty which, for years, he has tried to perceive in life is being destroyed or superseded by mediocrity and callousness.

For the truth is that human beings have neither kindness, nor faith, nor charity beyond what serves to increase the pleasure of the moment. They hunt in packs. Their packs scour the desert and vanish screaming into the wilderness. They desert the fallen. They are plastered over with grimaces. . . . In the street, vans roared past him ; brutality blared out placards ; men were trapped in mines ; women burned alive ; and once a maimed file of lunatics being exercised or displayed for the diversion of the populace

(who laughed aloud), ambled and nodded and grinned past him, in the Tottenham Court Road, each half apologetically, yet triumphantly, inflicting his hopeless woe. And would he go mad? (pp. 136-7)

Septimus "has gone through the whole show, friendship, European war, death." (p. 131) He feels guilty for not feeling, but society is responsible for his inability to feel, although society wants to punish him for it:

Once you fall, human nature is on you. Holmes and Bradshaw are on you. They scour the desert. They fly screaming into the wilderness. The rack and the thumb-screw are applied. Human nature is remorseless. (p. 148)

The sin of society consists in imposing meaningless rules, an order which the individual cannot understand because it is alien to his sensibility, so that he is reduced to indifference. Bradshaw and Holmes are organized society, "judges . . . who mixed the vision and the sideboard; saw nothing clear, yet ruled, yet inflicted" (p. 223) in obedience to their sense of proportion, supported by "the police and the good of society which would take care that these unsocial impulses were held in control." (p. 154) But Bradshaw and Holmes are also human nature, and in Septimus' sick mind human nature is identified with society because they both imprison man and destroy the moment of happiness which he experiences through communication. Septimus is not so alienated from life that he cannot value what he relinquishes by committing suicide. But when Holmes comes to fetch him, he finds no other way out than death: "he did not want to die. Life was good. The sun hot. Only human beings?" (p. 225) In spite of his madness, what Septimus says about society is coherent and derives from his own experience, so that his insanity appears mainly as an incapacity to identify himself with a social system which he despises because he has been forced to live through such an absurd catastrophe as the War, a catastrophe which society obviously thought of as a grandiose adventure. In the novels which Virginia Woolf wrote in the Twenties, *Jacob's Room*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *To the Lighthouse*, the death of young men killed in the War is presented as one of the most cruel blows dealt by the absurdity of life. However, it is only in *Mrs. Dalloway* that she conveys



so eloquently the tragedy and despair brought to individual life by the War. Fate alone cannot be incriminated. Human beings, "these lustful animals, who have no lasting emotions, but only whims and vanities, eddying them now this way, now that" (pp. 135-6) are responsible for building a world into which "one cannot bring children."

Clarissa accepts, and Septimus rejects, society, whereas Peter Walsh compromises. He voices the author's view on society for, after all, Septimus is insane and Clarissa too tolerant. He is the objective observer who, coming back from India, records the changes that have taken place in England between 1918 and 1923. During Clarissa's party he observes her guests with Sally Seton, who has also compromised by marrying a rich man; he condemns their snobbery, their obsequiousness and their insincerity, but he can discern real sensitiveness even in Richard Dalloway. If Clarissa did not marry Peter, it is because he demanded complete and reciprocal emotional commitment and because he had no social ambition. Like many of Virginia Woolf's characters, he is on the quest for truth beneath appearances, and on the whole he is not hampered by social motives. That is why he is a social failure. He has none of Septimus' intransigency, he hates the smugness of the English middle class, but he loves English civilization. Wearing the contented look of one who has had a full life and feels young enough to start anew, yet compelled at fifty-three to ask Hugh Whitbread and Richard Dalloway to help him find a job, Peter is at the mercy of his nature and of society, bereft of the one person he has always loved, Clarissa. In a way his attitude is similar to Orlando's, who acts alternately in obedience to her own nature and to conventions. Indeed, Peter may criticize hypocrisy, the mediocrity of many an English gentleman, the superficial character of social relationships, but he remains attached to his own class and its privileges and never questions their way of life or their attitude on important matters. The only character who criticizes the upper classes is Doris Kilman, whose silent diatribe against social injustice exemplifies the negativeness of class hatred.

In *Mrs. Dalloway* Virginia Woolf describes life in society on different planes: some people are simply aware of their environment and of the life that goes on around them; others feel this environment as an obstacle to real life; others still, particularly Clarissa,

find in social intercourse a means of reaching the essential meaning of their existence. Life in London becomes representative of that of the English people as a whole and of their different attitudes to life. As she walks in London on a June morning, Clarissa finds life "in people's eyes, in the swing, tramp, and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs." (p. 9) As the day wears on, we are made to observe London life at closer range, in Bond Street, where all activity is momentarily interrupted by the passage of an important and mysterious personage, who arouses the same automatic reaction among the onlookers; "The spirit of religion was abroad," says Virginia Woolf, "with her eyes bandaged tight and her lips gaping wide." (p. 23) Near Whitehall, Peter is forced to stand like everybody else and to watch with respect boys in uniform who march on "as if one will worked legs and arms uniformly, and life, with its varieties, its irreticences, had been laid under a pavement of monuments and wreaths and drugged into a stiff yet staring corpse by discipline." (pp. 78-79) In Regent's Park he recalls his youth and what he suffered because of Clarissa, then witnesses the despair of Rezia and Septimus Smith. Both Peter and Rezia pity "the battered woman" who sings of love opposite Regent's Park tube station. We are taken to Harley Street, where "the clocks . . . counselled submission, upheld authority, and pointed out in chorus the supreme advantage of a sense of proportion." (p. 155) And so from one place in London to another, whether in Lady Bruton's dining-room or in the Army and Navy Stores, the characters' attitude to the people around them reveal their personality. Naturally, this evocation of London with its incidental snapshots of those who seem satisfied and those who suffer—the poor, the unemployed—is very superficial. Even though they belong to the same whole, people are held together by very fragile ties: Miss Kilman's bitterness or Clarissa's neglect of Ellie Henderson show that class-hatred or snobbery create a gulf that cannot be bridged by a common allegiance to institutions. It is on a supra-social level that human beings can meet as Septimus and Mrs. Dalloway do. They are identified with each other through their common belief in the privacy of the soul and their conviction that men like Bradshaw make life intolerable, as well as through their sense of the tragedy of life.

Whether in *The Voyage Out*, in the stories in which she appears, or in *Mrs. Dalloway* Clarissa represents society. In the novel which bears her name she is in her favourite role, "the perfect hostess." Through the people who attend her party Virginia Woolf satirizes the English upper-middle class. She ridicules Hugh Whitbread, the perfect public-school type: "Look at him now, on tiptoe, dancing forward, bowing and scraping, as the Prime Minister and Lady Bruton emerged, intimating for all the world to see that he was privileged to say something, something in private to Lady Bruton as she passed." (p. 261) Another brilliant satire is that of the Bradshaws, whom Peter sums up very shrewdly as "damnable humbugs," or that of the Prime Minister, who "looked so ordinary, you might have stood him behind a counter and bought biscuits—poor chap, all rigged up in gold lace." (p. 259) Old Lady Bruton with her fine ancestors is presented as both a remarkable person and a grotesque old woman. As a matter of fact, for all her irony and apart from a few types whom she mocks ruthlessly, Virginia Woolf's attitude towards society, i.e., to the upper classes, is ambivalent. She both criticizes and admires them: she criticizes their smugness, their snobbery, their insensitiveness, but she admires them for what they achieve. She pokes fun at Richard Dalloway, "grey, dogged, dapper, clean," considering unimportant reforms yet unable to see what is really wrong with what he calls "our detestable social system." He is an attractive man, though, as Sally rightly suggests, a second-class brain; but then "What does the brain matter . . . compared with the heart?" (p. 293) As to Mrs. Dalloway, she is the best illustration of the author's ambivalence. Even though, as Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary, she meant "to bring in the despicableness of people like Ott,"<sup>1</sup> she certainly created a character sensitive enough to perceive the nature of life and give it meaning in accordance with her gifts. Indeed, Clarissa is a snob, she is conventional, often insincere and sentimental. She does exemplify what Virginia Woolf calls "the slipperiness of the soul,"<sup>2</sup> being good to people in order to gratify her own good opinion of herself. But she is also aware of her own shortcomings, of pettiness and jealousy in her own motives, and

<sup>1</sup> Lady Ottoline Morrell, who was then famous as a hostess. *A Writer's Diary*, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

she has that extraordinary capacity for being fulfilled through the people and the objects which surround her. She is, of course, typical of the milieu in which she lives, but she acquires dignity by finding in that milieu a means of realizing herself. Peter's criticism prompts her to examine what she has made of her life. Because he calls it futile, she defines the part she has played in society, which has always been to assemble and create harmony. This is her way of "reaching the centre," of communicating, of preserving her soul. Like Septimus, she is acutely aware of evil forces in society which threaten individual freedom and integrity. In fact, she feels Septimus' suicide as a judgment upon the futility of her own life. But the meaning she gives to death, her belief in the individual's right to be himself and her conviction that in her limited way she brings harmony into society, raise her, if only at rare moments, above the triviality of her ordinary existence.

Truthfulness and fidelity to one's self is the one fundamental rule of conduct that can be inferred from Virginia Woolf's work. Whatever criticism there is in her novels is fused in the larger themes she develops and always refers ultimately to the possibility for the individual to realize himself. There is nothing systematic about it. It is a subtle comment on the human personality and its relationship to its environment. Because of her own conception of the human personality Virginia Woolf's work is representative of the Twenties. R.L. Chambers defines as follows the three main intellectual assumptions which lay behind the mood of that decade :

the first was biological, that man is not a special creation ; the second physical, that time and space and the whole visible universe are probably best described in subjective terms, as aspects of a state of mind ; the third psychological, that the individual is a complex of consciousness, existing on more levels than that which is accessible to the normally conscious mind.<sup>1</sup>

Although the three statements help to understand the work of Virginia Woolf and the instability of the values of her time, it is mainly the third which, by suggesting that human consciousness exists at different levels, stresses the complexity of the human

<sup>1</sup> R.L. CHAMBERS, *The Novels of Virginia Woolf*, London, 1955, p. 76.

personality and brings to mind the possible consequences of such complexity on the relations between individuals. If we compare the personalities assumed by Orlando during the four centuries of her existence, we realize that it is only in the twentieth century that her selves multiply. Whereas previously she was only conscious of one self, she becomes aware that the oneness of her social self is mere appearance. We have seen that going beyond appearances is essential to the apprehension of truth, which alone can serve as an effective basis of communication between individuals. But the mystery which, because of its complexity, surrounds the personality of modern man, impedes communication, and if relations between two human beings are unsatisfactory, how much more disappointing social relations are. In all her novels Virginia Woolf stresses the loneliness of the individual, a loneliness which is mainly the result of his incapacity to communicate, except in very brief moments of ecstasy. When Katherine and Ralph at last succeed in meeting spiritually, she exclaims: "You've destroyed my loneliness."<sup>1</sup> But such communion is ephemeral. On the whole, the despair of her characters is due to a feeling of isolation and alienation from their fellow-beings.

Another consequence of acknowledging the complexity of the personality is that one is led to question the essential nature of the sexes. Whereas for D.H. Lawrence the individual found fulfilment by being purely man or woman, for Virginia Woolf the most complete human personality is androgynous and possesses the best qualities of both man and woman, allying intellectual knowledge and a capacity for action with feminine sensibility and intuition. Androgyny helps to overcome isolation and makes for better understanding between persons of different sexes. Yet, if Virginia Woolf admires the individual who combines masculine and feminine qualities, it is none the less obvious that her whole work asserts the superiority of woman and that she wants woman to develop in accordance with her own nature, not in imitation of man. In spite of the many pamphlets and essays she wrote in support of the feminist cause, her aim was not to help women get the vote. Naturally, she demanded equal rights for men and women, and her claims, which seem old-fashioned now, were very

<sup>1</sup> *Night and Day*, p. 534.



much to the point in the Twenties. But the feminism which inspires her novels has none of the combativity of *A Room of One's Own* or *Three Guineas*, in which she claims "equal opportunity" for all and protests against the egotism and vanity of men, who have always kept women away from the creative activities of society and held them in semi-slavery. In her novels feminism rests on the assumption that the intuitive understanding which is necessary for the apprehension of real life is peculiar to women. It is not by mere coincidence that her main characters are usually women: they are more inclined than men to withdraw from the agitation of ordinary life and perceive the real in silence. What Virginia Woolf most resents in men is their assurance that women must always sacrifice their personality to men. Even Mrs. Ambrose, who is obviously more emancipated and educated than most women, must compromise and flatter her husband's vanity, while Mr. Ramsay literally feeds on his wife's approval and admiration for him.

*To the Lighthouse* is Virginia Woolf's most feminist novel, for it conveys most subtly the feminine qualities of understanding, intuition and love which allow women to grasp the essence of life and the significance of experience, and make them perceive life as whole. Unlike D.H. Lawrence, in whose novels woman is often a destroyer of life because of her idealism, Virginia Woolf presents woman as a creative and fertilizing force, whereas man is sterile and destroys:

Mrs. Ramsay seemed to pour erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray, looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating, and into this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life, the fatal sterility of the male plunged itself, like a beak of brass, barren and bare. He wanted sympathy. He was a failure, he said. . . . It was sympathy he wanted, to be assured of his genius, first of all, and then to be taken within the circle of life, warmed and soothed, to have his sense restored to him, his barrenness made fertile, and all the rooms of the house made full of life . . . they must be furnished, they must be filled with life.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Virginia WOOLF, *To the Lighthouse*, London, 1952, p. 43.

Women who are truly feminine are a source of life and create harmony: "They all sat separate. And the whole of the effort of merging and flowing and creating rested on her. Again, she felt, as a fact without hostility, the sterility of men." (p. 97) Because of her sensibility, her intuition, her sympathy, woman creates life by unifying. The death of Mrs. Ramsay is followed by chaos and the disintegration of the house which she had filled with life. Man unmakes harmony through his vanity and his selfishness. Mrs. Ramsay is superior to her husband in her very effort to show that he is superior, and she always pities men as if they lacked something.

Virginia Woolf's male characters are far less developed psychologically than her women. They are often effeminate, or awkward in their masculinity like Richard Dalloway. There is a relation between men's incapacity for "being" and the life of action they lead. Active life is necessary but it is inferior, for it is often considered as an end in itself, so that it obliterates the vision which the individual must perceive behind the agitation of ordinary life. After leading a life of action, Orlando appreciates the finer and more subtle existence which her change into a woman entails:

Better is it to be clothed with poverty and ignorance, which are the dark garments of the female sex; better to leave the rule and discipline of the world to others; better be quit of martial ambition, the love of power, and all the other manly desires if so one can more fully enjoy the most exalted raptures known to the human spirit, which are . . . contemplation, solitude, love. (pp. 100-1)

In *The Waves* Bernard realizes that contemplation alone will lead him to the understanding he wishes to attain:

I wish to go under; to visit the profound depths, once in a while to exercise my prerogative not always to act, but to explore; . . . to indulge impossible desires to embrace the whole world with the arms of understanding—impossible to those who act. (p. 123)

Since understanding and intuitive knowledge usually pertain to women, Virginia Woolf wants them to foster these qualities and to play in society and in life a part which is in harmony with their own nature. Her irony towards the benefactors and the reformers

of society derives from her belief in the superiority of the contemplative life. On the one hand, she condemns the reformers who in the Twenties claimed for women the same prerogatives as for men, imitated them and destroyed in woman the essential qualities of her femininity. On the other hand, since it is the quality of "being" she most admires in women, her great female characters are devoid of any desires to reform the world or to lay down a moral code. If she admires women who, like Mary Datchet, work seriously for the improvement of the world, she doesn't spare the women who claim to lead a life of action for its own sake. She merely demands for woman the same opportunity to manifest herself as a woman as man enjoys to assert his manliness. She herself writes with the sensibility and the understanding of a woman, and one realizes that the perfect human character in her work combines, like Helen Ambrose, physical consciousness with the mental consciousness newly acquired by women or at least by some of them.

Virginia Woolf's art is never didactic. Rather, she invites the reader to cooperate and to infer her conceptions from her vision of life and of people. The values she prizes are integrity and the right to be oneself. She thinks that these values have driven women to claim emancipation as the slaves had done, or oppressed people, or the working classes. Her pessimism finds its source not merely in the individual's essential loneliness but in her "great sense of the brutality and wildness of the world."<sup>1</sup> A sense of the tragic in life hangs over all her novels. In the midst of active London Louis is "conscious of flux, of disorder, of annihilation and despair,"<sup>2</sup> and Mrs. Ramsay "always seized the fact that there is no reason, order, justice: but suffering, death, the poor. . . . There were the eternal problems: suffering, death, the poor."<sup>3</sup> True, the values which Mrs. Ramsay asserts are supra-social as are the values asserted by the characters in *The Waves*, who are "creators . . . striding not into chaos, but into a world that our force can subjugate and make part of the illumined and everlasting road." (p. 158) But this is precisely because the individual finds certainty only in himself and not in a society made of "scraps, orts and fragments." From one novel to another Virginia Woolf's characters

<sup>1</sup> *A Writer's Diary*, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup> *The Waves*, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> *To the Lighthouse*, pp. 74 and 68.

are increasingly haunted by the sight of a disintegrating society, which the anxiety and the instability of the age greatly emphasize. Her hope for a better world is expressed in *The Years* and her disappointment at the outbreak of the Second World War in *Between the Acts*. She wrote in her diary:

I want to give the whole of the present society—nothing less; facts as well as the vision. And to combine them both. I mean *The Waves* going on simultaneously with *Night and Day*. . . . I should aim at immense breadth and immense intensity. I should include satire, comedy, poetry, narrative. . . . And there are to be millions of ideas but no preaching—history, politics, feminism, art, literature—in short a summing up of all I know, feel, laugh at, despise, like, admire, hate and so on.<sup>1</sup>

This ambitious design, which eventually gave birth to *The Years* (1937), was the inevitable development of Virginia Woolf's art given her effort to render the wholeness of life. After the saturating process of *The Waves* which was intended to render the "moment whole" and to convey the essence of life, she was led to explore the value of the externality from which she had just divested the novel, and to conclude that the external world of matter, facts and events is also part of "the real." It is not that she has ceased to believe that one must transcend the external in order to apprehend reality. But the external is no longer merely a means; it combines with the internal in order to give what she calls the facts and the vision and thus to convey life more completely.

In a social panorama which covers approximately fifty years, from 1880 to the 1930's, Virginia Woolf attempts to recreate the changing scene of English society through the individual lives of the Pargiters. The years are 1880, 1891, 1907, 1908, 1910, 1911, 1914, 1917 and the Present Day (the Thirties). In each period private lives are shown in their social context and related to the political events of the time. Social classes or events of a different nature are opposed, thus conveying the coexistence of wealth and poverty, happiness and pain. 1880 shows Colonel Pargiter and his numerous children given to different activities: studying, visiting the poor, playing, or simply waiting rather heartlessly for their sick mother to die. In Oxford their cousin Kitty enjoys the

<sup>1</sup> *A Writer's Diary*, pp. 197-8.

leisurely life of a girl who waits for the happy event that will transform her existence. In 1910 the same Kitty, now married to Lord Lasswade, attends a political meeting where most of the Pargiters are present, including Sara. After the meeting Kitty goes to the opera. All through the performance of *Siegfried* she fears that they will announce the King's death, but we only hear of it at night, when it is announced in a poor London suburb where Maggie and Sara live. At each stage public events form a background to loves, marriages, births, deaths, conflicts, successes or failures, which bring joy or sorrow, fulfilment or disappointment, splendour or sordidness, until the present day, when Eleanor, the eldest of the Pargiter children, wonders what is the meaning of it all.

The chapter entitled "1880" is certainly one of the best episodes. Virginia Woolf describes the conventions of Victorian society with its sacrosanct tea-ceremony, the routine of a Victorian household resting on the responsible eldest daughter, the hypocrisy of the father who comes back from a visit to his mistress and is compelled to show a sorrow which he doesn't feel for the death of his wife. The falsity and meaninglessness of Victorian standards are exposed by Delia, who longs for freedom and truth, admits to herself the intolerableness of her mother's agony and her relief when the latter dies. She sees through her father's hypocrisy, and at her mother's funeral feels robbed of her one moment of understanding by the lies of the priest. In 1891 Eleanor is still the faithful daughter who takes care of her tyrannical father, while all the others have left home. Her own life is filled with her care for others and with numerous committee-meetings. Maggie and Sara are happy little girls enjoying a bonfire lit for Maggie's birthday. The security of their lives is contrasted with the poverty of the place where Delia lives and where Eleanor goes to comfort her when she hears of Parnell's death:

The streets they were driving through were horribly poor; and not only poor, she thought, but vicious. Here was the vice, the obscenity, the reality of London. It was lurid in the mixed evening light.<sup>1</sup>

Eleanor guesses at the life that goes on behind the thick yellow curtains, and we are made to guess with her. We learn here that

<sup>1</sup> Virginia WOOLF. *The Years*, London, 1958, p. 121.



many people in London are poor, that some live in appalling circumstances, that Delia, who was passionate about freedom, has left home to devote herself to the Irish cause, which makes her father rejoice when he hears of Parnell's death. But what deeper significance can we draw from the evocation of 1891? This is a question which we repeatedly ask as the years go by. Rose becomes a suffragette and goes to prison. Martin comes back from India and leaves the army; Morris, though a hard-working lawyer, doesn't have a brilliant career; his daughter Peg becomes a doctor, while his son North sells his farm in Kenya and comes home dissatisfied. Maggie is happily married to a French scientist. The normal course of their lives is interrupted by the War, to which they react according to their nature: some care passionately, Eleanor hopes a new world will arise, Sara refuses to be affected by it. Each generation has its rebel, and Sara is the rebel of the second generation. She withdraws within a world of her own. She speaks in poetic terms which reveal her indulgence in her own thoughts and her refusal to compromise with a society she condemns. In the third generation it is North and Peggy who don't fit and are dissatisfied with contemporary society for different reasons. Thus in their respective generations Delia, Sara, North and Peggy bring out what is evil in society: Delia, its hypocrisy; Sara, the superficiality of social intercourse and the meaninglessness of the War; North, the utter inexistence of people who are merely social creatures and the incapacity of others to communicate because of their fear to reveal themselves; Peggy, the anxiety and the threat to freedom in the Thirties. But what conclusion can we draw from the contrast between the characters' material circumstances and their attitudes towards life and towards society? As North thinks after his dinner with Sara, "these little snapshot pictures of people leave much to be desired." (p. 341) Except at the beginning and at the end of the novel, it is difficult to say in what particular way individual lives are affected by the important events which change English society. If we hear that Rose is in prison, we suppose that it is because she is a suffragette, but we are not made aware that her action has changed the life of English women. In the same way, we are struck by the contrast between society in 1880 and in the Present Day, but we do not know how the War, which we hear of through the description of air-raids and North's departure for France, has affected people. As in Virginia Woolf's

other novels, the characters in *The Years* remain remarkably true to themselves. Their attitude towards life is not modified by social changes. They react to these with honesty, indifference or resentment. But it is the social scene that is transformed, not the characters who, except for Eleanor and Peggy, do not even understand the nature of this transformation.

The significance of *The Years* is brought out by the summing up in the last chapter. Like Eleanor at seventy, we must seek meaning in the whole. For if at each period different characters ask the usual questions about their personality and the significance of their life, it is by surveying the fifty years and by contrasting 1880 with the Present Day that the full import of the evolution becomes apparent. It is seen by Eleanor as a change for the better. The English middle class have lost the security of the Victorians, but they have also done away with the hypocrisy and the rigidity of their standards. Modern society certainly appears more confused and chaotic, but the younger generation is competent and honest. All through the last chapter, Eleanor insists on the potential value of the present: "I do not want to go into my past. I want the present." (p. 361) The past is important only in so far as it can contribute something to the present. Regretfully but firmly, Eleanor dismisses Crosby, the old servant, who is symbolical of a past age; she tries to understand her young nieces and nephews, travels around the world with an ever fresh mind. It is not so much modern society itself that she values as its determination to progress and its capacity for doing so. At seventy she can still turn towards the future and say: "And now?" (p. 469) Yet one suspects that when Eleanor says that things have changed for the better and that "we're happier—we're freer," (p. 469) she expresses no more than her own opinion. Her optimism seems to spring more from her indefatigable nature and from the satisfaction of her fulfilled life than from a development in society which gives one reasons for hope. This is particularly striking when one compares the "visions" of the characters through whose consciousness Delia's party is described. Questioned about her life, Eleanor is puzzled because it is not something she can visualize as a whole. To her it has been a "perpetual discovery," a miracle, but how can she sum it up?

Oughtn't a life to be something you could handle and produce? But I've only the present moment, she thought. . . .

Atoms danced apart and massed themselves. But how did they compose what people call a life? . . . Perhaps there's 'I' at the middle of it, she thought; a knot; a centre. . . . My life has been other people's lives, Eleanor thought—my father's; Morris's; my friends' lives; Nicolas's. (pp. 395-6)

Towards the end of the party, Eleanor has a vision of the continuity of existence. It only lasts a moment, but it gives her confidence in the future. It is curious that compared to the younger generation, the older people seem full of expectation: At sixty Rose enjoys living and is proud of it, particularly as she now lives in an interesting world; Delia, almost seventy, still draws the same distinction between the "unconventional and the English";

All sorts of people were there, she noted. That had always been her aim; to mix people; to do away with the absurd conventions of English life. And she had done it tonight, she thought. There were nobles and commoners. (pp. 429-30)

Peggy envies the older generation their joy of living. She thinks they were wonderful because they were believers. She is honest but embittered by the death of her younger brother in the War. She adopts an almost clinical attitude towards her feelings and analyses her smallest sensations and reactions. She is too much aware of the distress around her to be able to enjoy life:

Far away she heard the sounds of the London night; a horn hooted; a siren wailed on the river. The far-away sounds, the suggestion they brought in of other worlds, indifferent to this world, of people toiling, grinding, in the heart of darkness, in the depth of night, made her say over Eleanor's world, happy in this world, happy with living people. But how can one be 'happy'? she asked herself, in a world bursting with misery. On every placard at every street corner was Death; or worse—tyranny; brutality; torture; the fall of civilization; the end of freedom. We here, she thought, are only sheltering under a leaf, which will be destroyed. And then Eleanor says the world is better, because two people out of those millions are 'happy'. (pp. 418-19)

Yet shortly afterwards she also has her moment of vision when she sees a "state of being in which there was real laughter, real

happiness, and this fractured world was whole; whole and free." (p. 420) But when she tries to convey it, she only succeeds in hurting her brother, and she is left with a feeling of desolation. North is no happier than his sister. Just back from Africa, he finds England changed and feels lonely, an outsider. He can't be interested in people, for whom his stock-phrase is that they only talk about money and politics. He rejects political commitment; what he wants is to remain true to his individual self and to discover what is real:

For them it's all right, he thought; they've had their day; but not for him, not for his generation. For him a life modelled on the jet, on the spring, on the hard leaping fountain; another life, a different life. Not halls and reverberating megaphones; not marching in step after leaders in herds, groups, societies, caparisoned. No; to begin inwardly, and let the devil take the outer form, he thought. . . . Not black shirts, green shirts, red shirts—always posing in the public eye; that's all poppycock. Why not down barriers and simplify? But a world, he thought, that was all one jelly, one mass, would be a rice pudding world, a white counterpane world. To keep the emblems and tokens of North Pargiter—the man Maggie laughs at; the Frenchman holding his hat; but at the same time spread out, make a new ripple in human consciousness, be the bubble and the stream, the stream and the bubble—myself and the world together—he raised his glass. Anonymously, he said, looking at the clear yellow liquid. But what do I mean, he wondered—I, to whom ceremonies are suspect, and religion's dead; who don't fit, as the man said, don't fit anywhere? He paused. There was the glass in his hand; in his mind a sentence. And he wanted to make other sentences. But how can I, he thought . . . unless I know what's solid, what's true; in my life, in other people's lives? (pp. 442-3)

Like Peggy, he is unable to communicate and realizes that fear separates people, "fear of criticism, of laughter, of people who think differently." (p. 447) Before they separate, Peggy and North, who have been hurting each other all evening, have a moment of understanding in which they apprehend a new world. Yet North thinks that it is only in stillness and solitude that the mind can be free. His conclusion is very pessimistic. It implies that in spite of the interest of life and the promise of the future, the

individual of the younger generation finds freedom only in himself. So that one cannot help feeling that Eleanor's vision is obscured by the anxiety and the confusion of the generation of the Thirties.

The novel ends on the expression of Eleanor's hope in the future, which is undeniably the "message" conveyed by *The Years*. It is justified by the progress accomplished in fifty years and by the constant change in society. But it doesn't mean that man's fundamental nature has changed, for he is still thwarted by the limitations of his being. This appears clearly from the confrontation in the last chapter of all that has contributed to define man and his place in society. In this chapter Virginia Woolf carries out her intention of presenting the whole of society in a "condensed and synthetized way."<sup>1</sup> As the characters appear at Delia's party and reveal by their attitude what they have become, the pattern reaches completion, and from this the significance of the whole can be derived in spite of the apparent chaos. We are again faced with the unavoidable co-existence of poverty and abundance, sordidness and beauty, the same distinctions characterize people: there are the unadapted like Sara and her friend Nicholas Pomjalski, honest men like Renny, women who look beautiful and fulfilled in their old age, social beings "prolific, profuse, half-conscious," and people for whom nothing changes, who merely make social noises like tut-tut-tut and chew-chew-chew and can never be shaken out of their complacency. Social intercourse is still marked with insincerity, and sensitive human beings are still hampered by their inability to communicate; yet though talk is often nonsense, it is the only way we have of knowing each other.

Thus attitudes are contrasted, but they are little more than attitudes. The theme of *The Years* is, as in Virginia Woolf's other novels, the discovery of personality and of life, the effort conscious human beings make to grasp the continuity and fullness of existence. But the novel hardly provides an interpretation of the social scene or the deeper meaning that the reader expects from such a panorama. Certainly, the rejection of a rigid social code in favour of a continual process of transformation which leaves room for improvement is important; but the only significant change which appears from the social development is the emancipation of women,

<sup>1</sup> Virginia WOOLF, "Letter to a Young Poet," in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*, Penguin Modern Classics, 1961, p. 189.



and the revelation of the opportunities which the new society offers them. Otherwise, although we are told of momentous events, we are not made aware of the way in which these affect society. To present an ordered world, then a chaotic one, and to say that the War took place in between does not explain how or why the world became chaotic. Virginia Woolf records more than she interprets. In this respect, Septimus' anxiety and suicide are a much better comment on the War than anything in *The Years*. She does not show insight into the forces at work in society, and her vision of a united world and a harmonious life does not result, as in her other novels, from a "quest" for the real but simply from a moment of serenity in the midst of a social gathering. Even if Eleanor has a glimpse of a more continuous, less confused existence, she has not sought to give meaning to her life by attempting to find a different reality beyond appearances. She never looked for a personal truth, never wondered whether she was right to be satisfied with the existing social order. Her behaviour, like that of all the other characters, is in harmony with the society she lives in. Even Sara, the least adapted of all, may feel that society is corrupt, cruel, hypocritical, her attitude is none the less negative; it is not counterbalanced by the apprehension of another life, and she is content enough with her social relations. So that the fullness of the last chapter does not quite cancel the impression that the whole lacks substance.

The combination of facts and vision which Virginia Woolf hoped to achieve in *The Years* could hardly have been entirely successful considering the method she used to express the external. She does not describe it as she did in *Night and Day*. She synthesizes it as in the novels where it serves as a means of access to an intangible reality. Facts and events are perceived indirectly through a newspaper heading, a conversation, sometimes a thought or a comment, they are seldom observed in their immediacy. But since it is a picture of society she wants to give, it is in the picture itself that one expects to find meaning, whereas here the rendering of facts and events through the people who are affected by them, divests them of their substantiality. This effect may be desirable when the external is a means to reach the internal as in *Mrs. Dalloway*. But events and facts become pointless if they are divested of the externality in which their significance must be found.

Curiously enough, the passages in which the external is actually described are the most successful and the most significant, such as the Victorian age or the short episode in 1918 when Crosby, the old servant, is seen alone and unhappy in the streets of London. As it is, the novel is a compromise. The last chapter alone achieves the author's purpose of fusing the external and the internal. However, if she has not succeeded in giving it the solidity which a work of that kind requires or in fusing in a harmonious whole the facts and the vision, she has endowed *The Years* with an indefinable richness of life; this impression is created by the continuity, the flux of life which is sensed beneath the multiplicity of beings and the fragments of existence as well as by the suggestion of the different levels of experience which the individual goes through. The vision of society that Virginia Woolf wanted to convey is blurred. However, her interpretation of the mood of the Thirties is a positive achievement, for she has rendered in a masterly way the sense of conflict between fear of further disintegration and hope in a better world which prevailed at the time.

If Virginia Woolf sounded hopeful in *The Years* in spite of the anxiety she seemed determined to dispel, she could not maintain her hope in the future for very long. In 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, the picture of society evoked only a few years before seemed already remote; it was now obvious that man could not escape his doom. Individual lives were stamped with a sense of impending catastrophe. Of course, Virginia Woolf did not express directly the anxiety people felt at the time. She retained her approach to art, and she criticized the younger writers of the Thirties for writing about the social and political situation without transmuting it into art.<sup>1</sup> Her own view of that situation remains implicit in her work: it is only the atmosphere, the uneasiness of the times that she renders in *Between the Acts* (1941). As usual, uncertainty and anxiety are experienced in individual lives. Only at rare moments—and then very briefly—do the characters seem free from strain and sadness:

Giles said (without words) 'I'm damnably unhappy.'  
'So am I,' Dodge echoed.

<sup>1</sup> "She felt that though we were aware of the calamitous condition of the world, we reacted to it with our intellects and wills, before we had experienced it fully through our sensibilities." Stephen SPENDER, *World Within World*, London, 1951, p. 158.

'And I too,' Isa thought.

They were all caught and caged; prisoners, watching a spectacle. Nothing happened. The tick of the machine was maddening.<sup>1</sup>

These words refer both to the characters' personal life and to the historical context in which they live. They reflect the misery of those who felt the inevitability of the coming disaster and were mad with the strain of waiting.

The story develops within twenty four hours. The main characters are Mr. Bart Oliver, his son Giles, his daughter-in-law Isa, his sister Mrs. Swithin, his grand-children, and Mrs. Manresa, who comes for lunch with a young friend of hers, William Dodge. The gentry make up the audience for the pageant written by Miss La Trobe, and the villagers act it. The historic pageant takes place every year at the Olivers' house, in the barn or on the terrace, in the natural scenery provided by the beautiful house and its surrounding park. It is the central event in the novel, and it presents different periods of the history of England starting with the time of Chaucer. The different episodes are seen in relation to the present and make clear the complexity of attitudes to be found in English society. Between the acts the characters, who remain under the impression of the scenes they have just watched, resume their conversations, their thoughts, or the surface life created by social intercourse, waiting until evening to reassume their real selves. The themes of the novel are developed through three centres of consciousness: the pageant, the audience and the individual characters. Actually, the pageant and the audience provide the historical and social background for the characters' introspective life. Isa watching the sixteenth-century play within the pageant is moved to assert that there are only three emotions in life: love, hate, peace—the peace of death. Giles, inspired by the moral of the eighteenth-century play, "where there's a will, there's a way," invites Mrs. Manresa, to whom he is attracted, to see the greenhouse. The "Victorian Age," still fresh in the memory of many in the audience, gives rise to censorious remarks. But Mrs. Swithin, a product of that age, is not interested in the peculiarities of a period; she believes only in human beings. When Isa, who thinks she must be extinct since

<sup>1</sup> Virginia WOOLF. *Between the Acts*. Penguin Books, 1953. p. 123.

she has lived in the reign of Queen Victoria, asks her: "Were they like that?" she answers: "The Victorians, ... I don't believe that there were ever such people. Only you and me and William dressed differently." (pp. 121-2) The first periods presented by the pageant bring to light the contribution of the past to the political and social situation of present-day England and to the nature of the English character, such as its capacity for endurance or its sense of humour. But the song of the villagers at the end of the eighteenth-century scene asserts the unchangeableness of the human condition throughout the centuries: "Digging and delving, hedging and ditching, we pass ... summer and winter, autumn and spring return, ... All passes but we, all changes ... but we remain forever the same." (p. 98) The Victorian age and the present day account for the contemporary English spirit. While waiting for the Victorian age to be shown in the pageant, some people in the audience are already induced to make comparisons between conditions under Victoria and in the twentieth century. Many are led to protest when they sense the irony and the criticism aimed at England's prosperity and respectability, at its exploitation of the thousands who had to pay the price for the Empire. Yet even the traditionalists must admit that children did draw trucks in mines, that the basement was anything but healthy, that the Victorians ate too much and that if change hadn't come "there'd be yards and yards of Papa's beard, of Mama's knitting." (p. 121) The audience are then kept waiting while Miss La Trobe wonders how to douche them with present-time reality. Nature comes to her rescue by sending an actual shower probably meant to symbolize the First World War, for the rain was "sudden and universal and the blots of rain were all people's tears weeping for all people." (p. 126) After this, the wall of civilization, which is in ruins, is rebuilt by human effort. Then, the audience, who are anxious to see how Miss La Trobe will represent them, are caught in the mirrors carried by the players in order to reflect them. With the exception of Mrs. Manresa, they are all afraid to look at themselves and would gladly escape if they were not forced by the comments of the actors to acknowledge that the pageant is not over:

Let's consider ourselves. Ourselves. Some bony. Some fat. Liars most of us. Thieves too. The poor are as bad as the rich are. Perhaps worse. Don't hide among rags. Or let our cloth protect us. Or for the matter of that book

learning; or skilful practice on pianos; or laying on of paint. Or presume there's innocence in childhood. Consider the sheep. Or faith in love. Consider the dogs. Or virtue in those that have grown white hairs. Consider the gun slayers, bomb droppers here or there. They do openly what we do slyly. . . . Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built by orts, scraps, and fragments like ourselves? All the same here I change to a loftier strain—there's something to be said; for our kindness to the cat; note too in to-day's paper 'Dearly loved by his wife'; and the impulse which leads us—mark you, when no one's looking—to the window at midnight to smell the bean. Or the resolute refusal of some pimpled dirty little scrub in sandals to sell his soul. There is such a thing—you can't deny it. What? You can't descry it? All you can see of yourselves is scraps, orts, and fragments? (pp. 130-1)

Having thus rather cruelly exposed people for what they are, Miss La Trobe finds it difficult to express in words what quality unites them. Music brings them together for a brief moment, for as *The Voyage Out* suggested, it conveys in a flash a vision of life as a whole:

Like quicksilver sliding, filing magnetized, the distracted united. The tune began; the first note meant a second; the second a third . . . and dawn rose, and azure; from chaos and cacophony measure; but not the melody of the surface sound alone controlled it; but also the warring battle-plumed warriors straining asunder: to part? No. Compelled from the ends of the horizon; recalled from the edges of appalling crevasses; they crashed; solved; united. And some relaxed their fingers, and others uncrossed their legs. Was that voice ourselves? Scraps, orts, and fragments, are we, also, that? The voice died away. (pp. 131-2)

If the conclusion of the pageant is that we are scraps, orts, and fragments, it also allows for hope of unity, although this unity seems very fragile and very artificial. The audience disperse to the sound of the song which marked the intervals "Dispersed are we"; comments on the pageant are interspersed with comments on the political situation in Europe.

As the pageant shows, Virginia Woolf is concerned with the fragmentary and chaotic aspect of life, felt all the more acutely



because of the threat of war. On coming home for the week-end, Giles is deeply irritated at having to submit to the requirements of social life while on the Continent men are already being shot. He is enraged with

old fogies who sat and looked at views over coffee and cream when the whole of Europe—over there—was bristling like. . . . He had no command of metaphor. Only the ineffective word 'hedgehog' illustrated his vision of Europe, bristling with guns, poised with planes. At any moment guns would rake that land into furrows; planes splinter Bolney Minster into smithereens and blast the Folly. He, too, loved the view. And blamed Aunt Lucy, looking at views, instead of—doing what? (p. 42)

This hesitancy over the right attitude to adopt was characteristic of the confusion of people who recognized the necessity of action, yet felt both impotent and repelled by the horror of war.

As usual, it is through the sensibilities of women that the important themes are expressed since, as in all novels by Virginia Woolf, they are more fully drawn than men. Each of them represents a particular aspect of feminine sensibility, contemporaneous to the author and perceived by her. Miss La Trobe, the author of the pageant, "seethes wandering bodies and floating voices in a cauldron, and makes rise up from its amorphous mass a recreated world." (p. 108) The pageant is to her a source both of torment and of joy according to her failure or success in communicating her vision and the audience's reaction to it. But she is at least fulfilled in the act of creation. Old Mrs. Swithin remains true to traditional values because they still answer for her the same living purpose. Her innocence is very much like that of Mrs. Hilbery and makes it possible for her to ignore the ugly facts of life. Her attitude is complementary to that of her brother, a rationalist and a separatist, while she is intuitive and a unifier. She is the only character who ignores appearances and believes that all is harmony beneath the apparent chaos. Like Mrs. Ramsay, who took Charles Tansley with her because he was unhappy, she senses unhappiness in William Dodge and takes him around the house to soothe him. Unlike Giles, she ignores William's perversion and is only conscious of his suffering. William words for Isa the indefinable malaise she feels hovering over them: "the doom of sudden death hanging over us. . . . There is no retreating and

advancing." (p. 82) These words apply to everyone since war threatens to affect everybody. But Isa is particularly conscious of an uneasiness, a restlessness felt by the people of her age—the age of the century—and for which there is no remedy. She feels the future shadowing the present, and we see her through the book avoiding the crowd to indulge her melancholy:

'Dispersed are we,' she murmured. And held her cup out to be filled. She took it. 'Let me turn away,' she murmured, turning, 'from the array'—she looked desolately round her—'of china faces, glazed and hard. Down the ride, that leads under the nut tree and the may tree, away, till I come to the wishing well, where the washer-woman's little boy . . . dropped a pin. He got his horse, so they say. But what wish should I drop into the well?' She looked round. She could not see the man in grey, the gentleman farmer; nor anyone known to her. 'That the waters should cover me,' she added, 'of the wishing well.' (p. 75)

Isa's only certainty is her fierce love for her children. Her rejection of the strain imposed by social intercourse, her frustrated desire for the gentleman farmer, her death-wish (expressed several times in the novel) are different expressions of the unrest, confusion, and feeling of impotence which beset the individual. They are also characteristic of the complex sensibility of the modern woman, who is no longer entirely fulfilled in a husband and children. This is the more striking when Isa is contrasted with Mrs. Swithin. The opposition between these two characters brings out the gentility, the feeling of peace, the optimism of the late Victorians and the restlessness, the anxiety of Virginia Woolf's own contemporaries, two attitudes to life which still co-existed in the Thirties. Isa also brings into play an aspect of human relationships which Virginia Woolf had never treated so unambiguously before: physical desire. It is felt as a strain drawing the characters together or separating them: Giles and Mrs. Manresa, Isa and the gentleman farmer, whose presence she feels though she seldom sees him, William's admiration for Giles and the latter's repulsion, and the final confrontation of Isa with Giles. Until evening comes, the latter are aware of each other's presence only during brief moments, although Isa is all the time conscious of the dual quality of their relationship: love and hate. When they meet in the silence and solitude of the evening, freed from the conventions imposed by

society, they are again simply man and woman facing each other in the nakedness of their nature and ready to start life :

Left alone together for the first time that day, they were silent. Alone, enmity was bared ; also love. Before they slept, they must fight ; after they had fought, they would embrace. From that embrace another life might be born. But first they must fight, as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night. Isa let her sewing drop. The great hooded chairs had become enormous. And Giles too. And Isa too against the window. The window was all sky without colour. The house had lost its shelter. It was night before roads were made, or houses. It was the night that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks. Then the curtain rose. They spoke. (p. 152)

The last sentence, unexpected and enigmatic, marks the beginning of Giles's and Isa's real life. This sentence has led to many interpretations of the novel and its title. To Joan Bennett, "Between the Acts" suggests the three main aspects of the novel: the pageant, between the acts of which the human comedy is played; the interval between the First and the Second European War; and the interval in the love of Isa and Giles. For Warren Beck, the novel is "fundamentally historical and sociological, representing the English between the acts of appeasement and war, and tracing down the roots of traditional English attitude then being subjected to disturbing strains."<sup>1</sup> Guiguet explains that the interval is that of ordinary life while the essential, "le drame miraculeux de la vie et de la mort se poursuit, inéluctable, dans les ténèbres."<sup>2</sup> Considering the close relation between the historical and the individual in the novel, there is no doubt that the title refers to both these aspects of the book. Whether the acts are the Munich agreement and the Second World War rather than the two Wars, as it is more generally believed, is difficult to say. It is true that the novel emphasizes the bewilderment and the feeling of impotence which prevailed during the period of appeasement. On the other hand, it also characterizes the attitude and the mood of the

<sup>1</sup> Warren BECK, "For Virginia Woolf," in *Forms of Modern Fiction*, pp. 231-2.

<sup>2</sup> Jean GUIGUET, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

generation whose youth was spent between the Wars. As to the private meaning of the novel, it seems obvious that the real action, or real life, begins when the curtain rises for Isa and Giles.

The characters of *Between the Acts* are more evanescent and more lightly drawn than in any of Virginia Woolf's preceding novels; yet their coming together at the end suggests an intensity and a realness which she had hitherto seldom attained. This may be due to Isa and Giles's composite relationship of love and hate, or to the impact produced by physical desire. The futility of appearances which they have been forced to keep up all day, the uncertainties and infidelities, all are swept away, become insignificant as they set about their fundamental life in all truthfulness. Yet, the fact that they "must fight as the dog fox fights with the vixen, in the heart of darkness, in the fields of night," (p. 152) the suggestion that the house no longer protects and that man faces the night "before roads were made, or houses," the night "that dwellers in caves had watched from some high place among rocks," (p. 152) these are very disquieting. The real life Isa and Giles are now going to experience is very different from the spiritual reality that Katherine and Ralph, for instance, wanted to reach. In the solitude of the night Isa and Giles are comparable to the prehistoric men about whom Mrs. Swithin has just been reading. But whereas for the latter the passing of centuries since the prehistoric times leads to an optimistic assertion of the unchanging nature of man, it seems that for the younger generation, the only reality is physical. If this is so, if there is no certainty outside this dark night and physical being, then there is little hope of salvation, for it means the negation of the spiritual understanding which made belief in the wholeness of life possible. The novel as a whole doesn't sound so desperate; if it evokes a world on the brink of catastrophe and the absence of spiritual values to support man, the fact that real action begins at the end may suggest that life goes on, giving birth to new life and a new generation.

In *Between the Acts* personal relations, however imperfect, still make up the real substance of life. This is made clear by the characters' repeated attempts to establish some kind of relation with one or several other human beings. They cannot escape or ignore the pressure of the outside world; some, like Giles or Miss La Trobe, do not even want to, but they still exist as individuals who try to overcome their isolation. The realities of every-day life

and the conflicts which arise from the difficulty of understanding one another are not obliterated. On the contrary, they become more acute, for the threat of destruction in the world at large is reflected in individual life and personal relations are rendered more difficult by circumstances against which the individual is powerless. However, it must be pointed out that if the individual's confusion is intensified because of the social context, it does not arise from it. Still, the kind of harmony created by Mrs. Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* is inconceivable in *Between the Acts*, and this shows how much more sensitive Virginia Woolf is to the contemporary mood than it is generally assumed. It is true that the women who are capable of creating harmony belong to an earlier generation which is disappearing. Isa is definitely incapable of unifying or of bringing people together. On the contrary, she is hostile to most people except one or two individuals. Mrs. Swithin, who survives from another age, is the only person who sees beyond appearances and comforts those who feel frustrated, but her capacity for creating harmony is much more limited than that of Virginia Woolf's earlier heroines. As a matter of fact, the social gathering in which women unify and create harmony reflects the kind of society they live in. Mrs. Ramsay, who belongs to an earlier age than Mrs. Dalloway, brings harmony in her family with its small circle of friends and acquaintances. This may be because in her time the individual, woman in particular, still found fulfilment in family life. In *Mrs. Dalloway* it is not in the family but in a worldly gathering that Clarissa can assemble and unite. She does nothing of the sort in her family, and in this respect, it is interesting to compare her attitude towards Miss Kilman, the friend of her daughter, with Mrs. Ramsay's attitude towards Charles Tansley, the friend and admirer of her husband. In *The Years* Delia's party has nothing in common with the harmonious atmosphere which Mrs. Dalloway creates among a carefully selected group: it is a large assembly to which all sorts of people have been invited. If the older generation are fairly happy and look back with satisfaction upon their past life, the younger people are often frustrated and fail to establish the personal contacts they had hoped for by coming to the party. In *Between the Acts* Miss La Trobe's attempts to integrate and unite are not very successful. "Dispersed are we" is the leitmotif of the novel, and we have seen how precarious and limited the relations between individuals have become.



Critical opinions about *Between the Acts* differ as much as they do about Virginia Woolf's other novels. Some consider it as a substantial work because its social implications are more obvious than in any of her other novels.<sup>1</sup> Others think that it is obscure and that only a reader familiar with Virginia Woolf's world can recognize her usual themes.<sup>2</sup> Virginia Woolf herself wrote that it is more quintessential than her other books,<sup>3</sup> but in a letter to John Lehmann written only a few days before her death she called it "slight and sketchy."<sup>4</sup> However, considering the nervous strain under which she was no doubt labouring so shortly before committing suicide, it is perhaps permissible to question such a judgment. The unsubstantiality of the novel may be due to the elusiveness of the relations between the characters: they share a sort of intuitive understanding and apprehend each other's feelings or thoughts in spite of the clumsiness of speech, or even without words at all. For instance, Miss La Trobe understands that Mrs. Swithin meant: "you've stirred in me my unacted part" when she said: "I might have been—Cleopatra." Actually, *Between the Acts* might be the novel about silence that Hewett so much wanted to write. It is certainly "quintessential," its material "refined" to the utmost. Yet, Virginia Woolf does convey with remarkable subtlety the malaise which man experiences in the expectation of catastrophe, together with a sense of the continuity of life which transcends all human experience, whether individual, social, or historical.

In her essays on modern fiction Virginia Woolf stresses the difficulty for the writers of her generation to convey the reality of life. She rejects the materialists' assumption that a character is what his social and material circumstances make him. Reality is spiritual; it is to be found in the meaning of experience as the individual grasps it, rather than in experience itself. It is the pattern that emerges from the individual's interpretation of the sensations that fall upon his consciousness, a pattern woven with all the imponderables of our every-day life. In this pattern society

<sup>1</sup> Warren BECK, "For Virginia Woolf," *op. cit.*, p. 328.

<sup>2</sup> Jean GUIGUET, *op. cit.*, pp. 319-20.

<sup>3</sup> *A Writer's Diary*, p. 359.

<sup>4</sup> John LEHMANN, *I am My Brother*, London, 1960, p. 113.

may be widely represented or almost non-existent. What we perceive of society is what, according to Virginia Woolf, the individual perceives of it; save in flashes of insight he is mostly aware of his environment as a complex and often hostile world, though he himself is blinded by his selfish and confused vision of life. The main centre of consciousness in Virginia Woolf's novels is usually a woman, perhaps because she felt she could better express a woman's sensibility. But she was also indulging in the peculiar form of feminism manifest in her belief that the more perceptive sensibility of women makes them keenly alive to the world around them. It is through their consciousness that she renders the individual's loneliness, his anxiety, or despair, and his sense of the absurdity of life. She criticizes Victorian values and their persisting influence on English society from a woman's point of view, prompted by her belief that woman is the chief victim of the conventionality and insincerity which underlies them. Her feminism is now largely outdated, but the qualities which produced it, truth and integrity, are universal values which make for understanding between individuals, enable them to communicate, and are the sole basis of personal relations, the redeeming feature of her characters' life. There is nothing sentimental about her exploration of the feminine sensibility; on the contrary, it brings out the moral vigour and creative energy of woman.

Though she is obsessed with the individual's feeling of isolation and his frequent inability to fit into the world of men, Virginia Woolf's work ultimately illustrates the rewarding reciprocity of the individual's relation to society. Confused as he is by the versatility of his emotions and the apparent triviality of his actions, the individual perceives only at privileged moments, in the recollection of his experience, that he belongs to a whole to which he contributes a small but essential part. Conversely, enigmatic and chaotic as this whole may appear, on a higher and usually hidden plane it is coherent and permanent and is apprehended as such by the individual when he can see beyond its changeableness and derive from it a feeling of security. This changeableness and perpetual movement is the very source of its continuity and capacity for progress. In the course of her work we see Virginia Woolf attempting more and more to define this whole in concrete terms by giving it a social, or as in *Between the Acts* a historical, perspective. Tradition and English civilization impose themselves

increasingly upon her characters' consciousness, as is obvious in her last two novels. In the end the impression created by her work as a whole is one of permanent conflict: despair alternates with happiness, solitariness with communion, hopelessness with faith in life. The bleak world which makes Septimus despondent is also one "in which an ancient civilization . . . seems to have bred in us the instinct to enjoy and fight."<sup>1</sup> Like Matthew Arnold, she admires the "courage, high spirit, self-confidence" of those of her countrymen who have made England what it is, though she can also ridicule their shallowness and obtuseness. In fact, there are two sorts of characters in her novels: those who don't fit in, hypersensitive beings whose desire to be truly themselves is frustrated by society, and those who are mainly conscious of existing for the part they play in society. In all her novels except *The Waves* the woman who is the centre of consciousness creates harmony, though of a precarious kind, by her intuitive understanding of human beings, and by bringing together if only momentarily, the disparate members of human society. This harmony sometimes appears as an insignificant achievement. As Professor Simon rightly points out, "assembling people in a drawing-room does sound a little trivial as an answer to the problem of life."<sup>2</sup> Virginia Woolf herself was aware of it: she found Mrs. Dalloway "tinselly," and, after all, the latter's "offering" is in keeping with what she is. Moreover, apart from Mrs. Ramsay, none of her creative female characters contributes in a lasting way to the improvement of personal relationships, but this is precisely an instance of the tragedy of life.

In his article "Virginia Woolf: The Novel of Sensibility" William Troy writes: "Mrs. Woolf has written almost exclusively about one class of people, . . . a kind of super Bohemia, as acutely refined and aristocratic in its way as the world of Henry James, except that they concentrate on sensations and impressions rather than on their problems of conduct. . . . Through solitude these people are able to relieve themselves with finality from the responsibilities of living."<sup>3</sup> It is true that Virginia Woolf's

<sup>1</sup> *The Common Reader*, First Series, p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> Irène SIMON, "Some Aspects of Virginia Woolf's Imagery," *English Studies*, XLI, 3 (June 1960), 188.

<sup>3</sup> William TROY, "Virginia Woolf: The Novel of Sensibility," in *Literary Opinion in America*, ed. by M.D. Zabel, New York, 1962, pp. 325-6.

characters mostly belong to the leisured middle class ; she wrote about what she knew best, and we have seen that she did not write successfully on poverty because, as she was well aware, she didn't know what real poverty was. However, the aspects of life she describes, loneliness, the complexity of human relationships, the transitoriness of experience, the desire to create beauty, these are universal themes. The real privilege of a minority in her novels is to be aware of these aspects of life and to be able to reflect upon them ; and this is hardly a question of class, as the obtuse and insensitive upper-class characters in her novels show. Moreover, her characters do not relieve themselves from the responsibilities of living as William Troy suggests ; only Virginia Woolf's notion of what is important in life differs from Mr. Troy's, and it is misleading to interpret her work without taking into account her conception of life and the way in which she tries to convey it. When interpreting " human nature, the spirit we live by, life itself, " she does concentrate on the sensations and impressions of her characters. To describe a person's inner life is to her the nearest way of grasping what this person is. It is also a way of expressing her belief in the value of thought as opposed to action. She does not despise action, but she objects to its being considered as the main criterion of the significance of life, " teaching a man to value himself not on what he *is*, . . . but on the number of railroads he has constructed, or the bigness of the tabernacle he has built." <sup>1</sup> Action for its own sake and as the sole purpose of life develops one side of the personality and atrophies the other, whereas consciousness and thought make for completeness by illuminating the individual's experience and thus make it possible for him to identify action with its import. On the metaphysical plane it gives man a sense of order and unity beyond the apparent chaos and flux in the world. By perceiving the wholeness of life in a visionary moment, or by tracing its pattern in the complexity of experience, Virginia Woolf's characters become aware of the permanency of life, which makes up, however imperfectly, for the confusion and transiency of their personal experience. Through their subjective

<sup>1</sup> Matthew ARNOLD, *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 108.

perception of time<sup>1</sup> they momentarily escape the conventional and consequently the external reality in which they live in society. Their awareness of life as a perpetual movement and discovery is incompatible with the fixedness of conventions. Moreover, it is in their moments of vision that they overcome loneliness and are able to communicate with other human beings.

William Troy's assertion that Virginia Woolf's characters "relieve themselves from the responsibilities of living" also suggests that they elude the moral obligation for the individual to take part in the life of society through action or through his respect for established standards. Indeed, she definitely objects to moral pressure, whether induced by conventions or by institutions. Here again we find an echo of Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* and of his discrimination between the Hellenists' "spontaneity of consciousness" and the Hebraists' "strictness of conscience." "As Hellenism speaks of thinking clearly, seeing things in their essence and beauty, as a grand and precious feat for man to achieve, so Hebraism speaks of becoming conscious of sin . . . as a feat of this kind."<sup>2</sup> The pressure of religion in *The Voyage Out*, of public opinion in *Night and Day*, or of love and conversion in *Mrs. Dalloway* are of the same kind as the moral pressure described by Arnold and can be contrasted with Jacob Flanders's admiration for the free spirit of the Greeks. But does this mean that Virginia Woolf's novels are devoid of moral significance? Her exposure of selfishness and hypocrisy, her implicit denunciation of war and other calamities provoked by man, are certainly of a moral nature. So is her insistence on charity and understanding as a contribution to man's happiness. Her moral ideal is illustrated in such characters as Mrs. Ramsay or Mrs. Swithin, who combine a belief in the individual's right and freedom to be himself with a sense of duty towards one's fellow-beings. In her attitude to morals Virginia Woolf is fairly representative of the period in which she writes, for, like her contemporaries, she has no set of beliefs universally and

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Woolf's concept of time has been touched upon by almost every critic who has analysed her work. For a clear explanation of this concept as well as of the influence on her in this respect of Bergson, Proust, and Joyce, see Margaret Church, *Time and Reality, Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, Chapel Hill, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew ARNOLD, *op. cit.*, p. 168.



unquestionably accepted by the society mirrored in her novels.<sup>1</sup> Actually, her fiction reflects the different states of mind which prevailed between the Wars: the reaction against a lingering Victorianism, the confusion of the individual bereft of social support in the Twenties, and the veiled apprehension and anxiety in the Thirties. To the problem of living in the modern world she gives a strictly personal answer: understanding, however ephemeral, between individuals. Virginia Woolf mistrusts all conventions, even language, which is so inadequate to convey the true being of man; she trusts to intuition to allow individuals to communicate. Her exploration of supra-social values is partly the consequence of her lack of faith in society. When the individual sees nothing but chaos in his most immediate environment, he is naturally led to seek another reality. Self-knowledge, truth, and integrity are the positive values which enable the individual to have his moment of vision.

<sup>1</sup> "So our contemporaries afflict us because they have ceased to believe." See "How it Strikes a Contemporary," in *The Common Reader*, First Series, p. 302.

## WYNDHAM LEWIS

Ours is a clownish age. If so the man  
You be to understand it then you can  
Scarcely be other than a man in an Iron Mask  
Or choose but choose a most invidious task.—  
Henceforth the voice you hear is the deep growl—  
The mask, if any, the notorious scowl—  
Of Enemy Number One.<sup>1</sup>

Wyndham Lewis was so prolific a writer that one sometimes tends to forget he was a painter in the first place, though his method owes much to the painter's approach to his subject. His basic motive as a writer was to defend Western civilization and art, which, in his eyes, were threatened with the deterioration of "genius." "Many of my books," he writes, "are merely a protest against Anglo-Saxon civilization, which puts so many obstacles in the way of the artists."<sup>2</sup> In his creative work he does not so much attempt to represent the classical tradition, to which, in his opinion, Western civilization owes its greatness, as wage war on all that degrades it: Romanticism, Bergson's philosophy, relativism, emphasis on instinct rather than intellect, the English "nouveau roman," amateurism in art, and, more generally, the hypocrisy which he detected everywhere in English society. He makes Romanticism the source of all evils, and his opposition to it must be seen in relation to the opposition between Classicism and Romanticism, which was the subject of much controversy in the second and third decades of this century. To the detractors of Romanticism this antithesis was "a difference between the complete and the fragmentary, the adult and the immature, the orderly and the chaotic."<sup>3</sup> Lewis's criticism of the decline of Western civilization owes much to the French neo-classicists who, before the First

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *One-Way Song*, London, 1960, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Leonard Amster, *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, ed. by W.K. Rose, London, 1963, p. 275.

<sup>3</sup> T.S. ELIOT, "The Function of Criticism," *The Criterion*, II, 5 (October 1923), 34.

World War, were engaged in denouncing Romanticism and Bergsonism,<sup>1</sup> but his views remained substantially the same to the end of his career. Though he claimed that his "philosophical criticism," as he called it, grew out of his creative genius, it is almost impossible to understand his fiction without some knowledge of his philosophical analysis of the contemporary scene. But since many of his essays are repetitive, I shall only discuss *Time and Western Man*, which contains the essence of his thought. The pessimism and intellectual arrogance of his critical writing are matched by the inhumanity of his fiction.

*Tarr*, published in 1918, is not immediately concerned with English society but with a conflict of values in which, according to Lewis, Western civilization is at stake. In the person of the pseudo-artist Kreisler Lewis presents German Romanticism as a dangerous threat to the intellectual values which have contributed to man's greatest achievements and are, or should be, the be-all of life. At the same time, he offers a portrait of the artist and of the role he is to play in society, which illustrates his own philosophical, social, and political views. Tarr<sup>2</sup> is a young English painter who lives in Paris and is closely associated with the international Bohemia, particularly with its German representatives. The milieu in which he lives is described with the same contempt as Lewis was to show for the Bohemia of Bloomsbury, his main objection being that these artists, semi-artists and hangers-on vulgarize art and undermine it. From the very beginning of the novel, Tarr asserts his separateness and is anxious to dissociate himself from amateurs, particularly if they are English. Through a violent and often cruel exposure of their amateurism, he tries to convince them that real art is above their reach because they submit to the conventions of their class and can never be original. Hobson, another English painter, is the favourite target of Tarr's

<sup>1</sup> Among them was Charles Maurras, Paul Bourget, Henri Massis, Ernest Seillière, Julien Benda, Pierre Lasserre and Jacques Maritain, though it must be pointed out that they did not all hold the same views or criticize Romanticism and Bergsonism for the same reasons. For a detailed analysis of Lewis's indebtedness to these writers see Geoffrey WAGNER, *Wyndham Lewis, A Portrait of the Artist as the Enemy*, London, 1957.

<sup>2</sup> In *Rude Assignment* Lewis acknowledged that the character was partly autobiographical.

diatribes, because he is not a true revolutionary and is unworthy of belonging to an artistic élite :

Hobson, he considered, was a crowd. You could not say he was an individual, he was in fact a set. He sat there, a cultivated audience, with the aplomb and absence of self-consciousness of numbers, of the herd—of those who know they are not alone. Tarr was shy and the reverse by turns ; he was alone.<sup>1</sup>

Tarr reproaches Hobson with his affected untidiness ; he sees it as a sentimental indulgence, not a mark of poverty. Hobson wears the uniform of his set, the shabby Cambridge graduates who parade their Bohemianism :

You have bought, have you not, for eight hundred pounds at an aristocratic establishment a complete mental outfit, a programme of manners : for four years you trained with other recruits : you are a perfectly disciplined social unit, with a profound *esprit de corps*. The Cambridge set that you represent is, as observed, a hybrid of the Quaker, the homosexual and the Chelsea artist. . . . You represent the *dregs* of Anglo-Saxon civilization : there is absolutely nothing softer on the earth. Your flabby potion is a mixture of the lees of liberalism, the poor froth blown off the decadent Nineties, the wardrobe-leavings of a vulgar bohemianism with its headquarters in the suburb of Carlyle and Whistler. (p. 17)

This is obviously intended as an attack upon the Chelsea and Bloomsbury artists from whom Lewis had dissociated himself when he quarrelled with Roger Fry.<sup>2</sup> Its virulence is disproportionate to its object, for Hobson is rather inoffensive and can hardly be said to represent English Art. But for Lewis the fact that such people are allowed to dabble in art, simply because they have leisure and money, is a symptom of a dangerous social laxity which threatens to kill good art altogether. The aggressiveness with which Tarr discusses Hobson with Hobson himself is unpleasant and uncharitable. But as an artist, Tarr thinks that it is his duty to criticize regardless of what people feel : " I am one of the people

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *Tarr*, London, 1951, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, who had joined the Omega Workshops in 1912, broke with Fry in 1913 and founded his own Rebel Art Centre.

who see: that is a responsibility." (p. 19) Tarr claims insight and a sense of responsibility because intellectually he is above the common herd of men. He is always trying to protect his artistic, i.e., his intellectual, self from the insidious influence of the senses. When the novel opens, he has just broken with his German fiancée, Bertha Lunken, but he is not entirely free from her and he goes back to her in an attempt to overcome his sensual self and to assert his indifference. Detachment and freedom from Bertha mean detachment from life, which to him is the artist's ultimate purpose. If a part of himself is attached to stupidity, as he feels it is in his relationship with Bertha, it is because "his artist's asceticism could not support anything more serious than such an elementary rival." (p. 219) When later in the novel Tarr starts a relationship with Anastasya Vasek, who is intellectually superior to Bertha, he makes sure that he treats her as a prostitute and does not allow her to impinge upon the essential part of himself. "Surrender to a woman was a sort of suicide for the artist. Nature, who never forgives the artist, would not allow *her* to forgive. So he has two enemies instead of one." (p. 221)

The theme of *Tarr* is the conflict between art and life: it is illustrated by Tarr's long and eventually successful efforts to master life through his intellect. In answer to Anastasya's question "What is life?" Tarr answers: "Everything that is not yet purified so that it is art." (p. 326) For Tarr life is mainly sexuality because this is the only aspect of life which thwarts the free play of his intellect. Sex and emotions are repulsive and make him wish to transcend ordinary life. They determine Otto Kreisler's attitude, which Lewis condemns as a dangerous source of nihilism and cynicism in Western thought and culture. Kreisler is thirty-six years old and the eternal student. He feels that he is near the end and that "his life might almost have been regarded as a long and careful preparation for voluntary death, a self-murder." (p. 170) Deadness is indeed the most striking feature of his life. Its futility, aimlessness and stupid, provocative noisiness are described in a chapter appropriately entitled "Doomed, Evidently." At a party organized for the German colony of artists he behaves with the utmost rudeness and caddishness in order to shock people, to defy society and to revenge himself on it. But he is merely made more conscious of his own nothingness and dismissed as a brute. The next morning Kreisler decides that he will commit suicide, though



he temporizes because he enjoys wallowing in unhealthy imaginary sufferings. He exploits his sentimental and meaningless revolt until he loses all dignity. He wishes to "bare" Anastasya's soul: "If he could insult her enough she would be bared-souled. There would be the naked *weibliche Seele*. Then he would spit on it." (p. 160) He has no opportunity to effect such violation, but he rapes Bertha, who had come to pose for him. Kreisler might be said to foreshadow Spandrell in Huxley's *Point Counter Point*, who is also a romantic and makes it a point to degrade life and women when occasion offers. But for Spandrell, as for most thwarted romantic idealists, nihilism is a by-product of disillusion: he is in quest of an absolute, and he sins against life because he is disappointed with it. Kreisler, on the other hand, literally feeds on nihilism and on his conviction that he is a victim of fate. This is also true of Bertha Lunken, in whose life Kreisler himself becomes the instrument of destiny.

Both Kreisler and Bertha are presented as symptoms of the emptiness and deadness which lie at the core of German Romanticism. Kreisler, in whom the senses prevail, is incapable of self-control; the confusion in his existence is constantly associated with his sensuality and his Romanticism. The same can be said of Bertha, "this high-standard aryan bitch." Not only does she sentimentalize her relationship with Tarr, though in a small bourgeois way since her ultimate purpose is marriage, but she has, as Tarr says, "a nice healthy bent for self-immolation." (p. 24) She is ready for self-sacrifice when on the evening of the party she sees in Kreisler "a romantic enigma." She deliberately romanticizes her relationship with him: "The meanness, the strangeness, the *déchéance*, in consorting with this sorry bird, must be heightened into poetry and thickened with luscious fiction." (p. 197) When he rapes her, she is momentarily appalled, crushed by the terrible absence of romance, but after Kreisler has apologized in grand style, she feels that

a brilliant light of grateful confusion of all the emotions emanating from Kreisler had been afforded by this demonstration: the notion he had evoked in parting, that they had been doing something splendid together—a life-saving, a heroism—found a hospitable ground in her spirit. Taking one thing with another, things had been miraculously transformed. Her late depression now merged in a steadily growing exaltation. (p. 210)

In the same way, Kreisler attempts to romanticize his duel with Solytk. Actually, he merely wants to vent his hatred on the latter and to provoke a crisis in his own life. His very wish to fight a duel is a romantic aberration associated in his mind with his idea of German respectability. Kreisler offers to forego the duel if Solytk kisses him; as Solytk refuses, Kreisler kills him when he is not even looking. Kreisler realizes that he has made a mess of everything and that there is nothing for him to do but to die, and he commits suicide in the prison of a frontier town. Although he had foreseen this end and even appointed a date for it, his death is as void of significance as his life has been and without the least trace of dignity. He is merely conscious of a repulsive physical sensation, and this symbolizes his whole attitude to life: "He hung, gradually choking—the last thing he was conscious of his tongue." (p. 308)

Kreisler's fate is the inevitable outcome of his unbounded Romanticism, to which he is unable to give expression in art for want of talent and of dedication. He is "pure german (*sic*), of the true grain," homesick "for the romantic stiff ideals of the german students of his generation," (p. 121) and unwilling to abandon "the old romantic personal values he was used to in his fatherland." (p. 81) In creating Kreisler, Lewis was aiming at both Romanticism and Germany. Kreisler's undignified and senseless death is in keeping with his complete transformation into a "machine." According to Lewis, the more romantic and emotional people are, the more "mechanical" they become. This is because by yielding to their emotions and failing to use their intellect, they are reduced to a body, i.e., to a machine, a "thing," and are therefore "dead." That is why Kreisler and Bertha are called "machines" whenever they behave emotionally. When Bertha, a "lump of half-humanity," is being romantic about Kreisler, "the machine, the sentimental, the indiscriminate side of her awakes." (p. 146) When he rapes her, he is said to "revenge himself as a machine might do, in a nightmare of violent action." (p. 206) Anastasya herself, who outdoes Bertha in physical opulence, is described as "an even more substantial machine . . . women possessed of such an intense life as Anastasya always appeared on the verge of a dark spasm of unconsciousness: with their organism of fierce mechanical reactions their self-possession must be rather a bluff,

and to have on your hands a blind force of those dimensions!" (p. 221)

Lewis distinguishes between the deadness of man as an animal-machine and the deadness which is a requisite for art. We have seen that people who do not use their intellect are "dead," and that Lewis equates all life that takes place on a purely animal or emotional level with death. That is why Tarr says that "*Death* is the one attribute that is peculiar to life," whereas "Art is identical with the idea of permanence. Art is a continuity and not an individual spasm." (pp. 326-7) On the other hand, since art must transcend the movement and the flux of life, it must have a quality of deadness:

'Anything living, quick and changing is bad art always; naked men and women are the worst art of all, because there are fewer semi-dead things about them. The shell of a tortoise, the plumage of a bird, makes these animals approach nearer to art. Soft, quivering and quick flesh is as far from art as it is possible for an object to be.' 'Art is merely *the dead*, then?'

'No, but deadness is the first condition of art. The armoured hide of the hippopotamus, the shell of the tortoise, feathers and machinery, you may put in one camp; naked pulsing and moving of the soft inside of life—along with elasticity of movement and consciousness—that goes in the opposite camp. Deadness is the first condition for art.' (pp. 327-8)

This definition of art tallies with Lewis's "Vorticism," which "asserts the metaphor of experience as a vortex, the only important aspect of which is the still centre, as opposed to the violent but unimportant flux of the mass in motion around the centre."<sup>1</sup> Lewis himself explained Vorticism as follows: "You think at once of a whirlpool. At the heart of the whirlpool is a great silent place where all the energy is concentrated. And there at the point of concentration is the vorticist."<sup>2</sup> "Vortex is energy," Lewis wrote in the first issue of *Blast*; its aim is to trap some essential, "to get to the essential truth." It is worth noting, however, that if Lewis painted masterpieces as a vorticist, none of his novels exemplify the stillness of art as a term of reference

<sup>1</sup> John McCORMICK, *Catastrophe and Imagination, An Interpretation of the Recent English and American Novel*, London, 1957, p. 295.

<sup>2</sup> Viola HUNT, *I have this to Say*, p. 211, quoted by Geoffrey WAGNER, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

against which life might be viewed. In this respect, we must remember that it is the vorticist who is at the heart of the whirlpool, not the product of his imagination. Tarr theorizes about art and life but he is never caught in a moment of vision or understanding, and he is himself immersed in life. But keeping in mind the opposition between the stillness of art as a product of the intellect and the movement of life symbolized in the novel by sex, we can at least understand Tarr's interpretation of Kreisler's behaviour:

I believe that all the fuss he made was an attempt to get out of Art back into Life again. . . . *Back into sex* I think would describe where he wanted to get to: he was doing his best to get back into sex again out of a little puddle of art where he felt he was gradually expiring. . . . The sex-instinct of the average sensual man had become perverted into a false channel. Put it the other way round and say his art-instinct had been rooted out of sex, where it was useful, and naturally flourished, and had been exalted into a department by itself, where it bungled. The nearest the general run get to art is *Action*: sex is their form of art: the battle for existence is their picture. (pp. 329-30)

If we remember that "when the events of his life became too unwieldy or overwhelming, he converted them into love," (p. 100) instead of using his intellect and converting them into art, we perceive why Kreisler could never be an artist, since he committed the unforgivable sin of mixing life with art. Lewis presents *action* as an alternative for people who are incapable of being artists. Kreisler is frequently described as a man of action: he has taken part in a fight in Italy, his duel with Soltyk is the consequence of a compulsion to act and so is his outrageous behaviour at the party. Action in this sense is peculiar to people who are the slaves of their emotions because it is merely a response to stimuli which are provoked by emotions. But Lewis also uses the word "action" in a quite different sense, meaning the intellectual energy which masters "things" and transforms them into art. Walking in a park where he comes regularly, Tarr feels that it is dyed

with personal colour for the rest of his existence. *No one*, he was quite convinced, had squandered so much of the imaginative stuff of life in the neighbourhood of these terraces, ponds, and lawns. So this was more nearly *his Park* than it was anybody else's: he should never walk through it without bitter and soothing recognition from it.

Well, that was what the 'man of action' accomplished. In four idle years he had been, when most inactive, experimenting with the man of action's job. He had captured a Park!—Well! he had spent himself into the earth, the trees had his sap in them. (pp. 245-6)

This conception of art as a form of superior activity transcending ordinary life naturally leads to the view that the artist is separated from, and superior to, the herd of ordinary men. "To produce is the sacrifice of genius," Tarr says. His passion for art makes him "fond of chaos," for that is where he gets the material for his art, and he knows that "it is the artist's fate almost always to be exiled among the slaves." (p. 250) But this doesn't prevent him from being "free," not subject to the ordinary laws of men. "You can't have 'freedom' both ways and I prefer the *artist* to be free, and the crowd not to be 'artists.'" (p. 247) This obviously means that the crowd can neither be free nor have any sense of art. It is the privilege of a few to be artists since very few people are capable of it, and art, provided it is exceptionally good, raises the individual above the common herd. Tarr-Lewis strongly objects to the vulgarization of art:

What does all our emotional talk about the wonderful artist-nation, etc., amount to?—we exclaim and point because we find thirty-five million *petits-maitres*; each individually possessing very little taste, really, living together and prettifying their towns and themselves. (pp. 247-8)

Lewis associates this vulgarization with Romanticism or more precisely with his own conception of Romanticism: to believe in the natural goodness of all men leads inevitably to the conviction that all men are naturally capable of, or entitled to, any activity. This assumption too often induces all those who can afford to, to dabble in art. Lewis is convinced that good art is always produced by a few exceptional individuals:

Success is always personal. More than ever he was steadily convinced that above a certain level co-operation, group-genius was a slavish pretence and in fact absurd. Mob-talent and popular art was a good thing, it was a big, diffuse, vehement giant; but he was quite sure the only songs of the popular muse that were exciting were composed by great individuals, submerged in an unfavourable time. (p. 344)



Because he considers himself as a superior individual, Tarr feels he has a right to exploit other people for his own purposes, even in human relationships, and, as we have seen, he experiments with the "moribund Bertha" in a selfish attempt to test his own feelings and his capacity to resist the appeal of the senses. Bertha's submissiveness may be considered as an illustration of Lewis's conviction that the slaves do *not* want freedom and are glad to have a master to submit to. But before he can master other people, Tarr must first of all master himself. His experience with Bertha allows him to treat Anastasya as a mere object, and the latter does not particularly mind. Tarr could never marry her anyway because she is too intelligent. She proves it by willingly declining to "possess" Tarr, by keeping in her proper place and showing her awareness of the part she is to play. The scene in the restaurant during which they discuss art, is repulsive because so much emphasis is laid on the gross sensuality displayed by Anastasya, but their indulgence in sensuality appears almost as a purification for Tarr, and it is immediately afterwards that he feels he has conquered. At the beginning of the novel he had told Hobson: "'Half of myself I have to hide. I am bitterly ashamed of a slovenly common portion of my life that has been isolated and repudiated by the energies of which I am so proud.'" (p. 14) At the end of the novel he no longer hides his sensual self, he gives it its proper place in his life. His self-division is not presented as an evil which should be overcome but as a reality which must be reckoned with and emphasized. The "Self," i.e., the senses, is associated with emotions and romance and should never be allowed to weaken the intellect or the "Not-self." Lewis does not use this terminology in *Tarr*, but he illustrates the opposition between "Self" and "Not-self" in his hero. Significantly, Tarr is a painter who observes people from without with his "Not-self," which is symbolized by the "eye." This accounts for Tarr's cruelty towards his fellow-beings. As V.S. Pritchett says, "Tarr does not apologize for being a two-girl man: he does not moralize, he does not torture himself, he is not even cynical."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> V.S. PRITCHETT, "The Eye Man," in *Books in General*, London, 1953, p. 252.

Although *Tarr* deals essentially with the right attitude of the artist, its social implications are obvious. Lewis's conviction that the artist is an exceptional being and is entitled to privilege is stated in *Time and Western Man*:

In art, as in anything else, all revolutionary impulse comes in the first place from the exceptional individual. No collectivity ever conceives, or, having done so, would be able to carry through, an insurrection or a reform of any intensity, or of any magnitude. That is always the work of individuals or minorities. It is invariably the man who is privileged and free, as Plato was, who initiates or purposes, and plans out such further ambitious advances for our race. The rest follow.<sup>1</sup>

This is a fairly moderate assertion in spite of the fact that the freedom of the artist is supposed to justify his selfishness and his arrogance. It does not simply mean freedom to create and exemption from the constraints to which ordinary people are subject, it also means freedom from other human beings, a purpose which *Tarr* tries to achieve all along: "The absolute would be the individual of individuals, the self that has never broken down but has maintained its isolation."<sup>2</sup> *Tarr* repeatedly alludes to his isolation, though he does not always succeed in maintaining it. Like Lewis, he advocates the cult of reason and rejects emotions because the man who yields to them is to some extent at the mercy of the object of his feelings. *Tarr* resents depending emotionally on anyone, particularly on women, who in his mind are associated with all that is weak and soft:

God was man: the woman was a lower form of life. Everything started female and most so continued: a jellyish diffuseness spread itself and gaped upon all the beds and bas-fonds of everything: above a certain level sex disappeared, just as in highly-organized sensualism sex vanishes. On the other hand, *everything* beneath that line was female... he enumerated acquaintances palpably below that absolute line: a lack of energy, permanently mesmeric state, almost purely emotional, they all displayed it, they were true 'women.' (pp. 344-5)

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *Time and Western Man*, Boston, 1957, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 454.

In *Time and Western Man* Lewis criticizes feminism as "a revolution that aims at reversing the respective positions of the sexes, and so returning to the supposed conditions of the primitive Matriarchate." (p. 36) Reason is associated with masculinity, whereas emotions are considered as a feminine attribute and of a lower order. "We should make a new world of Reason for ourselves,"<sup>1</sup> Lewis writes in his defence of the "classical." "The 'classical' is the rational, aloof and aristocratical; the 'romantic' is the popular, sensational and 'cosmically' confused. That is the permanent political reference in those terms."<sup>2</sup> The rejection of Romanticism in *Tarr* implies a rejection of the "popular" and of what is in any way vulgarized or connected with the crowd. At the beginning of the novel *Tarr* explains that because of her emotionalism Bertha is "very near to the 'people' . . . Bertha is a bourgeoisie or rather bourgeois-bohemian, reminiscent of the popular maiden: she is the popular maiden at one remove—I am not in love with the popular maiden." (p. 24) Lewis's horror of the "popular," of what he calls the emotional and sensational character of the masses, often amounts to an obsession. *Tarr*, the impersonation of the "Enemy," has an almost vicious pleasure in challenging all that reminds him of the "Many." But his arrogant assumption that the greater part of humanity is despicable and deserves to be exploited is outrageous because it seems so gratuitous. *Tarr* condemns humanity in the name of an art which serves no other purpose than itself. Geoffrey Wagner is certainly right when he writes that Lewis is "far closer to the nineteenth-century aesthete than he likes to imagine."<sup>3</sup>

*Tarr's* insistence on the unique role of the artist as an "intellectual" detached from the flux of life reflects Lewis's belief, fundamental in his work, that the artist guided by reason is the creator of Western civilization and alone responsible for preserving it:

The Not-self, and especially the physical, is almost the patent and property of the Western genius. The 'natural magic' of Western poetry owes its peculiar and penetrating quality to the intense relations of the Western mind to this alien physical world of 'nature.' . . . It is in non-personal

<sup>1</sup> *Time and Western Man*, p. 377.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey WAGNER, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

modes of feeling—that is in *thought*, or in feeling that is so dissociated from the hot, immediate egoism of sensational life that it becomes automatically intellectual—that the non-religious Western Man has always expressed himself, at his profoundest, at his purest. That is, of course, the heritage that is being repudiated in the present 'time'-modes. We are busy in everything, in the West, substituting the personal for the impersonal, the private for the public.<sup>1</sup>

This conception of the artist is far from being substantiated in Lewis's works: it is even contradicted in the very book in which Lewis develops it. *Time and Western Man* is a long and difficult essay full of repetitions, digressions and contradictions. Yet, when it was first published, it was hailed by T.S. Eliot as the product of "the most remarkable example in England of the actual mutation of the artist into a philosopher of a type hitherto unknown."<sup>2</sup> Eliot was referring to the impossibility for the intellectual to avoid considering "the problem of Liberty and Authority, both in politics and in the organization of speculative thought. Politics has become too serious a matter to be left to politicians."<sup>3</sup>

*Time and Western Man* (1927) throws light on the relation Wyndham Lewis makes between Romanticism and Bergsonism on the one hand, and social and political democratization on the other. It also shows Lewis's insight into the revolutionary character of the period, though he looked upon the transformation as a symptom of decadence rather than of revolution. He accuses Bergson and the "time-philosophers" of debasing art, literature, and philosophy because they advocate an approach to them which makes sensations all-important and which should therefore be confined to music. According to Lewis, this approach is essentially romantic and, like all attitudes derived from Romanticism, is responsible for all that is vulgar, immature, or unhealthy whether in art, in ordinary life, or even in politics. He accumulates examples such as advertisement, an unhealthy preoccupation with sex, the doctrine of action,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Time and Western Man*, p. 263.

<sup>2</sup> T.S. ELIOT, "A Commentary," *The Criterion*, VI, 4 (November 1927), 387.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

<sup>4</sup> Lewis's condemnation of "action" stands in contradiction with his admiration for the *Action Française* and later for Hitler, though he expressed the hope that the latter would promote "intelligent" action.

so-called "revolutionary" art movements, the predominance of the mass over the individual, the Russian ballet, the cult of the savage and the child-cult.

For Lewis the romantic approach to life and art is "the opposite of the real." A romantic person is someone who has not much grasp of present and actual things. The majority of men in modern society are "romantic" because they live in a dream of non-existent things such as "the world of cheap art, education and publicity." A "romantic" is a "dreamer," but the kind of dreamer who would want, for instance, to destroy all machinery. Far from alluding to the part played by dream in romantic art, Lewis simply means that the "romantic" is unrealistic. He concludes his reflections on the romantic mind with the following definition:

We say 'romantic' when we wish to define something too emotionalized . . . something opposed to the actual or the real: a self-indulgent habit of mind or a tendency to shut the eyes to what is unpleasant, in favour of things arbitrarily chosen for their flattering pleasantness. Or else we apply it to the effects of an egoism that bathes in the self-feeling to the exclusion of contradictory realities, including the Not-Self; achieving what we see to be a false unity and optimism, regarding all the circumstances. (p. 10)

On the basis of this definition Lewis criticizes the work of Joyce, Pound, and Gertrude Stein, and dismisses it as romantic art. I shall deal later with Lewis's criticism of *Ulysses*. Where Pound is concerned, he shows that the poet is in love with the past—the worst heresy—and that he wants "action." The work of Gertrude Stein is "dead," "romantic," "unreal," and she is a supporter of the child-cult. Moreover, she is an eminent writer in what Lewis calls "our *musical society*; that is our time-society, the highly-intellectualized High Bohemia." (p. 49) "Musical society" is Lewis's contemptuous expression for the artistic coterie of the Twenties. Music is an art in *time*, an emotional art: it must be remembered, it is felt and thus involves the senses. Like Spengler, Lewis distinguishes between music and the plastic arts, though he criticizes him for doing so, above all for thinking that the "musical" is superior to the "plastic."<sup>1</sup> He draws a parallel

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note that the first issue of *Blast* contained the following assertion: "All arts approach the condition of music." Quoted by Frank KERMODE in *The Romantic Image*, London, 1957, p. 134.



between Spengler and Bergson: what the former calls "life," "will," "movement-quality" are simply Bergson's "élan vital," and Spengler's notion of the *world-as-history* could be called *world-as-time* because it is the psychological world, the world of human emotions. Spengler is the true "philosopher of Zeitgeist" because he considers everything as a time-phenomenon; Lewis sees him as a product of German Romanticism, an upholder of the vitalism which gave rise to the First World War.

It is perhaps significant that Lewis makes no distinction between Spengler and his defence of "Faustian" culture, and men like Darwin, Einstein, Schopenhauer and Bergson. For him they are all guilty of the same heresy because all have contributed by their work to man's loss of individuality. Lewis asserts that biology, mathematics and metaphysics as developed by Darwin, Einstein and Bergson have acted upon one another to produce the "time-philosophy," which does away with the traditional categories in all fields of experience and enquiry, stresses the organic and dynamic aspects of life and reveres life in the raw as opposed to life disciplined and organized by the mind. Thus "Bergson's 'creative evolution' is as Darwinian as was the 'will to power' of Nietzsche," (p. 209) and his "élan vital" is equivalent to Schopenhauer's "will." The political implications of these philosophical doctrines are obvious: by emphasizing the unconscious in man, they make him lose his individuality, for man can only be an individual when he is conscious. Having lost his individuality, he lives in a state of "common humanity" and gives precedence to what Plato calls "the mob of the senses." Life at this level is purely "sensational," and we know that Lewis associates the life of the senses with the "subhuman" majority. This loss of individuality necessarily leads to political democratization. People are encouraged to give up their personal responsibility and to hand over their life to the community: "*Discouragement of all exercise of will, or belief in individual power, that is the prevalent contemporary attitude for better or for worse.*" (p. 306) On the other hand, the doctrine of action which derives from the Darwinian doctrine of "the struggle for existence" and from Bergson's vitalism leads to fascism.<sup>1</sup> Bergson's philosophy is thus held responsible for

<sup>1</sup> At this stage Lewis is naturally concerned with Italian fascism only; he professed little admiration for Mussolini.

the development of both communism and fascism. Lewis himself was to become an admirer of fascism, particularly of the German brand, but when he recanted his fascist opinions just before the Second World War, he again associated fascism with democracy on the ground that both were mass movements. Meanwhile, he also attacked at length Behaviorism, which, so he thought, gave the final blow to consciousness and substituted the body for the mind. Professor Watson, he said, describes man as a human body or a machine which possesses only instincts and habits but no mind.<sup>1</sup> Still, the worst mischief-maker remains Bergson, whom Lewis even accuses of dishonesty. Though he often declares that philosophers are the victims of politicians who exploit their ideas for their own purposes, where Bergson is concerned, he asserts that the latter's philosophy deliberately attempts to deceive men and ultimately aims at destroying individuality.

*Time and Western Man* belongs to the same trend as the reaction against Romanticism initiated in France by the neo-classicists and in the Anglo-Saxon world by such men as Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, T.S. Eliot and T.E. Hulme. Irving Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism* (1919) no doubt stimulated many of the attempts which have since been made to define the nature of Romanticism. Thus in 1924 Arthur Lovejoy, taking as a starting point the disagreement between the definitions of some neo-classicists (Lasserre, Seillière, Babbitt and More), wrote "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," an essay in which he asserted the "plurality of Romanticisms" and argued that "any attempt at a *general* appraisal even of a single chronologically determinate Romanticism—still more, of 'Romanticism' as a whole—is a fatuity." It was only in 1949 that René Wellek met Lovejoy's challenge to exhibit "some common denominator" of all forms of Romanticism. In "The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary

<sup>1</sup> *Time and Western Man*, p. 335. Lewis misinterprets Behaviorism, which rejects the concept of instinct and explains human behaviour in terms of responses to outside stimuli. He does not distinguish between instinct and the unconscious because both can give rise to forms of behaviour not controlled by intelligence.

<sup>2</sup> "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," *PMLA*, 39, 2 (1924), 229-53, reprinted in *English Romantic Poets*, ed. by M.H. Abrams, (pp. 3-24). New York, 1960, p. 22.

History"<sup>1</sup> he argued that "we find throughout Europe the same conceptions of poetry and of the workings and nature of poetic imagination, the same conception of nature and its relation to man, and basically the same poetic style." (pp. 160-1) In "Romanticism Re-examined"<sup>2</sup> he surveyed the attempts made chiefly after the Second World War to define the term "Romanticism" and found that all these studies agree with regard to "the central creed of the great romantic poets in England, Germany, and France"; they all see in romantic poetry an endeavour "to overcome the split between subject and object, the self and the world, the conscious and the unconscious." (p. 132) On the other hand, in a recent comparison between German and English Romanticism<sup>3</sup> René Wellek assumes that "there is a common core of Romantic thought and art throughout Europe," but then proceeds to bring out the differences between German and English Romanticism. In his introduction to *Romanticism Reconsidered* Northrop Frye presents Romanticism in its historical perspective and insists on the concern of scholars to examine "the degree of real content which Romanticism has" rather than counter the influence of the anti-Romantic movement in criticism. Literary criticism, particularly of the last twenty years or so, abounds in studies on Romanticism which could thus be cited to testify to a widespread interest in this movement and its effects on art or more generally on civilization. I have alluded to some significant comments on this subject to stress the variety of interpretations that have been given of Romanticism but also to underline the fact that, whatever their definition, all scholars agree that Romanticism was a serious endeavour on the part of the artist to redefine man's relation to the world and to describe the part played by imagination in this reassessment. None of them would seriously consider Lewis's definition of Romanticism as an attempt to "dehumanize" man and to destroy all authority in life and art.

<sup>1</sup> "The Concept of 'Romanticism' in Literary History," *Comparative Literature*, I, 1 (1949), 1-23, 147-72, reprinted in *Concepts of Criticism*, New Haven, 1963, pp. 128-98.

<sup>2</sup> "Romanticism Re-examined," in *Romanticism Reconsidered*, ed. by Northrop Frye, New York, pp. 107-33.

<sup>3</sup> "German and English Romanticism: A Confrontation," *Confrontations*, Princeton, 1965, pp. 3-33.

