"Wieseltier ... has chosen wisely ... One can recommend this book as either an introduction to or a reminder of Lionel Trilling, one of the few intelligent men of our time toward whose work ... an intellectual obligation exists."

Richard Gilman, *The New York Times Book Review*

THE MORAL OBLIGATION TO BE INTELLIGENT

SELECTED ESSAYS

LIONEL TRILLING

EDITED & WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY LEON WIESELTIER

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Introduction

by Leon Wieseltier

In 1971 Lionel Trilling gave a talk at Purdue University on the subject of his work as a critic. He spoke autobiographically, which was not his custom. His notes for the occasion dwell at length on his experience as an undergraduate at Columbia College in the 1920s. "The great word in the college was INTELLIGENCE," he wrote. "An eminent teacher of ours, John Erskine, provided a kind of slogan by the title he gave to an essay of his which, chiefly through its title, gained a kind of fame: THE MORAL OBLIGATION TO BE INTELLIGENT."

Trilling must have startled his audience when he submitted that as a young man "I did not count myself among those who were intelligent." Instead "I was intuitive; and I rather prided myself on a quality that went by the name of subtlety." He did not aspire to intelligence, he explained, because it was not a quality that was required of a novelist, and he aspired to be a novelist, a calling that required "only a quick eye for behavior and motive and a feeling heart." In Trilling's criticism, certainly, there is no trace of this depleted conception of the novel. In 1947 he gave his own demonstration of the utility of "intelligence" for the writer of fiction in his novel *The Middle of the Journey*, which shrewdly examined the fideist mentality of American Communism and recorded the disfigurements that ideology visits upon experience. (It included a portrait of Whittaker

Chambers as George Eliot might have drawn him.) It is hard to imagine a waking moment in Trilling's life in which he was not consecrated to the intellect and to its cause. He had almost no higher term of approbation than to call something or someone "exigent" and "strenuous." But youth is unexigent and unstrenuous. In any event, Trilling's early indifference to intellectuality did not last long. (As he later remarked fondly about Elliot Cohen, "he never played the game of being young.") And so he recalled that he was soon "seduced into bucking to be intelligent by the assumption which was prepotent in Columbia College—that intelligence was connected with literature, that it was advanced by literature."

It must be said that Trilling's professor did not always live up to his own maxim. John Erskine's works included the novels *Galahad: Enough of His Life to Explain His Reputation* and *Penelope's Man: The Homing Instinct*, and a particularly witless essay in misogyny called *The Influence of Women—And Its Cure.* (It concludes with a coarse colloquium among Socrates, Diogenes, Herodotus, Pericles, Casanova, and André Chénier.) But still Erskine earned a place in the history of the humanities in America. A scholar of the English literature of the Renaissance, he created the General Honors course at Columbia, the immersion in great books that eventually transformed undergraduate education in America. "We were assigned nothing else but the great books themselves," Trilling recalled in his seminar at Purdue, "confronting them as best we could without the mediation of ancillary works." The excitement of a canon, of *this* canon: there was a time when there was such an excitement, though Trilling typically animadverted that the course "was not exigent enough." In 1961, in *Partisan Review*, he complained famously of the complacence, the "delighted glibness," with which his own students at Columbia experienced, and thereby betrayed, their collision with the literary monuments of modernity. (Trilling was appointed an instructor in the English department at Columbia in 1931, and a few years later he completed the dissertation on Matthew Arnold that became his first book in 1939. Also in 1939, Nicholas Murray Butler, the president of the university, invoked his "summer powers" to appoint Trilling an assistant professor of English and the first Jew in the department to become a member of the Columbia faculty. Trilling taught at Columbia until his death in 1975. In a life without external incident, he became an authority on internal incident.)

"The Moral Obligation to Be Intelligent" had appeared in *The Hibbert Journal* in 1914. "The disposition to consider intelligence a peril," Erskine

began, "is an old Anglo-Saxon inheritance." The grounds of this hoary demotion of the mind were moral, religious, and emotional—this "assumption that a choice must be made between goodness and intelligence; that stupidity is first cousin to moral conduct, and cleverness the first step into mischief; that reason and God are not on good terms with each other; that the heart and the mind are rival buckets in the well of truth, inexorably balanced—full mind, starved heart—stout heart, weak head." The aim of Erskine's manifesto was to end "the peculiar warfare between character and intellect." Conscience, in his account, originated not in the English tradition, but in the German tradition; and not in the mind, but in the will. Yet it was in America that the party of the intellect was formed. Americans, Erskine proclaimed, were "confederated in a Greek love of knowledge, in a Greek assurance that sin and misery are the fruit of ignorance." Americans momentously understood that "if you want to get out of prison, what you need is the key to the lock [and] if you cannot get that, have courage and steadfastness." Social and economic problems were not problems of will, they were problems of mind.

Erskine's essay was not immune, clearly, to the racialist idiosyncracies of its time, and its survey of anti-intellectualism in English literature (in the English novel especially) was sorely inadequate. Its construction of mental life in America was somewhat imbued with the new enthusiasm for expertise, with the technocratic inflection of the intellectual vocation. Yet finally Erskine extolled intelligence for more than its utility. Shifting rather fitfully from the pragmatic mood to the transcendental mood, he finished his essay with the vatic announcement that "we really seek intelligence not for the answers it may suggest to the problems of life, but because we believe it is life,—not for the aid in making the will of God prevail, but because we believe it is the will of God. We love it, as we love virtue, for its own sake, and we believe it is only virtue's other and more precise name."