What Lewis calls Romanticism is actually Rousseauism as defined by Irving Babbitt: 'The Rousseauist' ... specializes in his own sensations. He goes in quest of emotional thrills for their own sake."<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, Geoffrey Wagner shows that the English anti-romanticists translated, and did not originate, anti-romantic criticism; their works merely "prolonged a battle fought out in France earlier and in America."<sup>3</sup> In fact, Lewis's attack against Romanticism is not merely lacking in originality; it is indiscriminate and ignores, whether deliberately or not it is difficult to say, those features which are usually recognized as belonging to English, German, or French Romanticism and sometimes to all three. I am thinking, for instance, of the idealistic philosophy which underlies German Romanticism, or of the romantic conception of the artist and of imagination, all of which are relevant to Lewis's criticism of Romanticism. It should be noted that whereas Irving Babbitt is careful to specify that he is not dealing with Romanticism in general but "only with a particular type of romanticism [which] needs to be seen as a recoil ... from a particular type of classicism."<sup>4</sup> Lewis simply assumes that Romanticism in general implies a mechanistic approach to life because it gives precedence to the subconscious and values instinct above intellect. It is characteristic of his approach to his subject that although he repeatedly criticizes the organic conception of the world represented by the Romantics, he does not once refer to the contrast between the mechanical and the organic as it was first described by the Romantics themselves. He terms "mechanical" exactly the opposite of what the Romantics mean by it and takes it for granted that his own terminology holds good. Similarly, in his defence of the intellect he does not realize how very limited his antithesis intellect vs. instinct is. What he opposes to instinct is merely discursive reason. Elsewhere he wrote "I should say that you could make good art out of almost anything, whether good or bad from the standpoint of right reason,"<sup>5</sup> but he does

<sup>1</sup> Professor Welles has noted the tendency to make Rousseau the wellspring of all Romanticism and to reduce Romanticism to Rousseauism. In his opinion "Rousseau is duly overrated if he is made the originator of attitudes which he helped to popularize but did not invent." *Concepts of Criticism*, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Irving BABBITT, *Rousseau and Romanticism*, New York, 1962, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey WAGNER, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> Irving BABBITT, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> "The Values of the Doctrine behind 'Subjective' Art," *The Criterion*, VI. 1 (July 1927), 12.

not make clear what he means by "right reason." Unlike Irving Babbitt, he does not seem to believe in the controlling power of imagination, and he would have scoffed at René Wellek's assertion that German Romanticism "emphasizes the totality of man's forces, not reason alone, nor sentiment alone, but rather intuition, 'intellectual intuition,' imagination."<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, Lewis's association of the emotional, the sensual and the popular with German Romanticism in particular is difficult to account for, unless he has in mind the more pervasive character of Romanticism in Germany than in other countries or the collaboration there between music and the other arts. In this respect as in other matters, he seems to have been influenced by the French neo-classicists.<sup>2</sup> Evidently, he also sees German Romanticism as a form of Rousseauism.<sup>3</sup> On the whole, he uses the word "romantic" in its popular sense, and his conception of Romanticism has little in common with English Romanticism.

*Time and Western Man*, like many other works published by neo-classicists at approximately the same time,<sup>4</sup> was written in defence of Western civilization, whose greatness, according to Lewis, has always depended on the rationalistic tradition inherited from the Greeks. To the romantic "time-philosophy" of Bergson Lewis opposes a rational philosophy which he calls "spatial philosophy" or "philosophy of the eye," which attaches itself to the concrete and radiant reality of the optic sense." (p. 403) The eye apprehends the reality of "common sense," which is the kind of reality we have inherited from pagan antiquity. Lewis's approach to reality is external, discursive, rational:

As much as [Bergson] enjoys the sight of things 'penetrating' and 'merging,' do we enjoy the opposite picture of them standing apart . . . much as he enjoys the 'indistinctive,' the 'qualitative,' the misty, sensational and ecstatic, very much more do we value the distinct, the geometric, the

<sup>1</sup> René WELLEK, *Concepts of Criticism*, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> Benda's *La Trahison des Clercs*, also published in 1927, is markedly anti-German but puts the case against German Romanticism much more clearly than *Time and Western Man*.

<sup>3</sup> See René Wellek's assertion that German Romanticism, in contrast with English and French Romanticism, is not Rousseauistic. *Confrontations*, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> See among others BENDA, *op. cit.* (1927), and Henry MASSIS's *Défense de l'Occident*, published in 1925.



universal, non-qualified—the clear and the light, the unsensational. (p. 428)

“The image purified of the sensational” is one of Lewis’s definitions of the classical. He also insists that “the *external* approach to things belongs to the ‘classical’ manner of apprehending.”<sup>1</sup> But his main claim to classicism rests on his defence of the superior intellect and its rational powers. He explains that one must *think* even in one’s approach to God, and not have an intuition of his existence. The only acceptable form of belief is rational: the Greek Logos is the “true God.” In fact, Lewis confuses the rational process with the rationalist himself, and asserts that the more individual and separate man is by the originality of his thought the nearest he comes to being an “Absolute”:

The sense of personality, of being a person, is, according to us, the most vivid and fundamental sense that we possess. . . . In our approaches to God, in consequence, we do not need to ‘magnify’ a human body, but only to intensify that consciousness of a separated and transcendent life. So God becomes the supreme symbol of our separation and of our limited transcendence. . . . It is, then, because the sense of personality is posited as our greatest ‘real,’ that we require a ‘God,’ a something that is nothing but a *person*, secure in its absolute egoism, to be the rationale of this sense. . . . God must be a sexless image, . . . a head and its mind. (pp. 446-7)

The first thing we note about Lewis’s Classicism is that, like his conception of Romanticism, it is very limited. It is nothing more than a method, certainly not a conception of art which reflects the classical spirit. W.A. Thorpe writes that Lewis’s Aristotelianism is sentimental and he even calls it “a prejudice rather than a philosophy.”<sup>2</sup> It is essentially based on a defence of the intellect, which is about the only element that Lewis recognizes in Greek Classicism. What he says of it in *Time and Western Man* is a long way off from the purpose of the neo-classicists, which is “not to resuscitate Aristotelianism and Thomism artificially, but to revive the spirit that created them.”<sup>3</sup> Lewis’s

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Geoffrey WAGNER, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup> W.A. THORPE, Review of *Time and Western Man*, *The Criterion*, VII, 1 (January 1928), 72.

<sup>3</sup> E.R. CURTIUS, “Restoration of the Reason,” *The Criterion*, VI, 5 (November 1927), 396.

Classicism is very different from that propounded by those of his contemporaries whom Eliot describes as "being on the side of what we call 'the intelligence.'"<sup>1</sup> For instance, it stands in contradiction with Babbitt's and Eliot's assertions that classical art is not unique but representative of a class and that the classical imagination works from an ethical centre. It also contradicts Eliot's conception of tradition, his belief that "no artist has his complete meaning alone."<sup>2</sup> In the context of the controversies about authority and order in Western civilization which took place in the Twenties, the conflict between Classicism and Romanticism was inflated because of the political implications attached to these terms by the neo-classicists.<sup>3</sup> Even Eliot associated authority in thought with authority in politics. However, Lewis, who was so vehement in his denunciation of Romanticism, did not contribute to the creation of the true Classicism to which he and other neo-classicists aspired. On the contrary, his literary work shows that he is a characteristically "romantic figure."

A brief comparison between Eliot's theory of the impersonality of art and Lewis's conception of the artist is a convenient starting point to demonstrate Lewis's unclassical attitude. For Eliot art must be impersonal, and he explains that the sacrifice of the artist is "a continual extinction of personality. . . . Poetry is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality . . . the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material."<sup>4</sup> The poet is a medium who achieves detachment not by rejecting emotion but by making it impersonal through art. Though, as it has been shown, Eliot's theory may contain an element of

<sup>1</sup> T.S. ELIOT, Review of *Reason and Romanticism* by Herbert READ and *Messages* by Ramon FERNANDEZ, *The Criterion*, IV, 4 (October 1926), 757.

<sup>2</sup> T.S. ELIOT, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Prose*, London, 1963, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Nowadays, critics tend to consider the antithesis "classical-romantic" as unsatisfactory and draw attention to the neo-Hellenism of German, English, and French romantics. In view of Lewis's frequent references to Plato to counter Romanticism it is also worth noting that in his essay "Classical and Romantic," published in 1923, H.J.C. Grierson had called Plato the first "great Romantic," *The Background of English Literature, Classical and Romantic*, London, 1950, p. 273.

<sup>4</sup> T.S. ELIOT, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Selected Prose*, pp. 25, 29 and 26.

romanticism,<sup>1</sup> it is in keeping with the generally accepted conception of Classicism. This theory is the expression of Eliot's endeavour to transcend the personal element in feeling and emotion, which to the neo-classicists is the most distasteful characteristic of romantic art. In contradistinction to this theory is Lewis's definition of the artist as "a person, secure in its absolute egoism."<sup>2</sup> It is difficult, however, to distinguish between the selfishness to which, according to Lewis, the artist is entitled and what he calls the "fanatical self-feeling" of the romantics or "the hot, immediate egoism of sensational life." His artist strives to achieve the individuality and the indifference of a transcendent God. He is at the centre of the Vortex, arrogantly detached from the flux of life. Tarr, for instance, ignores the senses—after he has satisfied them with the contempt they deserve. He makes the park *his* and derives an additional satisfaction from the fact that *no one* can see it in the same light as he. This is very far from the "still centre" which Babbitt described and which inspired Eliot. The "still centre" is reached through imaginative insight into the universal as it manifests itself in life. For Lewis, on the contrary, the aim of the artist is to impose his own arbitrary form on the world. His conception of society dominated by an intellectual elite is not merely aristocratic, it is tyrannical since the artist has the right to use society for his own purposes and to fulfil himself as an individual at the expense of the majority. At the end of *Time and Western Man* Lewis denounces the form of altruism which incites men "to legislate for the subhuman." (p. 440) In Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* poets are also compared to God because they are Creators; they participate in the divine in so far as they transcend their own time and place. Poets are the "legislators of the world." However, unlike Lewis, who resents the poet's obligations to the world, Shelley stresses the unselfish character of the poet's attitude and of his task, and brings out the connection between poetry and social good. The poet's imagination is an

<sup>1</sup> Philip LE BRUN, "T.S. Eliot and Henri Bergson," *RES*, New Series, XVIII, 70 and 71 (1967), 149-161, 274-286. Le Brun argues that Eliot's theory of impersonality is "a highly sophisticated form of romantic theory." (285) He shows Eliot's indebtedness to Bergson for his cult of impersonality and even for his idea of an "objective correlative."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "Reality is to be sought in the self or the person." *Time and Western Man*, p. 454.

instrument of moral good because it reveals unknown aspects of life, conduces to self-knowledge, and makes men understand and share in the pains and pleasures of other human beings. According to Shelley, poetry in the widest sense of the word "connects, animates, and sustains the life of all"; the creation of poetry "in its most perfect and universal form" springs from a generous impulse and is an instrument of social renovation.

The selfishness of Lewis's artist is neither a classical nor a romantic attitude: he stands alone and insists on standing alone in a world which he challenges, but he is not a victim of society, rather an intellectual exploiter of it. As V.S. Pritchett rightly says, "the new note in *Tarr* [is] the notion of human relationships as mere fodder for a master race, the artists, those distorted Martians, all eye and brain and the will to power."<sup>1</sup> Whatever *Tarr* may say about the sacrifice of the creative artist, he does not apprehend his "vision" at the cost of suffering and he does not represent "the artist in isolation." Nevertheless, Lewis's attitude is romantic in other respects, and it is often so in the sense that Babbitt gives to Romanticism: Lewis puts the arts at the centre of civilization; he believes that the intellectual genius is beyond good and evil and has no moral responsibility.<sup>2</sup> But he is also a romantic in that his attacks against the stupidity of mankind are the product of a violent disillusion and pessimism which made him despise "humanity in the lump."<sup>3</sup> To describe the latter, he even uses a method favoured by the German Romantic writers: the grotesque. His assertion that creative art is "magic" is also romantic, and he shares with the German Romantics the belief that the artist can transform nature and make it his by imposing his own order upon it. Fichte saw man as a creative being at the centre of the universe imposing his own rule upon it; he insisted however, that *noblesse oblige*, whereas Lewis suggests nothing of the kind. As we shall see, Lewis's belief in the unquestionable superiority of the artist and in his authority made him reject one aberration for another. He denounced the deliberate search for sensations, but he advocated reason for its own sake. He criticized

<sup>1</sup> S.V. PRITCHETT, "The Eye-Man," in *op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, for Arthur O. Lovejoy "The one 'Romanticism' which has an indisputable title to the name was conceived as . . . a sense of the inner moral struggle as the distinctive fact in human experience." *Op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Irving BABBITT, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

democracy and humanitarianism as "sham," but his glorification of the artist-individual drove him to a very "romantic" political extremism and to admiration for a system based on the very "values" he had condemned in *Tarr*. He is, unfortunately, an example of the confusion he attributes to others.

The artist whom Lewis most criticized for using the "mental" method derived from the philosophy of time is Joyce. The "mental" method "leads, as it is intended to lead, to a physical disintegration and a formal confusion" (p. 115); "it imposes a softness, flabbiness and vagueness everywhere in its bergsonian fluidity." (p. 103) Joyce's use of local colour and of psychological time in *Ulysses* makes it a masterpiece of romantic art. This novel is "unorganized brute material," (p. 91) yet it is also the work of a craftsman, and "what [Joyce] thinks seems to be of a conventional and fixed order, as though perhaps not to embarrass the neighbouring evolution of his highly progressive and eclectic craftsmanship." (p. 93) Lewis's treatment of Joyce in *Time and Western Man*, *The Human Age* and *The Apes of God* invites comment and has been variously interpreted. For Goldberg *Ulysses* shows weaknesses which substantiate Lewis's interpretation.<sup>1</sup> J.I.M. Stewart also agrees with Lewis and several times refers with approval to his criticism.<sup>2</sup> But Harry Levin and Geoffrey Wagner are of opinion that Lewis is malicious. Wagner adds that his misunderstanding of Joyce cannot but be deliberate, and he shows how full of contradictions Lewis is in his "Analysis of the Mind of James Joyce." Lewis's attitude towards Joyce as it appears in his letters differs from the views expressed in *Time and Western Man*, for in the former he repeatedly praises him,<sup>3</sup> and to Joyce himself he wrote approvingly of *Ulysses*. Lewis does not question the importance of Joyce's work; he criticizes it as an illustration of Bergson's philosophy, which he takes as a symptom of decadence. As in his approach to Bergson, he simply ignores the aspects of *Ulysses* which might contradict his

<sup>1</sup> S.L. GOLDBERG, *Joyce*, Writers and Critics Series, London, 1962, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> J.I.M. STEWART, *James Joyce*, Writers and their Work Series, London, 1957.

<sup>3</sup> In a letter to Richard Aldington, however, Lewis writes: "The Ulysses 'thought-stream' method is only appropriate to the depiction of children, morons, and the extremely infirm (Fredigonde)." *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, p. 191.



opinion. Because *Ulysses* is a "time-book" and because Joyce makes use of the interior monologue, Lewis refuses to consider the composition of *Ulysses*. Far from being a mere display of emotions and feelings brought to light by "automatic writing," the novel emphasizes the lack of genuine relations between the characters. It is curious that Lewis, who was concerned with conveying the deadness of the "Many," should not have realized that this was precisely what Joyce was doing, nor that Stephen conforms to his (Lewis's) conception of the artist. It is true that this conception is very differently illustrated in *Ulysses* and in *Tarr*. Tarr takes his separateness for granted. Stephen acknowledges his indebtedness to his parents, to the Church, to Ireland, but he frees himself from all three, one after the other, and each tearing away involves a struggle which brings him nearer to impersonality. Joyce's theory of the depersonalization of the artist, which he expounds in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, has something in common with Eliot's views on the subject as they are stated in *Tradition and the Individual Talent*.<sup>1</sup> Joyce sees this depersonalization as a progress, at the last stage of which the personality of the artist "finally refines itself out of existence, impersonalizes itself, so to speak."<sup>2</sup> This progress, by which the artist purifies life, allows him to achieve an "aesthetic stasis" in which his mind is raised above emotion. Far from being "an instinctive" and from revelling in "the fluid material gushing of undisciplined life,"<sup>3</sup> Joyce condemns mere emotional expression and says that improper art, the art which gives rise to such feelings as desire or loathing and awakens a physical sensation, is kinetic as opposed to the ideal refined emotion which has been purified and transcended by the artist. Ironically, Lewis's picture of society in *The Human Age* and, to a lesser extent, in *The Apes of God and Self Condemned* is intended to arouse loathing in the reader; as such it may be considered as "improper art." Lewis's art is

<sup>1</sup> In a recent article David Ward also draws attention to the similarity between the two theories and writes that the publication of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* "helped to precipitate Eliot's idea of Impersonality." "The Cult of Impersonality: Eliot, St. Augustine and Flaubert," *Essays in Criticism*, XVII, 2 (April 1967), 175.

<sup>2</sup> James JOYCE, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Penguin Books, 1964.

<sup>3</sup> *Time and Western Man*, pp. 90 and 115.

"kinetic" in that he often attacks individuals without having first digested the emotions which provoked the attack. It is Lewis's tragedy as a writer that he never achieved the "aesthetic stasis" described by Joyce. His caricature of the latter in *The Human Age* is a striking example of it.

*Childermass* (1928), the first part of *The Human Age*, which was to be Lewis's most important work, is mainly a satire of Bergsonism and Bergsonians. Its theme is similar to that of *Time and Western Man* but is developed in an ambitious and difficult allegory. The scene is a camp "outside Heaven," some kind of Limbo where people wait for admission to the "Magnetic City." It is a desert separated by the "Styx" from the "Outposts or investing belt of Beelzebub." The Bailiff describes it as "the Plain of Death . . . full of an empty whirling underneath—its movements signify nothing."<sup>1</sup> The two main characters, Pullman and Satterthwaite—Pulley and Satters—meet outside the camp and decide they will try to reach the city. Pullman was a famous writer on earth, and Satters was his fag when they were together at Chatterhouse. Their relationship remains throughout one of prefect and fag, Pullman adopting from the start a commanding and protective attitude towards the babyish and apparently homosexual Satters "reincarnated" as a sixteen-year old boy. In the first part of the book Pullman and Satters start walking, presumably towards the city. Actually, their journey is an excursion into "space-time" during which they undergo changes of identity and are subject to visions, mirages or illusory experiences. Pullman's appearance as well as some details about his early life—the famous writer born a Roman Catholic, who was in Trieste at the outbreak of the War—makes it clear that he is a caricature of James Joyce. Sam, the rich Jew presented as a sham—"I am an impostor from head to foot" (p. 132)—is meant to represent Gertrude Stein. Pullman, "a veteran rat trotting in an aerial gutter," guides Satters to their "point of vantage" (probably the "flux of space-time"). "Once they get there he will rest, and have a dream perhaps, of gigantic apparitions inhabiting the dangerous hollows inside the world." (p. 16) The two men are always referred to as automata or machines.

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *Childermass*, London, 1956, p. 463.

When Satters unexpectedly falls upon Pullman, the latter is wandering beside the Styx, "a lost automaton rather than a lost soul." They start walking together "both pairs of eyes withdrawn into the respective shells," Satters "with a long-legged slouch," Pullman "with a slowing down of his light-limbed machine." Such words as machine, automaton, shell, disk (for the eye), mask, doll, clockwork (referring to movements) occur on practically every page, not only in connection with Pullman and Satters but with anyone who inhabits the "Plain of Death." Yet the two main characters belong to a superior cast and are particularly conscious of it when they meet the peons, i.e., "the multitudes of personalities which God, having created, is unable to destroy." (p. 37) The peons are apparently slaves and seem to stand for the masses. They don't work but they are in a position which simulates whatever action they are supposed to be engaged in. This seems to fit in with Lewis's often expressed opinion, particularly in *Rotting Hill* and *The Vulgar Streak*, that the working classes are the people who work least. Satters's eyes are attracted "to these halted human shells as though to a suddenly perceived vacuum but with them it is not the abstract abyss." (p. 23) Pullman, who mistrusts "the mysterious inflammability of all more instinctive organism," tries to divert his attention from this "zoo of men" among whom "many don't know they exist. If you don't take any notice they continue to think they're not there and of course then it's all right." (p. 30)

Although the first part of the book is better than the second, it makes repulsive reading, because the account of the characters' wanderings is at moments frankly nauseating. This is obviously intended to create disgust for the interior world described by artists like Joyce and for what Lewis calls sensationalism. While he walks with Pullman,

Satters day-dreams and stares and steins while he clings to his new-found instrument for all he's worth.

Pulley has been most terribly helpful and kind there's no use excusing himself Pulley has been most terribly helpful and kind—most terribly helpful and he's been kind. He's been most terribly kind and helpful, there are two things, he's been most kind he's been terribly helpful, he's kind he can't help being—he's terribly. He's been most fearfully tiresome when he likes and he's been tiresome too but who doesn't when they're not? He has been most terribly. But who does ever? Oh I don't know! There

can be no mistake about it all's not on one side when it's not all smooth sailing it shouldn't be—there are one-sided housetops—brickholds and there are mutual arrangements not one-sided I mean they are mutual. That is his or he should say theirs. He's sure it was so. He's been terribly kind and helpful. Every fellow's not then in the camp he's sure this is the first. One doesn't know when, to be well off. As well off. (pp. 50-51)

This is only one of several passages in which Gertrude Stein's style is parodied. Satters's relations with "Miss Pullman" are definitely equivocal, and the emphasis on his wayward childishness and on his refusal to become more mature is so insistent that it becomes ridiculous. "In burning appropriate soliloquy the first neuter show-baby hen-pecks his dolly Pulley to himself and comes out of his nursery, with a cave-man scowl for the rejuvenating mask at his side." (p. 55) All this illustrates Lewis's opinion that "this capable colossal authoress relapses into the role and mental habits of childhood. . . . But the *child* with her is always overshadowed by the imbecile."<sup>1</sup> The "neuter show-baby" is no doubt an allusion to Lewis's belief that as a result of William James's teachings "we are asked to conceive of ourselves as neutral or neuter . . . and our segregations are to be broken down."<sup>2</sup>

As Pullman and Satters progress through Bergsonian land, everything shifts and changes. They see trees and try to reach them but when they do, the trees disappear, sometimes to be seen some distance further. The objective and exterior world is thus made unstable and subject to flux. Pullman and Satters fall by turns into some kind of fits when they enter "timeless" moments during which they behave unconsciously. Pullman advises Satters to think of the maxim *Nothing is but thinking makes it so* in order to regain self-control. At other times they are the victims of "Time-Hallucinations." Satters calls one of them a "picture" and is reluctant to enter it, but he is forced to do so by Pullman. "It's hollow! It's only Time," the latter says to encourage him: indeed stepping into the "picture" or "hallucination" they find that "it's like being in a vacuum." (p. 106) The vacuum turns out

<sup>1</sup> *Time and Western Man*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

to be England: "It's all desiccated . . . It's not alive. . . . Nothing here is living." (p. 107) They find themselves in Old England and witness seventeenth-century pastoral scenes. Pullman feels quite at home, but as he alludes to his father, "the father-son motif crops up, with savage appeals from its stage-tomtoms." Pullman protests vehemently against fathers: "they are like reason, overrated and not essential at all." When the fathers depart, a "small select chorus of stealthy matronly papas" representing Big Business appear and offer "meat-pale sunkist fleshings of celanese silk stuffed with chocolates, crossword-puzzles, tombola-tickets for crystal-sets, and free-passes for war-films, to the million-headed herd of tiny tots of all ages but one size." (pp. 116-17) After this satire of Big Business stupefying the masses with toys to keep them quiet, we find Pullman and Satters in a Lilliput eighteenth-century England. They come to the Old Red Lion Tavern, where they see Thomas Paine, the author of *The Rights of Man*. Symbolically, Satters quarrels with him and tramples him to death "in an ecstasy of cruelty."<sup>1</sup>

The Bailiff, whom Pullman greatly admires, is described as a "dark-robed polichinelle." (p. 161) He is often addressed as "Puppet," and his tribunal is in the form of "a lofty tapering Punch-and-Judy theatre." He denies the individuality of man and asserts that "it is only imbeciles that suppose themselves of any importance." (pp. 280-1) His motto is "I'm primitive and proud of it." (p. 336) He and his chorus of homosexuals celebrate his negroid origins, then he starts a half-hysterical incantation in baby-talk and negro-talk which ends with a parody of Joyce:

Ant add narfter thort wilt? nope one mild one just this  
dear Shaun as ever was commixed wid Shem Hanp ant  
Japhet for luck (for he's a great mixer is Master Joys of  
Potluck, Joys of Jingles, whom men call Crossword-Joys for  
his apt circumsolutions but whom the gods call just Joys or  
Shimmy, shut and short.—'Sure and oi will bighorror!' sez  
the dedalan Sham-up-to-date with a most genteelest soft-  
budding gem of a hipcough. (pp. 215-16)

<sup>1</sup> It seems that Lewis's reference to Paine's *Rights of Man* is simply intended as a pun: the rights of *Man* as opposed to *Woman*, for Lewis is unlikely to be referring to what Paine stands for.



D.H. Lawrence also gets his due. But the main point of the second part of the book appears in the arguments between the Bailiff and his principal opponent, Hyperides. The latter, who defends classical thought, is the leader of a sect with fascist leanings: its members wear Swastikas, and Hyperides asks to be represented by Alectryon, a young man who used to belong to the *Action Française*. The Bergsonian Bailiff is supposed to be a time-philosopher, while Hyperides and Alectryon are Lewis's mouthpieces. They first argue about time. When the Bailiff says that time commences for anything "when it is in touch with something else," he is challenged by Hyperides, whose objection is that the philosophy of time destroys a long cultural tradition by which the primitive and the mechanical in man had been overcome. The future of humanity is at stake: by favouring intuition and the senses at the expense of the intellect, one reduces people to "the dead level of some kind of mad robot of sex." (p 194) Hyperides accuses the Bailiff of attempting to rule men like an undifferentiated "marine underworld" or like an "insect-swarm":

You are drilling an army of tremulous earthworms to overthrow our human principle of life, not in open battle but by sentimental or cultural infection so that at last indeed there will be nothing but these sponges of your making left.—You do not believe in the sex-goods you deal in. . . . You need not—*power* is your vice. . . . It is your *complex*; with you sex like money is merely a congenial instrument in its service, and quite secondary." (p. 196)

The Bailiff's enemy is the male with his lordly and absurd pretensions. Homosexuality is a branch of the Feminist Revolution since large-scale male perversion is the logical male answer to the New Woman. "Homosexuality is a department of Social Revolution"; (p. 389) it is essentially a romantic and sentimental phenomenon, a "snobbery or cult" encouraged, together with feminism, in order "to lay the foundations of a neuter-class of childless workers" and to destroy the European Family already doomed by the machine-age. The Bailiff's answer to Alectryon's appeal in favour of the "doomed herd" is that they are not doomed since they don't enjoy the privilege of reason and are not human: "If you succeeded in removing the bandages they would trample you to death for robbing them of their illusions, that's what they are like." (p. 393) The Bailiff's answer is meant to

emphasize his cynicism, for, as we shall see, he appears to glorify the masses while he actually despises them. But in saying that the masses are not human, he expresses one of Lewis's favourite ideas, which shows how inconsistent or confusing the latter can be.

In the second part of *Childermass* Hyperides and his followers make clear the political implications of the time-philosophy, and the book becomes a political allegory. Lewis suggests that dictators or rulers of the Bailiff's type want everybody, even naturally gifted men, to become like the herd. "Persons possessed of conspicuous undemocratic abilities must become *outcaste* in the midst of the modernist class-conscious orthodoxy. . . . The fanatical 'proletariat' of mediocrity must exclude them or attack them in its holy war against privilege, the privileges of nature being even less palatable than the privilege that is the benefice of men." (p. 377) The Bailiff declares unequivocally his opposition to artists and intellectuals and expresses his dislike for the *image* and the *word*: "articulateness is not a recommendation to us;" (p. 253) the Bailiff further insists that in the "Magnetic City" they prefer bank clerks to artists. He describes for the appellants the kind of regime they are to expect and tells them that they are not entitled to Habeas Corpus or to anything resembling it: "There is no Rule of Law for us, you are absolutely without rights independently of my will." (p. 262) Only the *peons* are privileged, their person is sacrosanct, and they even have the right to kill with impunity. The Bailiff celebrates the liberation of the working mass by the Modern jazz-age Men, and he triumphantly exclaims: "Le mob c'est moi!" (p. 333)

The personality of the Bailiff is another element that lends itself to political interpretation since he obviously personifies some kind of political ruler. The insistence with which he is referred to as a puppet suggests that he merely represents a higher power undefined and unknown to the crowd. This is also substantiated by his function as bailiff. The fact that his tribunal is a kind of Punch-and-Judy show and that he is such a good actor points to the reasons for which he has been chosen. He is the arch-trick performer, the ideal Impostor of Impostors, who satisfies the whims of "that dear stupid awe-struck thing—the Eternal Public—that *will* have its favourite show." (p. 230) While performing his tricks, the Bailiff looks like "a greatly enlarged mask of Chaplin." But he is also "the Bloody Balie in the flesh, helmeted in the

semi-Phrygian red of Punch of Red Revolution and Red Passion, the beast set there to mock and madden, at the gate of what?" (p. 290) Macrob detects the menacing tone behind his over-sweet exhortations, his hypocritical appeals to the people's love and his false bestowal of privileges. The Bailiff is clever enough to let the crowd judge those who dare to protest; he assumes the attitude of a victim, and his indignant guards either kill the rebels—before he has had time to intervene—or the crowd lynch them as they do with Macrob. Of course, the Bailiff pretends to be sorry, particularly when a lower-class appellant is killed by his guards and he realizes that he incurs the wrath of the crowd. He need not fear them because they are easily taken in by his tricks. But the massacre of innocent appellants becomes a true "childermass," not only in the real sense of the word but also figuratively since the appellants are innocents deceived by the Bailiff, who does his best to make them surrender their individuality. Even an intelligent man like Pullman is deceived and doesn't fully grasp what the Bailiff really stands for. At some point Pullman tells Satters that the Bailiff recommends *intellect* and *will*, which is exactly the contrary of what he does. Evidently, he cultivates confusion among his hearers. The novel ends with his return to the "Citadel of Unreality" while one of Hyperides' disciples wonders "Who is to be *real*—this hyperbolic puppet or we? Answer, oh destiny!" (p. 400)

For one unacquainted with Lewis's thought *Childermass* is hardly readable. The first part is hallucinatory and very obscure, perhaps deliberately so in order to render the confusion which reigns in the interior world when human beings cease to recognize the laws by which what is primitive in their nature can be conquered. The numerous imitations of Gertrude Stein's and Joyce's style ridicule their experiments with language, which is the main instrument through which thought is being deteriorated. These writers are responsible for the decay of Western thought because they deprive the intellect of the means of expressing itself with clarity and order and render rational thinking all but impossible. Yet, Pullman and Satters, who indulge in such experiments, are the dupes of the Bailiff, the Bergsonian representative of an unknown power. It is obvious that they gain nothing, at least momentarily, from being where they are. "We behave as we do *from memory*. . . . We behave as though we were now what

we used to be, in life." (p. 91) Being after death what they were when they lived may suggest that their life had already a quality of deadness about it. One thing is certain: their excursions into the "Unconscious" does not regenerate them. On the contrary, it brings out what is repulsive, violent, perverse in them and deprives them of self-control. As to the Bailiff, he embodies all that Lewis condemns in contemporary thought, its political implications and its consequences for the individual. There is no doubt that the system he represents is communism—or what Lewis takes for communism—as the allusions to "Red Revolution," "Red Passion" and "red beast" indicate. Still, at the end of *Childermass* we cannot be absolutely certain of Lewis's meaning apart from the fact that he criticizes Joyce and Gertrude Stein for their approach to art. However, it doesn't seem too fantastic to suppose that the Limbo in which Pullman and Satters set on an expedition and in which the accepted notions of time and space have been abolished, is the seat of an ordeal at the end of which they hope to reach some kind of "Heaven." Though they don't know it yet, it is the "Heaven" of a communist state. They are not deterred by the Massacre of Innocents, which is presented as an inevitable episode of the Punch-and-Judy show; nor is Pullman influenced by the arguments of Hyperides. He sets on his way determinedly in order to discover the "reality" of the Bailiff's paradise. Pullman will learn who the Bailiff is when he arrives in Third City (called "Magnetic City" in the camp outside). There the Bailiff is overthrown without difficulty since he never had any real power at all, though no one had ever objected to his assuming the semblance of it. "My whole existence is a pure bluff," he tells Pullman, confessing that what made his show of power possible was the people's credulity.

The political character of *The Human Age* becomes more obvious in *Monstre Gai* (1955). The title of this second volume refers to an expression which describes the Bailiff in a hysterical outburst shrieking uninterruptedly on his "puppet-stage" "Die the man—die the man—die the man."<sup>1</sup> This sequel to *Childermass* was not published until twenty seven years later, but the thought which underlies it is fundamentally the same, for

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *Monstre Gai*, London, 1955, p. 284.

Lewis's outlook has changed remarkably little in the meantime. It is true that the "democratization" which followed the Second World War gave him new reasons for attacking communism, but it is rather surprising to find that his attack is still connected with the child-cult, the youth-cult and homosexuality, and that he satirizes with the same contempt Satters and his refusal "to visualize himself at any time later than his sixteenth year." Pullman is now less of an innocent and a dupe and may therefore be held responsible for choosing to serve the Bailiff, who here represents "gangster-wealth" at its most irresponsible.

When Pullman enters Third City, he feels "a tremendous violent romantic disillusion. The splendours of the imagination crashed." (p. 7) He had expected some kind of Heaven, and all he sees are thousands of people wearing bowler hats and looking like idiots. Third City is a kind of Welfare State in which Lewis has introduced all that he hates in modern society and holds responsible for its decline, all that he associates, often wrongly, with Left-wing politics: the child-cult, the youth-cult—"Perhaps fifty percent of the city is the desiccated remains of youth-propaganda of forty years ago." (p. 33)—homosexuality, negro-worship, etc. Money is provided gratis, and people are paid to be maintained in idleness and idiocy. "Was there ever so irresponsible a dole!" (p. 41) Third City is primarily intended as a Heaven for Mr. Everyman; on the whole, the Bailiff is very careful to keep out intelligent men. The only efficient thing in the city is the police-force. Mannock, who introduces Pullman to the city, describes the regime as "the decay of an at one time more sensible system." (pp. 25-26) The satire on the obtuse English clubmen is directed against a vestige of that system. An innovation, however, is that women are confined to a "yenary" on the outskirts of the city. Its immediate purpose is to provide the Bailiff with an important income from the sale of illicit liquor and dope, and from the commerce of prostitutes. The women live there in appalling conditions and fifty percent commit suicide. No particular reason is given for the existence of the yenary except that "there is a great weight of prejudice in high places against women." (p. 206) It may be intended to canalize all the emotions of men towards another goal or to make sure that they will become perverts and easier to control. Perhaps Lewis satirizes the attempt made in some communist countries to have men and women live in separate



camps. The important point is that the family is non-existent; society in Third City is degenerate and chaotic.

The "Padisha" is a handsome but stupid giant, an angel reduced to man-size. "Everything to do with Man [fills] him with an immense fatigue, a passionate lack of interest," (p. 154) and he governs the city "as a God would govern a stinking swamp, or as a man would govern a cemetery full of ill-favoured spectres." (p. 154) He is at war with the Devil, who provokes terrible storms over Third City and threatens it with destruction. The inhabitants are deeply shaken by these storms, and many of them die. The knowledge that they can be blotted out at any moment by a thunderbolt only encourages them to indulge in the mediocre materialism of their existence.

For this was their life (if one can speak in this way of people, who, to be quite strict about it, were dead). If they were to be destroyed, and that for ever, the next day, or the next week, why should they behave differently now, than they had always done, drifting meaninglessly, acting the living without being the living—acting the young without being the young. . . . They were all half alive in a mysterious void; and so long as their hearts ticked and their brains functioned, *tant bien que mal*, and the breath came and went in their nostrils, they must continue to play this game for what it was worth, prepared for a thunderbolt which would blot them out at any moment. (pp. 85-86)

This again illustrates Lewis's conviction that most people lead a purely animal life and that their dread of destruction, which has considerably increased in twenty-five years, makes them even more attached to their material possessions. "The human kind here consists of a horde of idiots . . . there are perhaps a few dozen—perhaps a few hundred—men of intelligence." (p. 166) But the men of intelligence, personified by Pullman, have sold themselves to the Bailiff because "for a writer of his experimental sort it was to the Left wing that he must turn for sympathy and patronage," (p. 262) as he had always done in his earthly life. At the end of the book "the major disharmonies of the contemporary scene on earth" are concentrated in a public square. Father Ryan represents Tradition, Vogel is the voice of Social Revolution, Hyperides is a fascist leader. The fourth power is naturally the Bailiff, who dominates the scene and has Hyperides assassinated behind a smokescreen while he dances on his stage like a lunatic

puppet. But he has now exasperated the people too much, and he is forced to flee from Third City taking with him Satters and Pullman, who feels he is committing himself to the Devil but lacks the will to break with him.

In *Malign Fiesta* (1955) the Bailiff arrives in Heaven with Pullman and Satters. Pullman only realizes where he is when he enters the Bailiff's house, and he understands he has made a mistake. Matapolis is essentially a punishing centre, and all its inhabitants are involved in one way or another in its major activity. Soon Pullman and Satters see a convoy of sinners arriving in Matapolis :

The Sinners were four abreast, and all the way down, upon either side, were guards with rifles slung over their shoulders. The knowledge of what awaited these people horrified Pullman, but the expression of their faces showed that they were quite unprepared for what was in store for them, especially the women.<sup>1</sup>

It is evident that Dis (the Punishment Centre) is a concentrationary universe which outdoes all one has heard of about concentration camps. Some of the scenes imagined by Lewis are too horrible to bear thinking of. Pullman witnesses all this "without turning a hair" and even becomes the confident and counsellor of Sammael, the puritan Devil who reigns over Matapolis. The two are united by their contempt for man: Sammael became a torturer because of his abhorrence for man and his abominable playmate woman: "As it is men become more depraved every day—more vulgarly sensual, more grotesquely wicked. The spectacle of some little creature attaining the depths of dirtiness unequalled in the past and actually believing he can deceive me, revolts me." (p. 346) When Sammael wonders whether he and his angels will not have to choose between being angels or men, it is Pullman who devises a plan for the "humanization of the Divine." By proposing to change angels into men, Sammael plans "a liquefaction, as it were, of those titanic immortal units—their immortality will dissolve into mortality, their vast individual shapes will cut up into thousands of facsimiles of themselves. There would be everywhere a swarming of ephemeral units in

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *Malign Fiesta*, London, 1955, p. 443.

place of a world of larger and more stable things." (p. 479) In order to inaugurate this "Human Age" Pullman organizes a "Malign Fiesta," and advises Sammael to introduce women into Angeltown. The "Humanization of the Divine," of the "Angelnature," is achieved by forcing upon it woman "with all her sexishness, her nursery-mind, her vulgarity." This is an act of hatred on Sammael's part since he is a strict puritan and loathes woman. During the Fiesta Pullman suddenly realizes that Sammael is resolved "to explode the supernatural, ultimately to make an end of God" and that he himself "has been actively assisting at the annihilation of the Divine." (p. 511) This understanding of his fault comes rather late and is somewhat surprising for, after all, the intelligent Pullman knew all the time what he was doing; he had also advised Sammael to organize an efficient police in Angeltown and to choose the ex-Bailiff as the head of the secret service. When he receives a message from God, he becomes terribly frightened and he is eventually carried away by two white Angels, presumably to be tried by God.

It is a pity that *The Trial of Man* was never finished for we don't know how Lewis intended to conclude *The Human Age*. The emphasis on the "humanization of the Divine" in *Malign Fiesta* can be interpreted as an illustration of the destructive influence of contemporary thinkers, which, according to Lewis, breaks down the individual. If we remember that the more separate, the more isolated man is, the nearer he comes to the Divine, we can understand the nature of Pullman's sin. We may wonder, however, whether there is any relation between Sammael's violation of the Divine and his role as a torturer since it is in this double capacity that he appears in the book. Pullman also is shown assenting to the horrors he witnesses and participating in the destruction of the Divine. His arrival in Matapolis among concentration camp torturers seems almost inevitable after his commitment to the Bailiff, who is first presented as a Bergsonian philosopher, then as a representative of gangster-wealth, then as a citizen of Hell. If there is some kind of continuity in the trilogy, the time-philosophy exploited by politicians must be interpreted to lead to state-socialism and ultimately to dictatorial regimes and concentration camps. Lewis strikes rather indiscriminately at his favourite targets, but the general argument of *The Human Age*, might be described as follows: the Bergsonians, who insist on the

necessity to develop intuition at the expense of the intellect, encourage man to indulge in the senses and in the confusion of his inner world. By exploring his subconscious, man brings out what is lowest in him, and the importance he gives to instincts naturally leads him to a cult of the child, in whom instinct is predominant, and to a cult of what is primitive in man. The child-cult is associated to the mother-cult; as a result of the growing feminism, man, who is despised for his virility, is tempted to turn homosexual. Lewis considers that feminism, homosexuality and contempt for the male, which are responsible for the destruction of the family, are exploited by politicians who are only too glad to divest people of their differences and reduce them to neuter will-less beings. They incite people to sexual perversion or merely endeavour to transform them into sense- or sex-machines, which will diminish their self-control, impair their intellect and make them more pliable and submissive. They also deprive man of his claim to individuality by insisting that the human personality is part of the surrounding world. Philosophical communism conduces to political communism, and this is how most Western countries to-day are infected with it. No action is intact. Lewis also considers communism or socialism as a means used by Big Business to exploit the great majority of people, the middle class even more than the masses. Indeed, although the masses are being stupefied into a state of quasi-animalism, they enjoy privileges that the middle class don't have. Lewis has developed this last point with obsessive emphasis in *Rotting Hill* (1951). His contempt for the masses is such that all his characters express it whatever attitude or ideology they are supposed to stand for. "Humanization" where ordinary men are concerned means "animalization" or "deadening." England is now a dead country threatened with atomic warfare and not wholly free of the spirit which makes concentration camps possible.

*The Human Age* offers a striking picture of the mediocre life to which, according to Lewis, democratization might lead. It also draws attention to the inhumanity of men in the modern world and to the irresponsibility with which the "person" now contributes to schemes which threaten mankind with destruction. Unfortunately, Lewis's imagination is frequently subordinated to his criticism instead of being stimulated by it. *Monstre Gai* and

*Malign Fiesta* are less discursive than *Childermass*, but the whole fails to convey a sense of the human tragedy which this trilogy is supposed to interpret. We are very seldom inclined to mistake Lewis's puppets for real human beings, which is of course the reaction that he meant to arouse. On the other hand, it is difficult to infer from his satire the standards by which his puppets are judged. Lewis too often gives the impression that he is lashing out right and left out of mere personal hatred.

As in *Time and Western Man*, the most significant aspect of Lewis's criticism in his trilogy is his awareness of the forces at work in modern thought, particularly of the impact of the "time philosophy." However, the first question that comes to mind is whether Lewis's interpretation of Bergsonism is correct. As Geoffrey Wagner writes, "Bergson's philosophy suffers injustice at the hands of the neo-classicists and, in Lewis's case, injury is added to insult when we find him considerably indebted to Bergson's *Le Rire*."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Lewis is unfair to Bergson, for the latter is not so arbitrarily and stupidly opposed to the intellect as Lewis suggests, though it is important to point out that Bergson talks of "intelligence" whereas Lewis says "intellect" and always shows man acting clearly under the influence of either the intellect or the senses. Bergson insists on the important part played by intelligence in apprehending reality: "Agir et se savoir agir, entrer en contact avec la réalité et même la vivre, mais dans la mesure seulement où elle intéresse l'œuvre qui s'accomplit et le sillon qui se creuse, voilà la fonction de l'intelligence."<sup>2</sup> What Bergson insists on, is that instinct is not inferior to intelligence as it was generally admitted since Aristotle; the difference between instinct and intelligence is not one of intensity or degree, but of nature. Intelligence and instinct oppose and complete each other; they imply two utterly different forms of knowledge: "Il y a des choses que l'intelligence seule est capable de chercher, mais que par elle-même elle ne trouvera jamais. Ces choses, l'instinct seul les trouverait; mais il ne les cherchera jamais."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, when intelligence cannot apprehend some aspects of life, it is complemented by intuition, which is

<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey WAGNER, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> Henri BERGSON, *L'Evolution créatrice*, in *Œuvres*, Paris, 1963, p. 657.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 623.



l'instinct devenu intéressé, conscient de lui-même, capable de réfléchir sur son objet et de l'élargir indéfiniment; l'intelligence reste le noyau lumineux duquel l'instinct, même élargi et épuré en intuition, ne forme qu'une nébulosité vague. Mais à défaut de la connaissance proprement dite réservée à la pure intelligence, l'intuition pourra nous faire saisir ce que les données de l'intelligence ont ici d'insuffisant et nous laisser entrevoir le moyen de les compléter.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, Bergson's purpose was to make what he calls "l'intelligence" more inclusive than "intellect," and "intuition" more inclusive than "instinct." On the contrary, Lewis separates the two, and champions abstract intellect and discursive reason as cut off from, and even opposed to, instinctive forces. What he also fails to mention is that in spite of the importance he grants to intuition, Bergson believes that intelligence and intuition should cooperate :

L'intuition au premier abord semble bien préférable à l'intelligence, puisque la vie et la conscience y restent intérieures à elles-mêmes. Mais le spectacle de l'évolution des êtres vivants nous montre qu'elle ne pouvait aller bien loin. Du côté de l'intuition, la conscience s'est trouvée à tel point comprimée par son enveloppe qu'elle a dû rétrécir l'intuition en instinct, c'est-à-dire n'embrasser que la très petite portion de vie qui l'intéressait; — encore l'embrasse-t-elle dans l'ombre, en la touchant sans presque la voir. De ce côté, l'horizon s'est tout de suite fermé. Au contraire, la conscience se déterminant en intelligence, c'est-à-dire se concentrant d'abord sur la matière, semble ainsi s'extérioriser par rapport à elle-même; mais justement parce qu'elle s'adapte aux objets du dehors, elle arrive à circuler au milieu d'eux, à tourner les barrières qu'ils lui opposent, à élargir indéfiniment son domaine. Une fois libérée, elle peut d'ailleurs se replier à l'intérieur et réveiller les virtualités d'intuition qui sommeillent encore en elle.<sup>2</sup>

Like his attacks on Romanticism, Lewis's satire on Bergson must be viewed in the context of the strong opposition of the neo-classicists to anything that endangered rationalism. I have already alluded to this in my discussion of *Time and Western Man* and of the antithesis "classical-romantic"; to consider intelligence

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 645-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 649-50.

as antagonistic to intuition is another way of stating this antithesis. A controversy on this subject was carried on for a year in *The Criterion* between John Middleton Murry and T.S. Eliot; it began with Murry's plea for a new synthesis between intelligence and intuition that would serve as a basis for the new Classicism.<sup>1</sup> The writers who took part in the argument (Charles Mauron and Ramon Fernandez were also involved in it) were all anxious to redefine intelligence and intuition in answer to Bergson's definition of the two. Though they disagreed as to the exact meaning of these words,<sup>2</sup> they all criticized the Bergsonians' departure from rationalism and the relativism of their philosophy as conducive to spiritual anarchy. Fernandez's objection to Proust's work, for instance, is that "elle n'édifie point une hiérarchie des valeurs, et elle ne manifeste de son début à sa conclusion, aucun progrès spirituel."<sup>3</sup> Eliot adds to this that for such writers as Proust and Joyce "the dissolution of value [has] in itself a positive value."<sup>4</sup> The position of these neo-classicists is clearly formulated in an editorial note of *The Criterion*: "... the voices of reason and beauty are drowned in the shouts of charlatans; and the mass of the nation, without authority and without judgment, authorizes and supports an intellectual chaos, a spiritual inferiority."<sup>5</sup> This is exactly the kind of protest that Lewis dramatizes in *The Human Age*. However, that work itself shows that Lewis mistakes the sterile intellect for intelligence.

It is almost inevitable that Lewis's external approach to his subject should make him intolerant, for he can only observe what

<sup>1</sup> JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY, "Towards a Synthesis," *The Criterion*, V, 3 (June 1927), 294-313. Murry's article was prompted by Eliot's review of *Reason and Romanticism* by Herbert Read and *Messages* by Ramon Fernandez in *The Criterion*, IV, 4 (October 1926), 751-7, see above p. 179n.

<sup>2</sup> Eliot is rather vague on the subject: "To me both intelligence and intuition are mysterious." ("Mr. Middleton Murry's Synthesis," *The Criterion*, VI, 4, October 1927, 343.) To Charles Mauron intuition "is nothing but a catchword applied to all the mental phenomena of which we have no clear idea." ("Concerning 'Intuition'," *The Criterion*, VI, 3, September 1927, 235). For Ramon Fernandez intuition is intimately connected with intelligence, though he ultimately sides with Eliot—"perhaps for reasons which Mr. Eliot would not accept." His position among the neo-classicists is the most *nuancé* and he sees the danger for them of adhering to a "short-sighted reason."

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by T.S. ELIOT, in *The Criterion*, IV, 752.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> RICHARD ALDINGTON, "Notes," *The Criterion*, I, 4 (July 1923), 421-2.

he sees, and at best grasp it intellectually, since the eye is symbolical of the intellect and even *is* the intellect. But he can never feel with anyone, indeed he deliberately and defiantly refuses to do so. By rejecting insight into man's inner world, he necessarily misses one part at least of the truth, and he is himself liable to be subjective. As Stephen Spender rightly remarks,

The fact is that by imposing an external order on internal disorder, by ruggedly insisting on and accepting only the outsides of things, one does not improve matters. One merely shouts and grows angry with anyone who has a point of view different from one's own. For another point of view is sure to seem visceral, internal, decadent. One is, in a word, merely asserting that one is afraid of the symptoms which one dislikes in oneself, and more particularly in other people, not that one can cure them.

Take this insistence on the external into the world of politics, and what is it but fascism? It is saying that we must suppress the effeminate, dark members of our society (the Jews), we must arrange our façade to look as well as possible, to appeal to the eye (the private armies), we must drive the symptoms of decadence underground.<sup>1</sup>

Spender's association of an artistic method with a political attitude may seem far-fetched, but it is worth noting that Lewis himself associated Classicism (and thus the external approach) with fascism. In *Hitler* he wrote that "the Hitlerist dream [was] full of an imminent classical serenity,"<sup>2</sup> and in *Childermass* he states quite explicitly that the Hyperideans, who defend the classical, are fascists. Lewis himself considered that he was apolitical: "In a period of such obsessing political controversy as the present, I believe that I am that strange animal, the individual without any 'politics' at all. You will find neither the politics of communism nor those of the militant Right here."<sup>3</sup> Lewis admired both fascists and communists for admitting "that there must be a master."<sup>4</sup> In *The Diabolical Principle* he described his politics as "partly communist and partly fascist, with a distinct streak of monarchism in my marxism, but at bottom anarchist with a healthy

<sup>1</sup> Stephen SPENDER, *The Destructive Element*, London, 1937, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *Hitler*, London, 1931, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> *Time and Western Man*, p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> *The Art of Being Ruled*, p. 95, quoted by Geoffrey WAGNER, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

passion for order."<sup>1</sup> This sounds paradoxical, but Lewis's political attitude is, indeed, full of contradictions.

However much Lewis may claim to be impartial and unprejudiced—and he repeatedly does so—it is hard to take him at his word, for in three works<sup>2</sup> at least he comes out definitely for Hitler and Germany. He praises Hitler for being a "Man of Peace"<sup>3</sup> and a prodigious organizer. "I myself am content to regard him as the expression of current German manhood—resolved with that admirable tenacity, hardihood and intellectual acumen of the Teuton, not to take their politics at second-hand, not also to drift, but to seize the big bull of Finance by the horns, and to take a chance for the sake of freedom." (pp. 201-2) Even Hitler's crimes could be explained away: "The *Judenfrage* finds if not its justification, at least its *rationale*," he says, and his advice to the British is: "Do not allow a mere *Bagatelle* of a *Judenfrage* to stand in the way." (p. 242) In *Left Wings over Europe*, a pamphlet supposedly on peace, Lewis criticizes the English government for "denying Germany the most elementary right of a Sovereign State: namely to fortify its own territory against attack."<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to see how Lewis reconciles his desire for peace with his wish to rearm Germany. He further asserts that only the German communists have arms while the nazis "have only fists and sticks to defend themselves with," but he concedes on the next page that the nazis arm themselves "in response to extreme provocation."<sup>5</sup> Lewis contends that if there is a war, the League of Nations and the Extreme Left will be responsible for it, and that it is probably France that will attack Germany. In both *Left Wings over Europe* and *Count your Dead* he comes out strongly against Baldwin and the English conservatives (the "Bolsho-Tories"): "The present system of government in England is a *fake antique*. It is a machine-made grandfather's clock.... A disarming façade of 'democracy' conceals what is in fact a money Trust, which runs like a national waxworks but for whom we are a side-line, not the main concern....

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator*, London, 1931, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> *Hitler*, *Left Wings over Europe*, and *Count Your Dead: They are Alive!*

<sup>3</sup> *Hitler*, p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *Left Wings over Europe*, London, 1936, p. 323.

<sup>5</sup> *Hitler*, pp. 19-20.

As a 'nation' we have ceased to exist."<sup>1</sup> Lewis also believes that the Russians and the English have the strongest armies in the world, while the Germans are quickly trying to get a tank or two to defend themselves against the French. He calls the Abyssinian War a war of liberation: "It is not such a tragedy that the industrious and ingenious Italian, rather than the lazy, stupid predatory Ethiopian, should control Abyssinia."<sup>2</sup> He naturally supports Franco and asserts that Marx is *not* the only solution to the confused situation created in Western Europe and the enslavement resulting from "Loan-Capital": "Fascism is at least a better solution than that. Fascism might be a very good solution indeed."<sup>3</sup> This was in 1937. In 1939 Lewis reversed his opinions (he calls it "giving up his neutrality") and in *The Hitler Cult* he revised a number of views he had so inconsiderately expressed in *Hitler*. He now thought that the Englishman would make a better job of the future than the German: "The mere thought of Hitler's Germany reconciles one, does it not, to our ramshackle civilization."<sup>4</sup> In 1939 Lewis also wrote a pamphlet entitled *The Jews, Are They Human?* in which he attacked anti-semitism, praised the qualities of the Jewish race and criticized the German policy towards the Jews. This change of attitude is naturally reflected in his fiction.

The purpose of these comments is not to demonstrate Lewis's fascist sympathies but to clarify his position in order to throw light on the fiction he wrote in the Thirties. Moreover, Lewis's inconsistency in politics is a fairly good example of the contradictions which are to be found in his work. His sincerity has been questioned, but, paradoxically, it seems that in politics he is saved by his contradictions, for a man who is not sincere takes at least good care to be consistent. In so far as his attitude needs an explanation, I rather agree with Stephen Spender, who writes that "the politics of [the reactionaries] are secondary effects of their thoughts about the tragedy of culture in modern industrial societies."<sup>5</sup> Still, considering the aspect of his work

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *Count Your Dead: They Are Alive!*, London, 1937, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> *Left Wings over Europe*, p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> *Count your Dead*, p. 83.

<sup>4</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *The Hitler Cult*, London, 1939, p. 254.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen SPENDER, "Writers and Politics," *The Partisan Review*, XXXIV, 3 (Summer 1967), 372. Spender's article is a review of *Journey to the Frontier* by Peter STANSKY and William ABRAHAMS, of *The Reactionaries* by John HARRISON and of *Writers and Politics* by CONOR CRUISE O'BRIEN.



that concerns us, these politics do indicate a muddled thought, a complete lack of political insight and even an ignorance of facts which it is difficult to forgive in one who devoted so much time and energy to writing political pamphlets and who—in his own words—assumed the role of a prophet. Lewis seems to have rather enjoyed his part as the “Enemy.” His political attitude is of the same order: provocative, defiant, arrogant, or simply ludicrous, and it certainly damaged his reputation as an artist. He never put into practice his own belief that “to root politics out of art is a highly necessary undertaking: for the freedom of art like that of science, depends entirely upon its objectivity and non-practical, non-partisan passion.”<sup>1</sup> James Joyce, whom he so often criticized for cultivating a form of literature leading to some kind of intellectual or spiritual communism and hence to decadence, succeeded much better than he did in keeping above political passions.

*The Apes of God* (1930), Lewis's most important satire, is a merciless denunciation of people who contribute to the “humanization of the Divine” by aping it. Amateurism in art is one form—the most important as far Lewis is concerned—of the degradation of authority and excellence, observable in all fields. “A maniacal taste for debunking the literary heroes of the past century” is the outcome of a “self-immolating hysterical liberalism” and is matched with a “wave of perversion among the young.” The “Encyclical” composed by Pierpoint epitomizes Lewis's criticism of the “apes.” The latter are the dream of the economist-utopist come true. Every man with means and leisure can now claim to be an artist, and everyone who can afford to can be a Bohemian:

All these masses of Gossip-mad, vulgar, pseudo-artists, *good-timers*—the very freedom and excess usually of whose life implies a considerable total of money, concentrated in the upkeep of this costly ‘bohemian’ life—are the last people, as every artist will tell you, from whom support for any art can be expected.<sup>2</sup>

These people cause damage to creative art because they are identified in the mind of the public with art and intelligence. They

<sup>1</sup> *The Diabolical Principle*, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *The Apes of God*, London, 1935, p. 121.

produce a little art themselves "more than inconsequent daubing and dabbling but less than the 'real thing.'" (p. 122) Most of them have private means, though they play the part of the penniless "genius." They naturally hate real, *living* genius: the hatred of the mediocre for the great is a recurrent motive in Lewis's work and it sometimes reveals his persecution mania. Lewis satirizes the malicious gossip of "those prosperous mountebanks who alternately imitate and mock at and traduce those figures they at once admire and hate." (p. 123) At the lunch party "chez Lionel Kein" the guests discuss and criticize Pierpoint although they have been influenced by him and have borrowed some of his ideas, and Zagreus explains how the notion of eminence is being deteriorated because everybody is becoming "eminent."

Zagreus introduces the nineteen-year old Dan Boleyn to different types of "Apes." Dan is his latest discovery, for the sixty-year-old Zagreus likes to be surrounded by good-looking young men whom he flatters by attributing to them artistic inclinations or "genius," which they never possessed. Dan has just come from Dublin, where his father called "Stephen" lives. There is a good deal of mockery in the book at people who claim an Irish origin and affect an Irish accent; it is probably intended to ridicule Joyce's "obsession with his province." Dan, the "virgin" with a "madonna-face, sensitively painted lips, blushing cheeks" is quite stupid, a puppet like all those whom Lewis associates with death-in-life. The first Ape he meets, a prominent one, is a caricature of Joyce, Julius Ratner, a Jewish writer and publisher, who is exceedingly preoccupied with his own person. "Jamesjulius, Jimmiejulius, Jujubejimmie, Juliojim, Joojulius," as Lewis calls him, acts the child. His "*personal* prose" is described as "automatic writing" and "spirit-tapping." He is called the split-man throughout the satire and is chosen symbolically by Zagreus to be split on the stage during a conjuror's trick at Lord Osmund's party. For this occasion Zagreus gives him the costume of an "African half-man": "I should have liked, Julius, to have fitted you out as a homunculus, a disembodied mind. Or as the Holy Ghost—the most tremendous of all feminine roles." (p. 330) However, the half-man adequately represents Julius since he has only developed one part of his personality.

After his lunch with Ratner Dan pays a call on Dick Whittington, a painter with more money than talent, who acts

the young man, "charlestons" all the time and rents a whole block of studios. Dan finds him discussing one of his pictures with some friends; the discussion is meaningless and they repeat the same things over and over again. Dan writes in his diary: "Discovered Apes in bitter argument over masterpieces of Apish art. Expected from moment to moment these higher Apes to fly at each other's throats. As far as I was able to discover, a red brick dwelling the subject of this dispute." (p. 183) At Pamela Farnham's tea-party the majority of the Apes are women who cajole a young man named Jimmy, while an insolent foreigner watches them and derides "these women and their pekinese." Their futile and senseless talk is reminiscent of Firkank—an analogy Lewis would have disliked—though Firkank is much better than Lewis at reproducing drawing-room conversations. Dan discovers in Jimmy a rival in youth and judges him severely:

As he looked at Jimmie he might have been regarding one of those life-size dolls, with mechanically revolving eyes, made for the children of the rich—or have been imagining, as their crooning mistress manipulated them, a glimmer of waxen sensuality stealing out of their glassy ocellation towards their possessor, soliciting an unnatural caress—a veiled, mechanically-repeated ogle, the thickening of a brutal coquetry in the squeak. Maturing in the bees-wax bosom, he might have conceived the voluptuous processes that would perhaps be evolved by the ingenious doll, appropriate to its puppet's condition. . . . Pammie-mammie: the love of babyhood, the return to the womb, the corruption of the cradle—the severe eyes of Daniel seemed to miss nothing of these far-flung analogies. (p. 204)

Yet it is chiefly in Dan that the youth-cult is satirized, and the fact that he is stupid and inarticulate is meant to emphasize the senselessness of that cult and the imbecility which Lewis associates with it. In *The Doom of Youth* he condemns the "erecting of 'Youth' into a unique value."<sup>1</sup> He asserts that an age-war is replacing the class-war and that the transformation of youth into a political ideology divides the world into two rigid and hostile parties: the old and the young. The youth-cult is exploited politically: "the term 'youth-politics' signifies the management of this system of education and propaganda-politics,

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *The Doom of Youth*, London, 1932, p. 265.

in which Ma and Pa Everyman are two childlike persons, of course."<sup>1</sup> However, whereas the age-snobbery may have serious consequences for the poor (while seeking employment, for instance), for the rich it is, as in everything else, a sham-fight. The cult of youth is derided throughout *The Apes of God*, and since homosexuality is associated with this cult, most characters are homosexuals. Lewis is hardest on the Finnian Shaws, whom Starr-Smith, not older than twenty-five himself, considers as "God's own Peterpaniest family." He describes their family-group as "a sort of middle-aged *youth-movement*. . . . This they have become in their capacity of 'rebels' against authority. The dangers of the war must have driven them into that attitude. The idea of 'youth' supervened—afterwards. It coloured with a desirable advertisement-value their special brand of rich-man's gilded bolshevism. In the fairy-tales they have spun about this theme ever since, Cockeye has always been the wicked giant who tried to kill them during the big bad naughty World War." (p. 565) Cockeye represents the old generation in the child-parent war which Harriet and Osmund Finnian-Shaw try to perpetuate. According to the rules of this war-game, Cockeye is responsible for the War, he is "the Old Man who made the War":

'You must bear in mind,' says Blackshirt to Daniel, 'that it is always *the War* that in fact they are talking about. The child-parent-war-game was manufactured in the War-time. . . . There would be no harm in that if it did not serve to screen the actual villain. It is important that the *true* cause should not be lost sight of. But both the *sex-war*, and the *child-parent-war*, each of them advance with a romantic bitterness their bogus claimants, for the honour of being the arch-villain of the European War. The authentic villain rubs his hands I should think as he looks on—and watches from his ambush these subsidiary *Wars* of our Peace-life, which have come out of the stinking bowels of the big one—and plots, who can doubt it, a bigger!' (pp. 555-6)

Lewis objected to the war literature written in the Twenties because, as he said in *The Old Gand and the New Gang*, "it occults, rather than discloses, the true 'universal' extent and significance of the tragedy. . . . The deliberate 'youth-hysterics' of now ageing men, young at the outset of the War, has thrown smoke-screens of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, foreword ix.

emotions around the cold facts. Engaged in these clamorous disputes with his ancestors the War novelist of 1927-30 never even began to think of who his real enemy might be!"<sup>1</sup>

One of the major events which take place during Dan's initiation is the lunch *Chez Lionel Kein Esq.* This is a satire of the rich Jew who plays at being Proust. He and his wife are "*blottis* in a furnished paralleloped with all required by the human worm for its needs. . . . There they would be observing with conspiratorial glee each other's obscenities—cheating time with professional unction." (p. 237) In spite of lengthy discussions, this chapter is on the whole a successful evocation of a social gathering at which snobs attempt to outshine each other and either flatter or criticize people maliciously. They are all "*in search of an author, the people who have never been able to become Fiction.* How portentously they suffer for the want of a great artist to effect that immortal translation." (pp. 293-4) This is partly why they attend a party at the house of a potential Proust: "Fiction in its more high-brow form is in fact the *private news-sheet*, the big Gossip-book—the expansion of a Society newspaper-paragraph—of the Reigning Order." (p. 262) Since they despair of finding a real author, they all write about each other and about themselves. During lunch Zagreus "broadcasts" Pierpoint, which means that he repeats word for word what Pierpoint usually says. While he is prolonging his broadcast for the sake of Dan, he hears Isabel Kein discuss him openly, and he retaliates by describing her to Dan and by pointing out to him what kind of Apes her guests are. He is asked to leave the house, but before he does so, we are given a picture of the vulgarity and pettiness of people who pretend to distinction and refinement but whose very snobbery is a form of vulgarity.

The crowning event of Dan's initiation is Lord Edmund's Lenten Party, which is chiefly a satire on a well-known London literary family. The main basis for the satirical portraiture of the Finnian Shaws is, as we have seen, their affected youth and childishness, but Lewis also exposes the snobbery, self-esteem and ridiculous presumption as well as the intrigues of people in a coterie. The account of the party, which takes up almost three hundred

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *The Old Gang and the New Gang*, London, 1933, pp. 59 and 62-63.



pages, is presented in twenty-three "tableaux vivants" which reproduce different forms of "aping":

In fact in a sort of ill-acted *Commedia dell' Arte*, with its pantalones and Arlechinos, this family-circle passed its time. A passion for the stilted miniature drama of average social life, as it immediately surrounded them, had assumed the proportions with this family of a startling self-abuse, incessantly indulged in. Their theatre was always with them. (pp. 354-5)

Zagreus, Ratner, Dan, and Margolin, a "sham-Yid" or "militant slum-Jew in excelsis," are the spectators of this grotesque spectacle and, as usual, Zagreus interprets what they see and comments in Pierpoint's words. They witness this "Zoo of sham kings-in-the-forest" eagerly play a part which, they hope, will be described in the gossip-column and invent small catastrophes to provide themselves with sources of excitement. In the midst of the party the Finnian Shaws retire to "private apartments" with a select group of friends; they create a new circle of privileged snobs within their larger "menagerie" and provoke a rush at which they indignantly protest. Starr-Smith, the Blackshirt, is denied admittance, until he produces a press-card, when he is suddenly flattered by all the Finnian Shaws, who hope to have their poems included in an anthology he is editing. He is the only person in the book who is not satirized and who appears to be honest and disinterested. He is Pierpoint's political secretary and his warmest disciple, a less uncompromising denunciator of "aping" than Zagreus, and particularly hard on Jews and negroes such as Ratner and the barman or "tropical man." He also exposes Zagreus, who has not paid Pierpoint his due for all the ideas the latter has given him. Starr-Smith challenges him publicly while he is performing *The Vanish*, a trick which symbolizes what was to happen to that society of "Apes."

Zagreus plays a twofold part in the book: he denounces the "Apes," but he is at the same time Pierpoint's spokesman, and for that very reason he is himself an Ape. He has been identified with Lewis, but this is doubtful since Zagreus merely "acts" Pierpoint, who is probably Lewis himself. "Horace [Zagreus] is one of the crowd," Ratner says, "he doesn't pick pockets—he picks Brains." (p. 419) At the end of the satire Zagreus rejects Dan

for Margolin, charging the former with offences he has not committed in order to get rid of him. The General Strike breaks out, and Dan, the "moron," the "dummy," with a face "like a shell of mutton-fat" wanders unhappily about the streets of London without understanding the cause of the unaccustomed aspect of the city. The novel ends, as it had begun, with Zagreus' visit to Lady Fredegonde Follett, the "oldest spoilt-baby in Britain," the "oldest veteran Gossip-star" who "steins away night and morning to herself, making patterns of conversations, with odds and ends from dead disputes." (pp. 13-23) She is in her drawing-room with her husband, who has just died, and she tells Zagreus that she has deliberately provoked his death. She has also succeeded in cheating Dick Whittingdon of his heritage. She now declares her love to Zagreus, and he accepts to marry her, old and grotesque as she is, only because he needs her money. Lewis spares no pains to arouse disgust at the lack of dignity and the sordid rapacity of distinguished Bloomsbury highbrows.

Like *The Human Age*, *The Apes of God* criticizes all that Lewis condemns in modern society: the child-cult, the youth-cult, homosexuality and what he considers as a wave of bolshevism among the upper classes. He shows these evils at work among English intellectuals or rather so-called intellectuals and artists. He called his satire a "massacre of the insignificant," but many critics reproached him precisely with having chosen an insignificant target for such a tremendous literary effort. Indeed, Lewis's scorn is disproportionate to its object, though for him more than artistic amateurism is at stake since his purpose is to defend all that is "eminent" and valuable in all fields of life. When Zagreus deplores the disappearance of the Hero from modern literature or the substitution of "crowd-eminence" for the eminence of the really great individual, he is alluding to the theme which underlies *The Apes of God* and which Lewis explains in *The Lion and the Fox*:

For in the universal organized revolt against authority it is not only the head of a state or the head of a family—the king (on account of political privilege), the employer (on account of his monopoly of wealth)—but, with an ingenious thoroughness, every form of even the most modest eminence, that is attacked. Indeed, the centre of attack is rapidly shifting from the really eminent (who are considered as

already destroyed) to the *petit bourgeois* mass of the smally privileged.<sup>1</sup>

By ignoring or denigrating the real artist, the "Apes" hope to make their own "Levellers' Club" more eminent, though, like the majority of human beings, they are only parasites subsisting on the individual, in their case on Pierpoint. Like a god, Pierpoint is surrounded with mystery, he is invisible and he is isolated. This "painter turned philosopher," who thus allies talent and intelligence, might well be "the Person, the One, the responsible representative of others."<sup>2</sup>

Lewis's conception of the "Many" as opposed to the "One" is closely related to his division of human beings into "things" and "Persons." The "things" are the "Many," the crowd, people who live on an animal or dead level, whereas the "Person" is the man of intelligence who uses his "intellect" and is isolated from the crowd. He is a real human being who reaches "godhood" through his individuality and is opposed to the machine, the puppet, the split-man or the automaton. In *The Wild Body* Lewis wrote that "One must assume the dichotomy between body and mind—we have to postulate two creatures, one that never enters into life, but travels about in a vessel to whose destiny it is momentarily attached. That is, of course, the laughing observer, and the other is the Wild Body. . . . The root of the comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observations of a *thing* behaving like a person."<sup>3</sup> Lewis's conception of satire is much indebted to Bergson, whose lectures he followed at the Collège de France. Bergson writes:

Les attitudes, gestes et mouvements du corps humain sont risibles dans l'exacte mesure où ce corps nous fait penser à une simple mécanique. . . . Ce qui est comique c'est ce qu'il y a de tout fait dans notre personne. Le personnage comique est un *type*.<sup>4</sup>

Lewis's satire consists in deriding puppets who have much in common with Bergson's "Pantin à ficelles." But whereas Bergson says "Nous rions toutes les fois qu'une personne nous donne

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *The Lion and the Fox*, London, 1955, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *The Wild Body*, London, 1927, pp. 243 and 246.

<sup>4</sup> Henri BERGSON, *Le Rire*, in *op. cit.*, pp. 401 and 457.

l'impression d'une chose."<sup>1</sup> Lewis postulates that people are "things" and makes fun of them for believing that they are persons. The "Apes" of God are of course "things" attempting to be "persons" or god-like beings. But it should be noted that to be a "thing" or a "person" is not a matter of class since the "Apes" belong to the higher-middle class, though it is obvious that the working class could never be anything but "things."

Lewis also wrote about *The Apes of God* that "no book has ever been written that has paid more attention to the outside of people."<sup>2</sup> His external approach is fairly successful in the description of characters, though his satire gives an impression of superficiality. The dialogues, which often give a foretaste of Ionesco's plays, imply nothing more than the futility or the idiocy of the characters who are presented as symptoms of a decadent society. But is this enough to convey a picture of the decay of culture, civilized values and social hierarchy? Lewis's target is too limited to the caricature of the "Apes" to achieve this purpose. We have to take his word for it that this is what "aping" leads to. He considers that the artist is above morals, and Zagreus' assertion that to be good, satire must be "unfair," "single-minded" and "backed by intense anger"<sup>3</sup>—all of which characterize *The Apes of God*—is in keeping with his claim. But Lewis's anger prevents him from transcending his subject and limits the bearing of a work which is otherwise full of pungent and ferocious humour. His view of humanity is terribly grim, and one is reminded that Tarr had "conceived the world as emptied of all dignity, sense and generosity." (p. 257)

*Snooty Baronet* (1932), another satire, is harsh and destructive to the point of boredom. The narrator himself says: "Look for nothing but descriptions out of a vision of a person who has given up hoping for Man, but who is scrupulous and just, if only out of contempt for those who are so much the contrary."<sup>4</sup> Most

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 414.

<sup>2</sup> *Satire and Fiction*, p. 46, quoted by Geoffrey WAGNER, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

<sup>3</sup> Bergson also brings out the cruelty of laughter as an instrument of social criticism: "Le rire est, avant tout, une correction. Fait pour humilier, il doit donner à la personne qui en est l'objet une impression pénible. . . . Il n'atteindrait pas son but s'il portait la marque de la sympathie et de la bonté." *Le Rire*, p. 481.

<sup>4</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *Snooty Baronet*, London, 1932, p. 233.

characters in the novel are so unpleasant—the narrator even more so than the people he derides—that it is not surprising he should be disgusted with the human race. The wonder is that he is not disgusted with himself. *Snooty Baronet* has much in common with *The Apes of God* for here again the literary Bohemia of London is Lewis's target, but the picture he gives of it is more sordid and never comic. Snooty Baronet, Sir Michael Kell-Imrie, is a writer who has taken up the study of man "upon exactly the same footing as ape or insect." His victims are "'progressive,' popular, even 'fashionable persons,' of the topdog race and showy class. . . . Members of those ape-like congeries—gangs, sets, anti-armies, forces of Lilliput, number-brave coteries, militant sheep-clans-fraternities, rotaries and crews." (pp. 63-65) There is nothing new in all this, nor in the description of Snooty as the artist who is "alone with his hard vision" and can trust no one alive. He has an affair with Valerie Ritter, an ageing gossip-column "girl of fashion," who writes pornographic novels and represents the world of emotions. Yet Snooty himself is not the god-like artist who transcends the animal and mechanical world: he has a wooden leg and a plate in his skull, and this makes him partly mechanical; moreover, he cannot refrain from sexual intercourse although it makes him sick. It seems that his partial subjection to the mechanical and the animal makes him more fiercely determined to degrade other men. His literary agent, Humph, is a typical "puppet," "automaton," "animal," "moron," a sham always acting a part. He wants Snooty to go to Persia to study the cult of Mithras and write a book on it. Snooty starts on the trip with Humph and Val; when they get there, he shoots Humph in the back in an entirely gratuitous act. He abandons Val, ill with small-pox, among bandits and more likely to die than to survive. She does recover and goes back to England, but she is disfigured for life. One character in the novel is presented sympathetically: this is Robert McPhail—a portrait of the poet Roy Campbell—whom Snooty visits in the South of France on his way to Persia. McPhail is killed in a bull-fight in which he need not have taken part; the crowd positively relish the sight of his wounds and blood. His death is symbolical of the sacrifice of the "One" to the "Many" in a diseased society.

In *Time and Western Man* Lewis describes Behaviorism as "the final kick or touch that was required to precipitate the 'mind'



into the abyss." (p. 336) For him Behaviorism is related to the philosophy of time because it "substitutes the body for the mind"; "the human body is a machine . . . all the facts about the human machine can be stated 'in terms of stimulus and response.'" (pp. 333-5) Walking in the Strand, Snooty sees in a shop-window an automaton raising a hat and replacing it on its head. Like Humph, the puppet has a prominent chin and short legs. Snooty realizes that most people are puppets, not only Humph and those in the street who stop to look at the automaton but he himself also. "The puppet was *one of us* as much as the people at my side." (p. 161) Snooty thinks he illustrates the behaviorist conception of man when he kills Humph, who behaves like a friend towards him. Because he hates man in general and because the people he knows are "all-puppet cast," he asserts that he merely obeys one of his impulses or "stimuli" by killing a man who is nothing but an automaton. Snooty seems to have a double personality, one aspect of it being the artist, the observer, the mind, the other the "wild body," who ironically turns out to be criminal when he is supposedly acting as a behaviorist: "I behave as a *Behaviorist* and as such I claim I should be accepted, and if there is nothing else that I can do to prove it, I will at least continue to *behave* as you have seen me behaving through these pages, and as all true Behaviorist *must* behave. If you are a true Behaviorist and not merely a sham one, you behave as I have behaved! Put that in your pipe and smoke it, all you professors of this implacable doctrine!"<sup>1</sup> (p. 309)

Snooty's description of the cult of Mithras, which, he says, gave rise to bull-fighting, is a satire on the glorification of sex as propagated by D.H. Lawrence. Snooty's interest in "Mithraism" leads him to read a book entitled *Sol Invictus-Bull Unsexed* supposedly written by D.H. Lawrence. Lewis describes Mithras as a kind of generalissimo, and his cult as a popular religion which glorifies action.<sup>2</sup> "Their God is a God of Time, 'Boundless

<sup>1</sup> Lewis is drawing conclusions from the Behaviorist theory, but he does not describe it fairly and he misinterprets it: Behaviorism never compelled people to behave in a particular way but merely described how people *do* behave in response to stimuli.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis may have borrowed the idea of the cult of Mithra(s) from Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, in which Mithraism is described as the "popular religion of the Roman legionary."

Time' while we are of temporal stuff, the children of Time. D.H. Lawrence was attracted by the thought of a Mithraic Europe as much as by the Bull." (p. 94) Lewis was prejudiced against many of his contemporaries; his criticism of Lawrence may not be wholly unfounded, but it is bigoted and often based on misunderstanding. His condemnation of Lawrence's "cult of the primitive" is understandable considering his (Lewis's) position on this subject, but his unrelenting abuse and his personal criticism reveal a strange vindictiveness.<sup>1</sup> Still worse is the singular lack of insight and judgment implied in his assertion that "one can never laugh enough at a literary man like Lawrence." Dr. Leavis, who defended Lawrence in an article entitled "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Wyndham Lewis and Lawrence,"<sup>2</sup> questioned Lewis's ability to judge Lawrence and asserted that Lewis's own treatment of sex was "hard-boiled, cynical and external." This is particularly true with reference to *Snooty Baronet*, and the same can be said not only of his treatment of sex but of man in general. Snooty says that, like Lawrence, he is on the side of Nature. But this can only mean that he is on the side of Nature *against* Man not *with* him:

It is not *Nature*<sup>3</sup> but it is *Man* who is responsible for the transformation of this land into a waterless desert. That is why I have thrown in my lot with nature—that is why I break the social contract, and the human pact. (p. 113)

Obviously, that is also why Snooty feels entitled "to hatch a plot against Mankind." (p. 63)

In *The Revenge for Love* (1937) Lewis creates characters who are not mere puppets but human beings capable of loving and suffering, and for the first time his satire turns into a tragedy. The theme of the novel is the hypocrisy of modern society, whether

<sup>1</sup> According to Geoffrey Wagner, Lewis went so far as to suggest that "Lawrence died of a most unpleasant disease," *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> *Scrutiny*, III 2 (September 1934). This is a review of T.S. Eliot's *After Strange Gods*. Dr. Leavis refers in it to Lewis's treatment of D.H. Lawrence in *Paleface*.

<sup>3</sup> By nature Snooty simply means what England, a country "flowing with milk and honey," has to offer. He insists that the country is reduced to nothing by the wickedness of man. There may be an allusion in this passage to Rousseau's *Social Contract* since Lewis never lost an opportunity of criticizing Rousseau. He opposes man to nature to emphasize the fact that man is not good and corrupts nature.

in love, art or politics, and the inevitable defeat of the man who is honest and takes that sham society seriously. It is defined from the start by Don Alvaro, the warder of Percy Hardcaster in a Spanish prison, who says that "We are only free once in our lives. . . . That is when we gaze into the bottom of the heart of our beloved and find that it is false—like everything else in the world."<sup>1</sup> This is almost immediately illustrated by a young Spanish girl who brings Hardcaster his food in a basket with a false bottom. Alvaro discovers a letter under it, but he doesn't disclose his discovery and doesn't prevent Hardcaster from attempting to escape. He then shoots the guard who had let him out and wounds Hardcaster in the leg. Thanks to his Spanish adventure the latter becomes aware of what is false in people and ideas. He understands that Alvaro, whom he had taken for a gentleman, "was false"; he learns that Serafin, who had helped him to escape, was paid by both sides; and he realizes that his own politics are not free from sham either:

Bluff was the tactical basis of the latter-day revolutionary personality. . . . In Percy's professional make-up he never quite knew what part of bluff went to what part of solid belief. . . . And Percy Hardcaster was as honest a fellow as any in the Party: and having learnt a part, he really played it *con amore*. . . . This basket was not in reality of simple manufacture. It was most of it honest *false bottom*. (pp. 48-49)

Margot is another character who wonders about the reality of things and people; she attempts to preserve her integrity and that of her love for Victor Stamp. Love is her only motive and she will be made to pay dearly for it, as the intellectual Hardcaster will have to pay for the sincerity of his attachment to the party and for "playing the game" honestly. At the party given by Sean O'Hara in honour of Hardcaster on his return from Spain Margot finds herself amidst a crowd of Left-wing intellectuals and artists; she feels that these "wax-dolls," these "shampolitics," these *unreals* are "a dangerous crowd of shadows" that hover over Victor and herself and try "to turn them into phantoms and so to suppress them." (pp. 172-3) Victor is associated with them because he is a painter, but "he does not give a damn, one way

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham LEWIS, *The Revenge for Love*, London, 1952, p. 1.

or another for 'the people.'” (p. 70) He knows that he is not a good artist, though occasionally and almost by chance he can create a good thing. He is a disillusioned man, a Kreisler who lives in a vacuum, with the difference that Margot attempts to redeem him by her excessive love and to save him from such critics as Pete Wallach (Reuben Wallach) “who [is] forcing Victor’s head in the gas-oven.” (p. 157) Margot doesn’t care whether Victor is a good painter or not. He is an artist and as such he must be supported, so that she is desperate because she realizes that “in the modern world—that meant the tragic scene upon which she and Victor lived and suffered—there was no place for the artist, no place at all.” (p. 156) Good art cannot flourish in a society of shams, and Margot’s fear that Victor may be “unreal” is justified. He cannot exist in any real sense as an artist because, as Percy later explains to her, “Art as you understand it is finished. Your sort of art is as dead as the dodo. . . . It was the fine flower of a *system*. . . . The system’s finished. Art is the first thing to be scrapped. . . . All these people want their money for Rolls-Royces. They don’t believe in their system any more themselves or (consequently) in the art of their system.” (pp. 326-7) This is substantiated by the fact that Abershaw, whom Margot has caught forging Victor’s signature, wants him to work for a rich and well-known art-dealer who runs a workshop where faked masterpieces are produced :

Help him to work honestly they *would* not. . . . They said no one could make an honest living to-day. And they saw to it that he shouldn’t. Indeed it was dishonest to make an honest living to-day . . . oh yes, to work was ‘bourgeois’—and they disseminated the belief that because society was rotten, work was out of the question : for they wanted the whole world slowly to strike, to go into chronic unemployment and to be idle, that they might take it over and rule the roost, with a hand of iron. (p. 178)

At first, Victor refuses to join the workshop, but they are so poor that he finally accepts Abershaw’s proposition for Margot’s sake and in spite of her protests. But he cannot stand it for long, and he destroys the picture he had been working on for several days.

Insincerity in art is only one aspect of dishonesty in a society of fakers, and at least neither the dealer nor the painters pretend that they are being honest or doing something valuable. The worst

fakers are to be found in politics: their action is more harmful because it affects everyone. At the party given for him Hardcaster takes it for granted that every educated person knows what propaganda is, and he tells atrocity-stories which he is supposed to have experienced in the Spanish prison and in hospital. He greatly enjoys the social prestige it gives him, particularly among women. This wins him the sympathy of Gillian Phipps, an enthusiastic communist who yet despises Margot for not being a lady and who is also rather contemptuous of Jack Cruze, a rich man but a vulgarian, whom she discusses openly with her husband in his presence, thus practising what she calls "mental communism." She encourages him to court her without ever giving herself, and when she makes fun of him she compares him to Lawrence's "escaped cock." The allusion to Lawrence in this context is, of course, completely irrelevant. Gillian also bestows her favours on Percy, the communist hero, and when the latter tells her in good faith that his tales at the party were propaganda, she becomes indignant, because he is not a real hero but a paid agitator who has allowed himself to become a cripple, a "show-piece," a "*museum of class-war atrocities*" through sheer carelessness. The whole scene is an exposure of the bluff that enters into politics but also of communists like Gillian, "sham-underdogs athirst for power: whose doctrine was a universal Sicilian Vespers, and which yet treated the real poor, when they were encountered, with such overweening contempt and even derision." (p. 160) Indeed, Percy now "was turning into something definitely—beneath her eyes. Into a stupid fat little man, of the working class." (p. 204)

For Gillian politics are a game, like love, and she doesn't even play it correctly. Percy tells her that she is playing with ideas and that she is a communist for the fun of it; he explains to her that the working classes and the middle or upper classes have different purposes in making the revolution. But he pays dearly for not having realized sooner that for most Left-wing intellectuals communism is merely a game. While he is arguing with Gillian, Jack Cruze comes in and is told that Percy has been insulting her. He beats Hardcaster, and when the latter is down, he kicks him ferociously under the eyes of the upper-class Gillian, for whom the sporting spirit and "playing the game" are so important. Lewis often derides the notion of "playing the game"; to him this is a sham that blurs the sense of reality of the English. Percy



comes back from hospital a changed man physically and morally, no longer inclined to consort with parlour-communists. Yet he falls a victim to another kind of game. He is asked by Abershaw and O'Hara to smuggle arms into Spain and to take Victor and Margot to help him. Margot, who is very anxious about Victor, makes things difficult for them. But when Hardcaster suspects that Victor is being used in a dishonest way, he follows Margot to Spain in search of Victor, and he is taken prisoner. Victor is momentarily saved by Percy's initiative, but he and Margot are killed in a storm while trying to get back to France. Before he abandons the car in which he thought he had smuggled arms, Victor discovers in its false bottom not guns but bricks, and he realizes too late that he could have been saved by Margot, who suspected all the time that he was being deceived. A forged letter supposedly written by Hardcaster is found on him so that Percy has little chance of leaving the Spanish prison :

He 'played the game.' As ever, with an incorruptible mind, he remained a true 'sportsman.' To *himself*, at least, he never pretended that he was hardly used. He accepted, for his political opinions, the status of a game—a game, of course, of life and death. He would have been more the 'happy warrior' certainly, in the class-battle, if he had been possessed of a more dishonest mind. But fresh hardships only seemed to have the effect of seasoning his vision. His integrity stiffened after each fresh buffet of fate. (p. 372)

"In 1937," says Geoffrey Wagner, "we reach the peak of Lewis's interest in fascism, and it is necessary always to read *The Revenge for Love*, his principal political satire, against the background of these sympathies."<sup>1</sup> There are few direct allusions to fascism in the novel; Margot merely states her preference for Blackshirts rather than for communists because she feels that Left-wing politics in Great Britain are an "enormous sham." Lewis insists that Western countries—Spain and England in particular—undermine their own foundations under the foreign influence of Marxism. The Spanish War is viewed as a fight between "politicos," which the Spaniards have allowed to develop through weakness, and which destroys the traditional grandeur of Spain. "It was odd—or perhaps not!—that England should go the way

<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey WAGNER, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

of Spain. Two countries with a glorious past . . . going rotten at the bottom and at the top, where the nation ceased to be the nation—the inferior end abutting upon the animal kingdom, the upper end merging in the international abstractness of men—where there was no longer either Spanish men or English men, but a gathering of individuals who were *nothing*.” (p. 6) Lewis believes that politics are a necessary evil. In *The Lion and the Fox* he analyses Machiavelli and agrees with him that men are not good and must be held in check by some individual or by the state. Hardcaster himself considers that politics are necessarily Machiavellian: “*He who goes out so save a fool, must do so as an impostor. . . . There is only one way of fighting a lie, and that’s with a lie. . . . There’s no room for George Washington in this sinful world. . . . If you don’t use the lie it is as if you made war upon a nation armed with bombs and gas with flintlocks or just with fists.*” (pp. 48 and 202) However, having recognized the character of the political game, he plays it correctly and with respect for what people are. Thus he admits that Alvaro, who shot him in the leg, was a fine man in his way, and he respects Victor and Margot Stamp. His integrity comes up frequently against Left-wing orthodoxy. According to Gillian, he has no right to call an ex-civil-guard a fine man, and Mateu, the Catalan who really smuggles the arms while Victor is a mere “decoyduck,” objects to Percy’s effort to save Victor because it might endanger their smuggling. Tristram Phipps is also a victim of Left-wing orthodoxy. He is the only minor character who is sincere and honest; he is an indoctrinated innocent who goes so far as to leave his wife because they disagree about politics. As to Gillian, although she is satirized for “kissing ideas” and for being a communist in theory but not in practice, she expresses Lewis’s opinion that the intellectuals, not the working classes, make revolutions:

It was all for *their* sake that the Gillians and Tristrams of this world were going to make a revolution! . . . It is we so-called ‘intellectuals’ of the upper classes, who are the only real communists. . . . When a workman becomes a communist he only does so for what he can get! He regards it as just another *job*—a jolly sight better paid than any he can get out of the bosses. And when he makes himself into a communist he brings with him all his working-class cynicism, all his underdog cowardice and disbelief in everything and

everybody. All his tinpot calculations regarding his precious *value*. That is why Marx insisted on the necessity of his *hatred* being exploited. It's the only pure passion he is capable of! As a communist he has mixed with his communism the animal characteristics of his class. All that cheap sentiment and moral squalor. At the best he is a mercenary. And a mercenary is always a potential traitor! (pp. 219 and 225)

The main object of *The Revenge for Love* as a political satire is to denounce the dishonesty and make-believe of Left-wing politics among English intellectuals in the Thirties. Lewis frankly suggests that many are communists out of interest, though for the majority politics is simply a game as art was for the rich Bohemians of the Twenties. Apart from Tristram Phipps and the main character, none of these intellectuals is honest, and it is obvious that none is ready to act up to his beliefs: "One and all in their hearts determined that it was more necessary than ever to see to it that they should remain *the brains* of the Revolution." (p. 146) Margot, who sees through them, knows that she and Victor should have the strength "to call their noisy shadow-bluff": "Spring up and face them, and they would give way before you. For they had no will. Their will to life was extinct, even if they were technically real." (p. 174) However, Lewis is again somewhat inconsistent in his denunciation of Left-wing intellectuals, for he presents them both as fake-thinkers and as the people who really make the Revolution and are exploited by the working classes. Even the main characters, who are the victims of Left-wing intellectuals, enjoy deluding themselves and others in some way: Percy likes to indulge in self-pity; Victor is called a "deluded" man, and the fact that he is a painter without talent renders somewhat senseless Margot's sacrifices for him. At one point the genuineness of her love for Victor is questioned, so that one wonders whether it is possible for any human being to be completely free from some element of make-believe. It is true that on the whole Margot and Hardcaster are presented sympathetically and that Victor improves by living with Margot. Lewis has at last created human beings whom he does not despise for experiencing emotions, people who can be devoted and disinterested. But he is even more pessimistic than in his previous satires, because he shows that such people don't have a chance in modern society.

They are mercilessly exploited and destroyed. They court disaster because their generosity runs counter to the interest of those who make use of naive and sincere people. The most cruel revenge is on Hardcaster for the integrity of his faith, and all through the novel there is a sense of impending catastrophe whenever Margot's love for Victor is mentioned. Love and faith are doomed; they do not regenerate, they condemn men to death in a world in which everyone attempts to exploit everyone else.

Most critics agree that *The Revenge for Love* is Lewis's best novel, and Lewis himself wrote: "It is probably the best complete work of fiction I have written."<sup>1</sup> Yet it is a pity that he didn't take care to make the plot plausible, for the most important part of the action is based on the smuggling of arms into Republican Spain, and the main characters die or are imprisoned for it, though it is difficult to understand why the Spanish Republicans should have condemned the people who were bringing them arms. If anyone was likely to interfere or to protest, it was the French, not the Spanish. The error is, of course, irrelevant to the meaning of the novel. If anything it helps to illustrate Lewis's conception of politics as a dangerous, futile and meaningless sport. Henceforth, the main theme of his work is the impact of politics, communism in particular, on the individual. In answer to a question about Margot's association with communists, he wrote that "Communism has something to do with everyone. Even when it seems a long way off."<sup>2</sup> The threat of communism is the more dangerous in England as it is not brutally imposed but insidiously permeates everyone's life. The easy adherence of English intellectuals to communism is seen as the result of nineteenth-century liberalism and tolerance<sup>3</sup>. In *The Red Priest* Lewis even shows how religion is being used to attract people to communism by drawing a parallel between that political doctrine and Christianity. Actually, Lewis had some ground for his satire on English intellectuals, for the ease with which many of them publicly recanted their opinions showed that they had committed themselves without due consideration. As we shall see, Orwell condemned Left-wing intellectuals for the same reason though from a different standpoint.

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, Letter to Desmond Flower, p. 242.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter to W.K. Rose, p. 509.

<sup>3</sup> The English communists themselves claimed this: see Stephen SPENDER, *Forward from Liberalism*, London, 1937.