This is an exalted jumble, and there is much in it from which Trilling would have recoiled—its supernaturalism in particular, though he allowed that there are sublimities of character and understanding that may not be competently captured by an exclusively naturalistic vocabulary. (Of Eliot's supernaturalism, Trilling wrote, "I have spoken of it with respect because it suggests elements which a rational and naturalistic philosophy, to be adequate, must encompass.") And Trilling emphatically believed that "the problems of life" must indeed be brought before the mind,

though not for the purpose of eliciting anything so simple and so heartening as "answers." The elements of Erskine's creed to which Trilling must have kindled, and to which he hewed in all his criticism, were its avowal of the intrinsic worth of the mind, and its affiliation of the mental with the moral. The influence of the teacher upon the student is unmistakable, for example, in a withering commentary on Dreiser that Trilling wrote in 1946: "But with us it is always too late for mind, yet never too late for honest stupidity; always a little too late for understanding, never too late for righteous, bewildered wrath; always too late for thought, never too late for naïve moralizing."

Trilling never encountered a good reason to postpone thinking, though he lived in an age when such reasons were regularly and popularly advanced, in the forms of totalistic philosophies and totalistic politics. He was one of the most formidable critics of totalism that his dogmatic and pitiless century produced. Trilling was a distinguished enemy of his time. There was never just one thing, in his work: no single lock, no single key. He was mentally indefatigable; there was order in his writing, but there was no repose. This made Trilling an exceedingly unmoralistic moralist. His interest in virtue included also an interest in a doubting regard of the prevailing notions of virtue. He exemplified the intellectual vocation not least by his impiety about it. He bore down on people like himself—on the infamous "we" in his essays—almost to the point of provincialism. But this was the cheerless and thankless virtue of the true intellectual: to disquiet his own side, to "unmask the unmaskers," to "dissent from the orthodoxies of dissent."

The intellectual life, if it is genuine, is a life of strain. The business of the intellectual is the stringency business. Those were Trilling's onerous instructions. A half century later, it is impossible to read the golden preface to *The Liberal Imagination*, the influential collection of essays that he published in 1950—"it has for some time seemed to me that a criticism which has at heart the interests of liberalism might find its most useful work not in confirming liberalism in its sense of general rightness but rather in putting under some degree of pressure the liberal ideas and assumptions of the present time"—and not to feel the sting. There is a lasting profit in Trilling's sting. In his polemic against the undiscomfited progessivism of the 1930s and 1940s lies a lesson about the relationship of honesty to love. He deplored ease more than he deplored error. He prized fearlessness more than he prized happiness.

Innocence bored him; purity he refused to credit; sanctity was more than he wished to grasp. His gospel was complexity—or as he put it, "variousness, possibility, complexity, and difficulty." This was not a theory or a method. It was a cast of mind and a pedagogical scruple. In Trilling's hands, nuance was an instrument of clarification, not an instrument of equivocation. This made his work exhilarating and exasperating.

He was always warning about appearances, and worrying that a life without illusions was itself an illusion. Trilling cherished the modern novel for its worldliness, for its ability to provide an accurate picture of the problem of reality and appearance in modern life. The subject of the novel was society, or complication. A multiplicity of classes had engendered a multiplicity of meanings, Trilling contended, so that certainty was no longer possible, and appearances, in the form of manners, acquired a new prestige as a condition of knowledge; and of these appearances the novel was made. Since the novel was social, it was epistemological. It was the art that was born when the settled sense of reality died.

Trilling's criticism was a long search for the sense of reality, and a long tribute to it. "When, generations from now, the historian of our time undertakes to describe the assumptions of our culture, he will surely discover that the word 'reality' is of central importance in his understanding of us." Trilling deeply resented the obscurantist uses of realism in American culture, "the chronic American belief that there exists an opposition between reality and mind and that one must enlist oneself in the party of reality." But he was not quite a party man, philosophically or politically. He inhabited an essentially inharmonious world. He was enough of an idealist not to mistake reality for mind, but not so much of an idealist that he mistook mind for reality. He was, instead, a scholar of the relation.

Trilling took the sense of reality to be one of the most precious attainments of the mind, and also one of the most unlikely. "Let us not deceive ourselves," he declared at the end of an introduction to *Anna Karenina* in 1951. "To comprehend unconditioned spirit is not so very hard, but there is no knowledge rarer than the understanding of spirit as it exists in the inescapable conditions which the actual and the trivial make for it." Trilling ardently defended William Dean Howells for devoting many chapters of a novel to its hero's hunt for an apartment. In this way, he argued, the writer had acknowledged "the actuality of the conditioned, the literality of matter." And "to lose this is to lose not a material fact but a spiritual one, for it is a fact of spirit that it must exist in a world which re-

quires it to engage in so dispiriting an occupation as hunting for a house." Trilling was not a materialist, but he was not an escapist. The objective of his work as a critic was a lucid apprehension of the thick tangle of freedom and necessity. He had no doubt that the tangle was final, that the poles of existence would never part.

But lucidity—the mixture of clarity and courage that Camus in particular promoted into a new stoical ideal—was not all that Trilling meant by "mind." When he spoke of mind, he was speaking of reason. To be sure, he might not have been delighted by the characterization of his point of regard as rationalism. The career of rationalism in modern culture did not exactly dazzle him. "To be rational, to be reasonable, is a good thing, but when we say of a thinker that he is committed to rationalism, we mean to convey a perjorative judgement. It expresses our sense that he conceives of the universe and man in a simplistic way, and often it suggests that his thought proceeds on the assumption that there is a close analogy to be drawn between man and a machine." The modern misadventures of reason were many: the reason of the utilitarians and their liberal heirs had desiccated the spirit, but the Reason of the Hegelians and their totalitarian heirs had killed it. Historically, reason had often behaved like the enemy of imagination and the enemy of decency. It had given absolution to middlebrows and murderers.