*The Vulgar Streak*, published in 1941, is also a condemnation of counterfeiters, though of a different kind. The hero is the son of a labourer, who counterfeits money and rises in the social scale by dressing well and acquiring a good accent. Lewis doesn't consider the novel as a social satire but as a piece of tragic fiction.<sup>1</sup> Like Victor Stamp, Vincent Penhale realizes too late the regenerating power of love and the fact that it may be stronger than class. His wife dies and he commits suicide. Lewis also intended his hero to be a twentieth-century Julien Sorel,<sup>2</sup> a man afflicted with the same *mal du siècle* as Hitler: the worship of force and action. "Vincent Penhale is a child of his time and infected with a disease that as a by-product gives us fascism."<sup>3</sup> *The Vulgar Streak* is almost aggressively anti-Hitler; it is the fictional counterpart of *The Hitler Cult*. "I have proved . . . upon my little personal stage that force is barren,"<sup>4</sup> Vincent says. However, his effort to maintain himself in the upper classes doesn't seem a very good example of action for its own sake, because it is not so aimless as Lewis says it is. Rather, it is the importance Vincent attaches to the outward symbols of class particularly dress and accent, which are meaningless, as he eventually comes to realize. In fact, Lewis himself criticizes class snobbery in England and the system of education which condemns a man to remain a slave if he was born one, a system which denies strong intellects the right to develop, thus depriving England of useful intelligent people. At the same time, he draws a fairly detailed picture of the working classes, whom he calls the worst snobs because they accept their status as "subhuman inferiors" and do everything they can to help their masters keep them down. Vincent's family, among whom laziness, drink and vulgarity prevail, are presented as typical working-class specimens. Worst of all is their mass-spirit and their hatred of anyone who escapes from their "inferno."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, Letter to Robert Hale, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 332. He explains this in a letter to H.G. Wells.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter to Robert Hale, p. 306.

<sup>4</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *The Vulgar Streak*, London, 1941, p. 235.

<sup>5</sup> It would seem at first sight that Lewis is less contemptuous of the working classes in this novel since he condemns English class snobbery. But it is obvious that he is as contemptuous of the working classes as ever. The fact that he seems to sympathize with Vincent illustrates his divided attitude towards Vincent's show of force: he is determined to condemn it, yet he cannot help admiring it.



Lewis's bias against the "changeless Many" is again evident in *Self Condemned* (1954), the first novel he published after the War. The theme of the novel is the struggle of a professor of history, René Harding, to keep his intellectual integrity. As an intelligent and creative man, he wants to break free from the Philistine majority who "inhabit a peculiarly violent Stone Age." He resigns his professorship and emigrates to Canada, where he fails to find the cultural environment he needs in order to create. Canada is described as a country of the utmost intellectual and cultural poverty. After three years of "living death" in a hotel room Harding is prepared to compromise with intellectual orthodoxy. The hotel, "a microcosm fearfully and wickedly mismanaged," like human society, is destroyed like Europe by a tremendous fire. Harding's wife commits suicide because she thinks that his accepting a professorship at a Canadian university means that they won't go back to England. Harding is momentarily crushed by this trial, then he recovers his exterior hardness. He becomes a "half-crazed replica of his former self," for he is now a machine like everyone else. He is greatly pleased with the success of his latest book and glad to become a professor at an American university, which formerly he would have considered shameful. Harding is one of Lewis's most unpleasant characters. Unlike Hardcaster, he suffers without dignity and is sickly sentimental when he experiences emotions. His attitude towards love, or rather sex, is simply repulsive; it is not surprising that he should find the latter degrading. His own final degradation, which he incurs as a kind of defiant gesture towards his dead wife, is not devoid of self-pity. The objective hardness on which his reputation as a historian rests is mainly a show, for he no longer believes in it and has lost the self-respect which had always dictated his behaviour.

*Self Condemned* is often marred by too long expositions of Harding's theories, which are based on Lewis's view that human history can only be visualized and described as a "crime-story," a "chaos" or a "burlesque." This is because men ignore the products of creative minds as well as the heroic creators themselves who are "knocked down by the gang of criminals [the heads of states] with the assistance of course of the unenlightened herd."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wyndham Lewis, *Self Condemned*, London, 1955, p. 86.

Lewis may have intended to suggest that, given the circumstances in which the creative individual is forced to live in modern society, it is impossible for him to retain his integrity. This would take us a step further than *The Human Age*, in which Pullman felt he had to compromise with "Big Business" and "gangster wealth" because they at least provided the artist with the means of practising his art. Harding is often accused of having a destructive intelligence, though his friend "Rotter" claims the contrary and asserts that his writing contains "an implicit proposal for revaluation, moral and intellectual throughout society." (p. 95) But on what basis? Since the novel is partly autobiographical, we might ask the same question about Lewis's work. His assertion that men of intelligence should rule the world is rather vague as a basis for regeneration and irrelevant to humanity as a whole. Moreover, Lewis's opinion about men of intelligence is somewhat arbitrary. He may not share the nihilism of his hero, whom he describes as "dangerous,"<sup>1</sup> but *Self Condemned* and much of his work in general illustrate Harding's conception of life:

If one condemns all history as trivial and unedifying, must not all human life be condemned on the same charge? Is not human life too short to have any real value, is it not too hopelessly compromised with the silliness involved in the reproduction of the species, of all the degradations accompanying the association of those of opposite sex to realize offspring? . . . The problem of problems is to find anything of value intact and undiluted in the vortex of slush and nonsense: to discover any foothold (however small) in the phenomenal chaos, for the ambitious mind: enough that is uncontaminated to make it worth-while to worry about life at all. And as to condemning the slush and nonsense, the pillage and carnage which we have glorified as 'history': why, that throws us back upon the futility of our daily lives, which also have to be condemned. (p. 351)

The significance of Lewis as a writer must be viewed in relation to the strong reaction against liberal democracy initiated by the French neo-classicists; it was during his association with them in Paris before the First World War that his views on art and politics

<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, Letter to Mrs. Amor Liber, p. 558.

were formed. Though he did not commit himself politically like Maurras, Lewis's opinions developed in roughly the same manner as those of the French writer: like him, he started by violently attacking the Germans and their Romanticism and was eventually led to support Hitler in the name of order and discipline, though he was always sceptical of the merits of action and cannot have been blind to the irrational element in fascism. This development was entirely motivated by his ineradicable conviction that democratization was bringing about the collapse of Western civilization. As Ernst Curtius put it, "The anarchical condition of European intelligence [was] nothing other than the irruption of democracy into the sphere of the intellect."<sup>1</sup> The neo-classicists attributed the impact of democracy on all spheres of human activity to Romanticism and to Bergsonism: the former had largely contributed to diffuse the humanitarian ideal which eventually gave rise to democracy, and it was debasing art to the level of the popular and the vulgar by exalting emotions and sensations. The latter emphasized the "becoming" and the flux of life and thus did not only acknowledge its instability but encouraged it. By identifying man with his surrounding world, the Bergsonians were depriving him of his individuality. To these critics the "merging" and "penetrating" of all life in an attempt to grasp it as a whole was equivalent to a form of communism which degraded the achievement of the superior being who creates in isolation. Moreover, by giving prominence to instinct and intuition, the Bergsonians were discrediting the intellect and impairing the authority of the one instrument that ensures the continuity of Western culture and civilization. Lewis believed with Maurras that the masses should relinquish all responsibility to an intellectual elite but, unlike Maurras, he didn't think this elite should be hereditary. He also shared the neo-classicists' opinion that the real intellectual, the "clerc" was being corrupted either by his adherence to democracy, by the state, which made it impossible for him to keep aloof from the life of the ordinary citizen, or by international financiers who had become the actual rulers of the world. However, unlike most neo-classicists, Lewis was never a nationalist.

<sup>1</sup> "Restoration of the Reason." *The Criterion*, VI, 5 (November 1927), 392.

Lewis's association of political democracy with the adulteration of culture<sup>1</sup> made him exalt the "artist-hero" without realizing that the very concept was in contradiction with his idea of art as the supreme human activity. It is, indeed, difficult to reconcile his theoretical aestheticism with the political role he is prepared to assign to the artist and with his own mixing of politics and art. This inconsistency became more flagrant between the Wars when Lewis increasingly allowed the critic in him to supersede the artist. Given the nature of his political attitude, it gave rise to other inconsistencies which in the end are responsible for the controversial character of his work as novelist and critic of English society. For instance, in his criticism of "art-politics" Lewis appeals to a "classical" tradition of authority and order which is entirely foreign to the English cultural tradition. In socio-politics the order defended by English traditionalists is inherent in their conception of society as an organic whole; it is not the non-hierarchical order imposed by "One" on the "Many." Moreover, it is an order which allows for the individual's "free play of consciousness"<sup>2</sup> and is based on belief in human perfection, and not on a belief in the stupidity of the majority of human beings. Similarly, while allowing for exceptions, one must remember that the major English literary tradition was never "classical" in Lewis's sense of the word, i.e., exclusively rationalist. It is also worth stressing that Lewis's vision of the artist as the centre of the act of creation, and not as a medium, is hardly consistent with his advocacy of Classicism. If Eliot's cult of impersonality in art is an attempt to escape from the personality of feelings and emotions, the selfishness of Lewis's artist makes him necessarily subjective. His own extremism both in the attitudes he adopted and in the form of his satires could hardly be reconciled

<sup>1</sup> In *The Reactionaries*, London, 1966, an often questionable analysis of the politics of Yeats, Lewis, Pound, Eliot and Lawrence, John Harrison argues that democracy does not necessarily entail adulteration of culture. He explains that English culture has always been predominantly democratic and that the literature that used to be read by the lower classes—the Bible, Bunyan, Dickens—was good, as were the newspapers produced and read by them—for instance, Cobbett's and Hetherington's. It is only when the upper classes (the Tories and Lord Northcliffe in particular) started to produce and aptly advertise cheap literature that the traditional standards of the lower classes fell. (pp. 205-6) There is a good deal of truth in this statement, but it corroborates Lewis's view that the decadent upper classes in collusion with international finance corrupt the lower classes.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew ARNOLD, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

with his narrow conception of Classicism or for that matter with Classicism in general.

In spite of the un-English character of the tradition he defends it is mainly English society and English art that Lewis criticizes in his fiction. But again, there is a discrepancy between the ambitious character of his purpose to illustrate the decline of Western civilization and the limited scope of his satire, which seldom rises above a mere denigration of individuals. *Tarr* and *The Revenge for Love* are exceptions, but in *The Apes of God* and *The Human Age* it is hardly possible to dissociate his denunciation of contemporary attitudes from the people who were supposed to uphold them. Thus to deride the youth-cult, the child-cult, the cult of action, primitivism, homosexuality, and the "demasculinization" of society which is ruining its structure, Lewis embodies them in well-known literary personalities of the inter-war period who seem to have been recognized by everyone at the time. The fact that their identification in Lewis's satires considerably adds to the interest of these works is an indication of their weakness as literary products. True to his principle of separating art from life, Lewis did not hesitate to satirize even life-long friends, let alone artists whom he really despised like Lawrence. Setting himself up as public "Enemy" he exposed what he called the sham politics of Left-wing intellectuals, fakers in love and in art, and took Bloomsbury artists and their "societification" of art as his main target. Lewis is never so pessimistic as when he denounces hypocrisy, the disparity between people's avowed principles and their actual behaviour. But his excessive anger prevents him from transmuting his criticism into an impersonal and universal satire. Moreover, he seldom discriminates between trivial and essential things and his indictment of modern society can be so disproportionate as to defeat its purpose.

Lewis might be called a "revolutionary conservative." He was a conservative in his opposition to democracy, his contempt for the present and its increasingly industrialized and disintegrating civilization, in his attachment to the tradition which had contributed to the greatness of Western culture. That he was opposed to change is not only manifest in his political views but in the stubbornness with which he kept fighting battles that had become irrelevant. Yet he considered himself as a true revolutionary on the ground that he belonged to the enlightened minority who are



always responsible for any real change or progress in society. Only the "person," the "One" is capable of generating advancement; the masses follow blindly. That is why Lewis was so fiercely critical of philosophers and artists who, in his opinion, contributed to the debasement of the "Many." But this prevented him from appreciating what was truly revolutionary in the literary art of his time, in the works of Joyce, Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. He only saw that these artists exalted the inner life of the individual and that the characters in their novels revelled in emotions; he was too prejudiced, particularly towards Joyce, to discover anything else in their art.

Si l'art qui ne donne que des sensations est un art inférieur, c'est que l'analyse ne démêle pas souvent dans une sensation autre chose que cette sensation même. Mais la plupart des émotions sont grosses de mille sensations, sentiments ou idées qui les pénètrent : chacune d'elle est donc un état unique en son genre, indéfinissable, et il semble qu'il faudrait revivre la vie de celui qui l'éprouve pour l'embrasser dans sa complexe originalité.<sup>1</sup>

Lewis's fiction fails entirely to convey the complexity of human nature because his external approach prevents him from investigating the hidden motives of the human psyche. Though he set out to revolutionize the arts, his original contribution to literature is limited. The dichotomy between body and mind on which his satire is based makes him convey the grotesque in man successfully. His pungent style, which relies almost entirely on the aggressiveness of his highly idiosyncratic arrangement of harsh words, gives his work an intensely personal character. But it is also obvious from his many repetitions, contradictions and inconsistencies that Lewis was an untrained thinker, which partly explains the lack of harmony in his work.

The main theme of Lewis's work is the "humanization of the Divine" in art and in politics. He saw this process as the outcome of a mechanization which was due to the disparagement of the intellect. In contradistinction to Lawrence, the mechanical was for him the emotional and the instinctive. Hence his contempt for women (at least in his fiction), who, in his eyes, stood for

<sup>1</sup> Henry BERGSON, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, in *op. cit.*, p. 15.

all that was soft, sentimental, "jellyish" in human behaviour. Harding's remark that "he always forgot that Hester was a human being because she was so terribly much the woman"<sup>1</sup> aptly illustrates Lewis's opinion that indulging in emotions or sensations reduces man to an automaton. Most of his novels convey his vision of a mechanized humanity, of lifeless puppets, morons or half-men vegetating in mediocrity and stupidity. He does illustrate the violence of contemporary life and recreate the nightmarish atmosphere of big cities in which men lead a lifeless existence. But he doesn't make clear in what particular way men are being dehumanized, because since they are mere puppets from beginning to end, his characters never change as human beings do. They do not degenerate since they are bad from the start. Nor can they ever be redeemed or, with the possible exception of Hardcaster, learn from experience. The few characters in his fiction who embody his own ideal of classical order and intellectual superiority are utterly unpleasant because of their arrogance, their defiant amorality and their hatred of humanity, the same hatred which makes Lewis lose all sense of measure and mars his criticism. His assertion that "merely by living we contaminate ourselves"<sup>2</sup> gives the measure of his distaste for humanity and for life as distinct from art.

Lewis's criticism of society is mostly negative, for nothing in his work compensates for the disgust he attempts to arouse at the repulsiveness of humanity. Like most conservatives, he was a pessimist, but he turned his pessimism into contempt. His novels are essentially an expression of his misanthropy and of his belief in man's weakness and stupidity. He is, in fact, an inverted romanticist fascinated by his vision of perverted mankind. The extravagance of his satire, the loudness and arrogance of his protest seem to be the product of disillusion and of personal discontent. Lewis lacked the humility of the true artist more preoccupied with his work than with himself, and that is why he did not achieve the detachment necessary to a work of art. He can never rank with artists who, like him, criticized the society of their time but were able to transcend their personal anger. Above all, he cannot rank with Lawrence, with whom at first sight he seems to have much in

<sup>1</sup> *Self Condemned*, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> *The Hitler Cult*, p. 173.

common. They both vehemently denounced contemporary civilization and the mechanization of man, and they were equally critical of the literary coteries of the Twenties. Their rendering of the atmosphere which prevailed in some social circles at the time shows precisely that Lawrence achieved universality where Lewis remained entangled with personalities without actually bringing them to life. Lawrence exalts life, its beauty and its richness; Lewis debases it with the intention of showing that it is being degraded by man, but he himself never suggests a better way of life. He cannot visualize characters who are wholly or harmoniously human, and his advocacy of reason is too often the expression of his dessicating conservatism. Ultimately, his failure is, as we have seen, artistic, though we must make allowance for his strong personality, his pungency, his intellectual independence. It is perhaps too soon to say how Lewis will be judged in the future. Ironically, he seems to illustrate his own assertion that "to-day . . . the performer exists chiefly in order that the critic may act—as a Critic."<sup>1</sup> I think, however, that he will be considered as an important literary figure of the inter-war period and that interest in his work will revive periodically—perhaps when men are prepared to hear some uncomfortable truths about themselves.

<sup>1</sup> "The Dithyrambic Spectator," *The Calendar of Modern Letters*, I, 2 (April 1925), 94. Many of Lewis's works are being reprinted.

## RONALD FIRBANK

To break a butterfly, or even a beetle, upon a wheel is a delicate task. Lovers of nature disapprove, moreover the victim is apt to reappear each time the wheel revolves, still alive, and with a reproachful expression upon its squashed face to address its tormentor in some such words as the following: "Critic! What do you? Neither my pleasure nor your knowledge has been increased. I was flying or crawling, and that is all there was to be learnt about me."<sup>1</sup>

In his preface to *The Complete Ronald Firbank* Anthony Powell says that "Ronald Firbank is not a writer to be critically imposed by argument. He must be approached . . . in a spirit of sympathy."<sup>2</sup> Though this is true with respect to most creative writers, it is certainly the first requisite with Firbank. Otherwise one is likely to wonder what to make of his provocative fantasies. He is greatly admired by some—mostly for his technical skill and originality and for the "opulent beauty" of his settings—and he is dismissed by others as unworthy of serious consideration. The few critics who allude to him agree that one cannot take too much of him at a time and that his novels cannot be dissected, for they are too unsubstantial to lend themselves to analytical scrutiny. Even Jocelyn Brooke,<sup>3</sup> an obvious admirer, calls him a "pure artist" but has some difficulty in making good his claim. The extravagance of court life in an imaginary Balkan country, the desire of a fashionable woman to be immortalized by a stained-glass window in a cathedral, a visit to Greece, the whims of centenarians, the success and misadventures of artists, or the eccentricities of a cardinal, such are the frivolous elements on which Firbank builds his conversation-pieces. Only in *Prancing Nigger*, a novel about

<sup>1</sup> E.M. FORSTER, "Ronald Firbank," in *Abinger Harvest*, London, 1961, p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony POWELL, Preface to *The Complete Ronald Firbank*, London, 1961, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Jocelyn BROOKE, *Ronald Firbank and John Betjeman*, Writers and their Work Series, London, 1962.

the misfortunes of Haitian Negroes, does he allow compassion to creep in very briefly, but he hastily returns to his frivolous mode.

Firbank's characters resemble one another because they all talk about trifles in the same way, and it is impossible to remember which character belongs to which novel. What one does remember about his collection of unusual people—aristocrats, ecclesiastics and their choir-boys, artists, lesbians and homosexuals—is their uninhibited pursuit of pleasure, their determination to enjoy life in whatever way suits them (one soon learns to expect anything), their taste for the beautiful, and their capacity to ignore any unpleasantness or catastrophe, or to turn it into yet another source of enjoyable gossip. They are insensible to, or even unaware of, ordinary human concerns and emotions. Firbank creates his own delicate and fantastic world with complete disregard of morality. All his characters are perverts, some innocently, others naughtily, and this can only suggest affectation and a desire to shock. On the other hand, his posthumous papers<sup>1</sup> denote a high degree of artistic seriousness and testify to the care with which his novels were built. That is why one cannot altogether ignore the amorality of his writings, especially since this aspect of his work came to be identified with the prevailing mood of the Twenties. Firbank is an innovator as a creator of gaily irresponsible social attitudes and as a stylist, who conveys exclusively through dialogue the futility and the heartless gaiety of these attitudes. His work seems ageless because of its fantastic character. But he produced at the right moment the kind of literature people were likely to enjoy, and the young writers of the Twenties who tried to interpret the spirit of their age were clearly influenced by him.

The world imagined by Firbank is deliberately cut off from reality. It reflects his desire to escape the ugliness of ordinary life and to ignore all sources of tension and displeasure. The life of retirement which Firbank led in Oxford during the War is characteristic of his refusal to be involved in any serious human predicament. Siegfried Sassoon, who knew him at the time, says: "Watching him through the jungle of orchids I found it hard to believe that this strange being could have any relationship with the outer world. He was as unreal and anomalous as his

<sup>1</sup> Ronald FIRBANK, *The New Rhythm and Other Pieces*. London, 1962.



writings and the room—with its exquisite refinements and virtuosities of taste—seemed a pathetically contrived refuge.”<sup>1</sup> The testimonies of his acquaintances suggest that he was trying to resemble his own characters, though his excessive shyness prevented him from meeting people with the same detached assurance. His withdrawal into a private world of nonsense and the rich elaborate elegance of his fictional *mise-en-scène* may be due to a particular mixture of *fin de siècle* aestheticism and a distaste for serious social problems. He was writing in a period of transition, but his work foreshadows attitudes which the lost generation of the Twenties was to adopt.

Firbank's novels express the passing moment: “Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself is the end,”<sup>2</sup> and life is to be enjoyed at all costs. The behaviour of his characters is completely unpredictable and never accounted for. He presents as natural the most secret and unavowable feelings and instincts. Here is a fairly typical example of his writing:

It was to be an evening (flavoured with rich heroics) in honour of the convalescence of several great ladies, from an attack of ‘Boheara’, the new and fashionable epidemic, diagnosed by the medical faculty as ‘hyperaesthesia with complications’: a welcoming back to the world in fact of several despotic dowagers, not one perhaps of whom, had she departed this life, would have been really much missed or mourned! And thus, in deference to the intimate nature of the occasion, it was felt by the solicitous hostess that a Tertulia (that mutual exchange of familiar or intellectual ideas) would make less demand on arms and legs than would a ball: just the mind and lips . . . a skillful rounding-off here, developing there, chiselling, and putting-out feelers; an evening dedicated to the furtherance of intrigue, scandal, love, beneath the eager eyes of a few young girls, still at school, to whom a quiet party was permitted now and then. . . .

‘Vittorio forbids the circus on account of germs,’ the wife of the President of the National Society of Public Morals murmured momentarily.

‘Really, with this ghastly Boheara, I shall not be grieved when the time comes to set out for dear Santander!’ a

<sup>1</sup> Siegfried SASSOON, *Siegfried's Journey*, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> Walter PATER, quoted by Cyril CONNOLLY in *Enemies of Promise*, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 4.

woman with dog-rose cheeks, and puffed, wrinkled eyes, exclaimed, focusing languishingly the Cardinal.

'He is delicious in handsomeness tonight!'

'A shade battered. But a lover's none the worse in my opinion for acquiring technique,' the Duchess of Sarmento declared.

'A lover; what? His Eminence ...??'

The Duchess tittered.

'Why not? I expect he has a little woman to whom he takes off his clothes,' she murmured, turning to admire the wondrous *Madonna of the Mule-mill* attributed to Murillo. On a wall-sofa just beneath, crowned with flowers and aigrettes, sat Conca, Marchioness of Mucarnudo.

'*Qué tal?*'

'My *joie de vivre* is finished; still, it's amazing how I go on!' the Marchioness answered, making a corner for the duchess. She had known her 'dearest Luiza' since the summer the sun melted church bells and their rakish, pleasure-loving, affectionate hearts had dissolved together. But this had not been yesterday; no; for the Marchioness was a grandmother now.

'Conca, Conca: one sees you're in love.'

'He's from *Avila*, dear—the footman.'

'What!'

'Nothing classic—but *oh!*'

'Fresh and blonde? I've seen him.'

'Such sep ...'

'Santiago be praised!'

The Marchioness of Macarnudo plied her fan.

'Our hands first met at table ... yes, dear; but what I always say is, one spark explodes the mine!' And with a sigh she glanced rhapsodically at her fingers, powdered and manicured and encrusted with rings. 'Our hands met first at table,' she repeated.

'And ... and the rest?' the duchess gasped.

'I sometimes wish, though, I resembled my sister more, who cares only for amorous, "delicate" men—the Claudes, so to speak. But there it is! And, anyway, dear' the Marchioness dropped her voice, 'he keeps me from thinking (ah perhaps more than I should) of my little grandson. Imagine, Luiza ... Fifteen, white, and vivid rose, and ink-black hair. ...' And the Marchioness cast a long, pencilled eye towards the world-famous *Pietà* above her head. 'Queen of Heaven, defend a weak woman from *that!*' she besought.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ronald FIRBANK, *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli*, in *The Complete Ronald Firbank*, pp. 660-2.

Firbank creates his own Eden, in which there is nothing right or wrong in the pursuit of beauty and pleasure; his characters have no concern for human beings, for this would be an obstacle to the free enjoyment of life. Whoever takes life seriously is doomed to failure and banished from Eden. People spend their lives in futile or frivolous activities. At a party organized by Mrs. Henedge, a young man reads an unknown verse by Sappho, and all the ladies present go into raptures over it although the verse doesn't make sense at all. Mrs. Henedge has a new dress made for her conversion to Catholicism and another one for her re-conversion to Anglicanism. Even death is taken lightly; though it may inspire a slight melancholy, this is dispelled by the excitement of the funeral arrangements, and the dominant feeling is one of satisfaction at being alive. Most characters simply refuse to be touched by death. Nor are marriage, love, or religion allowed to thwart selfish pleasure. They are turned into mere social affairs or instruments of vainglory. Money is not permitted to intrude either. When people are ruined, they withdraw from the scene without complaining, as any good loser is supposed to do. Life is a game in which women have the initiative; when they are good at it, they care little about men and their feelings, and often make use of them. In Firbank's novels the female character who dominates the social scene is absolutely free, snobbish, unencumbered by considerations which entail personal dedication or suffering. The thoughtlessly cruel modern woman whose whims determine man's fate was to reappear as Mrs. Viveash and Margot Metroland in Huxley's and Waugh's satires. Waugh's vision of a crazy society in which clever women take the lead owes much to Firbank.

The antics of the characters, their witty conversations, the pleasant nonsense of their existence and the inconsequence of their behaviour reduce life to sheer farce. Centenarians indulge their lingering sexual appetites; a cardinal, naked but for his mitre, pursues a choir-boy in his cathedral. But the carelessness and absurdity of the characters' comportment also derive from their sense that purposiveness and dedication are of no avail to reach the one desirable aim: social success. Yet life seems to take revenge on nonsense and irresponsibility, for these often provoke catastrophe. In *Caprice* Miss Siquier, who wants to be a great actress, is caught in a mouse-trap set by her most dedicated admirer

and dies just after a successful first night. The son of Lord Intriguer dies of shock in an expedition to Sodom because he suddenly sees a jackal while composing a sonnet. In *Inclinations* a famous actress is shot by a fashionable woman firing at a flying fish. These catastrophes are never described, they occur between chapters to avoid creating embarrassment and disturbing the gaiety of the other characters. But the latter's unconcerned references to these catastrophes make their irresponsibility and the futility of their lives all the more striking. The way in which these accidents happen and the characters' reaction to them emphasize the precariousness and meaninglessness of life; they stress its instability and reveal the characters' curious lack of expectation or of illusion about humanity. Indeed, what can one expect in a world in which wisdom is never learned, a world without love or attachment, in which people, though conscious of tensions just beneath the surface of life or of tragedy within or just beyond the limits of their environment, do their best to ignore them?

Firbank's characters like to appear unworldly, but this is only when they can take their social position for granted. Actually, all try to win recognition through eccentricity and extravagance. For instance, a famous actress thinks of organizing a concert of music by Rossini and Cimarosa and considers the colour of the chasubles which the clergy are to wear for the baptism of her chow. Religion and sex—they are often associated—come next among their interests, mainly because they provide sensuous and rather hysterical gratification. By religion is meant the ornaments and sometimes elaborate practices of Catholic rites or the improbable pleasures of religious community life. Sex usually implies a kind of neurotic, giggling sensuality which leaves the characters emotionally uninvolved. Mademoiselle de Nanianzi compares her former engagement to the Prince with her relationship with Sister Ursula and decides in favour of the latter because of "the charm, the flavour of the religious world! Where match it for interest and variety!"<sup>1</sup>

Firbank giggles with his characters, and he obviously enjoys their antics. His fantasies hardly imply any social criticism; at most they are parodies of an elegant, fashionable, snobbish and charmingly detached society. However, the wind of folly which

<sup>1</sup> Ronald FIRBANK, *The Flower Beneath the Foot*, in *op. cit.*, p. 553.

runs through his work does not silence the undertone of melancholy and often leaves behind a faint taste of disgust and bitterness. In spite of their frantic search for pleasure the characters are always bored. In *The Flower Beneath the Foot* His Weariness the Prince murmurs in a voice extinct with boredom—the prototype of Mrs. Viveash's expiring voice—and most characters could say with Lady Parvula: "I go about as other fools, in quest of pleasure, and I usually find tedium."<sup>1</sup> The fact that all those who attempt to be serious fail in life and are made to look slightly ridiculous may be another source of melancholy. Moreover, the characters' refusal to look straight at life and their unavowed feeling that this prevents them from getting their full share of it arouse in them a sense of frustration. None of this is clearly expressed, but Firbank sometimes comes very near to giving a glimpse of the tragical reverse side of buffoonery. When Cardinal Pirelli dies after his pursuit of a choir-boy, death gives him a dignity he lacked in life, and the contrast awakens regret that his life should have been what it was: "Now that the ache of life, with its fevers, passions, doubts, its routine, vulgarity, and boredom, was over, his serene, unclouded face, was a marvelment to behold. Very great distinction and sweetness was visible there together with much nobility, and love, all magnified and commingled."<sup>2</sup> The seriousness of this passage jars with Firbank's detached frivolousness in the rest of the novel. It is as if he realized that morality, though a convention, has its roots in human nature. Yet the obtrusion of seriousness on Firbank's world makes it cruel and morbid. This sometimes happens in *Cardinal Pirelli* and *Prancing Nigger* when Firbank stops frolicking.

Firbank's work is ageless and apparently too fantastic to be viewed as the mirror of a period. His wit, his nonsensical jokes, his gaiety and the atmosphere of irresponsibility and inconsequence of his novels can be enjoyed for their own sake. He brought to the novel a technique which allies dispassionate observation and economy and is particularly suited to record the surface life and the chit-chat of society. He is the first modern writer to have caught and exactly reproduced the tone of futile social intercourse. Firbank has an ear for conversation, and, like

<sup>1</sup> Ronald FIRBANK, *Valmouth*, in *op. cit.*, p. 404.

<sup>2</sup> *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli*, p. 698.



a tape-recorder, he transcribes without comment the incoherent bits of talk which make up the chatter of a crowd. All his novels and almost all his chapters start abruptly in the middle of a conversation as if one suddenly came upon a group of people without knowing who they are and what they are talking about. There is no transition between the chapters or "scenes"; they are juxtaposed with little or no narrative, a method which enhances the impression of dislocation in the social world he creates.

There are traces of a belated Romanticism in Firbank's work, particularly in *Odette* and *Santal*. His preciousness and his artificiality, his deliberate exclusion of morality from art, the frivolity of his characters and their immunity from the everyday world, these point to an aestheticism inherited from the Nineties. Only three of Firbank's novels were actually published in the Twenties: *The Flower Beneath the Foot* (1923), *Prancing Nigger* (1924), *Concerning the Eccentricities of Cardinal Pirelli* (1926), and only *Vainglory* (1915), *Caprice* (1917) and *Valmouth* (1918) take place in England. Yet his work exemplifies the tone, the manner and the mood which came to be identified with the fashionable English society of the Twenties. In a way he anticipated their behaviour by imagining people who want to avoid responsibility and take refuge in art and pleasure; after the War the younger generation recognized their own attitudes in his novels. This may account to some extent for his success in the Twenties and for the revival of interest in his work after the Second World War. The innumerable parties, the jazzband always playing *The Blue Banana* in the background of a social gathering, a queen with her crown on, crossing her capital on an errand in an open automobile, the gossip columnists, and fashionable ladies untiringly cheerful and greeting each other with "My Dear, what a honeymoon hat!", all these are part of the hectic and frivolous atmosphere of the Twenties. A disrupted world is created by the apparently random assemblage of conversations intended to convey an impression of pleasant confusion. Moreover, since the dialogue and the surface life it renders seem to make up the whole existence of Firbank's characters, life itself is reduced to nothingness.

Without deliberately intending to satirize society Firbank exposes its chaotic state and the dissoluteness of its morals by revelling in the follies of his private world. By recording non-

committally the eccentric talk of fashionable people and by making light of barely suggested tragedy, he initiates a method, later to be exploited by Waugh, by which situations and characters become self-satirizing. He doesn't make fun of elderly ladies boasting shamelessly of their infatuation for young boys; nor does he comment on the irresponsibility or the snobbery of his characters. There is no penalty or retribution for whatever attitude they adopt, but the author's detachment or his delight makes them all the more grotesque or ridiculous. The chimerical world of Firbank's novels might suggest any period; if it weren't for a few details in the setting, one couldn't even place it. But it stages a rootless and disintegrating society, and its very singularity indicates a desire, common to many people in the Twenties, to escape from the pressure of society into a world of their own.<sup>1</sup> It is a mad world, whose frantic gaiety doesn't quite succeed in keeping out the sense of impending disaster. Yet the gaiety outlives many frustrations and disappointments. This cheerfulness at all costs is due to a sense of the transiency of life and of the fragility of human beings, which makes them eager to enjoy the present moment and to escape from the burden of ordinary life. Of course, the people who do so are necessarily the idle rich, who can afford to be eccentric or indifferent to criticism because their position is taken for granted.

Firbank strives after perfection both in his style and in the beauty of the world he creates. Whatever his intention, he does convey a vision of an unsound world; he never sees it as a whole but always piecemeal, and he brings the bits together in the most unexpected ways. By imitating him and adapting his method to their needs, both Huxley and Waugh recognized their debt to an artist who had opened the way to the expression of a new rhythm of life; they sensed in his fantasies the throb of modern neurotic society. They made theirs the irreverence, the delight in shocking, the slightly bitter satisfaction at stressing the unpredictability and instability of life, and Waugh perfected his technique of neutral observation. Like Firbank, Huxley and Waugh felt the melancholy and disillusion which underlie this avid search for pleasure.

<sup>1</sup> According to Grant Richards, this must have been how Firbank felt even during the War, for he was in constant fear of being forced into the army. *Author Hunting*, London, 1960, p. 200.

Firbank's world is too heartless to be genuinely gay: the absence of love, the lack of faith in human nature, the selfish enjoyment of life, the total disconnection between people or social groups make the individual unspeakably lonely. To stress this aspect of his work would destroy the delicate web of his fanciful creations and endow him with a seriousness out of proportion with his achievement; it would also seem irrelevant to the atmosphere of careless extravagance in his novels. But when the merry-making is interrupted for a moment, one is appalled at the futility of it all.

## ALDOUS HUXLEY

Not a soul  
But felt a fever of the mad, and play'd  
Some tricks of desperation.

(*The Tempest*, I, ii, 208-10)

For myself, as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom; we objected to the political and economic system because it was unjust. The supporters of these systems claimed that in some way they embodied the meaning of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confusing these people and at the same time justifying ourselves in our political and erotic revolt: we could deny that the world had any meaning whatsoever.<sup>1</sup>

The philosophy of meaninglessness is the essence of Huxley's early novels, of those witty and merciless satires in which he exposes the spiritual disease of the post-war generation. Huxley was an eloquent interpreter of the feverish mood of the Twenties. His clever and sardonic criticism of his contemporaries lays bare the futility and immorality of a social class which seeks oblivion in pleasure. He expresses the unavowed despair which underlies their defiant negation of values and shows the vulnerability of modern man, his distrust of his fellow-beings and his reluctance to face life responsibly. His characters are mostly upper-class people who can still afford to lead a leisured existence and divide their time between house-parties and travels; or they are artists and intellectuals of the type which Wyndham Lewis so much despised for corrupting "genius" and undermining the greatness

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Ends and Means*, London, 1946, p. 273.

of Western civilization. All of them are sophisticated people who refuse to take life seriously and either become cynics or are secretly distressed about their own negative attitude. In a sense, the type of characters he presents in his early novels and what he reveals of their way of life limit the bearing of his satires. On the other hand, the comments of his intellectuals on the human condition give his work an air of universality which often leaves the reader wondering at the perspicacity and the breadth of the author's judgment. This and the topical character of his novels explain their success, though Huxley has always been both a widely read and a controversial writer.

It is a commonplace to say that Huxley can create neither a plot nor characters and that his novels consist in bringing people together and making them talk. This form of fiction has been, if not vindicated, at least accounted for, by Frederick Hoffman,<sup>1</sup> who showed that Huxley used ideas as if they were animated persons and that he dramatized ideas instead of the life of his characters. His conversation-pieces are often a curious blend of urbane seriousness reminiscent of Peacock and of Furbankian frivolity. His method can hardly render the reality of life or of people, for it only reveals a limited aspect of the human personality. But the characters' exchange of ideas and the glimpse we have of their behaviour make clear the individual and social attitudes he wishes to interpret. Huxley does not present life itself but the approach to life of a particular social class. As has often been pointed out, he is his own most lucid critic. The mixture of superior irony and bitterness in his satires may be accounted for by his twofold capacity as detached observer and self-deprecating actor in the social game he presents: in each of them an intelligent but frustrated young man vainly attempts to come to terms with life. The novels published by Huxley between the Wars are to some extent the story of these attempts and of his own spiritual development.

In *Crome Yellow* Mr. Scogan sums up the plot of the novel Denis is writing as follows:

Little Percy, the hero, was never good at games, but he was always clever. He passes through the usual public

<sup>1</sup> Frederick HOFFMAN, "Aldous Huxley and the Novel of Ideas," in *Forms of Modern Fiction*, pp. 189-200.



school and the usual university and comes to London, where he lives among the artists. He is bowed down with melancholy thought; he carries the whole weight of the universe upon his shoulders. He writes a novel of dazzling brilliance; he dabbles delicately in *Amour* and disappears, at the end of the book, into the luminous Future.<sup>1</sup>

This description also fits the plot of Huxley's first novels, with the difference that the hero never disappears into the luminous Future but remains stuck in the grim present. *Crome Yellow* (1921), *Antic Hay* (1923) and *Those Barren Leaves* (1925) were the first and most significant post-war novels which dealt with the predicament of the "Clever Young Man" in a confused society. Denis, Gumbriel Jr., Chelifer and to some extent Calamy illustrate different stages in the development of the artist or intellectual who wishes to reach perfection in art or in his chosen field and to discover the secret of personal happiness. These young men start in life with plenty of illusions about their future achievements and with vague ideals about the true, the good and the beautiful. But they are soon disappointed in their romantic expectations, and they are either unable to reconcile the real with the ideal or torn between idealism and the temptation to yield to the cynical nihilism of those with whom they associate. They are at once anxious to fit into society and to escape from it, eager to discover the quintessence of life behind its richness, yet afraid of its complexity and above all of committing themselves to a positive attitude. They are absolutely unprepared for life and unable to behave sensibly in a world which is itself without established standards or beliefs. That is why they are much more at ease in the world of ideas and wish, as artists, "to work [the manifestations of life] into an idea."<sup>2</sup> Denis, who feels so insecure and lost in the real world is acutely aware of the difficulty of living and is the more inclined to retire into an Ivory Tower:

One entered the world . . . having ready-made ideas about everything. One had a philosophy and tried to make life fit into it. One should have lived first and then made one's philosophy to fit life. . . . Life, facts, things were horribly complicated; ideas, even the most difficult of them, deceptively simple. In the world of ideas everything was clear;

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Crome Yellow*, Penguin Books, 1960, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

in life all was obscure, embroiled. Was it surprising that one was miserable, horribly unhappy? <sup>1</sup>

The consequence of the young man's inability to cope with ordinary life is an incapacity to act, particularly evident in his ineffectual endeavours to be a successful lover. Denis is seldom free from a sense of frustration because he can never take an initiative. Gumbriel also lacks self-assurance, but he puts on a semblance of decision and momentarily gains confidence by wearing a false beard. The mild and melancholy Gumbriel is thus transformed into a complete man and the transformation gives him power to act and to conquer where formerly he would have been hopelessly inefficient. But the episode is a farce; his completeness belongs to a fantasy world. It may help him to win the favour of Rosie, who also assumes a false personality to gain assurance, but when he discards his disguise in order to please the innocent Emily, he is unable to resist the challenge issued by Myra Viveash to destroy their relationship: he renounces his chances of being happy with Emily and allows himself to be dragged into a vacuum. As to Chelifer, he denies the potential richness of life much more consciously and determinedly. Whereas Denis's disenchantment finds expression in nostalgia and a melodramatic death-wish, and Gumbriel's in gloom and self-disgust, Chelifer becomes deliberately cynical on the ground that "Reality gives imagination the lie direct." <sup>2</sup> His cynicism is a form of self-protection, for he wants to avoid being disappointed again. He is rightly called a "reversed sentimentalist," for the obstinacy with which he kills all pleasure and joy in life and confines his existence to a mediocre reality is proportionate to his former exaggerated idealism.

The disenchantment of Huxley's early heroes is partly an effect of their sense of isolation. Whether in the secluded world of Crome, in the hectic atmosphere of post-war London, or in the sophisticated, cosmopolitan setting of an Italian palazzo, everyone goes about in search of his own pleasure. The characters seem to have been brought together by mere chance; they talk but share no particular interest, purpose or feeling, and their relations with one another are mostly based on pretence. They are people without love and without compassion, unaware of others as human

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Those Barren Leaves*, London, 1950, p. 149.

beings capable of joy and suffering. They are "all silent and all damned," Denis reflects looking at his companions. They are, indeed, incapable of real communication, isolated in their own thoughts, interests and concern with themselves. It is Denis again who deplores that "we are all parallel straight lines,"<sup>1</sup> while Myra Viveash actually wishes "one could manage things on the principle of railways! Parallel tracks—that was the thing."<sup>2</sup> The older generation refuse even more deliberately to take an interest in their fellow-men: "People aren't in my line," says Henry Wimbush, "They don't interest me, they give me no emotion."<sup>3</sup> He looks forward to the time when it will be possible "to live in dignified seclusion, surrounded by the delicate attentions of silent and graceful machines, and entirely secure from human intrusion."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Gumbriel Sr. acknowledges his incapacity to deal with people: "Most of them I don't like at all, not at all"; he only aspires to privacy: "No need to look on the dirty world or let the dirty world look on you."<sup>5</sup> Like Wimbush, he seeks refuge in the past by building miniature seventeenth-century cities. These older people have retained a sense of decency and are capable of generosity, but they have always lived in a fairly closed world and refuse to open their minds to change and progress or even to take an interest in mankind. Gumbriel Jr. rightly guesses that his father is more attached to his models than to himself. He sees in his father one of the few individuals who might personify his own ideal of the true, the good and the beautiful, but he is also aware of the futility of his father's life purpose. Unable to discover anything worthwhile around him, he comes to think that "It's altogether too late in the day to have dreams,"<sup>6</sup> and he renounces his ideal.

Most Huxleyan heroes react like Gumbriel to the ambient barrenness. They are too weak to resist the spiritual disease of their day and they readily give up the human values they had meant to uphold. Gumbriel himself offers the best example of sheer irresponsibility, for he is sensitive enough to be aware of what he misses by allowing the "desiccated waste" to extend around him.

<sup>1</sup> *Crome Yellow*, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Antic Hay*. Penguin Books, 1960, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> *Crome Yellow*, p. 61.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>5</sup> *Antic Hay*, pp. 27 and 29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

There are quiet places also in the mind. . . . But we build bandstands and factories on them. Deliberately—to put a stop to the quietness. We don't like the quietness. All the thoughts, all the preoccupations in my head—round and round continually. . . . And the jazz bands, the music-hall songs, the boys shouting with the news. What's it for? What's it all for? To put an end to the quiet, to break it up and disperse it, to pretend at any cost that it isn't there. Ah, but it is; it is there, in spite of everything. Lying awake at night, sometimes—not restlessly, but serenely, waiting for sleep—the quiet reestablishes itself, piece by piece; all the broken bits, all the fragments of it we've been so busily dispersing all day long—a crystal quiet, a growing, expanding crystal. It grows, it becomes more perfect. . . . And at last you are more conscious of something approaching; it is almost a faint sound of footsteps. Something inexpressibly lovely advances through the crystal, nearer, nearer. And, oh, inexpressibly terrifying. For if it were to touch you, if it were to seize and engulf you, you'd die. . . . But one can't face the advancing thing. One daren't. It's too terrifying, it's too painful to die. Quickly before it's too late, start the factory wheels, bang the drum, blow up the saxophone. Think of the women you'd like to sleep with, the schemes for making money, the gossip about your friends, the last outrage of the politicians. Anything for a diversion. Break the silence, smash the crystal to pieces. There it lies in bits. And by this time the lovely and terrifying thing is three infinites away, at least. And you lie tranquilly on your bed, thinking of what you'd do if you had ten thousand pounds, and of all the fornications you'll never commit.<sup>1</sup>

Though this passage is a rather poor attempt at conveying Gumbriel's intuition of another reality, it explains the moral cowardice which makes people seek refuge in a destructive nihilism. *Antic Hay* is Huxley's most cruel satire of the aimlessness and spiritual confusion which prevailed in the coteries of artists and intellectuals in post-war London. Each character in the novel stands for a distorted attitude, whether in art, intellectual pursuit, or emotional and spiritual life. In Lypiatt, as in Mary Thriplow in *Those Barren Leaves*, Huxley satirizes a belated and sham romanticism and exposes with cruel lucidity the spiritual poverty of people who use art and beauty to conceal their emptiness. Both stimulate passions with their minds because they are emotionally impotent, and both

<sup>1</sup> *Antic Hay*, pp. 146-7.

deceive themselves by pretending to feelings which they never experience. Lypiatt is quick to denounce the nihilism of his friends: "Ideals—they're not sufficiently genteel for you civilized young men. You've outgrown that sort of thing. No dream, no religion, no morality."<sup>1</sup> But for all his noisy and self-intoxicating declarations about life and art he is an artist without talent or vision who is eventually made to face his nothingness and loses all sense of dignity when he seriously contemplates suicide without having the courage to commit it.

Mercaptan is a counterpart to Lypiatt. In his little rococo boudoir he enjoys "conversations across the polished mahogany . . . and delicately lascivious *witty* flirtations on ample sofas inhabited by the soul of Crebillon fils."<sup>1</sup> He is a dilettante completely cut off from reality: "*Homo au naturel . . . ça pue*. What I glory in is the civilized, middle way between stink and asepsis."<sup>1</sup> He revels in his small, soulless, degenerate world, and his cultivation of "refinement" leads him to the complete negation of feeling and life. Lypiatt rightly sums up what his existence amounts to:

'You disgust me—you and your odious little sham eighteenth-century civilization; your piddling little poetry; your art for art's sake instead of for God's sake; your nauseating little copulations without love or passion; your hoggish materialism; your bestial indifference to all that's unhappy and your yelping hatred of all that's great.' (p. 48)

Yet Mercaptan's hatred of life seems trivial compared to Coleman's satanic depravity. The latter is a cynic who revels in degradation and filth. Unlike Spandrell, whom he foreshadows, he does not feel it necessary to account for his perversion, which may simply be due to the horror of an immature man for sex: "The real charm about debauchery is its total pointlessness, futility and above all its incredible tediousness." (p. 186) He finds it particularly interesting to watch children "tobogganging down into the cess-pools" and he derives an additional satisfaction from the sense that he is committing a sin: "It's only when you believe in God and especially in hell, that you can really begin enjoying life." (p. 223) He takes good care not to be contaminated by other people's weaknesses and makes fun of them while doing his best to destroy

<sup>1</sup> *Antic Hay*, p. 47.



their illusions. There is one person, however, whom he is careful to avoid: Myra Viveash, the fashionable beauty whose eyes have "a formidable capacity for looking and expressing nothing." She destroys whomever she allures with her expiring death-bed voice. Her life is a void, an infinite boredom, a cold and heartless game with other people's lives. She is largely responsible for Gumbriel's disenchantment, she ruins Lypiatt's life and destroys Shearwater's peace of mind. The latter is another perverted intellectual, a physiologist interested in science for its own sake, in the functions of the human body but not in man. He tries to forget Myra Viveash by devoting himself to grotesque and pointless experiences. At the end of the novel he pedals unceasingly on a stationary bicycle while Mrs. Viveash looks on and comments discouragingly: "To-morrow . . . will be as awful as to-day." (p. 254) In fact, it is not surprising that Gumbriel, Lypiatt and Shearwater should be so completely subjugated by Myra Viveash, who symbolizes the destructive nihilism to which they adhere, what she calls "Nil, omnipresent nil, world-soul, spiritual informer of all matter." (p. 170) The depressing conclusion of Huxley's early novels is that the hero agrees to live in a vacuum with his joyless pleasures, his disgust towards himself and others and his concealed hopelessness.

The selfishness of Huxley's characters and their escapism is deeply related to their inability or their unwillingness to face their own nature. None of them can reconcile the potential spiritual greatness of man with what they consider as his physical repulsiveness. They either try to ignore the body or become cynically sensual. Most of them could say with Scogan: "Nature or anything that reminds of nature disturbs me."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Scogan and Cardan, the two elderly commentators on life in *Crome Yellow* and *Those Barren Leaves*, deplore the futility of attempting to transcend the limitations of the self. In moments of depression Cardan is reminded that the body suffers degradingly, dies and is eaten by maggots. In his urbane manner he declares that the final triumph of the flesh over the body is a farce which the wise man forgets lest it should spoil the pleasures of the spirit as well as of the body. But he cannot ignore the fact that spiritual decline keeps pace with bodily decay and he is aware of being in a blind alley because he has never discovered what

<sup>1</sup> *Crome Yellow*, p. 133.

might have harmonized his split personality and given his life its "raison d'être." This self-division is the dilemma of all Huxleyan heroes; they are caught in the vicious circle of their dichotomy and emotional sterility: as pure intellectuals or pure sensualists they are emotionally sterile, while this incapacity to feel makes them either turn exclusively to the realm of the spirit where man can be "magnificent, strong and free," or yield to the physical with self-disgust. Their insensitiveness is further increased by the interest with which they analyse what feelings they may experience. Denis is so busy dissecting all his feelings and actions that he is unaware of "all the vast conscious world of men outside him; they symbolized something that in his studious solitariness he was apt not to believe in."<sup>1</sup> How impoverishing this process of self-analysis can be is illustrated in such artists as Mary Thriplow and Philip Quarles, the novelist in *Point Counter Point*.

Huxley's satire of the English upper classes in the Twenties seems to have much in common with Wyndham Lewis's: both writers attribute the decline in their characters' standards of behaviour to their self-division and express the same contempt for all that is not intelligence and common sense in man. However, whereas Lewis views man's dichotomy as a desirable condition and criticizes his contemporaries for cultivating the wrong half of their personality, Huxley sees in that dichotomy the source of man's confusion and tragic plight. It is true that, like Lewis, he is unable to create a character capable of behaving as a normal human being, a fact which accounts for his partial failure as a novelist. On the other hand, he at least discriminates between sensations and feelings and satirizes his characters' callousness and unwholesome approach to life. In his early novels there are also occasional touches of sympathy and understanding which now and then take the place of real insight and prevent his work from being purely satirical; this also reveals his deeper awareness of the complexity of life. Huxley attempts to convey the duality of man through a mixture of seriousness and farce in his characters' behaviour; he naturally uses the farcical or the grotesque to render their incapacity to cope with life. Thus the dignified Henry Wimbush shrinks from human contact but enjoys the spectacle of pigs breeding in numbers and delights in the eccentricities of his

<sup>1</sup> *Crome Yellow*, p. 137.

ancestors. His family chronicle is in fact a historical account of the growing split in man's personality and of his increasing reluctance to face his nature and the reality of life. Crome was built in the seventeenth century by Sir Ferdinando, who was preoccupied with one problem: "the proper placing of his privies." He found the necessities of nature so incompatible with the greatness of man that he wanted the privies to be the rooms nearest to heaven, "provided with windows commanding an extensive and noble prospect. . . . lined with bookshelves containing all the ripest products of human wisdom . . . which testify to the nobility of the human soul."<sup>1</sup> In the eighteenth century Sir Hercules, a dwarf, built for himself and his wife a beautiful miniature world and committed suicide when he realized that its artificial refinement could not supersede or even keep out the brutishness of ordinary men. In the nineteenth century the three romantic Lapith girls pretended to ignore their bodily existence and never ate in public until one of their suitors discovered that they gorged themselves in secret, and threatened to expose their greediness.

Crome is truly representative of this refusal to take men as they are: "It makes no compromise with nature, but affronts it and rebels against it," (p. 55) Mr. Scogan says. He himself feels only at home among the works of man, which are the "products of friendly and comprehensible minds," whereas nature even in those few aspects of it observable in a big city—the sky, an occasional tree, the flowers in the window-boxes—evokes a world "inhumanly large and complicated and obscure." Scogan and Cardan are both products of nineteenth-century materialism and belief in progress. They were brought up in an age when man thought he was conquering Nature. Scogan rejoices in the achievements of applied science which gradually replace natural functions, but like Cardan, he is a disappointed man. Both are convinced that the majority of people in contemporary society are not sufficiently intelligent to make use of progress and civilization or even of their increasing freedom; whatever class they belong to, they are all becoming bourgeois, i.e., domesticated and degraded animals. Scogan and Cardan favour the creation of a Rational State in which the men of intelligence "will learn to harness the insanities to the service of reason." However, the confidence of these staunch

<sup>1</sup> *Crome Yellow*, p. 56.

rationalists in the men of intelligence is not devoid of irony, for the élite to which they belong has ceased to feel responsible and would not be able to govern. They are themselves unable to deal with life. Mr. Scogan has no other resource to comfort Denis than his disenchanting nihilism: "What's the point of it all? All is vanity. . . . But then why allow oneself to be distressed? After all, we all know that there's no ultimate point. But what difference does that make?" (p. 166) At sixty-five Cardan finds solitude too disquieting even for a day; he is afraid of poverty and death, and he coaxes a simpleton into marrying him in order to secure her fortune. The simpleton dies, and he is again faced with the prospect of solitude and poverty. Huxley often resorts to the grotesque to describe the whims of the older generation. Lilian Aldwinkle, Cardan's elderly hostess in *Those Barren Leaves*, also loses all sense of propriety and dignity when she tries to become Chelifer's mistress. All these people are the spiritual inheritors of Crome, for none are able to face life or to integrate into the world of men.

Huxley's typical young hero does not, like Waugh's, reappear in each work as the same naive and slightly obtuse character. Unlike Denis, Gumbriel does not lament over a missed opportunity. He very soon makes his the philosophy of his generation: "[One] takes things as they come. . . . It seems so obvious. One enjoys the pleasant things, avoids the nasty ones. There's nothing more to be said."<sup>1</sup> Gradually, however, the temptation to adhere to an ideal becomes more insistent and, when rejected, leads to a more bitter form of nihilism. In *Those Barren Leaves* Chelifer and Calamy embody two antithetic aspects of a split personality. Both have reached the same dead end: Chelifer is a poet who adheres with perverse obstinacy to a self-inflicted mediocre existence on the ground that he has no right to ignore the real character of the contemporary world: "Religion, patriotism, the moral order, humanitarianism, social reform—we have all of us, I imagine, dropped those overboard long ago. But we still cling pathetically to art. . . . It's time to smash the last and silliest of the idols . . . [to] put away the ultimate and sweetest of the inebriants and wake up at last completely sober—among the dustbins at the bottom of the area steps." (pp. 84-85) He, therefore, seeks

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

out "the heart of reality" and, with feigned detachment, describes his life as "one unceasing slide through nothing." (p. 108) Unlike Chelifer, Calamy does not make ordinary life a source of self-torment and he does not gloat over its horrors. However, his attempt to escape from a meaningless world is not very convincing. When he is too blasé to go on with the social game, he decides to give his life a purpose, and he transforms his predecessors' motto "one takes things as they come" into: "The man of sense sees the world neither too rosilily nor too biliously and passes on. There is the ulterior reality to be looked for." (p. 371) This sentence and Calamy's retirement from society foreshadow the spiritual quest described in *Eyeless in Gaza*. It should be noted, however, that even at this early stage the "ulterior reality" is presented as a refuge from the world; it does not transform the hero's vision of it or his life in it. Indeed, Calamy takes for granted the "wearisome condition of humanity" and bases his search on his self-division because he thinks that he must ignore the body to be able to explore the depths of the mind. Both Chelifer and Calamy evade a positive attitude to life in exactly the same manner: the former chooses a soulless reality and rejects the temptation of the mind, while the latter gives up the flesh reluctantly to cultivate the spirit. But Calamy's mysticism is only a false start; the Huxleyan hero is not yet prepared to reject this world for a timeless and spiritual peacefulness.

*Those Barren Leaves* is the last of Huxley's novels in which the detached observer satirizes the aimlessness and sterile agitation of a disrupted society and cannot refrain from finding the spectacle amusing. Apart from *Brave New World* they are in their limited way his most successful novels and come nearest to achieving his purpose, which might be likened to that of Knockespotch, the imaginary author whose tales Mr. Scogan so much appreciates:

Oh, those Tales—those Tales! How shall I describe them? Fabulous characters shoot across his pages like gaily dressed performers on the trapeze. There are extraordinary adventures and still more extraordinary speculations. Intelligences and emotions, relieved of all the imbecile preoccupations of civilized life, move in intricate and subtle dances, crossing and recrossing, advancing, retreating, impinging. An immense erudition and an immense fancy go hand in hand. All the ideas of the present and of the past, on every



possible subject, bob up among the Tales, smile gravely or grimace a caricature of themselves, then disappear to make place for something new. The verbal surface of his writing is rich and fantastically diversified. The wit is incessant.<sup>1</sup>

The particular zest of these tales lies precisely in their lack of meaning. "I am tired of seeing the human mind bogged in a social planum," Knockespotch is supposed to have said, "I prefer to paint it in a vacuum, fully and sportively bombinating." (p. 81) The trouble with Huxley's characters is that they are never quite free to frolic as they please. Unlike Firbank's or Waugh's characters, they allow their pleasure to be marred by the bitterness or self-disgust which makes cynics of them. Their distrust of their fellow-men and their lack of illusions about them, their indifference to personal tragedy often clash with their apparent concern for the greatness and progress of humanity as a whole. Moreover, the characters who denounce modern society and the folly of men are themselves responsible for the breakdown of moral standards and beliefs. This emphasizes the absence of conviction in Huxley's early work. The worst sin in his eyes is stupidity, "being unaware," and the greatest good is intelligence, which, as he more or less acknowledges, is powerless to make men behave reasonably. But by the end of his third novel Huxley is clearly growing tired of eccentricity and is ready to give up negativism.

In *Jesting Pilate* Huxley compares life to a melody in which separate moments are meaningless but all the moments put together reveal the nature of the tune and its significance:

At any given moment life is completely senseless. But viewed over a long period it seems to reveal itself as an organism existing in time, having a purpose, tending in a certain direction . . . it is conceivable that the moment of world existence, of which we are each aware during a human lifetime, may be an essential part in a musical whole that is yet to be unfolded.<sup>2</sup>

This idea is exploited in *Point Counter Point* (1928), which marks the beginning of Huxley's quest for meaning in life and in art.

<sup>1</sup> *Crome Yellow*, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Jesting Pilate*, London, 1948, pp. 150-1.

He creates a microcosm whose numerous parts illustrate a central theme unfolding contrapuntally like a musical fugue. As in Huxley's previous novels, this theme is the refusal of man to face his own nature and the dichotomy that ensues from his escapism. But for the first time Huxley suggests that men might be reconciled with their condition if only they realized that they are parts of an organic whole to whose nature they contribute unconsciously. His purpose is to offer a synthesis of life and to render its complexity and richness, "to get the whole range of thought and feeling" and convey it in a harmonious composition in which individual elements find their proper place. Describing the execution of Bach's suite in B minor, Huxley stresses its contrapuntal structure and compares its interpreters to the orchestra of human life:

The parts live their separate lives; they touch, their paths cross, they combine for a moment to create a seemingly final and perfected harmony, only to break apart again. Each is always alone and separate and individual. 'I am I' asserts the violin; 'the world resolves round me.' 'Round me' calls the cello. 'Round me' the flute insists. And all are equally right and equally wrong; and none of them will listen to the others.<sup>1</sup>

The plot of the novel develops on several planes on which a series of variations takes place: Huxley brings together different sorts of people in the same place, or simultaneous scenes involve closely related people, or again he shows different characters reacting in their own way to the same event. Moreover, each theme—for instance, sensuality or mysticism—is given a different twist or emphasis according to the character who illustrates it. The first theme introduces Walter Bidlake tired of his mistress, Marjorie Carling, who is with child. In spite of her entreaties he leaves her to attend a party at Lady Tantamount's, where most characters are present. Walter is in love with Lucy Tantamount, a hard and cold woman, who eventually accepts him as her lover and makes him suffer. Illidge comes down from the laboratory to listen to the music. He is of lower-class origin and a communist. He meets Webley, the fascist leader. Later in the novel he associates with Spandrell to kill Webley. The latter, an idealist and a man of action, is in love with Elinor Quarles, Walter's sister.

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Point Counter Point*, London, 1930, p. 32.

She is waiting for Webley when she is called to her parents' country-house where her child has been taken ill with meningitis. Instead of Elinor, Webley finds Spandrell and Illidge, who kill him. Shortly afterwards little Phil dies. Spandrell commits suicide. Another theme is illustrated by Burlap, the rapacious editor for whom Walter works. He succeeds in seducing Beatrice, an ageing virgin who works for him. The novel ends with Beatrice and Burlap having a bath together while a secretary whom Burlap has dismissed commits suicide. A number of secondary characters add to the variations on the themes Huxley develops: Lady Tantamount revels in social blunders; her husband, a distinguished biologist addicted to science for its own sake, is incapable of personal relations and outside the laboratory behaves like a child of ten, "a fossil mid-Victorian child, preserved intact." Lord Gattenden, his brother, tries to prove the existence of God mathematically and takes revenge on the universe for being a cripple by ignoring the world of appearances. John Bidlake, Walter's father, once a very talented painter and a sensualist, is reduced to a human wreck by old age and cancer; he takes refuge with his wife Janet, whom he has always neglected. Mr. Quarles, Philip's father, a fake intellectual, spends his time doing cross-words and compensates for his sense of inferiority by having love affairs with young typists.

This vast network of themes and characters illustrates the evils which poison man's life and modern society. Moral cowardice, unhealthy spirituality, sensualism, cold intellectualism, bitterness and discontent, cynicism, action of its own sake or for the sake of a false ideal, lack of sensibility, hypocrisy, all these evils are illustrated and opposed to the warm humaneness of Mark and Mary Rampion, who are portraits of D.H. Lawrence and his wife. The Rampions do not share in the action; they are brought in whenever Huxley wants to contrast their healthy conception of life with the perversity or weakness of the other characters. For this reason Rampion gives the impression of not being integrated in the orchestra, and the sense of harmony which he was no doubt intended to create is absent from the novel. "What I complain of," says Mark Rampion, "is the horrible unwholesome tameness of our world." (p. 129) The world is tame because people have been domesticated by the all-powerful institutions which govern modern Western civilization. This tameness is unwholesome because instincts and

spontaneous living are being restrained. Rampion analyses man's inner division and attributes it to religion, science and business (Jesus-Newton-Ford) which "ripped the life out of our bodies and stuffed us with hatred." (p. 162) Religion is responsible for man's ideals, for his effort to be better or other than merely human. When man tries to be an angel or a devil, the only possible result is death, which is also the outcome of industrialism, the monster born from the combined efforts of science and business. Its effects are felt everywhere, even in education, which inspires children with a love for machinery, and in art, which expresses the spirit of industrialism by sterilizing life out of things. Industrialism is supported by political parties which advocate americanization even in Russia: on both sides, machinery takes people to hell, only in Russia the rich men have been replaced by government officials. The industrial civilization is the fruit of an excessive intellectualism which serves the new gods instead of serving man and provokes inward decay, infantilism, degeneration and all sorts of madness and primitive reversion. For Rampion, the evil is rooted in the individual so that it is the individual psychological outlook which must be reformed. The only absolutely evil act that a man can perform is an act against life, against his own integrity. Rampion pleads for life with a passion truly reminiscent of Lawrence, though unfortunately he is no more than a mouthpiece for the latter's ideas:

Our truth, the relevant human truth, is something you discover by living completely with the whole man... Nobody's asking you to be anything but a man. A man, mind you. Not an angel or a devil. A man's a creature on a tightrope, walking delicately equilibrated with mind and consciousness and spirit at one end of his balancing pole and body and instinct and all that's unconscious and earthy and mysterious at the other. *Balanced*. . . . And the only absolute he can ever really know is the absolute of perfect balance. (pp. 555-60)

The character who is most strikingly opposed to Rampion is Spandrell with his strange mixture of cynicism, debauchery and asceticism. He finds all human beings hateful and boring, and boasts of depraving young girls whom he makes desperate by revealing to them the full horror of their corruption. As Rampion rightly guesses, his motive is hatred of sex: "You hate the very

basis of your life, its ultimate basis. . . . Not only you. All these people. . . . It's the disease of modern man." (p. 161) Spandrell pursues sin systematically in order to prove the existence of God, for "some people can only realize goodness by offending against it." (p. 215) When he becomes used to the wrongness of acts he at first thought sinful, he sees no other solution than to commit more serious offences. After killing Webley in order to prove the existence of God, he discovers that his crime is more stupid than horrible and that, whatever he does, he remains on the dust-heap. Just before committing suicide, he invites the Rampions to listen to Beethoven's A minor quartet in order to discover with them in the "Heiliger Dankgesang" the proof that God exists. Spandrell experiences a moment of perfect serenity, though to Rampion his intense spirituality is equivalent to death because it is achieved "by throwing half of himself in the paper basket." The reverse attitude is Lucy's cold, civilized lasciviousness. She rejects Walter's tenderness because she wants to be emotionally free. Like Spandrell, she is confined to solitude and to a "deathly sort of liveliness." Rampion thinks that promiscuous love-making is the ascetic's contempt for the body expressed in a different way. When people hate life, their only alternative is promiscuity or asceticism, two forms of death. Burlap's perversity and hypocrisy and Marjorie's unwholesome spirituality are other manifestations of fear and hatred of life.

The characters of *Point Counter Point* serve as models for one among them, the novelist Philip Quarles, who is himself writing a novel about a novelist. Philip is a semi-autobiographical character, and his notebook offers illuminating comments on Huxley's purpose and achievement in *Point Counter Point*; it also makes clear why Huxley was attracted to Lawrence's view of life but unable to adhere to it. Like Rampion, Philip thinks that an excessive development of the mental functions leads to the atrophy of the other features of the human personality. He realizes that actual living is more difficult than the intellectual life, that even the "Search for Truth" is a refined substitute for genuine living. He shares Rampion's ideas, but he is unable to live up to them, "to transform a detached intellectual scepticism into a way of harmonious all-round living." (p. 440) "It is easy to believe one ought to change one's mode of living," he says, "The difficulty is to act on the belief." (p. 473) His mother's efforts to induce in him



a desire to give himself, Elinor's attempts to make him more human even by encouraging him to have affairs with other women, are unavailing. Emotionally, he remains an alien, using his wife as a go-between in his relations with the outside world. If only for the sake of his work, he rather wishes that he could really feel those emotions which he understands so thoroughly, or be one of those personalities he so readily assumes, but at heart he prefers to remain emotionally free even if this means being confined to his own mind; after all he is only safe in the world of ideas, and there at least he is certain of his superiority. Elinor, the most normal and human character in the novel, suffers from his attitude: he cannot give her the human warmth she craves for. His poor attempts at intimacy fail, and Elinor, who admires Webley but doesn't love him, feels that unfaithfulness is the only way in which she can shake Philip out of his indifference. Characteristically, Webley is a man of action and violent emotions, Philip's exact opposite. The latter realizes that his relationship with his wife has come to a crisis but all he does is use it as a basis for the plot of a novel.

In his notes on the musicalization of fiction Philip expresses his desire to convey life in its immediacy, by allowing an equal part to intuition and intellect. This is clearly what Huxley attempts to do in *Point Counter Point*. But if he can observe people and describe their states of mind, he cannot infuse them with a life of their own nor present them as he sees them: "multifarious, inconsistent, self-contradictory."<sup>1</sup> The structure of the novel and his approach to the characters are determined by a turn of mind which is also Philip's:

The essential character of the self consisted precisely in that liquid and undeformable ubiquity; in that capacity to espouse all contours and yet remain unfixd in any form, to take, and with an equal facility efface, impressions. To such moulds as his spirit might from time to time occupy, to such hard and burning obstacles as it might flow round, emerge, and, itself cold, penetrate to the fiery heart of, no permanent loyalty was owing. The moulds were emptied as easily as they had been filled, the obstacles were passed by. But the essential liquidness that flowed where it would, the cool indifferent flux of intellectual curiosity—that

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Do What You Will*, London, 1929, p. 81.

persisted and to that his loyalty was due. If there was any single way of life he could lastingly believe in, it was that mixture of pyrrhonism and stoicism which had struck him, an inquiring schoolboy among the philosophers, as the height of human wisdom and into whose mould of sceptical indifference he had poured his unimpassioned adolescence. (pp. 269-70)

It is this "essential liquidness" and "the cool indifferent flux of intellectual curiosity" which make Huxley look at life from different angles: "Multiplicity of eyes and multiplicity of aspects seen. . . . Each sees, professionally, a different aspect of the event, a different layer of reality. What I want to do is to look with all those eyes at once." (p. 266) By looking at life through the eyes of his many characters and by describing their reactions to it, Huxley presents a wide range of contemporary attitudes. Through the development of various themes, the confrontation of characters and the clash of ideas, he explores various aspects of life. This naturally emphasizes the heterogeneous character of contemporary society; it also allows the author to expose a number of aberrations which estrange men from their real nature as well as the diversity of escapes they devise. Actually, Huxley denounces the same evils as in his previous novels, with the difference that eccentricity is no longer farcical but life-destroying and a frequent source of tragedy. He widens the scope of his criticism by examining the philosophic tendencies of the Twenties in their vulgarized and often distorted expressions and by giving examples of the class-hatred and the political squabbles between fascists and communists in England at the time. In order to achieve completeness he "assume[s] the god-like creative privilege and elect[s] to consider the events in the story in their various aspects—emotional, scientific, economic, religious, metaphysical, etc." (p. 409) Still, however comprehensive his vision of the contemporary world, however accurate his diagnosis of the disease of modern industrial society, the novel is, to use his own words, a "made-up affair" and "slightly monstrous."

Huxley was aware that the multiplicity which underlies the structure of his novel might result in "a too tyrannical imposition of the author's will." (p. 409) This is certainly true in so far as each character's life is made consistent with the ideas he illustrates and his fate is the inevitable outcome of his approach to life.

"Everything that happens is intrinsically like the man it happens to," (p. 389) Spandrell says, an assertion substantiated by the kind of death he chooses. Similarly, Webley, who had appealed to force and violence, meets with a violent death. This determinism leaves little room for the autonomous development of characters; the latter behave as their creators expect them to. Like the novelist-zoologist in Philip's novel, Huxley's approach to his characters is that of a scientific observer who illustrates human vices through those of animals: he compares Lucy's cruelty with that of crocodiles and Spandrell's orgies with copulating snakes. He is sometimes amused, though mostly horrified, at their queer behaviour, but he assumes that they cannot be saved from themselves because he has no faith in human beings nor apparently in life. Indeed, it is his lack of any deep-set conviction that makes all truth relative in his eyes and makes it possible for him to look at life from multiple angles. It also undermines the authority of Rampion's position and explains why Philip Quarles cannot put into practice the ideas he shares with his friend. He adheres to the theory of inconsistency and advocates it, but he cannot be inconsistent himself, and instead of asserting passionately like Rampion that it is natural for man to be inconsistent, he demonstrates it rationally. In the end Quarles's fear of life and "congenital" incapacity to live integrally is Huxley's most eloquent comment on the tragic isolation of modern man.

*Point Counter Point* is a significant novel both as a criticism of modern civilization and as a landmark in Huxley's development. It shows a maturity unprecedented in his fiction and a deep insight into the human mind and soul. It is also Huxley's most humane work because of his attempt to interpret human suffering and of his lack of irony towards his main characters. He makes a serious endeavour to present life as a whole and to offer integral living as a way of redeeming man from the evils of modern life. Unfortunately, Rampion merely preaches his message, he is not shown living it. Moreover, Huxley has no intuition of wholeness; he illustrates the *idea* of wholeness by making multiplicity a substitute for it: "All you need is a sufficiency of characters and parallel contrapuntal plots." (p. 408) Nor does he reconcile passion with reason; at best he says that "the very possession of a body is a cynical comment on the soul and all its ways. It is

a piece of cynicism, however, which the soul must accept, whether it likes it or not." (p. 576) This remark, coming from Elinor at the end of the novel, is a confession of failure: the characters are incapable of integration, and the novel does not suggest that integration is possible. The orchestra presented by Huxley merely interprets fragments of isolated and unsatisfactory lives. The "abrupt transitions" are certainly present, but there are few of those subtle variations, of those exquisite and unexpected associations, of the fantasy or sadness which a musical fugue can convey. This is perhaps because most characters are consistently bad and show little real feeling, perhaps because, like Quarles, Huxley cannot deal with the simple manifestations of ordinary human feelings: "When it came to the simplicities, he lacked the talent—that talent which is of the heart no less than of the head, of the feelings, the sympathies, the intuitions, no less than of the analytical understanding." (p. 267) On the other hand, he draws a shrewd picture of the English social scene in the Twenties. By relating the experiences of individuals to the contemporary historical background, he throws light on the climate of death which prevailed after the First World War, impairing personal relations and poisoning man's life. His evocation of the social chaos shows that he still looks at humanity with the same horror and fear. Eventually, the central theme of the fugue drowns Rampion's voice and the ending of the novel is a sardonic comment on man's incorrigible perversion. Although Huxley was led to acknowledge the incompatibility of Lawrence's philosophy with his own approach to life and art, he kept from his association with him a conviction that man is and should remain whole: whereas in his first novels he had advocated reason as the sole guide to the best way of life, in his later work he points to the danger of an exclusive adherence to reason at the expense of instincts. This broader vision accounts for his attempt to convey a more complete picture of man in *Point Counter Point* and *Eyeless in Gaza* though this picture is still limited.

*Brave New World* (1932) is the only pure satire Huxley has written. It is a picture of what our world might become if we allow applied science to condition our life entirely and to destroy our individuality. From his earliest work Huxley showed interest in the form of government and social structure that were most

likely to offer man the greatest possibilities of fulfilment. Like many thinkers of the inter-war period, he felt that the disintegration of the European aristocracy after the First World War demanded the formation of a new élite. Huxley's criterion of excellence is, like Wyndham Lewis's, intelligence; he also recommends an aristocracy of the mind though one that would include different types of intelligence. In *Proper Studies* he argues for the uniqueness of each individual, the inequality in reason and intelligence which differentiates men and should be taken into account when determining the place they are to occupy in society. "A perfect education is one which trains up every human being to fit into the place he or she is to occupy in the social hierarchy, but without in the process destroying his or her individuality."<sup>1</sup> In *Brave New World* Huxley's dream of a hierarchical society has come true. But it does not allow the individual to develop in harmony with his nature. It is similar to Mr. Scogan's "Rational State," in which there is no room for individual aspirations. Poets, however, are not yet destroyed in the lethal chamber, they are merely sent to a distant island.

In the upbringing of the Herd, humanity's almost boundless suggestibility will be scientifically exploited. Systematically, from earliest infancy, its members will be assured that there is no happiness to be found except in work and obedience; they will be made to believe that they are happy, that they are tremendously important beings, and that everything they do is noble and significant. For the lower species the earth will be restored to the centre of the universe and man to pre-eminence on earth. Oh, I envy the lot of the commonalty in the Rational State! Working their eight hours a day, obeying their betters, convinced of their own grandeur and significance and immortality, they will be marvellously happy, happier than any race of men has ever been. They will go through life in a rosy state of intoxication, from which they will never awake. The Men of Faith will play the cup-bearers at this lifelong bacchanal, filling and ever filling again with the warm liquor that the Intelligences, in sad and sober privacy behind the scenes, will brew for the intoxication of their subjects.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Proper Studies*, London, 1929, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> *Crome Yellow*, pp. 130-1.



Huxley describes the society imagined by Scogan with the mixture of ironical amusement and seriousness which characterizes his early novels. He presents a world from which nature has been as far as possible eliminated both from man's environment and from his personal life. It is not the political dictatorship dreaded by most people but the equally inhuman society created by an unconditional demand for comfort and security. The worst threat that now hangs over Western civilization is that the Utopia so long dreamed of by philosophers and scientists should come true. For progress, the fruit of unlimited scientific research, is a powerful and dangerous instrument in the hands of the world controllers. It gives them the means of organizing the state and the lives of men along very strict pre-established lines. The tragic dilemma of modern man is at last solved for him by being made irrelevant: he need no longer reconcile body and mind; his main functions are skilfully channelled and mechanized or simply eradicated. Another of Mr. Scogan's fantasies is made true through the dissociation between love and procreation. Ironically, it is in this overorganized world that men achieve integration though at the cost of their individual freedom. The stereotyped "flapper" with her "promise of pneumatic bliss" symbolizes the new society.

The motto of the New World is "*Community, Identity, Stability.*" It is not ensured by force but by creating the conditions which make it inevitable. Babies are decanted as socialized human beings and predestined to becoming standard men and women; they are classified according to the part they are expected to play in society. The main principle of education is the suppression of natural instincts through conditioning. Indeed, man can be conditioned to anything: "What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder."<sup>1</sup> Maternity no longer exists except accidentally, and "mother" has become an obscene word, while love and individual passion have been replaced by a cold promiscuity encouraged from childhood: "Everyone belongs to everyone else." (p. 42) Emotion is withheld from all human intercourse, and the old notions of family and home are presented as the horrors of a past and miserable civilization. In order to avoid neurosis women are given pregnancy substitutes; violent passion surrogates are

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY. *Brave New World*, Penguin Books, 1956, p. 37.

compulsory, they are the psychological equivalents of fear and rage. Even the religious instinct finds an outlet in the cult of Our Ford which allows people to satisfy both their need for religious faith and for collective hysteria. Belief in God has, of course, been eradicated. People believe in God when they have been so conditioned, or when they are unhappy. But there is no need for an absolute when the social order is immovable and its stability is its own justification. Moreover, God isn't compatible with machinery, scientific medicine and universal happiness. If anything should go wrong in this well-organized world, there is always *soma* to help one to get away from reality. *Soma* is the supreme remedy, the equivalent of moral strength, "Christianity without tears."

Children are conditioned through hypnopaedia, "the greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time." (p. 33) They are taught slogans, "words without reason," until the words instilled into the child's mind in his sleep *is* his mind. Thus man is completely dehumanized since even thought is automatized by the state. People behave in an undifferentiated insensitive way on the individual plane, and they are taught to abhor nobility and heroism, which are symptomatic of political inefficiency. Their spiritual and emotional deathliness entails the complete disappearance of creative activity. There is nothing to write about since, by suppressing pain and conflict, the state has also quenched the incentive to self-expression and to the interpretation of experience in terms of art. All the treasures piled up in centuries of intense living and expression of individual genius have become irrelevant. The eradication of love, understanding and compassion, the replacement of self-denial by self-indulgence, the extinction of ideals, the condemnation of solitude and contemplation, and the destruction of the mystery of life and death have rendered the creation of beauty impossible and undesirable. Even science has to be sacrificed; this may seem paradoxical since it has made progress possible, until we realize that the search for truth is a threat to stability; as a consequence, science must be carefully controlled, for it might defeat the ends of this "scientific" society. Truth and beauty have given place to comfort and happiness. People are happy because they get what they want, and they never want what they cannot get. All conditioning aims at making people satisfied with their inevitable social destiny.

Yet even in a well organized society errors are apt to happen. Because of a mistake in their conditioning Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson are not perfectly regimented. Bernard is an intelligent Alpha plus trained in psychology. Unlike the people of his caste, he likes to be alone and to do things in private. He feels separate and isolated and often has the impression that he is an outsider. He resents being a mere cell in the social body. He would like to feel strongly and to know what passion is. Bernard and Helmholtz share the knowledge that they are individuals and long to assert themselves as such, Bernard in personal relations, Helmholtz as a creative writer. However, when Bernard is threatened with exile for unconformity, he behaves like a coward. By associating cowardice with sensitiveness and individuality, Huxley weakens his point against organized society. In this respect Helmholtz is a better example of a harmonious personality, but his role in the novel remains very limited. Huxley obviously wished to avoid making him an apostle of regeneration.

Before his exile Bernard had gone with Lenina to an Indian Reservation in Mexico where the people have been preserved from civilization. Everything there is alive, and they feel man's nearness to the earth. But primitiveness, squalor, superstition, prejudice are not very tempting to the man who has experienced civilization, and going backwards is impossible. Bernard brings to London the savage John and his mother Linda, a former Beta girl lost in the Reservation. To her, return to civilization means a return to *soma*. John, who was educated partly by Indians, partly by reading an old edition of Shakespeare's works, has always imagined the civilized world as a kind of paradise. When he reaches London, civilization turns out to be a nightmare. He cannot overcome his disgust and horror at the sight of the Delta Dwarfs, and they almost kill him when he throws away their rations of *soma* and offers them liberty. Asked to choose between God, poetry, real danger, freedom, good and evil on the one hand, and civilization on the other, he rejects civilization and claims the right to be unhappy. Life in the Brave New World becomes an inhuman farce, and by a cruel irony its people provoke his death. John is in love with Lenina, whom he identifies with Shakespeare's Miranda. But he is horrified at her shameless promiscuity, for as a true old-worlder, he associates the flesh with sin. He seeks purification in self-punishment and decides to retire to the

country in order to live naturally and ascetically and to escape the filth of civilized life. Confused and humiliated, he commits suicide after a horrible and most distasteful session of whipping which turns to collective hysteria.

In *Brave New World Revisited* (1959) Huxley examines one by one the social evils of the contemporary world and shows to what extent the situation he imagined in 1932 has already come true. Modern society is faced with "the problem of rapidly increasing numbers in relation to natural resources, to social stability and to the well-being of individuals."<sup>1</sup> Political power, almost inevitably centralized in overpopulated and highly industrialized countries, together with technology and applied science concur to annihilate the individual, deprive him of his freedom and reduce him to a mere cog in the social machine. In democratic as much as in totalitarian countries the state increasingly takes precedence over the individual: "It's better that one should suffer than that many should be corrupted."<sup>2</sup> People are thus made to lose their personality and become functions in the social body. It makes them feel lonely and insignificant, though material comfort and the pleasure of consuming partly make up for the coldness of their environment while mass communication media such as the popular press, radio and television prevent them from thinking too much or from paying too much attention to the realities of their world. Huxley further describes the means which the modern statesman commands to persuade his people that they live in the best possible world. Brainwashing, chemical persuasion and hypno-paedia can and sometimes have been used on individuals or even on crowds. Huxley's analysis of life in the modern metropolis is meant to show what high price man is paying for scientific progress; the deliberate annihilation of human nature, the suppression of art and the limitation of individual aspirations. All this was already illustrated in *Brave New World*, though we are now in a better position to appreciate this satire and its implications. Throughout this work Huxley remains faithful to his satirical outlook without yielding to the temptation of a more human approach. Even Bernard and the Savage are not allowed for long to appeal to the reader's

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Brave New World Revisited*, London, 1959, pp. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup> *Brave New World*, p. 120.

understanding or to win his approval: the former wants the best of both worlds, the latter is neurotic and self-destructive. By slightly distorting reality or magnifying some of its aspects, Huxley brings home to his reader the consequences of the disappearance of freedom, passion and creativity. The controller's words about the conditioning of the masses sound alarmingly true:

'His conditioning has laid down rails along which he's got to run. He can't help himself; he's foredoomed. Even after decanting, he's still inside a bottle—an invisible bottle of infantile and embryonic fixation. Each one of us, of course, ... goes through life inside a bottle. But if we happen to be Alphas, our bottles are, relatively speaking, enormous.' (p. 175)

By the mid-Thirties the threat of war was again hanging over the world and fighting was soon to break out in vulnerable spots. For many people fascism was a threat which they hoped to check by committing themselves politically. In *Ends and Means* Huxley explains how people went over from disillusionment and cynicism to political commitment:

Disillusion, fatigue and cynicism succeeded the initial enthusiasm (about the First World War), and when it was over, the sense of pointlessness became a yawning abyss that demanded to be filled with ever more and intenser distractions, ever better 'good times'. But good times are not a meaning or a purpose; the void could never be filled by them. Consequently, when the nationalists and communists appeared with their simple idolatries and their proclamation that, though life might mean nothing as a whole it did at least possess a temporary and partial significance, there was a powerful reaction away from the cynicism of the post-war years. Millions of young people embraced the new idolatrous religions, found a meaning in life, a purpose for their existence, and were ready, in consequence, to make sacrifices, accept hardships, display courage, fortitude, temperance and indeed all the virtues except the essential and primary one, without which all the rest may serve merely as the means for doing evil more effectively. Love and awareness—these are the primary, essential virtues. But nationalism and communism are partial and exclusive idolatries that inculcate hatred, pride, hardness, and impose that intolerant dogmatism that cramps intelligence and narrows the field of interest and sympathetic awareness. (pp. 124-5)



Huxley was a pacifist, probably since the First World War when he was associated with the Morrels, who were the inspirers of a pacifist movement. He didn't think that communism could ward off the danger of war. As he explains in *Ends and Means*, he thought that the Soviets wanted peace, but in this matter as in the management of their country they used bad means to reach their ends; they were like the militarists of the First World War, who thought that war was an efficient means to end war. Huxley called himself a "rational idealist." To the Marxist ideal which advocates a reform of social institutions in order to create conditions favourable to the individual, he opposed an ideal which made the reform of the individual a preliminary to the reform of society. He analysed the elements in modern society which made for war, and he defined the means by which he thought it could be avoided. He developed the same theme in *Eyeless in Gaza*.

*Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) records five moments in the life of the hero: as a sensitive child, he already evades his real nature and tries to match other people's image of himself. As a young man, he is the lover of Mary Amberley, who dares him to seduce Joan, the fiancée of his life-long friend, Brian. This betrayal leads to Brian's suicide. After this Anthony breaks with Mary and systematically refuses to commit himself emotionally. At thirty-five he is an amiable intellectual without real personal life or sense of responsibility. He is divided between his work and a heartless sensuality. A few years later, in 1933, Helen, Mary's daughter, becomes his mistress. He takes good care to refuse the love she offers; though she is deeply hurt, she accepts his conditions because she is herself in a sad predicament. Once when they are naked on the roof of Anthony's house, a dog falling from an aeroplane crashes near them and spatters them with blood. The incident arouses in Helen a feeling of repulsion for Anthony, whereas he becomes aware of her as a person and realizes too late that he loves her. He agrees to go to Mexico with Mark Staithes partly because he thinks he must get out of his spiritual impasse, partly because he is ashamed to confess his cowardice, for they are expected to take part in a revolution. In Mexico he meets Dr. Miller, an anthropologist, who diagnoses his disease as both physical and spiritual and converts him to mysticism and constructive pacifism.

Several experiences in Helen's life explain her disenchantment and the perversity with which she hurts herself and hides her wounded sensibility. All the important episodes in her life and in Anthony's are told in four alternating narratives. Huxley repeats with time the experiment he had carried out with characters and place in *Point Counter Point*. At the beginning of the novel Anthony, who has been looking at old snapshots, is suddenly reminded of the past; events come back to him confusedly "as if the snapshots were dealt out by a lunatic."<sup>1</sup> In spite of the apparent absence of connection between the snapshots he is led to make certain associations. The seemingly haphazard flashbacks suggest the complexity of the human personality and the importance of events which leave their impact on the subconscious and influence man's behaviour. By avoiding continuity and by juxtaposing events which took place at different periods, Huxley hopes to make clear why the characters became what they are. A whole network of cause and effect relationships is created, though the complete lack of transition sometimes makes it difficult to connect events. The discontinuity in the narrative is meant to emphasize the confusion in Anthony's life, while it also gradually brings to light the motives which have always determined his behaviour and stresses the relation between past, present and future. Anthony's awareness of his past is conducive to self-knowledge, an essential preliminary to self-change. He has always been actuated by lust and fear, of being decent like Brian, of being ridiculed by Mary if he didn't kiss Joan, of confessing his betrayal to Brian, and then by the fear of committing himself and of losing his beloved freedom; in other words, fear of life has always imprisoned him, but he now hopes to overcome it by facing the hostile crowd he is going to lecture on pacifism. Fear is the root of evil not only in Anthony's life but in the other characters' as well; it pervades the novel and becomes more conspicuous when the characters face loneliness, old age or death.

All the characters are tormented by the old plight of being "born under one law, to another bound." Brian is imprisoned in his moral code and tortures himself uselessly to atone for what he calls his base desires. The despair which drives him to commit suicide arises as much from self-disgust as from disappointment in

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Eyeless in Gaza*, London, 1936, p. 23.

others. Hugh Ledwidge is a specimen of arrested sexuality, while Helen is a thwarted idealist. In her "hell of emptiness, and drought and discontent," she seems akin to Mrs. Viveash and Lucy Tantomount, but she is much more sensitive and rather pathetic in her repeated efforts to reach fulfilment spiritually and physically. Mark Staithes is an inverted Spandrell: he resents his dependence on other human beings, whom he despises, and he enjoys "forcing humans to be fully, *verbally* conscious of their own and other people's disgustingness." (p. 245) Like Spandrell, he craves for a spirituality which he cannot attain; he lives ascetically and he adheres to a strict moral code in order to feel more separate, more intensely himself and in a better position to look down on other people. He is a communist because it seems the only thing worth being in the Thirties, but he asserts that there is not much difference between tyranny under commissars or under gauleiters. If he goes to Oaxaca and tries to help the revolutionaries, it is not because their revolution makes sense but in order to submit himself to yet another hard trial and prove his superiority through sheer assertion of his will.

The fact that Anthony Beavis is a sociologist who discovers the sterility of theorizing and seeks redemption in action is significant of Huxley's new outlook. His hero's conversion to mysticism is accounted for by his abhorrence of the past, which he disavows when he realizes that his life and that of his friends have been marred by futility and madness. Similarly, his constructive pacifism is based on Huxley's new, though clearly theoretical, conviction that "'unchanging human nature' is not unchanging, but can be, and very frequently has been, profoundly changed."<sup>1</sup> Anthony is the first character in Huxley's fiction who undergoes a spiritual change and decides to act upon it. His purpose is to achieve liberty and to convince other people that they can also achieve it. But what exactly does he mean by it? Even before his conversion he had made detachment from the self a condition of freedom: "How can there be freedom so long as the 'you' persists? A 'you' has got to be consistent and responsible, has got to make choices and commit itself." (p. 365) As a sociologist, he thought that freedom could only exist for a few economically independent individuals: man has always exchanged one form

<sup>1</sup> *Ends and Means*, p. 24.

of slavery for another, slavery to nature for slavery to institutions or vice-versa. But for himself freedom was an excuse for avoiding action either on the professional or on the personal plane. Twenty years later he realizes that this freedom was illusory: "I preferred to be *free* for the sake of my *work*, in other words, to remain enslaved in a world where there could be no question of freedom for the sake of my amusements." (p. 323) After his conversion Anthony makes liberation from the self a means of reaching a higher end, of achieving a union with the spiritual reality which underlies the phenomenal world and gives it what significance it possesses:

The ideal man is the non-attached man. Non-attached to his bodily sensations and lusts. Non-attached to his craving for power and possessions. Non-attached to the objects of these various desires. Non-attached to his anger and hatred; non-attached to his exclusive loves. Non-attached to wealth, fame, social position. Non-attached even to science, art, speculation, philanthropy. (p. 325)

Huxley further explains that "People will behave justly and pacifically only if they have trained themselves as individuals to do so, even in circumstances where it would be easier to behave violently and unjustly." (p. 325) In other words they must use their inner powers in order to practise the virtues which make for non-violence. Intelligence is essential as a means of increasing awareness, and love is the instrument by which man can hope to ensure peace and justice. Love in the widest sense is a unifying factor between individuals and between peoples. "Unity of mankind, unity of all life, all being even" is the ultimate good; evil is the accentuation of division. That is why man must achieve unity beyond the turmoil of his surface life.