And the enemies of reason repelled Trilling as completely as some of reason's friends. His later writings in particular were a sustained assault upon "the contemporary ideology of irrationalism," a rubric of intellectual irresponsibility under which he included the sins of "intuition, inspiration, revelation; the annihilation of selfhood—perhaps through contemplation, but also through ecstasy and the various forms of intoxication; violence; madness"; in a word, the sins of immediacy. In 1972, in *Sincerity and Authenticity,* he traced the history of "the disintegrated consciousness" from Diderot and Hegel to Marcuse and Laing. Trilling inquired frequently and penetratingly into the non-ethical or anti-ethical energies in modern literature. He acknowledged the vitality of what he famously called "the adversary culture," and he was himself the most forceful (and the most wry) adversary of the adversary culture.

The important point is that Trilling's fascination with unreason followed strictly from his commitment to reason. In this respect he belonged to the most superb line of modern rationalism, to the sturdy, disabused company of Freud and Mann (who once remarked, against

Nietzsche, that the world is never suffering from a surfeit of reason) and Isaiah Berlin. These were the rationalists with night vision. When Trilling cautioned that "we must be aware of the dangers which lie in our most generous wishes," when he detected traces of evil in the good and traces of good in the evil, he was practicing this night vision. These rationalists trained reason's gaze upon its contrary, and they held fast to the study of disorder until reason no longer flinched.

They rejected the day vision, the flinching rationalism, of the Enlightenment, for which the rational was the real, or at least all the real that reason would consent to recognize. Instead they preached rationalism *after* romanticism. For the rational is plainly not the real; and before the reality of the irrational, reason's scorn will not suffice. These rationalists demanded of reason what Milton demanded of virtue, that it not be a youngling in the contemplation of evil. (The greatest of the rationalists with night vision was Primo Levi, who actually lived the night.) Trilling, too, was undeceived about the immunity of the world to mind; but it was this sobering knowledge of the world's punishing way with human purposes—Trilling called this knowledge "moral realism"—that gave to mind its muscle and its magnanimity, its power to withstand its own weakness and not be put to flight by what it could not master.

In a review of *The Liberal Imagination* that R. P. Blackmur later collected among his "essays in solicitude and critique," he patronizingly described Trilling as "an administrator of the affairs of the mind" and as "a liberal humanist in hard straits," as if there were no glory in liberal humanism and the straits were not hard. Trilling "has cut down on tykish impulses and wild insights," Blackmur observed, more in critique than in solicitude. "The trouble is that his masters, Arnold and Freud, both extremists in thought, make him think too much." To the charge of thinking too much, Trilling would have gladly pleaded guilty; but he would have demanded to know how it was possible to think too much about problems whose solutions can be discovered only by means of reflection.

He understood, of course, that not all of life's problems are of that kind. In the notes for his autobiographical lecture, he reminisced about "the rational life" of the 1930s and 1940s: "Every aspect of existence was touched by ideas, or the simulacra of ideas. Not only politics, but child-rearing, the sexual life, the life of the psyche, the innermost part of existence was subject to ideation." The mordancy of his reminiscence is evident. The "ideation" of which Trilling speaks in this passage is a little

comic, almost a deformation. And many of the "New York intellectuals"—Trilling's colleagues in the great mid-century metropolitan experiment in balancing the claims of Marxism and modernism, Europe and America, alienation and solidarity, justice and beauty—were in this way deformed. In their delegitimation of Stalinism and in their divorce of the criticism of literature from the criticism of politics, they made themselves genuinely indispensable to the intellectual history of their country; but they often exaggerated the transparency of the world to their minds, and in their worship of "ideas" they often failed to observe the difference between an idea and an opinion. Trilling was not noisy in the New York manner. For this reason, he wrote the most lasting prose of any of the New Yorkers. His writing is precious not least for its patience. The imperturbability of his style was the consequence of a pained and permanent sense of the opacity of life. The dialectical toil of his essays was Trilling's way of walking diligently before what he could not promptly and cleverly understand.

About one thing, then, Blackmur was right. Trilling was indeed an extremist in thought, or an extremist for thought. This marked his limitation as a critic of literature. He was singularly unstimulated by form and by the machinery of beauty. (He wrote about Keats as if Keats, too, was an intellectual.) He did not read to be ravished. He was exercised more by "the moral imagination" than by the imagination. And he grew increasingly suspicious of art. (He became especially absorbed, in his later years, by Rousseau's letter to d'Alembert.) In works of literature Trilling found mainly the records of concepts and sentiments and values. "For our time the most effective agent of the moral imagination has been the novel of the last two hundred years. It was never, either aesthetically or morally, a perfect form and its faults and failures can quickly be enumerated. But its greatness and its practical usefulness lay in its unremitting work of involving the reader himself in the moral life, inviting him to put his own motives under examination, suggesting that reality is not as his conventional education has led him to see it . . ." In this regard, Trilling was a very unliterary literary critic. His conception of his critical duty was less professional and less playful—and bigger. The novels and the poems that he pondered were documents for a moral history of his culture. Finally he was a historian of morality working with literary materials, and the exquisiteness of the result is most perfectly on display in the great essay on *The Princess Casamassima*.

So there is indeed nothing tykish or wild here. There is instead a climate of philosophy and deferred felicity, of renunciation and unceasing examination. There are ironies, but not shabby ones. And art, too, falls under the moral obligation to be intelligent. At the time of his death, Trilling was working on an essay about Jane Austen. He was a little baffled by the apparent revival of the writer's reputation among his students—the uprisings at Columbia and elsewhere in 1968 were still fresh in memory—and he dared to hope that "in reading about the conduct of other people as presented by a writer highly endowed with moral imagination and in consenting to see this conduct as relevant to their own, they had undertaken an activity which humanism holds precious, in that it redeems the individual from moral torpor." Trilling left the essay unfinished, though it is clear from the fragment that remains that the piece was conceived as an admonition against aesthetic ideals of life. His partisan devotion to the critical intellect, to the dignity of dialectic, was the subject of the very last sentence that he wrote: "It is, I think, open to us to believe that our alternations of view on this matter of life seeking to approximate art are not a mere display of cultural indecisiveness but, rather, that they constitute a dialectic, with all the dignity that inheres in that word . . ." And still inheres in it, if Lionel Trilling's teaching still lives.

Some years ago I remarked to Diana Trilling that the unavailability of Lionel Trilling's essays was a scandal, and she invited me to do something about it. The present volume is the grateful result of her invitation. I have included " 'That Smile of Parmenides Made Me Think,' " the essay on Santayana, because Lionel once expressed his wish to Diana that it appear in any anthology of his essays, but all the other choices were my own. Almost all of them were obvious. The essays appear in the order of their original publication. Daniel Aaron, Jennifer Bradley, Lissy Katz, Adam Kirsch, Brian Phillips, Elisabeth Sifton, Derek Walcott, and James Wood have my thanks.

THE MORAL OBLIGATION TO BE INTELLIGENT

The America of John Dos Passos

1938

U.S.A. is far more impressive than even its three impressive parts—*The 42nd Parallel*, *1919*, *The Big Money*—might have led one to expect. It stands as the important American novel of the decade, on the whole more satisfying than anything else we have. It lacks any touch of eccentricity; it is startlingly normal; at the risk of seeming paradoxical one might say that it is exciting because of its quality of cliché: here are comprised the judgments about modern American life that many of us have been living on for years.

Yet too much must not be claimed for this book. Today we are inclined to make literature too important, to estimate the writer's function at an impossibly high rate, to believe that he can encompass and resolve all the contradictions, and to demand that he should. We forget that, by reason of his human nature, he is likely to win the intense perception of a single truth at the cost of a relative blindness to other truths. We expect a single man to give us all the answers and produce the "synthesis." And then when the writer, hailed for giving us much, is discovered to have given us less than everything, we turn from him in a reaction of disappointment: he has given us nothing. A great deal has been claimed for Dos Passos and it is important, now that *U.S.A.* is completed, to mark off

the boundaries of its enterprise and see what it does not do so that we may know what it does do.

One thing *U.S.A.* does not do is originate; it confirms but does not advance and it summarizes but does not suggest. There is no accent or tone of feeling that one is tempted to make one's own and carry further in one's own way. No writer, I think, will go to school to Dos Passos, and readers, however much they may admire him, will not stand in the relation to him in which they stand, say, to Stendhal or Henry James or even E. M. Forster. Dos Passos's plan is greater than its result in feeling; his book *tells* more than it *is*. Yet what it tells, and tells with accuracy, subtlety, and skill, is enormously important and no one else has yet told it half so well.

Nor is *U.S.A.* as all-embracing as its admirers claim. True, Dos Passos not only represents a great national scene but embodies, as I have said, the cultural tradition of the intellectual Left. But he does not encompass—does not pretend to encompass in this book—all of either. Despite his title, he is consciously selective of his America and he is, as I shall try to show, consciously corrective of the cultural tradition from which he stems.

Briefly and crudely, this cultural tradition may be said to consist of the following beliefs, which are not so much formulations of theory or principles of action as they are emotional tendencies: that the collective aspects of life may be distinguished from the individual aspects; that the collective aspects are basically important and are good; that the individual aspects are, or should be, of small interest and that they contain a destructive principle; that the fate of the individual is determined by social forces; that the social forces now dominant are evil; that there is a conflict between the dominant social forces and other, better, rising forces; that it is certain or very likely that the rising forces will overcome the now dominant ones. *U.S.A.* conforms to some but not to all of these assumptions. The lack of any protagonists in the trilogy, the equal attention given to many people, have generally been taken to represent Dos Passos's recognition of the importance of the collective idea. The book's historical apparatus indicates the author's belief in social determination. And there can be no slightest doubt of Dos Passos's attitude to the dominant forces of our time: he hates them.

But Dos Passos modifies the tradition in three important respects. De-

spite the collective elements of his trilogy, he puts a peculiar importance upon the individual. Again, he avoids propounding any sharp conflict between the dominant forces of evil and the rising forces of good; more specifically, he does not write of a class struggle, nor is he much concerned with the notion of class in the political sense. Finally, he is not at all assured of the eventual triumph of good; he pins no faith on any force or party—indeed he is almost alone of the novelists of the Left (Silone is the only other one that comes to mind) in saying that the creeds and idealisms of the Left may bring corruption quite as well as the greeds and cynicisms of the established order; he has refused to cry "Allons! the road lies before us," and, in short, his novel issues in despair.—And it is this despair of Dos Passos's book which has made his two ablest critics, Malcolm Cowley and T. K. Whipple, seriously temper their admiration. Mr. Cowley says: "They [the novels comprising *U.S.A.*] give us an extraordinarily diversified picture of contemporary life, but they fail to include at least one side of it—the will to struggle ahead, the comradeship in struggle, the consciousness of new men and new forces continually rising." And Mr. Whipple: "Dos Passos has reduced what ought to be a tale of full-bodied conflicts to an epic of disintegration."