*Eyeless in Gaza* ends with Anthony's meditation on a mystical experience which makes him perceive "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." He is aware of peace as "a dark void beyond all personal life." (p. 619) for "minds like ours can only perceive undifferentiated unity as nothing." (p. 615) Thus, the void of life, which had hitherto been meaningless and a source of despair for Anthony and all Huxleyan heroes is transformed into the nothingness of perfect non-attachment and acquires a regenerating value. But as a man who undergoes a spiritual experience, Anthony fails entirely to convince the reader. For one thing, he

has not successfully integrated body and mind before transcending them to achieve union with the ultimate reality. His solution is that of a divided person, for he rejects the body, of which he is still ashamed, to follow a spiritual path about which he is himself uncertain :

Quietism can be mere self-indulgence. Charismata like masturbations. Masturbations, however, that are dignified, by the amateur mystics who practise them, with all the most sacred names of religion and philosophy. 'The contemplative life.' It can be made a kind of high-brow substitute for Marlene Dietrich : a subject for erotic musings in the twilight. (p. 503)

Similarly, Anthony hopes to convert people to pacifism by appealing to love and intelligence although he is convinced that most people are selfish and stupid. After his second speech at a pacifist meeting he feels like Mark that "they might as well go and talk to cows in a field. . . . I caught myself taking intense pleasure in commenting on the imbecility of my audience and human beings at large. Caught and checked myself, reflecting that seeds had been sown." But his meditation ends with the thought that "At present, most people seem more or less imbecile or odious ; the fault is at least as much in oneself as in them." (pp. 170-1)

Anthony's scepticism about the success of his undertaking is due to his wrong approach to his spiritual experience. Indeed, his conversion is the outcome of an elaborate intellectual process, not a spontaneous act of faith. Meditation is a technique, self-knowledge and training in the use of the self are mere devices which are supposed to make the spiritual experience possible, but they are not associated to the love and compassion which he also considers as requisites for this experience :

The fundamental problem is practical—to work out systems of psychological exercises for all types of men and women. . . . In time, it might be possible to establish a complete and definite *Ars Contemplativa*. A series of techniques, adapted to every type of mind. Techniques for meditating on, communicating with and contemplating goodness. Ends in themselves and at the same time means for realizing some of that goodness in practice. (p. 565)

This lack of inner compulsion as well as his unconvinced and cold proselytism explains why it is hard to believe that Anthony's



commitment is anything but a temporary way out of his spiritual confusion. Obviously, he is still more preoccupied with himself than with the state of the world and his escape into mysticism excludes the complete surrender of the self which always marks a real conversion. His technical approach to the spiritual also accounts for the failure of the novel: Anthony describes mysticism, he does not experience it, and the passages which deal with it are not more dramatized than the essays on the same subject in *Ends and Means*. Another reason for this failure is that Huxley has abandoned satire without giving a more complete or more normal picture of man. He is still the detached observer who discourses on the follies of his contemporaries. True, he shows greater psychological insight than in his previous novels, and he has also made clear the relation between disorder in private life and the confusion and violence in public life. On the other hand, the elaborate structure of the novel is inadequate to show that the combination of past, present and future in an attempt to transcend time is a means of achieving true freedom. It fails precisely to convey that element of moral growth essential to a true conversion. Anthony's willingness to stand on a platform and be attacked by people whom he despises anyway may be an example of self-mastery, but it does not make real the "ultimate spiritual reality" which is the ground of his action. On the whole, he still fits in with the description of the Huxleyan hero given by Philip Quarles in *Point Counter Point*:

By this suppression of emotional relationships and natural piety he seems to himself to be achieving freedom—freedom from sentimentality, from the irrational, from passion, from impulse and emotionalism. But in reality, . . . he has only narrowed and desiccated his life; and what's more, has cramped his intellect by the very process he thought could emancipate it. (p. 474)

Huxley's belief in action and in the efficacy of reform was of short duration, and his acquired faith in the perfectibility of human nature did not outlive his realization that men were inevitably heading towards war and destruction. Three years after *Eyeless in Gaza* he published a novel in which he satirized more fiercely than ever the depravity of human beings and recommended complete detachment from life on the ordinary human level. In *After Many*

a *Summer* (1939) he makes no compromise between perversion on the one hand and sainthood or something approaching it on the other. He is more convincing in his interpretation of vice, though his usual types are so overdone that they are no longer recognizable as human beings. Like Wyndham Lewis's "apes," they are degenerate creatures engaged in a senseless and grotesque show. The performance is often witty and amusing even if it sometimes verges on the tragic. But it is frequently interrupted by the preaching of Huxley's mouthpiece on mysticism. The shifts between the farce and Mr. Propter's philosophical essays are representative of Huxley's dualistic vision of man.

Among the grotesque characters we find the American millionaire, Jo Stoyte, who is sickeningly afraid of death and employs a full-time doctor, Obispo. In exchange for keeping Jo in good health the latter is given all facilities to do research work on longevity. Obispo is the most unpleasant of Huxley's cynics: he perverts Virginia Maunciple, the brainless beauty who acts at once as mistress and adoptive daughter to Jo and he observes the effects of his experiments with a detached scientific interest. Jeremy Pordage, an oldish, fossilized Mercaptan, arrives from England to edit the Hauberk papers bought by Stoyte from the impoverished descendants of an English earl. He is bored with the frightfulness of the world and shrinks more from life than any of Huxley's hard-boiled intellectuals. The disordered universe created by Stoyte turns out to be his spiritual home:

... because it was the embodiment of an imbecile's no-track mind. Because there were no issues and nothing led anywhere and the dilemmas had an infinity of horns and you went round and round . . . round and round in an infinite cosiness of issueless thoughts and feelings and actions, of hermetically bottled art and learning, of culture for its own sake, of self-sufficient little decencies and indecencies, of impassable dilemmas and moral questions sufficiently answered by the circumambient idiocy.<sup>1</sup>

This indulgence in nonsense for its own sake and in the aberrations and corruption of a world exclusively actuated by materialism and self-indulgence shows to what degradation sterile intellectualism and sheer sensualism can lead. In Jeremy Pordage the conflict

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *After Many a Summer*, Penguin Books, 1959, p. 140.

between body and mind becomes a farce ; a few intellectual fads and pornography are all that remains of a once serious dilemma.

In this insane and corrupt world Propter would appear as an agreeably normal and balanced character if he lectured a little less and was involved in what action there is in the novel. But even while he helps the unfortunate transients who pick up oranges on Stoyte's plantations, he feels it his duty to explain with a logic which one can hardly expect them to follow that they are responsible for their own misfortunes because ignorance and stupidity are no less severely punished by the nature of things than deliberate malice ; their gravest offence was to accept the world in which they found themselves as normal, rational and right. Propter presents mysticism as a practicable and rewarding way of life. He quotes Cardinal de Bérulle's definition of man as " a nothingness surrounded by God, indigent and capable of God, filled with God, if he so desires." (p. 76) He rejects ideals on the ground that they are all magnified aspects of the personality ; the only acceptable ideal is union with God, which can only be achieved through liberation from personality, from craving and from time. Time is the medium through which evil propagates itself and in which evil lives, therefore time is evil. Good lies outside the prison of personality in a state of pure, disinterested consciousness. The negation of personality as an expression of self-will, which is itself a denial of God, leads to the belief that nothing can be achieved on the strictly human level that isn't evil.

On the human level, good exists as the proper functioning of the organism in accordance with the laws of its own being. On the higher level, it exists in the form of a knowledge of the world without desire or aversion. (p. 99)

Between the animal below and the spirit above there is nothing but a swarm of impulses, sentiments and confused notions which must be transcended. Indeed, Propter asserts that the world as it is and people in their strictly human capacity are beyond hope. Salvation lies in retreat from humanity, in an intellectual and intuitive union with God, for society can never be improved. Whereas for Anthony meditation was a preparation for action and, so he hoped, would contribute to the improvement of society, Propter thinks that " Right action " is the means by which the mind is prepared for contemplation. Society itself is good only in so

far as it renders contemplation possible for its members. "What is important in regard to the social environment is not its progressive-ness or non-progressive-ness (whatever those terms mean) but the degree to which it helps or hinders individuals in their advance towards man's final ends."<sup>1</sup> Actually, Mr. Propter's assertion that men have to choose between almost insuperable difficulties on the one hand (in order to actualize goodness) and absolutely certain misery and frustration on the other, leaves the majority of people with little hope of finding happiness—whatever one means by it—in either world.

The plot of the novel and its main theme are based on Obispo's research on longevity. They are inspired by Huxley's aversion for time and its accompanying evils, decay and death, as well as by his aversion for man's bodily existence. Virginia's exclamation about two baboons copulating: "'Aren't they cute! Aren't they *human!*'" (p. 70) is a fierce satirical comment on the characters. Obispo hopes to find a means of prolonging human life in the intestinal flora of a carp. In the Hauberk Papers Jeremy discovers the diary of the fifth earl of Gonister, in which the latter explains that he eats the viscera of freshly opened carp and observes on himself the effects of rejuvenation. At the age of eighty-three he had three illegitimate children and at about ninety-five a scandal forced him to have his funeral celebrated in order to escape imprisonment. He then retired with his housekeeper to subterranean apartments. Obispo decides to go to England and to take with him Virginia and Jo Stoyte. In the cellar of the earl's country-house they discover the earl and his housekeeper. He is now two hundred and one, and both are perfect anthropoids! More afraid of death than ever, Stoyte wonders how long it would take a man to become an ape and concedes that, after all, in their own way they are having a pretty good time!

The denouement of the novel is a masterpiece of grim humour, but it arouses disgust as well as amusement and conveys the author's full horror of physical decay. To prolong life without being able to stop the degeneration of the body is to preserve the repulsive animal in man, not the enlightened human being. Like Swift's *Struldbrugs*, who only retained the disadvantages of old age and gradually lost all the spiritual, intellectual and emotional

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *The Perennial Philosophy*, Cleveland, 1962, p. 80.

qualities which differentiates men from animals, the earl of Gonister, though a highly intelligent and reasonable man, has allowed himself to become a slave to his physical being and to time. Huxley insists in all his writings that man always pays a high price for every victory over Nature. In *The Perennial Philosophy* (1962) he writes that "The doctrine that God is in the world has an important practical corollary—the sacredness of Nature, and the sinfulness and folly of man's overweening efforts to be her master rather than her intelligently docile collaborator. . . . Modern man no longer regards Nature as being in any sense divine and feels perfectly free to behave towards her as an overweening conqueror and tyrant." (pp. 76 and 79) Man's efforts to master Nature by prolonging life amount to a violation of its sacredness; he denies what is divine in him and makes it possible for him to unite with God. Moreover, to prolong human life is to extend the potentiality of pain and evil and thus lengthen what in Eckhart's words is the greatest obstacle to reaching God. Attachment to time is an attachment to the human personality, that "stinking lump" ruthlessly derided in the perversity of Obispo, in Jeremy's squalid indecencies, in the degrading hysteria to which Virginia is reluctantly led and in the repulsiveness of Jo Stoyte, who is insistently called a "warm, smelly barrel." The latter's willingness to survive even as an ape is a sardonic evidence of man's gross surrender to the flesh.

The coexistence of satire with religious or philosophical preaching in *After Many a Summer* is the last and most regrettable expression of Huxley's dualistic vision of man. In *Point Counter Point* and *Eyeless in Gaza* he expressed his belief in the possible improvement of man as a human being. In *After Many a Summer* he seems to have given up hope completely and has thereby destroyed the moral implications of his satire. He has reached the extreme limit of defeatism: society is no longer worth improving, and he is convinced that nothing will palliate the banefulness of industrialism, business and centralized governments. Men make war either because they like it, or because they allow themselves to be persuaded that it is necessary. Munich or no Munich, it doesn't really matter what politicians do since nationalism will always produce a war in every generation. Propter's comment on the fall of Barcelona is that, whether captured or not, the city was foredoomed to perpetual self-stultification and to self-destruction for it existed on the plane of the absence of God. This detachment



from human affairs is rather unpleasant for at the time many people were suffering while, after all, Huxley was safely preaching from California. It is the more objectionable as it leads him, even as an artist, to deny significance to anything human. To deny the value of the human personality and what it stands for amounts to a denial of all human values; these are not even criticized, they are simply abolished. Huxley wishes to transcend what is merely human, but he does not succeed in doing so in the novel. He dwells separately on the two parts of the self, and the dichotomy is emphasized by the structure of the novel, for he is alternately a satirist who caricatures contemptible specimens of humanity and an essayist who discourses in the most abstract manner. Propter is a purely static character who at no moment substantiates the spiritual experience he pleads for. If the satirical aspect of the novel is fairly successful, it is because, as in his early work, Huxley relies on shock and irony to arouse indignation and disgust, but his lack of faith in men is even more destructive than his early nihilism: "When human life is seen as intrinsically meaningless and evil, then the work of the novelist, whose task it is to present a picture of that life in terms of its significance and value, is deprived of all justification. Art and life must be thrown overboard together."<sup>1</sup>

Except for *Ape and Essence* (1949), in which he imagined the quasi-total destruction of mankind by atomic warfare, followed by the rebirth of a deformed and repulsive humanity, Huxley's work after *Time Must Have a Stop* (1944) indicates a softening of his attitude towards contemporary man. He continued indefatigably to denounce the same evils in modern society, and he generally did this in pamphlets which expressed his thought more appropriately than his fiction. In *Science, Liberty and Peace* (1947) he reasserts his ideal of freedom, peace, justice and brotherly love and insists again that the scientist must adopt a more responsible attitude if the world is to be saved. In *Doors of Perception* (1954) he describes a mystical experience provoked by mescaline and conveys the impression of liberation from human limitations. Until then he had known contemplation as "discursive thinking," and it is probably because he experienced it at last as a liberation that he could enter its visionary quality. In his last novel, *Island* (1962), he describes a

<sup>1</sup> D.S. SAVAGE, *The Withered Branch*, London, 1950, p. 155.

community of contented individuals living according to the principles he had advocated in his 1946 preface to *Brave New World*:

In this community economics would be decentralist and Henry-Georgian, politics Kropotkinesque and co-operative. Science and technology would be used as though, like the sabbath, they had been made for man, not (as at present and still more so in the *Brave New World*) as though man were to be adapted and enslaved to them. Religion would be the conscious and intelligent pursuit of man's Final End, the unitive knowledge of the immanent Tao or Logos, the transcendent Godhead or Brahman. And the prevailing philosophy of life would be a Higher Utilitarianism, in which the Greatest Happiness principle would be secondary to the Final End principle—the first question to be asked and answered in every contingency of life being: 'How will this thought or action contribute to, or interfere with, the achievement, by me and the greatest possible number of other individuals, of man's Final End?' (pp. 8-9)

Huxley once more denounces man's follies, though he also expresses his belief that intelligent individuals could lead a reasonable life if they wanted to. From *Crome Yellow* to *Island* Huxley's standards haven't changed: they are intelligence, common sense and measure.

Huxley's literary achievement between the Wars is essentially inspired by his vision of man as a self-divided, ineffectual actor in a mad and hopeless world. His early satires are the most successful because his witty, devastating conversation-pieces, interspersed with samples of awkward or purposeless behaviour, are best suited to his criticism of the intellectual and artistic coteries of the Twenties. Though few of his characters are memorable, he has so magnified some aspects of their personalities as to give a cruel though striking picture of their vices. He is a better moralist in his earlier than in his later fiction, because he shows the folly and ugliness of immorality without resorting to long, metaphysical disquisitions. He also conveys more directly the confusion of his characters and their implicit need for reliable standards. His early heroes are lost in the noisy and aimless agitation of modern life, contemptuous of the fossilized attitude of their elders, yet secretly appalled at the vacuum in which they

are whirled. They mistrust all institutions, all forms of action, all decent and normal relationships. They have inherited a dislocated world, a world without faith and they have no illusion or expectations about mankind. They ward off loneliness through pointless or unwholesome associations and seek refuge from the barrenness of their existence in some artistic or scientific activity practised for its own sake. They have abdicated all responsibility for themselves and for their environment and are truly "chairless in an exhausting world."

It is often difficult to infer from his early work the standpoint from which Huxley criticizes the spiritual illness and nihilism of post-war society. One detects in his more intelligent characters, those who seem to act as mouthpieces for his ideas, a refusal to be taken in by any claim to sincere and positive values. They even refuse to be duped by their own intelligence and are their own merciless detractors. On the other hand, Huxley understands his characters too well to be a true satirist, and the trouble is that he generally imparts his understanding theoretically. As a novelist he explains too much without leaving room for mystery or intuitive communication. This is particularly obvious in *Point Counter Point* and *Eyeless in Gaza*, which otherwise might have the makings of great novels. For Huxley becomes more explanatory about his characters—without showing them actually living—as they are faced with some alternative to their unsatisfactory outlook and way of life. At the same time, the gap between perverts and saints becomes wider and the extreme types are less recognizably human. One reason for this may be that from *Brave New World* to *After Many a Summer* his satire becomes more universal. He no longer criticizes a particular class but humanity at large and the world which men have made for themselves. He sees this world as the outcome of nineteenth-century materialism and of man's over-confident belief that he can master Nature. Dominated by scientific and technological experts who are prepared to reduce them to mere biological or consuming units, modern men have been lured into a cold sensualism and material comfort. Huxley draws attention to the danger of destroying life altogether by encouraging man to rely increasingly on artificial rather than natural resources. He shows the reverse side of progress, the high price man has to pay for it in individual freedom and impoverishment of his spiritual and creative life. "Progressive

science is one of the causative factors involved in the progressive decline of liberty and the progressive centralization of power, which have occurred during the twentieth century."<sup>1</sup> In both democratic and totalitarian states technology provides the men in power with the means of persuading the masses that concentration of political and economic power is for the good of all. Huxley's own conviction with regard to applied science is that "the sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath," and he believes that an appropriate use of technology could really contribute to the fulfilment of man instead of thwarting it. It is a question of being able to distinguish between ends and means, a discrimination which modern man is increasingly less able to make.

As a novelist, Huxley is essentially concerned with the question of good and evil in contemporary life. We may wonder then what standards or values he implicitly upholds in his criticism of society. The forms of perversion and corruption he derides are all deviations from nature: not the nature of crude bodily existence that Mr. Scogan finds so disturbing but some harmonious integration of the physical and spiritual in man, a sort of compromise which is reflected in his continuing insistence on common sense and measure in all fields of life. Intelligence and awareness induce people to accept the compromise; stupidity makes them reject it and generates evil. Yet, this compromise is an ideal to which Huxley never reconciled his own vision of man in spite of his efforts to do so in *Point Counter Point*, *Eyeless in Gaza* and *After Many a Summer*. In theory he remained faithful to that ideal, but in practice he deprived it of meaning by encouraging man to free himself from his nature in order to unite with an impersonal God. Huxley has always combined curiosity for the richness and multiplicity of life with interest in the mysterious reality which informs it. His conversion to mysticism answers two deeply-felt needs. The first is an obsessive desire to achieve freedom through liberation from human limitations. Though he wrote of Swift that "he could never forgive man for being a vertebrate mammal as well as an immortal soul," he was himself haunted by what he called "the prodigious grandeur and the

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Science, Liberty and Peace*, London, 1947, p. 5.

abjection of the human race."<sup>1</sup> Mysticism made it at last possible for him to escape the conflict between body and mind by transcending it and making it irrelevant. His second, less obvious need was a craving for an absolute. In fact, the anxiety of Huxley's characters is partly metaphysical; the substitutes for religion in *Brave New World* are evidence of Huxley's belief that men cannot do without some kind of religious faith. Unfortunately, his introduction of mysticism into fiction has only emphasized his dualism as philosopher and writer. To declare that "Nature is blessedly non-human; and insofar as we belong to the natural order, we too are blessedly non-human"<sup>2</sup> is to renounce the interpretation of life in human terms. Huxley's satire in *After Many a Summer* is more cruel and disheartening than in any other novel, and the solution proposed inconsistent with his view of the incurable wickedness of man. At the same time, preaching mysticism has stressed the incompatibility between the novelist and the essayist, who strive for prominence in his satires. Yet, it is significant that Huxley's conversion did not induce him to give up his interest in men. He persevered in his pessimistic indictment of the human race, but to the last he attempted to give mankind an ideal that would save it from destruction.

<sup>1</sup> *Antic Hay*, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, "The Desert," in *Collected Essays*, London, 1960, p. 25.



## WILLIAM GERHARDIE<sup>1</sup>

There can be no happiness for us, it exists only in our anticipations.

(CHEKHOV, *The Three Sisters*)

William Gerhardie is a minor writer now mostly forgotten by the larger public. Yet, his early fiction seems to have been greatly appreciated in the Twenties, probably because it was so well suited to the mood of that period. Like the early works of Huxley and Waugh, his first three novels describe a young man's experience of a world falling apart at the end of the First World War and render the particular quality of life which prevailed at that time. Gerhardie himself strongly objected to being called a critic of the times. He thought that, viewed over a long period, life offered the same recurring pattern of war and peace, of folly and disillusion, which testifies to the continuity of the human character; he asserted that he only meant to describe the human condition in general and to give a few examples among many of the usual folly of mankind. Whatever he may have written about his fiction, Gerhardie does give a satirical picture of the Twenties. That the satire was not intentional, as he explained at length,<sup>2</sup> in no way alters the vision of society he conveys in his early novels. These are typical products of the post-war era and have always been regarded as such.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, their success at the time they first appeared and the praise they received from

<sup>1</sup> The author's name was spelled "Gerhardi" until fairly recently. In a letter to the *T.L.S.*, October 12, 1967, he mentioned that he had reverted to an "earlier ancestral spelling of his name."

<sup>2</sup> In the introduction to the Uniform Edition of his work published in 1947.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, the review in the *T.L.S.*, September 13, 1947. It is entitled "Satire in the Twenties" and compares the novels of Gerhardie with the satires of Wyndham Lewis, Huxley and Waugh.

well-known writers may suggest that they gave the public a recognizable image of itself. It is worth noting that, like Firbank's novels, Gerhardie's work enjoyed a period of revival after the Second World War, though, unlike Firbank's, it was of short duration. This makes it perhaps more obvious that some element in the life portrayed in his novels is peculiar or congenial to post-war society.

Gerhardie's first novel, *Futility* (1922), owes its melancholy mood to the author's gentle evocation of a world coming to an end. The characters witness this disintegration without being aware of its implications. They cling with chimerical hopefulness to privileges which have already vanished except in their imagination. It is a novel of thwarted hopes, of illusion and disappointment, which takes place at the time of the Russian Revolution. It is strongly influenced by Chekhov, and its theme has much in common with that of *The Three Sisters*. On the eve of the First World War the narrator, a young Englishman of Russian upbringing, attends a performance of the play with the three charming Bursanov sisters and their father. He is unaware of the similarity between the lives of his companions and the existence of the people in the play, who distress him by their melancholy, their incredible inefficiency and their inertia. Yet, gradually, he is made to realize what Bursanov meant when he sadly observed that Chekhov was a great artist. Nikolai Vasilievich Bursanov is entangled in a complicated and inextricable net of relationships with his former wife, the woman he lives with, the young girl he wants to marry and a host of relatives, friends and servants; they all expect him to support them and follow him from St Petersburg to Vladivostok on a errand which proves as useless as the British intervention in Russia.

The correlation between the confusion prevailing in social and political affairs and the muddle of private lives is felt throughout the novel. The latter is divided into four parts: *The Three Sisters*, *The Revolution*, *Intervening in Siberia*, and *Nina*. In the first part, which, as its title indicates, owes much to Chekhov's play, Gerhardie describes a Russian bourgeois household just before the outbreak of the First World War. He expresses their uneasy feeling that their way of life is doomed and that something ought to be done to prevent further disintegration. In Chekhov's play Irina longs for a purposeful life:

We must work, work. That's why we are not happy and look at life so gloomily—we don't know anything about work. We come of people who despised work.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, Nikolai Vasilievich is fond of repeating that he wants to act :

'We ought to *do* things. I want to *do* things. This moment I am teeming over with energy. I could do and settle things to-day, square up our affairs, and start life afresh.—But—'<sup>2</sup>

Actually, he simply sits and worries, deliberately ignoring the situation. His usual inertia and the complete uselessness of the few initiatives he takes are striking examples of the futility of a social class which cannot keep pace with the changing scene and allows itself to be overtaken and ruined by the Revolution. They are bored and restless, but they are paralysed by a sense of impotence and by their inability to visualize their future clearly.

The second chapter is a counterpart to the first and describes the chaos in public life. The Revolution doesn't mean much to the characters. They keep waiting for developments that will not occur. For Nikolai Vasilievich the Revolution is hardly more than a further delay to the removal of his difficulties. "My house—the mines" is what he mutters when faced with the real circumstances of the Revolution. He and his hangers-on are involved in events too big for them to understand. Only uncle Kostia is aware that they are caught up in a vast turmoil which matches the confusion in their private lives :

Issues, motives being muddled up. This ethical confusion, and the blind habitual resort to bloodshed as a means of straightening it out. More confusion. Honour is involved. Bloodshed as a solution. More honour involved in the solution. More bloodshed. That idiotic plea that each generation should sacrifice itself for the so-called benefit of the next ! It never seems to end. (p. 75)

As the novel develops the futility of both public and private attitudes becomes increasingly devastating :

I remember there was something hopeless about that night, a sense of dread about the political and economic chaos.

<sup>1</sup> A. CHEKHOV, *The Three Sisters*, translated from the Russian by Stark Young, New York, 1941, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> William GERHARDIE, *Futility*, London, 1947, p. 78.

that seemed to harmonize with Nikolai Vasilievich's state of mind. I think it may be that he found a kind of ghastly pleasure in the thought that if he was miserable, if destitution stared him in the face, the whole world seemed also to be tumbling about him into decay and ruin. (p. 79)

The British army and Nikolai Vasilievich "intervene in Siberia," the former in the vain hope of defeating the Bolsheviks, the latter with the equally vain purpose of recovering his mines. Both interventions are conducted with unbelievable misjudgment and inefficiency. The British "are fussing over us [Russians] and always in the wrong direction, running about like clowns in a circus." (p. 160) Nikolai Vasilievich follows them about and prepares himself to . . . wait for a miraculous unravelment of his situation. Through upheavals of all kinds the three sisters are content to *live*, that is to say, to indulge in what the present offers without allowing circumstances to impinge upon their joy of life. Their gradual emancipation and their untiring dancing to the sound of jazz music foreshadows the insatiable search for pleasure of the young heroines of the Twenties. There is also a touch of restlessness in Nina; she turns the narrator's three months' journey to Vladivostock to propose to her into another "adventure in futility" comparable to the Russian general's vain attempts to join Wrangel's army and "seriously" begin to reconquer Russia.

Gerhardie renders a particular quality of living which consists in waiting indefinitely for a better life to start. The characters' blind hope that something will turn up and save them emphasizes the futility of their motives and of whatever move they make. The novel is indeed a drama of futility: the futility of attempting to maintain the old order of things and the old way of life, the futility of intervention, whether in private affairs or in the civil war, the futility of the inevitable horrors of the war, of political action, of hope, and in the end even of love. The narrator himself is filled with a sense of futility and a feeling of impotence when he seriously suggests a plan for settling the difficulties aroused by the complicated relations between the members of the Bursanov household and their hangers-on. He is sharply rebuked because they think he cannot really understand their troubles and turns them into a joke. What Andrei Andreiech fails to grasp is that human beings cannot be made happy by a simple and reasonable

solution of their difficulties. Their unhappiness doesn't spring from their predicament so much as from their inherent inability to be satisfied with what they have. The best example of men's constant craving for an impossible happiness is Nikolai Vasilievich, who becomes involved with one woman after another because the object of his desires ceases to appeal to him when it has become his. Happiness, Gerhardie suggests, does not depend on the particular circumstances of men's lives but on the latter's reactions to them. Everything in life is futile because men forever pursue an ideal which eludes them since their desire is spent with the attainment of their purpose. They live in hope, not in fulfilment. That is why "waiting" is a predominant aspect of man's attitude to life and adds to its futility by preventing him from concentrating on the present for the sake of an improbable future.

How melancholy, but strangely fascinating were these evenings: this gathering of souls dissatisfied with life, yet always waiting patiently for betterment: enduring this unsatisfactory present because they believed that the present was not really *life* at all: that *life* was somewhere in the future: that *this* was but a temporary and transitory stage to be spent in patient waiting. And so they waited, year in, year out, looking out for *life*: while life, unnoticed, had noiselessly piled up the years that they had cast away promiscuously in waiting, and stood behind them—while they still waited. ( p. 151)

The melancholy which pervades *Futility* springs from the characters' feeling of expectancy, from their awareness of lost opportunities as well as from the narrator's nostalgic recollection of the three charming sisters. It blends with humour to give the novel its peculiar tone, which is an important element in this first and best "humorous tragedy." Gerhardie has created a type of Russian characters known to Western readers through nineteenth-century Russian fiction. He succeeds in rendering the humaneness which underlies their tolerant acceptance of extraordinary and unconventional forms of behaviour, their hospitality, their mixture of boastfulness and shyness and, above all, the tragi-comedy of their lives. Their behaviour is at once more ludicrous and tragic in view of the social and political background, for the two predicaments, the private and the public, result from the same human folly. Uncle Kostia, the eternal philosopher, is quick to point this



out to Andrei Andreiech when the latter asks him "whether [he] is doomed by [his] sense of inutility":

'*My* inutility! *Your* inutility! What the devil does it matter *whose* inutility? Is your Admiral very *utile*, may I ask? What I was saying was that we all behaved as if we were actually *doing* things, boarding this Trans-Siberian Express as if in order to *do* something at the end of the journey, while actually the journey is in excess of anything we are likely to achieve.' (p. 119)

Similarly, the narrator's musing on the inability of human beings to make the most of life makes it clear that, interrelated as they are, the private and the social situations are primarily examples of the absurdity of men. At this early stage Gerhardie did not yet think that "Nothing is until it's over"; he did not yet associate living with the past but with the present. Living is an awareness of the potential richness and value of the passing moment.

Like Chekhov, Gerhardie attempts to render life in its fluidity, complexity and elusiveness. He wants to convey the sense of living which he identifies with a sensibility to the quality of experience rather than with experience as such. In this respect he might be compared with Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield, who encouraged him as a writer. But apart from *Futility* his achievement as an interpreter of the human psyche is negligible. This is indeed the only novel in which he strikes a perfect balance between sentiment and humour to render his vision of a bewildered humanity. At the same time, it is easy to see why *Futility*, together with Gerhardie's other early novels, was hailed as a "novel of the Twenties." Not only is the characters' bewilderment in keeping with the madness of the world in which they live, that world is shown falling apart as the Western world was shown disintegrating in other English novels of the period. Nevertheless, it is chiefly the tone, the mixture of self-pity and flippancy, as well as the attitude to life illustrated in the novel that strike us now as characteristic of the post-war decade: nostalgia for better times, the sense of living in a world without values and the feeling that nothing matters more than the passing moment; above all, the meaninglessness of all action. Naturally, the meaninglessness of life is not necessarily a matter of social or political disorder, but awareness of it in the Twenties certainly matched a mood prevalent in that period.

A sense of futility also runs through *The Polyglots* (1925), which has a similar background and is set in Far East Russia after the First World War and the Russian Revolution. The absurdity which underlies the characters' behaviour is further emphasized, and the contradiction between their aspirations and their actions is more manifest. There is Aunt Theresa talking of the heroism of war, discoursing in terms of blood and fire, then getting anxious because her son, who is fighting in Belgium, hasn't written for six weeks. She is angry with Georges, the narrator, for telling her that "the dead are the victims of the folly of adults who having blundered the world into a ludicrous war, now build memorials—to square it all up with. If I were the Unknown Soldier, my ghost would refuse to lie down under the heavy piece of marble; I would arise, I would say to them: keep your blasted memorials and learn sense!"<sup>1</sup> Shortly afterwards they hear that Anatole has been court-martialed and executed on the eve of the Armistice, because he had fallen asleep while on guard in place of a friend. Georges is indignant with humanity at large and with his family in particular for "talking murder," then crying for their loss. "With opinions like those—opinions that cause murder—what right have they to hope that *their* sons will survive?" (p. 46) Anatole himself was a militarist at heart but he was also a generous man who could have fought more profitably for life. Instead, he fought with courage and devotion for a cause which had long ago become meaningless, "was a carcass like the man who died for it." The same is true of the men who die for the "Russian National Cause," refusing to acknowledge that it is a lost cause. They cannot see that the Revolution was inevitable, and they attribute it to the work of German and Jewish "agitators" or regard it as a bad joke. Their men desert and go over to the enemy, for the Revolution has now become the "Russian National Cause." Meanwhile, Russian generals keep deploring the liberation of the serfs!

The extraordinary conditions of life which prevailed at the time in that part of the world emphasize the impression that the individual characters drift like everything around them. Again, the interrelation between the disorder in public life and the madness in individual behaviour is evident. Uncle Lucy, whose dividends used to contribute to the support of the whole family, becomes insane

<sup>1</sup> William GERHARDIE, *The Polyglots*, London, 1947, p. 31.

and commits suicide, not only because he is ruined by the Revolution but also because "the ordinary normal spectacle of life as it is lived on our planet proved too much for him." (p. 198) The people of all ages and nationalities who live on him fret and get agitated to no purpose, each worrying about his own small problems. They are rather pathetic because of their helplessness, though sometimes contemptible, but they are also capable of disinterestedness. They form a microcosm, confused and bewildered like the world at large, a world which for the older generation has lost all meaning. The narrator portrays the characters with humour and compassion, sometimes critically but never with malice. Nor does he spare himself, since his own behaviour is just as absurd as that of his relatives. His reaction when Sylvia is to marry Gustave Boulanger is quite irrational. He takes her love for himself for granted and is not sure that he wants to marry her, but when she is to marry someone else, he feels cheated and realizes that he has missed his chance of being happy. Still, on their way back to Europe, when his passion is satisfied and he understands that he will not rid himself easily of his relatives, he envies Gustave who has been left alone in Harbin. His emotional life in no way gratifies his deeper needs, and, like Gerhardie's other commentators on life, he attributes this failure to human nature :

I fretted, but all the time I felt that I was fretting over things not worth the pain. We were so earnest, so unfor-giving, exacting, intense ; we were shouting ourselves hoarse till we were deaf to the real inner voice which even in moments of peace seemed scarcely resolute enough to make itself heard ; and beneath it all was the sense that all this, as it were borrowed emotion, though consuming and painful enough, was trivial and unnecessary. (p. 230)

Georges somewhat resembles the heroes of Huxley's early novels. However, he is more conscious of his failings as a human being, and he understands that his dissatisfaction and melancholy are due to his own incapacity to enjoy life. "Why don't we make haste and live? But how? How to make the most of life? If you grip it, it runs through your fingers." (p. 160) Already at his age he declares that "life is best in retrospect." (p. 28) Yet he can also show the unconcern of youth and be cynical, though he is capable of genuine affection as it appears from his friendship with the exquisite Natasha. The mixture of cynicism

and tenderness in his affair with Sylvia foreshadows the relationship between Nina and Adam in Waugh's *Vile Bodies*: the characters find themselves in similar circumstances since each allows the woman he loves to marry someone else and becomes her lover afterwards. Georges also shares with Wyndham Lewis's Tarr a tendency to get involved with women, a familiarity with "polyglots" and a bent for philosophical speculation. He is more English and more "modern" than the narrator of *Futility*, who was unashamedly romantic, but he is the same type of man rendered more sophisticated by experience. The narrator of Gerhardt's first two novels is a happy combination of the Russian pre-war hero and the English post-war Bright Young Man. He has experienced war, not on the Western Front but in a part of the world where heroism seemed more futile yet because it didn't conduce to victory and where chaos, futility, and despair were felt long before they became noticeable in post-war Western society. This may account for the more articulate nature of his disillusionment as well as for his constant preoccupation with death and with the meaning of life:

I don't know what it's for, why or who wants [life]. It seems so unnecessary, useless, even silly. And yet I cannot think that it's all in vain. There must be—perhaps a larger pattern somewhere in which all these futilities, these shifting incongruities are somehow reconciled. But shall we know? Shall we ever know the reason? (p. 78)

This kind of questioning echoes Rachel's in *The Voyage Out*, though, as I have already suggested, the way in which Gerhardt answers these questions in his later works cannot compare with Virginia Woolf's.

The narrator's uncertainty about the purpose and meaning of life gives *The Polyglots* its melancholy undertones. The absurdity and the inefficiency with which the characters attempt to extricate themselves from their predicament are often tinged with sadness. At the same time, Georges' persistent indictment of the folly of war and of the ensuing chaos emphasizes the social disorder, which is given additional stress by the variety of the characters and of their follies. Moreover, *The Polyglots* is one of the rare post-war English novels in which the characters actually see their world crumbling about them and are shown experiencing the kind of situation which led to disappointment and confusion in post-war society. However, here, as in *Futility*, there is a correlation between

social disorder and the muddle of private lives rather than a cause-and-effect relationship. The two situations and the sense of frustration they give rise to are due to the irrationality shown by man in all circumstances. The narrator comments with the same disenchantment on all the follies of men, on their self-contradiction, whether in matters of love or politics, and on their failure to make the most of life's opportunities. Yet, already in this second novel the author is too theoretical and long-winded in his search for the meaning of life. Instead of presenting the characters' disillusionment through their attitude, he tends to describe it and to discuss their failure to achieve happiness. The novel is a medley of tragi-comic incidents, portraits of eccentric personalities, and humourous and sentimental passages. The narrator is alternately delighted, bored, or desperate. He is shocked at the inconsequence of his fellow-beings in their personal life and in the conduct of the War, in the drawing up of the Versailles Treaty and the taking up of "causes." Yet, he is mollified by their helplessness and by their blindness to the futility of life. Each episode adds to their bewilderment. Endless dissatisfaction and absurd conduct, Gerhardie seems to say, give life its flavour, but they also create disorder among his "polyglots." The effect is no doubt enhanced by the mixture of political madness, romance, philosophy, and extravagance, all embodied in a somewhat loose narrative, for Gerhardie himself hasn't quite mastered the general confusion.

At least one half of Chehov's attitude to life was humorous. Apart from his farces, his humour was of that high comedic quality: never quite divorced from a suspicion of tragedy. It is warm and human.<sup>1</sup>

Gerhardie's remark about Chekhov could apply to his own early novels. His analysis of the Russian writer's work shows how much he is indebted to him for his definition of life and the rendering of it in literature. Gerhardie's happiest imitation of Chekhov is in the blend of pathos and humour in *Futility* and *The Polyglots*. In these works the characters seem real because he shows them actually living. He is not averse to sentimentality, particularly in describing Natasha's death in *The Polyglots*, but it

<sup>1</sup> William GERHARDIE, *Anton Chehov*, London, 1949, p. 16.



is restrained by a delicate sense of measure and seldom becomes melodramatic. He described his novels as "humorous tragedies" in accordance with his belief that insight into the tragic condition of man coupled with "compassionate humour" for his weakness conveys the only vision of life that is not out of focus. He insisted that he was not a satirist, that he had no axe to grind and that his work had been misinterpreted by most critics for twenty five years.<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, his complaints about being misunderstood and his detailed "literary credo" are rather overdone. After all, a novel should speak for itself and cannot be entirely dissociated from the reader's response to it. When all is said, there is social criticism of a kind in Gerhardie's novels, if only because the follies of men he describes are the expression of their bewilderment at a time of historical and social crisis.

More than any other novel by Gerhardie *My Sinful Earth* is the work of a particular moment, indeed one of the most typical "post-war" novels. The author himself did not deny this and called it "a novel of the Twenties," so obvious is it that it can be identified with the mood of that period. It is a pity that he did not retain the original title *Jazz and Jasper* which he later found nauseating. "My Sinful Earth" deliberately echoes the philosophical implications of Shakespeare's sonnet but it is quite inappropriate to this comedy, which often verges on the farcical. Frank Dickin, a not very successful writer, is acquainted with a beautiful Russian émigrée and her even more beautiful daughters Zita and Eva. He becomes a protégé of Lord Ottercove, a powerful and immensely rich press baron. The latter supports his niece and her husband, Viscount de Jones, a scientist who has always been in love with the Russian émigrée. All these people are involved in complicated relationships. Eventually, Dickin, de Jones and Ottercove are good-humoured rivals in their efforts to win over the delightful Eva, who favours all three of them. Viscount de Jones is obsessed with the idea of destroying the world but he has never been taken seriously. He disintegrates the atom and the earth, saving only a rounded mountain top which revolves by itself round the sun with only a few survivors. The inhabitants of this new planet get busy reorganizing life on the same absurd principles and ideas as in the old world.

<sup>1</sup> See the introduction to the Uniform Edition of his work, p. xix.

Lord Ottercove's personality as well as the dynamism with which he runs his affairs and, to all appearances, a big part of the world, set the tone of the novel. This all-powerful man, "the big drum in the jazz band of our civilization," (p. 240) who can do or undo everything on earth, whether private lives, reputations, fortunes or international wars, is a symbol of the new values which he helps to set up. Money is the all-important asset. Since Ottercove has an unlimited amount of it, acquired by his own intelligence and ability, he belongs to the new race of potentates who exercise a strange fascination on their contemporaries by their capacity to act. "Frank believed High Finance to be closely allied with Mysticism. It was ineffable and inutterable: it could be revealed but not explained; its priests were inspired." (p. 74) Lord Ottercove<sup>1</sup> launches men on successful political careers, takes up the silliest causes and rallies the nation to support them. This is pleasantly satirized in the "crop-increasing stunt" and the "dog campaign" by which Ottercove hopes to ensure the political victory of his friend Joe. Public events and international conflicts are parodied as well as the blind acquiescence of most people in opinions and actions dictated to them by the press lords:

Lord Ottercove hailed the prospect of war with mixed feelings of journalistic felicity and human discomfiture. As the probability—and later the unavailability—of war became more certain, the humane resistance in him yielded to patriotic excitement, and he wrote himself the leading article, heading it: 'The Nation demands—.' And the nation, reading it at breakfast next morning, felt that, yes, it was in them to demand, and they demanded and would not sheathe the sword until they had fought to utter exhaustion. . . . Once again there was 'A Cause.' (p. 179)

It is not so surprising then that an Ottercove should regard the world as a sort of chess-game in which he can move the pawns at will and feel that he has some kind of supernatural power which entitles him to interfere in all aspects of life. He is alternately a good and an evil spirit, stimulated by the effect he produces on people and by his influence on the events of his time. Like a god,

<sup>1</sup> Lord Beaverbrook, who was a friend of Gerhardie's and the original of Lord Ottercove, also served as a model for the newspaper magnate in Waugh's *Scoop*.

he takes his role very seriously and enjoys his sense of power. In addition, he is convinced that he is of service to mankind by giving in his papers an image of the world which hardly corresponds to reality :

Life is a dream, according to my philosophy, a dream of illusions. And this faculty of creating illusions in a world of appearances is, I claim, the function of the journalist. (p. 70)

In the run for power over mankind Ottercove has a serious rival, whom he has never taken seriously because he thinks money can buy everything, even the right to exist. When he offers de Jones to buy the visible world from him and the latter refuses, he is beside himself with anger until he realizes that the disintegration of the world is going to make first-rate news. But de Jones does disintegrate the world in order to revenge himself for not being taken seriously. Scientists of his type will blow up the world in the belief that they are fulfilling a mission, while the men in power are irresponsible enough to take the chance of disregarding warnings. In fact, the world is in the hands of press lords like Ottercove who "give the public what it wants" but would not exhort them to behave reasonably, and of scientists like de Jones who cannot increase the crop-growing capacity of the earth but are proud to be able to destroy it altogether. That men are unwilling to improve or are incapable of it is further illustrated on the new planet when de Jones kills the inn-keeper because she protests against her son's disintegration. He kills her to ensure peace on the planet, and he imagines his descendants and Frank's armed to the teeth, not for aggression but for defence alone. All this is conveyed with detached and humorous zest, though the narrative is too often sprinkled with philosophical speculations. Like one character in *The Three Sisters*, Ottercove is fond of asserting that the ordinary visible world doesn't exist but merely "seems"; de Jones repeats that God wants the world to be destroyed so that it can resurrect, and that he is God's chosen instrument; Dickin wants to escape life in time. It is not always clear whether this pseudo-philosophy is meant seriously or is being ridiculed by the author. Probably, as in his other novels, Gerhardie wants to stress men's incapacity to discover meaning in life, but this metaphysical concern is out of tune with the farcical context of the novel.

*My Sinful Earth* is another of Gerhardie's variations on the absurdity of life. But, above all, it expresses with fantasy the temper of the post-war years. The rhythm of modern life is felt through Ottercove's restless activities either in London or on the Riviera. The dissatisfaction which runs through the characters' life in spite of their merrymaking is typical of the atmosphere of the post-war novel. Pleasure-seeking and melancholy are also characteristic features of Firbank's fantasies, and melancholy easily turns into bitterness or a sense of frustration in Huxley's or Waugh's satires. This seldom happens to Gerhardie's young men perhaps because, unlike most post-war heroes, they are fairly lucky in love. The female characters in Gerhardie's novels are incapable of serious or coherent thinking, but they are charming and loving women. They are eccentric and have no sense of reality: Mrs. Kerr, for instance, spends lavishly one day, then works the next as a servant in order to feed her children. Eva, her daughter, is equally irresponsible and exhibits the innocence and impudence, the fragility and toughness which characterize the heroine of the Twenties. Gerhardie's young women never show the callousness nor the mercenary disposition of Waugh's female characters, but like the latter, they are lacking in moral sense. They have the knack of ignoring the uglier aspects of life and contribute a good deal to the general atmosphere of extravagance and lunacy.

*My Sinful Earth* is not so polished a novel as *Futility* or even *The Polyglots*. There is a strong autobiographical element in Gerhardie's work; it is obvious from *Memoirs of a Polyglot* that he exploited over and over again the events and incidents of his personal life. But the personal element is less successfully transmuted in *My Sinful Earth* than in his first novels; the narrator comes too much to the fore though his possibilities as a character seem to be exhausted. Frank Dickin often sounds trivial and cheaply sentimental. Yet he is also inclined to cynicism and with Ottercove and Eva delights in the atmosphere of general inconsequence and lunacy. Here is life at its craziest with evenings at the Kiss-Lik Club, reminiscent of Michael Arlen, Mrs. Kerr's extravagant outings and Eva's most unlikely adventures, all of which take place in a world threatened with destruction. Ottercove, who will appear in most of Gerhardie's later novels, is presented as a new world master, and his revolution in journalism is shown

to affect all aspects of life in an unprecedented way. *Jazz and Jasper* was the first modern novel to satirize the overwhelming influence of the press on behaviour and ways of thinking. It showed how the sensational press fostered a feeling of insecurity among the public; it created an artificial world in which disasters and the doings of the great were of paramount importance and aimed at making people forget the grim reality of their own existence. However, Gerhardie's stroke of genius was the atomic disintegration of the earth, his prophetic, though humorous, vision of the sinister threat that was to hang over coming generations.

There is little to be said for Gerhardie's later novels. After *My Sinful Earth* he never regained the freshness and spontaneity of his early work. He seems to have applied a recipe which, having worked in the past, was expected to work indefinitely. The novels he wrote in the Thirties often present the same characters in exactly the same terms and merely reproduce the passages which concern them from one novel to another. Nor is their author against telling the same jokes in several novels. This repetitiveness is irritating and adds to the tediousness of his later fiction. The characters are never real because they merely talk about their feelings but are not shown experiencing them. Their life is too trivial or presented too flatly to arouse interest. Essentially, the theme of Gerhardie's fiction remains the same: the insanity of mankind, the futility of man's exertions to attain objects that are themselves devoid of significance. He describes man's bewilderment and anxiety and explains that these are unnecessary though inevitable. As previously, he takes examples in contemporary life to illustrate the follies of men. In *Of Mortal Love* the characters spend most of their time attending Bohemian and fashionable parties in Bloomsbury and Mayfair, while some are involved in Left-wing politics or support Social Credit. *My Wife's the Least of It* pokes fun at the political conflicts of the Thirties. Mr. Baldrige enjoys parodying political orators and making speeches to support the "Marxism of the Upper Classes." Still, Gerhardie insists that contemporary events do not really impress individuals, who are more affected by the unsatisfactoriness inherent in all human existence.

The "philosophy" Gerhardie attempts to build up on this view of life becomes increasingly obtrusive in his later novels. "Nothing



is until it's over" is the essence of ordinary living. Men only realize the value of experience when it is over. While they are waiting for "real" life to begin, it slips away unnoticed. Then, they suddenly become aware that the small irrelevant things which they had disregarded but which buried themselves in their consciousness was their real life. The sense of lost opportunity in all novels by Gerhardie is a consequence of man's inability to concentrate on the present because he is not aware of its potential richness. He saves his chances of happiness for an uncertain future, and he keeps going supported by the idea of "Paradise Deferred." In his introduction to *Resurrection* Hugh Kingsmill explained that Gerhardie believed neither in the good time nor in the bad world but was most concerned with knowing why man "was having a bad time in a good world." The question was partly answered by his assumption that man was by nature unable to live in the present. He also thought that life as we know it is but a distorted, partial image of an unknown whole from which we are severed during our existence in time. In his later novels his characters' sense of frustration is contrasted with the fleeting moments of bliss they experience when they recollect the past and are momentarily serene and free from craving. The quality of these moments treasured and remembered gives meaning to life.

The analogy of this approach to life with Proust's is obvious. Indeed, Gerhardie forces the comparison upon us by frequent references to his master in *Resurrection*. That we do things on earth because we have already done them in a previous life, the impossibility of knowing other people, the maxim "Nothing is until it's over" expressed slightly differently, all these elements are to be found in one passage of *Le Temps Retrouvé*. Even the expression "real but not actual, ideal but not abstract," often used by Gerhardie to describe aspects of things usually hidden from us and revealed in moments of ecstasy, is taken from Proust. But Gerhardie discusses theories and methods; he cannot make use of them and never renders through art the evanescent beauty of a moment of fulfilment. Since he hardly uncovers the emotional life of his characters, neither their experiences nor their reactions to them are convincing, the more so as these reactions are always fairly similar in order to prove the unchangeableness of human nature. Proust often shows man failing to appreciate happiness as long as he feels it to be secure, then becoming restless when he

realizes that he might lose it. The changes of moods and feelings of his narrator are described with subtlety, and their psychological truth is impressive. The detailed analysis of feelings and the psychological elucidation which are the subject-matter of Proust's writing are absent from Gerhardt's work. When Proust's narrator fails to fully enjoy experiences which he had craved for, it is often because they are so fertile in sensations that he prefers, as it were, to keep his impressions in store until they can be recollected and appreciated in all their complexity later on. With Proust the deferment of happiness is a source of emotional enrichment which gives significance to time past. In Gerhardt's later novels the past is meaningless and trivial, while the description of the present doesn't even make real the sense of frustration it is meant to convey. These novels consist of disparate elements which do not blend. Though Gerhardt asserted that he was doing something similar to what Proust did in *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, he was not equipped as a writer to carry out the task to which he applied himself. He reduced all life to a repetitive and almost mechanical rejection of the present in order to delight in a past nostalgically remembered but recreated without imagination.

The significance of Gerhardt's criticism of society is limited to his first three novels. This is not, as might be supposed, because his later work aims so deliberately at illustrating his philosophy, for in developing this philosophy Gerhardt may have been influenced by his vision of the world in the early Twenties. His belief that our apprehension of the reality and wholeness of life is evanescent was shared by other writers at the time: as I have already suggested in dealing with Virginia Woolf, it may well have been prompted, or at least strengthened, by the unsatisfactory state of the world in the post-war years. Yet with the publication of each novel and for years afterwards Gerhardt felt the need to explain that he was no committed writer, that he had no axe to grind and did not wish his novels to be taken for satires. So much insistence indicates that some elements in his novels could be called satirical. When he surveys the contemporary scene, as he does in most of his novels, Gerhardt ridicules social chaos in the same way as the other follies of men. True, individual life does not usually depend on social and political circumstances. On the other hand, a significant interpretation of life should transcend the

particular circumstances which inspired it or convey the further implications of these circumstances. Gerhardie's criticism of society in his later novels is limited because his characters are on the whole too flimsy to represent anything but themselves, just as they are too trivial to illustrate his philosophy convincingly. Paradoxically, Gerhardie was at his best when he recreated the surface life of an era, as he did in his early fiction. His first three "humorous tragedies" do voice, as this expression suggests, the "comic despair" of *Petrouchka*.<sup>1</sup> "Humour," Gerhardie writes, "is clairvoyance in the service of this life. It is pure perception."<sup>2</sup> Humour is the best corrective of our distorted and partial view of life for it tempers exaggeration and helps man to acquire a sense of proportion. It brings out the vanity of human beings, but it sheds light on their unhappiness. Gerhardie's use of "compassionate humour" made him an excellent interpreter of the contradictory moods of the post-war years: the coexistence of frivolity with melancholy, of pleasure-seeking with a sense of frustration, of futility with a craving for permanence. This interpretation of individual unrest at that particular time is also the best illustration of his philosophy of life.

<sup>1</sup> This expression was used by Cyril Connolly to describe the hero of the novel of the Twenties in *Enemies of Promise*, p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to *Futility*, p. xv.

## L.H. MYERS

The gulf lies not between those who affirm and those who deny, but between those who affirm and those who ignore.<sup>1</sup>

To leave Gerhardt for Myers is to become aware of two opposite trends in the English novel between the Wars: the first is the expression of a frustrated sensibility turned upon itself and heedless of traditional moral values; the second is represented by writers who are concerned with ethical values and criticize the lack of moral discrimination shown by the intellectual élite who cultivate all forms of sensibility for their own sake. L.H. Myers, who belongs to this second trend, makes no concession at all to what he calls "artistic snobbery." He is out to explore the attitudes of his contemporaries and the principles which inspire them. Searching for truth with tireless patience, he exposes forms of thought and conduct generally assumed to be good, but which lead to corruption, and he shows how certain philosophies and ideologies which appear to have nothing in common are conducive to a similar deterioration of spiritual values. All his characters are wealthy or powerful people who are completely cut off from the ordinary circumstances of contemporary life. In *The Orissers* (1922) Eamor is completely isolated, and its inhabitants have little contact with the outside world. *The Clio* (1925) takes place on a yacht which sails up the Amazon. *Strange Glory* (1936) is set in the Louisiana swamp and *The Near and the Far* (1935 and 1940) in sixteenth-century India. However, neither the remoteness in space or time nor the social class to which the characters belong are obstacles to Myers's exploration of contemporary attitudes. On the contrary, they allow him to concentrate dispassionately on the essence of the problems he deals with. "My intention," Myers

<sup>1</sup> L.H. MYERS, *The Near and the Far*, containing *The Root and the Flower* and *The Pool of Vishnu*, London, 1946, p. 91.

writes, "was not to set aside the social and ethical problems that force themselves upon us at the present time. On the contrary, my hope has been that we might view them better from the vantage-ground of an imaginary world."<sup>1</sup>

"Civilization" is an important word in Myers's vision of society. It is associated with fastidiousness, also a key-word, which describes a highly developed moral sensibility and spiritual refinement. Fastidiousness is opposed to triviality and vulgarity, which denote unawareness of spiritual values. The basic conflict illustrated in Myers's work is between what makes for refinement and civilization on the one hand and for materialism on the other, or between the spirit and the world. By "the world" Myers means a society which is at bottom materialistic whatever ideals it pretends to pursue. "The world," says Jali in *The Pool of Vishnu*, "is an organized system of mean second thoughts," (p. 720) in which men check what generous impulse they have and give in to a spirit of competitiveness. The motives which underlie people's reactions in "the world" are pride and fear: pride in their social position and in the scrupulousness with which they live up to it, and fear of other people's opinion. Even when they belong to the traditional upper classes, their refinement is all on the surface: they are not really cultured or fastidious. In fact, they always behave according to type because this is the only way which makes them feel secure. "The world" is a society which "glorifies itself" and considers its own organization as an end in itself. It exacts from its members unconditional respect for its institutions and conformity to conventional standards of behaviour. It ignores man's deeper instincts and individual tastes and sets up a cult of appearances. Fashion and public opinion are all-important criteria.

In his first two novels Myers examines two fundamental and irreconcilable attitudes to life and draws attention to their limitations. In *The Orissers* civilization and refinement are symbolized by Eamor, the estate which has belonged to the Orissers for five hundred years and which Lilian Orisser wants to keep for her stepson Nicholas. Among the "fastidious" are also Cosmo, Sir Charles's elder son, and Allen Allen, his former secretary now in love with Lilian. Eamor is mortgaged in favour of John Mayne.

<sup>1</sup> *The Near and the Far*, preface to the 1940 edition, p. 5.



Lilian's second husband. With his nieces, Madeline and Nina, and Walter Standish, his secretary, John Mayne represents "the world" at its worst. The fight between the Maynes and the Orissers over Eamor symbolizes the antagonism between their attitudes to life. Indeed, neither John Mayne nor Madeline really intends to deprive Lilian of Eamor, but they both want to humiliate her and to make her recognize the superiority of their values over hers.

Lilian draws strength to fight the Maynes from "the idea that she is not only handing down a tradition but purchasing the conditions necessary to its continuance."<sup>1</sup> The tradition she wants to preserve is one of culture, intellectual achievement and striving after spiritual ends. To abandon Eamor would entail "spiritual impoverishment" and surrender to a materialistic society. Thanks to Lilian, life at Eamor remains an "elegant ritual," and distinction withstands the intrusion of "modern barbarism" chiefly represented by Madeline. In the isolation and "dreadful peace" of Eamor Lilian cultivates in Nicholas a taste for intellectual speculation and self-consciousness. At nineteen he is an intelligent and cultivated man, but he clearly develops towards spiritual death instead of spiritual fulfilment. As Allen explains to Lilian, his spirit is "turned back upon itself. He has no energy to apply to battling with the world, because all his energies are consumed in conflict with himself." (p. 306) The fact is that Nicholas doesn't even battle with the world; Lilian and Allen do this for him. He refuses to leave Eamor and has no experience of the world at all. If his life becomes merely sterile and not destructive like Cosmo's, it is because he has few opportunities and no personal reason to vent his hatred of the world in destructive action. On the whole, the tameness of his behaviour contrasts unfavourably with the feverish restlessness of Cosmo, whose vision of the world derives from personal experience. In this respect, Lilian and Nicholas resemble Sir Charles, who was never tempted to come into contact with his fellow-beings. Nicholas is "interested in ideas rather than in people." (p. 67) He doesn't want experience, and he thinks that the world of action is "a perpetual temptation to the dissipating of one's energies." (p. 206) To him life is either animalism or pure intelligence, and he adheres unreservedly to the latter. "To be alive is to offer resistance to the flux, to contract out of the general

<sup>1</sup> L.H. MYERS, *The Orissers*, London, 1923, p. 274.

fluidity into a hard discreteness, to curdle into independent self-consciousness." (p. 236) His dualistic conception of man makes him think that "sex [is] the vulgarest of all vulgar lures in life's whole bag of tricks." (p. 255) His affair with Isabel soon comes to an end because his senses are gratified but he refuses to treat her as a person and to communicate with her spiritually as he does with Lilian.

Like the Orissers, Allen values the spiritual life: his attraction to Cosmo, his sympathy for Nicholas, for whom he also deems it essential to secure Eamor, show that he is himself fascinated by the Ideal. However, he is aware of the danger of an exclusive devotion to the spirit and warns Nicholas that "the Ideal that is not discoverable beneath the forms of the Actual is a chimera." (p. 340) He thinks that the dualism "between the animal life of the race and the volition of the individual" is the result of man's loss of "that immediate unity with the life of the race which was so spontaneous in the minds of our ancestors." (p. 440) Allen believes in the continuity of life and in the participation of all human beings in it. Incomplete men and women "are in dire need of larger personalities, in which the individual elements of the mind, such as reason and will, shall be harmonized with the deeper instincts of race, to form one living whole." (p. 442) Yet in spite of his conviction that the dualistic elements in human nature can be reconciled, he doesn't reach fulfilment. He and Lilian love each other, but he has no fundamental need of her. "All that he needed, fundamentally, was his work. He had never been—he never would be—dependent on human relationships." (p. 534) Consequently, none of the Orissers is gratified by their victory over the Maynes, a victory supposedly gained by spiritual values. Allen feels the incompleteness of his life; Lilian achieves serenity, but it is "the serenity of a mock life." As to Nicholas, his obstinate isolation at Eamor is death-in-life. "Civilization" is far superior to the trivial existence of the world, but it is not without shortcomings. Among the Orissers it is definitely sterile, though Allen's outlook is more positive than Nicholas's. Myers makes a shrewd distinction between the spiritual development of Allen and that of Nicholas, but on the whole he doesn't seem to have realized how negative the attitude of the Orissers actually was.

The real superiority of the Orissers over the Maynes lies in their honesty towards themselves. For instance, Cosmo's standard

of sincerity is so extravagant that he is taken for a madman. In their determination to be true to their inner being they refuse to submit to the moral standards of the community and recognize no other sanction than that of their own conscience. That is why Lilian feels justified in becoming Allen's mistress and why she refuses to play on John Mayne's feelings, which she would consider as a self-betrayal. That is also why Allen feels he has a right to kill Cosmo, who threatens to thwart Lilian's claim to Eamor. Admittedly, Cosmo's hatred of the world is destructive. His resentment against Lilian, whom he holds responsible for his failure in life, could have been as harmful as the jealousy of the Maynes and even become the instrument of their revenge. Still, his murder by Allen is a serious flaw in the novel for it destroys the Orissers' claim to being the keepers of spiritual values; it is not merely an offence against conventional morality but also an outrage against the very spirit they are trying to preserve and of which Cosmo was after all a fanatical upholder. This spirit, as Allen himself suggests when he talks of unity with the life of the race, originates in the cosmos and partakes of its life. Wentworth expresses this clearly in *Strange Glory*:

I live here, not in order to be alone, but to feel connected. It so happens that in this place I feel particularly aware of the intertwining of our spiritual roots. That feeling comes up, I think, from the earth. We all have our feet upon a common earth, our bodies are all built up out of a common mould, we all spring from similar ancestors, we all have similar memories through them, it is in the feel of the earth that we get the feel of humanity.<sup>1</sup>

Allen's thoughts on this subject are confused. This adds to the impression that Myers hasn't worked out satisfactorily the belief, more clearly defined in his later novels, that the transcendental and the concrete should meet and that men should come together in a living relationship through their connection with the universe. It also draws attention to the fact that spiritual values are more talked about than reflected in the behaviour of the characters. Lilian's attitude towards John Mayne may be due to her determination to remain herself, but it also lacks generosity. Again, this shows that the Orissers are chiefly concerned with

<sup>1</sup> L.H. MYERS, *Strange Glory*, New York, 1936, p. 145.

themselves and that their spirituality is devoid of compassion. Moreover, it is never tested in the world, and it is not at all certain that the Orissers would come out well if it were. These failings make their claim to moral superiority unconvincing. After all, they are not much bothered by the fact that Eamor is preserved for them thanks to the material values they so much despise and in spite of the fact that Lilian doesn't keep her side of the bargain with John Mayne. The discrepancy between their principles and their behaviour partly accounts for Myers's failure to put the case for civilization convincingly.

Myers is more subtle in his analysis of the values and ways of life which make for materialism and in the distinction he makes between John Mayne and his niece. John Mayne is the exact counterpart of Lilian: he knows exactly what he lives for and is as determined to get it as she is. His personality is nowhere better revealed to Lilian than at the beginning of their marriage: he takes her to huge hotels, where they always occupy the "Royal suite" and where she is "shown off as a trophy—as a piece of bric-à-brac for her husband's friends to admire leeringly, as though they actually held her between finger and thumb." (p. 109) Lilian has "the revelation of an existence more barren than she had been able to imagine." (p. 109) Life for John Mayne "dotes on variety, with plenty of movement, plenty of scope for the emotions, plenty of what is commonly called 'action' and 'character.'" (p. 386) Through contact with the Orissers, he is made aware of "realms beyond his ken," whose existence he had suspected without ever trying to discover what they were. The light in his eyes after the conclusion of the marriage ceremony, a light which "must often have appeared in them at the conclusion of a successful business deal," (p. 108) shows that his attitude to Lilian is one of domination. He feels that by his generosity towards the Orissers, a proof in his eyes that he is also capable of a non-materialistic attitude, he has won a right to Lilian's gratitude and affection. He is soon made aware that it is folly to count on "a reciprocation between material and spiritual values," (p. 122) and his life becomes embittered. Success in the world has always been his main purpose; by entering into conflict with the Orissers, he is made to face an aspect of life which he is unable to master. His failure "corrupts his spirit" by making him lose the "spiritual obtuseness" which is "the saving grace" of the men of his kind and which

Walter Standish so successfully retains. When Lilian resists him, John Mayne realizes that her values are not so negligible in "the real game of life" as he had imagined; his humiliation makes him hate himself, his life is poisoned, and he loses his self-satisfaction. Eventually, he gives her Eamor and implicitly recognizes the superiority of her standards. He is vanquished in the spiritual conflict which she has forced upon him, and he dies without recovering his equanimity.

At one stage in the contest between the Maynes and the Orissers, Lilian's husband feels that although he has been contaminated, he will yet be avenged by Walter and Madeline. He watches them go for a ride and sees in them "an expression of life's willingness to dispense with spiritual significance . . . a brutal exposition of the self-sufficingness of the flesh." (p. 119) When they come back from their ride and commit an unprecedented outrage by riding over the lawn, John Mayne understands that he has found a perfect successor in Madeline:

He felt sure that Madeline's femininity and Walter's obtuseness would serve them both well. . . . Superbly from their vantage-point, would they carry on the feud against the other kind, the enemy, and perhaps without ever clearly understanding what they were doing. Yes, there was the beauty of it! There was the triumph! Long might they preserve their innocence! To do that which you will, that which you are fashioned to do, in all innocence there was the secret of life! (p. 128)

The innocence of Walter and Madeline is unawareness, the capacity to ignore, as Gokal says in *The Near and the Far*, the inability to discriminate between good and evil, which for Myers is more dangerous because more misleading than the deliberate choice of evil. Walter's ignorance is partly due to his refusal to recognize the real nature of things or of people and to take responsibilities. He is "what passes in the world for an honourable man; but he [sees] to it that his honour [shall] not lie along too difficult a road." (p. 224) Walter's honour is dictated to him by his fear of public opinion. His policy in life consists in avoiding making mistakes which might endanger his position as John Mayne's collaborator and Madeline's future husband. According to Nicholas, his life is utterly futile, for its sole object is to conform to the requirements of social morality and institutions. His dishonesty



towards himself can be fully appraised through the efforts he makes to remain ignorant of Madeline's dealings and of her true nature. Both Walter and Madeline represent society as defined by Wentworth and Stephen in *Strange Glory* :

Society encourages the spirit of competitiveness and the cult of appearances—and it is these that make men cruel, trivial-minded and self-deceiving.<sup>1</sup>

Madeline's capacity for self-deception is greater than Walter's, and it is chiefly in her attitude to life that Myers denounces the harmful influence of false idealism. She is Lilian's most bitter enemy because she is humiliated by the latter's rejection of her friendship. But she is not even aware that her offer is not sincere, that her kindness is a means of gaining ascendancy over the person to whom she makes herself agreeable. She considers Lilian's refusal to idealize as positively wicked and cynical. She herself keeps true to her motto, "One must idealize or one will cease to struggle," (p. 161) and she finds a justification for all her emotions and actions however wicked. The romanticism and false idealism indulged in by Madeline are for Myers a real source of evil, all the more dangerous as they are not recognized for what they are and entail the degeneration of man by making him submit to a mechanistic code of behaviour that has no root in his inner being. Nicholas diagnoses the disease of modern society as it manifests itself in Walter and Madeline : "We are entering upon a new age of materialism . . . [which] is coming like an anti-Christ, in the semblance of its opposite. It offers a pseudo-idealism, which is typified in its male and female aspects by Walter and Madeline." (p. 345) The latter sets up an ideal of self-sacrifice which she uses as emotional blackmail. She represents the "Great Mother," "generative nature" increasingly powerful in modern society. As to Walter, his need to idealize is turned towards society, which he invests with "all the dignity and authority of religion." (p. 349) Since he doesn't even have the vitality of a John Mayne nor the self-awareness which makes the latter a more complex character, all his energies go towards developing a public figure. In Walter intelligence is being progressively brought under the shackles of convention, custom and the social instinct. In the future millions and millions of Walters in happy collaboration with

<sup>1</sup> *Strange Glory*, p. 378.

their Madelines, and animated by nothing but an overpowering instinct for self-perpetuation and comfort, will apply themselves, undisturbed, to the soulless task of ordered social living. Saturated through and through with the spirit of the Hive, the Walters will dignify their crass materialism with the title of Humanism, apt name for a religion as proper to despiritualized man as Apianism to bees and Porcinism to pigs. (p. 350)

In all his novels Myers criticizes humanism and condemns it as a "pseudo-religion" which originates in a spurious idealism: it reveres society as an end in itself and refuses to acknowledge the transcendental. Humanism is altruistic but denies the spirit in which all men share, which is the true basis of their equality. It exalts the ideal of social duty at the expense of self-illumination. As we shall see, Myers believes that society can only be regenerated through individual integrity. He condemns the kind of humanism which deifies "Humanity" yet shows little concern for the moral and spiritual life of individuals. Humanists like Walter and Madeline believe in "progress," by which they mean the improvement of material conditions. They only think of humanity in the abstract, not of individuals; they fail to see that individual behaviour can determine the character of society and don't realize that their want of "fastidiousness" in matters of personal integrity cannot be compensated for by humanitarian works. It is characteristic that Walter's main activity should be philanthropy; when he is married to Madeline, they vie with each other in supporting the humanitarian cause and in showing public spirit. In relation to this subject one may compare Myers's condemnation of love as an end in itself and the relation he sees between idealism and materialism with Lawrence's discussion of these topics in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* and *Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*. However, the word "Ideal" does not have the same meaning for the two writers: for Lawrence, the "Ideal" is that which is derived from the mind; for Myers, the "Ideal" is the transcendental, and it is only "false idealism" that he associates with materialism. "Idealism" in Lawrence and "false idealism" in Myers differ in that the former is a conscious attitude whereas the latter is unconscious. However, they are equally dangerous because they are cultivated by people who are always talking about spirituality and are convinced of the moral superiority of their attitude to life.

As a novel, *The Orissers* is not quite satisfactory: its main fault lies in Myers's inability to present the characters and their conduct in concrete terms. Everything is discussed or described instead of being conveyed directly; although we are made to perceive fully the characters' mental activity, we have doubts about their actual comportment in ordinary life; they are seldom tested in the world, and when they are, they do not come out well. There is also a discrepancy between the importance of the issue fought by the characters and its concrete symbol, Eamor. The intrigues for its possession involve on both sides pettiness and doubtful transactions, which are not more admirable because the Orissers take full responsibility for what they do. Another shortcoming in the novel is the inadequate rendering of the relation between man and the universe. Allen discusses it in the abstract; we are still a long way off from *The Near and the Far* when, in the garden surrounding the palace of Agra, Jali feels the dreadfulness and the terror which the world holds for him. What the novel makes clear is the thoughts and motives which actuate human conduct, the confusion which underlies the morality based on public opinion and the self-deception which many are prepared to resort to in order to comply with it. Myers points to the void or the turpitude which can be detected behind the cult of appearances or in an existence exclusively focused upon the world. He contrasts them with the spiritual strength and graciousness which spring from a rich and self-exacting inner life. His denunciation of humanism implies that enthusiasm for reform and the welfare of humanity is too often the expression of motives which are at bottom selfish or the outcome of a personal sense of frustration. People like Mr. Wilkinson in *The Clio* "erect love into a principle" because "they don't love by instinct."<sup>1</sup> As Lady Oswestry says, "perhaps working for the good of humanity has a parching effect." (p. 137) On the other hand, a spirituality which has nothing to feed upon but intellectual speculation is also desiccating. Myers associates refinement and culture with moral fastidiousness; his aristocrats advocate a morality of the heart and are above conventional modes of behaviour. This can be a dangerous position, and it is difficult to say to what extent Myers is aware of its limitations in *The Orissers*.

<sup>1</sup> L.H. MYERS, *The Clio*, Penguin Books, 1945, p. 137.

In *The Clio* "civilization" is not tested in a fight against evil but in its own capacity to offer the characters a way of life which gratifies their deeper needs. Civilization can be associated with mere worldliness or conduce to a higher form of being depending on the characters' "triviality" or their "fastidiousness." Civilization, one of them says, "is the best thing in the world" and the *Clio* is "the fine flower of civilization." Lady Oswestry's guests "[are] aware of themselves as a social group with certain standards to keep up," and each "[feels] he has to hold his own in the group." (p. 16) But on the whole, they are not too exacting with themselves and merely try to keep up appearances. Sir James has achieved a certain poise in life by ignoring its main conflicts and by avoiding responsibilities. Lady Oswestry's chief concern is to find the right face cream. Olga wants a husband, and Mary is so engrossed in her love for Gerald that she is indifferent to everything that happens on the yacht. The emptiness of civilized life is revealed through the triviality of Angela and Francis. The former is cold and calculating, because early in life she saw that the main thing was to display the right manners and clothes as well as the right tastes and opinions. Francis's life is a tissue of gossip and truly illustrates Harry's saying: "It is not sin but triviality that hideth us from God." (p. 151) The inadequacy of civilization as mere form is best illustrated in Stella, Harry and Hugo, who are dissatisfied with the futility of life however refined and civilized. Stella is a "sentimental revolutionary" who takes refuge in romanticism. At the end of the novel she stays with Harry in South America in order to help him in his revolutionary enterprise. The latter rejects civilized living and can only express contempt for those who submit to its standards. He finds an outlet for his restlessness in revolutionary politics and is successful with the natives because, as Sir James explains, he has the cunning, the practical imagination, the impatience and the passion for burlesque which so well serve the modern politician. Hugo has something in common with the early Huxleyan hero, particularly with Denis in *Crome Yellow*. He finds that "human beings and forests and sunsets [are] all part of a sad and insoluble mystery," (p. 69) but he is strongly influenced by Sir James in his search for the right life, and he eventually finds his way.

Civilized standards are put to the test in the jungle, where the *Clio* is held up for several weeks. The boredom of the passengers

brings to light their purposelessness. Contact with primitive nature forces the more sensitive characters to reconsider their attitude to life. Mary realizes how trivial Gerald is and becomes aware that she doesn't really love him. Hugo puts an end to his meaningless affair with Stella. Mary finds him sitting in the forest, terrified because he has been bitten by a serpent, and her genuine compassion gives him an intuition of another reality. They suddenly see each other with new eyes and are carried by their love upon another plane of being. Hugo thinks now that "what really [matters is] the emotional intensity with which one [lives]." (p. 138) His relationship with Mary foreshadows that of Mohan and Damayanti in *The Pool of Vishnu*; it is a relationship which requires an equal amount of "fastidiousness" and "candour" on both sides. Hugo feels the validity and the necessity of attitudes impelled by the "heart" and recognizes the fundamental dryness of Mr. Wilkinson, the humanist. He discovers *l'homme de cœur* beneath the worldly exterior of Sir James and realizes that the latter's "materialism [is] impregnated with idealism, while the concealed foundations of Mr. Wilkinson's idealism [are] . . . materialistic." (p. 123) For that reason he thinks that "the honour of the human race [is] safer in that man's [Sir James's] hands, his selfishness, hardness and cynicism notwithstanding." (p. 123) Sir James is devoid of humanitarian principles; he believes "in government by the rich for the preservation of our existing culture and civilization." (p. 67) Yet one finds in him more warmth and sympathy than in Mr. Wilkinson, who worries about a sailor because he is ill and poor but has no compassion to spare for Sir James on his death-bed. The saving grace of Sir James is the dignity with which he keeps up his civilized standards to the last, "renouncing even the relief of an occasional groan" and never "[permitting] an expression of suffering to be seen upon his face." (p. 120) Civilized living is still the best form of existence, above all when contrasted with the natives' incompetence and repulsiveness.

*The Clio* is a slight novel, and the characters have even less opportunity than in *The Orissers* to exemplify by their behaviour the attitudes they discuss. Yet there is a greater emphasis on the concrete; the impact of nature on men, particularly on Sir James, is more strongly felt, although some characters remain impervious to the heavy and pervasive effect of the jungle. Myers shows here that with trivial people civilization can degenerate into mere



worldliness. But the self-awareness and dignity of Sir James, the real courage of Lady Oswestry and her refusal to take herself too seriously, and the genuineness of Mary and Hugo's love also suggest that there is something to be said for civilized living even in its worldly form. Indeed, civilization also includes inherited qualities which the individual can develop if he wants to. This implies that civilized people can respond in a positive manner when put to the test, though in ordinary circumstances the positive character of civilization is limited. Still, when opposed to primitiveness, civilization becomes attractive. According to Myers, it is still the best we have in modern life. That is why its forms should be regenerated by qualities of the heart.

In *The Clio* civilization is almost a makeshift, although Myers also makes it clear that its value depends much on the individual's willingness to live up to its standards. In *Strange Glory*, which was written after *The Root and the Flower* before the completion of *The Near and the Far*, Myers achieves a more satisfactory union between the external and the internal, and is more successful in presenting an attitude to life inspired by "the heart." In the Thirties Myers adhered to communism, a doctrine of which he "knew nothing from first-hand experience and one which served him chiefly to provide him with an emotional stopgap."<sup>1</sup> His conversion to communism did not make him deny the merits of civilization as he understood it; the characters of *Strange Glory* do not reject it:

'Let us give the devil his due,' Stephen says, 'competitive-ness, snobbishness, vanity and pride have done more for civilization than all the virtues put altogether. It is they that have lifted men out of savagery. . . . But now I truly believe, unless there comes a spiritual change, we shall be carried over a precipice. (p. 139)

Though living in Russia most of the time, Stephen cannot become a communist: "I know I am quite unpardonably influenced by the ugliness of life over there, by the absence of all graciousness and grace. I cannot stand the crudity of thought or the bad manners." (p. 139) He only stays in Russia because he feels that communism

<sup>1</sup> G.H. BANTOCK, "The Novels of L.H. Myers," in *The Novelist as Thinker*, ed. by B. RAJAN, London, 1947, p. 59.

will lead men towards regeneration. He and Wentworth agree that they should not allow themselves to be deceived by the fact that the new spirit appears to be materialistic, "should indeed believe itself to be materialistic. . . . The new civilization misunderstands itself and its own spirit, and yet the force that is carrying it along testifies for it." (pp. 243-4) The Russian communists have achieved the long desired brotherhood of men; if the spiritual values that inspire it are not immediately apparent, it is because they are still fighting against the social order they have replaced, and because such drastic changes as took place in Russia often seem cruel. Wentworth thinks that "the ideal of self-illumination and the ideal of social duty are not incompatible." (p. 137) Stephen is supposed to carry out through action what he, Wentworth, achieves through contemplation. However, Myers's opinion that communism is not opposed to the spirit remains purely theoretical. As always, he treats the problem honestly and does not conceal the fact that communism is not wholly reconcilable with standards that he deems it essential to preserve. However, he is not convincing because communism as he presents it here is purely idealistic and takes no account of reality, and because his position is not worked out in the novel.

Myers is more successful in presenting Wentworth's philosophy. The latter has retired from the world because he is naturally inclined to contemplation, and he thinks that "at his age, what you think, and what you are, become more important than 'good works.'" (p. 137) Paulina Charlesworth, a rich young woman dissatisfied with her futile way of life, meets him in his place of retirement and gradually comes under his influence. In spite of Wentworth's advice, she marries a conventional young man but regrets it when she becomes aware that her husband is deeply attached to the old social order and to his own privileges. The fact that Myers criticizes Paulina's husband for insisting that "they keep up their position" in London and Bridgnorth, their country seat, shows how he has developed since *The Orissers*. In his first novel Eamor is a symbol of spiritual values; in *Strange Glory* Bridgnorth is made a symbol of convention and empty sociability and used as a warning against attachment to tradition as such. "History, tradition, culture are all very well in their way; but they are not enough." (p. 208) What Myers is now after is expressed by Wentworth: "I want the fulness of life. . . . Yes, to throw off

the shams and trivialities that cramp and stifle life—that is what we need. . . . I want a vision of Man.” (p. 209) Wentworth is a mystic who looks upon the forest as an expression of the transcendental and believes that man must enter into a living relationship with other individuals and with the earth. He believes in a spiritual force which “holds us earth-creatures together to form an earth-spirit as compact and distinct and unique as the globe of the material earth.” (p. 159) Wentworth brings peace to Paulina and acts as her guide in her discovery of spiritual values, but only in her relationship with Stephen does she learn to be completely herself and to fully apprehend “the wonder of the living Now.” Although we are made aware of the enriching value of their relationship, it has none of the regenerative power that it would assume in a novel by Lawrence, for instance. Moreover, however admirable the relations between Paulina, Wentworth and Stephen, it is difficult to see what their equivalent would be if they lived in society, for these relations seem to depend on the peace and atmosphere of the forest. Only the personality of Wentworth, his self-fulfilment and serenity are fully convincing. They are more salutary to Paulina than any theory. Wentworth foreshadows the Guru, though he is not only a teacher but remains a searcher after the true life until his death. As his personality takes shape, one perceives his warmth and understanding and realizes that he is laying a new basis for life and for action, an attitude in which “the heart” plays as important a part as the mind. “The intellectual is only a little part of the spiritual man; there is no good or bad but feeling makes it so—not thinking but feeling.” (p. 221)

*The Root and the Flower* (1935) is the best of Myers's works. It consists of three short novels, *The Near and the Far*, *Prince Jali* and *Rajah Amar*. In spite of numerous arguments, this work comes closer to real life because each character is seen acting in accordance with what he believes. Also, the background is more substantial and the characters are not isolated, so that the relation between individual behaviour and the nature of society appears much more clearly. Myers's theme is still the search for the good life, i.e., the search after truth. Truth, Jali hopes when the novel opens, will enable him to reconcile the “Near” with the “Far,” the concrete with the transcendental. The different ways of life examined by Myers are tested by Jali, who approaches them with a

fresh and unprejudiced mind, sufficiently sensitive and pliable to be influenced. Our impression of him is less of a child than of a neophyte who is being initiated into the ways of the world, because learning from experience as he does requires a maturity of judgment beyond his age. He first comes into contact with the world at Agra, where he has been taken by his parents to attend festivities in honour of Emperor Akbar. Myers examines from an ethical point of view the impression made on him by the people he meets. The Emperor is expected to choose a successor between his sons Salim and Daniyal. Salim has revolted against his father and is in disgrace. Daniyal is the more in favour with his father as he becomes converted to the Din Ilahi, the new religion by which Akbar hopes to unify the empire and to unite Church and State under one sceptre. The cause which the rajahs choose to support, the reasons for which they do so, and the possible consequences of their commitment provide the basis for Myers's analysis of the forces at work in society.

The rajahs tend to support Daniyal because he is more "civilized" than Salim. Amar, Jali's father, whose pride is rooted in "ideas of racial, cultural and intellectual superiority" regards Akbar as the descendant of "barbarians without tradition, culture or understanding." Amar intends to retire from the world and to spend the rest of his life in contemplation. Before he retires, he wants to make sure that he is committing Sita, his wife, and Jali to the right cause. He knows it is useless to advise Sita to follow a course of which she cannot wholly approve because she can only follow her heart and is not even prepared "to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's." Sita is a Christian, and to her the visible world is "a garment of God." (p. 94) She finds in its beauty a proof of the meaning she ascribes to it, for in her eyes the visible world reflects the transcendental. For Amar, on the contrary, "the Path [guides] you away from the sensuous world altogether, away from yourself, away from the ardours of earth even at their keenest and purest." (p. 94) Sita does not criticize his intention to retire from society, but she is pained at his refusal to hope that they will come together in another world: "It argued, if not a weakness in his love, a complete absence of faith in the determining power of love." (p. 100) Indeed, Amar distrusts feelings and emotions and only believes in the reasoning power of the mind. His views are the exact opposite of his brother-in-law's,

Hari Khan, who lets his life "flow as unreasoning Nature wills," (p. 120) gives in to his emotions and intuitions and knows but one command: "Live!" Sita, who suffers from the growing estrangement and tension which their different attitudes to life develop between herself and Amar, is attracted to Hari. At first, she resists her love for him, then, like Lilian Orisser and Paulina, she comes to feel that she must be truly herself and reject conventional morality. She and Hari dislike Daniyal instinctively and feel that he is a source of evil, whereas Amar cannot bring himself to believe that Daniyal is important enough to be really bad. Yet when he meets the prince, he has "an immediate impression of vulgarity . . . it was a defect of spirit, of the innermost spirit—something that betrayed itself primarily to the moral sense." (p. 134) This only bears out his impression that Daniyal's trivial-mindedness is such that he is a nonentity and therefore not dangerous. However, Amar condemns his half-sister Srilata because she is too lenient with Daniyal and overlooks moral standards. Srilata is also alive to spiritual values, but in her enthusiasm for culture and wit she is apt to disregard "triviality." Myers condemns her tolerance and lack of moral taste because they contribute to the dissemination of evil. But he also shows that Amar, who is acutely conscious that he must discriminate morally, runs the danger of making the same mistake: engrossed in his pursuit of spiritual ends and paralysed by his belief that all is illusion, he is inclined to avoid commitment altogether.

Amar hopes that when he retires from the world, his friend, the Brahmin Gokal, will help Sita and Jali to govern his small state until the latter's majority. But Gokal makes it clear to him that he must not count on either of them to approve of Daniyal as an emperor. Gokal insists that Amar must follow his intuition in judging Daniyal and shows him in what way his refusal to oppose Daniyal can be harmful. He explains to Amar that his indifference to the prince is similar in practice to Mobarek's approval of him or to the enthusiasm of the humanist Smith for him. Mobarek believes in the fundamental inequality of men and looks upon society as a "systematizing of natural inequalities." As a Buddhist, Amar ought to condemn this outlook, but he is himself too attached to tradition and too conscious of the superiority of his class to disagree. What he objects to are the "worldly" criteria by which Mobarek judges human beings. The chief difference between them is that



Mobarek is attached to tradition as such and hardly feels it necessary to account for his determination to keep the hierarchical order as it is, whereas Amar thinks that a hierarchical society must reflect a scale of spiritual worth. Mobarek naturally sees in the *Din Ilahi* a means of maintaining a rigid hierarchy; that is why he supports Daniyal, but also because he sees in the young man's revolt against nature something that makes for civilization. Curiously, the humanist Smith, who is bitterly and indignantly opposed to Mobarek's convictions, approves of Daniyal for the same reason. However, whereas Mobarek thinks that civilization can be achieved through a cult of the conventionalized and the artificial, Smith sees in the aesthetic experience an ideal which brings men together. He believes in "goodwill guided by reason." (p. 429) Amar perceives that the agnosticism of Smith generates materialism because he cannot relate his life on earth to a higher purpose; reason is to him what "art" is to Daniyal, i.e., an ideal which makes him blind to "the immensities in which men live" and to the spiritual order of the universe. Amar is struck by Smith's unfastidiousness and asserts that it is more important to show moral than aesthetic taste. Gokal points out to him the relation between humanism and homosexuality and explains them as "kindred manifestations of an arrested and distorted spiritual life"; it is not by chance that Plato is the chosen teacher of both humanists and homosexuals. Gokal is convinced that when Daniyal has secured power with the help of Mobarek, he will discard him in favour of Smith. In spite of his growing insight into Daniyal's real character, Amar still cannot see anything positively evil in him because he is too detached to realize the power of evil. When he declares (in much the same spirit as Charles Orisser) that "there is no current of human sympathy flowing between myself and the rest of mankind," (p. 505) he acknowledges his aloofness and his unsuitability to decide what is good for mankind. Moreover, since he believes that the achievement of spiritual ends must free man from the ties of ordinary living, he undervalues life. The yogi tells him that "those who do not live in contact with reality can do nothing—nothing to promote either evil or good." (p. 511) Only when he sees Daniyal crush the head of a cat with his foot out of sheer cruelty, does Amar realize the power of evil in the prince. Then he commits himself to action, but he is struck by one of Daniyal's bodyguards before he can draw his sword.

The point which Gokal tries to make clear to Amar is that it is more wicked to ignore good and evil, which is what the trivial-minded do, than to do evil purposely, which at least implies a recognition and defiance of God. To Gokal evil is the highest degree of wickedness; it is an offense against God and the Spirit of the universe. It manifests itself in acts of pure cruelty against creatures of God, chiefly through the infliction of mental sufferings and the pleasure derived from it. Gokal first became aware of evil when he was poisoned by Gunevati; it made him see that evil is inherent in human nature and in life itself. His affair with Gunevati made him realize that, while absorbed in his spiritual and intellectual pursuits, he had ignored the beauty of the phenomenal world and had been unaware of innocence and naturalness, but it also made him perceive the weakness of human nature. Though scandalous in the eyes of his friends, his passion for Gunevati humanizes him. Even after she has left him, he does not withdraw into a life of exclusive spiritual and intellectual speculation but remains aware of the phenomenal world, whose significance he now sees as "a feature of the Absolute." In this he is influenced by Sita, who also makes him perceive the value of loving-kindness, not as an incentive to social duty, which would make it a humanistic, and therefore materialistic, and sentimental attitude, but as a power which gives form and significance to life. Gokal comes to recognize the creative power of "the heart."

Until he comes into contact with the Guru, Jali's initiation into life consists mainly in a discovery of the many aspects of evil, which strengthens his conviction that the world is a place of suffering and horror. This conviction is related to his acute consciousness of the loneliness and separateness of each human being. Jali shares his uncle Hari's awareness of evil and his fear of the universe and of life. The latter tells Jali that "not to be afraid of this world, you must belong to it. . . . Pretend to yourself that you are like others. . . . Everyone is doing it." (p. 17) He also looks for certainty and truth, but he tries to ignore his own self by living intensely and dangerously. "Your *true* self is isolated—behind a barrier of pretences," the Guru tells him, "You want to live as a type, but you are not one of those who can." (p. 652) Hari remains in conflict with himself until he is killed by his enemies. Even Sita has only brought him temporary peace. Jali, who is young and more open to what life can teach him, keeps trying to

answer the question with which he had met his uncle's advice : " If everyone is pretending to be like others, who is like himself ? " (p. 17) He first comes into contact with the world through Gunevati, whose assurance and serenity derive from her instinctive knowledge of what lies at the heart of things. She lives mainly physically, and to her, religion and sex are one. Jali is struck by the fact that religion permeates her whole existence while leaving her impervious to morality. She simply combines a mindless animalism with an awareness of the mystery of the universe. She takes social differences for granted, but all men are males to her, and it is by teaching Jali that the sexual impulse is common to all men that she offers him a means of overcoming his loneliness. For a short time he loses his sense of separateness by living as a young rake, soon to realize, however, that sexuality does not dispel his essential loneliness. He still yields to Gunevati, but his spirit shrinks from her, particularly when he understands that there is something evil in her mindlessness : it is the kind of evil which manifests itself among the masses, who mostly belong to religious sects addicted to orgies and human sacrifices. These sects are severely condemned by Akbar, and its members, when caught, are thrown to the elephants. Jali comes to look upon Gunevati as " an incarnation of a dark and dreadful power." (p. 256) Her perversity and triviality stand in his eyes for the animalism and corruption of the world. It is also her presence in Daniyal's Camp which crystallizes his vague impression that there is something wrong with the Pleasance of the Arts.

Jali is introduced into the Camp by his cousin Ali. His first reaction is one of unreserved admiration, though he can't help being surprised at Ali's new sophistication and interest in the arts. He finds that the artificiality cultivated at the Camp is a means of freeing oneself from the tyranny of Nature, but he is also forced to acknowledge that the Camp is the last place in the world where one can be truly oneself :

The Camp taught that thinking for oneself consisted in nothing more than in reversing established opinions, that the newest thing was necessarily superior to the one that came before, and that the ultimate test of the worth of an idea was its capacity to startle the Philistine and annoy him. . . . The Camp had its own inverted orthodoxy, and was as bigoted as any of the old schools : opinions

changed often, but always unanimously; they changed as fashions change, on the stroke of the bell. (p. 306)

The elegant and sophisticated frivolity of the Pleasance of the Arts becomes despicable in Jali's eyes when he understands that "the pleasure which the Camp took in regarding itself as scandalous was actually the chief source of its inspiration." (p. 340) When Gunevati explains that most people at the Camp are homosexuals, Jali looks upon them as monsters and feels only hatred and contempt for the corruption which Daniyal and his followers spread in the world.