These critics are saying that Dos Passos has not truly observed the political situation. Whether he has or not, whether his despair is objectively justifiable, cannot, with the best political will in the world, be settled on paper. We hope he has seen incorrectly; he himself must hope so. But there is also an implicit meaning in the objections which, if the writers themselves did not intend it, many readers will derive, and if not from Mr. Whipple and Mr. Cowley then from the book itself: that the emotion in which *U.S.A.* issues is negative to the point of being politically harmful.

But to discover a political negativism in the despair of *U.S.A.* is to subscribe to a naïve conception of human emotion and of the literary experience. It is to assert that the despair of a literary work must inevitably engender despair in the reader. Actually, of course, it need do nothing of the sort. To rework the old Aristotelean insight, it may bring about a catharsis of an already existing despair. But more important: the word "despair" all by itself (or any other such general word or phrase) can never characterize the emotion the artist is dealing with. There are many kinds of despair and what is really important is what goes along with the

general emotion denoted by the word. Despair with its wits about it is very different from despair that is stupid; despair that is an abandonment of illusion is very different from despair which generates tender new cynicisms. The "heartbreak" of *Heartbreak House*, for example, is the beginning of new courage and I can think of no more useful *political* job for the literary man today than, by the representation of despair, to cauterize the exposed soft tissue of too-easy hope.

Even more than the despair, what has disturbed the radical admirers of Dos Passos's work is his appearance of indifference to the idea of the class struggle. Mr. Whipple correctly points out that the characters of *U.S.A.* are all "midway people in somewhat ambiguous positions." Thus, there are no bankers or industrialists (except incidentally) but only J. Ward Morehouse, their servant; there are no factory workers (except, again, incidentally), no farmers, but only itinerant workers, individualistic mechanics, actresses, interior decorators.

This, surely, is a limitation in a book that has had claimed for it that it is a complete national picture. But when we say limitation we may mean just that or we may mean falsification, and I do not think that Dos Passos has falsified. The idea of class is not simple but complex. Socially it is extremely difficult to determine. It cannot be determined, for instance, by asking individuals to what class they belong; nor is it easy to convince them that they belong to one class or another. We may, to be sure, demonstrate the idea of class at income-extremes or function-extremes, but when we leave these we must fall back upon the criterion of "interest"—by which we must mean *real* interest ("real will" in the Rousseauian sense) and not what people say or think they want. Even the criterion of action will not determine completely the class to which people belong. Class, then, is a useful but often undetermined category of political and social thought. The political leader and the political theorist will make use of it in ways different from those of the novelist. For the former the important thing is people's perception that they are of one class or another and their resultant action. For the latter the interesting and suggestive things are likely to be the moral paradoxes that result from the conflict between real and apparent interest. And the "midway people" of Dos Passos represent this moral-paradoxical aspect of class. They are a great fact in American life. It is they who show the symptoms of cultural change. Their movement from social group to social group—from class to class, if

you will—makes for the uncertainty of their moral codes, their confusion, their indecision. Almost more than the people of fixed class, they are at the mercy of the social stream because their interests cannot be clear to them and give them direction. If Dos Passos has omitted the class struggle, as Mr. Whipple and Mr. Cowley complain, it is only the external class struggle he has left out; within his characters the class struggle is going on constantly.

This, perhaps, is another way of saying that Dos Passos is primarily concerned with morality, with personal morality. The national, collective, social elements of his trilogy should be seen not as a bid for completeness but rather as a great setting, brilliantly delineated, for his moral interest. In his novels, as in actual life, "conditions" supply the opportunity for personal moral action. But if Dos Passos is a social historian, as he is so frequently said to be, he is that in order to be a more complete moralist. It is of the greatest significance that for him the barometer of social breakdown is not suffering through economic deprivation but always moral degeneration through moral choice.

This must be said in the face of Mr. Whipple's description of Dos Passos's people as "devoid of will or purpose, helplessly impelled hither and yon by the circumstances of the moment. They have no strength of resistance. They are weak at the very core of personality, the power to choose." These, it would seem, are scarcely the characters with which the moralist can best work. But here we must judge not only by the moral equipment of the characters (and it is not at all certain that Mr. Whipple's description is correct: choice of action is seldom made as the result of Socratic dialectic) but by the novelist's idea of morality—the nature of his judgments and his estimate of the power of circumstance.

Dos Passos's morality is concerned not so much with the utility of an action as with the quality of the person who performs it. *What* his people do is not so important as *how* they do it, or what they become by doing it. We despise J. Ward Morehouse not so much for his creation of the labor-relations board, his support of the war, his advertising of patent-medicines, though these are despicable enough; we despise him rather for the words he uses as he does these things, for his self-deception, the tone and style he generates. We despise G. H. Barrow, the labor-faker, not because he betrays labor; we despise him because he is mealy-mouthed and talks about "the art of living" when he means concupiscence. But we do

not despise the palpable fraud, Doc Bingham, because, though he lies to everyone else, he does not lie to himself.