There is little doubt that the Pleasance of the Arts is a satire on the artistic and intellectual coterie of the Twenties. Myers, who had been introduced to them, found the snobbery and self-regard of Chelsea and Bloomsbury intellectuals repellent. Above all, he criticized their preference for artistic, rather than moral, discrimination. In *The Near and the Far* all the fastidious characters who come into contact with Daniyal's coterie are repulsed by the unwholesomeness of this aestheticism. Amar shrinks from the spiritual vulgarity of Daniyal and asserts that "art becomes great in the measure that it makes itself the vehicle of spiritual truth." (p. 443) Attending a dinner at Daniyal's invitation Hari finds the experience nauseating: "that chatter, those finicking manners. . . . The sniggering delight they took in one another's mean little immoralities." (p. 149) Yet the prince's vileness endows him with charm in Gunevati's eyes; when she talks of him to Jali, "her stories [are] of meanness, trickeries, and deceits, all of a most contemptible pettiness." (p. 346) Jali perceives the corrupting power of Daniyal when he realizes that Gunevati, who had been impervious to Gokal's teaching, is so quick to conform to the spirit of the Camp. It shows that the masses become more readily corrupted than converted to goodness, though in Jali's mind the comment is more damaging to Gunevati's superiors than to herself. Jali's insight into the nature of life at the Camp and its power to degrade makes him furious at the blindness of his father and the complicity of honourable men like Mobarek. His rage and hopelessness turn to despair and horror when he discovers that Gunevati has had her tongue cut out: the world is a place of evil, and those who serve it are punished according to its own standards. Jali knows that Gunevati deserves her punishment, but he feels

compassion and is only aware of "the darkness of the whole long night of humanity's suffering and evil-doing." (p. 383)

In spite of the historical setting of *The Near and the Far* the attitudes to life presented and discussed apply to contemporary society. Myers defines evil as a refusal to take an interest in any but trivial things; it is also a desire to inflict suffering on the "fastidious," in other words, to debase life in those who are aware of its spiritual significance. "Trivial-mindedness in individuals or communities is practically the whole of what I mean by evil"; (p. 542) the trivial-minded are "incapable of an emotional response to the universe in its august or divine aspect." (p. 541) Myers denounces trivial-mindedness in the lovers of art for art's sake and the lovers of mankind "in and for itself." Aesthetes and humanists are "haters of God," and their broad-mindedness springs from their ignorance of good and evil; the former adopt a superior attitude towards morality, while the latter, who are supposedly animated by humanitarian principles, often draw their energy from "envy, jealousy and disguised self-interest." As in *The Orissers*, Myers describes humanism as a materialistic philosophy which degrades life instead of exalting it. On the whole, his analysis of the attitudes he presents is more perceptive than in his former novels. This appears from the limitations of Amar's spirituality: he is indeed the most fastidious character, and it is he who points out the shortcomings of Mobarek's or of Smith's position. But he is himself criticized for carrying the Buddhist belief that all is illusion to such extremes that it leads to unawareness of evil or even acquiescence in it. He is warned that a spiritual quest of a purely intellectual character can lead to sterility and error, while the intelligence of the heart can be a reliable means of discovering truth, particularly when it comes to judging men. The scope of Myers's insight into human motives is also manifest in the discrimination he makes between apparently similar attitudes and in his arguing that very different attitudes ultimately lead to the same kind of corruption. The ambition of the righteous Ambissa, the dilettantism and worldliness of the refined but too tolerant Srilata, the frivolity of Ranee Jagashri, and the authoritarianism of Mobarek, are all spiritually akin to Daniyal's "triviality." In their ignorance of good and evil these "civilized" people are surprisingly like Gunevati, which shows that if the masses are unable to grasp the meaning of moral values, the élite do not hesitate to offend against them.



An important object of Myers's criticism is the declining sense of responsibility of the élite, obvious in their indifference to the moral values a ruling class is expected to uphold. Their sexual behaviour, clearly illustrative of the moral laxity of the post-war generation in England, brings them down to the level of the masses. But the association between religion and sex among the people in Akbar's kingdom argues at least for an instinctive perception of the forces at work in the universe, whereas the distorted sexual tastes of Daniyal and his friends are sheer perversity. However, Myers distinguishes between intuition, which is of the heart, and the animalism and irrationality of the masses. Another distinction he makes is between personality and type. One develops a personality by being true to the spirit in oneself, which makes it possible to commune with the spirit in others and in the world. Characteristically, the people who, like Sita, commune with the phenomenal world never feel lonely, whereas Hari and Jali find it difficult to overcome their separateness. Alienation results from behaving according to type, i.e., from cultivating appearances. Social types are of course most numerous among Daniyal's followers, but they are also to be found among people who revere traditions in themselves, like Mobarek, or Bhoj and Lakshmi in *The Pool of Vishnu*. On the whole, the distinction between personality and type is the same as between "fastidious" and "trivial," or spiritual refinement on the one hand and vulgarity and shallowness on the other. Whether one acts as a person or as a type determines the nature of human relationships and, ultimately, of society.

*The Root and the Flower* explores the motives and principles which underlie human behaviour. Myers's own "fastidiousness" in his search after truth entails a slowness in the development of the narrative which sometimes makes it tedious. But through his uncompromising exposure of insincerity, frivolity, corruption in social relationships, through his analysis of evil in a decaying social order, he is a moralist of the same stamp as Lawrence. He is not a novelist of the same stature. He doesn't leave his characters much scope for development; they represent moral attitudes and illustrates his views but they have little life of their own. Moreover, the spirituality on which Myers so much insists is too ill-defined to serve as an antithesis to the immorality he denounces. A spirituality without God or some other absolute, which merely posits the transcendental, can hardly be shown

operating at the social level. Myers must have felt its inadequacy in the face of the evil he describes and this perhaps accounts for the pervading pessimism of the novel. On the other hand, it blossoms into moral superiority when illustrated in individual advancement towards self-knowledge such as Amar's or Gokal's. Amar's path finally leads him to the contemplative life but not before he acknowledges that withdrawal from the world cannot in any way palliate the evil in it. He is first compelled to recognize that action is necessary. Contemplation is a condition to right action and should issue in action. By finally reconciling speculation with action, Amar, though separated from those he loves, will appear to them as a spiritual guide. Through him the novel reaches its inescapable conclusion: "Man is under an obligation to act. . . . And somehow in his action he must reconcile the pursuit of his own small, definite, and rightful ends with the working out of an inscrutable purpose." (p. 549)

*The Pool of Vishnu* is a sequence to *The Root and the Flower*. In the earlier novel most of the fastidious characters were in conflict with themselves. In spite of their willingness to help each other their quest for truth was lonely. They were engaged in rejecting unsuitable or negative attitudes rather than in accepting positive ones. In *The Pool of Vishnu* human beings who are not distorted by a corrupt social environment attempt to lead a harmonious and rewarding community life. The novel centres on Jali. It opens with a reference to the civil war provoked by Salim's revolt against Akbar. This brings about a dispersion of Amar's family: Amar withdraws from the world, Sita and Gokal are left in an old castle while Hari takes Jali to Daulatpur, where he will be safe. Hari becomes reconciled with the Emperor, but he is stabbed by his enemies before he has had the opportunity to work out a satisfactory relationship with Sita.

A new period of initiation starts for Jali at Daulatpur, where he stays with Bhoj and Lakshmi. After his confusing and nauseating experience in the Pleasance of the Arts he finds the palace of Bhoj a dream-like place with its refined and elegant life and its display of good manners. Living as an equal with so civilized people, he acquires at last self-possession and self-esteem. Yet he is uneasy when he compares his hosts' standards with those of his parents and when he realizes that these standards run

counter to the Guru's teaching. Like all the rajahs, Bhoj is attached to tradition and despises the Emperor for his lack of manners. Formality guides him in all circumstances and checks all his feelings. Jali sees that although "there is nothing slack, nothing gross, nothing tasteless in Bhoj and Lakshmi, although they [have] courage, self-control, energy and pride," (p. 693) there is something fundamentally wrong in their attitude. This he discovers to be an absence of freedom for spontaneous movements of the mind and heart. "Everyone laboured under an unceasing self-consciousness, self-constraint, and strain. These people were the slaves of their own social standards, and their slavishness was so ingrained that not one of them recognized it for what it was." (p. 693) Bhoj and Lakshmi stand for the cult of appearances, which Myers considers as a major social evil. It is a cult of "first-rateness"; people are afraid of appearing second-rate and they are afraid of each other. Bhoj and Lakshmi are motivated by self-esteem, for they feel they owe it to themselves to be first-rate in everything by strictly conforming to the traditional values of the community. But, as Damayanti remarks, "all those graces are worthless—become tainted—in the absence of a certain saving grace which they lack." (p. 735) Jali is soon disappointed with their spiritual obtuseness and the fundamental hypocrisy of their attitude to life discernible in the so-called authority of the men, who, in reality, always defer to feminine standards and values. When Randhir dies "for the sake of a fine gesture," simply because his mother and his wife believe in fine gestures, it seems to Jali that the god of conventional people is one that calls for human sacrifice. This may be intended as a criticism of the chivalrous spirit so murderous among the upper classes until the First World War. It is interesting to compare it with Lawrence's much sharper criticism of the notion of duty. Nor can Myers's frequent allusions to the predominance of women in society compare with Lawrence's treatment of this subject.

Bhoj's idea of a hierarchical society is similar to Mobarek's. "For all time there should be a few very wise and rich and cultured men at the top of society, and progressively less wisdom, and less wealth, and less culture as you go down the social scale." (p. 731) Mobarek reasserts his theories to the Guru, whom he accuses of doing great harm by going against tradition. The guiding hand of God is most clearly discernible in the traditions, the

institutions and the very structure of society ; each man has his naturally appointed place in the social hierarchy, he is a mere unit in the machine of civilization, and it is for the leaders of men to keep a glorious goal in view. The Guru does not deny the inequality of men, but he believes that society should be built on what men have in common instead of what differentiates them :

Spirit, which must stream through the individual man, if he is to preserve a sane and living soul, must stream through society as well. Every civilization, every culture, that has ever existed has owed its life to this. When the stream carries the body politic stiffens into a prison-house ; forms and institutions become manacles, and the State turns into a monstrous slave-driver. Demonic forces have taken control. With the leaders there is only a semblance of leadership. As a monster the State moves on to a ruinous destiny. The leaders will tell you that they are acting under divine inspiration, or that they are obeying inexorable laws ; and always they will dangle before the multitude the vulgar emblems of an impossible glory. But there is death in their hearts. Your priests, too, will pretend to enclose the Spirit in Churches. But those churches will be empty. Spirit is waiting in the market-place—waiting to be re-awakened and re-awakening man. (p. 794)

The Guru's objection to Mobarek's strict allegiance to the caste-system is that every man has a right to be treated as a person and not merely as " a member of a category or class," (p. 791) for " where there is no faith in human nature the government must always depend ultimately upon the maintaining of ignorance and the telling of lies." (p. 794) Lack of faith and lack of candour are at the root of much trouble and misunderstanding in personal relationships and in political affairs. Hari's reluctance to confide in Sita, Damayanti's belief that her father cannot possibly understand her or do without her, her secret dealings with the peasants, which denote a lack of trust in Mohan, all these attitudes are sources of conflict ; just as the courtiers' treatment of Akbar as an emperor and not as a person gives rise to political conflicts. The Guru believes " in the essential goodness of human nature " (p. 791) ; he also thinks that however much a person behaves according to type, " the person always survives—living a hidden subterranean life—which can be revived." (p. 935) He appeals to Akbar as a person whom one can trust and obtains edicts favourable to the

peasants; these edicts are a profession of faith and a token of Akbar's belief in the Rights of Man.

The relation between the personal and the public is stressed throughout the novel. "Every action is personal at its root." (p. 753) whether it is the action of a simple citizen or of an emperor; by making one's personal life satisfactory, one makes one's public life satisfactory too. "The personal alone is universal," (p. 900) the Guru says; it is so because "Spirit in its human manifestations resides in persons." (p. 900) Unfortunately, most people ignore the spirit and behave according to type, and, as already suggested in *The Root and the Flower*, this is one of the main sources of evil in society: "When a man surrenders to the typical, he joins a small artificial body of men, entering in contact with them on a superficial level in order to lead a shallow life. He is afraid of entering into contact with humanity, which can only be reached upon a deep level—the level of the personal life." (p. 900) Men are afraid of the personal because it contains demonic forces from which they run away instead of trying to control them. This, we know, has been Hari's plight throughout his life; it also endangers for a time the relationship between Mohan and Damayanti. But true personal contact on equal terms and on a basis of trust allows men to enter into a living relationship because they partake of the same spirit: "Spiritual separation alone is what the soul has to fear" (pp. 941-2); corruption and decay result from man's rejection or ignorance of his divine essence. "All communion is through the Centre. When the relation of man with man is not through the Centre, it corrupts and destroys itself." (p. 942)

The Guru persuades Jali that the evil which develops in society as a result of fear, ignorance of the self and the cult of appearances can be overcome. Like Nicholas in *The Orissers*, Jali cannot refrain from venting his hatred of the world, which appears to him coarse in spirit, heartless and trivial. "Yes! the world instinctively hates everything that has delicacy, fineness or magnanimity." (p. 747) When he goes to Agra with the Guru, he finds that "there is something in the air that turns people into play-actors," (p. 758) that he is in a world "ruled by a kind of arbitrary insanity... a vast and complex piece of machinery in which human beings [have] ceased to be human beings." (p. 756) But under the influence of the Guru he becomes convinced that it is society which corrupts



men and that he need not be afraid of them as if evil were inherent in their nature. The typical is not more powerful than the personal, and it changes as men's fashions and conventions change. Observing Mohan and Damayanti's experiment he realizes that men are capable of solidarity. Mohan and Damayanti had to come to terms with each other before they could come to terms with the peasants among whom they live. Before she accepted Mohan, Damayanti had to learn to act according to her heart and to reject the ideal of self-sacrifice which had encouraged her father to resort to emotional blackmail in order to keep her with him. She and Mohan had to learn to trust each other, to treat each other as equals and above all to approach each other without the least reservation of feeling or thought. The same is true of their relations with the peasants. But at the social level everything is more complex. Mohan has given up the throne because "he likes to be on terms of true equality and friendship with other men." (p. 700) When he receives his allowance from Bhoj, he calls a meeting of the peasants, who decide together how the money shall be spent. They leave a generous amount of it to Mohan and divide the rest among themselves according to their needs. Mohan gives another example of his generosity by bringing to Daulatpur a tribe of Gujars who once saved his life. His attitude provokes the wrath of Bhoj, who thinks that Mohan's methods are dangerous and wicked. The peasants outside Mohan's district are jealous and create difficulties for their own rajahs, who protest to Bhoj against Mohan. Bhoj's chancellor stirs up the baniya class, the rich townsmen and shopkeepers, against the peasants, or the peasants against a settlement of outcasts or against the Gujars. Villages are burnt and people killed; the rumour is spread that the Guru and his teachings are responsible for all the trouble and that he should be expelled.

The relations between Mohan and the peasants are based on friendliness. Mohan believes that friendship and religion are one, and his communism is founded on the assumption that men partake of the spirit. However, although Mohan believes in equality, he is not prepared to accept all consequences. When a peasant suggests that his allowance should be reduced, he is hurt in his pride and withdraws, leaving the peasants to discuss the matter. The latter are ashamed of their suggestion, and it is clear that Myers thinks they should be. With the honesty that

characterizes him Myers tackles the subject of money and shows that the actual sharing of it gives rise to difficulties which mere theories on equality are apt to leave out. It is possible, as D.W. Harding suggests, that "Myers is not committed to the belief that the sharing of money is in itself a virtue or the solution of social problems, and his novel is not a tract for economic communism."<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, there is a discrepancy between Mohan's principles and his actions. The Guru is quick to point out that Mohan's withdrawal from the meeting was an assertion of pride, though he calls the peasants offenders. When he says that "in his relations with the peasants [Mohan] still finds it difficult to prevent his habits of mind from frustrating his intentions," (p. 894) he implicitly avows that a person of culture and refinement cannot in practice give up his social superiority. For all Myers's assertions that all men are equal in so far as they partake of the spirit, his novels testify to his recognition of a natural hierarchy. In *The Root and the Flower* the masses are only represented by the mindlessness and animalism of Gunevati, and anyone who approaches them finds them nauseating and repulsive. Even Amar finds a poor excuse for his contempt: "I am a Buddhist certainly; but why should I offend my sense of cleanliness?" (p. 502) In *The Pool of Vishnu* it is significant that not one among the peasants is spiritually emancipated and able to discuss with Mohan as an equal. The latter's communism is no doubt an expression of his generosity, but it remains tainted with charity. What is even more significant is that Damayanti herself thinks that their experiment will fail; when she says this, she is not only thinking of their enemies in the leading class but also of the inefficiency of the peasants. Actually, their community can never be truly equalitarian, not because of the unequal distribution of money but because the peasants do not share their ideals. They may believe in the equality of men but they do not understand the Guru's theories. All this shows that for Myers communism was less a reality than an ideal still untainted by human wickedness; in his eyes Mohan's experiment was a Utopia or a dream which answered his need to believe in men as the Guru does:

If someone tells me that men in the mass are selfish, lazy and stupid, I am ready to grant him that. But I will add

<sup>1</sup> D.W. HARDING, "A Statement of Positives," *Scrutiny*, IX, 2 (September 1940), 164.

that they have all the opposite qualities as well. No one who knows the lives of simple men can fail to be astonished and to marvel. With what incredible fortitude do men bear up against long-drawn hardships and miseries! With what astonishing heroism and self-sacrifice they confront every pain and every danger! . . . Men are by nature adventurous, generous and gentle. These are the natural graces of mankind. (p. 935)

Myers's admiration for the lives of simple men is theoretical, which partly accounts for the contradictions in the novel. He never shows the simple lives he says he admires, though he is never sentimental about the poor. Obviously, they were outside his own experience, and he could not deal with them imaginatively. This is the real flaw in the novel; the sincerity of the Guru is not to be doubted, but his message sounds false all the same.

Jali's stay with Bhoj and Lakshmi is the last phase in his experience of worldliness and triviality. When he leaves them to stay with Mohan and Damayanti and is brought into frequent contact with the Guru, he enters a period of positive learning at the end of which he is ready to face his own responsibilities as Rajah of Vidyapur. He has shed his illusions one by one and he is conscious of the difficulties which await him when he puts the teachings of the Guru into practice. Above all, Jali has lost his fear of the world; he has learned to master his sense of separateness by recognizing the spirit in other men and by communing with them through the divine essence of which they partake. This, he knows, is not an achievement; it is simply the ground on which he must learn "to think and feel and act," a process which must be renewed in each new situation and arouse a fresh response to life instead of a conventional one. The Guru's answer to his misgivings is similar to the knowledge attained by his father: "One must remember and one must act. The knowledge gained in communion and ripened in solitude must pour its life into the world through action." (p.941) It is characteristic that Jali should keep a pessimistic vision of the world in spite of his acquired conviction that man is naturally good but corrupted by society. This seems to indicate that for all his willingness to find a way towards regeneration Myers could not dispel his view of society as an organization in which "an extraordinary crudity of feeling and vulgarity of aim were displayed." (p. 908)

*The Pool of Vishnu* is inferior to *The Root and the Flower* because it is too didactic. In the earlier novel Myers criticized philosophies and attitudes to life which he knew well and whose effects he had had the opportunity to observe; he could thus interpret them more easily in concrete terms. True, *The Root and the Flower* is full of philosophical disquisitions, and events are sometimes told instead of being rendered in their immediacy; still, the sense of discovery, though of a moral nature, is kept all through, because the complexity of the plot, the great number of characters and the suspense created by withholding parts of the story or the issue of conflicts, keep up the interest in the development of the plot and its moral implications. In *The Pool of Vishnu*, however, Jali discovers life mainly through other people's experience: through the story of Mohan and Damayanti, or by observing the behaviour of Bhoj and Lakshmi. Otherwise, he listens to the Guru and acquiesces in his teaching. The latter's ideas are exemplified in actions, but these tend to be mere illustrations instead of lifelike occurrences from which significance arises. The story lacks a compelling force which would make it develop according to its own inner necessity. The Guru comments on what happens and gives advice, and although his comments are Myers's positive contribution to social criticism, they are not perfectly integrated. They testify to his awareness of the complexity of life and of human beings. Yet, paradoxically, Myers advocates free play for the "intelligence of the heart" and does so almost exclusively in intellectual terms. One feels the tenderness and understanding between Mohan and Damayanti, and the Guru is a gentle figure, but these impressions derive from what is said about the characters rather than from what they are. *The Pool of Vishnu* suggests that, like Nicholas Orisser, Myers is more interested in ideas than in people. His vision of community life somewhat simplifies the issues and is not free of inconsistencies. But this is irrelevant to the significance of his plea for spiritual regeneration and for personal relationships of a high-minded and utterly sincere nature.

Myers's novels are, to use his own words "a compromise between philosophy and fiction."<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the philosophy does not

<sup>1</sup> L.H. MYERS to Olaf STAPLEDON, October 19, 1934, quoted by G.H. BANTOCK in *L.H. Myers, A Critical Study*, London, 1956, p. 133.

always harmonize with the fiction : his approach is too analytical, too slow, and often too didactic to allow for much vitality. A novel by Myers is a carefully elaborated whole, but, like his more fastidious characters, Myers sometimes gives the impression that there is no current of sympathy between himself and the rest of mankind. Nevertheless, he is an absorbing novelist, and his descriptions of rich natural scenery, the South American jungle, the Louisiana Swamp, India—though he never visited these places—blend with his rendering of the richness and variety of human nature to suggest the immense possibilities of life. Integrity, high-mindedness, and a capacity for discrimination are terms of excellence that come to mind with reference to Myers's writing. The search for the good life he describes is not an easy one : it is a difficult journey towards self-conquest which demands an uncompromising attachment to truth and respect for the Spirit in man.

It is superfluous to insist on the relevance of Myers's criticism to contemporary Western society. He did so himself in several letters,<sup>1</sup> and it is sufficiently apparent from his novels even if their setting is remote in time or place. He dealt exclusively with the rich and the powerful because they were the people he knew, people who played a leading role in the life of society. He held them responsible for the corruption which he observed in upper-class life in the Twenties and which, gaining all classes of society, were leading to disintegration. Significantly, even in his early novels there is both a negative and a constructive side to his criticism. The negative shows in his contempt for trivial-mindedness, for traditions and institutions which are but the desiccated remains of a civilization built on the highest moral and spiritual values. The "civilized" have lost sight of the real meaning of their customs and ignore the duties which their privileged position involves. Unlike some of his contemporaries who ascribed the triviality of the post-war generation to disillusion, Myers saw in this triviality the hollowness and selfishness of men turned in upon themselves and often proud of their cynicism. He attributed their futility to a loss of insight into the hierarchy of values, which entailed a general tolerance more destructive of the moral standards of civilized life than the deliberate choice of evil. For Myers this attitude was the outcome

<sup>1</sup> Some of these letters are included in G.H. Bantock's *L.H. Myers, A Critical Study*.



of the combined influence of aestheticism and of a man-centered humanism. An exclusive preoccupation with art went with a delight in sensations or states of mind for their own sake regardless of their moral nature. The kind of humanism that made man the centre of the world betrayed unawareness of the mysterious forces at work in the universe. It made progress and material welfare the be-all of life but blunted man's craving for a spiritual life and in the end produced a new sort of fanaticism: that of the staunch rationalist who dismisses all religious experience as superstition or prejudice. Myers's insistence on spiritual values resembles Lawrence's exaltation of the religious spirit. He recognized that most people in modern society believe in God, but he interpreted their tepid faith as a form of deism which ultimately is void of spirituality. He himself adhered to the Eastern view that any religion is better than no religion at all.<sup>1</sup> The constructive aspect of his novels is based on the assumption that the universe is a manifestation of the Absolute. That is why Gokal in *The Root and the Flower* approves of the association by the people of religion with sex: they see the relation between human beings and the transcendental. But a hierarchical order should reflect a scale of spiritual worth. Aesthetes and humanists have generated nihilism and spiritual bankruptcy. Men must now recognize that they partake of the same universal Spirit. They must trust the "intelligence of the heart" and probe into their deeper intuitions. Only self-knowledge and complete sincerity will lead to a regenerated community life.

Myers's development between the Wars was fairly typical: he was first a witness of social decay and merely felt the need for a regeneration of civilized values; then he committed himself to a political ideal. Myers was a very rich man who felt nothing but hatred for the conventions and insincerities of upper-class life. Like many writers of his generation, he was moved by a sense of guilt and by a deeply felt necessity to resist what he saw as the forces of evil. Just as he thought there was a hierarchy of values, so he believed there were many degrees of evil. In his early novels he defined evil as trivial-mindedness and denial of the Spirit, and as a refusal to assess the moral value

<sup>1</sup> See Morabek in *The Root and the Flower*: "To the religious-minded there is nothing more odious than irreligion." (p. 434)

of human behaviour. Then, he saw evil as a will to inflict suffering particularly on the "fastidious." In *The Root and the Flower* he showed evil at its worst, as an act of pure cruelty against a creature of God. Amar's change of attitude towards Daniyal and his subsequent change of heart present in a masterly way the conversion undergone by many "fastidious" persons in the Thirties. Some who, like Amar, had been solely concerned with their own spiritual progress and salvation in a frivolous and degenerate world were compelled to act by the sudden revelation of evil as a purely gratuitous will to destroy. From then on detachment was impossible; the pressure of events was such that it was either commitment or death, not only physical death but spiritual death as well, the collapse of the whole fabric of civilization. Characteristically, for Myers action did not mean social or political militancy. He was too distrustful of social or political institutions and of their power to destroy or dry up the most generous impulses to believe that they could contribute to the moral regeneration of society. Action was the concrete manifestation of spiritual progress in a community of enlightened men. It was, as Amar experiences for the first time when he becomes a pilgrim, "the power to mix with his fellow-men without pride, without pretence, without concealments and without shame."<sup>1</sup>

The writer's dilemma in the Thirties is most dramatically illustrated in *The Pool of Vishnu*. Again, Lawrence comes to mind when we think of Mohan's community of persons, though Lawrence would have loathed the self-conscious "stripping" of souls that Myers demanded of his characters. The communism he advocated was based on spiritual awareness and the Christian gospel of love; it demanded generosity and friendliness. An important point in the novel is that good *can* outweigh evil and that there is a dignity in human life which too many people in contemporary society are inclined to deny. For Myers, so strongly opposed to materialism, communism did not mean struggle for better living conditions but for the recognition of spiritual values. This is the way presented to Jali, the young man who feels so keenly the insanity and wickedness of the world and who complains that he has no standards to live by. Myers's communism was of course

<sup>1</sup> *The Pool of Vishnu*, p. 611.

unorthodox, and it is obvious from Mohan's experiment that he was aware of the difficulties that must arise in attempting to reach his ideal. He was not alone in associating the generous impulse he discovered behind Russian communism with his religious view of the universe. The ex-communist writers who contributed to *The God that Failed*<sup>1</sup> explain that they committed themselves because they were convinced of the generous and disinterested nature of Russian Communism. Stephen Spender writes that "the property-less nature of the classless society is a political fact at the very centre of communist life, shared by the whole people. This gives the communist faith a significance which so far has only derived from the ways of life laid down by religion."<sup>2</sup> The belief that Christian ethics and the communist doctrine could be reconciled was soon to cause disappointment among Left-wing intellectuals. It is interesting to compare their self-deluding enthusiasm for communism with Orwell's non-conformist obstinacy in keeping to his personal judgment and in maintaining his intellectual independence in the Thirties. There is nevertheless a common element between the socialism of Orwell and the communism of Myers: both are inspired by the ideal of human brotherhood and animated by a Christian spirit. Moreover, for all his enthusiasm as a convert, Myers may have felt the incompatibility between his faith and the complete, but impossible, surrender it demanded. Mohan's behaviour is full of unresolved tension. He is clear-sighted enough to realize that though a classless society is the ideal, it is clearly Utopian. He rejects his own class, yet he cannot adhere to another. Mohan is truly a hero of our time: striving to belong with the whole of mankind but hopelessly alienated.

<sup>1</sup> *The God that Failed*, Six Studies in Communism by Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, André Gide, Richard Wright, Louis Fischer and Stephen Spender, ed. by Richard Crossman, London, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen SPENDER, *Forward from Liberalism*, London, 1937, p. 23. See also *Christianity and the Social Revolution*, ed. by J. Lewis, K. Polanyi and D. Kitchin, a book of essays published by the Left Book Club in 1935. The contributors describe the communist experiments made by Christians since the early days of Christianity. They draw a parallel between communism and Christianity and finally demonstrate that twentieth-century communism is heir to the Christian tradition.

## GEORGE ORWELL

There is no such thing as genuinely non-political literature, and least of all in an age like our own, when fears, hatreds, and loyalties of a directly political kind are nearer to the surface of everyone's consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

When Orwell came back from Burma, where he had been working as a police officer, the Western world was on the brink of the Great Slump of 1929. He was then going through a crisis provoked by the remorse he felt at having served British Imperialism. "For five years I had been part of an oppressive system, and it had left me with a bad conscience. . . . I was conscious of an immense guilt that I had got to expiate."<sup>2</sup> This sense of guilt is at the origin of Orwell's persistent and often masochistic association with the unprivileged and the victims of injustice. England in the disturbed years of the Great Depression gave him plenty of opportunity to observe the effects of poverty and to question the system that could produce such evil. The account he gave of his school-days experiences shows how sensitive he was since childhood to the humiliations which poverty can inflict and to the destructive power of injustice on the human mind. The life he chose to lead in the Thirties is so intimately bound with the social and political history of the period that we cannot altogether ignore his personal experience. It gives his writing its highly idiosyncratic character and that passionate tone which, together with his well-known honesty, is so compelling an element of his art. Orwell was not alone among the writers of his generation in condemning the standards of middle-class life in England, but his rejection involved more than a denunciation of meaningless conventions and institutions, and his position was more dramatic because his despair at not finding an adequate substitute for them was greater. He committed himself to politics, but he saw that

<sup>1</sup> George ORWELL, "The Prevention of Literature," in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, Penguin Books, 1962, pp. 166-7.

<sup>2</sup> George ORWELL, *The Road to Wigan Pier*. London, 1959, p. 149.

each cause carries its own traps and he came to the conclusion that nothing could improve the desperate condition of human beings in a diseased society. He always wrote, he said, "from a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice," and he attempted "to make political writing into an art." To Orwell all writing was ultimately political because he thought that in modern society no sphere of human existence is left untouched by politics.

Orwell's pre-war novels expose the sham and corruption of all organizations that wield power in some form or other. They present the predicament of the modern Englishman caught between his strong loyalties to traditional institutions and his disgust for what they have become. Orwell was first made to face this dilemma as a servant of British Imperialism in Burma. He became aware of the discrepancy between the democratic principles which the liberals upheld in England and their continuing support of colonialism. At the same time, he was building up a violent hatred of the colonial system, though he remained a sincere admirer of what the early empire builders had achieved. He dramatized this conflict in *Burmese Days* (1934). The theme of this novel is not directly relevant to English society as a whole but to a minority, the Anglo-Indians, and the kind of communities they set up in the Far East, but it throws light on Orwell's approach to a social system in which he was ultimately involved and shows that from the start, his reactions to his environment were ambivalent.

The community portrayed in *Burmese Days* is one from which purpose, achievement or rewarding personal relationships are conspicuously absent. The Anglo-Indians try to recreate England in India and by doing so merely show up the worst prejudices of the English middle class. They do not try to understand the people on whom they impose their rule and the outward signs of their civilization, and they are inevitably corrupted by serving imperialism without grasping the nature of their task. A conflict arises in Kyauktada, where the scene of *Burmese Days* is set, when the central authorities send word that the Anglo-Indians are to admit a native member to their club. U Po Kyin, the dishonest city magistrate, is determined to be elected and intrigues ruthlessly for that purpose. He has a rival in Dr. Veraswami, the most respectable Indian in town, who enjoys some prestige among his countrymen because he is the friend of a white man, Flory. The latter sympathizes with the Burmese and makes some effort to understand



them, but he is a coward; although he has promised his friend to propose his name, he signs a motion protesting against the admittance of Indians to the club. Flory is torn between his loyalty to his country and his knowledge of the evil nature of imperialism. He revolts inwardly against its hypocrisy; "the white man's burden" is a lie which corrupts the English and is at the bottom of their beastliness towards the natives. "We Anglo-Indians could be almost bearable if we'd only admit that we're thieves and go on thieving without any humbug . . . the British Empire is simply a device for giving trade monopolies to the English—or rather to gangs of Jews and Scotchmen."<sup>1</sup> Flory, it is obvious, has no sense of proportion. He falls in love with Elizabeth Lackersteen, a petty and shallow girl who has come to Kyauktada in search of a husband. He attempts to initiate her into Burmese life and culture, but she is uninterested and shocked. On two occasions she really feels admiration for him and is on the point of accepting him: the first time is after a successful hunting party when he appears to her as a heroic and adventurous "pukka sahib"; the second time is after his courageous behaviour during a riot provoked by Ellis. But U Po Kyin sends Flory's former Burmese mistress to blackmail him publicly in church during the Sunday service. Elizabeth rejects him definitely and even refuses to quarrel, pretending that there never was anything between them. Flory commits suicide, Dr. Veraswami is ruined, while U Po Kyin is elected to the club and honoured by the Governor. A few months later Elizabeth marries Mr. McGregor and "fills with complete success the position for which nature had designed her from the first, that of a burra mensahib." (p. 287)

Though Elizabeth is the immediate cause of Flory's death, the ultimate and more important reason is his spiritual destruction by imperialism as a result of his inability to come to terms with it. The force of Flory's criticism is impaired by his desire to marry a woman who would soon embody all that is most hateful in Anglo-Indian society, but it also illustrates the hero's as well as the author's ambiguous attitude towards the Empire. Flory disapproves of British rule in Burma, but he could not simply leave it and have nothing more to do with imperialism because he is attached to the country. Yet in spite of this attachment, of his sympathy for the

<sup>1</sup> George ORWELL, *Burmese Days*, London, 1949, pp. 39-40.

natives, and of his hatred of imperialism, he does not treat the Burmese as if they were his equals, not even Dr. Veraswami. It is not surprising that the latter should be fanatically pro-British. Flory was perfectly safe in criticizing the Empire in front of him, and he knew his criticism could in no way diminish his friend's admiration for England. He talked to him as if to himself but he would clearly not have liked it if Veraswami had countenanced his opinion. Though Veraswami is the most worthy representative of his race in Kyauktada, he does not come out too well. The author is often ironical towards him and slightly contemptuous of his unflinching loyalty; he is dealt with sympathetically but as an inferior all the same.

Flory's spiritual confusion can be better illustrated by comparing Orwell's approach to his subject with Forster's in *A Passage to India*. It is noticeable, for instance, that on the whole, Orwell's Burmese lack dignity and pride although Dr. Veraswami is not without self-respect. Forster's Indians have a code of honour which, though it differs from the Europeans', is just as strict and as important in their eyes. Aziz is proud, and his criticism of the English is often to the point. In *A Passage to India* the natives and the English have their shortcomings, but on both sides they are human beings with the same faculty of feeling; although at the end Aziz and Fielding are separated by political circumstances, they are not as human beings. Indians and English are dealt with in exactly the same way. Forster is aware that some features in the Indian character can never win the approval of the English and he brings out the incompatibilities between the two races, but he at least tries to see the Indian point of view. In a time of crisis Flory does not have to wonder where his loyalty lies. The same is true of Orwell, and that is why he can never approach the Burmese from the inside. In fact, he believes that an important weakness of British rule is that it cannot fathom the Oriental character and often honours the dishonest and wicked while ruining honest people. Finally, though both Orwell and Forster believe that the natives are inefficient, Forster suggests that the Indians will one day be able to govern themselves and illustrates this through Mr. Das's efficient presiding of the trial. Orwell is not so optimistic, and he doesn't think it desirable that British rule should come to an end. There lies the essence of his dilemma: the English system is notably superior to anything the Burmese

might achieve but the English are nonetheless committing an injustice, and their position is morally wrong. Orwell's concern was for the conscience of the English for he was already acutely conscious of the corruption inherent in power.

Orwell believed that in spite of its benevolent nature, there was something evil about English Imperialism. The evil sprang partly from the unenviable position of the Anglo-Indians. There were, of course, men who really hated Orientals, people like Ellis who were sorry that Flory hadn't ordered the police to shoot at the crowd during the riot, or who hoped that a serious rebellion would give the English an excuse for repression. But even Ellis's behaviour is partly prompted by fear, for he is intelligent enough to realize that the white man is losing grip in the East. Added to this was the Philistinism of the Anglo-Indians which made their life uninteresting, devoid of values or incentives and confined to a mediocre conformity. Moreover, except for a minority who were really useful, there were many minor officials who knew that their job could be done just as well by natives, and this gave them a sense of futility.

Orwell also shows that the living conditions in India do not make life easier for the English. "The life of the Anglo-Indian officials is not all jam. In comfortless camps, in sweltering offices, in gloomy dak bungalows smelling of dust and earth-oil, they earn perhaps the right to be a little disagreeable." (p. 34) The natives are not cooperative; Orwell often refers to their provocative attitude and to their talent for unnerving the English, who are seldom presented as powerful authoritarians oppressing the Burmese. On the contrary, Orwell insists on the limited amount of real power they have and on how much they are at the mercy of the natives. This is strikingly expressed in *Shooting an Elephant*, that very good short story in which Orwell shows how the natives force the Englishman to live up to their notion of the "pukka sahib" and make him act against his conscience. The often-quoted passage in which Orwell explains why he has to kill a valuable animal, accounts for the feeling of frustration and powerlessness which the rulers were often made to experience:

And suddenly I realized that I should have to shoot the elephant after all. The people expected it of me and I had got to do it; I could feel their two thousand wills pressing me forward, irresistibly. And it was at this moment, as

I stood there with the rifle in my hands, that I first grasped the hollowness, the futility of the white man's dominion in the East. Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd—seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an absurd puppet pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys. He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib. For it is the condition of his rule that he shall spend his life in trying to impress the 'natives', and so in every crisis he has got to do what the 'natives' expect of him. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it.<sup>1</sup>

The moment of revelation, which brings home to Orwell that he is as much a victim of the system as an instrument of it, is rendered with admirable simplicity. The story shows more clearly than *Burmese Days* how sensitive he was to the sniggering of the natives and how mixed his feelings for them were. "All I knew was that I was stuck between my hatred of the Empire I served and my rage against the evil-spirited little beasts who tried to make my job impossible." (p. 92) Orwell entertained a love-hate relationship with natives and Englishmen alike. But when all was said, the hard lives they led in the East and the special nature of the hell that was the Anglo-Indians' lot when they retired to England made their position unenviable, whereas the natives needed foreign rulers.

Orwell's view of imperialism is, on the whole, rather simple, for he merely considers it as a political and economic form of oppression intended to provide the oppressors with advantages. As some of his critics have remarked, he did not foresee that the English would abandon the Empire of their own free will and still continue to draw their dividends. He hated the power which made them oppressors, and because the Burmese were the underdogs, he had to criticize the English. This was his reaction to the end of his life: whether the oppressed were Indians, the unemployed, a political minority in Spain or in Russia, he always stood up for the weaker side. One could say of Orwell what he said of Dickens: "Always and everywhere he is, as a matter of course,

<sup>1</sup> "Shooting an Elephant," in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, p. 95.

on the side of the underdog." <sup>1</sup> That is why his attitude was never orthodox because, like Dickens, he found that "to carry this to its logical conclusion one has to change sides when the underdog becomes an upperdog." <sup>2</sup> But for all his criticism of British rule in India it is certainly true, as Malcolm Muggeridge suggests, that there was much in the British Empire official that Orwell admired :

The ordinarily-accepted view is that Orwell was deeply revolted by what was expected of him as a member of the Burma Police Force and that his subsequent political views were to some extent a consequence of the great revulsion of feeling thereby induced in him. Personally, I consider that this is an over-simplification. It is perfectly true that Orwell was revolted by the brutality necessarily involved in police duties in Burma, as he was revolted by all forms of brutality, and indeed, to a certain extent by authority as such ; but it is also true that there was a Kiplingesque side to his character which made him romanticize the Raj and its mystique. <sup>3</sup>

This is corroborated by Orwell himself in his essay on Kipling :

It may be that all they did was evil but they changed the face of the earth, whereas they could have achieved nothing, could not have maintained themselves in power for a single week, if the normal Anglo-Indian outlook had been that of, say, E.M. Forster. <sup>4</sup>

Richard Rees writes that "Orwell's Burmese experience stimulated both the conservative and the anarchic strains in his character." <sup>5</sup> He also notices that Orwell was both a rebel and a supporter of authority, that he was a rationalist and a debunker of spurious idealism and spirituality, but also a romantic and a lover of the past. Some of his other critics tend to emphasize one or the other feature of his character and show him either as a true conservative or as an uncompromising revolutionary. But, as Richard Rees suggests, the complexity of his character should

<sup>1</sup> George ORWELL, "Charles Dickens," in *Critical Essays*, London, 1960, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Tom HOPKINSON, in *George Orwell, Writers and their Work Series*, London, 1953, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> "Rudyard Kipling," in *Critical Essays*, p. 116.

<sup>5</sup> Richard REES, *George Orwell, Fugitive from the Camp of Victory*, London, 1961, p. 29.



never be lost sight of. It accounts for the unresolved tensions in Flory, the pathetic yet not wholly attractive hero of *Burmese Days*. It is significant, however, that given his resentment towards the natives and his horror of imperialism, the latter should have prevailed and determined Orwell's career. "In the end I worked out an anarchistic theory that all government is evil. . . . I had reduced everything to the simple theory that the oppressed are always right and the oppressors always wrong; a mistaken theory but the natural result of being one of the oppressors yourself. I felt that I had got to escape not merely from Imperialism but from every form of man's dominion over man."<sup>1</sup>

When Orwell came back to Europe, he lived in Paris, sometimes in very poor circumstances, then in London, where he taught school, worked as a private tutor and later as a part-time assistant in a bookshop. These jobs alternated with periods of tramping which Orwell felt it his duty to go through in order to know what complete destitution really meant:

I wanted to submerge myself. . . . At the time failure seemed to me to be the only virtue. Every suspicion of self-advancement, even to 'succeed' in life to the extent of making a few hundreds a year, seemed to me spiritually ugly, a species of bullying.<sup>2</sup>

Orwell's experiences as a tramp are recorded in *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). It shows up poverty for exactly what it is: neither a noble condition nor a tragic one but merely a squalid plight which degrades man. Poverty forces people to resort to the most unlikely devices to subsist or to avoid humiliation; it often reduces them to an animal-like existence exclusively concerned with the attempt to survive. As we shall see, Orwell's incursions among the tramps and later into the more conventional working classes led him to socialism. The important thing is that the oppressed in England provided an analogy with the oppressed in Burma: the living conditions which prevailed in some areas or sections of the population further stimulated his sense of responsibility and induced him to question the structure of society. His experience from the time he came back to England to the outbreak

<sup>1</sup> *The Road to Wigan Pier*, pp. 148-50.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

of the War provides the basic material for the novels he wrote between 1935 and 1939. In *A Clergyman's Daughter* and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* he attempts to show how people react when faced with complete destitution and tries to render the feeling of insecurity incurred through loss of faith and allegiance to a new god: money. He is not interested in the predicament of young middle-class intellectuals; the issues faced by his characters are those of the average man in modern society, though many of his characters cannot be said to represent the average person. But the quality of life they experience is that of the majority of people. Lack of faith, hopelessness and fear poison the atmosphere and prevent man from enjoying the simple, decent life to which he is entitled. Spiritual degradation is now man's pitiable fate; Orwell illustrates it by pointing to the worst evils in modern Western society: the mercenary character of the new civilization, economic distress, and the threat of fascism and war.

*A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) describes the life of Dorothy Hare. She works very hard as her father's housekeeper and manager of his parish; he takes refuge in the past and is despised by his parishioners for his superior attitude. He lives fairly comfortably in the world of imagination, leaving his daughter to fight with the village tradesmen because he doesn't give her enough money. Dorothy's puritanical and rather masochistic form of religion induces her to impose upon herself unnecessary hardships and self-punishments. One evening for no very clear reason except over-tiredness, she loses her memory and leaves her home. Ten days later she is found in London wearing old clothes which do not belong to her, and she has been robbed of her money. She joins a group of hop-pickers and walks for miles with them begging or stealing her food until she and Nobby, one of the hop-pickers, find work and live in a camp with gypsies and East-enders. When Nobby is arrested for theft, Dorothy recovers her memory under the shock. She writes to her father explaining the truth, but though he has no intention of abandoning her, she doesn't get his answer quickly enough, and she goes back to London with a family of hop-pickers. After unsuccessful attempts to find a job she lives a few days as a tramp and is arrested. She is eventually rescued when she comes out of court, and she gets a teaching position in a appalling private school. She is dismissed when the headmistress finds a teacher

who will bring pupils to her school, but this time an old friend of hers takes her back to the village and offers to marry her. She refuses him and goes back to a life of drudgery and petty respectability, but she has now lost her faith and must find some justification for her hard work in the gratification to be derived from a well-done task.

The plot is rather improbable; the novel lacks unity and its meaning is not clearly developed or successfully embodied in the life of the characters. It is not sure, for instance, that Dorothy's experience of extreme poverty and the very harsh conditions in which she lives as a tramp are responsible for her loss of faith. There is no relation between the different episodes of her adventure and no indication at all that it modifies her character or makes her more mature. Yet it is hardly likely that a middle-class girl could go through such experiences and be unaffected by them. They make it possible for Dorothy to enter a world of which people of her kind are usually unaware. It is probably this glimpse of a hopeless, miserable and dishonest world which induces her to go back to an existence that for all its mediocrity is at least secure and decent in the traditional simple way.

The interest of Dorothy's life in exile lies in the first-hand knowledge it provides of particular social groups. In all his writings on poverty Orwell makes it clear that the mere struggle to keep alive is a hard full-time job for the very poor. He shows what a privilege it is to have a job for those who have been out of work. Dorothy's experience has taught her a commandment which everyone in modern society should keep in mind: "Thou shalt not lose thy job." While she is hop-picking, the long laborious hours in the sun are a trial but she is also happy to work in the country, and for the first time becomes aware of the sense of solidarity which prevails among the poor. She feels it again in London when she joins a group of tramps who spend the night in Trafalgar Square. Orwell never romanticizes poverty but he often heightens its effects by showing the poor caught in nightmarish adventures. The atmosphere of the square at night and the sufferings of the tramps are rendered in a short extraordinary one-act dramatic piece. The outcasts seem to be involved in a sort of fantastic ordeal while, actually, their only concern is to keep warm and secure a cup of tea. The complaints of the sufferers nursing their private grievances and remembering better times are

delivered against an infernal background created by the blasphemous mass conducted by an unfrocked priest. Orwell exploits the dream-like quality of the experience to show how far the consciousness of the destitute is affected by their situation. A recurrent theme in his work is that poverty degrades the individual: either lack of food and of a proper place to rest gradually drive him into a sort of unreal state in which the inner and outer worlds become vague and slightly out of focus, and this makes him unable to think clearly; or he is forced to accept unpleasant jobs and to work so hard that, as a result, he has no time for thinking, and his manners degenerate. Orwell did not believe that poverty can redeem the individual, and he criticized religion for suggesting that it does.

Dorothy's experience as a school-teacher brings out the insecurity and ugliness of life in modern society: it points to the difficulty for well-bred women with reduced means and no adequate preparation to make a living and retain the respectability of their class. The episode is also a documentary on English private schools. Mrs. Creevey, the headmistress of the fourth-rate school in which Dorothy teaches, declares with frank cynicism that her school is exclusively a money concern:

What you've got to get hold of once and for all is that there is only one thing that matters in a school, and that's the fees. As for all this stuff about 'developing the children's minds,' as you call it, it's neither here nor there. It's the fees I'm after, not *developing the children's minds*. After all, it's no more than common sense. It's not to be supposed as anyone'd go to all the trouble of keeping and having the house turned upside down by a pack of brats, if it wasn't that there's a bit of money to be made out of it. The fees come first and everything else comes afterwards.<sup>1</sup>

At first, Dorothy, who is horrified at the ignorance of the children, really tries to teach them seriously and to awaken their interest for what they are learning. Soon the parents start protesting because they are afraid she will give them "dangerous" knowledge, and Dorothy is forced to conform to the standards of the school. However, the parents are only criticized by the way because they

<sup>1</sup> George ORWELL, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, London, 1960, p. 255.

contribute with stupid righteous zeal to the success of one of the worst swindles: paid education, which, so Orwell suggests, often maintains children in ignorance and deprives them of the chance of an adequate preparation for life. Orwell strongly objected to private schools, whose main concern, he said, was to make money; he was indignant that children should be the victims of this educational system. "The expensive private schools to which the rich send their children are not, on the surface, so bad as others, because they can afford a proper staff, and the Public School examination keeps them to the mark; but they have the same essential taint." (p. 261) Orwell insisted on the mercenary character of private teaching at all levels. Even at Eton he personally resented the contempt, real or imaginary, of the paying students towards the scholars. Yet other writers of his generation who came from rich families tried for scholarships and felt it an honour to receive one.

While she lives on an ill-paid job in a London suburb, Dorothy is in an utterly depressed state of mind. She suffers from "the corrupting ennui that lies in wait for every modern soul," and she realizes what it means to have lost her faith, for she now discovers a deadly emptiness at the heart of things. She still goes to church because she perceives "that in all that happens in church, however absurd and cowardly its supposed purpose may be, there is something—it is hard to define, but something of decency, of spiritual comeliness—that is not easily found in the world outside. It seemed to her that even though you no longer believe, it is better to go to church than not; better to follow in the ancient ways, than to drift in rootless freedom." (p. 270) Man has freed himself, and rightly so, from the ascendancy of religion, but he has nothing to put in its place and he resents it, for "faith vanishes but the need for faith remains the same as before." (p. 315) Through the unrewarding nature of Dorothy's life before her exile and the inhumanity of her father Orwell shows that religion has served its purpose. He objects to it as to any conservative institution, but he also believes that religion, like political creeds, controls the mind and restricts the range of human thought. This is not always successfully expressed in the novel, for religion simply appears as an inadequate spiritual support. He makes this point clearer in *Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool*, in which he explains that Tolstoy's main aim in his later years was "to narrow the range of human



consciousness." <sup>1</sup> Religious people are like political leaders in their desire to coerce man: "They will, if they can, get inside his brain and dictate his thoughts to him in the minutest particulars." <sup>2</sup> Nothing in *A Clergyman's Daughter* can compare with the tortures imposed on Winston Smith to teach him orthodoxy of thought in 1984, but Dorothy's self-imposed punishments are a good example of the hold of religion on the mind of the believer. In discussing both Tolstoy and Gandhi, Orwell asserts that the asceticism inspired by religion is contrary to man's nature and cripples him spiritually. "The essence of being human is that one does not seek perfection. . . . Sainthood is a thing that human beings must avoid." <sup>3</sup> Orwell was convinced that all philosophies of non-attachment denote a desire to escape from the pain of living, which is always hard work. "Your verminous Christian saints are the biggest hedonists of all," Mr. Warburton tells Dorothy, "They're out for an eternity of bliss, whereas we poor sinners don't hope for more than a few years of it." (p. 308) Ultimately, it is the religious attitude which is self-interested and hedonistic, for "The aim is to get away from the painful struggle of earthly life and find eternal peace in some kind of heaven or Nirvana. The humanist attitude is that the struggle must continue and that death is the price of life." <sup>4</sup>

Still, when all is said against religion, the fact remains that life without faith and unredeemed by an ultimate purpose has "a quality of greyness, of desolation, that could never be described, but which you could feel like a physical pang at your heart. Life, if the grave really ends it, is monstrous and dreadful." (p. 315) Dorothy refuses to deceive herself, to live as many people in her case do without bothering too much about what they really believe. She sees her predicament clearly and knows that she cannot escape its depressing consequences:

There was no possible substitute for faith; no pagan acceptance of life as sufficient to itself, no pantheistic cheer-up stuff, no pseudo-religion of 'progress' with visions of glittering Utopias and ant-heaps of steel and concrete. It is all or nothing. Either life on earth is a preparation for

<sup>1</sup> "Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool," in *Inside the Whale and other Essays*, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> George ORWELL, "Reflections on Gandhi," in *The Partisan Review Anthology*, New York, 1961, p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> "Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool," p. 115.

something greater and more lasting, or it is meaningless, dark and dreadful. (p. 316)

She comes to the conclusion that "if one gets on with the job that lies to hand, the ultimate purpose of the job fades into insignificance; that faith and no faith are very much the same provided that one is doing what is customary, useful and acceptable." (p. 319) This is an inconclusive ending, and it is the less satisfactory as Dorothy's loss of faith is not really accounted for. What the novel does convey is the desperate condition of modern man, the fact that the individual is condemned to live in a world which has destroyed the decency inspired by Christianity, for which there is no substitute. The paradox in Orwell's view of religion is that while criticizing it as an institution, he regrets the disappearance of the attitude to life it had generated and deplors the absence of an absolute which gives meaning to life. As to Dorothy, she still sees the world as a Christian cosmos, even though it seems devoid of sense to her, and she thinks that "the Christian way of life is still the way that must come naturally to her." (p. 308) Orwell continued to approve of the Christian attitude to life, and in his war-time essays he praised the English for "having retained a tinge of Christian feeling, while almost forgetting the name of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

Orwell is said to have steadily refused to allow *A Clergyman's Daughter* to be reprinted because he considered it as a bad novel. His judgment was fairly sound, though the novel is not without interest, if only for the light it throws on some aspects of English life. Orwell was primarily interested in describing the quality of English life; he shows it degenerating because traditions have lost their moral significance and religion has run dry as a source of spiritual strength. There remains only the bleak prospect of a life without love or joy.

In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936) Orwell describes the experience of a young would-be poet who, like himself, decides to live on the fringe of society. Though he makes the decision himself and gives up two well-paid jobs to avoid being involved in the money-world, he is utterly unable to face the consequences of his decision and sinks into a stupid, negative revolt. Gordon

<sup>1</sup> George ORWELL, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, London, 1962, pp. 14-15.

Comstock's first impulse to revolt against money does not arise from a mature understanding of its destructive power but from a humiliating personal experience: he was acutely conscious at school that the other boys despised him for his poverty. As time went on, he realized that money-worship had been elevated into a religion: "Perhaps it is the only real religion—the only really *felt* religion—that is left to us. Money is what God used to be. Good and evil have no meaning any longer except failure and success."<sup>1</sup> Unlike those who take revenge on fate by trying to make good, he expresses his contempt for money by trying to ignore it altogether. But from the moment he renounces money, he becomes pathologically obsessed with the conviction that his failures in all fields are due to his poverty. He no longer earns enough to have the minimum of comfort he needs to be able to write. He cannot meet people on equal terms because he feels humiliated by his poverty, and he finds that this mars his personal relations. Gradually, he sinks into a sub-world where nothing matters any more:

Under ground, under ground! Down in the safe soft womb of earth, where there is no getting of jobs or losing of jobs, no relatives or friends to plague you, no hope, fear, ambitions, honour, duty—no *duns* of any kind. That was where he wished to be.

... He liked to think that beneath the world of money there is a great sluttish underworld where failure and success have no meaning; a sort of kingdom of ghosts where all are equal. That was where he wished to be, down in the ghost-kingdom, *below* ambition. It comforted him somehow to think of the smoke-dim slums of South London sprawling on and on, a huge graceless wilderness where you could lose yourself for ever. (p. 217)

Gordon is eventually rescued by Rosemary, who gives herself to him. When she is pregnant and talks of having an abortion, he suddenly realizes that he wants the child to live. He and Rosemary get married, and he returns to his old job in an advertising agency, a job for which he is apparently more gifted than for poetry.

Orwell's case against money is rather lame because it is made out by Gordon, who is too trivial, cynical and selfish to understand the meaning of his experience. As soon as he starts living on a small salary, he achieves the exact opposite of his aim. He wishes

<sup>1</sup> George ORWELL, *Keep the Aspidastra Flying*, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 49.

to withdraw from the world of money and to ignore it as much as possible, yet he lacks the physical and still more the spiritual strength to live without money. Some people are indifferent to money or to the comfort it provides; others can face poverty with a sense of humour or accept an uncomfortable situation as Orwell himself is seen doing in *Down and Out in Paris and London*. But Gordon imagines, obviously wrongly considering the generosity of his friends, that the poor man is barred from personal relationships, from social intercourse, from mere physical well-being and, as an artist, from the power to create. Orwell's point is that "poverty kills thought and that the strain of loneliness and squalor stupefies the individual. He writes in *Down and Out*: "It seems to me that when you take a man's money away he is fit for nothing from that moment."<sup>1</sup> Gordon discovers "the peculiar lowness of poverty, the shifts that it puts you to, the complicated meanness, the crust-wiping."<sup>2</sup> Instead of being fulfilled by an ascetic existence devoted to poetry, he is reduced to petty worrying because he is still attached to what money can buy. That is why he can hardly be considered as a helpless victim of the money-world. He is not fit to illustrate Orwell's contention that poverty creates a frustrated state of mind which distorts man's attitude to life and affects his intellectual or spiritual development:

It is in the brain and the soul that lack of money damages you. Mental deadness, spiritual squalor—they seem to descend upon you inescapably, when your income drops below a certain point. Faith, hope, money—only a saint could have the first two without having the third. (p. 63)

This rash generalization shows how far Orwell himself is involved in the situation he describes. Gordon's hatred of the money-world is also his, and his character is inconsistent because he satirizes his revolt while condoning his motives.

The futility of Gordon's rebellion is the more striking as it doesn't make him discover some essential truth to oppose to the cult of money, which is not surprising considering his limited view of poverty as evil:

He never felt any pity for the genuine poor. It is the black-coated poor, the middle-middle class, who need pitying. (p. 77)

<sup>1</sup> George ORWELL, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, Penguin Books, 1963, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Gordon confuses ends and means because he assumes that modern society makes an end of money, while he himself gives it an excessive importance by trying to do without it altogether. He is exactly like the middle-class people he criticizes, who spend a good deal of their income on keeping up appearances and who "having no money still live mentally in the money world." (p. 49) He still has many of their prejudices and is unaccountably ashamed of his poverty. He feels alienated, yet he is surrounded by people who constantly belie his assertion that the poor man must necessarily break down because society repudiates him. *He* distorts relationships by his vicious determination to prove society wrong. Actually, he is only concerned about himself: "I don't give a — for the state of the modern world. If the whole of England was starving except myself and the people I care about, I wouldn't give a damn." (p. 97)

While Gordon hesitates to go back to his former job and thinks about his life as a down-and-out, he is forced to recognize that

It had been a dreadful life—lonely, squalid, futile. He had lived thirty years and achieved nothing but misery. But that was what he had chosen. It was what he *wanted* even now. He wanted to sink down, down into the muck where money does not rule. But this baby-business had upset everything. It was a pretty banal predicament, after all. Private vice, public virtues—the dilemma is as old as the world. (p. 247)

Gordon's return to the world is thus rather lightly accounted for. But the most surprising fact is that when he gets married, he doesn't settle down to a lifetime of mediocrity. His return to the world of money is actually a return to life, and he is quite willing to join the middle-class men who used to "make him squirm."

It mightn't be a bad thing, if you could manage it, to feel yourself one of them, one of the ruck of men. Our civilization is founded on greed and fear, but in the lives of common men the greed and fear are mysteriously transmuted into something nobler. The lower-middle-class people in there, behind their lace curtains, with their children and their scraps of furniture and their aspidistras—they lived by the money code, sure enough, and yet they contrived to keep their decency. The money code as they interpreted it was not merely cynical and hoggish. They had their standards, their inviolable points of honour. They 'kept themselves



respectable'—kept the aspidistra flying. Besides, they were *alive*. They were bound up in the bundle of life. They begot children, which is what the saints and the soul-savers never by any chance do. (p. 255)

When he was in revolt against money, the aspidistra was for Gordon the symbol of a materialistic society. At the end of the novel he sees it as "the tree of life."

*Keep the Aspidistra Flying* is primarily an indictment of money and its effects on modern civilization. As a new tyrannical god, money has replaced all religious values and condemns man to an infernal life in a dreary and soulless metropolis. Orwell quotes verse 13 of the first epistle to the Corinthians and replaces all through the word "charity" by "money": "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not money, I am become as a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal..." Gordon has a ghastly vision of the Western world held in bondage by the destructive god:

... he saw a thousand million slaves toiling and grovelling about the throne of money. The earth is ploughed, ships sail, miners sweat in dripping tunnels underground, clerks hurry for the eight-fifteen with the fear of the boss eating at their vitals. And even in bed with their wives they tremble and obey. Obey whom? The money-priesthood, the pink-faced masters of the world. (p. 160)

Orwell makes advertisement the symbol of the money-ruled society. Gordon sees desolation and prophecies of doom behind the seemingly optimistic manifestations of life on the advertising posters:

Behind that slick self-satisfaction, that tittering fat-bellied triviality, there is nothing but a frightful emptiness, a secret despair. The great death-wish of the modern world. Suicide pacts. Heads stuck in gas-ovens in lonely maisonettes. ... And the reverberations of future wars. ... Yes, war is coming soon. You can't doubt it when you see the Bovex ads. The electric drills in our streets presage the rattle of the machine guns. (p. 21 and p. 246)

However, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* does not really convey the menace of war and destruction as *Coming Up for Air* does, again because Gordon's feeling of threat is aroused by an incompre-

hensible sense of personal frustration : " Gordon's income was two pounds a week. Therefore the hatred of modern life, the desire to see our money-civilization blown to hell by bombs, was a thing he genuinely felt." (p. 91) So much perversity makes Orwell's satire ineffective, the more so as the development of his theme through Gordon's attitude is confused. It is difficult to say to what extent the latter's unpleasantness is intentional since his criticism of the money-world is obviously Orwell's. The fact that Gordon revolts with hysterical, self-pitying bitterness against a situation which he has deliberately chosen deprives it of the moral significance inherent in the acceptance of pain and suffering. But his final surrender to middle-class respectability is hardly less baffling. Modern society, Orwell concludes, is so organized that by ignoring money one is simply rejected from the stream of life. One of the secondary themes of the novel is that the god of money even prevents life from going on

And lays the sleek, estranging shield  
Between the lover and his bride. (p. 162)

Orwell protests against birth-control and asserts that really vital people multiply almost like animals whether they have money or not. Gordon's family, in which *nothing ever happened*, is drawn back into life by Gordon's new conviction that the only thing to do is to live decently and make the best of it, as well as by the coming birth of a new life in their midst. The novel ends with a scene reminiscent of Lawrence, one of the very few instances in Orwell's work which suggests that life itself is stronger than any social evil and can save man from a doomed civilization.

Decency is a word often used by Orwell to describe a quality of life based on traditions and morals which have their root in Christianity. He believed that its disappearance contributed to the modern man's feeling of insecurity because it implied that anything might happen in this world of violence and brutality. To recapture a sense of traditional decency in English life is the main preoccupation of George Bowling, the hero of *Coming Up for Air* (1939). He is a fat, jovial insurance salesman, who leads a life of petty middle-class conformity in a London suburb and feels the tyranny of his nagging wife, his children and his job closing in upon him. At the beginning of the novel he describes

his environment and the people of his class with ironical perspicacity :

You know how these streets fester all over the inner-outer suburbs? Always the same. Long, long rows of little semi-detached houses—the numbers in Ellesmere Road run to 212 and ours is 191— as much alike as council houses and generally uglier. The stucco front, the creosoted gate, the privet hedge, the green front door. The Laurels, the Myrtles, the Hawthorns, Mon Abri, Mon Repos, Belle Vue. At perhaps one house in fifty some anti-social type who'll probably end in the workhouse has painted his front door blue instead of green. . . . After all, what is a road like Ellesmere Road? Just a prison with the cells all in a row. A line of semi-detached torture chambers where the poor little five-to-ten-pound-a-weekers quake and shiver, every one of them with the boss twisting his tail and the wife riding him like the nightmare and the kids sucking his blood like leeches. . . . In every one of those little stucco boxes there's some poor bastard who's *never* free except when he's fast asleep.<sup>1</sup>

Bowling explains that the middle-class people who live in these houses are at the mercy of the Building Companies as much as at the mercy of their employers. Fear is the main reason for their docility. Indeed, fear constantly haunts everyone's consciousness. "We swim in it. It's our element. Everyone that isn't scared stiff of losing his job is scared stiff of war, or Fascism or Communism, or something." (p. 19) This feeling developed after the First World War, which turned soldiers into nihilists with no moral support and afterwards brought them home to be changed from "gentlemen holding His Majesty's commission" into "miserable out-of-works whom nobody wanted." After his discharge from the army George Bowling discovered the realities of modern life. "And what are the realities of modern life? Well, the chief one is an everlasting, frantic struggle to sell things. With most people it takes the form of selling themselves—that's to say, getting a job and keeping it." (p. 130) Bowling was caught by the post-war spirit of competition, the overpowering anxiety to succeed at all costs and the merciless selfishness of the struggle: "Get on or get out. There's plenty of room at the top. You can't keep a good man down. . . . I'm neither a go-getter nor a down-and-out, and I'm by

<sup>1</sup> George ORWELL, *Coming Up for Air*, London, 1959, pp. 13-14.

nature incapable of being either. But it was the spirit of the time. Get on! Make good! If you see a man down, jump on his guts before he gets up again." (p. 134) It was only when he had secured a fairly good job and married a girl from the impoverished Anglo-Indian middle class that he realized what he was in for.

Hatred is one of the worst consequences of the fear which prevails in modern life. Listening to a lecture on fascism at the Left Book Club, Bowling is struck by the fact that the lecturer is inspired by hatred only :

It was a voice that sounded as if it could go on for a fortnight without stopping. It's a ghastly thing, really, to have a sort of human barrel-organ shooting propaganda at you by the hour. The same thing over and over again. Hate, hate. Let's all get together and have a good hate. (p. 151)

When people are afraid they resort to violence in the frantic hope of forestalling their own destruction :

Let's grab a spanner and get together, and perhaps if we smash in enough faces they won't smash ours. Gang up, choose your Leader. Hitler's black and Stalin's white. But it might just be the other way about because in the little chap's mind both Hitler and Stalin are the same. Both mean spanners and smashed faces. (p. 152)

Orwell was anything but a pacifist, and since his Spanish experience he constantly advocated fighting against fascism. He is not pleading for peace but attacking the inhuman attitude of men who have lost all notion of traditional decency and are insane with hatred. Such men, Orwell contends, are to be found on the Left as well as on the Right : their fanatical attitude dehumanizes human relations. In an essay entitled *Raffles and Miss Blandish* Orwell shows that violence in modern life is a token of moral degradation. He describes the attitude of Raffles, the hero of Hornung's detective stories : though a gangster, the latter accepted the values of society and never questioned its moral principles. In James Hadley Chase's *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* there is little difference between the methods of the police and those of the gangsters : the author's attitude to crime is equivocal, and if the reader sides with the police, it is because they are better organized and more powerful. Orwell attacks the indifference to morals which makes people accept violence, cruelty and perversion

as normal and will eventually lead to the acceptance of an existence controlled by power and hatred. As George Bowling remarks, it is the after-war that matters because the brutal fanaticism responsible for the War will have transformed the world into a hate-world, a slogan world :

The coloured shirts, the barbed wire, the rubber truncheons. The secret cells where the electric light burns night and day, and the detectives watching you while you sleep. And the processions and the posters with enormous faces, and the crowds of a million people all cheering for the Leader till they deafen themselves into thinking that they really worship him, and all the time, underneath, they hate him so that they want to puke. It's all going to happen. Or isn't it? Some days I know it's impossible, other days, I know it's inevitable. (p. 152)

Like Lawrence at the time of the First World War, Orwell had a prophetic vision of the kind of life that would result from the destruction of moral values and decency.

As George Bowling walks along the Strand observing the insane, fixed expression that people have, he is reminded of his childhood at Lower Binfield, Oxfordshire. He realizes that the civilization in which he grew up has disappeared: "It will never come again the feeling inside you, the feeling of not being in a hurry and not being frightened." (p. 106) Bowling expresses his nostalgia for the simple peaceful way of life that prevailed in English villages before the First World War. It was a stable life, in which people felt secure, never realizing that the old world was coming to an end or could ever change. "They didn't feel the ground they stood on shifting under their feet." (p. 110) He suddenly wants to see his village again and to recapture the feeling of peacefulness that one felt in the English countryside. He takes a few days' holiday, and without telling his wife, who couldn't possibly understand him, he goes back to Lower Binfield. On the way he has the impression that he is pursued by all the people who deprive the common man of his freedom and bully him into a soulless and joyless existence made of unnecessary and valueless loyalties :

... all the soul-savers and Nosey Parkers, the people whom you've never seen but who rule your destiny all the same, the Home Secretary, Scotland Yard, the Temperance League, the Bank of England, Lord Beaverbrook, Hitler and



Stalin on a tandem bicycle, the bench of Bishops, Mussolini, the Pope. (pp. 109-10)

All of them are after him shouting "There's a chap who thinks he's going to escape! There's a chap who says he won't be streamlined! He's going back to Lower Binfield! After him! Stop him!" (p. 177) But escape into the past is impossible anyway. When he comes to Lower Binfield, he finds that his village is transformed beyond recognition; it is now a fair-sized town surrounded with industrial concerns. There is even a bomb factory nearby and a big military aerodrome. His native house has been turned into an "arty" tea-shop, Binfield Hall is a lunatic asylum, and the pond where he used to watch a big carp has been drained and is a refuse dump for the "nature lovers" who have built smart villas behind it. No one recognizes him or even seems to recall his name. He then sees that you can't come up for air anywhere in England because there isn't any air. "The dustbin that we're in reaches up to the stratosphere." (p. 220) While he is in Lower Binfield, a bomb falls accidentally from an English aeroplane manoeuvring above the town. A house is destroyed and several people are killed or wounded. This makes him realize for good how chimerical his desire to rediscover the old way of life was. His excursion has taught him with certainty that

It's all going to happen. All the things you've got at the back of your mind, the things you're terrified of, the things that you tell yourself are just a nightmare or only happen in foreign countries. The bombs, the foodqueues. . . . There's no escape. Fight against it if you like, or look the other way and pretend not to notice, or grab your spanner and rush out to do a bit of face-smashing along with the others. But there's no way out. (p. 228)

He goes back to his trivial worries in Ellesmere Road utterly convinced that there is nothing to expect from the future except more hatred, violence and destruction.

With *Coming Up for Air* Orwell reaches a further stage in the dramatization of a way of life which makes modern man head for catastrophe. In *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* Gordon Comstock settled down to middle-class respectability with a newly acquired conviction that this was the only way if he wanted to live decently in modern society. This is precisely the kind of life from which

George Bowling feels the need to escape after fifteen years of marriage. Their way of life is the only possible one in an industrial and capitalistic society. Happiness may depend on successful personal relationships, but even Gordon and Rosemary would have found that their every-day life could not remain untinged with fear. Indeed, in all his novels Orwell shows that genuine personal relations cannot flourish in the oppressing atmosphere of modern life. Man has come to a deadlock, and retreat is impossible. By revisiting Lower Binfield, George Bowling commits the same mistake as his friend Porteous, but he understands that those who cling to the stable civilization which made life secure and peaceful, cling to something that is dead and are therefore dead themselves. Porteous, a public-school master solely interested in the past, remains unconcerned about public events: "Hitler? This German person? My dear fellow! I *don't* think of him." This makes Bowling reflect that "nearly all the decent people, the people who *don't* want to go round smashing faces in with spanners, are like that. They're decent, but their minds have stopped. . . . And all the decent people are paralysed. Dead men and live gorillas. Don't seem to be anything between." (p. 163)

Yet, we may ask, if the old attitude to life is dead and better dead since it would lead England to defeat, why is Orwell so nostalgic and sentimental about the past? Some critics stress the fact that he glorifies a way of life which is essentially conservative and whose preservation would have meant the continuation of hard working conditions, little or no education for the poor and more generally a very unsatisfactory existence for the unprivileged. But this is rather beside the point because Orwell does not glorify or sentimentalize the hardships of the poor. He doesn't regret pre-war working conditions but a quality of life which is essential to man's spiritual peace: above all stability, which until the twentieth century was ensured by tradition. Neither materialism nor the hysterical fear which turn men into brutes will save them from the horrors of totalitarianism. Orwell wants decency to prevail as the best guarantee against the temptation to yield to fear and hate. It is the "native decency of the common man,"<sup>1</sup> who, according to Orwell, merely wants to live the "decent, fully human life which

<sup>1</sup> "Charles Dickens," in *Critical Essays*, p. 59.

is now technically achievable."<sup>1</sup> Orwell's message may be compared to that of Dickens, which he describes as "Behave decently."<sup>2</sup> But it is gainsaid by his belief that decency can never counteract the effects of political fanaticism or war-mongering. With the majority of people decency is smothered by the petty cares of a harassed existence. In *Coming up for Air* Orwell succeeds better than in his previous novels in blending the experience of his main character with the development of his theme. He renders the atmosphere of fear and hatred which developed in pre-war days and coexisted with incredulity and indifference. At the same time, he shows how unreal and irrelevant these feelings and attitudes could become for the ordinary man facing the dismal realities of his everyday life.

Orwell's class-consciousness lies at the core of everything he wrote between *Down and Out in Paris and London* and *1984*. He saw mankind as hopelessly divided into categories which imprisoned people into fixed rules and attitudes and made real communication impossible. The gap between the ruler and the ruled cannot be bridged more easily in *Burmese Days* than in *1984*. In English society the passage from one class to another puts such a strain on the individual that it often entails a psychological breakdown. The characters in Orwell's novels who explore a social underworld are in no way enriched by their experience. On the contrary, they are made keenly aware of their limitations as human beings. The restraint imposed upon life by group imperatives is a central theme in Orwell's novels and essays; he felt that the English middle class in particular was subject to their overpowering pressure. This class is the real hero of Orwell's pre-war novels. It is their problems and preoccupations that he dramatizes, and he obviously thought that, more than any social group, they were the victims of industrialism and progress. They were either unable to adapt themselves to new conditions or forced by financial and industrial tyrants into a life-time of depressing suburban conformity.

Orwell accounts for the complexity of the English class system by showing that it is not entirely explicable in terms of money.

<sup>1</sup> "Looking Back on the Spanish War," in *Collected Essays*, London, 1961, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> "Charles Dickens," p. 56.

The middle-class people with military and professional traditions have always considered themselves superior to the commercial class. Before the First World War they were still "gentlemen" like the richer upper-middle-class people, and after the War when their incomes were greatly reduced, they attempted to retain their gentility at all costs. They were much worse off than the rising middle class, who earned at least fairly decent wages in new commercial or industrial concerns, and in some cases they were even worse off than many working-class families who didn't worry about keeping up appearances. In his pre-war novels he emphasizes the strain put on the young who are raised in the belief that they must keep up their standards but are too poor to live on equal terms with the people of the class to which they cling. It takes Gordon Comstock thirty years to become reconciled with life and clear up the confusion aroused by his education. George Bowling's wife also comes from one of those decayed middle-class families :

The essential fact about them is that all their vitality has been drained away by lack of money. In families like that, which live on tiny pensions and annuities there's more sense of poverty, more crust-wiping and looking twice at sixpence, than you'd find in any farm-labourer's family, let alone a family like mine. Hilda's often told me that almost the first thing she can remember is a ghastly feeling that there was never enough money for anything. Of course, in that kind of family, the lack of money is always at its worst when the kids are at the school-age. Consequently, they grow up, especially the girls, with a fixed idea not only that one always *is* hard-up but that it's one's duty to be miserable about it.<sup>1</sup>

These people are usually unaware of the hard social realities which they or their children will some day have to face. Orwell's work reflects his mixed feelings towards the impoverished section of the middle class. He satirizes them for their outdated outlook on life, but it is obvious from the works he wrote about 1935 that he was still influenced by their complex attitude towards money and class and that he was struggling to free himself from it. Although he hated their way of life and their submissiveness, he understood their predicament and the kind of morbid state of mind it could breed. Their confusion and their bitterness were due to the

<sup>1</sup> *Coming Up for Air*, p. 139.

obsoleteness of a social structure which left them uncertain about their own position. The middle classes, he said, have developed an "attitude of sniggering superiority punctuated by bursts of vicious hatred" towards the working classes because in terms of income they almost belong with them but are afraid of being included in their ranks. "More and more of them find themselves in a sort of deadly net of frustration in which it is harder and harder to persuade yourself that you are happy, active or useful."<sup>1</sup>

Orwell came into contact with the real working class—not the social outcasts he describes in *Down and Out in Paris and London*—when he was commissioned by the editors of the Left Book Club to write a book on the unemployed. The outcome of his stay among northern coal-miners was *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), which did not answer the editors' aim, for Orwell was not asked to state his views on the irreconcilability of classes, nor to question industrialism as such and still less to criticize English socialism. But his digressions from his original subject make this work the most eloquent testimony of the middle-class writer's dilemma in the Thirties.

Orwell does not idealize the working classes; his view of them, as of any other group, is ambivalent. He praises the traditions of the workers, the fact, for instance, that in a working-class home the father is always the master and not the woman or the baby as in a middle-class home. He describes the "warm, decent, deeply human atmosphere" of working-class life when the father is not out of work. Orwell found that atmosphere more congenial than that of a middle-class family. His approach to his subject is, as usual, quite unorthodox. He writes, for instance, that "to the working-class, the notion of staying at school till you are nearly grown up seems merely contemptible and unmanly." (p. 117) and he mentions the workman's contempt for the public-school boy. Orwell approves of the working-class attitude towards education because, as he says, they see through it and reject it. This may be surprising considering that education normally contributes to awareness, to a better understanding of life and ultimately to better living conditions. Orwell probably meant to stress the realistic attitude of the working class towards a kind of education which didn't prepare them

<sup>1</sup> *The Road to Wigan Pier*, p. 170.



for the work they would have to do. The "manly" attitude of the working classes is a sign of their vitality. When some of them struggle out of their class into the middle class, they often find "a sort of hollowness, a deadness, a lack of any warm human feeling."<sup>1</sup> Very often antagonism arises between proletarians and bourgeois when they are brought together. Like Wyndham Lewis, Orwell questions the sincerity of middle-class people who say they want equality but do not seriously intend to abolish class-distinctions and are not prepared to change their own habits.

Why should a man who thinks all virtue resides in the proletariat still take such pains to drink his soup silently? It can only be because in his heart he feels that proletarian manners are disgusting. So you see he is still responding to the training of his childhood, when he was taught to hate, fear and despise the working class.<sup>2</sup>

This kind of argument is irrelevant. Indeed, why should a middle-class man pick up bad manners because he wants to abolish class distinctions? Yet it is on the ground of such arguments that Orwell concludes that class prejudice can hardly be abolished. The lower classes smell is the inherent disease which makes prejudice against them ineradicable. His arguments imply that so long as people of different classes have such prejudices about each other, they had better remain separate. Orwell himself lived among workers who were extremely kind to him but always treated him as an outsider. In Spain he lived for a while in a classless society and wrote enthusiastically about it and became convinced that it is possible for human beings of different classes to associate without prejudice. But this was only possible in exceptional circumstances, for Orwell was a bourgeois and declared that he would always remain one; you can sympathize with the oppressed, live among them but not be of them. He drew attention to the problem aroused by the English class-system and called for a more realistic attitude towards it: economic status should be the main criterion, and the poorer middle class should get rid of their bias against the working class and be made to see that their real interest lies with them.

<sup>1</sup> Lawrence, whom Orwell takes as an example, made the same remark.

<sup>2</sup> *The Road to Wigan Pier*, p. 138.

It is easy to understand why in 1984 Orwell writes that "if there is hope, it lies with the proles." Since the middle Thirties he believed that they alone had enough vitality and common sense to infuse the country with new vigour and save it from catastrophe. As he showed in his pre-war novels, modern man was caught between inescapable evils. Something had to be done to prevent his being crushed by his way of life and to save England from fascism and destruction. He thought England could only be saved by the common man; nothing could be hoped from the upper classes, who had lost their former ability but refused to admit it and took refuge in stupidity. "They could keep society in its existing shape only by being *unable* to grasp that any improvement was possible."<sup>1</sup> The "Common man" was for Orwell the ordinary type from the poorer middle class or the working class. He ceased to bother about subtle class distinctions, referring only to the rich and the poor and noting that the working-class way of life was becoming increasingly similar to that of the middle class. Ordinary men, he said, tend to unite when they face the same dangers: enslavement in a heartless society, destruction by war, totalitarianism. Here again we can compare Orwell's belief in the common man with Dickens's and remember Chesterton's praise of Dickens for having so well conveyed the vitality of the common people in Trabb's boy: it is the vitality of "real humanity," of "those who have nothing but life."<sup>2</sup> Orwell trusted the common sense of the ordinary man, who cared less about political orthodoxy than about the practical results of political action. He wrote later that ordinary people had saved the British morale at the beginning of the War, because they had retained their integrity; they felt that they were fighting for democracy and knew that the War had to be won by their own efforts. However, Orwell's references to the "common man" do not express his conviction that social barriers have disappeared. He does note in *The Lion and the Unicorn* the appearance in England of an intermediate social class, made of people who are most at home in the modern world, "technicians, higher-paid skilled workers, airmen and their mechanics," etc. but they are merely a symptom of the evolution of society, not a proof that class-distinctions have been abolished.

<sup>1</sup> *The Lion and the Unicorn*, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> See Chesterton's introduction to *Great Expectations*.

*The Road to Wigan Pier* starts with a description of the vile living conditions created by industrialism as Orwell experienced them in an appalling lodging-house in the mining area. "It was not only the dirt, the smells and the vile food, but the feeling of stagnant meaningless decay, of having got down into some subterranean place where people go creeping round and round, just like black-beetles, in an endless muddle of slovened jobs and mean grievances." (p. 19) People like the Brookers, he writes, are one of the characteristic by-products of the modern world; they cannot be disregarded if one accepts the civilization that produced them. Orwell describes the nature of work in the mine and explains how the miners live on their small wages. He deals with the housing problem and conveys, perhaps unintentionally but with extraordinary vividness, the sense that escape from these rows of similar small comfortless black houses must be next to impossible. He discusses the budget of the unemployed and draws attention to the injustices of the Means Test. He stresses the deadening and debilitating effect of unemployment on everyone concerned, the human degradation it entails among the more miserable of the unemployed, and the devastating effects of unemployment on the morale of the workers. Contrary to what many people think, they do resent not being able to work, and are humiliated by it. One of the visible results of unemployment is physical degeneracy, which is increasingly widespread in England. This, Orwell argues, is not due to unemployment alone, which makes underfed, harassed, miserable people long for cheap luxuries, which somehow palliate their misery, rather than spend what they have on wholesome food. The degeneracy was already a noticeable feature before the First World War and is due ultimately to unhealthy ways of living generated by industrialism. Even in matters of food mechanization provides substitutes for the genuine products; they tempt people because of their shiny, standardized look but they corrupt taste. In *Coming Up for Air* George Bowling bites into a Frankfurt sausage and discovers that it is filled with fish: "It gave me the feeling that I'd bitten into the modern world and discovered what is was really made of. That's the way we're going nowadays. Everything slick and streamlined, everything made out of something else." (p. 27) Orwell insists that mechanization has entailed a deterioration in the quality of English life which is discernible everywhere. It should be pointed out, however, that his analysis

of the consequences of mechanization on modern man cannot compare with Lawrence's. Orwell states facts and alludes to the causes which are responsible for them, but he does not really explore the process by which mechanization destroys man, and he does not show its effects on his characters.

In the second part of *The Road to Wigan Pier* Orwell retraces, as it were, the road which took him from Mandalay to Wigan. We are reminded that his commitment to socialism was both intensely personal and representative of the dominant mood of the Thirties. Orwell's conclusion to his inquiry in the distressed areas is that "we are living in a world in which nobody is free, in which hardly anybody is secure, in which it is almost impossible to be honest and to remain alive." (p. 170) The only remedy is socialism :

And all the while everyone who uses his brains knows that socialism, as a world system and wholeheartedly applied, is a way out. . . . Indeed, socialism is such elementary common sense that I am sometimes amazed that it has not established itself already. (p. 171)

Yet socialism instead of establishing itself is everywhere in retreat before fascism. The responsibility, says Orwell, lies mainly with the socialists themselves. One of his grievances is that many socialists are insincere. Another source of complaint is that so many people in the socialist party are cranks and keep off from the party more serious-minded people, who hesitate to associate with them. Orwell speaks of "all that dreary tribe of high-minded women and sandal-wearers and bearded fruit-juice drinkers who come flocking towards the smell of 'Progress' like blue-bottles to a dead cat." (p. 182) Many sensitive people who "have a feeling for tradition or the rudiments of an aesthetic sense" (p. 217) recoil from the idea of "Progress" eventually leading to some kind of godless Utopian world. Another type of socialist whom Orwell abhors is the social reformer like Shaw or Mrs. Webb. The main motive of these socialists is a "hypertrophied sense of order." They want to make the world tidy by a set of reforms which "'we', the clever ones, are going to impose on 'them', the Lower Orders." (p. 179)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In "The Nature of the Labour Party," in *Towards Socialism*, ed. by P. Anderson and R. Blackburn, London, 1965, Thomas Nairn explains that the Labour Party has so far failed to carry out a truly socialist programme because the workers have never been able to seriously influence the leadership of the party, which by tradition is intellectual and Fabian.

Orwell's objection to socialism is that it is bound up with the idea of mechanical progress, not merely as a necessary development but as an end in itself. Socialism, Orwell writes, is essentially an urban creed which grew up more or less concurrently with industrialism. Most socialists accept industrialism too readily; they want to develop it further, and present its achievements as their primary aim. But mechanical efficiency entails softness and degeneracy and frustrates the human need for effort and creation. The process "has itself become a machine, a huge glittering vehicle whirling us we are not certain where, but probably towards the padded Wells-world and the brain in the bottle." (p. 205) It is not surprising then if the association "socialism-progress-machinery-Russia-tractor-hygiene-machinery-progress" should make some people hostile towards socialism. Orwell's advice is not very helpful but it could hardly be so: "The machine has got to be accepted, but it is probably better to accept it rather as one accepts a drug—that is, grudgingly and suspiciously." (p. 202) It is significant that in the middle of the political fervour which prevailed at the time in socialist circles, Orwell should have foreseen and drawn attention to a danger inherent in one of the major aims of contemporary socialism, namely the well-being of the masses through a highly mechanized way of life. Huxley had seen the danger before him, but Huxley was not a socialist. Orwell saw that the mechanization advocated by the socialists required collectivism and centralized control and that man could be made to live under a form of socialism in which he would be well fed but a slave. He does not yet emphasize the corrupting nature of centralized power but he does foresee the perils of excessive mechanization.

At the end of his book Orwell makes a sensible proposition by suggesting that the aims of socialism should be redefined and the stress put on the ideal of justice and liberty. Socialism should be humanized and the people of the Left should momentarily drop their differences and concentrate on one essential purpose: the overthrow of tyranny. If they persist in their "bourgeois-baiting," they will only frighten the sinking middle class, who cling to their gentility under the impression that it keeps them afloat. And it is these people who have contributed to the success of fascism in Germany. Orwell insists, somewhat naively, that if the real aim of socialism is made clear, every decent person will want to work for its establishment.



The Spanish Civil War was a disappointing experience for many intellectuals who had committed themselves to socialism in the Thirties. It provoked their withdrawal from Left-wing parties and their return to "liberalism." Orwell also was disappointed but he turned against what he believed to be the main cause of his disappointment, the communist party, and his faith in the socialist ideal was strengthened. Orwell had gone to Spain as a reporter, but once there, he found that he could not be a mere spectator. Since he had letters of introduction from the Independent Labour Party, he joined the P.O.U.M., a Marxist organization with Trotskyist affinities. The P.O.U.M. line was that the war and the Revolution were inseparable. This became a much controverted opinion particularly after the defeat of the Republicans. It is perhaps idle to reflect that if the Revolution had not been crushed out by the government under the influence of the communists, the Republicans might have won the war. It is well known, that Franco won because he was backed by Germans and by Italian troupes, whereas the Republicans were abandoned even by the Russians. But, as Hugh Thomas remarks in his history of the Spanish Civil War,<sup>1</sup> the Spanish workers had lost their chief reason for fighting once the Revolution was abolished and they lost the privileges they had acquired. The communist position was that they must do away with revolutionary chaos for the sake of efficiency. It was better to win the war first and make the Revolution afterwards. At first, Orwell, though fighting with the P.O.U.M., preferred the communist view because they *were* more efficient. After the liquidation of the P.O.U.M. and of many of his friends he questioned the good faith of the communist leaders in Spain and accused them of having betrayed the Revolution: "The thing for which the communists were working was not to postpone the Spanish Revolution till a more suitable time, but to make sure that it never happened."<sup>2</sup>

It is obvious from *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) that Orwell's participation in the Spanish War was a turning point in the development of his political outlook and strengthened its paradoxical character. He had enlisted to fight for "common decency." In

<sup>1</sup> Hugh THOMAS, *The Spanish Civil War*, London, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> George ORWELL, *Homage to Catalonia*, London, 1959, p. 70.

Barcelona at the beginning of the war he lived in a classless community which he had thought was impossible to establish.

The thing that attracts ordinary men to socialism and makes them willing to risk their skins for it, the 'mystique' of socialism, is the idea of equality; to the vast majority of people socialism means a classless society, or it means nothing at all. . . . And, after all, instead of disillusioning me it deeply attracted me. The effect was to make my desire to see socialism established much more actual than it had been before. (p. 112)

When he came back from the front to Barcelona, he found that the atmosphere had deteriorated. Class-distinctions were reasserting themselves, and the civilian population was losing interest in the war. This did not shake his enthusiasm for the socialist ideal; the workers had been frustrated of their Revolution, but its aims seemed the more desirable. Orwell's conclusion to his Spanish experience shows that he was more concerned with the human beings involved in the fight than with the triumph of any party policy:

When you have had a glimpse of such a disaster as this—and however it ends the Spanish war will turn out to have been an appalling disaster, quite apart from the slaughter and physical suffering—the result is not necessarily disillusionment and cynicism. Curiously enough the whole experience has left me with not less but more belief in the decency of human beings. (p. 247)

This is really the first time that Orwell expresses his belief in man and his admiration for him instead of viewing him merely as a social type. Possibly, his concern and his affection for the "common man" dates from that period. It is also at that time that Orwell acquired political views which he defended energetically until his death. One of them is that whoever associates with people whose fundamental interest it is that a socialist society should *not* be established, actually contributes to the success of fascism. This is what communists did in Spain by allying with the liberals, who were opposed to any change in the structure of society. As time wore on, Orwell was increasingly convinced that communists and fascists were playing the same political game. He never changed his mind about Russian communism, and he considered the subsequent alliance of England with Russia as an alliance between

enemies. The similarity between fascism and communism was another discovery he made in Spain; it sprang from a conviction that power necessarily corrupts, particularly when it is concentrated in a few hands. Of the corrupting effect of power, Orwell only had a glimpse in Spain, where the Russian purges of 1936-37 had some repercussions, but it made him aware of some of its possible consequences. One of them was that even a socialist revolution might subject the ordinary man to a form of slavery which could be worse than that of a liberal state. He also saw that truth was deliberately distorted for political purposes and for the first time alludes to the rewriting of history. But his belief that the spirit of man cannot be destroyed was not shaken until the Second World War.

But the thing I saw in your face  
No power can disinherit  
No bomb that ever burst  
Shatters the crystal spirit.<sup>1</sup>

The spirit which animates *Homage to Catalonia* was preserved intact and found an outlet at the beginning of the Second World War in Orwell's intense patriotism. It was urgent to save England from fascism as it had been urgent to save Spain a few years before; as in Spain, the only remedy was the Revolution. The basic idea of *The Lion and the Unicorn* or *Socialism and the English Genius* (1941) is derived from Orwell's association with the P.O.U.M., namely that the War and the Revolution are inseparable. In the first essay, "England your England," Orwell describes the "English Genius." English civilization is as individual as that of Spain. Its most marked characteristics are its gentleness, the privateness of English life and a belief in the liberty of the individual. The English have a great respect for constitutionalism and legality, and their judges are incorruptible. True, they are hypocritical about their Empire, and England is the most class-ridden country under the sun, a land of snobbery and privilege, but the whole nation is united in moments of supreme crisis. This essay is not only an ardent expression of Orwell's

<sup>1</sup> From a poem composed in honour of an Italian militiaman Orwell had known in Spain. Published at the end of his essay "Looking Back on the Spanish War," in *Collected Essays*, p. 208.

patriotism, it is an enthusiastic praise of the patriotism of the English, with the notable exception of the "Europeanized Intelligentsia." In the second part of his essay and in the second essay entitled "Shopkeepers at War" Orwell discusses the decay of the ruling class: because they are fighting for their own privileges and therefore for the preservation of inequality, the ruling class cannot possibly reconcile their interests with those of the majority of Englishmen. They have always regarded Hitler and still regard him as their protector against bolshevism: though "they will not deliberately sell out . . . at every decisive moment they are likely to falter, pull their punches, do the wrong thing."<sup>1</sup> Therefore, Orwell says, it is time to make the Revolution, and the English workers will certainly be able to stand as much as the Spanish. "What is wanted is a conscious open revolt by ordinary people against inefficiency, class privilege and the rule of the old."<sup>2</sup> The third essay, "The English Revolution," is a call to Revolution, for it is impossible to defeat Hitler while remaining economically and socially in the nineteenth century. Orwell presents a programme of reforms which aims at "turning the war into a revolutionary war" and England into a socialist democracy. Orwell recognized later that he had been wrong since the War was won without making the Revolution. But this does not impair the quality of his essay: its underlying theme is his attachment to England and the English way of life; its most impressive quality is the humaneness of his socialism and his understanding that it must be adapted to the particular character of the English, who, as he writes in his essay on Dickens, always "respond emotionally to the idea of human brotherhood."

Orwell's attitude to war may seem at times contradictory: it appears from *Coming Up for Air* and *Homage to Catalonia* that he had a deep horror of it; yet he encouraged people to fight. He thought that war is wrong but sometimes necessary and that it is nonsense to pretend that one side is as good as another because they both use violence; there is something like fighting for a good cause. He had a strong dislike for pacifists and never missed an opportunity to criticize them. To the pacifist argument that if you

<sup>1</sup> *The Lion and the Unicorn*, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

don't use violence, you will shame your aggressor out of it, Orwell answered :

If you throw away your weapons, some less scrupulous person will pick them up. If you turn the other cheek, you will get a harder blow on it than you got on the first one. This does not always happen, but it is to be expected and you ought not to complain if it does happen.<sup>1</sup>

Orwell was also convinced that many pacifists really wanted power, although on the surface they seemed to renounce it. He explains this in "Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool," and in "Politics vs Literature," a study on Swift, in which he says that pacifist or anarchist visions of society show totalitarian tendencies. Tolstoy would not use violence, but he would enter people's brains if he could and dictate their thoughts. The Houyhnhnms are not governed by law but by the dictates of "Reason"; they are not *compelled* to do anything, merely "exhorted" or "advised."

But public opinion, because of the tremendous urge to conformity in gregarious animals, is less tolerant than any system of law. . . . When human beings are governed by 'love' or 'reason', the individual is under continuous pressure to make him behave or think in exactly the same way as everyone else.<sup>2</sup>

The pacifists would not use violence, but they bully you into thinking as they do by even more compelling methods. "The distinction that really matters is not between violence and non-violence, but between having and not having the appetite for power."<sup>3</sup> Some extreme pacifists, Orwell says, start by renouncing power completely and end by warmly championing Hitler and antisemitism. He was convinced that by being a pacifist in time of war, one automatically helped the enemy and that it was easy to cry for peace when other people were defending your life. In his essay on Gandhi Orwell writes that Western pacifists never answer awkward questions honestly. For instance, they always evade the question: "What about the Jews? Are you prepared to see them exterminated? If not, how do you propose to save them without

<sup>1</sup> "Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool," in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, p. 114.

<sup>2</sup> "Politics vs Literature," in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> "Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool," p. 118.



resorting to war?"<sup>1</sup> Gandhi answered the question though in a staggering way: the Jews ought to commit collective suicide. To the pacifists who quoted Gandhi as an example of successful non-violent resistance, Orwell answered that Gandhi dealt with a fairly liberal government who gave him a chance to get a hearing. If he had lived under a totalitarian regime, he would have disappeared in the middle of the night, and no one would have heard of him again.

Though he was himself a Left-wing intellectual committed to politics under the pressure of events, Orwell was extremely critical of the English Left-wing intelligentsia. Like Wyndham Lewis, he accused them of insincerity. He felt in a position to criticize other intellectuals because his own ideas were drawn from personal experience and not from a theoretical humanitarianism. He condemned their internationalism, their irresponsibility and the discrepancy between their ideas and their actions. By embracing communism, "the patriotism of the deracinated," they were transferring their allegiance from their own country to a foreign political party; they were thus undermining the capacity of their country to resist a foreign enemy. "England is perhaps the only country whose intellectuals are ashamed of their own nationalism."<sup>2</sup> Their attitude during the Thirties was purely negative, and if England was able to keep on its feet in 1940, it was thanks to the atavistic patriotism of the English people in general, their ingrained feeling that they are superior to foreigners.

For the last twenty years the main object of the English Left-wing intellectuals has been to break this feeling down and if they had succeeded, we might be watching the S.S. men patrolling the London Streets at this moment. . . . The energy that actually shapes the world springs from emotions—racial pride, leader worship, religious belief, love of war—which liberal intellectuals mechanically write off as anachronism, and which they have usually so completely destroyed in themselves as to have lost all power of action.<sup>3</sup>

This indictment of English intellectuals is clearly exaggerated, though there is some truth in Orwell's assertion that the liberal

<sup>1</sup> "Reflections on Gandhi," in *The Partisan Review Anthology*, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> *The Lion and the Unicorn*, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> "Wells, Hitler and the World State," in *Critical Essays*, p. 94.

socialists tend to ignore the powerful emotions which often dictate mass behaviour. Orwell even writes that power-worship and cruelty were among the motives which attracted the English intelligentsia to the U.S.S.R. This is a one-sided view which Orwell might have been at pains to substantiate.

Orwell is on surer ground when he discusses the irresponsibility of the intellectuals and points to the gap between their opinions and their way of life. He says that they belong to the Left-wing middle class who are keen on ideology but remain attached to their bourgeois way of life :

All Left-wing parties in the highly industrialized countries are at bottom a sham, because they make it their business to fight against something which they do not really wish to destroy. They have internationalist aims, and at the same time they struggle to keep up a standard of life with which those aims are incompatible. We all live by robbing Asiatic coolies, and those of us who are 'enlightened' all maintain that those coolies ought to be set free but our standard of living, and hence our 'enlightenment' demands that the robbery shall continue.<sup>1</sup>

Another example of the shallowness of their views is the ease with which they changed their minds within a few years' time. Many of them were pacifists up to 1935, then advocated war against Germany from 1935 to 1939, and then promptly cooled off when the war actually started. But the Left-wing intellectuals are at their most irresponsible when it comes to political orthodoxy. Orwell expresses admiration for Auden's poem "Spain," but to talk of "necessary murder"<sup>2</sup> is only possible for a person to whom murder is a mere word. "To me," Orwell writes, "murder is something to be avoided. So it is to any ordinary person. The Hitlers and Stalins find murder necessary, but they don't advertise their callousness, and they don't speak of it as murder... Mr. Auden's brand of amorality is only possible if you are the kind of person who is always somewhere else when the trigger is pulled."<sup>3</sup> Orwell explains that most Left-wing intellectuals accept totalitarianism because they have no experience of anything but liberalism. The pattern of their life is usually the same: public

<sup>1</sup> "Rudyard Kipling," in *Critical Essays*, pp. 115-16.

<sup>2</sup> Auden changed it later to "the fact of murder."

<sup>3</sup> "Inside the Whale," in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, p. 37.

school, university, a few trips abroad, then London. "To people of that kind such things as purges, secret police, summary executions, imprisonment without trial . . . are too remote to be terrifying."<sup>1</sup> What many of them do not grasp is that by their indifference to oppression and persecution they corrupt their own intellectual decency. It is sinister, Orwell writes, to realize that "the conscious enemies of liberty are those to whom liberty ought to mean most."<sup>2</sup>

In spite of Orwell's severity towards Left-wing intellectuals, it would be wrong to suppose that he was not aware of the pressures to which they were subject once they adhered to a party. He understood their urge to commit themselves and the fact that, when they did so, they had to conform to the party line; yet he thought that, as intellectuals, they ought to have fully weighed the implications of their commitment. His own writing on political commitment shows how conscious he was that the intellectual was caught between irreconcilable claims on his conscience:

On the whole the literary history of the thirties seems to justify the opinion that a writer does well to keep out of politics. For any writer who accepts or partially accepts the discipline of a political party is sooner or later faced with the alternative: toe the line, or shut up.<sup>3</sup>

"Toeing the line" is the more difficult as totalitarian doctrines are not only unchallengeable but also unstable. In his essay on nationalism Orwell writes that "in the modern world no one describable as an intellectual *can* keep out of politics in the sense of not caring about them."<sup>4</sup> He deals with the problem more thoroughly in "Writers and Leviathan," in which he explains how intellectuals should keep the spirit of liberalism alive. They cannot prevent the invasion of literature by politics because to preserve a purely aesthetic attitude towards life is impossible in a world full of injustice and misery. Unfortunately, political responsibility usually forces the writer to yield to orthodoxy, which is not compatible with artistic integrity. Orwell suggests that the writers should distinguish between their political and their literary loyalties and recognize "that a willingness to *do* certain distasteful things

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> "The Prevention of Literature," in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> "Inside the Whale," in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, p. 39.

<sup>4</sup> "Notes on Nationalism," in *Collected Essays*, p. 286.

does not carry with it any obligation to swallow the beliefs that usually go with them. When a writer engages in politics he should do so as a citizen, as a human being, but not *as a writer*. . . . Whatever else he does in service of his party, he should never write for it."<sup>1</sup>

Orwell's main concern was to preserve man's intellectual integrity, for he thought it was threatened by the ease with which many allowed political parties to benumb their consciousness. Though he may have lacked discrimination in his attacks against intellectuals, he was probably right in his analysis of their political conversion. Disappointed young men found in communism a relief to their depressing purposelessness. Orwell writes that it is a mistake to believe that young people are attracted by laziness; on the contrary, they are usually prepared to sacrifice themselves for a cause and to commit themselves to the ideology that requires most of them. The contributors to *The God that Failed*<sup>2</sup> confirm his belief that many intellectuals turned to communism as to a religious faith to which they surrendered their whole personality. "The major problem in our time," Orwell writes, "is the decay of the belief in personal immortality."<sup>3</sup> Silone substantiates this statement when he describes his own spiritual distress at giving up the faith of his ancestors: "Who can describe the dismay of once and for all renouncing one's faith in the individual immortality of the soul?"<sup>4</sup> To many, communism was a substitute for religion. Koestler talks of his love for the party, Wright of the sense of solidarity he enjoyed: "With the exception of the Church and its myths and legends, there is no agency so capable of making men feel the earth and the people upon it as the Communist Party."<sup>5</sup> Gide writes in his *Journal*: "My conversion is like a faith. My whole being is bent towards one single goal, all my thoughts even involuntary—lead me back to it."<sup>6</sup> Of Chalmers's (Edward Upward's) conversion Spender says: "It is obvious that there were elements of mysticism in his faith."<sup>7</sup> When Spender was in Republican Spain, he found that "there was a devoutness, a sense of hope

<sup>1</sup> "Writers and Leviathan," in *Collected Essays*, p. 433.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 335, note 1.

<sup>3</sup> "Looking Back on the Spanish War," in *Collected Essays*, p. 206.

<sup>4</sup> Ignazio SILONE, in *The God that Failed*, p. 104.

<sup>5</sup> Richard WRIGHT, in *The God that Failed*, p. 160.

<sup>6</sup> André GIDE, quoted by Dr. Enid Starkie, in *The God that Failed*, p. 176.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen SPENDER, in *The God that Failed*, p. 238.

which made [him] think of the crowds described in the New Testament."<sup>1</sup> The success of communism among intellectuals in the Thirties was due to the fact that it momentarily filled a spiritual void. What Gide calls "the submersion of individual responsibility in organized authority" sometimes led to disappointment, but there remained the craving for the sense of security afforded by the fact of belonging to a united body of men. After their disillusionment some found a refuge in religion, a few were driven to fascism, but the majority gave their life a new purpose when the Second World War broke out. Their recantation of communism proved that Orwell had on the whole been right when he accused them of committing themselves irresponsibly. Orwell himself had always been an opponent of Russian Communism. Even while he advocated a Socialist Revolution, he opposed those of its corollaries that threatened the human values which can only exist in a liberal society. Already before the Second World War he was drawing attention to the dangers of Right- or Left-wing totalitarianism. The Russo-German Pact obviously bore out for him his conviction that fascists and communists had much in common. The German attack upon Russia did not make him change his mind. He wrote *Animal Farm* when enthusiasm for Russia was at its height. It was precisely this enthusiasm that made him feel people were as blind to the evils of totalitarianism as they had been in 1936.

Orwell's last two novels have much in common, though they dramatize two different stages in the history of dictatorship and treat them in completely different ways. They both take to its ultimate conclusion Orwell's belief that humanity is ineradicably divided into the powerful and the weak, who are also the clever and the unaware. Orwell's sympathy always goes to the latter, but his presentation of the ordinary men for whose sake the Revolution is supposedly achieved is equally disparaging in the two books. The animals or "proles" are treated kindly, yet they are so stupid that they cannot possibly avoid being exploited. Orwell suggests in fact that the state of subjection in which they are kept is the human condition. His vision is so pessimistic as to imply that mankind never makes any real progress.

The story of *Animal Farm* (1945) is too well known to be told in detail. Inspired by an old boar, the animals of Manor Farm

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245.



revolt against their farmer and establish an Animals' Republic. They rename it Animal Farm and work for the setting up of a free and equalitarian community. This proves more difficult than the overthrowing of their tyrant. The pigs, who are cleverer than the other animals, assume the direction of the farm and gradually form a new governing aristocracy as powerful and tyrannical as that of the human beings. The failure of the Revolution is confirmed when the revolutionary motto "All animals are equal" becomes "All animals are equal but some are more equal than others" and the animals can no longer distinguish between pigs and human beings. The allegory clearly retraces the history of the Russian Revolution up to the Second World War: the early difficulties encountered by the Republic, its isolation from the rest of the world until it became evident that it was definitely established, the struggle for power between Stalin and Trotsky, the trials in the late Thirties, the Russo-German pact, the subsequent attack of Russia by Germany, and finally Russia's association with the Allies and the identification of its interests with theirs. These events presented in the simple allegorical terms of a beast fable form the background to the struggle of the animals to attain equality, freedom and economic security until it becomes clear that they have merely exchanged one tyrant for another. The story is told with admirable simplicity and conciseness.

The satire in *Animal Farm* does not bear on the Russian Revolution only; its meaning extend to all revolutions and authoritarian forms of government. If the animals, who are animated by the most generous motives towards each other, do not succeed in maintaining equality, surely there must be some corrupting element in the exercise of power which destroys the fruits of the Revolution. It is evident from the start that the pigs intend to take advantage of the privileged position which their abilities give them over the other animals. Orwell seems to have been inspired by James Burnham, to whose work he devoted an essay:

Society is of its nature oligarchical, and the power of the oligarchy always rests upon force and fraud. . . . All historical changes finally boil down to the replacement of one ruling class by another.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Second Thoughts on James Burnham." in *Collected Essays*, p. 353.

And further :

The masses, it seems, have vague aspirations towards liberty and human brotherhood, which are easily played upon by power-hungry individuals and minorities. So that history consists of a series of swindles in which the masses are first lured into revolt by the promise of Utopia, and then, when they have done their job, enslaved over again by new masters.<sup>1</sup>

Orwell also illustrates Burnham's conviction that the great mass of people will always be apolitical; that is why a self-seeking, hypocritical minority can take advantage of the brainless mob, whose destiny it is to be always led or driven. This is what is so disheartening about *Animal Farm* : Orwell takes it for granted that the masses are stupid; at no moment in the story is there any sign of hope that they will ever achieve a higher degree of consciousness. The fact that some of them at least learn how to read does not make them cleverer or more capable of doing anything but the specific task for which they were apparently born. The easiness with which they agree to all the decisions of the pigs without always fully realizing their implications suggests that they hardly need to be made less conscious since they are not conscious to begin with. Boxer, who personifies the common man's faith in the Revolution and his willingness to sacrifice his own life to its success, is the blindest and most stupid of all, although he is also the most pathetic. After the slaughter of the animals who have confessed their guilt to Napoleon, Clover realizes that they have been betrayed, but she is unable to express her thoughts and that of her comrades, and the animals accept their fate because they don't know any better :

As Clover looked down the hillside her eyes filled with tears. If she could have spoken her thoughts, it would have been to say that this was not what they had aimed at when they had set themselves years ago to work for the overthrow of the human race. These scenes of terror and slaughter were not what they had looked forward to on that night when old Major first stirred them to rebellion. If she herself had had any picture of the future, it had been of a society of animals set free from hunger and the whip, all equal, each working to his capacity, the strong protecting the weak. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372.

Instead—she did not know why—they had come to a time when no one dared speak his mind, when fierce, growling dogs roamed everywhere, and when you had to watch your comrades torn to pieces after confessing to shocking crimes. There was no thought of rebellion or disobedience in her mind. She knew that, even as things were, they were far better off than they had been in the days of Jones, and that therefore all else was needful to prevent the return of the human beings. Whatever happened, she would remain faithful, work hard, carry out the orders that were given to her, and accept the leadership of Napoleon. But still, it was not for this that she and all the other animals had hoped and toiled. It was not for this that they had built the windmill and faced the bullets of Jones's guns. Such were her thoughts, though she lacked the words to express them.<sup>1</sup>

Orwell expresses the shattering of the socialist dream with moving simplicity. His vision of a socialism exclusively centered on liberty and equality was always Utopian. By exposing the inevitable deterioration of the revolutionary process, Orwell seems to be shedding his last hope for a better world.

The theme of *Animal Farm* is that power corrupts whoever holds it. The neighbours of Animal Farm are certainly not presented in a more favourable light than the aristocracy of pigs. Orwell satirizes the Western powers who first attempted to undermine the Revolution and spread innumerable lies about it, then made an alliance with Russia when their own countries were no longer threatened with the revolutionary spirit. Pilkington's cynical remark "If you have your lower animals to contend with, we have our lower classes" (p. 118) shows that the author makes little difference between one kind of ruler and another. Pilkington's admiration for the discipline and orderliness which prevail in the Animals' Republic points clearly to the aims of all rulers whether capitalist or communist: the exploitation of submissive masses by a privileged minority. It is mainly in their means that rulers differ. Orwell shows how much easier it is to impose hardships on the masses for the sake of an ideal. When Squealer tells the animals that bravery is not enough, that "Loyalty and obedience are more important. Discipline, comrades, iron discipline! That is the watchword for today," (p. 50) they are somewhat reluctant but

<sup>1</sup> George ORWELL, *Animal Farm*, Penguin Books, 1963, pp. 75-76.

they finally obey. They do not protest when their comrades are slain and they are made to watch "a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet while the air [is] heavy with the smell of blood." (p. 47) They are also reconciled to the idea that one generation must be sacrificed for the sake of the next. All this is possible only because the masses suffer of their own accord for the attainment of their Utopia. As time goes on, they no longer have any standards of comparison. They lead hard and hungry lives, and they are easily kept in check by a showy and carefully fostered patriotism :

They found it comforting to be reminded that, after all, they were truly their own masters and that the work they did was for their own benefit. So that, what with the songs, the processions, Squealer's list of figures, the thunder of the gun, the crowing of the cockerel, and the fluttering of the flag, they were able to forget that their bellies were empty at least part of the time. (p. 98)

All this shows the force of what Orwell calls "the mystique of socialism," the ideal of equality, for the sake of which people are prepared to accept anything.

Is Orwell's message then that all revolutions inevitably fail? Does Benjamin, the old donkey who sees through the pigs' game, express the author's opinion when he says that "hunger, hardship, disappointment are the unalterable law of life?" (p. 111) Orwell certainly expresses the disappointment of the common man, who expected so much from the Revolution, came so near to the goal, then saw his expectations once more thwarted. Yet the masses accept their fate less grudgingly than before the Revolution. They are still in bondage, but they are now under the illusion that they possess something, that they are co-owners of all that is achieved on their territory. They are in some measure prevented from revolting against their new rulers by the fact that the latter come, after all, from their own ranks. Although Orwell caricatures Soviet Russia and what he considers as the cynical hypocrisy of its leaders, *Animal Farm* is also a satire on the means used by clever men intoxicated with the exercise of power, who resort to evil means to ensure its continuance. The worst of these means is what Koestler calls "the dialectics of the unconscious," the subtle and clever process by which reality and truth are altered. In *Animal Farm* Squealer is a master at deceiving credulous animals by a subtle

blend of persuasion and threat which reduces them to silence because they are confused and don't know exactly where they stand. Even the past is modified and either given a new meaning or denied altogether. The commandments which rule their lives can be amended from one day to another without the animals being consulted, so that very soon the democratic spirit is destroyed. The instability of their beliefs further increases the confusion of the animals and induces them to accept blindly what they are told, which is the only way for them to remain orthodox and, so they think, not to endanger the success of their cause. It is also the only way in which they can make sure of their own safety, as they are sometimes made to realize with uneasy and uncomprehending amazement. At the end of the story the farm is renamed Manor Farm, and we are reminded of Stalin's endeavour to revive the myth of Old Russia :

If Trotsky was a fascist and Ivan the Terrible a soviet hero, all standards of judgment vanished and nobody knew what to believe. To-night, the angels of this morning might be declared devils. The resulting mental confusion conduced to hypocrisy and automatic unthinking acceptance of the unpredictable revelations from the heights of the Kremlin. Therein lay at least a minimum of security.<sup>1</sup>

Through the attitude of the lower animals Orwell shows that everyone is responsible for the establishment of tyranny : whatever the reasons for which people accept the alteration of truth and the decay of the standards of their community, they are themselves contaminated by attitudes which their acquiescence helps to maintain. When they confess to crimes which they have not committed, they are only consistent with their own acceptance of anything that may serve the Revolution. As Koestler writes in *Darkness at Noon*, "The accused confessed because they had been rotted by the Revolution which they served."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this is how Rubashov explains his own intention to confess :

They were too deeply entangled in their own past, caught in the web that had spun themselves, according to the laws

<sup>1</sup> Louis FISCHER, in *The God that Failed*, p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur KOESTLER, *Darkness at Noon*, London, 1961, p. 242.



of their own twisted ethics and twisted logic; they were all guilty, although not of those deeds of which they accused themselves.<sup>1</sup>

The belief that anyone is guilty who takes part in a revolution and tries by all means to ensure its success implies that any revolution contains its own bad seeds and raises again the question of ends and means. Orwell was willing to use bad means to some extent (war, for instance) to reach a good end (such as the defeat of fascism). Obviously, he simply considered war as one of the traditional means used by man to defend or recover legitimate rights, though he doesn't seem to have fully realized the extent of its destructiveness.<sup>2</sup> Still, according to him, war did not violate the nature of man, whereas the means by which the existence of totalitarian states is ensured corrupts the very essence of man, his spirit and his individuality.

*1984* (1949) is Orwell's final desperate warning against the danger of allowing the state to control the thoughts and the inner life of the individual. Like *Animal Farm*, the book is too well known to be described in detail, but the principles that underlie the dictatorship Orwell has imagined need some explanation. They are expounded in *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, supposedly written by Emmanuel Goldstein. The latter, formerly a hero of the Revolution, has left the state and opposes it from the outside by inspiring a brotherhood of opponents of the regime within the country. His pamphlet, which is said to be an excellent imitation of Trotsky's way of writing, makes clear the slogans which the party hammers into the consciousness of its members:

WAR IS PEACE  
 FREEDOM IS SLAVERY  
 IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> "How much rubbish this war will sweep away, if only we can hang on throughout the summer. War is simply a reversal of civilized life: its motto is 'Evil be thou my good', and so much of the good of modern life is actually evil that it is questionable whether on balance war does harm." From Orwell's Diary, quoted by Wyndham Lewis in *The Writer and the Absolute*, p. 181.

*War is Peace* is the state's fundamental slogan because it is only by maintaining a continuous state of war that the men in power succeed in perpetuating their authority and in keeping the peace within the country. The world is divided into three super-states, which are constantly at war and whose inhabitants are never allowed to communicate. The same system prevails in the three states with slight differences and under different names. The three world powers need not even be at war because they are entirely self-sufficient. In so far as there is any cause for conflict, it is that some disputed territories are reserves of cheap labour and that each state wants to acquire a ring of bases to strengthen its position. By a sort of tacit agreement they don't use the atomic bomb, which they all possess, because this would entail the destruction of their organized society and of their own power. As a matter of fact, the real purpose of this state of war, which should never lead to any decisive victory since this would put a stop to it, lies in its psychological effect on Party members. It stimulates the fear, the hatred, the adulation of leaders and the mood of orgiastic triumph that are necessary to foster the credulous and ignorant fanaticism which is the strongest support of the oligarchy. War thus provides an emotional basis for a hierarchical society, but it also provides an economic one, for it uses up the produces of industrialism which would otherwise contribute to raise the general standard of living. If the great mass of people who are stupefied by poverty were richer and enjoyed too much leisure and security, they would learn to think for themselves and would eventually overthrow the hierarchical society, whose stability thus depends on the poverty and ignorance of its inhabitants. War is thus made to play the part performed by comfort and hedonism in *Brave New World*.

*Ignorance is strength* applies equally to the mass of "proles" and to the members of the Outer Party. From the proletarians there is little to fear; they can be granted freedom because most of them cannot think anyway. In Oceania proles and animals are free. But among Party members and the new aristocracy made up for the most part of bureaucrats, scientists, technicians, trade-union organizers, publicity experts, sociologists, teachers, journalists and professional politicians the smallest inclination to independent thinking must be crushed at once. The best means of ensuring orthodoxy is of course education; the future aristocracy are trained

from childhood in the practice of *crimestop*, *blackwhite* and *doublethink*. "Crimestop is the faculty of stopping short, as though by instinct, at the threshold of any dangerous thought."<sup>1</sup> It means in fact "protective stupidity." *Blackwhite* is "a loyal willingness to say that black is white when party discipline demands this. But it also means the ability to *believe* that black is white and more to *know* that black is white, and to forget that one has ever believed the contrary." (p. 170)

*Doublethink* is a vast system of mental cheating by which power is maintained through endless contradictions :

*Doublethink* means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them. . . . *Doublethink* lies at the very heart of Ingsoc, since the essential act of the Party is to use conscious deception while retaining the firmness of purpose that goes with complete honesty. To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just so long as it is needed, to deny the existence of objective reality and all the while to take account of the reality which one denies—all this is indispensably necessary. (p. 171)

Even the names of the Ministries are examples of *doublethink*. The Ministry of Peace concerns itself with war, the Ministry of Truth with lies, the Ministry of Love with torture and the Ministry of Plenty with starvation. *Doublethink* makes it possible for the Party to control the thoughts of its members. The tragedy of modern civilization is that politicians are able to exploit the means invented by scientists to control and even destroy the spirit of man.

Goldstein's pamphlet describes Orwell's vision of a class-ridden humanity and reasserts his belief that no real advancement ever takes place among the lower classes :

Throughout recorded time, and probably since the end of the Neolithic Age, there have been three kinds of people in the world, the High, the Middle and the Low. They have been subdivided in many ways, they have borne countless different names, and their relative numbers, as well as their attitude towards one another, have varied from age to age ; but the essential structure of society has never altered. Even after enormous upheavals and seemingly irrevocable changes,

<sup>1</sup> George ORWELL, 1984, Penguin Books, 1956, p. 169.

the same pattern has always reasserted itself, just as a gyroscope will always return to equilibrium, however far it is pushed one way or the other. . . . Of the three groups, only the Low are never even temporarily successful in achieving their aims. It would be an exaggeration to say that throughout history there has been no progress of a material kind. . . . But . . . from the point of view of the Low, no historic change has ever meant much more than a change in the name of their masters. (p. 162-3)

From the beginning of the twentieth century the true aims of socialism, liberty and equality, have been more and more openly abandoned. The new political movements—Ingsoc in Oceania, Neo-Bolshevism in Eurasia, Death-worship in Eastasia—have “the conscious aim of perpetuating *unfreedom* and *inequality*.” (p. 163) In Oceania the proles are left alone, unless they are gifted or intelligent and liable to show signs of discontent. In this case they are simply exterminated by the thought police. But the majority of the proles are not even aware that they are oppressed: “Left to themselves they will continue from generation to generation and from century to century, breeding and dying, not only without any impulse to rebel, but without the power of grasping that the world could be other than it is.” (p. 168)

Yet in the first part of the book Winston Smith repeatedly asserts that “if there is hope it lies in the proles,” because they have remained human and have preserved an essential feature of an older civilization: personal relationships. They live naturally, they enjoy life for its own sake, and they have normal sexual relations, whereas these are forbidden to Party members, in whom the Party tries to kill the sex instinct or to distort it. It is this natural element in man which, so Winston hopes, will in the end be strong enough to overthrow the tyranny of the Party. At the same time, he has doubts about the capacity of the proles to revolt: “Until they have become conscious they will never rebel, and until after they have rebelled they cannot become conscious.” (p. 160) Orwell’s treatment of the proles in *1984* is frequently criticized because the hope he puts in them is not substantiated and is even contradicted by his scepticism about their capacity to revolt. Indeed, as in *Animal Farm*, the degree of consciousness he is willing to grant them is very low. It is also unlikely that any dictatorial government would simply ignore eighty per cent of a country’s population.

These inconsistencies in Orwell's vision of society are due on the one hand to his ambivalent attitude towards the proles, whom he sees as human but hopelessly ineffectual, while on the other hand, he considers the powerful as indomitable tyrants.

In the first part of the book Winston Smith describes his life as a member of the Outer Party in London, the major city of Airstrip One, as England has been renamed. He is a potential rebel, although his motives and his aims are extremely vague. He is merely conscious of an undefined hankering for a more human world and of a desire to escape, even momentarily, the tyrannical watching of the telescreen and the thought-police. That is why he likes to wander in the proletarian quarters. He meets there a Mr. Charrington who keeps a junk-shop and sells him a diary and a coral paperweight, which to Winston symbolize an earlier, more human civilization. Charrington offers to rent him a room in which there is no telescreen and where he could occasionally take refuge from the pressure of his ordinary activities. Winston works in the Ministry of Truth; his main job is to keep the past up-to-date, i.e., to rewrite it to make it suit the Party orthodoxy of the day. The mutability of the past is, with Newspeak and *doublethink*, one of the sacred principles of Ingsoc. History is no longer a science, it can be modified or reinterpreted according to the needs of the Party. By emphasizing its mutability, the Party undermines the trust of man in his own judgment and makes him doubt his ability to think. "The frightening thing," Winston reflected, "was that it might all be true. If the Party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event, *it never happened*—that, surely, was more terrifying than mere torture and death?" (p. 31) Similarly, Newspeak affects the consciousness of men by reducing their range of thought to make sure that Party members remain orthodox. Symes, who works on the Newspeak dictionary, comments enthusiastically on his work:

We're cutting the language down to the bones. . . . It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words. . . . The Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect. . . . Orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness. (p. 46)

This is illustrated by a man whom Winston watches and hears talking in a restaurant. Winston doesn't understand all he says,



but it is obvious that it is perfectly orthodox and that the man talks like an automaton :

Winston had a curious feeling that this was not a real human being but some kind of dummy. It was not the man's brain that was speaking, it was his larynx. . . . It was a noise uttered in unconsciousness, like the quacking of a duck. (p. 47)

In an essay entitled "Politics and the English Language" (1946) Orwell explains in what way language can corrupt thought. He asserts that "Modern language at its worst consists in gumming together long strips of words which have already been set in order by someone else and making the results presentable by sheer humbug."<sup>1</sup> Orwell was mainly attacking political language, whose vagueness, he said, gives a false picture of reality. For instance, "when defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out in the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets : this is called pacification."<sup>2</sup> If peasants are robbed of their farms and sent along the roads, this is called *transfer of population* or *rectification of frontiers*, etc. Such euphemisms are bred by insincerity, which, according to Orwell, is the great enemy of clear language. Orwell's own prose is simple and clear ; it indicates his determination to convey an unequivocal picture of reality and bears the mark of his strong individualism. He was extremely concerned with language because he thought that its decay was connected with the prevailing political chaos since it was used as an instrument for concealing or preventing thought. "Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." (1984, p. 157) In his pamphlet on Newspeak, published as an appendix to 1984, Orwell shows how language is made to influence the world-view, the mental habits, and ultimately the life of Party members. Newspeak is based on a reduction of vocabulary ; it is hoped that this will diminish the range of thought and make heretical thinking impossible. The language is divided into three vocabularies, one for everyday life, one for political purposes, and a third one consisting of scientific and technical terms. The special function of these vocabularies is

<sup>1</sup> "Politics and the English Language," in *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

to destroy meanings, to cancel out words and, by doing so, to do away with the concepts they stand for. The system was already used in Oldspeak though not on such a high scale. A good example is the word *Comintern*, which suggests a "tightly knit organization and a well defined body of doctrine," (p. 248) whereas *Communist International* "calls up a picture of universal human brotherhood." (p. 248) One can thus alter the meaning of an expression by abbreviating it, and this is done so systematically in Newspeak that the possibility of expressing unorthodox opinions is destroyed.

Winston Smith is himself fairly typical of the new order. His participation in the two minutes hate without being able to resist intoxication, although the object of his hatred is by turns Goldstein or Big Brother himself, and his sadistic desire to make Julia suffer before he knows that she wants him, show to what extent he allows his consciousness to be drowned by the sub-human frenzy aroused by the collective expression of hatred. However, he becomes aware that so long as he retains his consciousness, he will stay human, that this is the essential part of himself that he must preserve. At the same time, he realizes that his unorthodoxy will entail his annihilation, though he is far from suspecting what form it will take. He cannot refrain from rebelling, not because he is driven by generous motives but simply because his humanity, hence his power to think, has not yet been completely destroyed by the system. The immediate cause of his sin against the Party is another feature of his humanity: the sexual impulse. He has an illicit affair with Julia and is supposedly initiated into the brotherhood by O'Brien, a member of the Inner Party, who professes to belong to the underground movement. Winston's and Julia's willingness to do anything to help the brotherhood, including committing murder, cheating, forging, blackmailing, corrupting the minds of children, distributing habit-forming drugs, encouraging prostitution etc. shows how far they have already been corrupted by the Party, which has taught them that all means are justified to reach a desirable end. Still, they are apparently not prepared to renounce or betray each other, which again might be interpreted as a sign of Orwell's faith in humanity, even if, ultimately, Winston and Julia are destroyed and do betray each other. Indeed, there is nothing heroic about Orwell's characters: Winston Smith is an average man who has no ideal, no personal values to incite him to rebellion.

Julia is unaware of the corrupting effect of Party methods; with a cynicism apparently bred from a natural instinct for self-preservation, she never questions its teachings nor its oppressiveness so long as it doesn't directly interfere with her own life. She has learned to deceive the authorities and does it with impunity while she has casual affairs with Party members. It is only when she really falls in love that she becomes a prey worth the Party's attention.

If people like Winston and Julia, who have been conditioned by the Party and are not particularly intelligent or courageous, have a nostalgia for a human world and are almost unavoidably led to infringe the instructions of the Party, then there must be some natural element in them which refuses to be subdued by an inhuman tyranny and compels them to rebel. Winston is convinced that not only love but the animal instinct, "the simple, undifferentiated desire" will in the end tear the Party to pieces, for he thinks that "they can't get inside you. If you can *feel* that staying human is worthwhile, even when it can't have any result whatever, you've beaten them. . . . They could lay bare in the utmost detail everything that you had done or said or thought; but the inner heart, whose workings were mysterious even to yourself, remained impregnable." (p. 136) The horrible discovery that he is to make is precisely that they *can* get inside you and destroy your innermost being and that this is the way in which you are being annihilated.

Winston and Julia are arrested by Mr. Charrington, who turns out to be a member of the thought police. The third part of the book describes the process by which Winston is finally destroyed spiritually. It makes clear what until then Winston had vainly attempted to grasp. He had written in his diary *I understand How, I do not understand WHY*: why when war is not even necessary, when for the first time in history it has become technically possible to feed everyone on earth and equality could at last become a reality, why this horrible oppression should be imposed on humanity. The tortures and humiliations to which Winston is subjected by O'Brien, the Party inquisitor, are intended to destroy his power of arguing and reasoning, to make him distrust his own mind and to make him surrender his individuality completely and of his own "free will." At last he understands WHY, which is simply that power is an end in itself, coveted for its own sake. "One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a

Revolution; one makes the Revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power." (p. 212) How can a man best assert his power over another? By making him suffer; until a man suffers you can never be sure that he is not obeying his own will. "Power is in inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing." (p. 214) "If you want a picture of the future," O'Brien says, "imagine a boot stamping on a human face—for ever." (p. 215) Under the pressure of torture Winston admits that two and two make five, but he doesn't surrender his individuality to the Party until he is threatened with having his face devoured by rats, of which he has a hysterical and uncontrollable fear. Then he betrays Julia by crying that this should be done to her. After this he is completely broken down; he has no self-respect or dignity left. When he is let out of the Ministry of Love, his conversion is complete. Looking at Big Brother on the telescreen, he realizes that he loves him, and he surrenders his whole being to him willingly. "The long-hoped-for bullet was entering his brain." (p. 239) He is spiritually dead.

1984 owes much to Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. Orwell obviously drew from it his conception of the means by which the Party machinery modifies the human consciousness and forces man to rely on the Party authority instead of his own thought to achieve certainty. *Doublethink*, for instance, is simply a rationalization of the requirements of the Party as formulated by Rubashov. The latter's increasing self-doubts make him capitulate not out of cowardice but out of logic. Unlike his fellow-prisoner, who has a rigid code of honour and is prepared to die for it, Rubashov has no clearly defined moral values and must work out his rule of conduct for himself. He realizes that he will be defeated because he believes in the infallibility of the Party and no longer trusts his own motives of action: "I no longer believe in my infallibility. That is why I am lost."<sup>1</sup> Orwell sharply criticizes man's surrender to an authority that deems itself infallible and is prepared to impose

<sup>1</sup> Arthur KOESTLER, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

complete submission by any means whatever. To submit is to give up all the values acquired through centuries of culture, which the twentieth-century Revolution was precisely intended to exalt for the benefit of all. In *Darkness at Noon* subjection is at least justified by the revolutionary necessity. Not so in *1984*, in which sheer craving for power is the only motive. Though it seems unlikely that a dictatorship could be maintained without even a pretence of ideology, this is an interesting explanation. It accounts for much that seems uncanny in modern politics, particularly for the infliction of pain without the least prospect of gaining anything by it, a fact which in the Second World War revealed a terrifying strain of barbarism in men proud of their civilization. Winston's rebellion against the soulless tyranny of the Party is obviously useless. O'Brien's cruelty has no other aim than the gratification of a vicious instinct.

Orwell has staged a conflict which proves of standing importance in modern every-day life: it is provoked by the pressure to conform imposed by most political parties on their members and by the condemnation of independent thinking not only by Party authorities but by the majority of people. Orwell merely carried the phenomenon to the extreme forms it might take and sometimes does take. It often leads to the destruction of democracy by the democrats themselves when their instrument—party politics—becomes more important than their aims. Even English socialism, Orwell suggests, could lead to totalitarianism. Submission to a party indicates a shift in ethical values which is liable to entail the complete disappearance of morals. Goodness becomes synonymous with orthodoxy and, as Orwell remarks in his essay on Swift, the pressure of the group on the individual is so strong as to make sanity equivalent to conformity. " ' You would not make the act of submission which is the price of sanity, ' " (p. 200) O'Brien tells Winston. Again, the tendency to regard unorthodox individuals as somehow unbalanced and therefore unsound is very noticeable in countries which champion democracy and where the word " different " has often come to mean " social outcast. " In *1984* the alienation which results from individualism is punished as a crime. Human nature is automatized, instincts are canalized and exploited for political purposes, politics invade the existence of man and annihilate him. An artificial order is imposed on life not, as in *Brave New World*, in order to regulate it but to destroy it:



"vaporization," as death is euphemistically called, is the decisive factor in the formation of an élite of right-thinkers and conformists. Since the external reality is subject to interpretation, since it exists only in the mind, control over the mind entails control over history, over the past, the present and even the future. Younger generations never learn to think for themselves; they cannot trust their own judgment nor understand in what way their inner being is destroyed by the Party. Of course, heresy has always been persecuted. What is new is that scientists have found the means to detect it even before it is expressed. Science, or such branches of it as are still explored in *1984*, contributes to the destruction of man rather than to the improvement of his condition.

Orwell's picture of the desolation, the lack of warmth, the inhuman relations among men in an overorganized state is overpowering. Man is completely isolated and cannot even derive hope from sharing his misery with other human beings. There is no room for friendship or love; only the sexual impulse remains an irrepressible manifestation of human nature. Orwell has chosen to show the horror of tyranny as it might be experienced in modern society, but he dissociates it from the artfulness with which it is often combined, which is consistent with his theory of power for its own sake. In his negative Utopia the Party is no longer a group of fallible human beings but a god-like and all-powerful abstraction which arrogates to itself the power of life and death. Yet it seems to me that in the last part of *1984*, particularly when he shows Winston threatened with rats, Orwell fails in the same way as Wyndham Lewis in the third part of *The Human Age*: there are limits to the horrors which one can imagine, and although recent history has shown that these limits can be extended very far, to transcend them in fiction often defeats the intention of the author. He provokes the desired shock but also such repulsion for the whole scene that the reader cannot even pity the victim. By a curious but not unfrequent reaction, the witnesses of a terrible and undeserved punishment are often as angry against the victim as against the torturer, particularly if it deprives the victim of his dignity. Furthermore, Orwell doesn't seem to have realized that O'Brien's relentless logic sometimes drives him to the border of insanity and that this might be a source of corruption more dangerous than rebellion to the preservation of the Party's authority. He has imagined a purely static society, considering that an oligarchy

powerful enough could stay in power for ever. One might object that history rarely comes to a stop. On the other hand, when a dictatorship is maintained for more than thirty years, release must seem highly improbable. For Winston Smith there is no alternative to Ingsoc; though he hopes in the proles, he cannot contemplate the possibility of their revolting in his lifetime.

In *Milton's God* William Empson discusses an article in which the author asserts that "Orwell [has] filled his political satire with unconscious or half-conscious meanings of a different kind," namely man's "complete, unconditional surrender to the transcendental, paradoxical nature of God."<sup>1</sup> Empson corroborates this hypothesis and declares that the allegory applies to both communism and Christianity. "George Orwell very positively thought it the ultimate shame for a man to yield his conscience to an authority which craves to torture him and can only be restrained by a renunciation of thought, whether the authority is Stalin or God the father."<sup>2</sup> He disagrees with Gerber, however, when the latter says that Orwell was partially unconscious that his satire could apply to religion as well. There is much to be said for Empson's position, for in his essays Orwell often compares the hold of communism on the spirit of man to that of the Catholic Church, and the political authority which demands orthodoxy to the Inquisition. He repeatedly argues that communism has filled the place left empty by religion and demands of its members the same unrestricted submission. Whatever the kind of totalitarian or religious authority the Party stands for, it evidently assumes a power which is usually attributed to God only, and the relationship between this authority and the people under its sway is of the same nature as that between God and man. Party members believe in Big Brother, but they have never seen him, and doubts are often raised as to his existence. Many of them are willing to live ascetically for the sake of the Party and to accept the sexual continence imposed by it. Punishment for unorthodoxy means hell or purgatory, and here again the similarity between religion and politics is striking. The Party member is *eager* to be purged of unorthodoxy or thought-crime, and he is grateful to the Party for

<sup>1</sup> Richard GERBER, "The English Island Myth, Remarks on the Englishness of Utopian Fiction," *The Critical Quarterly*, I, 1 (Spring 1959), 41.

<sup>2</sup> William EMPSON, *Milton's God*, London, 1961, p. 235.

"helping" him to love and to submit unreservedly even at the cost of pain. Orwell denounces this deliberate obedience of man to an all-powerful authority which robs him of his self-respect and lowers him as a human being. Instead of seeking self-fulfilment in a society with equal opportunities for all, twentieth-century men allow themselves to be humbled again by a power which is as exacting as the religious tyranny which many of them have overthrown. The sight of man refusing to be self-sufficient as if he were lost without an almighty Master was for Orwell a discouraging one. He felt that the pressure of a politicized society on the individual was as strong as that exercised by religion on a medieval community. In fact, *1984* dramatizes the failure of modern man to become free, the recurring destruction of Prometheus' dream.

The theme of *1984* is basically the same as that of Orwell's previous novels. It is a vehement protest against the quality of life created by the modern tendency to overorganize and to politicize all aspects of life. This tendency leads to a set of conditions in which man loses his identity, his association with the past, and in the end is completely annihilated. Orwell rebels against the alteration of objective truth and the corruption of language as a means of confusing man and of impairing his consciousness. He protests against industrialism and the dreary life it has engendered. Winston's and Julia's escape to the country are a brief but unavailing attempt to recover their humanity. Man is doomed to being mechanized; he is destroyed by the very instrument which he had thought would free him. In *Brave New World* Huxley warned that the price paid for progress might be too high; Orwell asserts that progress will defeat its own ends. His picture of the future is grim, and few people are prepared to believe that human nature could be so altered and its fundamental instincts suppressed. Orwell himself was not so desperate as to declare that his Utopia would come true,<sup>1</sup> but he was careful to point to the ultimate developments of existing trends. Contrary to what some critics have said, he did not lack imaginative power in creating the repulsive society of *1984*, he deliberately showed how ugly and inhuman the

<sup>1</sup> "My novel *1984* ... is ... intended as a show-up of the perversion to which a centralized economy is liable ... I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily *will* arrive, but I believe ... that something resembling it *could* arrive." Quoted by Irving HOWE in *Politics and the Novel*, New York, 1957, p. 240.

world could become. It was Huxley's belief that "a book about the future can interest us only if its prophecies look as though they might conceivably come true ;<sup>1</sup> there is no reason to believe that Orwell's Utopia will not stand the test as well as *Brave New World*. The two books are often compared, and we are more inclined to believe in the future as described by Huxley because his satire is often comic in spite of its cruelty and because the "Brave New World" seems nearer to our Western society. On the other hand, we are afraid even to consider that Orwell's Utopia might materialize. As a matter of fact, the message is fairly similar in the two books, for both criticize a society made stable through the dehumanization of man and the lowering of his consciousness. The main differences lie in the means used by dictators to reach their ends, but the two trends illustrated by the novels can be observed in the modern world. Comfort and hedonism have always competed with asceticism for the soul of man. Eroticism can be a source of degeneration, and in *Brave New World* it is encouraged in order to destroy the traditional values of love and marriage. But it is equally true that when these values are abandoned, it is often in favour of strict abstinence imposed from outside for the purpose of using to other ends the unreleased tension in men. It could be further demonstrated that the two Utopias were inspired by real aspects of modern life. What is important, however, is that each in its own way calls attention to the dangers run by humanity and implicitly appeals to our attachment to individual values.

Lawrence's advice, "Never trust the artist, trust the tale," holds as true for Orwell's work as for other writers'. Still, it should be recalled that Orwell's criticism of society is unequivocally the product of his personal experience because this explains to a certain extent why he is a great writer without being a great novelist. With the exception of *Animal Farm*, he seems to have been less concerned with the conventions of a particular literary genre than with the quality of his writing in general, and he made little distinction between imaginative and non-imaginative literature. Long passages in his novels read almost like essays, whereas some parts of his other books, *Down and Out in Paris and London*,

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Brave New World*, Introduction, p. 9.

*The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Homage to Catalonia*, convey as well as any work of fiction the artist's vision of reality. Orwell's work is strongly autobiographical, but he had some difficulty in transmuting his personal experience into fiction and in reconciling it with the satirist's purpose in order to create a plausible character. Most critics point to the weakness of his characterization, and it is true that he is not sufficiently interested in what his characters are nor in their development to make the texture of their life a vehicle for his meaning. Rather, the significance of his novels arises from their comments on life. Yet his characters are not merely the mouthpieces of his ideas but appear as test-cases meant to exemplify the debasing nature of modern life. Indeed, they are seldom master of their own existence. They are at a loss in modern society but do not rebel against it of their own initiative; rebellion is forced upon them by circumstances. Most of them are tormented people who are not up to the trial imposed on them.

The commonplaceness of Orwell's characters is partly due to his vision of society as an aggregate of average men ruthlessly exploited by all those who have some kind of power. He was not so much interested in the individual's life as in what prevented that life from being private and the individual from being himself. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he never advocated a "change of heart" because he thought that the heart of the common man was sound enough. Evil was primarily social and political and showed itself by directly or indirectly restricting individual life and thought within narrow limits. It could only be checked by personal integrity, though the fight was always uneven. Orwell's characters are inevitably defeated; in fact, his novels tell the story of their defeat. The pattern of his works is usually the same: contact with the social or political reality entails indignation and sometimes rebellion, but in the end the individual always resigns himself to his fate and tries to make the best of it. Concentrating on the individual's environment and on what frustrates him rather than on the individual himself, Orwell describes the condition of man and the quality of his life in modern society: the absence of faith, the avidity for money or power, the ugliness of the industrial world, the fear, hatred and violence it generates, and finally the organized destruction of individualism. Through his successive indictments of imperialism, liberalism and orthodox socialism it is humanity that he brings to trial, and he concludes, as a



disappointed idealist, that it never comes up to his expectations. Probably, he could never have been satisfied with any social system, because he criticized the hypocrisy and the compromises inherent in all forms of social and political life.

Notwithstanding the universality of some aspects of Orwell's criticism it is often confined to English society as such rather than aimed at Western civilization. His extreme class-consciousness and his analysis of the English class-system made him point to the obsolescence and inadequacy of social structures which, in his eyes, weakened England as a nation. He showed that economic frustration and bitterness led a large portion of the English middle class to a negative attitude. He also described dirt, physical degeneracy and the demoralization of men as the inevitable effects of industrialism and capitalism combined. In this respect his description of the Brookers' household in *The Road to Wigan Pier* is as evocative as Lawrence's description of Tevershall in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Associated as it was with a materialistic approach to life, industrialism produced a spirit of competitiveness which dehumanized men and destroyed the gentle and decent insular way of life of the English. Though strongly opposed to religion as a conservative force or as an incentive to orthodoxy, Orwell regretted the disappearance of an attitude to life inspired by Christianity. His nostalgia for a typically English civilization can be compared to Waugh's. They were both chauvinistic and proud of the insular individualism of the English. But they upheld two different traditions: Waugh was attached to the Catholic aristocracy, whereas Orwell stood up for the ordinary Englishman, whom he considered as a victim of an increasingly inhuman and diseased society.

Orwell's career started with a protest against the old order and ended with a protest against the new. His criticism of society is full of paradoxes because he was never faithful to a particular outlook or ideology but expressed with integrity what he considered to be the truth about an attitude or a situation. He was a rebel but also a supporter of authority, an individualist who had retained the strong sense of responsibility traditional among the people of his class. He hated imperialism but greatly admired the men who had built the Empire and had contributed to the greatness of England. He was a harsh critic of conservatism, yet a romantic lover of the past. Orwell would have liked the best of two worlds.

He knew that progress was inevitable but, as he wrote in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he accepted it grudgingly and suspiciously. He strongly objected to the socialists' demand for mechanization, to their wish to transform society into a well-organized, technically efficient, but inhuman concern. Progress as an end in itself too often obscured the real aims of socialism: equality and justice. Orwell's socialism seems to have been an attitude to life rather than a well-defined ideology. He was little concerned with details or particular claims for improvements, for he thought that the quality of life in general would necessarily improve if men were honest with themselves and with others in their pursuit of the socialist ideal. Orwell's socialism was very near to the Christian ideal of human brotherhood. However, as he showed in *Animal Farm*, this ideal was incompatible with the exercise of power and was usually abandoned by revolutionary leaders. Orwell wanted the Revolution but condemned the uncompromising methods by which it is generally achieved. He trusted the common sense and the feeling of solidarity of the common man to apply the principles of socialism, but he thought that if the Revolution demanded of men the sacrifice of their integrity, then it defeated its own purpose.

The decline of individualism is a major theme in the English novel between the Wars. Orwell described several aspects of it such as the standardization of ways of life generated by progress and materialism. But he was less concerned with the uniformity of life as such than with the uniformity of thought it implied. Naturally, he thought that a materialistic civilization and its powerful agent, publicity, were largely responsible for the repulsive sameness that prevailed in modern society. However, given the growing impact of politics on private life, he thought that the greatest threat to individualism lay in political orthodoxy and in the deterioration of language as a means of creating confusion and thereby justifying power. Political orthodoxy was a prelude to totalitarianism and to the annihilation of the individual; it destroyed independent thought and entailed a reduction of consciousness if one accepted its contradictions blindly. Modern man tended to lose his individuality in favour of some cause, whether totalitarian, nationalistic, or religious. True, men with some kind of authority have tried in all times to hold sway over the human mind, but it is much easier to do so in the twentieth century owing to new and more efficient means of persuasion. Moreover, man's loneliness and

insecurity make him seek refuge in an authoritarian organization which deems itself infallible. He is all the more inclined to relinquish his conscience to a higher power as the traditional notions of good and evil have lost their meaning and he must find his own way in all circumstances. It is easier to accept the decisions of a party without too much questioning. Thus a new kind of morality takes shape which consists in endorsing anything that is orthodox. The only way of preserving one's integrity is to be able to decide for oneself what is acceptable and what is not. Clarity of language is therefore essential as a means of avoiding confusion. Orwell not only believed in the interdependence of language and thought but also of language and conscience. Language, he said, reflects a frame of mind, the morals of a people, their willingness to achieve clearly defined aims or, on the contrary, their readiness to be deceived by words. Orwell showed that language can be made a powerful instrument of corruption and thus ultimately influence the nature of society. Men who use ready-made sentences or a party phraseology eventually become incapable of individual thinking or of discriminating between lies and truth. Even murder can be condoned if language is manipulated to that purpose. A totalitarian régime "with loudspeakers telling you what to think"<sup>1</sup> was for Orwell the ineluctable climax of all social restraints.

It is difficult to say whether Orwell would have been a great novelist if he had focused his interest on personal relationships as he intended to shortly before his death. His fictional achievement is often limited by his urge to convey his message at all costs; he was not sufficiently detached to give free play to his inventiveness or he may have been disinclined to do so, and the moralist in him often thwarted the artist. He has created no memorable character in which his vision of life is fully developed. Yet he is nonetheless a great writer because of the consummate harmony between the kind of prose he wrote and what he wished to express. He was a non-conformist both in what he said and the way he said it. He spoke out the truth to enlighten the public, but he also sought to impress the reader with a sense of urgency derived from his vision of society. Indeed, it is through the sense of immediacy that emerges from his novels, through the identification

<sup>1</sup> *Coming Up for Air*, p. 161.

of his own personality and experience with his work, rather than through his characters' lives that Orwell renders the alarming reality of the modern world. His work exemplifies the contradictions of contemporary man, the frustrating tension in his life, his tragic need for an absolute and his impossibility to surrender to an ideal which would demand the sacrifice of his individuality. Orwell compelled his contemporaries to face some truths about their own age; he warned them against the evil forces which they had irresponsibly awakened and of which they were losing control. Among the problems he tackled some have been solved, some seem less urgent, but his work as a whole remains as topical as ever because of the spirit which animates it.

## EVELYN WAUGH

Order has been turned into a disgusting chaos. We need no barbarians from outside; they're on the premises, all the time.<sup>1</sup>

Like Orwell, with whom he has more in common than first appears, Waugh denounces the deterioration of the English way of life and of English civilization, though he does so exclusively from a conservative point of view and is mainly concerned with the decline of the upper classes. His tone is also very different from that of Orwell's mostly humourless criticism. As I have already suggested in my essay on Firbank, Waugh owes much to the latter as a satirist: he not only imitates his audacity and his detachment from the cruelty of life, he exploits brilliantly the form of dialogue initiated by Firbank and makes it the main instrument of his satire. Waugh himself wrote that satire could only flourish in a stable society: "It presupposes homogeneous moral standards—the early Roman Empire and eighteenth-century Europe."<sup>2</sup> The world he portrays is indeed without foundation, "a polished floor that revolves quickly" and from which people keep getting flung off. The African jungle is his favourite image to describe modern society, in his eyes a treacherous playground for savages and fools.

In *Decline and Fall* (1928) comic nonsense and fantasy bring to light the insanity which prevails in post-war society. The plot is presented with a maximum of economy and a studied will to shock. The hero, a product of the public-school and academic systems, is an innocent marked as a victim of the corrupt world into which he is unwillingly thrust. Paul Pennyfeather lets things happen to him; he "would never have made a hero, the only interest

<sup>1</sup> Aldous HUXLEY, *Antic Hay*, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Evelyn WAUGH, quoted by Frederick STOPP in *Evelyn Waugh, Portrait of an Artist*. London, 1958, pp. 194-5.



about him arises from the unusual series of events of which his shadow was witness." (p. 123) Returning from a meeting of the League of Nations Union, he is "debagged" by members of the Bollinger Club, who are having their annual dinner and greatly enjoy being riotous and destructive, and as a consequence he is sent down for indecent behaviour. He becomes a schoolmaster at Llanabba Castle, where Dr. Fagan, a cynical but not too exacting headmaster, assures him that "he has been in the scholastic profession long enough to know that nobody enters it unless he has some very good reason which he is anxious to conceal."<sup>1</sup> Paul falls in love with Margot Best-Chetwynde, the mother of one of his pupils, a millionairess who runs a chain of brothels euphemistically called "The Latin-American Entertainment Co. Ltd." She introduces him into Mayfair society and involves him in the white-slave trade without his knowledge. He is arrested on the morning of their marriage and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment. He spends a few months in prison and is rescued by Margot, who arranges to have him sent to a nursing home headed by Dr. Fagan, M.D. After a mock-operation he is alleged to be dead and allowed to disappear from the social scene. He returns to Oxford and resumes his studies in theology.

Paul's incursions into various spheres of English society are so many encounters with the irresponsibility, amoralism, corruption or sheer madness discernible in many aspects of English life. Whether at Oxford, in an employment agency in London, in a public school in Wales, in a country house, a prison, or a nursing home, people act with the same carelessness and unawareness of the real implications of their actions. Paul's experience with the Bollingers is only a rehearsal for his experience in the world: he is ill-treated under the eyes of the Junior Dean, who does not intervene because Paul is not important enough. Actually, the representatives of authority implicitly encourage the destructiveness of the Bollingers because of the highly prized port that is only brought up from the cellars when the college fines reach fifty pounds. Similarly, Paul is unjustly condemned and sent to prison, while Margot Metroland escapes punishment. Paul's innocence and naiveté contrast with, and emphasize, the outrageous behaviour of the other characters. On the other hand, his passivity and lack

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn WAUGH, *Decline and Fall*, Penguin Books, 1962, p. 18.

of insight into human character not only reveal the inadequacy of his education but also his incapacity to discriminate between good and evil. In a way, Waugh is more contemptuous of the people who, like Paul, stick to the rules without understanding them than of the rogues who deliberately defy society or disturb its order and get away with it.

Though none of Waugh's early characters is capable of a responsible, mature, or simply humane, attitude, some appear to have in his eyes a kind of saving grace which is not unrelated to the superb aplomb with which they take their pleasure in complete defiance of all moral judgment. Margot Metroland belongs to this category: beautiful, attractive, and rich, she makes the most of what life has to offer without troubling in the least about right or wrong. Very skilfully, Waugh provokes at once indignation and tolerance for the people of her kind. Yet she is an impostor like Grimes, Philbrick and Dr. Fagan. These characters' success in life is proportionate to their impudence; no representative of traditional institutions, whether in justice, education, or religion, performs his task with integrity and a sense of responsibility. Grimes, an unscrupulous rogue, is "always in the soup"; yet he is never "let down" because he is an ex-public-school man. Philbrick is a swindler and a criminal who ends up as opulent as he has always pretended to be. Fagan, a cynical impostor on a grand scale, will do anything provided it is remunerative. He is twice an agent in Paul's change of personality, once when Paul becomes a schoolmaster at Llanabba Castle and a second time when he presides over Paul's mock-death. For both he and Paul this event is the beginning of "a new phase in life," i.e., of another round of swindling for the one, of another period of dull and unrealistic initiation into life for the other.

After his departure from Oxford Paul meets the same characters playing the same parts in different spheres of society: Llanabba Castle, Mayfair, Egdon Prison. Wherever he goes, inefficiency, madness and dishonesty prevail. Prendergast, the unhappy and unauthoritative schoolmaster, who left the Church because he had "doubts," is seen at Egdon as the prison chaplain. His doubts are a source of disorder even in prison, where his incapacity to impose discipline lands him into trouble with prisoners as it did with pupils. By a cruel irony, his head is sawn off by a visionary maniac, a man who has appointed himself "the sword of Israel:

the lion of the Lord's Elect." Philbrick imparts the news to Paul in chapel:

'O God, our help in ages past,' sang Paul.  
 'Where's Prendergast to-day?'  
 'What, ain't you 'eard?' e's been done in.'  
 'And our eternal home.'  
 'Damned lucky it was Prendergast,  
 Might 'ave been you or me!  
 The warder says—and I agree—  
 It serves the Governor right.'

'Amen' (pp. 183-4)

The gruesome humour of the song leaves no doubt as to the way in which this piece of savagery should be interpreted. Prendergast's weakness marks him as a victim. He had left the Church then gone back to it after discovering "that there is a species of person called 'Modern Churchman' who draws the full salary of a beneficed clergyman and need not commit himself to any religious belief." (p. 141) Sir Lucas-Dockery, the governor of the prison, is a caricature of the modern reformist who applies literally and without understanding them the new methods of psycho-analysis. He is more concerned with the success of his method than with the welfare of the prisoners under his care and will blindly go to any length to prove his optimistic conviction that "almost any crime is due to the repressed desire for aesthetic expression." (p. 177) He gives carpenter tools to the mystic criminal who kills Prendergast. The episode is turned into an inhuman farce which derides the lunacy, not of the inmates, but of those who are chosen to ensure the working of institutions. Clearly, it is a mad world which trusts a Fagan to educate its children, a Lucas-Dockery to see to it that criminals are fit to return to society, and a Prendergast to officiate as a representative of the Church. Yet each episode is treated with apparent levity and a non-committal fake-seriousness which demystify society as well as the people who take themselves seriously or distort the ideals they pretend to be serving. Society is a sham, which Waugh exposes with insolent gusto, bringing to light the disorder created by well-meaning incompetent fools. Scoundrels are not more harmful because they at least know what they are up to.

The heartless and barbarous world of *Decline and Fall* is pictured with a disconcerting but calculated detachment which makes it all the more shocking. For instance, little Lord Tangent's death is imparted without comment in four sentences :

Tangent was sitting on the grass crying because he had been wounded in the foot by Mr. Prendergast's bullet. (p. 71)

'Tangent's foot has swollen up and turned black,' said Best-Chetwynde with relish. (p. 94)

Everybody was there except little Lord Tangent, whose foot was being amputated at a local nursing-home. (p. 105)

'It's maddenin' Tangent having died just at this time,' [Lady Circumference] said. 'People may think that that's my reason for refusin'. (p. 149)

These statements are a merciless comment on the negligence, the foolishness and the lack of compassion of those involved. Tangent's death and Prendergast's unheroic martyrdom are extreme consequences of a general unconcern. The Junior Dean who witnesses Paul's "debagging" does not protest when he is sent down. Neither Margot nor Peter can be bothered about Paul's unjust condemnation. Potts, Paul's best friend, is the main witness for the prosecution at his trial and is even commended by the court for his unshakeable attitude. Paul takes this general callousness for granted. Apart from his youthful infatuation for Margot, he himself seems hardly capable of genuine feeling. He is not unattractive as a character because he is a victim who never retaliates, a convenient scapegoat. In the end he accepts Silenus' definition of life as a game for a few privileged people :

'You pay five francs and go into a room with tiers of seats all round, and in the centre the floor is made of a great disc of polished wood that revolves quickly. At first you sit down and watch the others. They are all trying to sit in the wheel, and they keep getting flung off, and that makes them laugh, and you laugh too. It's great fun.' . . . But the whole point about the wheel is that you needn't get on it at all, if you don't want to. People get hold of ideas about life, and that makes them think they've got to join in the game, even if they don't enjoy it. It doesn't suit everyone. . . .

'Now you're a person who was clearly meant to stay in the seats and sit still and if you get bored watch the others.

Somehow you got on to the wheel, and you got thrown off again at once with a hard bump. It's all right for Margot, who can cling on, and for me, at the centre, but you're static. Instead of this absurd division into sexes they ought to class people as static and dynamic. There's a real distinction there, though I can't tell you how it comes. I think we're probably two quite different species spiritually. (pp. 208-9)

Paul is also static in a different sense, for his experience in the world leaves him almost unchanged. He acquires a sense of humour, which is perhaps an indication that he understands a little better what goes on around him, but he behaves much as he did during his first stay at Oxford. He joins again the League of Nations Union and acquires a new friend called Stubbs, with whom he develops the same kind of relationship as with Potts. The only lesson Paul has learned as a future clergyman is to avoid Prendergast's mistake. Order in the Church must be preserved at all costs, which suggests that social order should also be enforced if necessary :

There was a Bishop of Bithynia, Paul learned, who had denied the divinity of Christ, the immortality of the soul, the existence of good, the legality of marriage, and the validity of the Sacrament of Extreme Unction. How right they had been to condemn him ! (p. 212)

Paul even condones intolerance for the sake of the established order :

So the ascetic Ebionites used to turn towards Jerusalem when they prayed. Paul made a note of it. Quite right to suppress them. (p. 216)

Paul's failure to achieve maturity is typical of Waugh's pre-war heroes and no doubt implies that maturity and real understanding of traditional institutions are non-existent in contemporary society. The academic world is not more reliable than fashionable London. Lady Circumference's moral code is a mere set of conventions and prejudices : though a representative of the landed aristocracy, she is not more aware of the values traditionally connected with her class than the newly-made peer Maltravers, who was born in a slum. Left to themselves the young drift into debauchery. Society is only a gathering of unattached individuals easily adaptable to any situation because nothing really matters. The reckless and shameless pursuit



of excitement has become the only recognizable law, but it doesn't lead to happiness; apart from Philbrick and Fagan all the characters are disenchanting, even Grimes, the "life force." Margot regains respectability by marrying Maltravers, and takes Alastair Trumpington as a lover to shake off the boredom of her new married life. Her son, Peter, Waugh's first Bright Young Thing, is disappointed in Paul and in his mother, who shows him the way to irresponsibility.

In scene after scene madness, greed, irresponsibility and selfishness are displayed as normal behaviour in Church, in prison, at school, or among London fashionables. There is no room for reason or humaneness in this savage world. The opening scene at Scone is fairly typical of what happens in Waugh's novels: the social élite destroy the symbols of culture and civilization, breaking a grand piano, smashing China, throwing a Matisse in a water-jug or destroying the manuscript of a poem. The novel ends, as it began, on the evening of the Bollingers' annual dinner; they play their game of destruction with the same gusto as their predecessors. Yet, obviously, Waugh feels more sympathy for them than for the social outsiders who occasionally cross their path and whom he slightly despises for their tediousness, their lack of style and of charm. He combines satire of an unprincipled social élite with a hardly concealed admiration for them, which adds to the ambiguity created in his early novels by the absence of implicit standards.

In *Vile Bodies* (1930) Waugh brings together three representatives of the country's leading institutions, the State, the Church and the Aristocracy: they are Outrage, off and on Prime Minister, Father Rotschild, a jesuit, and Lord Metroland, formerly Maltravers. They attend a party at Anchorage House and discuss the younger generation. All three show the same lack of concern and symbolize the stupidity, cowardice and deceit with which the old elude their obligation to guide the young. Outrage, an inefficient and inane politician, thinks that the young "had a chance after the war that no generation ever had. There was a whole civilization to be saved and remade—and all they seem to do is to play the fool."<sup>1</sup> Metroland approves of the younger generation for

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn WAUGH, *Vile Bodies*, Penguin Books, 1955, p. 131.

shirking responsibility and says that "If those young people can find a way to get on without it, good luck to them." (p. 131) Only Father Rotschild understands the young; he rightly remarks that "they are all possessed with an almost fatal hunger for permanence." (p. 132) But he watches their antics tolerantly because he cannot be bothered and is more interested in political intrigue than in offering them guidance. As a matter of fact, the older generation set the worst example of unprincipled behaviour and viciousness. Mrs. Panrast, a Lesbian, is indifferent to the fate of her son. Lady Throbbing takes drugs; her son, Miles Malpractice, is a notorious homosexual, and her daughter works in South America for Margot Metroland's "Entertainment Company." The Duchess of Stayle marries off her daughter without the latter's assent to a man she doesn't love. Colonel Blount is a more attractive but not more reliable type. He refuses to help his daughter Nina and her fiancé, Adam Fenwick-Symes, to get married, but he lends his old country-house to a cinema company and gives them the major part of his fortune to make a very bad film. He very much enjoys tricking the young and leaving them to take care of themselves.

These are the respectable people, whom the Bright Young Things try to shock into recognizing their own importance and to emulate socially. The young sometimes appeal to their elders for support, but they never get any help, for "the fine phalanx of the passing order," who meet at Lady Anchorage's with traditional pomp and a dignity which masks their corruption, do not take the young seriously enough to admit that they need help. While the old are at Anchorage House, the younger set attend a party given by Archie Schwertz in a captive dirigible. The party is the nucleus of the young people's life, the symbol of their merry-making and escapism and the best means of soothing their fears. Indeed, fear is the underlying motive of their behaviour; the fear of solitude, of having to acknowledge one's purposelessness or to face one's inner confusion, the fear of being left out of the crazy round of pleasures and excluded from the happy few. The extravagant activities of the Bright Young Things is their way of seeking notoriety. The Honourable Agatha Runcible leaves 10 Downing Street in the morning in a Hawaiian dress and causes the Cabinet to fall. She telephones to all the newspapers to protest against customs officers who have mistaken her for a spy and searched her

thoroughly. These officers act with the utmost lack of efficiency and intelligence. Margot Metroland, still a high-class procuress, is the only fashionable hostess who manages to entertain both the older generation and the Bright Young Things. She holds a reception for Mrs. Ape—the American revivalist Aimée McPherson—and sends some of her “Angels” to South America. Mr. Chatterbox, himself a Bright Young Thing, records the doings of these fashionables in the popular press; they make front-page news and reflect the public’s lack of discrimination between what is important and what is not.

*Vile Bodies* is made up of disconnected episodes very much in the Firbank manner. There is a slender intrigue based on the attempts of a young writer, Adam Fenwick-Symes, to get enough money to marry Nina Blount. On his return from Paris, his autobiography is burnt by customs officers. He takes lodgings at the Shepherd’s Hotel and wins a thousand pounds from a young man simply by performing a trick. He gives the thousand pounds to a drunken major to be placed on a horse which is sure to win. For the rest of the novel Adam plays a sort of hide-and-seek game with the major but fails to recover his money. His unrealistic hopes that Nina’s father will help him are simply laughed off by the old man. So Nina marries a rich man, whom she immediately deceives with Adam. At the end of the novel Adam is seen on “the biggest battlefield in the history of the world.” He has lost his platoon and meets the drunken major, who pays him the 35,000 pounds he owes him in devaluated money. The major, now a general, has lost his division; with the sounds of battle far away, he seeks comfort in his car with one of Mrs. Ape’s “fallen” angels and a case of whisky “salvaged” from an officers’ mess.

Like Paul Pennyfeather, Adam is an innocent who becomes a victim of his own helplessness and of other people’s stupidity and callousness. But he is not a mere shadow of whom the author is slightly contemptuous; rather, he is a slightly pathetic figure, a melancholy and incompetent young man. Moreover, he not only belongs to the fashionable set which the author satirizes yet at bottom sympathizes with, he is also the embodiment of that mixture of irresponsibility and anxiety which deters the people of his generation from action. He longs to marry Nina and believes that marriage must last, but he himself creates the obstacles to his marriage. He enjoys roaming about with the Bright Young

Things and at the same time longs to escape from their inhuman world :

' Adam, darling, what's the matter ? '

' I don't know. . . . Nina, do you ever feel that things simply can't go on much longer ? '

' What do you mean by things—us or everything ? '

' Everything. '

Later he said : ' I'd give anything in the world for something different. '

' Different from me or different from everything ? '

' Different from everything. . . . Only I've got nothing . . . what's the good of talking ? ' (p. 192)

The only way is to go on attending more parties :

' Oh, Nina, *what a lot of parties.* '

(. . . Masked parties, Savage parties, Victorian parties, Greek parties, Wild West parties, Russian parties, Circus parties, parties where one had to dress as somebody else, almost naked parties in St. John's Wood, parties in flats and studios and houses and ships and hotels and night clubs, in windmills and swimming-baths, tea parties at school where one ate muffins and meringues and tinned crab, parties at Oxford where one drank brown sherry and smoked Turkish cigarettes, dull dances in London and comic dances in Scotland and disgusting dances in Paris—all that succession and repetition of massed humanity. . . . Those vile bodies . . .)  
(p. 123)

This well-known passage is an eloquent comment on the feelings of the young about their endless search for pleasure. It expresses a resigned acceptance of things as they are as well as self-disgust at the acceptance and a hopeless conviction that nothing will change. The experiences of the Bright Young Things are either "sick-making" or "too shaming," and their judgment on everything is "too bogus." But life sometimes takes them at their own word and proves more cruel than they had expected. Flossie Duncan swings on a chandelier and kills herself. Agatha Runcible, irresponsible to the last and drunk with brandy and excitement, gets as spare-driver into a racing-car and crashes. Her nightmares convey a fairly realistic vision of the life of the Bright Young Things :

' I thought we were all driving round and round in a motor race and none of us could stop, and there was an

enormous audience composed entirely of gossip writers and gate crashers and Archie Schwertz and people like that, all shouting at us at once to go faster, and car after car kept crashing until I was left all alone driving and driving—and then I used to crash and wake up.' (pp. 187-8)

Her friends organize a party in her hospital room and help to kill her off. Simon Balcairn, the descendant of a great English house, commits suicide because he is on the point of losing his job as a gossip writer and is humiliated at being told to leave Margot Metroland's house. He puts his head in the gas-oven and in this undignified manner joins his forefathers "who had died at Acre and Agincourt, in Egypt and America." These deaths are taken casually; whoever leaves the coterie is soon forgotten. Yet, however futile their association, it rests at least on a common feeling of insecurity and restlessness. In the end they are all dispersed: "'How people are *disappearing*,'" Agatha exclaims shortly before her own death, and Nina tells Adam:

'You know there seems to be none of us left now except you and me'  
'And Ginger'  
'Yes, and Ginger.' (p. 206)

Like Paul Pennyfeather, Adam hardly changes. His disappointment merely makes him slightly cynical. He sells Nina to Ginger in order to pay for his hotel bill. When Ginger is called up, Adam spends Christmas with Nina at her father's as if he were her husband. He is on his way to becoming a Basil Seal.

*Vile Bodies* recreates the atmosphere of Mayfair in the Twenties: The Bright Young People with their frantic "fureur de vivre" and their wish to establish their inconsequent behaviour as the normal standard of conduct are in fact "rebels without a cause." They resent the leniency of their elders because it makes their provocative misbehaviour the more pointless, but they do not see what is wrong with their parents and have no positive values to oppose to the latter's degenerate standards. This is a world of Firbankian frivolity and extravagance, in which lesbians, homosexuals and procuresses are accepted as the norm. Lady Throbbing and Mrs. Blackwater owe much to the corrupt centenarians of *Valmouth*, and the party given for Mrs. Ape recalls the party in honour of Sappho in *Vainglory*. However, Waugh does not giggle



like Firbank at the eccentricities of his characters. He may sometimes betray a partiality for them, but he is aware that their antics lead to catastrophe. "There is a radical instability in our whole world order," says Father Rotschild, "and soon we shall all be walking into the jaws of destruction again, protesting our pacific intentions." (p. 133) As a cynical warning against this possibility, the last chapter, entitled "Happy Ending," takes place during a fictive total war. The world presented here is corrupt, dislocated and doomed to destruction: no moral or spiritual value, no culture, no tradition can survive the devastating action of stupidity, mock religiousness and cynicism.

In *Black Mischief* (1932) the irresponsible follies of the Bright Young Things are becoming somewhat stale. The post-war generation are no longer so young, and many are dispersed; those who stayed and kept the game going for want of anything better to do have to go to a great deal of trouble to get some kind of excitement. They are bored with themselves, and the public is bored with them. Alastair Trumpington, who makes an appearance in most of Waugh's pre-war novels, is married but not "settled." He and his wife Sonia stay in bed while their friends hang around. The heyday of the party is over:

'No one asks us to parties now except Margot. Perhaps there aren't any others.'

'The boring thing about parties is that it's far too much effort to meet new people, and if it's just all the ordinary people one knows already one might as well stay at home and ring them up instead of having all the business of remembering the right day.'<sup>1</sup>

The main scene of the novel is not London but Azania, an imaginary island off the East African coast. The two main characters, Basil and Seth, represent two different forms of barbarism, the one English, the other African. Basil is a cynical and unscrupulous adventurer for whom things have come to a crisis. With Alastair and Peter Pastmaster he has gone on a racket in the very constituency for which he was going to stand at the next election; naturally, he is asked to stand down. Like Trumpington and

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn WAUGH, *Black Mischief*, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 95.

Pastmaster, Basil Seal belongs to a prominent English family: his late father was Chief Conservative Whip for twenty-five years; his mother is still a well-known and most respectable hostess. She is forever disappointed in her son, forever appealing to family friends to find some position for him, which he doesn't even bother to take up. While he tells her that he is going to Azania and steals her emerald bracelet under her very eyes, she dreams of him as a respectable barrister. Basil treats everybody and everything in the same off-hand manner; actually, he is a gifted man capable of being as brilliant as he is dissipated; in the eyes of Seth, Emperor of Azania, he stands as "the personification of all that glittering, intangible Western culture to which he [Seth] aspire[s]." (p. 105) As soon as Basil comes to Azania, Seth makes him minister of information.

Seth, "Emperor of Azania, Chief of the Chiefs of Sakuyu, Lord of Wanda and Tyrant of the Seas, Bachelor of the Arts of Oxford University," has come back to his country firmly determined to modernize it. His grandfather, a famous cannibal warrior, had conquered the country from the Arabs and kept enough authority to avoid disorder and the establishment of a European protectorate. Seth must now assert his authority over the inland tribes; General Connolly is winning the war for him with the old weapons, "lies and the spear." For the Emperor, however,

'This is not a war of Seth against Seyid but of progress against Barbarism. And Progress must prevail. I have seen the great tattoo of Aldershot, the Paris Exhibition, the Oxford Union. I have read modern books—Shaw, Arlen, Priestley. What do the gossips in the bazaars know of all this? The whole might of Evolution rides behind him; at my stirrups run woman's suffrage, vaccination and vivisection. I am the New Age. I am the Future.' (p. 16)

When Connolly comes back from the war with the news that the warriors have eaten Seth's father, the latter dreams of educating them by the Montessori method. He is himself a product of an incongruous association of primitivism with civilization, at once subject to "the inherited terror of the jungle" and "desperate with the acquired loneliness of civilization." He has a naive and stubborn faith in progress but does not understand its nature or even its purpose. With Basil's help he launches a one-year plan of

modernization and decrees the most extraordinary and self-contradictory measures, none of which can be constructive: "... ideas bubbled up within him, bearing to the surface a confused sediment of phrase and theory, scraps of learning half understood and fantastically translated." (p. 137) One of his decrees runs as follows:

For your information and necessary action; I have decided to abolish the following:

Death penalty.

Marriage.

The Sakuyu language and all native dialects.

Infant mortality.

Totemism.

Inhuman butchery.

Mortgages.

Emigration.

Please see to this. Also organize system of reservoirs for city's water supply and draft syllabus for competitive examination for public services. Suggest compulsory Esperanto. Seth (pp. 136-7)

He plans a city with big avenues and has the Anglican cathedral pulled down in order to realize his scheme. Just before the arrival of two English women representing the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, he orders the creation of a museum with specimens of the fauna of Azania and confiscates the house of a powerful warrior for this purpose. At a dinner in honour of Dame Mildred and her companion a dignitary of the court assures "the two ladies renowned through the famous country of Europe for their great cruelty to animals [that] the Azanians too, in [their] own small way, are cruel to [their] animals. . . . it is to the great nations of the West and North, especially to their worthy representatives that are with us to-night, that we look as our natural leaders on the road to progress. Ladies and gentlemen, we must be modern, we must be refined in our Cruelty to Animals." (p. 138) Still, Azanians are apparently not more savage than their well-intentioned visitors. Dame Mildred's diary contains the following entries: "Disembarked Matodi. . . . Condition of mules and dogs *appalling*, also children. . . . Fed doggies in the market-place. Children tried to take food from doggies. Greedy little wretches." (p. 146)

In spite of some opposition, the majority of Seth's reforms go down wonderfully well with the natives, who adopt them enthusiastically without understanding them. When Seth orders boots for the Imperial Guard, they organize a feast at which they eat them. When he decrees birth-control and the resourceful Youkoumian imports birth-control devices from Cairo, these are glorified as magical instruments of virility and fertility. The comic effect of the novel derives from the natives' happy misinterpretation of any kind of reform or planning. Soon, however, Seth loses through his misapplication of the benefits of civilization the peace which Connolly had secured thanks to traditional barbarism. The Emperor antagonizes Connolly by trying to force the army to wear boots; he loses the support of the Nestorian Church when he advocates birth-control and that of the Anglican Church when he destroys their cathedral. The Earl of Ngomo does not forgive him the confiscation of his palace. Finally, the whole population loses faith in the government when the Emperor issues worthless banknotes with "a large medallion portrait of Seth in top hat and European tail coat." (p. 141) The Emperor's opponents set up a revolt with the help of the intriguing French envoy: on the day appointed for a pageant to celebrate sterility the festivities are interrupted by a riot stirred up by young men of the Nestorian Catholic Action, "muscular Christians who for many weeks now had been impatiently biding their time to have a whack at the modernists and Jews who were behind the new movement." (p. 177) The ensuing confusion is given additional emphasis as it is described by Dame Mildred Porch and Miss Tin, who, naturally, do not understand what is going on.

The members of the British Legation in Azania vie with the natives in irresponsibility and inefficiency. Sir Samson Courteney, a diplomatic failure delighted to be relegated in Azania, is utterly ignorant of what goes on in the country. He spends the best part of the morning playing in his bath with an inflated india-rubber sea-serpent; he plays a game of bagatelle in the afternoon and knits in the evening. Lady Courteney spends her days trying without success to grow an English garden; their daughter Prudence kills boredom by playing erotic games with William, the first attaché, until Basil comes along and gives her more substantial matter for her "panorama of life." While the company at the British Legation are at their innocent games,

Sixty miles southward in the Ukaka pass bloody bands of Sakuyu warriors played hide-and-seeek among the rocks, chivvying the last fugitives of the army of Seyid, while behind them down the gorge, from cave villages of incalculable antiquity, the women crept out to rob the dead. (p. 54)

The natives are at least consistent in their primitivism, whereas those who wish to impose modernity on Azanians toy cynically or unconsciously with the now meaningless symbols of Western civilization. Basil explains to Seth:

'We've got a much easier job now than we should have had fifty years ago. If we'd had to modernize a country then it would have meant constitutional monarchy, bi-cameral legislature, proportional representation, women's suffrage, independent judicature, freedom of the press, referendums....'

'What is all that?' asked the Emperor.

'Just a few ideas that have ceased to be modern.' (p. 118)

Cut off from the ancestral traditions of his people, yet unable to grasp the meaning of progress, Seth provokes a conflict which he cannot resolve. In Azania as in England political intriguers and mischief-makers scheme against the government. Seth takes refuge inland with the Wanda warriors, but he is killed by the minister of interior. Basil, who had followed him, attends his funeral; during the ensuing banquet held in his honour by his cannibal hosts, he unknowingly eats Prudence, who had been on her way to England, "an English girl returning home to claim her natural heritage." (p. 202) She is a victim of the carelessness and incompetence of the civilized as much as of native savagery. After so much confusion Azania is made a joint protectorate. Order is restored, though it is only apparent. The natives relapse into barbarism and are prevented from causing trouble by the British police. Efficient but dull and conventional civil servants replace the happy and inconsequent child-adults. Only the Arabs in the low quarters of Matodi go on as if nothing had happened. The Armenian, Mr. Youkoumian, another "life force," is the only one to survive all crises. His adaptability and his slogan "I want no bust-up" have served him well, and he is now "a useful little fellow" for the English officials, whom he supplies with boots for the barefooted levy. Even poor General Connolly, one time duke of Ukaka, is driven out of the country and separated from "Black Bitch," his picturesque wife.



It would be absurd to see in *Black Mischief* a satire of African primitivism. Waugh is less concerned with the natives' incomprehension of modernity than with the misapplication of it by the English. Through the former's ignorance and the latter's stupidity he explodes the myth of progress and shows the futility of attempting to impose it in complete defiance of human nature and ancestral customs. The failure of the English to recognize the power of barbarism and its underlying violence is a devastating comment on their own want of a scale of values. Chaos in Azania only emphasizes by comparison the disorder in London; obviously, English savages are not so very different from African primitives. Basil is perfectly aware of the irrelevance of Seth's plan of modernization, and he greatly enjoys the natives' resistance to civilization. This is crazy inconsequence on a larger scale than in the London jungle! When the second revolution breaks out, he positively relishes the mischief and delights in frightening everyone at the British Legation. His attitude is one of cynical amusement at the fact that he alone understands what Seth, Youkoumian and himself are really up to. Yet, as Seth's minister of information, he displays a seriousness and capacities that would probably work wonders if better employed. Basil is a cad, but an intelligent one, and is therefore less harmful in Waugh's eyes than the stupid and the incapable that are everywhere to be seen in places of authority. "Do you know," says Sonia after Basil's return to London, "deep down in my heart I've got a tiny fear that Basil is going to turn serious on us too?" (p. 217) She rightly senses that Basil is seeking for an opportunity to gratify his need for action. In spite of the latter's roguishness, Waugh sympathizes with him and makes him the only lucid character, who with false innocence adds to the general confusion.

*Scoop* (1938) was written after *A Handful of Dust*, but, like *Black Mischief*, it is inspired by Waugh's experience in Abyssinia, which he visited at the time of the Emperor's Coronation and as a war correspondent in 1935. Moreover, it belongs in spirit with the earlier novels; it relates the farcical adventures of war correspondents and satirizes the purpose and methods of modern journalism. It is not another *Black Mischief*, rather a complement to it: it presents the same problem the other way round. Civilized people are confronted with a situation they do not understand and

do not behave more rationally than natives in the face of civilization. Even more than in his previous novels Waugh reduces organized activity to absurdity, because it is conducted without discernment and leads to chaos.

Lord Copper, a newspaper magnate, owner of the *Daily Beast*, is asked by Mrs. Algernon Stitch to send a Mr. Boot as a war correspondent to Ishmaelia. Through an error of the foreign editor of *The Beast*, William Boot from Boot Magna Hall, who writes a weekly article on *Lush Places* for the paper, is sent out instead of the writer John Boot. William is unfit for the job, though he can hardly be distinguished from the other journalists since none of them understands what is happening in Ishmaelia. They are solely interested in getting a "scoop": "News is what a chap who doesn't care much about anything wants to read. And it's only news until he's read it. After that it's dead."<sup>1</sup> William is incompetent, but he refuses to be imposed upon by the Ishmaelite authorities. When Dr. Benito, who has momentarily the upper hand in Ishmaelia, sends all the journalists on an inland expedition to make sure that they are out of town when the real trouble starts, William remains obstinately in the capital and comes by chance across important news. Mr. Baldwin, whom he had obliged earlier, enables him to exploit the news and makes the situation clear to him. William is hailed in England as one of the greatest war correspondents and Lord Copper gets him a knighthood, though by another error it is awarded to John Boot, the writer. William refuses to have anything more to do with active journalism; he keeps his small job as a commentator on *Lush Places*. His uncle Theodore takes his place at the banquet given in his honour and secures the advantageous contract which had been proposed to William.

The political crisis in Ishmaelia is a prophetic parody of the conflicts that arise in developing countries which are a prey to powerful foreign interests. The farcical character of the plot is heightened by the Jackson family, American negroes from Alabama, who rule over the country with a good-humoured, though somewhat despotic, inefficiency. In spite of periodical rows in the Jackson family, the Ishmaelites are perfectly satisfied with the régime. One of these rows is exploited by fascists:

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn WAUGH, *Scoop*, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 66.

The Jacksons were effete, tyrannical, and alien; the Ishmaelites were a white race who, led by Smiles, must purge themselves of the negro taint; the Jacksons had kept Ishmaelia out of the Great War and thus deprived her of the great fruits of victory. (pp. 77-78)

The Jacksons don't worry much about this, but Left-wing politicians all over the world do, and Left-wing organizations collect funds which the Jacksons are glad to accept without attempting to understand this sudden generosity. Everybody outside Ishmaelia is convinced that there is going to be a war; the Ishmaelites simply rejoice that the rumour brings many foreigners to their country, which is a good thing for business. Actually, the Germans and the Russians support rival parties because they covet the gold concession owned by Mr. Baldwin. When things come to a crisis, the fascist leader takes to the mountains, while Dr. Benito proclaims the Soviet Union of Ishmaelia. His defenestration by the giant Swede Olafsen, made drunk by Mr. Baldwin, restores the Jacksons to power to the satisfaction of the Ishmaelites, who "as long as something, good or ill, was happening to the Jacksons, felt an intelligent interest in politics." (p. 177) Civil war has just been avoided, and Mr. Baldwin can keep his gold concession.

Like the sequence of events which lead to Benito's overthrow, the novel "unfold[s] itself with the happy inconsequence of an early comedy film." (p. 176) Waugh presents the war as a farce in which the natives are involved only in so far as they profit by it. For Western journalists, Ishmaelia is a convenient place for foreign intrigue and an exotic country whose misfortunes are likely to impress the readers of sensational daily papers. Indeed, the main object of Waugh's satire is the insane sensationalism of the press, whose purpose is not to inform but to impress an ignorant public and thus insure its own continuance and prosperity. When William leaves for Ishmaelia, Lord Copper tells him:

What the British public wants first, last, and all the time is News. Remember that the Patriots are in the right and are going to win. *The Beast* stands by them four-square. But they must win quickly. The British public has no interest in a war which drags on indecisively. A few sharp victories, some conspicuous acts of personal bravery on the Patriot side and a colourful entry into the capital. That is *The Beast* Policy for the war. (p. 42)

When William fails to send exciting news, the cables he receives from London become increasingly imperative :

LORD COPPER PERSONALLY REQUIRES VICTORIES STOP ON RECEIPT OF THIS CABLE VICTORY STOP CONTINUE CABLING VICTORIES UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE STOP. (p. 140)

Neither journalists nor readers even attempt to understand the nature of the conflict : the latter merely want their daily share of excitement, and the former are prepared to give it to them by lying if necessary. An American journalist tells how he went unknowingly to the wrong Balkan country to report on a revolution and described imaginary riots which his paper printed, actually provoking a revolution in that country. Instead of enlightening readers, journalists bring about disorder in public life through their irresponsibility. In Western countries the press destroys the public's peace of mind and adds to their confusion about world affairs. The host of journalists and concession-hunters who invade Africa aggravate an already confused situation and exploit it for their own purposes. The white men, who are supposed to bring the benefits of civilization to the African continent, are an element of trouble through their futile activity. Even the journalists' language is barbaric and incomprehensible and contrasts comically with the carefully worded statements of Dr. Benito or the ornate language of Seth's proclamations in *Black Mischief*.

Waugh describes in *Scoop* three different worlds and their particular kind of insanity. When the foreign editor of *The Beast* comes to Boot Magna Hall, he feels "like a Roman legionary, heavily armed, weighted with the steel and cast brass of civilization, tramping through forests beyond the Roman pale, harassed by silent, elusive savages, the vanguard of an advance that had pushed too far and lost touch with the base." (p. 210) In contrast with the city, Boot Magna Hall is indeed a barbaric outpost : its inhabitants are completely isolated from the bustle of civilized life and antagonistic to any outsider. Their aimless existence in the decaying old house testifies to the inefficiency and irresponsibility of their class. The social order itself is reversed, and nannies rule over the house. Though uncle Theodore sings his favourite line over and over again, "change and decay in all around I see," they are all blissfully unaware of time. However, the easy-going and warm atmosphere of Boot Magna Hall makes it a human world, and

for all its irony, Waugh's description of it is not free of nostalgia. When William leaves the country for the City, he finds himself in "a cold and hostile world." Copper House, the seat of *The Beast*, is a symbol of that world, in which private life, truth, and whatever remains of a humane civilization are sacrificed to the public's unhealthy demand for sensational news. Considering the lack of understanding between English people living in different environments—Boot Magna Hall and London—the Western journalists' attempt to understand the Ishmaelian situation is simply preposterous. They do not understand their own civilization, and by their futile and unintelligent practices they add to the existing confusion in Africa. Whether one turns to life in the country or in the hectic atmosphere of London, or to the adventurous existence of war correspondents in exotic places, one faces the same inconsequent and senseless game. During a visit to London Uncle Theodore quotes his favourite line; it is echoed by William in *Ishmaelia*: "change and decay in all around I see" is a universal leitmotive.

The four novels analysed so far are entertaining social satires; Waugh exposes the chaos and the insanity of the modern world by presenting the more striking features of its surface life. The quality of the dialogue, the terseness of the narrative, the pointedness and detachment with which characteristic attitudes are emphasized make them self-revealing, the source of their own ridicule. The author's sense of humour and the amusement he seems to derive from his own entertainments invest the early novels with a tolerance and good humour which counterbalance their pungency; they suggest that Waugh belongs to the world he describes and rather cynically enjoys the mischief, while making it clear that he is no dupe of what is going on. Waugh draws facts from his own experience; a parallel could easily be drawn between adventures told in his travel books and occurrences in his pre-war novels. Imagination mainly serves his comic purpose and his skill in bringing to light the funny side of things.

*A Handful of Dust* (1934) differs in tone from Waugh's previous novels. Critics have discerned in it a new seriousness and concern for English society. Actually, Waugh deals with the same aspects of modern life: deceptiveness, cruelty, amorality; but he now emphasizes the tragic and frustrating side of things rather than



the comic. His satire becomes more biting and full of grating irony. Also, without revealing more of his characters' inner life, he exposes more conspicuously the moral and spiritual void of their existence.

Tony Last is a misguided representative of the humanistic tradition. He is utterly unaware of the harsh facts of life and of evil in the world. He is romantically attached to his Gothic house, Hetton Abbey, the symbol in his eyes of all that is valuable in English life :

There was not a glazed brick or encaustic tile that was not dear to Tony's heart . . . the bedrooms with their brass bedsteads, each with a frieze of Gothic text, each named from Malory, Yseult, Elaine, Mordred and Merlin, Gawaine and Bedivere, Lancelot, Perceval, Tristram, Galahad, his own dressing-room, Morgan le Fay, and Brenda's Guinevere, where the bed stood on a dais, the walls hung with tapestry, the fire-place was like a tomb of the thirteenth century, from whose bay window one could count, on days of exceptional clearness, the spires of six churches—all these things with which he had grown up were a source of constant delight and exultation to Tony; things of tender memory and proud possession.<sup>1</sup>

The unity of the family, the "duty towards one's employees," towards the tenants, the poor relatives, the village, the church, these are part of an order whose stability Tony never questions. He is gentle, considerate and selfless, and, like Waugh's earlier heroes, he is an innocent forced into a world of chaos. However, immaturity is more harmful at thirty than at twenty, the more so as Tony does not live among irresponsible young fools but among callous and merciless adults. When Brenda takes a flat in London, where she can more easily meet the colourless and mediocre Beaver, Tony postpones the improvements he meant to order for Hetton. He is increasingly at a loss in the face of Brenda's growing coldness, but he never doubts her faithfulness. He patiently and loyally tolerates her interfering friends, all of them unscrupulous, ruthless and fashionable barbarians. When John Andrew, their son, is kicked by a horse and dies, Tony is primarily concerned for Brenda and even finds an excuse for her leaving him on the day after the funeral to spend the week-end with Beaver.