The moral assumption on which Dos Passos seems to work was expressed by John Dewey some thirty years ago; there are certain moral situations, Dewey says, where we cannot decide between the ends; we are forced to make our moral choice in terms of our preference for one kind of character or another: "What sort of an agent, of a person shall he be? This is the question finally at stake in any genuinely moral situation: What shall the agent *be*? What sort of character shall he assume? On its face, the question is what he shall *do*, shall he act for this or that end. But the incompatibility of the ends forces the issue back into the questions of the kind of selfhood, of agency, involved in the respective ends." One can imagine that this method of moral decision does not have meaning for all times and cultures. Although dilemmas exist in every age, we do not find Antigone settling her struggle between family and state by a reference to the kind of character she wants to be, nor Orestes settling his in that way; and so with the medieval dilemma of wife vs. friend, or the family oath of vengeance vs. the feudal oath of allegiance. But for our age with its intense self-consciousness and its uncertain moral codes, the reference to the quality of personality does have meaning, and the greater the social flux the more frequent will be the interest in qualities of character rather than in the rightness of the end.

The modern novel, with its devices for investigating the quality of character, is the aesthetic form almost specifically called forth to exercise this modern way of judgment. The novelist goes where the law cannot go; he tells the truth where the formulations of even the subtlest ethical theorist cannot. He turns the moral values inside out to question the worth of the deed by looking not at its actual outcome but at its tone and style. He is subversive of dominant morality and under his influence we learn to praise what dominant morality condemns; he reminds us that benevolence may be aggression, that the highest idealism may corrupt. Finally, he gives us the models or the examples by which, half-unconsciously, we make our own moral selves.

Dos Passos does not primarily concern himself with the burly sinners who inherit the earth. His people are those who sin against themselves and for him the wages of sin is death—of the spirit. The whole Dos Passos morality and the typical Dos Passos fate are expressed in Burns's quatrain:

I waive the quantum o' the sin,
The hazard of concealing;
But, och! it hardens a' within
And petrifies the feeling!

In the trilogy physical death sometimes follows upon this petrifaction of the feeling but only as its completion. Only two people die without petrifying, Joe Williams and Daughter, who kept in their inarticulate way a spark of innocence, generosity, and protest. Idealism does not prevent the consequences of sinning against oneself, and Mary French with her devotion to the working class and the Communist Party, with her courage and "sacrifice" is quite as dead as Richard Savage who inherits Morehouse's mantle, and she is almost as much to blame.

It is this element of blame, of responsibility, that exempts Dos Passos from Malcolm Cowley's charge of being in some part committed to the morality of what Cowley calls the Art Novel—the story of the Poet and the World, the Poet always sensitive and right, the World always crass and wrong. An important element of Dos Passos's moral conception is that, although the World does sin against his characters, the characters themselves are very often as wrong as the world. There is no need to enter the theological purlieus to estimate how much responsibility Dos Passos puts upon them and whether this is the right amount. Clearly, however, he holds people like Savage, Fainy McCreary, and Eveline Hutchins accountable in some important part for their own fates and their own ignobility.

The morality of Dos Passos, then, is a romantic morality. Perhaps this is calling it a bad name; people say they have got tired of a morality concerned with individuals "saving" themselves and "realizing" themselves. Conceivably only Dos Passos's aggressive contemporaneity has kept them from seeing how very similar is his morality to, say, Browning's—the moment to be snatched, the crucial choice to be made, and if it is made on the wrong (the safe) side, the loss of human quality, so that instead of a man we have a Success and instead of two lovers a Statue and a Bust in the public square. But too insistent a cry against the importance of the individual quality is a sick cry—as sick as the cry of "Something to live for" as a motivation of political choice. Among members of a party, the considerations of solidarity, discipline, and expedience are claimed to replace all others and moral judgment is left to history; among liberals, the idea of social determination, on no good ground, appears tacitly to exclude

the moral concern: witness the nearly complete conspiracy of silence or misinterpretation that greeted Silone's *Bread and Wine*, which said not a great deal more than that personal and moral—and eventually political—problems were not settled by membership in a revolutionary party. It is not at all certain that it is political wisdom to ignore what so much concerns the novelist. In the long run is not the political choice fundamentally a choice of personal quality?

Hemingway and His Critics

1939

Between *The Fifth Column*, the play which makes the occasion for this large volume, and *The First Forty-Nine Stories*, which make its bulk and its virtue, there is a difference of essence. For the play is the work of Hemingway the "man" and the stories are by Hemingway the "artist." This is a distinction which seldom enough means anything in criticism, but now and then an author gives us, as Hemingway gives us, writing of two such different kinds that there is a certain amount of validity and at any rate a convenience in making it. Once made, the distinction can better be elaborated than defined or defended. Hemingway the "artist" is conscious, Hemingway the "man" is self-conscious; the "artist" has a kind of innocence, the "man" a kind of naïvety; the "artist" is disinterested, the "man" has a dull personal ax to grind; the "artist" has a perfect medium and tells the truth even if it be only *his* truth, but the "man" fumbles at communication and falsifies. As Edmund Wilson said in his "Letter to the Russians about Hemingway," which is the best estimate of our author that I know:

> . . . something frightful seems to happen to Hemingway as soon as he begins to write in the first person. In his fiction, the conflicting elements of his personality, the emotional situations which obsess him, are externalized and objectified; and the result is an art which

> is severe, intense, and deeply serious. But as soon as he talks in his own person, he seems to lose all his capacity for self-criticism and is likely to become fatuous or maudlin.

Mr. Wilson had in mind such specifically autobiographical and polemical works as *Green Hills of Africa* (and obviously he was not referring to the technical use of the first person in fictional narrative) but since the writing of the "Letter" in 1935, we may observe of Hemingway that the "man" has encroached upon the "artist" in his fiction. In *To Have and Have Not* and now in *The Fifth Column* the "first person" dominates and is the source of the failure of both works.

Of course it might be perfectly just to set down these failures simply to a lapse of Hemingway's talent. But there is, I think, something else to be said. For as one compares the high virtues of Hemingway's stories with the weakness of his latest novel and his first play, although one is perfectly aware of all that must be charged against the author himself, what forces itself into consideration is the cultural atmosphere which has helped to bring about the recent falling off. In so far as we can ever blame a critical tradition for a writer's failures, we must, I believe, blame American criticism for the illegitimate emergence of Hemingway the "man" and the resultant inferiority of his two recent major works.

It is certainly true that criticism of one kind or another has played an unusually important part in Hemingway's career. Perhaps no American talent has so publicly developed as Hemingway's: more than any writer of our time he has been under glass, watched, checked up on, predicted, suspected, warned. One part of his audience took from him new styles of writing, of love-making, of very being; this was the simpler part, but its infatuate imitation was of course a kind of criticism. But another section of his audience responded negatively, pointing out that the texture of Hemingway's work was made up of cruelty, religion, anti-intellectualism, even of basic fascism, and looked upon him as the active proponent of evil. Neither part of such an audience could fail to make its impression upon a writer. The knowledge that he had set a fashion and become a legend may have been gratifying but surely it was also burdensome and depressing, and must have offered no small temptation. Yet perhaps more difficult for Hemingway to support with equanimity, and, from our point of view, much more important, was the constant accusation that he had attacked good human values. For upon Hemingway were turned all the

fine social feelings of the now passing decade, all the noble sentiments, all the desperate optimism, all the extreme rationalism, all the contempt of irony and indirection—all the attitudes which, in the full tide of the liberal-radical movement, became dominant in our thought about literature. There was demanded of him earnestness and pity, social consciousness, as it was called, something "positive" and "constructive" and literal. For is not life a simple thing and is not the writer a villain or a counter-revolutionary who does not see it so?

As if under the pressure of this critical tradition, which persisted in mistaking the "artist" for the "man," Hemingway seems to have undertaken to vindicate the "man" by showing that he, too, could muster the required "social" feelings in the required social way. At any rate, he now brought the "man" with all his contradictions and conflicts into his fiction. But "his ideas about life"—I quote Edmund Wilson again—

> or rather his sense of what happens and the way it happens, is in his stories sunk deep below the surface and is not conveyed by argument or preaching but by directly transmitted emotion: it is turned into something as hard as crystal and as disturbing as a great lyric. When he expounds this sense of life, however, in his own character of Ernest Hemingway, the Old Master of Key West, he has a way of sounding silly.

If, however, the failures of Hemingway "in his own character" were apparent to the practitioners of this critical tradition, they did not want Hemingway's virtues—the something "hard" and "disturbing." Indeed, they were in a critical tradition that did not want artists at all; it wanted "men," recruits, and its apologists were delighted to enlist Hemingway in his own character, with all his confusions and naïvety, simply because Hemingway had now declared himself on the right side.

And so when *To Have and Have Not* appeared, one critic of the Left, grappling with the patent fact that the "artist" had failed, yet determined to defend the "man" who was his new ally, had no recourse save to explain that in this case failure was triumph because artistic fumbling was the mark of Hemingway's attempt to come to grips with the problems of modern life which were as yet too great for his art to encompass. Similarly, another critic of the Left, faced with the aesthetic inferiority of Hemingway's first play, takes refuge in praising the personal vindication

which the "man" has made by "taking sides against fascism." In other words, the "man" has been a sad case and long in need of regeneration; the looseness of thought and emotion, the easy and uninteresting idealism of the social feelings to which Hemingway now gives such sudden and literal expression, are seen as the grateful signs of a personal reformation.

But the disinterested reader does not have to look very deep to see that Hemingway's social feelings, whatever they may yet become, are now the occasion for indulgence in the "man." His two recent failures are failures not only in form but in feeling; one looks at *To Have and Have Not* and *The Fifth Column*, one looks at their brag, and their disconcerting forcing of the emotions, at their downright priggishness, and then one looks at the criticism which, as I conceive it, made these failures possible by demanding them and which now accepts them so gladly, and one is tempted to reverse the whole liberal-radical assumption about literature. One almost wishes to say to an author like Hemingway, "You have no duty, no responsibility. Literature, in a political sense, is not in the least important. Wherever the sword is drawn it is mightier than the pen. Whatever you can do as a man, you can win no wars as an artist."

Very obviously this would not be the whole truth, yet saying it might counteract the crude and literal theory of art to which, in varying measure, we have all been training ourselves for a decade. We have conceived the artist to be a man perpetually on the spot, who must always report to us his precise moral and political latitude and longitude. Not that for a moment we would consider shaping our own political ideas by his; but we who of course turn for political guidance to newspapers, theorists, or historians, create the fiction that thousands—not, to be sure, ourselves—are waiting on the influence of the creative artist, and we stand by to see if he is leading us as he properly should. We consider then that we have exalted the importance of art, and perhaps we have. But in doing so we have quite forgotten how complex and subtle art is and, if it is to be "used," how very difficult it is to use it.

One feels that Hemingway would never have thrown himself into his new and inferior work if the necessity had not been put upon him to justify himself before this magisterial conception of literature. Devoted to literalness, the critical tradition of the Left took Hemingway's symbols for his intention, saw in his stories only cruelty or violence or a calculated indifference, and turned upon him a barrage of high-mindedness—that

liberal-radical high-mindedness that is increasingly taking the place of thought among the "progressive professional and middle-class forces" and that now, under the name of "good will," shuts out half the world. Had it seen what was actually in Hemingway's work, it would not have forced him out of his idiom of the artist and into the idiom of the man which he speaks with difficulty and without truth.