The senseless and cruel death of his child brings to light the complete absence of genuine spiritual values in Tony and his

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn WAUGH, *A Handful of Dust*, Penguin Books, 1961, pp. 14-15.

incapacity even to acknowledge his suffering. John Andrew meant everything to him, not only because he was his son, but because he was his only descendant, a gentleman, who would own Hetton and perpetuate its traditions. When he is killed, Tony carefully avoids thinking about his loss and conceals what feelings he may experience behind an exaggerated thoughtfulness towards other people. He only betrays some emotion in the presence of Mrs. Rattery, because she is a perfect stranger to him. Nothing supports him in his trial. His regular attendance at church is not in any sense the expression of his faith. When the vicar comes to see him after John's death, Tony merely wants to discuss arrangements with him: " 'He tried to be comforting. It was very painful . . . after all the last thing one wants to talk about at a time like this is religion.' " (p. 115) He later tells Mr. Todd that he has never considered whether he believes in God. When Brenda arrives from London after the accident, they behave like perfect strangers:

Brenda took off her hat and threw it down on a chair in the hall. 'Nothing to say, is there?'

'There's no need to talk.'

'No. I suppose there'll have to be a funeral.'

'Well, of course.'

'Yes: to-morrow?'

She looked into the morning-room. 'They've done quite a lot, haven't they?' (p. 122)

The reader's sympathy for Tony combines with resentment against his careful avoidance of personal feelings. He suspects that Tony's impassiveness not only conceals embarrassment but covers his incapacity to experience normal human feelings and to face such an ordeal with maturity. Brenda is strikingly composed and cold, but Tony is emotionally sterile and fails by his exaggerate considerateness to provoke in his wife the revulsion of feeling which might be expected after such a catastrophe. The heartless Polly Cockpurse proves right when she says: " 'That's the end of Tony so far as Brenda is concerned.' " (p. 120)

Brenda and John Beaver don't love each other. She is simply bored, irresponsible and selfish. Moreover, in the Mayfair world with which she is still vaguely connected through her weekly visits to London adultery is as natural a pastime as gossip or shopping. That Beaver "is second-rate and a snob . . . and he's got to be taught

a whole lot of things" is part of his attractiveness. She is not deterred by his indifference or his acquisitiveness. When John Grant-Menzies comes to tell her that her son is dead, she is at Lady Cockpurse's listening to a fortune-teller, and John Beaver is in France :

'What is it, Jock? Tell me quickly, I'm scared. It's nothing awful, is it?'

'I'm afraid it is. There's been a serious accident.'

'John?'

'Yes.'

'Dead?'

He nodded.

She sat down on a little Empire chair against the wall, perfectly still with her hands folded on her lap, like a small well-brought up child introduced into a room full of grown-ups. She said, 'Tell me what happened. Why do you know about it first?'

'I've been down at Hetton since the week-end.'

'Hetton?'

'Don't you remember? John was going hunting to-day.'

She frowned, not at once taking what he was saying. 'John ... John Andrew ... I ... oh, thank God ...' Then she burst into tears. (p. 118)

Brenda's "thank God" shows how far she is alienated even from her son. Her attitude after the death of John Andrew suddenly makes significant the process of disintegration that has been taking place in the family. When she next sees Beaver, she tells him :

'Until Wednesday, when I thought something had happened to you, I had no idea that I loved you.'

'Well, you've said it often enough.'

'I'm going to make you understand,' ... 'You clod.' (p. 125)

It is to this cold, despicable affair that Tony is sacrificed.

Until Brenda actually writes to Tony that she loves John Beaver and wants a divorce, he refuses to acknowledge that their relationship has altered: her long stays in London, their growing estrangement, her comment after their son's death, "'It's all over, don't you see, our life down here,'" (p. 123) even his misery at being left alone are unavailing. He is clearly unwilling to face the issue and to admit that his beautifully ordered world has collapsed.

When Brenda makes the situation clear to him, he agrees to take on the blame in the divorce case as befits a gentleman. Private detectives follow him to a Brighton hotel, where he is supposed to spend the week-end with a hired girl and her terrible child. Tony becomes aware of the mixture of ignominy and farce in the occasion; only then does he realize to what extent his life has stumbled into chaos:

'... for a month now he had lived in a world suddenly bereft of order; it was as though the whole reasonable and decent constitution of things, the sum of all he had experienced or learned to expect, were an inconspicuous, inconsiderable object mislaid somewhere on the dressing table; no outrageous circumstance in which he found himself, no new, mad thing brought to his notice, could add a jot to the all-encompassing chaos that shrieked about his ears. (pp. 137-8)

His disillusion is not complete until he hears that Brenda wants him to sell Hetton to provide her with a substantial alimony, which is the condition on which Beaver is willing to marry her. Tony refuses "to give up Hetton in order to buy Beaver for Brenda." He at last perceives clearly the inadequacy of his code of honour and of his romantic conception of life:

A whole Gothic world had come to grief... there was now no armour glittering through the forest glades, no embroidered feet on the green sward; the cream and dappled unicorns had fled. (p. 151)

Nothing in Tony's orderly life has resisted Brenda's destructive negativeness. Characteristically, he postpones the solution to their conflict and runs away from it, hoping to recapture some of the romantic idealism of his earlier existence. He sets out for Brazil with a Dr. Messinger in search of a city, the symbol of his humanistic dream:

His mind was occupied with the City, ... He had a clear picture of it in his mind. It was Gothic in character, all vanes and pinnacles, gargoyles, battlements, groining and tracery, pavilions and terraces, a transfigured Hetton, pennons and banners floating on the sweet breeze, everything luminous and translucent; a coral citadel crowning a green hill-top sown with daisies among groves and

streams; a tapestry landscape filled with heraldic and fabulous animals and symmetrical, disproportionate blossom. (p. 160)

Tony and Dr. Messinger show the same incompetence and immaturity in their expedition as in civilized life, and they soon get into trouble. Messinger frightens their Indian guides away with a mechanical mouse. Tony is terribly ill with fever, and Messinger leaves him to get some help but gets drowned in a ten feet fall. Alone in the Brazilian jungle, feverish and unable to take care of himself, Tony at last breaks down and cries. Meanwhile in London Brenda, abandoned by Beaver, who does not want her without money, also breaks down "in an agony of resentment and self-pity." However, Brenda's trial is of short duration and ends with her marriage to Jock Grant-Menzies, whereas Tony's painful experience in the Brazilian jungle leads him to death-in-life. At the climax of his delirium he has a chaotic vision of his recent past and under this hallucination beholds the City as a transfigured Hetton:

Tony saw beyond the trees the ramparts and battlements of the City; it was quite near him. From the turret of the gatehouse a heraldic banner floated in the tropic breeze. . . .

At last he came into the open. The gates were before him and trumpets were sounding along the walls, saluting his arrival; from bastion to bastion the message ran to the four points of the compass; petals of almond and apple blossom were in the air; they carpeted the way, as, after a summer storm, they lay in the orchards at Hetton. Gilded cupolas and spires of alabaster shone in the sunlight. Ambrose announced, 'The City is served.' (p. 203)

The City is a cluster of huts which belong to Mr. Todd and his Indian family. He cures Tony but keeps him a prisoner in order to have someone who will read Dickens to him every afternoon. Ironically, Tony, who has at last recognized the inadequacy of his Victorian attitude to life, is condemned to spend the rest of his existence gratifying a lunatic's whim for a Victorian imaginary world. Flying from London barbarians, he falls a prey to a real savage, who will not allow him to forget the sentimental and rather naive humanism of a Victorian writer. This is the final outcome of his childish romanticism and blindness to human nature. Again,



the last words he utters in his delirium reflect the truth most accurately :

Let us kill in the gentlest manner. I will tell you what I have learned in the forest, where time is different. There is no City. Mrs. Beaver has covered it with chromium plating and converted it into flats. (p. 207)

In an article entitled "A Handful of Dust : Critique of Victorianism," Richard Wasson explains that the novel "is a critique of the whole tradition of English religious and social life. That tradition is bankrupt because its protestant and romantic nature has cut England away from the true source of ethical and religious behaviour which lies in Roman Catholicism."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Waugh shows that the traditional religious and social life is bankrupt. The Vicar of Hetton preaches sermons composed in pre-war days in India :

'... let us remember our Gracious Queen Empress in whose service we are here, and pray that she may long be spared to send us at her bidding to do our duty in the uttermost parts of the earth; and let us think of our dear ones far away and the homes we have left in her name, and remember that though miles of barren continent and leagues of ocean divide us, we are never so near to them as on these Sunday mornings, united with them across dune and mountain in our loyalty to our sovereign and thanksgiving for her welfare; one with them as proud subjects of her sceptre and crown.' (pp. 32-33)

The villagers are not at all surprised for "few of the things said in church seemed to have particular reference to themselves." (p 32) The vicar tells them in his Christmas sermon: "Instead of the glowing log fire and windows tight shuttered against the drifting snow, we have only the harsh glare of an alien sun; ... Instead of the placid ox and ass of Bethlehem ... we have for companions the ravening tiger and the exotic camel, the furtive jackal and the ponderous elephant. ..." (p. 60) But this is an integral part of their Christmas festivities, "one with which they would find it hard to dispense." This is a sharp blow at the conventional

<sup>1</sup> Richard WASSON, "A Handful of Dust: Critique of Victorianism," *Modern Fiction Studies*, VII, 4 (Winter 1961-1962), 327.

character of Tony's Anglicanism. A religion which preserves the ritual but is careless of its meaning is a worthless institution. However, as it often happens, Waugh's satirical image has a double meaning, for Tony does face an alien sun, and the companions Brenda brings to Hetton are, indeed, like the ravening tiger or the exotic camel. Similarly, by submitting to the hypocrisy and the shamefulness of the divorce procedure, Tony countenances Brenda's violation of the sanctity of marriage and illustrates the moral bankruptcy of English life.

Though Tony is a weak and pathetic victim, Waugh does not spare him either, because he is blind to the real significance of traditions and tolerant of the invasion of his house and the disintegration of his home by modern savages. Like Waugh's earlier heroes, the characters in this novel are indifferent to moral values: just as his house is fake Gothic, so Tony's rules of conduct are based on a conventional but unreliable moral code. He is as responsible as Brenda for the collapse of his world. Yet here as in his earlier novels, Waugh's attitude is ambivalent. Tony is satirized for being romantically attached to a tradition cut off from its actual roots, but he is also the last representative of a civilized way of life destroyed by modern savagery. Waugh is hard on him because he allows that way of life to be destroyed through lack of faith and because he is not equal to his duty as a keeper of the values of Western civilization.

In all Waugh's pre-war novels old country houses are being pulled down in order to make place for apartment houses or factories. Their destruction symbolizes the disappearance of the way of life and traditions they stood for. In *Decline and Fall* Mrs. Beste-Chetwynde's house, "the finest place of domestic Tudor in England," is being rebuilt into "something clean and square" from which the human element has been eliminated. Nor is the transformation so contrary to the spirit of the last holders of "King's Thursday": Margot's brother-in-law, who sold her the house, "could never quite see what all the fuss was about." (p. 117) In *Vile Bodies* Colonel Blount's house "Doubting Hall," called "Doubting 'All'" by the servants, is invaded by cameramen and made the setting of a third-rate film. In *Scoop* Boot Magna Hall is falling into decay, and its inhabitants are mostly old dotards. This process of destruction is not new: violation of the old houses

started in the nineteenth century when many were "rebuilt" in Gothic style to suit the tastes of prosperous industrialists as it was the case with Llanabba Castle. Another damaged house is Hetton Abbey first rebuilt in extravagant Gothic style then turned into a silver-fox farm. Like Charles Ryder, the narrator and "architectural painter" in *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), Waugh catches a glimpse of these houses before they are finally deserted or debased. He also loves "buildings that grew silently with the centuries, catching and keeping the best of each generation,"<sup>1</sup> and he deplores that the aristocracy should abandon them together with the civilized and refined living for which they were built. In *Brideshead Revisited* Waugh describes such a house and recreates a life style which was bound to disappear. The theme of the novel is, in the author's words, "the operation of divine grace on a group of diverse but closely connected characters," its intention "to trace the workings of divine purpose in a pagan world, in the lives of an English Catholic family, half-paganized themselves, in the world of 1923-1939."<sup>2</sup> Though published at the end of the Second World War, this novel is complementary to Waugh's pre-war work because it presents fairly similar material in a different light.

Waugh describes a Catholic aristocratic family as the perpetrators of an uninterrupted English tradition and their house as the symbol of that tradition. When Lord Marchmain marries a Catholic and becomes one himself, he tells his wife: "You have brought back my family to the faith of their ancestors." (p. 212) However, he apostatizes, and so do two of his children. Their religion does not make them better than other people either as human beings or as citizens; on the contrary, they are "far worse," says Sebastian. Apart from the elder son, who remains faithful to the letter of Catholicism and of family traditions, the Marchmains are destroyed by the conflicting pressures of their nature and their religion. Even Lady Marchmain, at once a saint and a "femme fatale," is destroyed, having contributed to the disintegration of her family and to the ruin of their happiness. Still, she has accomplished the one thing that matters: she has impressed her children with the essential spiritual truth and made

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn WAUGH, *Brideshead Revisited*, Penguin Books, 1962, p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Frederik STOPP in *op. cit.*, p. 108.

it impossible for them to deny it in the end. This is an important aspect of the novel: by converting Charles Ryder to Catholicism the Marchmains become the instrument of his progress from a Pagan to a Christian set of values, which are man's only hope in this uncivilized age. For the first time Waugh offers a way out of the confusion of the modern world, though he doesn't proselytize but simply presents the Roman Catholic Church as the one stable institution in the modern wilderness and as a lasting and eventually inescapable reality in the lives of its members.

A striking feature in *Brideshead Revisited* is the marked contrast between the civilized and refined world of Lady Marchmain and the uncouth society which threatens it and is represented by Rex Mottram and Hooper. Rex, a successful politician, wants to marry Julia Marchmain because he hopes to acquire through her an aristocratic veneer which would help him in his career. Describing him years later, Julia says:

He simply wasn't all there. He wasn't a complete human being at all. He was a tiny bit of one, unnaturally developed; something in a bottle, an organ kept alive in a laboratory. I thought he was a sort of primitive savage, but he was something absolutely modern and up-to-date that only this ghastly age could produce. A tiny bit of a man pretending he was the whole. (p. 193)

Father Mowbray says of Rex, who is being instructed to become a Catholic, that "he doesn't correspond to any degree of paganism known to the missionaries." (p. 185) He represents the younger generation who "have such an intelligent, knowledgeable surface, and then the crust suddenly breaks and you look down into the depths of confusion you didn't know existed." (p. 186) As in Waugh's earlier work, modern man is presented as a confused barbarian, though Waugh does not laugh at his antics any longer: he has become impatient of the mediocrity which supplants refinement and the aesthetic enjoyment of life, a mediocrity which, according to him, is a consequence of moral relaxation among the upper classes.

Much has been said about Waugh's snobbish love of the English aristocracy. In *Brideshead Revisited* he appears to be fascinated by the accumulated beauty and the detached cultivation of aesthetic pleasure which only a long tradition of great wealth

makes possible and enjoyable without reservation. The privileges of the aristocracy are obviously justified when they live up to the standards which were originally theirs. When they allow chaos and confusion to invade their lives and their houses, they are responsible for their own downfall and also for the decline of civilization. When Ryder, just back from South America, hears that Anchorage House is being pulled down, his only comment is: "It's just another jungle closing in." (p. 221) When he finds himself in the noisy confusion of a party organized by his wife, he thinks: "Here I am, back from the jungle, back from the ruins. Here, where wealth is no longer gorgeous and power has no dignity." (p. 225) Regret for the past and a romantic idealization of his former association with the Marchmain family pervade the memories of Charles Ryder. The lyrical recollection of Ryder's and Sebastian Flyte's extravagances in Oxford has little in common with Waugh's pungent satire of the Bright Young Things in his pre-war novels. Sebastian initiates Ryder in architecture and wine tasting; cosmopolitan Anthony Blanche initiates him in modern poetry by reciting *The Waste Land*. Both reveal to Ryder the beauty and richness of the world through the care-free but fruitful experiences of adolescence:

Looking back, now, after twenty years, there is little I would have left undone or done otherwise . . . all the wickedness of that time was like the spirit they mix with the pure grape of the Douro, heady stuff full of dark ingredients; it at once enriched and retarded the whole process of adolescence as the spirit checks the fermentation of the wine, renders it undrinkable, so that it must lie in the dark, year in, year out, until it is brought up at last fit for the table. (p. 46)

The tone of this passage is fairly typical of the spirit in which Ryder remembers his youth; it denotes a sentimental attachment to the kind of life it promised. The promise was never fulfilled partly because of the dispersion of the Flytes and his estrangement from them, partly through his own failure in later years to marry Julia and become the holder of Brideshead, but ultimately because the beauty and refinement of civilized life have been destroyed by the Hoopers of this world.

Hooper is a coming officer of lower-class origin. Waugh's contempt for his mediocrity, which he believes to be characteristic of his class, intensifies his regret for the vanishing glories of the



English aristocracy. That men born in families famous for their past achievement should make way for the beneficiaries of a potential Welfare State is utterly unacceptable to the author. This menace is felt throughout the narrative and acts as an incentive to Ryder's recollection of a better world. The wish to recall and immortalize an ideal way of life before it was finally destroyed for the sake of Hooper is an important motive in the novel. A comparison between two passages, one which alludes to Ryder's youth, the other to Hooper's, makes clear Waugh's excessive idealization on the one hand, his exaggerate contempt on the other. Here is Ryder remembering the idyllic time he spent at Brideshead as a young man :

The languor of Youth—how unique and quintessential it is ! How quickly, how irrecoverably, lost ! The zest, the generous affections, the illusions, the despair, all the traditional attributes of Youth—all save this—come and go with us through life. These things are a part of life itself ; but languor—the relaxation of yet unwearied sinews, the mind sequestered and self-regarding—that belongs to Youth alone and dies with it. Perhaps in the mansions of Limbo the heroes enjoy some such compensation for their loss of the Beatific Vision ; perhaps the Beatific Vision itself has some remote kinship with this lowly experience ; I, at any rate, believed myself very near heaven, during those languid days at Brideshead. (p. 77)

Twenty years later Ryder sees Hooper as the representative of a dull and unduly demanding generation :

In the weeks that we were together Hooper became a symbol to me of Young England, so that whenever I read some public utterance proclaiming what Youth demanded in the Future and what the world owed to Youth, I would test these general statements by substituting 'Hooper' and seeing if they still seemed as plausible. Thus in the dark hour before reveille I sometimes pondered : 'Hooper Rallies', 'Hooper Hostels', 'International Hooper Cooperation', and 'The Religion of Hooper'. He was the acid test of all these alloys. (p. 15)

Fortunately, says Waugh in a later edition of the novel, society hasn't altered as quickly as he feared it would : "the English aristocracy has maintained its identity to a degree that then seemed

impossible. The advance of Hooper has been held up at several points." <sup>1</sup> Hooper stands for the stupid, vulgar and ignorant masses who threaten the civilized world. Ryder would gladly ignore that common herd and retire to Brideshead "the rest of the world abandoned and forgotten."

The religious theme of the novel is not successfully worked out, mainly because the impact of religion is conveyed through the attitude of the characters towards two problems which can only be real to Roman Catholics: the sin of divorce and the urgency of extreme unction. However willing he may be to believe in the reality and importance of these questions, the non-Catholic reader is not made to understand them nor to accept the way in which they are solved by the characters. What Waugh does make clear is that the rejection of religion, of Catholicism in particular, is a source of confusion and corruption. The savagery of modern society has grown out of a return to Paganism. When Julia Flyte apostatizes in order to marry a barbarian like Rex Mottram, she allows disorder to set in her life. Waugh is not concerned with personal happiness; it seems, on the contrary, that the characters' religion is a source of suffering. What matters is the preservation of an essential truth which is a condition to peace, order and the harmonious exercise of traditional values. His fear lest these values should be sacrificed to the welfare of barbarians pervades *Brideshead Revisited*. The occupation of Brideshead by the army, itself a nucleus of democratic forces, marks the end of England's glorious period.

Events of the Twenties and Thirties are a mere background to Ryder's reminiscences, instances of the intrusion of barbarism upon his "Arcadia" and boring reminders of the outside world. Political events of the period are referred to in order to illustrate the stupidity and lack of insight of Rex and his political friends:

'Of course, he can marry her and make her a queen to-morrow.'

'We had our chance in October. Why didn't we send the Italian fleet to the bottom of Mare Nostrum? Why didn't we blow Spezia to blazes? Why didn't we land on Pantelleria?'

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to the revised edition of *Brideshead Revisited*, first published by Chapman and Hall in 1960.

- 'Franco's simply a German agent. They tried to put him in to prepare air bases to bomb France. That bluff has been called, anyway.'
- 'It would make the monarchy stronger than it's been since Tudor times. The people are with him.'
- 'The Press are with him.'
- 'I'm with him.'
- 'Who cares about divorce now except a few old maids who aren't married, anyway?'
- 'If he has a show-down with the old gang, they'll just disappear like, like...'
- 'Why didn't we close the canal? Why didn't we bomb Rome?'
- 'It wouldn't have been necessary. One firm note ...'
- 'One firm speech.'
- 'One show-down.'
- 'Anyway, Franco will soon be skipping back to Morocco. Chap I saw today just come from Barcelona ...'
- '... Chap just come from Fort Belvedere ...'
- '... Chap just come from the Palazzo Venezia ...'
- 'All we want is a show-down.'
- 'A show-down with Baldwin.'
- 'A show-down with Hitler.'
- 'A show-down with the Old Gang.'
- '... That I should live to see my country, the land of Clive and Nelson ...'
- '... *My* country of Hawkins and Drake.'
- '... *My* country of Palmerston ...' (pp. 262-3)

This pastiche in the Firbank manner also satirizes the senselessness of political arguments and the vain self-assertiveness of politicians. The futility of what they say is the more striking as these men become Cabinet Ministers at the beginning of the War. The only time when Ryder himself takes an interest in social and political events is when the General Strike breaks out. The spirit in which he comes back from Paris with a Belgian futurist who "claimed the right to bear arms in any battle anywhere against the lower classes," (p. 193) is typical of the immaturity with which all Waugh's heroes answer the call to duty. Ryder and Mulcaster, rather drunk after a round of night clubs, decide to show their patriotism :

'You and I,' he said, 'were too young to fight in the war. Other chaps fought, millions of them dead. Not us. We'll show them. We'll show the dead chaps we can fight, too.'

'That's why I'm here,' I said. 'Come from overseas, rallying the old country in hour of need.'

'Like Australians.'

'Like the poor dead Australians.'

'What you in?'

'Nothing yet. War not ready.'

'Only one thing to join—Bill Meadows' show—Defence Corps. All good chaps. Being fixed in Bratt's.'

'I'll join.'

'You remember Bratt's?'

'No. I'll join that, too.'

'That's right. All good chaps like the dead chaps.' (p. 198)

Waugh is clever enough to turn this into a joke, presenting Ryder and Mulcaster as slightly irresponsible young men who take it as a rather good and unusual game, "looking for trouble and finding none": "Next day the General Strike was called off and the country everywhere, except in the coal fields, returned to normal. It was as though a beast long fabled for its ferocity had emerged for an hour, scented danger, and slunk back to its lair." (p. 199) The characters' frustrated wish to make up for the strikers' "unpatriotic" behaviour is one example among many in Waugh's fiction of a puerile and ever disappointed longing for heroism. The First World War and the spirit of bravery it evoked haunt all his immature heroes; that spirit is the product of a class who courageously sacrificed its youth for the sake of insignificant commoners. In *Brideshead Revisited* it is illustrated by the story of Lady Marchmain's brothers:

... men who were, in all the full flood of academic and athletic success, of popularity and the promise of great rewards ahead, seen somehow as set apart from their fellows, garlanded victims, devoted to the sacrifice. These men must die to make a world for Hooper; they were the aborigines vermin by right of law, to be shot off at leisure so that things might be safe for the travelling salesman, with his polygonal pince-nez, his fat wet hand-shake, his grinning dentures. (p. 134)

Few characters in Waugh's novels approach life with maturity: well-bred young men like William Boot and Sebastian Flyte are afraid to lose the esteem of their nannies, who remain their moral guides even in adulthood. William compares his journalistic mission

in Ishmaelia to that of "Bengal Lancers and kilted Highlanders rising chivalrously to arms."<sup>1</sup> Sebastian, "in love with his own childhood," goes about with a teddy bear and tries to escape from reality; his inability to come to terms with it makes him an alcoholic and eventually a complete wreck. Tony Last, himself a father, keeps in his room "a gallery representative of every phase of his adolescence—the framed picture of a dreadnought (a coloured supplement from *Chums*), all its guns spouting flame and smoke."<sup>2</sup> When Dr. Messinger tells him in the Brazilian jungle: "From now onwards the map is valueless to us," Tony compares their position with the adventures of a childhood hero:

(Roll up the map—you will not need it again for how many years, said William Pitt ... memories of Tony's private school came back to him at Dr. Messinger's words, of inky little desks and a coloured picture of a Viking raid).<sup>3</sup>

Waugh's young men are prepared to go to war with an equally immature enthusiasm. In his pre-war novels they are engaged in their irresponsible antics and seem to be unaware of time; then they suddenly become elated when they realize that they will have their 1914 and their share of glory! Waugh belongs to a generation who were too young to fight in the First World War and repeatedly expressed a wish to make up in some way for the opportunity they had missed of serving their country.

In *Put Out More Flags* (1941) the characters who in Waugh's pre-war novels fooled away their youth for lack of anything better to do remember the dreams of their adolescence and welcome the opportunity to go to war. The novel deals "with a race of ghosts, the survivors of the world we both<sup>4</sup> knew ten years ago, . . . where my imagination still fondly lingers."<sup>5</sup> Peter Pastmaster, Alastair Digby-Vane-Trumington and Basil Seal are revived, and these upper-class rioters are shown to have the making of good citizens. At the beginning of the War when his sister imagines him as Siegfried Sassoon, T.E. Lawrence, or Rupert Brooke, his mother as a gallant officer, and his mistress as the unknown soldier, Basil

<sup>1</sup> *Scoop*, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> *A Handful of Dust*, p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>4</sup> Evelyn WAUGH and Randolph CHURCHILL, to whom the novel is dedicated.

<sup>5</sup> Evelyn WAUGH, *Put Out More Flags*, London, 1948, Introduction, p. 12.



wants to be "one of those people one heard about in 1919; the hard-faced men who did well out of the war." (p. 52) He exploits the presence of impossible refugee children in his sister's village by billeting them on respectable citizens who fear for their orderly homes; he removes the children after a few days in return for a bribe. He betrays his friend Ambrose Silk, then sends him away to Ireland and settles in his apartment. He refuses to join the army as a subaltern, but when England starts fighting and Peter Pastmaster raises commandos of "suitable officers," Basil joins them because "there's only one serious occupation for a chap now, that's killing Germans. I have an idea I shall rather enjoy it." (p. 233) According to John McCormick, this shows that Waugh has given up: "The old Basil would have joined the Nazis and ended at Postdam running the General Staff."<sup>1</sup> But this is to ignore Waugh's genuine belief in the readiness of the English upper classes to answer the call to duty, a belief implicit in his pre-war work.

At the beginning of the novel the War is merely another racket. Peter Pastmaster and Alastair Trumpington take themselves seriously as soldiers; but Sonia rightly says of Alastair's period of initiation as a private: "We always manage to have fun . . . wherever we are." (p. 128) Basil, always in the know, still feels free to enjoy his mischief-making and is not more harmful than the incompetents and "boobies" with whom the Ministries are encumbered. The first part of the novel is fairly similar in manner and tone to Waugh's pre-war work, though he occasionally alludes to the seriousness with which Basil wants to serve his country. In the last part of the narrative, however, the author's point of view shifts to suit his description of the aristocracy's patriotic zeal and wish for atonement. The follies of the inter-war period and the blindness and inefficiency of those in authority, before and at the beginning of the War, account for England's unpreparedness in the first phase of the conflict. But with the "Churchillian Renaissance" the War enters into "a new and more glorious phase." Peter Pastmaster, who emerges from his reckless youth more innocent than the *débutante* he is about to marry, arranges in Bratt's Club to spend the War with his friends and shows some sense of responsibility in doing so.

<sup>1</sup> John McCORMICK, *op. cit.*, p. 288.

"There's a new spirit abroad," said Sir Joseph Mainwaring.  
 "I see it on every side."

And, poor booby, he was bang right. (p. 233)

This change of spirit among Waugh's former Bright Young Things is rather too sudden to be really convincing. Waugh fails to make real the revival of responsibility among the upper classes: having first presented his characters through his well-known economical and non-committal dialogue, he could hardly shift to the deeper treatment which their changed attitude demanded. Hence, the ambiguity of the novel and the impossibility to take Peter, Alastair or Basil seriously even at the end. Moreover, Basil's ruffianism is less palatable than in *Black Mischief* because it is too easily redeemed by patriotic zeal.

Alastair Trumpington illustrates Waugh's failure to create a character susceptible of growth. In all the pre-war novels he is a prominent member of the Mayfair coterie; he betrays Paul Pennyfeather, becomes the lover of Margot Metroland, goes on rackets with Basil even after his marriage. He now reappears as an old acquaintance whom the author seems to have always loved. There is no sneer in Waugh's description of Alastair's "personal sense of schoolboy honour"; he treats him rather with affectionate approval: "England was at war; he, Alastair Trumpington, was at war. It was not the business of any politician to tell him when or how he should fight." (p. 52) Alastair enlists in the ranks: "I believe a lot of people felt like that in the last war." (p. 112) Later Sonia explains why he at first refused a commission and alludes to his wish to make amends for his past behaviour:

'I believe I know what Alastair felt all that first winter of the war. It sounds awfully unlike him, but he was a much odder character than anyone knew. You remember that man who used to dress as an Arab and then went into the air force as a private because he thought the British Government had let the Arabs down. I forget his name but there were lots of books about him. Well, I believe Alastair felt like that. You see he'd never done anything for the country and though we were always broke we had lots of money really and lots of fun. I believe he thought that perhaps if we hadn't had so much fun perhaps there wouldn't have been any war. Though how he could blame himself for Hitler I never quite saw. . . . At least I do in a way. . . . He went into the ranks as a kind of penance or

whatever it's called that religious people are always supposed to do.' (p. 114)

Another reason for his refusing a commission is that he doesn't want to meet the officers on social terms, but when all his friends enlist in the same regiment, Alastair becomes as excited as a school-boy. It is worth quoting the passage in which Sonia agrees to let him join them :

'Sonia, would you think it bloody of me if I volunteered for special service?'

'Dangerous?'

'I don't suppose so really. But very exciting. They're getting up special parties for raiding. They go across to France and creep up behind Germans and cut their throats in the dark.' He was very excited, turning a page in his life, as, more than twenty years ago lying on his stomach before the fire, with a bound volume of *Chums*, he used to turn over to the next instalment of the serial.

'It doesn't seem much of a time to leave a girl,' said Sonia, 'but I can see you want to.'

'They have special knives and tommy-guns and knuckle dusters; they wear rope-soled shoes.'

'Bless you,' said Sonia.

'I heard about it from Peter Pastmaster. A man in his regiment is raising one. Peter's got a troop in it. He says I can be one of his section commanders; they can fix me up with a commission apparently. They carry rope ladders and files sewn in the seams of their coats to escape with. D'you mind very much if I accept?'

'No, darling. I couldn't keep you from the rope ladder. Not from the rope ladder I couldn't. I see that!' (p. 229)

This is the spirit in which, at thirty-six, the former Bright Young People make up for their past follies.

*Put Out More Flags* was a sort of prelude to the trilogy<sup>1</sup> Waugh published after the Second World War and in which the school-boy honour theme is fully developed. These novels are written in the same style as *Brideshead Revisited*, though their sentimentality is tempered by a humorous portrayal of army life. Like Alastair and Basil, Guy Crouchback is thirty-six when the

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn WAUGH, *The Sword of Honour: Men at Arms* (1952) and *Officers and Gentlemen* (1955), New York, 1961, *Unconditional Surrender*, London, 1961.

War breaks out; he has suffered and lived in solitude for eight years, but he is not more mature than they are. When he goes to war, he dedicates his life to the English saint and crusader Roger de Waybroke and starts his own "crusade" against an enemy who becomes clearly recognizable at the time of the Russo-German pact. At first he is exalted by the army; he is proud of the traditions of his regiment and enjoys at last what he missed as a boy: "a happy adolescence." He compares his military experiences with the feats of his childhood hero, Captain Truslove. Soon, however, he is forced to realize that he is engaged in a war "in which courage and a just cause [are] quite irrelevant to the issue."<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to compare Crouchback with Tietjens, the hero of Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy, for they find themselves in a strikingly similar situation at an interval of twenty-five years. Both are unhappy because they are married to frivolous women who are bored with their gentlemanly behaviour. Both have a slow and unhappy career in the army because they bear the blame for mistakes which they have not committed and they stick to the rules and to their ideals even if it makes them unpopular; both allow themselves to be exploited by ambitious officers who receive all the honours, while their own position at the end of the War is hardly honourable. Guy is as chivalrous as Tietjens towards his former wife, and he remarries her when she is with child by a commoner. However, as early as 1914 Tietjens is fully aware that his public-school code of honour is outdated; though he does not approve of it, he sees the social evolution as inevitable, and his strength as a hero derives from his understanding of his predicament in a changing world. Guy simply blames the world for not being what he had imagined.

The main source of Guy's disillusionment is England's "dishonourable" alliance with Russia after the invasion of this country by the Germans. To him, it is an alliance with democracy and therefore with the enemies of civilization; this tragic alliance will finally destroy what remains of the English cultural and social tradition. There is no doubt that these views were fully shared, and approved of, by Waugh. Like the sixteenth-century martyr Edmund Campion, Guy associates the will to serve England with the will to serve God through Catholicism since he believes the

<sup>1</sup> *Men at Arms*, p. 145.

real English tradition to be Catholic. Like Alastair in *Put Out More Flags*, Guy thinks that the War will be a source of regeneration for the English upper classes. Unfortunately, he discovers that the only way out of the modern wilderness is to adhere faithfully to one's sense of personal honour. England's betrayal of the ideal of civilization is only to be expected since the aristocracy, who are supposedly the keepers of its values, have become as corrupt as the masses. Waugh makes this clear by describing the military careers of Ivor Claire and Trimmer.

Guy has always looked upon Claire as the typical gentleman, "The Flower of the Nation":

Guy remembered Claire as he first saw him in the Roman spring in the afternoon sunlight amid the embosoming cypresses of the Borghese Gardens, putting his horse faultlessly over the jumps, concentrated as a man in prayer. Ivor Claire, Guy thought, was the fine flower of them all. He was quintessential England, the man Hitler had not taken into account, Guy thought.<sup>1</sup>

This gentleman, whose main qualification in peace time is perfect horsemanship, runs away during the Cretan campaign and abandons his men, who are taken prisoners by the Germans. This is the end of all illusions for Guy, who has just heard of the invasion of Russia:

It was just such a sunny, breezy Mediterranean day two years before when he read of the Russo-German alliance, when a decade of shame seemed to be ending in light and reason, when the Enemy was plain in view, huge and hateful, all disguise cast off; the modern age in arms.

Now that hallucination was dissolved, like the whales and turtles on the voyage from Crete, and he was back after less than two years' pilgrimage in a Holy Land of illusion in the old ambiguous world, where priests were spies and gallant friends proved traitors and his country was led blundering into dishonour.<sup>2</sup>

The modern age in arms is personified by Trimmer, an ex-barber, who is even more representative than Hooper of the vulgar

<sup>1</sup> *Officers and Gentlemen*, p. 366.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 502.



and ignorant mass. Trimmer is made a hero by the astute Ian Kilbannock :

'Heroes are urgently required to boost civilian morale ; You'll see pages about the commandos in the papers soon. But not about your racket, Guy. They just won't do, you know. Delightful fellows, heroes too, I daresay, but the Wrong Period. Last-war stuff, Guy. Went out with Rupert Brooke.'

'This is a People's war,' said Ian prophetically, 'and the People won't have poetry and they won't have flowers. Flowers stink. The upper classes are on the secret list. We want heroes of the people, to or for the people, by, with and from the people.'<sup>1</sup>

A raid is simulated, similar to the one Guy has really launched and brought off without getting any credit for it, and Trimmer becomes a hero. He has an affair with Virginia, Guy's former wife ; when Guy remarries her, Trimmer's child actually becomes his heir. He is called Gervase after Gervase Crouchback, the martyr. This might have been a piece of grim humour in one of Waugh's pre-war novels ; in the trilogy it is a symbol of the aristocracy's "unconditional surrender," itself a token of their failure to redeem themselves and their country through their war pilgrimage.

Though Guy is quite right to consider the Russians as "his" true enemy, the author crudely simplifies the issue by making Trimmer a representative product of democracy. Similarly, to think that officers do not behave gallantly or gentlemen honourably because honour and courage are meaningless in a democratized society is preposterous. Waugh fails to make his position acceptable because the man who stands for the noble values of the aristocracy is Guy Crouchback, whose sole ambition at forty is to resemble a childhood hero ! Though we sympathize with Guy, again because he is a victim, he hardly qualifies as the ideal gentleman ; one expects more maturity and efficiency from the rulers of the world than he is capable of. Yet he is not satirized at any moment : "There is not a glimmer of humour in [Waugh's] picture of Guy Crouchback, who, by a shift of angle, . . . must appear as a character with endless comic possibilities. It does not even seem to occur to him that from the point of view, and in the language of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 352.

Crouchback's fellow-officers and superiors, he must have often appeared as a pain-in-the-neck."<sup>1</sup> Again, what is one to make of Crouchback senior, the saintly old gentleman who

was quite without class consciousness because he saw the whole intricate social structure of his country divided neatly into two unequal and unmistakable parts. On one side stood the Crouchbacks and certain inconspicuous, anciently allied families; on the other side stood the rest of mankind, Box-Bender, the Butcher, the Duke of Omnium (whose onetime wealth derived from monastic spoils), Lloyd George, Neville Chamberlain;—all of a piece together. Mr. Crouchback acknowledged no monarch since James II.<sup>2</sup>

He is terribly disappointed to hear that his grandson has not died gallantly on the battlefield but has surrendered with his regiment and been made a prisoner. However, for Guy, the War is not a fruitless experience: he realizes that it is the dreadful product of the evil and madness which prevail in the modern world and that his own wish to gratify his personal honour was part of the general insanity. A Jew, whose life he has saved, explains this to him:

'Is there any place that is free from evil? It is too simple to say that only the Nazis wanted war. These communists wanted it too. It was the only way in which they could come to power. Many of my people wanted it, to be revenged on the Germans, to hasten the creation of the national state. It seems to me there was a will to war, a death wish everywhere. Even good men thought their private honour would be satisfied by war. They could assert their manhood by killing and being killed. They would accept hardships in recompense for having been selfish and lazy. Danger justified privilege. I knew Italians—not very many perhaps—who felt this. Were there none in England? 'God forgive me,' said Guy, 'I was one of them.'<sup>3</sup>

Waugh's pre-war novels are masterly parodies of modern life, clever and brilliant satires of the folly of an age. At once a detractor and an admirer of the English upper classes, he caricatures

<sup>1</sup> Sean O'Faolain, *The Vanishing Hero*, London, 1956, p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Men at Arms*, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> *Unconditional Surrender*, p. 53.

their behaviour with the same dash and insolence that he prizes in their younger members. Individual frivolity and social chaos are the object of his satire. Caught in a reckless round of pleasure-seeking, his unthinking and irresponsible Bright Young Things are quite a match for their stupid and grotesque elders. National, social and religious institutions are profaned with gusto or indifference, traditions violated, and the notions of service and duty ignored or misunderstood. The world of Waugh's early novels is devoid of values; it is full of incomplete men and women who have lost the capacity to feel. Life is crude and uncivilized, seldom more than a senseless and cruel game. The innocent who enters it, whether willingly or not, is inevitably victimized, though his fate is not quite undeserved as it usually results from his simple-minded notions of right and wrong.

From one novel to another Waugh's young characters grow in cynicism and provocativeness, while their elders become increasingly muddle-headed and inefficient. Yet there is no denying Waugh's affection for the legendary Peter Pastmaster, Alastair Trumpington and Basil Seal, nor for some of his beautiful and elegant hostesses. Waugh has achieved a remarkable feat by presenting bad or mad characters without making them unattractive. The ambivalence of his approach is just perceptible enough to be disturbing; the ambiguity of his early novels is a challenging element because his half-concealed sympathy for the Bright Young Things combines with perfect detachment in the description of their antics or of the more general insanity and cruelty of the world. This lack of an implicit set of values adds to the ferocity of Waugh's satires. Moral justice is conspicuously absent from his novels but his point is precisely that there is no moral justice in actual life. His characters do typify current attitudes however fantastic these appear. Indeed, Waugh criticizes modern society by presenting slightly distorted and self-satirizing pictures of it. He scarcely emphasizes the eccentric behaviour of his models. Like Firbank, he presents them in disconnected conversation scenes which give his fiction a rapid and disjointed tempo suggestive of the hectic rhythm of modern life. William Gerhardie also comes to mind with regard to Waugh's vision of a lunatic world. In his autobiography Waugh writes that he was introduced to Gerhardie's novels by Claud Cockburn while still at Oxford. There is little doubt that he was influenced by him: Waugh's humour is seldom

compassionate, but some of his early novels are samples of a genre Gerhardie called "humorous tragedy."

Though his early novels are void of moral indignation and his standpoint is hard to define, Waugh's approach is not entirely negative. His early work seems paradoxical because he chastises a social class whom he otherwise considers as the rightful keepers of an order of which he wholly approves. As a political conservative, Waugh satirizes society in the name of the established order and of its traditions. As a Roman Catholic, he satirizes it in the name of faith. The barbarism which he derides so comically in his novels is the inevitable effect of a return to paganism and is as destructive in the so-called advanced countries as in the African jungle. The absence of a clearly defined purpose in life illustrates the confusion bred by agnosticism or religious indifference, while a simple-minded belief in man results in ignorance of evil. In these aspects of his criticism, Waugh achieves universality of a kind. Unfortunately, his satire is limited by his assumption that values, whether social, moral, or religious, are a matter of class. Just as the Catholic aristocracy in his later novels are saved by divine grace, so the upper-class trouble-makers of his early satires are redeemed by a social grace, which sometimes mars his humour and explains why Waugh is so much more tolerant of these trouble-makers than of social outsiders. He seems to have been fascinated by their "determination to treat with the world only on their own terms."<sup>1</sup>

Waugh's infatuation with the charm of the English upper classes eventually drove him to give up satire as an art form. Except for *The Loved One*, his post-war work is often marred by the sentimentality with which he celebrates the aristocracy and deplors their decline. His vision of English life became very pessimistic when he realized that the civilization they stood for was doomed. In some of his early novels the careless gaiety of his characters together with their obvious longing for stability and purposive action implied that, given a chance, they might show themselves worthy of their ancestors. Few writers have expressed like Waugh the temper of youth, the mixture of assurance and anguish of those who still feel they can master life. As he shows in *Put Out More*

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn WAUGH, *A Little Learning*, London, 1964, p. 205.

*Flags*, their panache made him confident that they would yet prove they could be as noble as they had been frivolous. Paradoxically, however, Waugh, who had been so sensitive to the chaos and anxiety of a post-war world, welcomed the Second World War in the same spirit as that which had brought disillusion and bitterness to the protagonists of the First, i.e., with enthusiasm and as an ordeal that would purify the young of their past follies. Associating the real English tradition with the Catholic aristocracy, he showed the latter starting on a crusade to preserve the values of Western civilization and of their own authoritarian tradition. But their venture was anachronistic; the last battle of the aristocracy had been fought and lost in 1914. Waugh was finally disappointed with their incapacity to resist the destructive forces of democracy: his gallant nobles are out of fashion; they withdraw from the social scene and allow the uncouth savages of the Welfare State to come into their heritage. Waugh's post-war fiction satirizes the decay of values which, in his eyes, inevitably follows democratization: the beauty, the dignity, the charm of English life make way for mediocrity and dullness; there is no way back to the delights of "Arcadia."



## CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

You know, you really are a tourist, to your bones. I bet you're always sending postcards with 'down here on a visit' on them. That's the story of your life.<sup>1</sup>

The discrepancy between Isherwood's reputation as an artist and his actual achievement was for some time a misleading element in the assessment of his work. In the Thirties he appeared to many as the potential interpreter of the human predicament in a socially and historically significant period, and he was still considered as a promising writer long after he had published what was to be his best writing. He played a prominent part among a group of writers who did not actually form a movement but were animated by the same romantic urge to infuse literature with a revolutionary spirit. Isherwood himself was seen as a rebel who had put a stop to his bourgeois education and broken with English middle-class life. However, in the light of his work it is difficult to interpret his revolt as part of a wider and more significant movement. This is a fact which I should not comment upon if it did not account to some extent for the limitations of his art and if Isherwood the narrator did not play so prominent a part in his fiction. In this respect *Lions and Shadows* (1938) is a revealing document as far as the man and the artist are concerned.

Though Isherwood carefully warns us that *Lions and Shadows* should be read as a novel, it is a hardly disguised autobiography. Its subtitle, *An Education in the Twenties*, suggests that the author also saw it as the story of a generation. He does indeed show how the First World War and its aftermath conditioned the lives of those who were too young to fight and came of age in the confused atmosphere of the post-war years. Isherwood tells us that even at his preparatory school he was emotionally "messed about" by masters and mistresses to whom the war years "had given full

<sup>1</sup> Christopher ISHERWOOD, *Down there on a Visit*, London, 1962, p. 349.

licence to every sort of dishonest cant about loyalty, selfishness, patriotism, playing the game and dishonouring the dead."<sup>1</sup> During his public-school years he developed a divided attitude towards the idea of war. He was strongly influenced by Chalmers, his revolutionary friend, who objected to patriotism and to war. When the two of them went to Paris with their public-school master, they visited "Les Invalides," which Chalmers had condemned in advance because it was a shrine to war. Isherwood was secretly impressed, but he wouldn't acknowledge it and agreed with Chalmers that it was ugly and vulgar. In the sixth form he proposed a motion before the debating society that "patriotism is an obstacle to civilization." But while thus joining in the protest against war, which was common enough in the Twenties, he also felt a sort of guilty excitement about it:

We young writers of the middle 'twenties were all suffering, more or less subconsciously, from a feeling of shame that we hadn't been old enough to take part in the European War. The shame, I have said, was subconscious; in my case, at any rate, it was suppressed by the strictest possible censorship. (pp. 74-75)

Nevertheless, he tried to make up for this sense of frustration by devising the idea of the Test, to which he longed to be subjected but which he also dreaded because he felt certain that he would fail. It was a test of courage, of maturity, of sexual prowess: in other words, a test of "Manhood." Until his departure for Germany Isherwood's career is a record of failures, not all of them connected with the Test, but all revealing his instability and illustrating the conflicting tendencies of his temperament. Under the influence of Chalmers's revolutionary idealism he defied the Cambridge authorities by purposely failing in the tripos in order to be sent down. He worked for a while as a private tutor and as secretary to a musician. Then, suddenly longing for respectability, he stopped playing the rebel and became a medical student. This led to a new failure, for he was not at all suited for medical studies. He gave them up and left England after the publication of his first novel, *All the Conspirators*.

In connection with the Test Isherwood developed at Cambridge a cult of the public-school system and built up a day-dream of

<sup>1</sup> Christopher ISHERWOOD, *Lions and Shadows*, London, 1953, p. 13.

romantic school life; he visualized himself as an austere young prefect who heroically overcame all sorts of dangerous obstacles, passed the Test successfully and became a Man. He remarks on the homosexual romanticism of his dreams; it is worth noting that he was about twenty at the time and that these dreams certainly reveal a refusal to grow up and to face life responsibly. He created with Chalmers other day-dream fantasies in which they took refuge from university life:

There was the private world which Chalmers and I had deliberately created for ourselves, a world which was continually expanding, becoming more absorbing, more elaborate, sharper and richer in detail and atmosphere, to the gradual exclusion of the history school, the Poshocracy, the dons, the rags, the tea-parties, the poker, the play-reading; the whole network, in fact, of personalities, social and moral obligations, codes of behaviour and public amusements which formed the outward structure of our undergraduate lives. (pp. 64-65)

In the Mortmere stories the "poshocrats" and the dons belong to the enemy camp. The basic themes of the tales and their myths derive from a central conflict between, on the one hand, the conspirators or mysterious characters of *The Other Town*, the anarchic and free Mortmere, and, on the other, the university system. According to Isherwood, he and Chalmers had come to Cambridge as to "the country of the dead" and had immediately escaped into their fantasy world, though Isherwood was sometimes tempted to join the "poshocrats," i.e., the snobs, the socially successful and all those who support the representatives of authority. As the conspirators became older, the poshocracy and the enemy became the English bourgeoisie and the social or political authorities. As late as the end of the Thirties Isherwood and those of his friends whom he had initiated into the Mortmere Myth were still under its spell. Auden, in particular, used in his poetry the names given to some enemies by Chalmers and Isherwood. Some readers seem to have resented these private jokes and conspiratorial games, mainly because they were used in connection with themes that were treated seriously. Yet the Mortmere stories were not merely a game. True, Isherwood found it odd some years later that he and Chalmers should have been so self-absorbed at the time of Hitler's Munich *Putsch*, of Mussolini's final campaign

against the democrats, of the first English Labour Government, or of Lenin's death. But when they left the university, they still saw society as divided into two enemy camps. Isherwood still speaks in terms of their fantastic myth when he uses the word "enemy" in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, in *Goodbye to Berlin*, or even in his latest works *A Single Man* and *A Meeting by the River*. The pleasure which several writers in the "Auden Group" seem to have derived from the Mortmere Myth is explained by Edward Upward<sup>1</sup> as a longing for fantasy and playfulness which made life more exciting, but disappeared when life did become exciting. One may also wonder whether their myth of a frontier dividing the enemy camps wasn't an unconscious imitation of a war-time situation. In Isherwood's novels it is definitely associated with the idea of the Test which the Truly Weak Man, Isherwood's neurotic hero, imposes upon himself. Moreover, the relation between the Truly Weak Man's incapacity to face reality and his longing to escape into a fantasy world cannot be questioned.

Julian Symons writes that "the most damaging criticism that can be made of Isherwood and his friends is that their deepest desires and longings were connected with public school and university; that, wishing to speak in popular language to a mass of people, they found themselves talking to each other in the language of their public school."<sup>2</sup> This is an unfair statement when applied to Isherwood's fiction. The novels he wrote in the Thirties were accessible to a large public and entirely concerned with the outside world. Only *Lions and Shadows* gives some indication that Isherwood was a public-school man, and he initiates the reader into his private world. Actually, this book gives a clue to the interpretation of his fiction because he alludes in it to his purpose as a novelist and describes the inner conflict which, as an artist, always prevented him from probing deeper into men's hearts.

In *All the Conspirators* (1928) Isherwood creates for the first time the Truly Weak Man and describes his neurotic attempts to avoid responsibility for his own life. Philip Lindsay wants to be a painter and a writer, but he has a job in the city which his mother wants him to keep at all costs. He runs away twice. The first time he comes home of his own accord, and his employer takes

<sup>1</sup> "Conversation with Edward Upward," *The Review*, 11-12, 65.

<sup>2</sup> Julian SYMONS, *The Thirties*, London, 1960, p. 25.

him back; but this is a defeat which Philip cannot accept. He is offered a job in Kenya and runs away again just before he is due to leave England. He develops rheumatic fever, which is enough to convince his mother that he must be given independence and be allowed to paint and write.

The novel is a protest against the dreariness of English middle-class life. Through his implicit criticism of Philip's milieu Isherwood satirizes the conventions of the middle class. His technique is still uncertain, though one can already detect his skill in provoking the reader's response and participation. However, the narrative is too often interspersed with conscious imitations of Joyce, the author resorting to the stream-of-consciousness to convey the feelings or thoughts of his "conspirators." These are the young dissatisfied characters who come up against the incomprehension of the old: Philip, his friend, Allen Chalmers, and his sister Joan, who is even less successful than Philip in attempting to escape from the stifling Kensington atmosphere of their home. Eventually, she marries Victor, a typical poshocrat, who sides with the enemy, i.e., with Mrs. Lindsay and all those who prevent the young from developing and living according to their own nature. Mrs. Lindsay and Victor want everybody to conform to a preconceived type and are genuinely incapable of understanding anyone who doesn't comply with the rules. Yet neither Joan nor her brother are capable of revolting. For all his hostility to the enemy camp and his desire to devote his life to art, Philip cannot pass the Test and simply shirks it, rejecting the responsibility for his repeated failures on his environment.

Isherwood's attitude towards his main character is ambivalent. He undoubtedly meant to bring out his weakness, his incapacity to make a decision and carry it through, his fear when he faces the Test, self-imposed but always eluded at the last moment. Philip is made to sound ludicrous when he remarks at the end of the novel: "'You see, Allen, what I really dislike about your attitude is that it gets you nowhere. You refuse to venture, that's what it is. You're timid. Oh, I grant you one's got to have the nerve.'"<sup>1</sup> He himself has simply frightened his mother into giving in to him. Yet that mediocre young man is the main conspirator, the hero chosen to wage "the great war between

<sup>1</sup> Christopher ISHERWOOD, *All the Conspirators*, London, 1957, p. 255.



the old and the young." The victory he wins over his mother is quite unheroic since, in reality, he compromises and is glad to settle comfortably in his Kensington home, though he has always pretended to hate it. Philip reacts against the social atmosphere in which he lives, but he is unable to live in any other way. G.H. Bantock doesn't seem far wrong when he writes that "The test could be just as well defined as a desire for social integration and acceptance by the group,"<sup>1</sup> for it is also prompted by the hero's awareness of his incapacity to deal with ordinary life. Isherwood presents this incapacity as characteristic of his generation. His young people are not enthusiastic because there is nothing to be enthusiastic about. They are unstable, unwilling to follow the traditional pattern of existence of the members of their class because they refuse to waste their talent on dreary or blind-alley jobs. "I like *All the Conspirators*," Cyril Connolly writes, "because it is a study of weakness, because Philip and Joan and Allen and Victor are English adolescence as I knew it."<sup>2</sup> One is reminded of Mr. Connolly's own weak hero in *The Rock Pool*.

Mrs. Lindsay is not quite equal to her role as an evil and possessive mother; she is a rather stupid and narrow-minded woman too obviously impressed by position and money. Clearly, she couldn't have been a serious obstacle for anyone but Philip. However, she illustrates a dominant theme in Isherwood's fiction: that of the possessive mother who shamelessly exploits her son's feelings and marks him for life, injuring his emotional self and making him unable to have normal human relationships. In *All The Conspirators* the conflict between mother and son often seems trivial because the characters themselves are petty. But in *The Memorial* the theme is treated much more subtly. Lily Vernon is more intelligent and cunning than Mrs. Lindsay. She cannot love her son as he is and uses her own unhappiness as a sort of sentimental blackmail to make him behave as she wishes. The boy is under a constant moral and emotional strain, which shows in his stammer and in his awkwardness and gives him a feeling of guilt whenever he enjoys himself with other adolescents. Even when he at last frees himself from the baneful influence of his

<sup>1</sup> G.H. BANTOCK, "The Novels of Christopher Isherwood," in *The Novelist as Thinker*, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> Cyril CONNOLLY, quoted by G.H. BANTOCK in "The Novels of Christopher Isherwood," in *The Novelist as Thinker*, p. 50.

mother and gives proof of his will and moral strength, he remains emotionally dissatisfied and only finds peace when he becomes converted to Catholicism. Other examples of frustrated or perverted development due to a possessive mother are Bernhard Landauer in *Goodbye to Berlin* and Mr. Norris. Even in *The Ascent of F6* the life and death of Michael Ransom are determined by his excessive love for his mother, while in *The World in the Evening* Stephen goes through several crises before he is finally freed from the influence of his much older wife who has always treated him as a son. The possessive mother is an obsessing figure in Isherwood's fiction; he presents her as a dominant and evil force in English middle-class life and associates her ascendancy with the high rate of homosexuality among Englishmen. In *Lions and Shadows* he describes his own effort to escape such influence as his only hope of achieving maturity: "You want to commit the unforgivable sin, to shock Mummy and Daddy and Nanny, to smack the nursery clock, to be a really naughty little boy. Well, why not start? Time's getting on. It's your only hope of ever growing up at all. If you stick to your safe London nursery life, you never *will* grow up. You'll die a timid shrivelled Peter Pan." (p. 307) In the light of *A Single Man* this sounds prophetic enough, for the real conflict in Isherwood's post-war work is between the homosexual narrator and the hostile world.

The First World War is another haunting theme in Isherwood's novels. In *Lions and Shadows*, for instance, it is never allowed to be forgotten for long and keeps intruding into the characters' lives. We have seen that Isherwood devised the Test to make up for his failure to take part in the War. At once fascinated and horrified, he listens to the war stories of Lester, an ex-service man, characteristically refusing to imagine that such things could happen to the men of his generation. Yet his sense of security is shaken, and it is partly to recover it that he starts studying medicine: a doctor is usually safe; he is respected, and if there is a war, he won't have to fight. Nevertheless, it was not through his medical studies, but by writing a novel about it that Isherwood freed himself from his "War complex." "*The Memorial* was to be about war: not the War itself, but the effect of the idea of 'War' on my generation. It was to give expression . . . to all the reactions which had followed my meeting with Lester at the Bay." (p. 296) It is well to remember, however, that when he wrote this novel,

Isherwood was under the influence of an American psychologist, Homer Lane, to whose theories he had been introduced by Auden. According to Lane, there was only one sin, "disobedience to the inner law of our nature." Man being naturally good should never control his desires, for when these are thwarted, as they often are by conventional education or by the pressure of society, he becomes diseased or inclined to selfishness and crime. "The disease of the soul is the belief in moral control: the Tree of knowledge of Good and Evil, as against the Tree of Life." (pp. 300-1) Diseases are warning symbols of a sickness of the soul and can only be avoided by being pure in heart. This became a key phrase among Auden's friends and prompted Isherwood to give up his medical studies, leave England and settle in Germany.

*The Memorial* (1932) is divided into four sections which deal respectively with one day in 1928, in 1920, in 1925 and 1929. The characters live and re-live in imagination significant experiences which took place within a period extending from the years just before the First World War to the late Twenties. The central event, the dedication of a War Memorial in 1920, is the climax of the novel; it makes clear what the War meant to each character and how it shaped their lives. The old squire, who has had a stroke, is no longer able to understand what the Memorial stands for. His degeneracy is the symbol of the disintegration of the family and of the social order he represents. His daughter-in-law, Lily Vernon, has brought him to the dedication ceremony because she wants him to play his part as the village authority; she becomes indignant when he is ignored by many villagers and by the middle-class people who live without romance in their ugly villas. Lily's husband, Richard, has been killed in the War, and she cultivates her grief deliberately to such an extent that she herself becomes unable to distinguish the genuine from the sham in it. She lives exclusively in the past, in "the old safe, happy, beautiful world" which she had thought would be preserved for ever. She uses what love and vitality she is capable of to coerce her son Eric, whom she wants to take his father's place. For years Eric exerts himself to please her, but as he becomes a man, he sees through her sentimentality and can no longer comply with it. She becomes spiritually dead and clings more than ever to the past.

Mary Scriven, Richard's sister, is the opposite of Lily; she is truly "pure in heart" and has always acted according to her own nature. To her, the War meant more hardship than ever, because her husband had deserted her, and her family, who had been opposed to her unconventional marriage, were unwilling to help her. An energetic and sane woman, she refuses to be impressed by the War Memorial because she lives in her time, not with the dead. "All this cult of dead people is only snobbery. I'm afraid I believe that. So much so, that the attitude which we're all subscribing to at this moment seems to me not only false but, yes, actually wicked. Living people are better than dead ones. And we've got to get on with life."<sup>1</sup> Mary's strength and good nature are appreciated by all; the parishioners of Gatesley and the London Bohemians appeal to her in the same way, and both old and young feel her strength and rely on her. Yet even a full life is not wholly rewarding in the post-war years: as she becomes older, Mary feels she has always been alone and taken for granted in her attempts to be useful. Her friends' insistence on her acting Queen Victoria over and over again at parties is a significant evidence of their lack of initiative and imagination, of the aimlessness of their generation imprisoned in the past and incapable of purposive action.

To Edward Blake, the shell-shocked ex-airman, the Memorial is a symbol of his own deadness. His disappointment in Richard and Mary after their respective marriage, Richard's death and his own war experiences have made of him a human wreck, homosexual and neurotic. He now goes from one psychoanalyst to another and carries through the cities of Europe a doom which he is unable to shake off. In 1928 he tries to kill himself and fails. It is through him that we are made to feel the more obviously destructive effects of war; some passages in the novel echo the torments of Septimus in *Mrs. Dalloway*, though Edward's predicament is deliberately reduced to a wretched but meaningless situation. The novel starts with his abortive attempt to commit suicide; it ends with the trivial, yet ironical, comment of a German boy: "that War . . . it ought never to have happened." (p. 294) The insignificance of Edward's experience is the more striking in the face of

<sup>1</sup> Christopher ISHERWOOD. *The Memorial*. London, 1952, pp. 112-13.

the young people's indifference and of the gap which alienates him from them. They are restless, irresponsible, and dissatisfied, eager to enjoy themselves, though most of the time bored. Only Eric takes everything seriously and starts a brilliant career at Cambridge, which he leaves suddenly at the time of the General Strike to dedicate himself and his fortune to welfare work. With his torments, his fears, his inability to cope with the realities of ordinary life he is a fairly typical Weak Man until he passes the Test by leaving Cambridge and doing what he likes. His conversion to Catholicism gives him the feeling of security he has always craved for; it illustrates the longing for stability and order characteristic of the men of Isherwood's generation.

In *The Memorial* Isherwood opposes two attitudes to life, the one valuing a dead past, the other rejecting meaningless conventions and obsolete values. The two, however, are equally sterile. His characters are bereft of individual or social support and unable to give their life significance through human relationships. Isherwood pictures a neurotic generation selfishly turned upon itself and incapable of development. Even the "pure in heart," though achieving some kind of fulfilment, are inevitably frustrated by the circumambient nothingness. Most characters do not develop at all; the glimpse we get of them at various periods of their life shows them hopelessly static. Isherwood implicitly criticizes the hypocrisy, conservatism and blindness to new social realities of the English upper-middle class. This *Portrait of a Family*, as the novel is ironically subtitled, is a story of disintegration, of which the War Memorial is a cruel symbol. At the end of the novel Mary, Edward and their young friends visit the Hall, the seat of the Vernon family; it belongs to the past, however, and has nothing to offer them. In fact, Eric has just sold it to a Manchester industrialist; the old squire is dead, and Lily's world has vanished for good.

*All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial* are the fruit of young Isherwood's reaction against English society. With the Berlin stories he becomes a "well-meaning tourist" and places himself in the position of a self-effaced yet all important narrator. We learn from Isherwood himself that he wanted to renew the English novel by applying to it the technique of the cinema: "I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not



thinking."<sup>1</sup> However, if he does indeed look at his characters from the outside and carefully keeps them at a distance, the author is nonetheless responsible for selecting and arranging the significant features of their behaviour as well as for revealing implicitly the relation between their plight and their historical background. In their limited way the Berlin stories are short masterpieces, for Isherwood struck a perfect balance between what he wanted to express and the technique that was most congenial to him as a novelist. The stories remain unsurpassed for their evocation of the last days of the Weimar Republic. The characters stand out against a background of unrest and chaos and are diversely affected by it; a subtle interplay of political factors and personal motives determines their existence. Their fate is inescapably linked to that of the nation: as the political background becomes more obtrusive and their situation more desperate, they grow accustomed to violence and hatred, and, apart from the workers, most people are soon prepared to accept the leadership of Hitler with indifference or relief. Before the final downfall of the Republic there is a sense of excitement aroused by the uncertainty of the political situation and by the climate of moral freedom which many foreigners found so congenial. Yet there is little to rejoice about: the social disintegration is complete, the old values have collapsed, and many people feel justified in their moral relaxation by the unusual and unprecedented chaos prevailing everywhere.

To the British observer this moral relaxation was often an indication of broad-mindedness, while the political agitation gave him the feeling that he was at the heart of things. This is the impression created by at least two thirds of *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (1935), the story of a Firbankian masochist and crook, who has always lived by his wits and exploits the corruption of German society for his own benefit. There are elements of farce and tragedy in the way in which Mr. Norris, perverse and unscrupulous, yet also naive and defenceless, takes advantage of the economic and political situation. Isherwood romanticizes him and makes him a pleasant character in spite of all. To relate his adventures would be pointless. But they bring to light his own immoral resourcefulness and the equally immoral lawlessness of the

<sup>1</sup> Christopher ISHERWOOD, *Goodbye to Berlin*, London, 1954, p. 13.

people he deals with. No one is immune from corruption because no one, apart from a few privileged industrialists, is left untouched by the catastrophic economic circumstances of the country. Though these circumstances determine the characters' attitude to life, the Berlin stories are anything but polemical literature. True, the narrator is elated when he attends a communist meeting and feels the workers' strength of purpose. He is impressed when he watches them marching in the streets, silently opposing the police and the Nazis. However, in spite of his sympathy for their cause, he does not romanticize it, and he does not commit himself to it but clings to his private values. Individual human beings are more important to him than any political ideal. Isherwood describes Berlin in a state of civil war, the dubious shifts and devices the unemployed resort to in order to survive, the indifference of the German public to shootings, arrests, acts of violence committed under their very eyes and the satisfaction of many of them after Hitler's *coup d'état*.

They smiled approvingly at these youngsters in their big, swaggering boots who were going to upset the Treaty of Versailles. They were pleased because it would soon be summer, because Hitler had promised to protect the small tradesmen, because their newspapers told them that the good times were coming. They were suddenly proud of their being blonde. And they thrilled with a furtive, sensual pleasure, like schoolboys, because the Jews, their business rivals, and the Marxists, a vaguely defined minority of people who didn't concern them, had been satisfactorily found guilty of the defeat and the inflation, and were going to catch it.<sup>1</sup>

Still, the fate of individuals is more impressive than the anonymous outburst of hatred and violence. Fräulein Schröder cries because her boarders leave the country and she cannot pay the rent; Otto is tracked by the Nazis because he is a communist; Baron Pregnitz commits suicide in the station lavatory: these personal tragedies are more easily grasped and felt than the big-scale tragedies which Hitler's coming to power foreboded.

In *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939) the hopelessness of Germany's political plight and its pressure on individual life are intensified.

<sup>1</sup> Christopher ISHERWOOD, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*, Penguin Books, 1955, p. 181.

Isherwood's field of observation becomes wider, while the characters' despair is the more intensely felt as the tension grows and they feel trapped. Sally Bowles is not one of the desperate. Like the narrator, she is English and therefore a mere spectator. But unlike him, she is not interested in the German situation, only in the moral laxity of the German capital, where a dissipated middle-class girl, fascinated by what she takes for the romance of prostitution, can indulge in debauchery as she pleases. Like Mr. Norris, she is redeemed by a kind of innocence which makes her as often a victim as a victimizer. She has one lover after another in the hope of eventually finding one who will take her to Hollywood. Isherwood has a particular talent for rendering the mixture of sham and ingenuousness in human beings. Otto Nowak is another of those attractive characters equally apt to deceive or be deceived, with no definite notion of right and wrong. For him, as for most boys of his age who have never had a steady job, anything short of crime is excusable. Isherwood first meets him on Ruegen Island, where Peter, a neurotic English boy has brought him. Soon, Peter's psychological complexity and illness are too much for Otto's healthy animalism; he goes back to Berlin, where he later gets in touch with Isherwood. The Nowak episode is considered by many as the best among the Berlin stories. Its success in the Thirties may have been partly due to the fact that it was mistaken for proletarian literature, though Berlin's Hallesches Tor is simply another place where Isherwood went "on a visit." However, the story is really an epitome of the desperate predicament of millions of Germans, and, without saying much about poverty, the author suggests with remarkable truthfulness the psychology of the poor. Frau Nowak, ignorant, sentimental and good flies into sudden rages for trifles but suffers many hardships silently, wearing herself out for her big family. The description of their everyday life is among the most lively and humane in Isherwood's novels. Frau Nowak is childishly happy when Otto and the narrator visit her in the sanatorium; but "Herr Issyvoo" is utterly depressed, frightened even, for the despair he reads in the eyes of some women is the most eloquent expression of the German people's hopelessness:

Erna was clutching my hand as though she were drowning. Her eyes looked up at me with a terrifying intensity of unashamed despair. . . . They all thronged us for a moment

in the little circle of light from the panting bus, their lit faces ghastly like ghosts against the black stems of the pines. This was the climax of my dream: the instant of nightmare in which it would end. I had an absurd pang of fear that they were going to attack us—a gang of terrifyingly soft muffled shapes—clawing us from our seats, dragging us hungrily down, in dead silence. (p. 215)

From the rich Landauers Isherwood has nothing to fear; he can remain perfectly detached towards them, for they make no appeal to his sympathy. It is only in retrospect that he understands Bernhard Landauer was serious when he suggested they go on a world tour together. Bernhard is a Jew who has a premonition of his doom and does nothing to avoid it. This fatalism is discernible in his enigmatic self-revelations during the party at his country-house. The guests make a pretence of being amused, though they are anxiously waiting for the results of the election. Isherwood conveys admirably the pent up tension of the scene, which he describes sympathetically but from the outside, like someone who is immune from threat and will be quietly crossing the border when Bernhard dies in a concentration camp. This mixture of sympathy and detachment is felt throughout the book. In the last chapter Isherwood describes the effects of the terrible winter that preceded Hitler's coming to power: boys are chased from their villages, attracted towards the city, which glows brightly and invitingly though it is in fact cruel, cold and dead; they starve and freeze on benches in the Tiergarten. The narrator visits a home for delinquents, which is like a minor replica of the disintegrated and diseased German society. The Nazis take possession of Berlin; if people in the streets are sometimes surprised at their acts of violence, they carefully avoid protesting or interfering. The only feelings expressed openly are hatred and a desire for revenge. The ordinary people adapt themselves to the new situation: "After all, whatever government is in power, they are doomed to live in this town." (p. 316)

Isherwood never deals directly with important issues; he interprets them in concrete and personal terms. These issues affect the characters in their everyday life, and it is through their effect on individuals that we discover their nature or understand their consequence. The collapse of the Weimar Republic or Hitler's

coming to power are seen through what they mean to a stricken Fräulein Schröder, or through the tragic fate of Bernhard Laudauer. When the German government closes the "Darmstädter und National" Bank, Isherwood does not discuss the consequences of the event but shows how it affects people:

A little boy was playing with a hoop amongst the crowd. The hoop ran against a woman's legs. She flew out at him at once: "Du, sei bloss nicht so frech! Cheeky little brat! What do you want here!" Another woman joined in, attacking the scared boy: "Get out! You don't understand it, can you?" And another asked, in furious sarcasm: "Have you got your money in the bank too, perhaps?" The boy fled before their pent-up, exploding rage. (p. 94)

In the same way, Frau Nowak's unequal temper, Otto's resentful laziness, the apathy, indifference or satisfied smiles of passers-by witnessing acts of violence are merely the outward signs of a deep social disease. Like Elizabeth, the writer in *The World in the Evening*, Isherwood translates everything into terms of individual human beings: "Elizabeth transposed everything she wrote into her own kind of microcosm. She never dealt directly with world-situations or big-scale tragedies. That wasn't her way. But she tried to reproduce them in miniature, the essence of them."<sup>1</sup> However, precisely because he wants to convey individual tragedy, Isherwood's external approach has its limitations. Indeed, it is only by viewing his characters from different angles that he finally hints at some inner life which, nevertheless, is never discovered. The result is that few things seem really important to the characters and that personal relationships, which, according to Isherwood himself, are the basic theme of his work, never seem really essential to them, an impression often strengthened by the narrator's own indifference. Few writers, it is true, suggest so much by saying so little, a fact which gave rise to the assumption that Isherwood was more deeply committed to man's condition in the Thirties and to the human predicament in general than he actually was.

Two obvious reasons have prevented Isherwood from developing as a writer. The first is a question of technique: he himself said

<sup>1</sup> Christopher ISHERWOOD, *The World in the Evening*, London, 1954, p. 134.



of his characterization that it was "flashy but thin; I was a cartoonist, not a painter in oils."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the "documentary novel," as G.S. Fraser calls Isherwood's fiction, is essentially a static genre which leaves little room for development. Its significance is drawn from the particular posture in which the characters are caught, but the characters themselves are static, viewed in relation to a particular moment, yet as evanescent as the moment itself. Another reason which explains why the Berlin stories constitute a climax in Isherwood's work, and not a promising beginning, is the narrator's refusal to become involved with other human beings. As *Lions and Shadows* clearly shows, his initial revolt against the established order was gradually transformed into a sterile rebellion not only against all that might thwart his individual freedom but also against all that might enrich him as a human being. Analysing his motives just before his departure for Germany, Isherwood admits that fear has always been the dominant influence in his life: "just plain, cold, uninteresting funk. Funk of getting too deeply involved with other people, sex-funk, funk of the future. I was eternally worrying about what was going to happen to me—in 1930, in 1940, in 1950; eternally building up defences against attacks which were never launched."<sup>2</sup> Fear and the desire to protect himself have always dictated "Herr Issyvoo's" attitude. In the Berlin stories his non-commitment is not quite distinguishable from his detachment as an artist, though we do get an occasional glimpse of his indifference: "The sun shines, and Hitler is master of this city. The sun shines, and dozens of my friends . . . are in prison, possibly dead . . . I catch sight of my face in the mirror of a shop, and am horrified to see that I am smiling. You can't help smiling, in such beautiful weather."<sup>3</sup> This passage conveys the cruel inequity of life but also sounds cynical and jars with the narrator's sympathetic rendering of the German situation. However, if the author sometimes gives evidence of the same levity as his more eccentric characters, he has nonetheless rendered the spirit of an age with incomparable talent and made real the fear and insecurity which pervaded the everyday

<sup>1</sup> *Lions and Shadows*, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 304-5.

<sup>3</sup> *Goodbye to Berlin*, pp. 317-18

life of ordinary people, the ineluctable impact of historical events on individual existence. The Berlin stories are a sequence to *The Memorial*; together they sum up the inter-war period, the plight of man caught between two world catastrophes.

Given his reputation as a Left-wing writer in the Thirties, it is perhaps worth specifying that Isherwood never committed himself wholeheartedly to a political ideal. He rebelled against anything that threatened individual freedom and, like many intellectuals in the Thirties, he may have thought for a time that his search for freedom was compatible with Left-wing politics. But he never made the mistake of deluding himself into believing that he sincerely wanted a revolution. "A young bourgeois intellectual . . . enthusiastic within certain limits. Capable of response if appealed to in terms of his own class-language" is how he sees himself in *Mr. Norris Changes Trains* (p. 67). In the same novel he describes a communist meeting and concludes: "One day, perhaps, I should be with it, but never of it." (p. 52) In *Goodbye to Berlin* as in *Prater Violet* (1946) he alludes to his "parlour socialism." Even the plays he wrote in collaboration with Auden and which made them known to a large public are a long way off from real commitment. They satirize the smugness and dreariness of English lower-middle-class life, but only *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935) contains an appeal to action. Its main theme is a denunciation of middle-class complacency, hypocrisy and cowardice as they are exemplified by the Army, the Church and the Gentry. The play is also a satire on capitalism; it caricatures small and despotic Balkan monarchies, a fascist state, its leader and the hysteria of the people. *On the Frontier* (1938) is mainly a condemnation of war, while *The Ascent of F6* (1936) points to the corrupting influence of power. The same absence of ideological commitment can be observed in *Journey to a War* (1939), in which two pictures of lacerated human bodies are published side by side with the legends: "The Innocent," "The Guilty." The book is an indictment of war:

War is bombing an already disused arsenal, missing it, and killing a few old women. War is lying in a stable with a gangrenous leg. War is drinking hot water in a barn and worrying about one's wife. War is a handful of lost and terrified men in the mountains, shooting at something moving in the undergrowth. War is waiting for days with nothing to do; shouting down a dead telephone; going without

sleep, or sex, or a wash. War is untidy, inefficient, obscure, and largely a matter of chance.<sup>1</sup>

War, as we know, is usually much more terrible than that. The book was published in March 1939 at a time when, for many people in Europe, war was the only way in which Hitler and his allies could be finally broken down. But Isherwood, who was already withdrawing from the European scene, had become a pacifist and thought at the time of Munich that

nothing, nothing, nothing is worth a war. . . . My friends, and thousands of people like us, said that a great betrayal had taken place. I said so, myself. And I wasn't being exactly insincere. Only, every time I said this, it was as if I mentally added: yes, but a war has been postponed—and a war postponed is a war which may never happen.<sup>2</sup>

Isherwood, it must be remembered, was never a supporter of action. His conclusion on the Chinese War is fairly typical of his general attitude: "And the well-meaning tourist, the liberal and humanitarian intellectual, can only wring his hands over all this and exclaim: 'Oh dear, things are so awful here—so complicated. One doesn't know where to start.'"<sup>3</sup>

A well-meaning tourist is, in fact, how Isherwood-the-narrator sees himself in *Down there on a Visit* (1962). But in his post-war novels the tourist is as important as the people he meets, and Isherwood, who had always been extremely reserved about himself, gradually drops his old reticences. The historical background, which was an essential element in his pre-war work, no longer determines the life of individuals. It is described but defiantly ignored by the hero, who disclaims any kind of commitment to society. In *The World in the Evening* (1959) Isherwood's characters react against the Second World War as Isherwood himself had reacted against the First, and they re-enact the Test. But proving one's Manhood now means asserting one's right to be a homosexual: "Compared with this business of being queer, and the laws against us, and the way we're being pushed around even

<sup>1</sup> Christopher ISHERWOOD in collaboration with Wystan AUDEN, *Journey to a War*, London, Faber, 1939, p. 202.

<sup>2</sup> *Down there on a Visit*, pp. 201-2.

<sup>3</sup> *Journey to a War*, p. 253.

in peacetime—this War hardly seems to concern me at all," (p. 311) one of the characters says. In *Down there on a Visit* the narrator is more outspoken yet in his refusal to let the outside world impinge upon his private life. His approach to the main characters is fairly the same as in the Berlin stories: Mr. Lancaster, Ambrose, Waldemar, and Paul are presented in concrete situations or through conversation; each represents a period in the author's life and is observed in relation to him. Christopher, Christophe, Christophilos or Chrissikins, as his friends call him, is in fact the main character. We see him as a young man impatient of the older generation, as an individualist determined to forget the German tragedy on a Greek island, then unhappily confused at the time of Munich. After the War he is shown as a converted spiritualist still unwilling to commit himself and failing to save his friend Paul. He is still the same Christopher who resents being forced to care and whom experience never touches deeply enough to change him. "My reasons for taking this particular trip" he explains on his way to Greece, "have nothing directly to do with the Nazis. They are quite unserious. And I suppose they show how little I've changed, in some respects, since the days of my visit to Mr. Lancaster." (p. 66) The "Down there" of the title is the characters' inner being, into which Christopher gets an insight before each in his turn disappears from his life without his being particularly affected. For each of them the "Down there" is a kind of hell, the hell of Mr. Lancaster, who desperately wants to be loved and commits suicide when he realizes that he never will be, the hell created by Ambrose on his island, where perversion and crime are the outcome of loneliness and despair, the hell of Waldemar, an unwanted refugee, who eventually goes back to Hitler's Germany, and finally the hell of Paul, a drug-addict and "the most expensive male prostitute in the world." Christopher has visited them all; he has felt the characters' loneliness, their despair; he has drunk with them, slept with them, taken drugs with them, he has gone through a "short attack of workerworship," has practised meditation with Paul and become a vegetarian. But it is always other people's hell that he penetrates. *He* doesn't die of anything. Above all, as one critic remarked, he hasn't died for anything.

How proud the "I" of the novels is of having survived! Survival is the main achievement of George, the 58-year-old hero

of *A Single Man* (1964). He belongs to a minority because he is a homosexual but above all because he is alive, and the living are the people who haven't given up, who, like himself, can still "get by." "I am alive" he repeats exultantly as he comes out of a hospital where he has just visited a dying friend. His exultation is natural enough; anyone who has looked death in the face has experienced a feeling of satisfaction at being alive. But we remember other occasions when the narrator expressed a similar joy of living because *he* could escape, while other people were being led to death. In *Down there on a Visit* he is no longer unwilling to describe his true state of mind at the time he left Germany: "And now I have to admit to myself that I have never been seriously involved, never been a real partisan; only an excited spectator." (p. 74) And further: "somehow I can no longer quite care . . . I feel I ought to feel guilty. But I don't." (p. 106) Yet Isherwood's work is pervaded with a sense of guilt at not having committed himself, and this makes him first apologetic, then defiant about it. Moreover, in spite of his compassion for his characters, he doesn't reach deeply enough in the presentation of their predicament to be aware of its full significance and to convey it to the reader. The feeling of impotence which underlies the Berlin stories is partly due to the fact that Isherwood does not explore the full implications of the situation he recreates. In the light of *Down there on a Visit* we understand that the narrator in Isherwood's novels is too preoccupied with himself to be deeply concerned with the plight of other men. It also sometimes prevents him from acquiring the necessary distance towards his own experience, as appears from *A Single Man*. This work is a sad comment on the narrator's career. "The past is just something that's over,"<sup>1</sup> George says. He is indeed without a past, utterly alone, yet afraid of giving too much of himself unless it is to someone with whom he can have sexual intercourse. He has formed no lasting relations and is still on the look-out for new friends and acquaintances. He starts the day bemoaning the death of his love and ends it looking for a new mate. But, somehow, this lonely man is pathetic. By ignoring the past systematically, he refuses to learn from experience and to be enriched by it; yet he also knows that the future is necessarily limited in time, and

<sup>1</sup> Christopher ISHERWOOD, *A Single Man*, London, 1964, p. 118.



anxiety underlies the determination with which he clings to life. Moreover, his assertion that he is still of the living rests mainly on his capacity for sexual pleasure, as if sex were the only symptom of life. Despite his attacks on the American way of life, despite his claim that because he is a homosexual he is a rebel who stands apart from the crowd, from the dead, we feel the narrator's old secret wish to be accepted even by the neighbours he despises, by his students, by the young, whom he cleverly, though often unconsciously, coaxes into liking and admiring him. In Isherwood's latest novel, *A Meeting by the River* (1967) the narrator seeks salvation through self-annihilation by becoming a monk in a Hindu monastery. But his encounter with his brother is like a re-enactment of the conflict between two aspects of his own personality: the homosexual fake rebel and the mystic.

The early novels and stories of Christopher Isherwood are, like the period they so well mirror, full of a promise that was never fulfilled. Within their limits, however, they are also a unique expression of the spirit and moods of the inter-war period. The social significance of his work arises from his dispassionate, yet imaginative, recording of the surface life of his characters, mostly weak, perverse, or else very ordinary, people. These characters are the symptoms of a collapsing world, a world which offers no sense of values or of permanence. Only the fragility of the passing moment is real and stirs up avidity for what life has to offer before an inevitable catastrophe. Isherwood conveys the impact of historical events indirectly through trivial incidents in the life of individuals; he makes very real the interrelation between personal life and society, not only by showing how the social and the political inevitably shape the individual's existence, but by presenting the individual as a victim of a situation for which he is also accountable. Thus in *All the Conspirators* and *The Memorial* the post-war generation are confused and suffer from a lack of real guidance, but they also wish to ignore the grim realities of life, and their weakness and neuroticism makes them incapable or unwilling to act. In the Berlin stories the characters' amorality reflects corruption on a grander scale, the tension in their lives is an effect of the paralysing fear through which the German nation feels it is becoming trapped; yet both the prevailing anxiety and

the atmosphere of corruption are seen paving the way for Nazism. However, Isherwood always carefully refrains from judging his characters; they are never presented in relation to a set of values, whether personal or social. If anything, he is inclined to romanticize his more pervert characters, who are always redeemed by a certain innocence and by their own experience of a wider and irresistible form of evil.

Isherwood's technique in *The Memorial* and the Berlin stories is well suited to convey the image of a dislocated world. His rejection of chronology and of all forms of transition between a series of episodes gives us unrelated snapshots of the social scene taken at different moments from different angles. The discontinuity of the narrative is paralleled by his presentation of the characters in a succession of flashes which throw light on the salient features of their personality but never reveal the complete man. In the Berlin stories these characters are mostly uprooted and isolated people, outsiders all, who come and go at a moment's notice. They are made equally fascinating whether they are rich business men, poor boys lost in the Berlin underworld, or the small ordinary people one meets in everyday life. Even the brevity of their pause in the narrator's field of vision emphasizes the instability of life in the Weimar Republic. Only the narrator remains unchanged, a detached observer who carefully keeps at a distance. As a connecting link, however, he gives the narrative some continuity, and by his very approach to his subject, his selection of significant incidents, his arrangement of them, his tone, he stamps the story with his own personality. Indeed, in spite of his detachment, few writers identify themselves so completely with their work as Isherwood. It reveals his contempt for ideas or ideals and his interest for the concrete reality in man's life, but it also brings out his particular blend of the frivolous with the serious. His high sense of the tragi-comedy of life does not altogether account for this; one cannot but feel that, to Isherwood, life is often a game between conspirators and poshocrats and that even in the late Thirties he still sees it in terms of his own immature revolt against anything that thwarts individual freedom.

If the narrator in Isherwood's stories cannot be ignored, it is not merely because his characters are seen in relation to himself. His detachment is a felicitous component of his stories but it is also a deceptive one. Isherwood is more obtrusive than it first

appears if only because he feels it necessary to explain why he remains a mere spectator. His detachment is not merely a literary necessity; it is also a moral attitude. Actually, he is more timorous than detached, divided between his inclination to look at the world from outside and his wish to share in its life. The narrator in his novels never lived down what he called the neuroticism of his generation: "In all those old crises of the twenties, the thirties, the war—each one of them has left its traces upon George, like an illness—what was terrible was the fear of annihilation."<sup>1</sup> In Isherwood's pre-war work fear and anxiety are to be detected in his characters' foolish behaviour, in familiar gestures, in the uncertain reaction of the German people towards the rise of Nazism. His post-war work lays bare his personal dilemma and shows him still fighting the somewhat imaginary "enemies" of his youth. His staunch individualism and his plea for complete freedom lead him in the end to claim nothing for the individual but the right to be a homosexual. Frivolity and amoralism become the symbol of a capacity to remain young. Isherwood's post-war work expresses an increasing nostalgia for youth, an intense desire to live and to enjoy the present moment, the need for the narrator to prove that he survives and is still among "the living." He certainly does survive, and his latest novel describes a new search for salvation. On the whole, however, it is unfortunate for Isherwood the artist that the hopes and fears of a generation should have crystallized into a mere assertion of the aberrant.

<sup>1</sup> *A Single Man*, p. 73.

## REX WARNER

There are many signs, good and bad, beautiful and monstrous. What more do you want?<sup>1</sup>

Rex Warner's political allegories were written in a decade of confusion, war and revolution. Yet they do not convey the tension, the sense of urgency, nor the feeling of anxiety which prevailed when these events occurred; like most novels of ideas, they tend to be abstract and didactic. They are all based on the crucial conflict between totalitarianism and liberalism in the modern world and denounce the amorality which results from the politicization of life. Warner condemns the destruction of natural life by the imposition on it of an artificial order, but he also raises the question of responsibility and shows that the defenders of tradition, who are the victims of the new order, actually help towards the establishment of dictatorship through their moral and spiritual confusion and their inefficiency. The weakness, the ignorance, or the unconcern of those who are accountable for the welfare of the nation serve the cause of tyranny. Liberalism has become too weak to resist new and destructive forces, though it leaves room for improvement and though its values could be made significant again and help men to regeneration. According to Warner, public and private life reflect the eternal conflict between good and evil, but the ultimate predominance of good depends on individuals alone.

In *The Wild Goose Chase* (1937) the author describes the inhuman and unnatural conditions of life in a town oppressed by a dictatorial government. The town lies beyond a frontier<sup>2</sup> which from time to time young men attempt to reach and to cross in pursuit of an ill-defined ideal. Three brothers set out on this mysterious quest: one is a lover of adventure, the second is an

<sup>1</sup> Rex WARNER, *Men of Stones*, London, 1949, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> In the literature of the Thirties the frontier is a frequent symbol of the dividing line between the real and the ideal. For other examples see Wyndham LEWIS, *The Human Age*, Christopher ISHERWOOD, *Lions and Shadows*, AUDEN and ISHERWOOD, *The Dog Beneath the Skin*.

intellectual, and the third, George, is simply a man of common sense and a lover of nature. They are in search of the Wild Goose, apparently a symbol of spiritual and political freedom or of justice and brotherhood. Before he reaches the frontier, George encounters Don Antonio, who, by cultivating pure thought and refinement in pleasure and in vice, has reached an unbelievable state of degeneracy. Don Antonio commits suicide when George makes him realize the emptiness of his life. His brother, a religious convert, has allowed his wife to undergo the worst humiliations rather than use violence, and George understands that his passivity is as destructive as Don Antonio's self-sufficiency. On the other side of the frontier, George meets Don Antonio's third brother, Joe, who has spent his life working for the Revolution. Joe is now too old for revolutionary action, and he hopes that a new leader will help the peasants overthrow the tyranny which the town exerts over the country around it. Until he has seen the town, George refuses to stay among the peasants. He is indignant at their inefficiency, their lack of solidarity, their credulity and the submissiveness with which they hand in the product of their labour to the town authorities in exchange for blue beads and cigarettes. For years and years they have been living in dilapidated houses; they have never ceased their revolutionary activities, but they have lost all hope of ever being strong enough to attack the town.

Warner exposes the fallacy of the fascist ideal by showing how love of order and purposefulness can lead to the destruction of life itself. However, his novel is a rather indiscriminate satire of dictatorial practices and methods and of capitalistic institutions, which to some extent accounts for its vagueness. George comes to know the customs of the town through a series of extravagant but tragic experiences, as when he is asked to referee a football match whose score has been decreed in advance by the government. The losers are all shot by the police, and George is condemned to the Research Department, which he narrowly escapes by appealing to the King. The Research Department foreshadows the infamous medical sections of German concentration camps: scientific experiments are practised on human beings, and the most horrible atrocities take place there. The scientists are obsessed with science for its own sake without being able to account for its purpose. The convent itself is a centre in which intellectuals and artists, who have all undergone an operation



and become hermaphrodites, spend their time in useless intellectual pursuit and in the cultivation of their distorted sexual tastes. These people refuse to take any responsibility for what they do and are quite unaware of the nature of their government. They are convinced that they are free to devote themselves to the disinterested work of the spirit, but their achievement is useless; nothing fruitful is taught in the convent, and the students are incapable of personal thought or judgment. The scholars are simply encouraged to indulge in idle speculation or to take an interest in frivolous subjects. Those who thus spend their time in futile intellectual pursuits are shown to renounce their personal integrity out of selfishness or indifference. Warner also satirizes overspecialization and the ignorance shown by scientists about things outside their own field. The lack of coordination between different research departments explains why there is no real progress in the town.

Similarly, George detects weaknesses in the political organization of the town and notices the absence of cooperation between the leaders and between important institutions. Like Orwell in *1984*, Warner suggests that dictatorship and tyranny are not necessarily efficient, though the deficiencies of the dictatorial system he describes are not always credible. When George, who has reorganized the revolutionary forces of the peasants, attacks the town, he is faced with mechanical giants who throw bombs and whom he soon neutralizes by destroying their mechanism. Men in the flesh, who are alive and use their intelligence, are shown to be more powerful than automata and in the end cannot be annihilated by machines. It is significant that the peasants, who are inadequately armed, succeed in capturing the town, which for so long seemed all-powerful and impregnable. However, rather improbably, George succeeds in conquering the town because the authorities have neglected to train pilots for their aeroplanes and to manufacture enough ammunition. His own adventures are also somewhat unlikely: his success in eluding his enemies or in mastering them makes him almost a chivalrous hero of legend rather than a revolutionary leader facing the realities of modern warfare. As John McCormick rightly remarks,<sup>1</sup> his pursuit of the king through a fantastic landscape of caverns, sliding walls and secret passages

<sup>1</sup> John McCORMICK, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

transforms the last part of the novel into a Gothic romance. This impression is heightened by George's love affair with Marqueta in a secret underground apartment. Love is sometimes an incentive, sometimes an obstacle, to revolutionary action, while sexual relationships are presented as a factor of regeneration and as a sign of man's attachment to life.

The society imagined by Warner is more human than the utopia later created by Orwell in so far as he never supposes men could be infallible in their exercise of power. The government is able to hold sway over large numbers of people with machines and propaganda, but the despair and resignation of the peasants and the workers are due to their confusion, to their lack of cooperation and of initiative as much as to the hopelessness of their situation. Once they have a capable leader, they never doubt that they will eventually overthrow the government. When he comes to the skyless town for the first time, George is horrified at its inhuman character. But he also realizes that the enormous power of the government rests on prestige and the submission of most people, who are taken in by the show of authority, rather than on the devotion of the masses or a really strong military force. That is why he trusts an organized mass movement to shake off tyranny. Warner satirizes all those who hope to make a revolution without the support of the masses, military adventurers or people who are more concerned with an ideal than with the welfare of the majority. Leaders who, like Pushkov, are urged to revolt by personal grievances, can never lead their people to victory. Before George helped the peasants, most of their leaders were men who had held posts in the town and had been dismissed :

And what surprised me about these men was that instead of speaking plainly about their own grievances, they spoke to us of the abstract ideas of justice and of government, of parliamentary systems and general enfranchisement—words which conveyed very little meaning to us. These leaders, many of whom died bravely, though some of them were traitors, were out of touch with the life of us peasants, and their leadership was thus weaker than it should have been. Some, indeed, were for raising a statue to the Goddess Reason, and others exalted the life of the savage. And these silly sideshows occupied much of their attention which ought to have been given to our bread and butter.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> REX WARNER, *The Wild Goose Chase*, London, 1945, p. 274.

The motive which should inspire revolutionaries is love, not love of the masses, not love of men and women, but simply love of life, "love of living, of delicacy and strength. It is the lively, it is the rich body and the candid mind, which are the lovable things. We love the country not because it is oppressed, but because it is alive. We hate the Government, not because it is wicked but because it is dead." (p. 298) When at last they are victorious, George makes it clear that the Revolution was only a means to an end. "When the king is dead, there will be no Government. We want to live, not to govern." (p. 404) The people assembled in the Anserium see the building dissipate in the air and a multitude of enormous white geese flying in the blue sky.

Rather too many things happen in this novel and the narrative lacks unity: the events of the chase, the temptations George rejects, and the obstacles he overcomes do not form a homogeneous whole, while some of them are irrelevant to the main theme. Warner attempts to render the complexity of life and stresses the difficulty of choosing the right course of action. He also tries to express the bewilderment of man subjected to physical and moral torture by a mysterious power. He shows life being cut off from its natural sources: his characters are either reduced to irresponsible and indiscriminating brain-workers or to mechanical units who live in an appalling city of steel and concrete. But Warner does not make real the nightmarish character of life in a dictatorial state; his writing is not compelling enough to move the reader one way or another. Moreover, the allegory is somewhat enigmatic. The narrator comments: "To this day it is impossible for anyone to be quite sure of what [the three brothers] were about when they left us." (p. 28) Tyranny must be overthrown, and this can only be done with the support of the masses. But what does George mean when he says after the Revolution: "I am uniquely interested in chasing the wild goose"? (p. 405) Is his sole purpose the constant pursuit of liberty and justice? After his victory over the authorities of the town he advocates anarchism and refuses to replace one form of organized society by another. He has overthrown a tyrannical and artificial order of things; he now glorifies the free manifestation of life and denounces all that may restrain it:

What our old leaders most respected we chiefly despise—the frantic assertion of an ego, do nothings, the over-cleanly,

deliberate love-making, literary critics, moral philosophers, ball-room dancing, pictures of sunsets, money, the police; and to what they used to despise we attach great value—to comradeship, and to profane love, to hard work, honesty, the sight of the sun, reverence for those who have helped us, animals, flesh and blood. (p. 440)

The people of the town have overthrown their oppressors and will eventually succeed in restoring the natural order of things. For George, however, this is merely a stage in the quest of his ideal. Though we never know exactly what this ideal is, liberty, equality and justice are no doubt part of it. Yet the man who strives after them is on a wild goose chase. The ideal George tries to achieve is repeatedly threatened with the same kind of dangers; it demands a constant struggle and can never be secured permanently. Warner may also have wished to suggest that liberty and justice, desirable as they are, cannot be man's final aim but must lead to a higher purpose. George is after a kind of perfection unknown to man, some sort of superhuman knowledge or goodness impossible to attain. What matters is not the ideal itself, which man never reaches, but that he should have an ideal and keep striving after it.

In an article published in *Critique* Herbert Howarth interprets *The Wild Goose Chase* as a quest for a vision of God. According to Howarth, the birds are "at once the Holy Grail and the heavenly father."<sup>1</sup> There may be some ground for this interpretation in a poem which serves as an introduction to the novel:

Wild Goose, I made you a symbol of our Saviour,  
with your fierce indifference to bye-laws and quiet flying,  
your unearthly song, your neck, like thunder and lightning,  
and your mysterious barbaric love.

O missionaries and motor-cyclists!  
Let us at daybreak honour the flying host,  
the yelping hounds of air who, with blood for essence,  
thrust like live shells through the speedways of heaven  
above low coasts, over bed of rotting reed.

By light-houses, through showers of ice, listen  
suddenly for onrush of wings, or from the storm  
the bell-like note of an outriding voice. (p. 14)

<sup>1</sup> Herbert HOWARTH, "Pieces of History," *Critique*, II, 1 (Spring-Summer 1958), 55.

It is not certain, however, that "our Saviour" stands for God. Nothing in the novel bears out or disproves Howarth's suggestion, and man's quest for a superhuman object may be profane as well as religious. It is doubtful that a Christian would call the love of God "barbaric" and that he would make the bird which symbolizes God so elusive. May not "our Saviour" be that natural life which, according to Warner, saves man and makes him one with the living universe? The "yelping hounds or air . . . with blood for essence" symbolize the force of life. Moreover, it must be remembered that it is George, who believes in nature as opposed to mechanization, who makes possible the overthrow of tyranny and the destruction of mechanized life. It is thanks to his wise leadership that the revolutionaries at last behold the flying geese. Still, George's experience of the forms of life he rejects is too obviously contrived to exemplify the effects of dictatorship. In addition, the novel ends with a vision of hope, yet the narrator tells us at the beginning that George came back from the chase behaving like a maniac, particularly when the wild goose was mentioned. What relation is there between his lunacy and the chase? Does Warner mean that the man who pursues an impossible ideal is either destroyed—like George's brothers who never come back from the chase—or that he cannot withstand the strain of his inevitable failure? If this is so, it is hard to believe in the success of the Revolution. Warner makes clear what he criticizes: the destruction of natural life, mechanized civilization, the exercise of power for its own sake, the irresponsibility of intellectuals, their indifference to important issues, the uselessness of much of their work and the easiness with which they allow themselves to be corrupted by the men in power. The meaning of the quest is less obvious, but is it not precisely that liberty and justice are never secured definitely and that the struggle must be carried on forever by successive generations?

In his next novel Warner takes up again a familiar theme, namely the responsibility of everyone for tyranny as a result of the growing assertion of man's worst instincts. *The Professor* (1938) is a novel of ideas: most characters are not even known by name: they have little life of their own, though they are sensitive to the moral pressures to which everyone was subject in the Thirties and which led to political action. The book describes the annexation



of a small state in Central Europe by a powerful fascist neighbour ; it is an almost faithful account of the Austrian *Anschluss*. The government of the country is made up of incompetent politicians who have no idea of the dangers run by the nation and are less concerned with its welfare than with their personal problems or with the prestige of the party they represent. They appeal to the professor to head a national coalition ; the latter is well known for his integrity and his adherence to democratic ideals. The old liberal politicians hope that he will rally the people round him because he is committed to no political party, while the intriguers believe that he will be an easy prey, as indeed he turns out to be. As soon as he comes to power, he is caught in a net of intrigues ; he refuses to adopt strict measures on the ground that he wants to act on a democratic basis. In spite of two attempts on his life, he remains blind to the real threat of the National Legion and does his best to maintain a strictly neutral attitude. Even when his son's fiancée is raped and tortured by legionaries and commits suicide, he denies his son's request to arm the workers. Shortly afterwards he is overthrown by the chief of police, a man whom he trusted but who was actually his main opponent. The latter surrenders the country to the enemy, who invade it in hords of droning aeroplanes. The professor escapes with the help of Sergeant Jinkerman, a communist police officer, who had warned him all the time against the police. However, he refuses to leave the country with Jinkerman and his son because he doesn't want to escape without Clara, the woman he loves. When he comes to her place, he loses his last illusion ; she is a spy and has betrayed him. He is arrested and tortured, but the chief of police offers to let him live provided he signs a declaration that he approves of the new government. He refuses and is shot " while attempting to escape. "

Instead of saving his country, as he thought himself fit to do, the professor leads it to catastrophe, mainly because he deals with problems in the abstract and is neither aware of political realities nor of human motives. He is guided by principles which he has never had the opportunity to test ; he is bewildered when he is made to face the complexity of human nature and discovers in man an inclination to evil, which he had never suspected or had ignored. His innocence is the innocence of the man who has never suffered and never come into contact with suffering humanity. " If you had eyes, " Jinkerman tells him, " you might see who your real

supporters are. It is a whole class whose existence and life you may theorize about but have never understood. You talk pedantically of the state as though it were a sum of individuals. You have no comprehension of the mass and force represented by these individuals in their collective groups."<sup>1</sup> The professor is indeed convinced that his countrymen are enlightened individuals, and he goes so far as to give the fascists arguments in favour of their nationalism. "The polis," he tells his students, "was an enclosure, a safety zone, or outpost against what to the Greeks (and in a very real sense their view was correct) was actually the barbarism of others who were outside this on the whole liberal organization." (p. 20) But there is no enclosed space in Europe, his son tells him. "The enemies of democracy are in control of our democracies, the enemies of the people rule, flatter and bribe the people; our barbarians are both inside and outside our imagined defences. And you, my father, with all your wisdom, sympathy and culture are, however little you may like the idea, helping to destroy us." (p. 22) However, the professor is determined to show the same tolerance and equanimity towards all political parties. "He believed firmly in the maxim that complete understanding would imply complete forgiveness." (p. 30) When he is in the wood with Clara, he overhears a conversation between his son and the latter's fiancée; he does not understand their despair, his son's assertion that it is impossible to love wholeheartedly when one is forced to desperate political action to preserve the dignity of life. "Our job is to destroy before we are destroyed ourselves," the son says, "and we must hate so that there may be a world for love." (pp. 87-88) Though intelligent and full of good will, the professor is as incompetent as the other members of the government, because he has always lived in a world of ideas and is unaware of evil. Moreover, his ideals are the product of a stable and secure civilization, but they are unattainable in a confused and troubled society in which the will to evil predominates; they cannot be understood by people who are either afraid or angry and find them irrelevant. The novel illustrates the collapse of liberalism and its failure to offer a definite and uncompromising solution in a period of crisis. Above all, it emphasizes the incapacity of well-meaning liberal statesmen, who, blinded by their traditions or their abstract notion

<sup>1</sup> REX WARNER, *The Professor*, London, 1946, p. 167.

of humanity, refuse to grasp the real significance of the symptoms of violence they witness. It seems that everyone in the country except the professor knows what they signify: even when Julius Vander, who used to be a humanist like himself and has become a leader of the National Legion, makes clear to him the real aims of fascism, the professor is unable to visualize the consequences of a fascist *coup d'état*. He disregards Jinkerman's warning against his devotion to abstract justice and ruins the country for the sake of a principle which has lost all meaning in the face of ruthless violence.

Julius Vander's explanation of fascism throws light on the motives which impel men to use violence and to destroy life in a frantic fit of self-assertion; it suggests that evil coexists with good in human nature and sometimes gets the upper hand when man is hopeless and can foresee no alleviation of his misery. When the professor tells Julius that the fascists claim to form a party that will restore the old morality in its original purity, the latter impatiently points to the bare facts of fascism:

Perhaps it has escaped your notice . . . that their morality, 'in its practical application,' . . . consists in beating or otherwise torturing to death people whom they happen, for one reason or another, to dislike; in deliberately distorting the truth; in burning books and pictures; and—what is more important—in doing all this with a profound sense of spiritual exaltation. . . . Your philosophical apparatus is too rigid, your practical experience is too narrow for you to be able to grasp the exceedingly important fact that, although the man in the street pays lip service to your ethical ideals and even shows a hangdog respect for your classical scholarship, in his real being he hates, fears, despises, and detests the one and the other. (pp. 108-9)

According to Julius, only self-preservation, lust for life, fear and hatred are real to most people, while the ethical ideals advocated by the professor constitute an artificial morality designed to keep people in their right places. The morality upheld by fascism is older and more vital; it appeals to emotions and dark forces which the artificial morality has hypocritically oppressed:

For we appeal not to the intellect or even to immediate self-interest, but to the dark, unsatisfied and raging impulses of the real man. It is we who are, in a psychological sense, the liberators. The only freedom that you offer is

economic freedom, a barren and dusty slogan which no one who is not an intellectual even understands. (p. 119)

His arguments are presented so convincingly that the whole passage almost sounds like an apology of fascism. In fact, it discloses an aspect of human nature which the supporters of liberalism or democracy, who naturally believe in man, are afraid to acknowledge. It is this aspect which Julius cynically extols when he defiantly formulates their ends: "For the leaders adventure, pride and power: for the slaves what they most want, and what you have denied them, absolute certainty, the demand for complete obedience, and the hope of booty." (p. 121)

The fiancée of the professor's son commits suicide not only because she is humiliated at the treatment she has received, but because she finds that the son is right, that normal human relationships are impossible in a world torn by violence and hatred:

My dreams were all the time false and by dreaming them so constantly, I have made myself unfit for life. ... The point is that in the midst of so much evil there can be no good. Even to dream of love in such a world is guilty. What is needed is a surgeon and, if not that, a destroyer. (pp. 155-6)

As the son points out to his father, two worlds are at war, a party of hatred and a party of love, but the professor still believes in the native goodness of man and asserts that the idea of democracy, of justice and legality is more important than emotions. He witnesses the rapid and complete collapse of the country's democratic defences, the destruction of its cultural inheritance, and he finds that he is himself thrown upon his own resources, confronted with a catastrophe whose full consequences he does not yet grasp. "The historical parallels failed to stir his mind: the actual process of life differed too remarkably from recorded history, and no imaginative insight could bridge the gulf between the living and the dead." (p. 202) When he comes to the cobbler's, Jinkerman's father, the latter reproaches him with arrogating to himself a detachment of which only God is capable. "For you, in your detachment, endeavour to legislate for the abstract man. What a terrible insult to the real living tortured men and women! What a denial of God! What a mutilation of yourself!" (p. 225) Julius had told the professor that men only unite and feel like brothers

when they are threatened from the outside. Now the cobbler tells him that love is what we feel for our fellow-men in misery and in terror. He also believes in the reality of evil, but to him it is a necessary condition to attain God. Evil and pain spring from the soul of man, and it is wrong to pretend detachment from them: "[Damnation] is the attempt to gloss over the truth that man's life is infinitely wretched." (p. 224) Life is a constant struggle between good and evil, and only by suffering does one feel part of the living world. The cobbler really loved his wife for the first time when he saw in her what is common to all men, "what [is] mortal, corruptible, full of pain and evil." Now he exalts suffering and death, and shortly before he dies, he appeals to God to make men fully realize that their misery is inevitable and that life only breeds sin and death:

Teach us, Love, not to shrink back in horror from the full beastliness of man. His body made to rot and stink, his soul tortured by unrecognized fears, mistaken ambitions, envies, and delusive lusts, help us none the less, Love, to see him as the most abject thing in nature, and most abject, most truly pitiable, when most proud. Let the sufferers to-day exult in the communion of their sufferings, in the startling revelation of their instability. (p. 235)

The novel is very pessimistic. The professor is made to experience the evil and pain which in their different ways Julius Vander, the son's fiancée and the cobbler have described, the first by exalting them, the second in despair, and the third by making them incentives to the pity and love of God. The professor revolts against the exaltation of suffering as well as against the resigned acceptance of it. He is forced to acknowledge the reality of evil and eventually sees his son, Jinkerman and their organization "as the only possible defenders not only of his own safety but of the idea of humanity and of the text of Homer." (p. 268) Though he has always regarded the Revolution with the utmost distaste, he becomes convinced that this is the only way for his country to recover its political independence. His own imprisonment and death symbolize the destruction of his liberal ideals. Love, which in Warner's novels is an essential means of assuring the continuity of "natural life," is violated by the rape of the son's fiancée and by the betrayal of Clara. Man sins against it in his craving for power, when he derives a sense of elation from the



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manipulation of powerful machines which subdue great masses of men. When the fascists invade the country in an interminable and deafening procession of aeroplanes, the professor thinks of this mass of metal tyrannizing over flesh and blood. He reflects that they were made by men and are controlled by human hands, and he sees them "as though they were the fierce spots of some immense disease, studding the sky and infecting the earth with fever." (p. 240)

The anonymity of the characters, the little we know about them, the mass of powerless human beings crushed by a minority determined to impose its rule by force and cruelty, sharpen Warner's vision of an impersonal, mechanical and pitiless world suddenly immersed in a long and oppressive night. The novel is an answer to the well-meaning and over-confident people who wonder how such disaster can ever come to pass; it is also a warning to the supporters of democracy who are so intent on serving an idea that they become blind to the irrational and unforeseeable urges which sometimes arise in men and impel them to act without regard for other human beings. The most dangerous failing of humanistic idealists is their unawareness of the real nature of life, of its mixture of good and evil, as well as a sort of complacent conviction that because they strive after lofty ideals, no evil can occur through them. In fact, their ignorance of evil or their indifference to it so long as they are not made personally to feel its impact, and their estrangement from suffering men and women, make them partly responsible for the destruction of the very ideals they mean to uphold.

*The Professor* describes the breakdown of liberalism and the dilemma of those liberal statesmen who, between the Wars, were caught between the pressures of Left-wing and Right-wing politics and reduced to powerlessness by their inability to realize that the circumstances called for an uncompromising attitude. In the name of liberty and tolerance they opposed a Left-wing Revolution and refused to take effective measures to check the rise of fascism. Like Orwell, Warner does not question the integrity of the liberal upper classes but shows them giving in to fascism, not because they are traitors, but because they are unaware of its real nature. Liberalism, Warner suggests, cannot cope with the political crises of the decade, because it deliberately ignores aspects of human nature which fascist and Nazi movements exalt. The professor

is always talking of the *idea*<sup>1</sup> of Democracy, the *idea*<sup>1</sup> of Justice and Legality, but he is powerless to make them prevail in actual life. That is why the fascist, Julius Vander, sounds more convincing than the professor, because the former talks about men in the flesh and knows how to appeal to the worst in them. The cobbler tells the professor: "I believe that you and your philosophy are in the long run more dangerous and more devastating than either war or poverty." (p. 213) This turns out to be true, if only because, by acting in accordance with his philosophy, the professor is partly responsible for war, poverty and tyranny. To his theoretical and so ineffectual humanism, Warner opposes a form of humanism based on a more realistic conception of man, on awareness of good *and* evil in human nature, and on the belief that each individual is part of the living world. He does not countenance the cobbler's assertion that "suffering is our atmosphere, and death is what we were born for," (p. 226) but he agrees that one must fear "the incapacity to feel compassion for the infinite suffering of the living . . . to lose the sense of one's unity with the living, to lose the power of love, how terrible that is!" (pp. 225-6) The professor merges into the living world when he refuses to support a regime of evil and death. Evil triumphs, and he knows that he has no chance of being saved, but he is confident that, for all its imperfections, life is always worth living.

Warner never makes one nation or one group of people responsible for fascism, and he refuses to assert with righteous indignation that "It can't happen here":

We have no right to disown our own shame in the up-bringing of the beast from whom we have so lately been delivered. There was no country in Europe without its fascist party, and this at a time before the label appeared likely to prove safe or profitable.<sup>2</sup>

Two forces stimulate men to action: will-to-power and love. When the former is glorified, it is usually at the expense of the latter, which is then sinned against and forgotten. Between the Wars some countries seemed more directly guilty of crimes against humanity, but all the nations which became involved in the Second

<sup>1</sup> My italics.

<sup>2</sup> Rex WARNER, *The Cult of Power*, London, 1946, p. 142.

World War tended to justify violence and destruction. In *The Aerodrome* (1941) Warner shows that this state of mind could take root even in a country like Britain with its tradition of gentleness and respect for the individual. The novel is purposely set in peace-time England in order to emphasize the dangers of an attitude to life which exercised such powerful attraction on many people. Why were men so fascinated by a doctrine of action and force which made them willing to sacrifice all personal relationships to it and even to destroy life? Warner attempts to throw light on the mood which gave rise to fascism, again stressing the failure of traditional authorities to realize that men were threatened with destruction and to provide them with a reliable alternative.

A military aerodrome is established near a small village. The pilots are encouraged to behave irresponsibly when they are off duty, but they are required to be efficient and precise in their work. They are advised to be cynical in their dealings with the villagers and to disregard the traditional institutions of village life; religion must be considered as mere superstition; they are asked to break off with their parents "who have served in most cases as channels or conduits through which [they] have all in varying degrees been infected with the stupidity, the ugliness, and the servility of historical tradition."<sup>1</sup> Love is reduced to physical pleasure without tenderness or sense of responsibility towards the woman. Above all "No airman is to be the father of a child," (p. 198) and "marriage" is, like "parenthood," "ownership" and "locality," a word used by "those who stick in the mud of the past to form the fresh deposit of the future." (p. 195) Sexual intercourse is encouraged, but the airman should see to it that he is not the one who suffers from his relationship with a woman. The purpose of this liberation from traditional morality and of the strict discipline imposed on the airmen in their work, is to form "a new and more adequate race of men. . . . This discipline has one aim, the acquisition of power, and by power—freedom." (pp. 206-7) The pilots completely disrupt the life of the village:

There had been a time . . . when the authority of squire and parson in the village had been absolute, and had been wisely and tenderly exercised. . . . Now the very presence of the Aerodrome on the hill, the very sound and sight of

<sup>1</sup> Rex WARNER, *The Aerodrome*, London, 1946, p. 196.



the machines crossing and recrossing our valley, seemed somehow to have dissipated the cohesion of our village and to have set up a standing threat to our regime. (p. 82)

A flight-lieutenant, who has become the friend of the Rector's son and has always behaved with the utmost irresponsibility and disrespect for the rules of life in the village, kills the Rector accidentally and remains quite indifferent to his deed. He is appointed by the Air Vice-Marshal to officiate in place of the dead Rector. The Air Vice-Marshal attends the funeral and announces in church that the village is requisitioned by the Air Force and that the villagers who are competent enough will be employed at the Aerodrome. The house and land of the Squire are also forfeited to the government, which hastens the Squire's death. But although their lives are so much upset, and though most of them cannot adapt themselves to the kind of work the Aerodrome has to offer, the villagers do not protest, not even when the Air Vice-Marshal kills the Squire's sister in church to prevent her from provoking a riot. The villagers are dissatisfied with the dictatorship exercised by the Air Vice-Marshal, but they have "no sense of direction, no confidence, no initiative." (p. 219) The younger and more ambitious among them show a rather unhealthy admiration for the display of force and organization of the airmen. To the latter, "the action of the Air Vice-Marshal in shooting a woman was a source of considerable amusement." (p. 26)

The deterioration of public life in the village has its counterpart in the life of individuals. The village authorities, who have always stood as symbols of the traditions they upheld, have all had a confused and unhappy life. At first the disclosure of their inefficiency and helplessness contrasts unfavourably with the purposiveness of the airmen. On Roy's twenty-first birthday the Rector tells him that he is not really his son, without saying who his real parents are. Coming home late that night, Roy overhears the Rector's confession and gathers that the latter hasn't told him the whole truth about his birth. He also hears that before his marriage the Rector killed his best friend by cutting the rope that was holding him when they were ascending a mountain together. The friend was in love with the Rector's future wife. He didn't die, however,—actually, he is the Air Vice-Marshal—though the

Rector never knew this and spent the rest of his life torturing himself with useless reproach and deceiving everyone around him. When the Squire dies, Roy witnesses a scene of hatred between him and his sister; yet he had always thought they were united by a strong mutual affection. "They had been symbols to me of security and peace; but I had learnt that they could represent neither of these qualities. What I had thought to be solid, rounded, and entire, now seemed to melt into frightful shapes of mist, to dissolve into intricacies wherein I was lost as though I had never been." (p. 135) Confused by what he has learned and disappointed by the irresolute attitude of the villagers, Roy decides to enlist in the Air Force. The rest of the novel is full of revelations, coincidences, *coups de théâtre*, which convince Roy that the people he used to admire and love are corrupt. He marries a girl who is supposed to be his sister. She deceives him with the flight-lieutenant, who soon abandons her. She becomes very ill when she hears that Roy is her brother, which in fact he isn't; they hear later that he is really the son of the Air Vice-Marshal. Meanwhile, the flight-lieutenant starts taking his role as a clergyman seriously. He falls in love with Eustasia, who prefers Roy and has an affair with him. When she is pregnant, he realizes that his career is at an end. But she runs away with the flight-lieutenant, who happens to be Roy's half-brother, the son of the Squire's sister and of the Air Vice-Marshal. They are killed in an accident provoked by the police acting on the orders of the Air Vice-Marshal, who in this way hopes to save Roy's career. But the latter is now horrified at the inhumanity of the Air Vice-Marshal's aims and determined to leave the Air Force, although he knows that his father will kill him rather than let him resign. Roy is saved by the Air Vice-Marshal's death; the latter is killed by accident in an aeroplane which the flight-lieutenant had sabotaged before attempting to escape.

These events are described with deliberate coldness as the ineluctable consequences of the characters' confusion, weakness and helplessness. The latter lead frustrated lives and make people around them unhappy because of their unflinching respect for conventions which, in view of their conduct, are necessarily meaningless. In contrast with their hypocrisy and unreliability the Air Vice-Marshal appears to Roy as a liberator who could regenerate life and infuse it with a new spirit:

'I should like you to understand,' he would say, 'that it is by no means sufficient to blame society for its inefficiency, its waste, its stupidity. These are merely symptoms. It is against the souls of the people themselves that we are fighting. It is each and every one of their ideas that we must detest. Think of them as earthbound, grovelling from one piece of mud to another, and feebly imagining distinctions between the two, incapable of envisaging a distant objective, tied up for ever in their miserable and unimportant histories, indeed in the whole wretched and blind history of man on earth.' (pp. 246-7)

Soon, Roy looks upon all those who do not belong to their organization as aimless people unfit for rule. To his guardians, who have broken down his sense of security by raising doubts in his mind as to his own identity, and have proved the futility of their standards by disclosing the muddle of their life, he opposes the Air Vice-Marshal, who seems so well equipped to take over the direction of the country and purge it of inefficiency and stupidity. In the Air Force are people who enjoy a sense of power because they manipulate the most powerful machines invented by man and feel that, because of their discipline, their efficiency, and their will, they are entitled to assume power over people whom they think incompetent and corrupt, and from whom they feel completely cut off. They find it natural to aim at nothing less than "to assume the whole authority by which men [live]." (p. 248) Yet, the hard and masterly structure of their institution is not without flaws. Whereas the airmen are proud of the supremacy of their organization as a whole, they are made to doubt their own superiority when they watch a demonstration of aeroplanes which are not piloted by men but controlled by wireless, and they realize the limitations of their own usefulness. Moreover, some of them, Roy and the flight-lieutenant in particular, start questioning the value of their aims when they see that these also entail the perpetration of crimes and cold-hearted personal relationships. Roy, who really loves Bess, becomes sorry for the wrong he has done to Eustasia and for the irresponsibility with which he has treated her:

Now I began for the first time to wonder what was the point of our tremendous programme, what lasting satisfaction was to be obtained from the acquisition of power over men's lives, what were the precise qualities of the new race of men which we designed to promote and for which we were

asked to sacrifice what had already begun to appear to me something of importance. (p. 275)

In the end, Roy becomes convinced that their organization is inhuman and stifles life, that far from being an expression of its nobility and grandeur, it denies life and its complexity, and confines it to the single endeavour to achieve the Air Vice-Marshal's ambition. He sees that there is more life in the despair, perplexity, and disappointment of some villagers than in the efficiency and self-confidence of the airmen, that the very vagueness of the villagers' life leaves room for opportunity and adventure and is only a sign of its immensity.

The fumbling conventions that had centred around church, manor, and public-house had been the efforts of generations of the dead to establish some basis of security in the middle of a mystery which to many of them had been delightful as well as startling. We in the Air Force had escaped from but not solved the mystery. We had secured ease for ourselves, discipline, and satisfaction. We had abolished inefficiency, hypocrisy, and the fortunes of the irresolute or the remorseful mind; but we had destroyed also the spirit of adventure, inquiry, the sweet and terrifying sympathy of love that can acknowledge mystery, danger, and dependence. (p. 289)

To the Air Vice-Marshal's will-to-power Warner opposes tolerance and the fullness of an existence lived in harmony with man's nature. The Vice-Marshal himself is not above the motives which disturb ordinary men and sometimes make their life so distressing. His strength springs as much from his determination to revenge himself on men as from a desire to reform the world; these degenerate into blind obstinacy, cruelty and crime when he meets with obstacles. His personal ambition, which arrogantly thrives on other people's unhappiness, is not more admirable than the Rector's sense of guilt concealed under a veil of extreme respectability. When he dies, the organization which he had built up and to which he had devoted his life, becomes ineffectual, at least as an institution capable of assuming the direction of the country, because its former efficiency was not the result of a disinterested concern for the welfare of the people but rested entirely on discipline, callousness and pride. With the death of their leader, the

airmen lose their ultimate purpose, for they were to be mere instruments in the fulfilment of his mission.

Warner looks at fascism from the inside; he presents it as a state of mind which develops in the individual who is disgusted at the chaos of his social environment, moved by insecurity and fear, and determined to remedy the disintegration of the group and the collapse of individual certainty. As he explains in *The Cult of Power*, the fascist is to begin with a social anarchist "asserting himself against general standards that seem too weak to be able to restrain him." (p. 11) He becomes so far involved in his process of destruction, and is so elated by the sense of power it gives him, that when all the old values are destroyed, there is no way out for him but to declare that the self-assertion, violence and brutality he has shown through the process are the normal attributes of the superhuman power he arrogates to himself in order to replace the power of God, which he has discredited. Characteristically, Warner never refers to economic reasons in describing fascism: it is advocated by power-hungry individuals and supported by large numbers of people because "it [attempts] at a low level to reconstruct a general system of belief to replace the vagueness and uncertainties of unregulated liberalism." (p. 131) *The Aerodrome* takes place in a small village whose social structure is far from representative of modern society; it is the last place where one would expect fascism to take root. By thus dissociating fascism from the particular circumstances which gave rise to it on the Continent, Warner concentrates on the essence of what is to him a moral disease. Moreover, it is in a small English village that one is most likely to find the values with which this moral disease can be contrasted. These values sound commonplace enough. Yet, they have kept men going for generations, and the denial of them has usually led to catastrophe: they are faith, love, hope, and above all acceptance of life as it is with its joys and sufferings.

In *Men of Stones* (1949) as in *The Aerodrome* Warner attempts to account for the insane ambition of modern political leaders. They are usually deeply disillusioned with human nature, then urged to improve it and to transcend other men because they feel different from the crowd and superior to it. Warner's heroes are also obsessed with a desire to escape from the bondage of time



and to be free of the feelings and emotions which bind ordinary human beings to one another. Even in his first novel, *The Wild Goose Chase*, George finds on coming to the city that he cannot rely on the ordinary notions of time and space. In the country people still go by the sun, but in the city time depends on each individual, because the natural order of things has been abolished and man is left to choose his own order. In *The Aerodrome* this is what the Air Vice-Marshal aims at: to be free from time, from the past and its paralysing influence and to be powerful and independent enough to shape his own future. Urging Roy to follow him to the end, he draws his attention to the mess the Squire and the Rector have made of their lives:

What a record of confusion, deception, rankling hatred, low aims, indecision! One is stained by any contact with such people. Can you not see . . . what I mean when I urge you to escape from all this, to escape from time and its bondage, to construct around you in your brief existence something that is guided by your own will, not forced upon you by past accidents, something of clarity, independence and beauty?<sup>1</sup>

In *Men of Stones* the governor of the prison, who wants nothing less than to be God, kills his father to make sure that he has severed all links with the past: "Fundamentally, the killing of the father symbolizes absolute responsibility and the ambition towards the superhuman. By dissolving the most obvious links between oneself and the generations which have gone before, one is, as it were, asserting one's free and chosen existence. One is creating oneself again." (p. 125) Dictators are often idealists to begin with, individuals who want to set up a perfect organization through which they hope to govern men for their own good, even against their will. But they are inevitably corrupted by the sense of power they derive from governing with the efficient means science puts at their disposal. Very soon they seek power for its own sake.

The leader of today must appear to his followers to be something superhuman. That is not the end of it. He must actually *be* superhuman . . . I, who in these modern days, with much greater material resources than have been available before, aim at dominating and redeeming the world, shall be worshipped as a God. (pp. 121-2)

<sup>1</sup> *The Aerodrome*, pp. 327-8.

However, in the end the leaders become the victims of their own inhumanity. Unlike Orwell's dictator, Warner's leaders are usually punished by death. He does not imagine a world in which tyranny could go on forever, because no man is infallible, because there always comes a time when the masses revolt against oppression, and because there is a kind of immanent justice which ultimately defeats those who want to be gods.

*Men of Stones* is Warner's most pessimistic work: for all his wish to express faith in life and in the reality of good, he suggests, perhaps unintentionally, that evil is stronger. In his previous novels man's lust for power did not exceed certain limits and was partly explained by the confusion which had given rise to it. But the Governor of the prison is stimulated by an insane and arrogant desire to be God; he doesn't feel it necessary to justify his ambition, though, like the Air Vice-Marshal, he wants men to believe that they are weak and insecure, because if they are sufficiently aware of their abasement and their isolation, they will want the peace and security that come from a higher will and accept him as their Redeemer. In order to prove to his subordinates that his power is equal to God's, he grants special privileges to some of them and tells them that "it is by grace not by personal merit that the highest happiness is won." (p. 178) When he dies, a new civil war breaks out, and the novel ends with a vision of endless war and destruction. The difference between Marcus, the young survivor, and Warner's other heroes is that the former can never recover a sense of security: whether he lives in a free state or under a system of oppression, he will always feel at the mercy of evil:

My happiness now comes from believing in good, not from disbelieving in evil. And whichever way one looks, one can never believe in security. . . . We are really at the mercy of powers beyond our control and it is good for us to realize this. . . . Wherever I was I should feel the oppression and suffering of which I am a part, and I should also feel my intense happiness in knowing from experience that what is good exists. I should never feel safe. (p. 195)

In spite of Warner's assertion that "love and pity . . . really do exist and, in themselves, cannot be touched at all," (p. 194) the book ends in hopelessness and despair. Warner's rendering of

the modern man's sense of isolation, of his uncertainty and bewilderment in the face of a mysterious authority brings Kafka to mind. However, though most critics insist on his debt to Kafka, I think that, on the whole, Warner has little in common with him. There is something of Kafka's allegorical manner in *The Wild Goose Chase* and *The Aerodrome*. But this is not enough to justify a comparison which may give rise to a misinterpretation of Warner's attitude to life. If Kafka's works have any social or political significance, we must ascribe it to his extraordinary intuition and gift of prophecy; Warner's allegories were written after the events he describes had actually taken place, and he deals with social and political realities. The relationship between the villagers and the town in *The Wild Goose Chase* shows a certain likeness to the relations between the villagers and the officials in Kafka's *The Castle*. However, though George faces in the city powerful and mysterious authorities, who recall these officials, he does not long remain uncertain of their identity. He soon grasps the nature of the king's authority, the limitations of the power exercised by the policemen, and he understands enough of the weakness of the government to devise a plan to overthrow it. A similar comparison has been made between the attitude of the villagers towards authority in *The Aerodrome* and their counterpart in *The Castle*. But contrary to what happens in Kafka's novel, the men in power, i.e., the airmen, are judged and criticized, and many villagers refuse to work at the aerodrome, either because they are not capable of it, or because they disapprove of the institution.

The important difference between Warner and Kafka is that in the latter's novels the holders of authority are indifferent about man, unwilling to assist him or to show him that he is on the right way. Man is alone, and even when he meets people who are prepared to help him, he is sure neither of their motives nor of their sincerity. Supposing even that they are sincere, it doesn't make much difference because they are just as powerless as he is. In Warner's novels man is seldom isolated, or only momentarily so, for Warner insists again and again on the importance of solidarity in human relationships. He also differs from Kafka in his determination to give life a definite meaning. One sometimes gets the impression, particularly in *Why Was I Killed?* (1943) and in *Men of Stones*, that he wants to reassure man at all costs. The

source of the Kafkaesque anguish is that man forever faces an unknown power whose favour he seeks or which he tries to escape, that he never knows what to expect until he finally submits to the arbitrary and is no longer surprised at what happens to him. On the contrary, Warner's heroes fight against an enemy whom they either know or learn to know, and they are also sure of what they must do in order to destroy him. Warner describes a world in process of losing its stability, disintegrating through man's fault. But precisely because men are responsible for the state of the world, it can always be saved by love and compassion. Warner does not merely voice the anguish of modern man; he condemns him for his indiscriminate acceptance of evil.

The message of Warner's political allegories is a moral one: men have the government they deserve and are individually answerable for the kind of leadership they get, for the attitude of their leaders is strongly influenced by their own tolerance, acceptance, or rejection of tyranny. To lack judgment or a sense of responsibility is to contribute to the political confusion of one's country and to encourage an evil form of government. Unfortunately, the individuals who, through their profession or their position in society, can be expected to judge a situation soundly and enlighten the masses are too often blind to the real consequences of political action. In this respect, Warner strongly criticizes liberalism because its supporters defend principles which the majority of people cannot even understand. They defend ideals which to workless and hungry men seem abstract and irrelevant. Moreover, their conviction that men will always answer the call of reason prevents them from realizing the power of evil. In Warner's novels the masses alone can overthrow tyranny. But they are also the brainless multitude, who need absolute certainty and a master whom they can obey.

Ambitious politicians argue that the majority of men need the strong guiding hand of a despot. But Warner's own attitude is ambiguous, for the contempt of these politicians for the masses often seems justified. He warns against the evil nature of their thirst for power and of their desire to transcend the ordinary laws of life in order to replace God, whose prestige they first undermine by calling attention to the confused state of the world.

But he also seems to be fascinated by these men, divided between his admiration for their strength, self-discipline and efficiency, and his horror of their sinister aims and of the means they use to reach them. This ambiguity is most strongly felt in *The Aerodrome* and in *Men of Stones*, for both the Air Vice-Marshal and the Governor are the most intelligent and efficient characters in these novels, and Warner explains only too well why they are fascinated by the exercise of a superhuman power and in their turn fascinate men in search of an ideal. He does not completely destroy the myths they create.

Though Warner insists that the individual shares in the responsibility for the state of the world, he also presents him as a victim of something beyond his control. Indeed, the decline in personal and social morals which indirectly gave rise to fascism, as well as fascism itself, are manifestations of evil as a powerful natural force. Man's dual nature is but a minor expression of a universal dualism: evil and good, power and love, tyranny and compassion, strive for predominance in the world and triumph alternately. That is why there is a certain fatalism in Warner's work in spite of his assertion in his later work that God reassuringly presides over all life and that the vast community of men can bring about the triumph of good. In this respect, the priest's comment in *Why Was I Killed?* is fairly typical:

I can only say that not the simplest question can be fully answered without referring it to the whole visible and invisible world; and this none of us can do. It is impossible for us, with our limited understanding, to justify any evil; and the evils, both of peace and war, are many. We can trace, no doubt, in politics and in economics and in sociology, many of the evils which cause war, and to trace them and cure them is of the utmost importance. But this we can only do with a horizon before our eyes much vaster than men have had hitherto and (though in a sense, it is the same thing) with an attention to detail much more accurate and loving than has been known previously.

If all men could see themselves as this unknown soldier of whom we are speaking, and who has been killed, if they could be aware of the perplexity which he would naturally feel, then they might become conscious of his need and of what I believe to be the will of God.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rex WARNER, *Why Was I Killed?*, London, 1945, pp. 187-8.



Warner urges man to accept life as it is on the ground that all that happens is the will of God and cannot always be understood. Evil belongs to the natural order of things, and it is up to man to yield to it or to reject it. But he can never escape from the natural order, and his attempts to transcend it can only conduce to worse evil and self-destruction. Whatever its shortcomings, life is noble and a source of joy for those who open their eyes to its potential richness and beauty. This is somewhat contradicted by his depressing portrayal of man's behaviour in contemporary society. Moreover, his philosophy of life is not implicit in his novels but expressed in a theoretical manner; his characters seem cold and insensitive, and many of them are also lifeless. We seldom think of them as real human beings, and that is why their inconsistencies, their weaknesses and their failures are hardly acceptable. There is enough action in the novels, but it is too often a substitute for the natural development of life. Warner renders the complexity of existence through a series of entangled and sometimes unlikely situations; he never conveys the subtleties of man's inner life, the diversity of his motives, the intricate interplay of good and evil in his behaviour. His characters are the embodiment of ideas; that is why, however much he may talk about life, he fails to create it.

## ANTHONY POWELL

In everyday life, the participants act their parts without consideration either for suitability of scene or for the words spoken by the rest of the cast: the result is a general tendency for things to be brought to the level of farce even when the theme is serious enough.<sup>1</sup>

Anthony Powell's pre-war novels are often called "Waugh-like" because of their subject and manner. Powell writes with the same detachment as Waugh, and he also has an ear for dialogue. However, as we have seen, the innovator in this field is not Waugh but Firbank, whom Powell always admired and to the revival of whose work he contributed.<sup>2</sup> Powell's early novels show neither Firbank's extravagance nor Waugh's pungency; indeed, he uses their method to produce the opposite effect, i.e., to deflate his characters' experiences. Of the five novels he wrote before the War, three have hardly any plot; they consist of a series of scenes and incidents which recreate life among Chelsea Bohemians and Bloomsbury second-rate intellectuals in the late Twenties. *Afternoon Men* (1931), once described as "the party novel to end all party novels," deals with the love affairs of literary, artistic and professional young men, on no account "Bright Young Things," but rather tired and frustrated survivors of an extravagant generation. *Venusberg* (1932) describes the love affairs of Lushington, a not very competent journalist sent as a foreign correspondent to a small Baltic State. It is full of eccentric figures and parodies the political confusion which prevailed in many small East European States in the Thirties. *Agents and Patients* (1936) deals with cynical semi-intellectuals, who extract all the money they can from an inexperienced and senseless young man who

<sup>1</sup> Anthony POWELL, *A Question of Upbringing*, London, 1952, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> In his introduction to *The Complete Ronald Firbank* (1961) Anthony Powell writes that it was at his suggestion that the publishing firm for which he was working reprinted Firbank in 1949, the date of the first Firbank revival.

"wants to see life." *From a View to a Death* (1933) and *What's Become of Waring* (1939) have a rather more substantial plot and less economical style; both contain elements which point to Powell's post-war novels. The first takes the reader from Chelsea to a country-house and to the world of fox-hunting; it describes the attempt of a painter to marry an upper-class girl and the no less cynical intrigues of her father to have the better of him. In the second of these novels the characters are in search of a mysterious but successful writer who turns out to be a fraud.

In these novels Powell seems to have deliberately set out to expose a way of life which Waugh had to some extent romanticized. There is none of the glamour of Mayfair about his characters; they are mostly upper-middle-class but impecunious, and are to be seen about Soho or at the house of faded hostesses. Everything about them is dingy, shabby and often sordid. *Afternoon Men* starts with Atwater telling Pringle: "'If you pay for this round and give me three-and-ninepence we shall be square.'" <sup>1</sup> This places him immediately for he is always involved in stingy accounts, though as a painter he sells fairly well. Atwater "[is] a weed-looking young man with straw-coloured hair and rather long legs, who [has] failed twice for the Foreign Office" (p. 2) and obtained a job in a museum through influence. Fotheringham is one of the sub-editors of a spiritualist paper: "the aura of journalism's lower slopes [hangs] round him like a vapour." (p. 53) Lushington and Da Costa in *Venusberg* rank a little higher professionally but are not very efficient either. In *Agents and Patients* Chipchase is an art-critic and an amateur psycho-analyst, while Maltravers, who is connected with the film industry, "might have been a better-class gangster figure of any period." <sup>2</sup> They are described as "post-war types, already perhaps a little dated." <sup>2</sup> When the novel opens, they are feeling the effect of the depression. Zouch, the main character in *From a View to a Death*, is a rather different type. He has moved for years among shabby Bohemians, but he has become a successful painter and is ruthlessly cynical in trying to rise into the upper class. Jasper Fosdick is another incompetent left-over from the War, utterly unable to keep a job, while his brother Forquil is a sort of decadent aesthete on whom

<sup>1</sup> Anthony POWELL, *Afternoon Men*. London, 1952, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony POWELL, *Agents and Patients*. London, 1955, p. 2.

"senile decay seemed already to have laid its hands while he was still in the grip of arrested development."<sup>1</sup>

These people are mostly bored, utterly inefficient and unambitious. Party-going and gossip of the most tedious kind are major activities in *Afternoon Men*. Undershaft, a man who has gone to New York, is their favourite topic and is discussed five times in ten pages in approximately the same terms. They all go to a party, uninvited, but drinking or dancing is not more exciting than gossiping and hardly raises their spirits.

'Do you read Bertrand Russell?'

'Why?'

'When I feel hopeless,' she said, 'I read Bertrand Russell.'

'My dear.'

'You know, when he talks about mental adventure. Then I feel re-inspired.'

'Re-inspired to what?'

'Just re-inspired.'

'Do you feel hopeless now?'

'Rather hopeless.'

'Do you really?'

'A bit.'

'Come back with me to my flat,' said Atwater, 'and have a drink there.' (p. 21)

Though he is not particularly attracted to her, Atwater starts an affair with Lola, simply because it seems the normal thing to do. Similarly, Harriet Twining takes Pringle as a lover because she cannot have the man she loves, and Pringle is as good as anyone else. Atwater too is in love with a charming girl, Susan Nunnery, but she doesn't want to fall in love and goes away with a richer man. In *Venusberg* Lucy eventually accepts Lushington because Da Costa is dead, while the more sophisticated women of *Agents and Patients* choose men for their money and their beautiful cars. They make no pretence of being in love. Mrs. Mendoza and Gaston de la Tour d'Argent come together because they recognize in each other a similar inclination for debauchery. Sarah and Maltravers have been married for two years, but they never stop

<sup>1</sup> Anthony POWELL, *From a View to a Death*, London, 1954, p. 41.

quarrelling, and each has love affairs which the other knows about. Chipchase rather enjoys declaring: "I don't pretend that my love affairs are not sordid. They are. They always have been. I like sordid affairs." (p. 1) In *From a View to a Death* Zouch pretends he is in love with Joanna Brandon, a naive, provincial girl who wants to be a highbrow. He persuades her to become his mistress, then proposes to Mary Passenger and advises Joanna to marry the grotesque Jasper Fosdick.

An incredible callousness prevails among the characters. In *Afternoon Men* Pringle takes his friends to the country, where they get as bored as in London. Pringle, who has become Harriet's lover, finds her making love with Barlow and feigns to commit suicide. He undresses on the beach under the eyes of Harriet and Atwater, who find it odd that he has no towel. Yet, it never enters their mind that Pringle might really be upset, and though they no longer see him on the water, they make love and go home quietly. When they find his note saying that he has decided to commit suicide, Atwater merely says that it was a mistake to come and stay with Pringle. Even Barlow, who feels responsible, never suggests warning the village people and fetching a boat to try and save him. They sit down to lunch and tell each other that Pringle has let them down. When the latter turns up in the evening in a fisherman's clothes, the tragedy turns into a grotesque farce, all the more so as it suddenly becomes clear that Pringle could never have committed suicide. They squabble endlessly to decide whether to give the man who saved him ten shillings or a pound, since after all, he "lifted him out of the water." In the end they wake up the exhausted Pringle to make him give the fifteen shillings on which they have compromised.

In *Venusberg* the farce turns into tragedy with the same utter meaninglessness. Political disturbances are caricatured and produce the same effect as the "stage policemen out of a knock-about farce" who invade DaCosta's flat after his death. He and Frau Mavrin are victims of the authorities' refusal to take the situation seriously because the ball, which is the event of the season, is more important. Except as a source of gossip, no one seems to care much about their fate. We never learn what Professor Mavrin feels about it, nor Lushington, who was having an affair with the professor's wife. Lushington can now have Lucy, who was in love with DaCosta, but both are indifferent to what happens.



When Zouch dies in *From a View to a Death*, Mr. Passenger cannot even hide his satisfaction: things have turned out better than he expected when he purposely gave Zouch a dangerous horse to mount. The latter's death "make things easier" for everyone; even Mary, who was engaged to him, doesn't seem unduly upset and arranges to stay with friends who have an eligible son. Unlike Waugh's Bright Young Things, who attempt to ignore death, thereby suggesting an uneasy awareness of its significance, Powell's characters are as insensitive to death as to life. Their existence is absolutely devoid of meaning, and they display their lack of purpose, their inability to live and their indifference in all circumstances. Except in *Agents and Patients*, in which cheerfulness is often associated with mischief-making, they don't even bother to show artificial gaiety or defiance as Waugh's characters do, nor the desire for special popularity which makes, for instance, Henry Green's characters in *Party Going* stick together, though they can hardly bear each other. Powell's characters merely try to avoid loneliness, and anyone is good enough for that purpose. They sometimes take the trouble to assert to each other that they have amusing friends, but their tone is so unconvincing that no one is taken in by what they say, and they are not particularly affected by the scepticism they meet with.

In *Afternoon Men* and *Venusberg* everything the characters say is of a depressing banality, so that the novels themselves tend to be flat and boring. The characters' lives are dreary, dull and completely devoid of glamour. They do whatever most people do when they want to have a good time but don't even pretend that they are enjoying themselves. One is only aware of their promiscuity and of the drunken messiness of their parties. The absurdity and mediocrity of their existence are due to their lack of initiative and their inability to act. They simply allow things to drift and remain unaware of the potentialities and rewards of action. In this they foreshadow the upper-middle-class men of *The Music of Time*, who are without ambition and unaware that they have a task to perform in society. Men like Atwater, Fotheringham, DaCosta or the Fosdick brothers have no sense of responsibility and can never be anything but failures, while Pringle and Zouch, who come from the rising business class, are selfishly ambitious and dishonest. However, they are rather rough creations in contrast with the more complex men of will of Powell's post-war novels.

As Bernard Bergonzi suggests,<sup>1</sup> *Agents and Patients* is hardly more than a farce, but this makes it also more high-spirited than any of Powell's pre-war novels. Chipchase and Maltravers are more enterprising though much more unscrupulous than Powell's earlier heroes; they are also less bored and consequently less boring. Blore-Smith, who is completely ignorant of life and leads a dead, uneventful existence, is their obvious victim. He has much in common with Paul Pennyfeather in *Decline and Fall*, but he is exploited more overtly by people who are more cynical and less considerate than Margot Metroland. They take him to a Berlin reminiscent of Mr. Norris's, but they are naturally blind to the latent tragedy. Maltravers greets the Brownshirts with a sonorous "Heil Hitler" and comments: "'They'll be coming into power soon. . . . Just as well to be on the right side of them.'" (p. 136) This is said with complete unconcern, for he has no idea what the Brownshirts stand for and doesn't care. For all his facetiousness, Maltravers belongs with the agents, people who act but usually do so to exploit others. Agents and patients are the two main types of characters in Powell's novels, the latter being victims of the former. The female characters are usually agents. Susan Nunnery and Harriet in *Afternoon Men*, Mrs. Mendoza, Sarah Maltravers and Pauline de Borodino in *Agents and Patients* are free from any attachment which might in any way make them emotionally dependent on another human being. They are not consciously cruel, only inconsiderate and determined to get all they can out of life. In a way they are less cunning than Waugh's heroines, but like most females in the comedy of manners of the period, they seldom hesitate between money and romance, or else they manage to get both.

Powell's first two novels and *Agents and Patients* parody the life of the typical inter-war hero: the disenchanting Bohemian-intellectual. The author reduces his characters to such nothingness that they can only breed contempt. They are either grotesque or so completely unaware of human values that they never inspire the sympathy or understanding which the disillusioned young can arouse in spite of their extravagance. The sharpness and the economy of Powell's style emphasize the dryness and

<sup>1</sup> Bernard BERGONZI, *Anthony Powell, Writers and their Work Series*, London, 1962, p. 27.

barrenness of the characters' existence. Unlike the heroes of Huxley and Waugh, they are not even humanized by a touch of despair. In *From a View to a Death* the cynicism of the characters is accounted for, but it doesn't make them more attractive. On the contrary, it shows to what length they are prepared to go in order to gratify their selfishness. Mr. Passenger, whose family has steadily declined for several generations, is ruthlessly determined to preserve it from intrusion and to protect his estate from any trespassing. The means he uses to get the better of Major Fosdick and Zouch are cruel, though disguised as tolerance and generosity. In fact, feelings and human relationships have no place at all in his life, and he is much more cunning than Zouch in making his will prevail. His daughter Betty, who experiences a sort of perverse pleasure in thwarting him, has much in common with him. From the start she sees through Zouch, and she invites Joanna Brandon to stay at Passenger Court for the same reason as her father offers Zouch to mount Creditor, i.e., in the hope that she will make a mistake that will discredit her. In spite of the satisfaction she gets out of shocking people, as when she becomes engaged to Torquil Fosdick, she knows well enough that there are limits she mustn't overstep. Like Mr. Passenger, Zouch considers himself as an "Uebermensch," "treating life as a sort of quick-lunch counter where you helped yourself and all the snacks were free." (p. 12) He realizes that Mr. Passenger is his match, but he is too selfish and too sure of himself to realize how much he is disliked by him. Will-to-power is the chief motive of the two men. In his endeavour to ascend the social scale, Zouch curiously resembles Widmerpool, the climber in *The Music of Time*. Like him, he is attached to form and resents the fact that Betty Passenger doesn't behave as people of her class are expected to. Also, there is in him a mixture of self-assurance and vulnerability which provokes Mr. Passenger to action. However, Zouch is himself very unpleasant. On the whole the atmosphere of frustration and dissatisfaction which pervades the novel is irritating and far too suggestive of mediocrity and dishonesty to seem distressing, which of course answers the author's aim.

From his early work onwards Powell seems to have been preoccupied with will-to-power as an important motive of action. For instance, Barlow and Atwater are always trying to prevail upon Pringle to make him do things he doesn't want to do, while

Chipchase and Maltravers wholeheartedly enjoy their hold over Blore-Smith. Zouch and Mr. Passenger are both greedy of power; the fact that Powell describes Zouch as a "fair English equivalent of the Teutonic ideal of the Uebermensch" may suggest that he considers will-to-power the chief human motive in the social and political arena of the period; in the inevitable contest between ambitious men the most cunning and cruel usually wins. Again, Betty Passenger hits the mark when she tells Zouch ironically that her father's cruelty is pathological.

At the end of *What's Become of Waring*, the narrator, who is writing on Stendhal, makes a comparison between the latter and the characters in the novel, suggesting that they all want power: "It was power Hugh wanted. Everybody wanted power. Bernard wanted power. Roberta wanted power. . . . Was money power? . . . T.T. Waring. He wanted power more than any of them." (pp. 235-6) However, except for T.T. Waring, who may derive a sense of power from the fact that his faked travel books have a tremendous success with the public, it isn't made clear at all that the other characters' chief motive is a desire for power, unless we equate will-to-power with selfishness. As W.D. Quesenbery remarks in an article on *The Music of Time*,<sup>1</sup> the dominant element in *What's Become of Waring* is chance, which together with will, is fundamental to Powell's view of life. Fortune-tellers, coincidence, chance acquaintanceships and meetings eventually lead to the discovery of T.T. Waring's true identity. The analogy with Powell's post-war work is further suggested by the introduction of a first person narrator, who plays a part similar to that of Nicholas Jenkins in *The Music of Time*. There is little to say about Powell's last pre-war novel: the impact of the mysterious T.T. Waring on the public recalls the impact of T.E. Lawrence on the imagination of a whole generation, though Waring in an impostor and far from being an idealist; his exposure by Hudson, who was going to write a book on his life and is very upset by the discovery of his identity, merely points to the essential mediocrity of men's lives and to their delusive romanticism.

Though it is sometimes preferred to *The Music of Time*, Powell's pre-war work is a limited achievement. *Venusberg* and

<sup>1</sup> W.D. QUESENBERRY, "Anthony Powell: The Anatomy of Decay," *Critique*, VII, 1 (Spring 1964), 5-26.

*What's Become of Waring* are rather thin novels. *Afternoon Men* remains the best because of its detached, yet contemptuously ironic, portrayal of an attitude and a way of life which seemed glamorous because fashionable, but were merely dull and slightly nauseating. *Agents and Patients* is funnier but also more farcical. *From A View to a Death* combines Powell's talent for creating eccentric characters with a deeper insight into human motives. At the same time, the contest between an unscrupulous upper-class man and a cynical ambitious young painter is a striking dramatization of class antagonism in the Thirties and forebodes the major theme of *The Music of Time*.

Among the post-war novels inspired by the inter-war period Powell's *The Music of Time* is probably one of the most ambitious. Nine instalments out of the twelve projected have so far been published<sup>1</sup>: the first appeared in 1951, while the latest came out in 1968. This retrospective view of English society at a significant period of its history brings out the continuity of the English novelists' vision of the decline of England and its ruling class. Powell takes up more or less where Ford Madox Ford had left off in his tetralogy about the First World War. Tietjens's comment that "If a ruling class loses the capacity to rule—or the desire!—it should abdicate from its privileges and get underground"<sup>2</sup> is only too well illustrated by Stringham, Powell's anti-hero, who in the Second World War would rather be a mess waiter than sit as an equal with a captain rising from the lower classes. The author's approach is clearly similar to that of Ford and of Waugh in *The Sword of Honour*, who both show the decline of the aristocracy consummated by war, the former prophetically, the latter as a fact. But in spite of this similarity to their point of view, Powell's method of presentation is very different from his predecessors'.

Powell's chronicle covers the period from the end of the First World War to the end of the Second. Each novel illuminates a different phase in the evolution of English society through a number of characters whose individual behaviour contributes to

<sup>1</sup> Anthony POWELL, *The Music of Time*, including: *A Question of Upbringing* (see p. 499, note 1), *A Buyer's Market*, 1952, *The Acceptance World*, 1955, *At Lady Molly's*, 1957, *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*, 1960, *The Kindly Ones*, 1962, *The Valley of Bones*, 1964, *The Soldier's Art*, 1966, *The Military Philosophers*, 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Ford Madox FORD, *Last Post*, p. 185.



the creation of new social patterns. In each phase people of all kinds move temporarily around the main characters, who epitomize the major trends of social change. They add to the web of experience and incident in which, with the passing of time, the narrator, Nicholas Jenkins, discerns a significant design. However, at the moment they are supposed to take place events are recorded passively with no special meaning attached to them. This is particularly true in the early instalments, in which the narrator is so self-effacing as to confine the narrative to a very superficial level and to give an impression of mediocrity. For he is the pivot-man of the sequence since the choice of remembered experience lies with him, and his appreciation of the significance of events determines the character of the novels. At the beginning of the sequence he describes people's behaviour with hardly any understanding of it; much importance is attached to the characters' movements or actions, but their motives are curiously simplified and very little is said about their feelings. As time goes on and the narrator becomes more mature, his understanding deepens, and his own values and sympathies are more sharply defined. But his view of the world around him remains a surface one, which is a weakness in a *roman-fleuve* of this kind.

The originality (and main defect) of the sequence lies in the author's attempt to combine the lightness of social comedy with the depth and scope of a socio-historical fresco. He hopes to convey this depth through a certain continuity in the attitude of the main characters, which in retrospect will make their actions significant. At the same time, through his external approach and passive recording of incident, he stresses the absurdity of life and its unexpected or incomprehensible developments. In an often-quoted passage at the beginning of *A Question of Upbringing* Powell gives the genesis of the sequence by comparing the attitude of human beings in life to that of the Seasons in a painting by Poussin :

The image of Time brought thoughts of mortality : of human beings, facing outward like the Seasons, moving hand in hand in intricate measure : stepping slowly, methodically, sometimes a trifle awkwardly, in evolutions that take recognizable shape ; or breaking into seemingly meaningless gyrations, while partners disappear only to reappear again, once more giving pattern to the spectacle : unable to control the melody, unable, perhaps, to control the steps of the dance. (p. 2)

Jenkins's occasional comments on the characters' approach to life further stress the awkwardness and unpredictability of their behaviour and shed light on the import of the social comedy. However, the variety of incidents, the farcical and the grotesque that impinge frequently on the serious or even the tragic, though illustrative of the agitation and diversity of life, are too trivial to account for a character's development, let alone to explain the alteration of social patterns. For instance, some of Widmerpool's features or some incidents in his life are recalled at intervals to remind the reader of his inadequacy in social or personal relationships: his unusual overcoat, Barbara Goring pouring sugar over his head at a ball, or his disastrous engagement to Mrs. Haycock. The significance of these incidents is overrated by the narrator, and his insistence on them is as much a sign of his own snobbery as a convincing evidence of Widmerpool's unsuitability for life in society.

Powell describes a society in transition, one in which new men, mostly from the lower-middle class, take the lead and provoke a change with little resistance from the traditional élite. Social and historical events give them an opportunity for action and advancement. These events are never described: the Depression, the Spanish Civil War, Hitler's coming to power, these are only referred to casually, though they also test the characters' response to public life and their sense of responsibility, and ultimately influence the social configuration emerging from the characters' reaction to the test. Even the Second World War takes place off-stage, its atrocities being reported, while the "Military Philosophers," Jenkins's colleagues and superiors at the War Office and the representatives of the Allied Armies in London, are either involved in petty administrative tasks, or are in a position to make decisions which send other people to a useless death. Here again it is the trivial and anecdotal aspects of life which are emphasized in an attempt to show how inconsistent the characters' attitude is with the momentous situation in which they are involved.

The disintegration of the Establishment and the corrupting influence of its decline on the whole of English society are shown through the individual movements of the characters on the social scene and some of its peripheral areas. Some of these spheres, like politics and personal relationships, tend to overlap when the characters use their power in one of them to succeed in the other.

The prevailing motives are self-interest, lust for money and power. Men like Sillery, the Oxford Don, or the writer St John Clarke are always seen courting the powerful; they adhere to the fashionable political party and, while socially on the Right, veer increasingly to the Left in their political attitude. In fact, all politicians or people interested in politics are presented as opportunists; even Quiggin, the apparently sincere and militant marxist, chooses his friends and relations according to their fortune and rank. Together with Widmerpool, Miss Weedon and Matilda Moreland, he is an outsider who tries to reach the higher spheres of society and to exercise influence in private as well as in public life.

It appears fairly early in the sequence that the characters belong to two different categories roughly defined by social status, which always happens to coincide either with a particular bluntness, or with sensitivity, to the art of living. Arthur Mizener<sup>1</sup> appropriately described Powell's characters as either men of will, whose prototype is Widmerpool, or men of imagination, whose typical representative is Stringham. Occasionally, adaptable men like the painter Barnby bridge the gap between the two categories, but on the whole, the characters' behaviour is determined either by will-to-power, among lower-middle-class people, or by imagination and sensibility, mostly to be found among the upper classes. Though it takes Jenkins some time to become fully aware of the scope of Widmerpool's ambition, it is evident from the beginning of the sequence that the latter is determined to "get ahead" and will not rest until he has reached the top. On the other hand, Stringham, the product of a traditional and refined art of living, lacks guidance and finally drifts into alcoholism.

The antithesis Widmerpool/Stringham symbolizes the social upheavals of the Thirties with the lower-middle-class seriously striving for power, and the upper classes playfully and irresponsibly allowing themselves to be defeated. Once after a party Widmerpool and Stringham start wrestling, the former seriously, as always, the latter laughing so much that he becomes quite powerless.

I was thinking, Jenkins writes, . . . of how strange a thing it was that I myself should have been engaged in a physical

<sup>1</sup> Arthur MIZENER, "A Dance to the Music of Time: The Novels of Anthony Powell." *The Kenyon Review*, XII, 1 (Winter 1960), 82.

conflict designed to restrict Stringham's movements: a conflict in which the moving spirit had been Widmerpool. That suggested a whole social upheaval: a positively cosmic change in life's system. Widmerpool, once so derided by all of us, had become in some mysterious manner a person of authority. Now, in a sense, it was he who derided us.<sup>1</sup>

Jenkins's surprise seems due at first to his lack of perceptiveness. But the "mysterious way" in which Widmerpool has become a person of authority also shows that the latter has caught them unawares, that he has been preparing himself for power while they were fooling away their youth. At the beginning of the Second World War Widmerpool is a high-grade officer while Stringham, at last cured of his alcoholism, but a humble nonentity, enlists as a private. His spiritual destruction symbolizes the final abdication of his class to the Widmerpools. "Awfully chic to be killed," Stringham reflects much in the manner of a First-World-War hero. Indirectly, yet symbolically, Widmerpool sends him to his death, though he does not die gallantly on the battlefield but in a Japanese prisoners' camp. By a cruel irony, Widmerpool becomes Stringham's heir by marrying the latter's niece. Like Waugh, Powell shows the upper classes relinquishing their inheritance and their power to the rising, but dull and graceless, lower orders.

Widmerpool's ambition is quite effectively served by the indifference to achievement and success of his upper-class acquaintances. The latter's aimlessness and lack of a sense of duty entail the loss of power and influence of their class. "Melancholy is the curse of the upper classes," says Barnby, and it is true that to some extent it explains the young men's lack of ambition. Already as a student, Stringham starts living in the past, and his outbursts of high spirits alternate with fits of depression. But it also seems that the men of sensibility, though prepared to take a job which appeals to them without necessarily paying, refuse to be sufficiently industrious or efficient to be even moderately successful. They think that success is vulgar, whether it takes the form of material prosperity, as with Peter Templer, or of professional achievement, as with Widmerpool, the man who never ceases to surprise them and whom they secretly despise. However, their own inclination to self-destruction and their irresponsibility, particularly in public

<sup>1</sup> *The Acceptance World*, p. 209.

life, bring about the gradual disintegration of their class and deeply impair their capacity for leadership. Erridge, who has inherited the Tolland family estate, neglects it utterly and spends the family fortune on "causes." Young men whose fathers and relatives were leaders in the First World War are content to become subalterns on the eve of the Second. In *The Valley of Bones*, as in Waugh's war novels, the commanding posts in the army are generally assumed by ambitious young men of the lower classes, while upper-class boys abdicate responsibility.

Desertion of the ideal of duty and of responsibility in public affairs is best illustrated in *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*, in which the abdication of Edward VIII is constantly referred to as a symbol of the rejection of values and of confusion. No one comes up to the traditional standards. The older generation themselves have become utterly inefficient, and their private lives reflect the decay of their ability as well as the apathy and futility of their general attitude. General Conyers, who gave up the army at fifty, when he got married, is proud of the small honorary position he holds at court and devotes his time to playing the cello and dabbling in psychoanalysis. Uncle Giles, an eccentric character, has been living on unknown resources and a limited private income since he was forced to leave the army for some obscure reason. He leads an "aimless, uncomfortable, but in a sense dedicated life. . . . Dedicated, perhaps, to his own egotism." The ineffectual Teddy Jeavons, who in Jenkins's words is "something left over from the war," lives on his wife, the easy-going Lady Molly. As to Dick Umfraville, he belongs to a generation who bridge the gap between two periods. "They partook of both eras, specially forming the tone of the post-war years; much more so, indeed, than the younger people. Most of them, like Umfraville, were melancholy; perhaps from the strain of living simultaneously in two different historical periods."<sup>1</sup> Umfraville marries four or five times, lives on his wits and even opens a night-club. He finally settles down with the distinguished and conventional Frederica Budd, who is Lady-in-waiting at court.

The will-to-power which acts as a prime force throughout the sequence and quickens the fall of the privileged class is a reflection in individual life of the powerful urge which determined the course of events between the Wars. On the other hand, the diseased

<sup>1</sup> *The Acceptance World*, p. 153.



sensibility of men unable to control their own life, let alone the society in which their class has always played a prominent part, brings about the decline of their culture. These two elements, which in Widmerpool and Stringham lead to self-centredness on the one hand and to self-destruction on the other, make for the disappearance of the complete man, who can face responsibility in public and private affairs and finds fulfilment in a harmonious individual life. Far from being a source of regeneration, the pervasion of the upper classes by lower-class elements aggravates the deterioration of standards. Not only do ambitious men take their tone from the declining and amoral, though still fashionable, upper class, they are not fastidious in their choice of means and add to the corruption of an already decaying Establishment. Here again, Widmerpool is the archetype. At times he even appears as a *deus ex machina* who relentlessly pulls the strings of power to ensure the efficiency of his plans, even if this means abandoning former schoolmates to certain death. Yet in spite of the narrator's obvious contempt for him, the effect of his unscrupulousness is damped by the ambient amorality. There is a confusion of values in all quarters, and it is no longer possible to choose between well-defined patterns of behaviour.

Disorder in public life, the decline of the upper classes, their breaking up as a homogeneous whole, and the decadence of England as a powerful nation, these are paralleled in the sequence by confusion in private life and failure in personal relationships. The parallel is particularly striking in *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*, in which marriages break up or prove sterile, while England finds itself unprepared on the eve of the Second World War. Together with will-to-power, sexuality is a prime force in the alteration of social patterns; it helps lower-class women to reach a higher social status, while upper-class women are attracted by the apparent vitality of the coming men. Marriage is thus another cause of the mixing of classes, though most unions among the younger generation soon break up. The sequence contains a remarkable number of marriages, divorces and regroupings, which illustrate Powell's image of life as a dance, but one in which people frequently and inconsiderately change partners. Actually the instability of personal relationships is one of the main causes of social disorder. Even the professionally successful men fail lamentably as human beings. Widmerpool is of course the typical

example, and the revelation of his impotence shows the price he has had to pay for neglecting human values. Peter Templer also fails in human relationships, not through lack, but through excess, of sexuality, and his dissolute life drives his second wife mad. Just before the Second World War Betty Templer breaks down while watching Peter act lust in a tableau representing the Seven Deadly Sins. This reminds Jenkins of a similar scene which took place in his home just before the First World War, when their maid broke down and rushed naked into the living room, where General and Mrs. Conyers were on a visit. General Conyers took charge of the situation, and soon afterwards Uncle Giles arrived and announced the assassination of the Austrian Archduke at Sarajevo. There is no one to take charge when Betty Templer breaks down, and immediately afterwards Widmerpool enters the dining room, "a sinister, threatening figure, calling the world to arms."<sup>1</sup>

Although Powell writes about a troubled and exciting period in history, his characters are most of the time involved in strikingly trivial situations. They are aware of their social and historical background, but their motives of action are generally selfish or petty. True, Erridge devotes much of his time and money to causes, but he is indifferent to his fellow-men. The sincerity of Quiggin as a marxist is not questioned, but his behaviour merely brings out his vanity and ambition. When he succeeds in superseding Mark Members as secretary to St John Clarke, Jenkins observes that "the dismissal of Members might almost be regarded as a landmark in the general disintegration of society in its traditional form."<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Members is more cultivated, civilized and refined: he is a gentleman. Actually, both Members and Quiggin hope to make themselves indispensable to St John Clarke, who is a bachelor, and to inherit his fortune. When it becomes known after the latter's death that he has left his money to Erridge, who is a peer and rich, Jenkins understands that it is in fact St John Clarke who has used Members and Quiggin for his own purposes. Self-interest prevails everywhere. There is no human solidarity, no indication that men are sometimes moved by passion, or if they seem to be, they are made to look ridiculous. Nothing

<sup>1</sup> *The Kindly Ones*, p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> *The Acceptance World*, p. 121.

recalls the extravagance, the eagerness in the pursuit of pleasure, nor the anxiety and the political excitement of the years between the Wars. Everything is reduced to mediocrity and insignificance: Jenkins is able to recall the twenty years of his life when a man is supposed to live most intensely and consciously, without remembering having encountered beauty or goodness, or, for that matter, real evil. Life seems to be a mere succession of events and actions which bring to light the awkwardness, blindness, and purposelessness of men.

In spite of flashes of high comedy, the sequence as a whole lacks vividness and fails to render the richness and variety of real life. This is due to the deflation of events and to the author's superficial approach to his characters. In addition to this, the complexity of life is presented, as already suggested, through what the characters do, through a series of anecdotes, rather than through what they are, i.e., through analysis of their motivations or a real exploration of personal relationships. Powell seldom ventures beyond the world of appearances. Moreover, he tends to rely on chance to provoke revelations that will throw light on past events. Chance is also a convenient way of re-introducing characters in the sequence or of bringing people together after a long separation. It may sometimes seem contrived, but it fits in with the carefully elaborated structure of the chronicle. As instalment after instalment appears, the reader will notice that most details about the life of a character are recalled to strengthen the impression he makes or to show him in a different light. The sequence is obviously built according to a strictly pre-ordained pattern defined by Jenkins's memory. Gradually, through the continuity and careful design of his narrative, he points to the necessity of order and continuity in life and society, while showing that they are repeatedly disturbed by the ambition or the folly of men.

Powell's intention to imitate Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is barely concealed: the title of his chronicle, the manner in which each part of the sequence is introduced, the parallels he frequently draws between his characters and figures in famous paintings, these naturally invite comparison with Proust's work, and critics have not failed to draw it. Powell himself refers openly to the Proustian character of his undertaking in *The Military Philosophers*, in which Jenkins discovers that he and his

fellow-officers have spent the night in the original of Balbec. Significantly, most of them fail to respond to the occasion, and even Jenkins cannot do so as intensely as he would have expected to. Both Proust and Powell explore the past and convey their vision of a changing order, but they have little in common as artists. One need only compare *A Question of Upbringing* with the first part of *Du Côté de chez Swann* to realize how different from Proust's Powell's approach to his subject is. Admittedly, the latter is not interested in childhood; his novel is merely concerned with pointing to such elements in the education of an upper-class adolescent and to such inclination in his character as will be decisive in his choice of a way of life. Compare, however, the extreme sensitiveness and the rich emotional life of Marcel as a child with Jenkins's passivity, or the detailed analysis of Swann's moods when he is in love with Odette with the unexplained, irrational attitude of Mona and Matilda in their numerous changes of partners. As we have seen, Powell reconstructs the past methodically and chronologically without referring to the inner life of his characters; he relies almost exclusively on facts to describe relations between individuals or between the individual and society. He is more interested in the possible consequences of action than in elucidating complex psychological states, whereas it is precisely Proust's extraordinary insight into human character that gives depth and significance to his work. Experience in *The Music of Time* is sometimes reduced to a series of anecdotes. "My dear Nick," Stringham tells Jenkins, "You know everybody. Not a social item escapes you."<sup>1</sup> One is sometimes tempted to endorse V.S. Pritchett's assertion that the sequence is turning into a gossip column. Proust's work may have been that too, but it was something else besides.

This predominantly anecdotal character of the sequence makes it often immature. True, we do get a sense of the movement of life, of all sorts of people coming and going, of a variety of attitudes illustrative of human folly. Powell's satire is of a refined quality, and it is often tempered with the sadness and dissatisfaction which he sees as the reverse of eccentricity and frivolity. But as an interpretation of the times the sequence is unsatisfactory. The

<sup>1</sup> *The Soldier's Art*, p. 80.

characters' life is all on the surface, with Jenkins pulling the strings of action but carefully avoiding ideas and emotions. "The essence of *understanding* the past," James Hall writes, "is loss of the particular excitements, angers, and hopes that give the present its complexity and incomprehensibility."<sup>1</sup> In Powell's work, however, these excitements and hopes are mostly ignored or ridiculed. Real life is stifled by petty motives and grotesque postures. Powell shows the ruling classes falling into mediocrity and being replaced by more efficient, though unprincipled, men. But he does not clarify the passions which urge men to action or to self-destruction, and the characters' fate seems too often determined by the category to which they belong rather than by what they are. As the sequence progresses, only Widmerpool, with his indomitable will-to-power and his spiritual poverty, remains something of a fascinating character and keeps arousing the curiosity of the reader.

The flatness of the narrative is to be ascribed to the personality of the narrator. He remains too long an impassive observer, and his unobtrusiveness together with his attitude of "polite surprise," as James Hall calls it, are often irritating. True, his self-control and detachment suit him as conductor of *The Music of Time*. He himself knows where he is going and bends his ambition to his own pace. He becomes creative in his own time, and we may assume that he progresses towards some kind of fulfilment. But whole areas of his own life remain secret, for instance, that of personal relationships, and in view of his superficial treatment of other people, we may question his perceptiveness and sensibility. On the other hand, Powell's satire may not be wholly compatible with a deeper exploration of human motives. His manner is that of social comedy, and almost inevitably, he fails to match the ambitious design of his chronicle with the depth that should characterize a work of that scope.

To some extent, this is compensated for by the structure of the sequence, which gains by being considered as a whole. In his orchestration of *The Music of Time* Jenkins brings out progressively, through cumulative incident, the forces and tendencies at work in society and the gradual shift of values. Without losing sight of the whole, he draws attention to the themes interpreted by individual

<sup>1</sup> James HALL, "The Uses of Polite Surprise," in *The Tragic Comedians*, Bloomington, 1963, p. 132.



performers. Each character represents a particular type of disorder, each novel portrays a particular aspect of life between the Wars: *A Question of Upbringing* describes a typical middle-class education in the Twenties; in *A Buyer's Market* the party is presented as the central social event it was between the Wars, while the young people are faced with choosing between the various opportunities offered to them in their personal and professional lives. *The Acceptance World* introduces the theme of the struggle for power. *At Lady Molly's* emphasizes the inadequacy of human relationships and the way in which they are affected by will-to-power; *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant* draws a parallel between the confusion and instability of private life and the disorder in public affairs. *The Kindly Ones* shows England—more particularly its upper classes—morally and spiritually diseased and unprepared for the coming struggle. In *The Valley of Bones* the leading forces in society are reorganized according to a new pattern, while *The Soldier's Art* and *The Military Philosophers* finally assert the victory of the new men over the old Establishment. During the Victory Day Service Jenkins remarks that England itself is worn out. But the men of will do not fail to exploit the new situation. "I have come to the conclusion that I enjoy power,"<sup>1</sup> Widmerpool says. Towards what destiny will he and his kind take England? This disturbing question implicitly follows his self-satisfied statement. But we must not expect the remaining instalments to answer it, for the sequence is unlikely to take us to the present time; it is only a sad comment on the past.

<sup>1</sup> *The Military Philosophers*, p. 205.

## CONCLUSION

"It is hardly an exaggeration to say that we do not know what kind of world we live in until we have experienced it through the coherent and meaningful configurations of our most original and perceptive artists."<sup>1</sup> The truth of this statement is confirmed by the foresight of the novelists in the inter-war period. In contradistinction to the social historian, who saw the Twenties as an age of optimism and the Thirties as a period of economic depression, though also of renewed interest in the welfare of humanity, the artist's vision of reality was first one of despair owing to the collapse of the traditional world, then of horror in view of the emerging social patterns. The English novel between the Wars interprets the difficult passage from an aristocratic tradition based on individual achievement to a system in which the combined influences of applied science and egalitarianism threatened to produce uniformly mediocre men. The writer of that period has thus portrayed English society at a moment of crisis and of deep transformation. Though it may be true that, as E.M. Forster writes, the interval between two wars "forms part of larger movements where wars become insignificant,"<sup>2</sup> that period is a landmark in the history of the novel, a self-contained phase of development, in which new ways of looking at the world and new forms of fiction took shape, which were soon taken for granted and opened up unlimited possibilities for the novel. Each decade had its key figure, or, as has often been suggested, its conscience: D.H. Lawrence in the Twenties and Orwell in the Thirties. Lawrence was the heir and last representative of an already long tradition of protest against the transformation of England from an agricultural into an industrial society. Orwell, on the other hand, accepted industrialism, though grudgingly, but he was appalled

<sup>1</sup> William Van O'CONNOR, "The Novel in Our Time," in *Forms of Modern Fiction*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> E.M. FORSTER, "English Prose Between 1918 and 1939," in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, Penguin Books, 1965, p. 280.

at the thought that it might eventually destroy man instead of contributing to his welfare.

The First World War and its aftermath brought to maturity economic, social and political movements which had their origin before, or at the beginning of, the twentieth century and modified the pattern of life. Industrialism, many writers insisted, was the source of all evil in the modern world: it stifled the natural life in men and turned them into puppets moving in ugly surroundings. Together with applied science and the general trend towards democratization, itself resulting from the industrial movement, it was giving rise to a materialistic society leading to our consumer world and to mass culture.

The artist's protest against the mechanization of man was not unconnected with his interest in the human personality and with his keen awareness of the dichotomy between flesh and spirit, for he thought that the process of mechanization was stimulated by the glorification of one aspect of the personality at the expense of the other. In the Twenties, possibly under the influence of Freud but more generally because of a growing interest in psychology, novelists were urged to explore hitherto ignored or unsuspected features of man's psychological make-up. The War had revealed his capacity for evil, and he now appeared as a more complex being than had been assumed. Another influence was that of the notion of relativity, which had such an impact on philosophy and morality. The effects of these discoveries were speeded up by the War, which had also seriously damaged the prestige of authority and brought discredit on traditional beliefs. As a result, the artist questioned the value of civilization and of man's achievement. The belief that humanity was progressing towards the kind of civilization that would ensure the happiness of all was definitely abandoned. Lawrence brought out the role of the subconscious in the individual's free expression of the self as well as in the impulsive manifestations of hatred and love which alternately separated man from woman or brought them together. Virginia Woolf described the individual's states of consciousness aroused in response to the surrounding world. Wyndham Lewis suggested no new interpretation of individual behaviour but sharply criticized the importance given by his contemporaries to relativity and the irrational in their rendering of individual life. He himself reasserted the superiority of the

" person, " that is to say, the rational being, over the base and stupid mass, who were corrupting Western civilization. Contempt for humanity in the mass was fairly common in the Twenties. It sprang from the writers' awareness of man's limitations and eventually widened their satire beyond the scope of social criticism.

For many writers in the Twenties the War gave the lie to all ideals originating in Christianity; it revealed the failure of liberalism and of the humanistic tradition, and denied all hope for progress. It heralded the fall of England as a world power and precipitated the decline of the ruling class. It exposed the inadequacy of the " old " and their standards. The War was followed by a debunking of all institutions, by the disruption of established social patterns and the rejection of traditional spiritual and moral values. This meant the end of society as a homogeneous and purposeful community. Confronted with the disintegration of the established order, disillusioned with the War, and influenced by theories which questioned the stability of any state of being and the rationality of man, the younger generation felt they were faced with nothingness, and they responded to the breakdown of values by giving themselves up to a frantic search for pleasure. *Futility, Jazz and Jasper, Crome Yellow* or *Decline and Fall* express the " comic despair " of the young, their feeling that the only answer to futility is futility. The central assumption in the satire of the Twenties is that in view of the disruption of society the individual is bound to behave foolishly and irresponsibly. Firbank was a forerunner and a model for the post-war satirists because he divested the novel of plot and narrative and reduced all social intercourse to disconnected and meaningless conversations. But the melancholy and sense of frustration which drove the young to seek refuge in frivolous activities was not merely the result of the individual's disenchantment with his surrounding world. Man himself, supposedly a complete, harmonious being, was thought unreliable. The impossibility for the individual person to trust anyone else accounts for the increasingly bitter and cynical tone of the post-war satires.

Two major themes were exploited by the novelists of the Twenties. One was the debunking of authority and its consequences for society, philosophy and art. The other, which was partly an effect of the collapse of authority and the ensuing disintegration, was the loneliness of man and the incommunicability between

human beings. Here again Firbank served as a model: through conversation-pieces in which each character follows his own thoughts regardless of what others are saying, he made sensible the lack of communication between people. The satirists saw loneliness as a product of the distrust and heartlessness which characterized all human relationships. For D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf, it was something deeper, referable to human nature itself though more keenly felt in a period of spiritual distress like the post-war era. One must beware, however, of considering loneliness as mainly an effect of the social dislocation, for it was also due to the individual's wish to free himself from all restraints. The writers of the Twenties were all fierce individualists. Lawrence, in particular, thought that man could only be saved by the spontaneous expression of his individual nature, while Virginia Woolf's art concentrated on the rendering of the individual's inner life. To Wyndham Lewis, only the individual mattered, because he alone can be creative and godlike.

Interest in the individual also led to a reinterpretation of man's relationship with society. Whether in the satirical novel or in Lawrence's and Virginia Woolf's deeper explorations of life, the individual views the anarchical state of the world with distress. He finds it impossible to identify himself with a meaningless order of things and feels alienated from his environment or, as in Lawrence's novels, he openly revolts against its deadness. The writers of the Twenties were unanimous in denouncing the weakness of civilization. Their characters seek refuge from it in primitive life, in a private world of personal relations, in pleasure, or in art, though the cultivation of art for art's sake itself became the subject of satire and betrayed the artist's sense of his own futility. The artistic coteries of the Twenties were derided for debasing both art and morals. Nevertheless while devising a new concept of aristocracy based either on innate superiority, on sensitiveness, or on intelligence, some writers were also laying the foundations of genuine human relationships and of the kind of community life that would encourage the individual to fulfil himself according to his nature. However, Lawrence's "religion of the blood" and his wish to see life regenerated through wholesome sexual relations could not be easily reconciled with a workable social system. Virginia Woolf's fiction dealt solely with individuals and personal relationships, yet even on this plane her characters succeed only occasionally in achieving



a precarious harmony, though understanding between individuals was to her the key to harmonious living on the social plane. The attempts by Huxley's "artist-hero" to approach life from a multiplicity of viewpoints did not make easier his identification with the surrounding world. These artists sought to free themselves from their sense of the transiency of life and of the fragility of personal relations through an apprehension of wholeness; but they never discovered the way to integration into society because they had not enough faith in anything save the individual. On the other hand, their conception of life as an endless flux of alternative moments of fulfilment and frustration, or as an ever renewed conflict between contrary forces made them challenge the formalization of any kind of human relationships. They themselves advocated sincerity and faithfulness to self in all circumstances. Their work expresses the hopeless dilemma of modern man divided between his wish for integration into a whole that would renew itself continually and his rejection of any form of coercion. Like many of their contemporaries, Lawrence, Virginia Woolf and Huxley discarded or mocked old conventions, but they felt that new ones were taking shape that would constrain the individual even more.

The reinterpretation of life, of human nature, and of the individual's relation to society led the novelists of the Twenties to experiment with form, each in his own way. The variety of such experiments testifies to the richness and liveliness of the novel but also to a lack of homogeneity due to a want of common beliefs among writers. However, a common denominator may be found in their determination to reject the social context of the traditional novel and in their attempt to express man's dissociation from society either by exploring his "real" life and his chances of self-fulfilment in an environment to which he is hostile; or by rendering the surface life of society and its new rhythm and interpreting the dislocation of the world through almost exclusive use of dialogue in short disconnected scenes. In the late Twenties and the early Thirties the latter technique was perfected by Waugh in his portrayal of modern barbarism; the best satires of the inter-war period were published in that short, transitional period, after which the reaction of some writers against the aesthetic concerns of the Twenties and the neglect of moral values they thought it implied, as well as their interest in the impact of political

movements on society, modified the trend of the novel. Virginia Woolf pursued her experiments up to the eve of the Second World War, but Huxley increasingly allowed the discussion of ideas to mar his satires, while Myers and Orwell were more concerned with what they had to say than with the form of fiction. Isherwood alone innovated in the Thirties, though he never produced the great work of which his early novels gave promise.

In the Thirties the economic, social and political situation forced itself upon the writers' consciousness. The slump and its consequences, Hitler's coming to power in Germany and Edward VIII's abdication in England, the Spanish Civil War, the Munich Agreement, made them aware of the degrading effects of destitution, of the confusion of values, of the threat of war and destruction. While in the Twenties the novelist described the individual's predicament in a disrupted world, in the Thirties he concentrated on the importance of the individual's behaviour and of his personal responsibility for the nature of society. Even Virginia Woolf, who in her first novel had told a story of withdrawal from the world of appearances, suggested in her last works that the meaning of life and a sense of achievement were also to be found in a social and historical whole. For many writers, the central assumption was no longer loneliness but conscience; most of them attributed social disorder and the weakness of Western civilization to the decay of spiritual values and the failure to discriminate between good and evil. Whether evil was for them of a spiritual, moral, or economic nature, they thought that only individual regeneration rooted in clearly defined beliefs could save society. But they were also urged by a sense of guilt because they belonged to the ruling class or to the cultural élite of the nation, and they felt that they must ensure the preservation of its spiritual heritage. In contradistinction to the aestheticism of the Twenties and in reaction against the philosophy of meaninglessness to which many had adhered in that decade, the novelists of the Thirties were conscious that part of their role in society was to enlighten and to guide.

A dominant feature in the novel of the Thirties was a sense of pressure and of threat within the country as well as without. Though Huxley and Orwell saw the future in different terms, they both showed that spiritual deadness, science and materialism could become efficient tools in the hands of power-thirsty men whose ultimate purpose was to regulate life and thought. They warned

against a future developing along lines which men might one day be unable to control. Some writers described a world in which lack of faith, avidity for money, the ugliness of industrial areas or economic insecurity generated fear, hatred and violence. They asserted that if the ruling class had become unfit for power and was indeed losing its authority, this was being taken over by political parties which demanded complete submission from their adherents. These parties had emerged as a result of economic distress and social disorder, but in the eyes of many, their success was also due to the adulteration of culture and to the individual's incapacity to think for himself, for spiritual confusion encouraged him to abdicate moral responsibility to a higher authority. Warner exposed the traps into which men might fall by supporting would-be dictators in the hope of remedying social disorder. Isherwood explored the hell of pre-dictatorial Germany and showed how, out of despair, the Germans allowed Hitler to take power. But Orwell perceived and insisted that a new morality was becoming influential, whose criterion was no longer truthfulness to the individual conscience but conformity of thought and behaviour to a group; it was a morality whose tenets would change with the interests of the group or the power that imposed it. Other writers in the Thirties suggested that man was no longer faced with a choice between good and evil but between the good of the individual and that of the state whatever this might be. Under the impulse of political commitment some even attempted to show that the two could be reconciled on a new basis. But Orwell thought that the problem of choice was much more complex. He criticized writers and intellectuals for allowing themselves to be deceived by their ideal of human brotherhood into transferring to a political party the allegiance they formerly gave to their country. He analysed the nature of the impossible dilemma with which the individual was confronted and made clear the full implications of his divided loyalties.

Though most of the criticism of society between the Wars bears as much on Western civilization as on England itself, the particular concern of some writers for English society should be underlined. It found a subtle expression in Virginia Woolf's and in Lawrence's last novel, and it was a major source of inspiration in the later works of Orwell, Waugh and Powell. Their main theme, where England is concerned, is the loss of Arcadia, the deterioration

of a way of life that was never to revive. But they were also concerned with England as a nation: Orwell in his war essays, Waugh in his later satires, and Powell in his portrayal of the decaying upper classes saw in the loss of ability of the ruling class and in their moral laxity the root of social disruption and of the emergence of a new, but corrupt, configuration of power. Waugh and Powell voiced their fear lest England's inheritance should be running to waste in the hands of ascending commoners, who were less civilized but as immoral as the aristocracy they were trying to supplant. However, the novels of Lawrence and Orwell stand out as most representative of that English tradition of individualism and non-conformity which makes personal integrity the supreme value. Lawrence was the greater novelist, and his vision of the affluent society moved by a powerful and lifeless mass spirit was indeed prophetic. Orwell expressed his fear of the annihilation of the individual. Their last novels were inspired by the same urge to convince their contemporaries of the uniqueness of man's inner self. In 1984 as in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* sexual relations alone help man to resist mechanization and the deadness of industrial civilization: for Lawrence, they are the expression of his faith in the act of living; for Orwell, they testify to the indomitableness of human nature. Lawrence's last novel is a hymn to life, Orwell's is a desperate attempt to save the spirit of man. For both, however, the passionate assertion of the value of individual life is associated with their love of England and with their concern for the quality of life in their own country.

The English novel between the Wars records the mutation from a Christian and humanistic civilization to one in which industry and science were gaining control over life. Novelists in the post-war era were inspired by a feeling of despair, which gave way in the Thirties to a vision of fear. Having portrayed a world falling apart and conveyed the individual's loneliness, some were urged to rehabilitate faith and action. But even those writers who, like Myers, Orwell and Huxley in the late Thirties, described a search for the good life, could not refrain from suggesting that the search was doomed to fail. Such novels as *The Revenge for Love*, *Coming Up for Air*, *After Many a Summer*, *Between the Acts*, *The Professor*, or *Goodbye to Berlin* render man's anxiety and horror under the threat of a new catastrophe. Many writers in the Thirties foresaw the dangers of the police state

and the growing violence in the modern world. But above all, the novelists of the inter-war period intimated that the sense of security which the individual used to enjoy in a stable and organic whole was lost forever, that unless man definitely silenced his personal conscience, he would be faced again and again with an impossible choice between individual fulfilment and the interest of the community and that, whatever his option, he was bound to pay a high price for it.



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