For what should have been always obvious is that Hemingway is a writer who, when he writes as an "artist," is passionately and aggressively concerned with truth and even with social truth. And with this in mind, one might begin the consideration of his virtues with a glance at Woodrow Wilson. Hemingway has said that all modern American writing comes from the prose of Huckleberry Finn's voyage down the Mississippi, and certainly his own starts there. But Huck's prose is a sort of moral symbol. It is the antithesis to the Widow Douglas—to the pious, the respectable, the morally plausible. It is the prose of the free man seeing the world as it really is. And Woodrow Wilson was, we might say, Hemingway's Widow Douglas. To the sensitive men who went to war it was not, perhaps, death and destruction that made the disorganizing shock. It was perhaps rather that death and destruction went on at the instance and to the accompaniment of the fine grave words, of which Woodrow Wilson's speeches were the finest and gravest. Here was the issue of liberal theory; here in the bloated or piecemeal corpse was the outcome of the words of humanitarianism and ideals; this was the work of presumably careful men of good will, learned men, polite men. The world was a newspaper world, a state-paper world, a memorial-speech world. Words were trundled smoothly o'er the tongue—Coleridge had said it long ago—

> Like mere abstractions, empty sounds to which
> We join no feeling and attach no form
> As if the soldier died without a wound . . .
> Passed off to Heaven, translated and not killed.

Everyone in that time had feelings, as they called them; just as everyone has "feelings" now. And it seems to me that what Hemingway wanted first to do was to get rid of the "feelings," the comfortable liberal humanitarian feelings, and to replace them with the truth.

Not cynicism, I think, not despair, as so often is said, but this ad-

mirable desire shaped his famous style and his notorious set of admirations and contempts. The trick of understatement or tangential statement sprang from this desire. Men had made so many utterances in such fine language that it had become time to shut up. Hemingway's people, as everyone knows, are afraid of words and ashamed of them and the line from his stories which has become famous is the one that begins "Won't you please," goes on through its innumerable "pleases," and ends, "stop talking." Not only slain men but slain words made up the mortality of the war.

Another manifestation of the same desire in Hemingway was his devotion to the ideal of technique as an end in itself. A great deal can go down in the tumble but one of the things that stands best is a cleanly done job. As John Peale Bishop says in his admirable essay on Hemingway (which yet, I feel, contributes to the general misapprehension by asserting the evanescence of Hemingway's "compassion"), professional pride is one of the last things to go. Hemingway became a devotee of his own skill and he exploited the ideal of skill in his characters. His admired men always do a good job; and the proper handling of a rod, a gun, an *espada*, or a pen is a thing, so Hemingway seems always to be saying, which can be understood when speech cannot.

This does not mean that Hemingway attacks mind itself, a charge which has often been brought against him. It is perhaps safe to say that whenever he seems to be making such an attack, it is not so much *reason* as it is *rationalization* that he resists; "mind" appears simply as the complex of false feelings. And against "mind" in this sense he sets up what he believes to be the primal emotions, among others pain and death, met not with the mind but with techniques and courage. "Mind" he sees as a kind of castrating knife, cutting off people's courage and proper self-love, making them "reasonable," which is to say dull and false. There is no need to point out how erroneous his view would have been were it really mind that was in question, but in the long romantic tradition of the attitude it never really *is* mind that is in question but rather a dull overlay of mechanical negative proper feeling, or a falseness of feeling which people believe to be reasonableness and reasonable virtue. And when we think how quickly "mind" capitulates in a crisis, how quickly, for example, it accommodated itself to the war and served it and glorified it, revulsion from it and a turning to the life of action—reduced, to be sure, to athleticism: but skillful physical effort is perhaps something intellectuals too quickly

dismiss as a form of activity—can be the better understood. We can understand, too, the insistence on courage, even on courage deliberately observed in its purity: that is, when it is at the service of the most sordid desires, as in "Fifty Grand."

This, then, was Hemingway's vision of the world. Was it a complete vision? Of course it was not. Was it a useful vision? That depended. If it was true, it was useful—if we knew how to use it. But the use of literature is not easy. In our hearts most of us are Platonists in the matter of art and we feel that we become directly infected by what we read; or at any rate we want to be Platonists, and we carry on a certain conviction from our Tom Swift days that literature provides chiefly a means of identification and emulation. The Platonist view is not wholly to be dismissed; we *do* in a degree become directly infected by art; but the position is too simple. And we are further Platonistic in our feeling that literature must be religious: we want our attitudes formulated by the tribal bard. This, of course, gives to literature a very important function. But it forgets that literature has never "solved" anything, though it may perhaps provide part of the data for eventual solutions.

With this attitude we asked, Can Hemingway's people speak only with difficulty? and we answered, Then it surely means that he thinks people should not speak. Does he find in courage the first of virtues? Then it surely means that we should be nothing but courageous. Is he concerned with the idea of death and of violence? Then it must mean that to him these are good things.

In short, we looked for an emotional leader. We did not conceive Hemingway to be saying, Come, let us look at the world together. We supposed him to be saying, Come, it is your moral duty to be as my characters are. We took the easiest and simplest way of using the artist and decided that he was not the "man" for us. That he was a man and a Prophet we were certain; and equally certain that he was not the "man" we would want to be or the Prophet who could lead us. That, as artist, he was not concerned with being a "man" did not occur to us. We had, in other words, quite overlooked the whole process of art, overlooked style and tone, symbol and implication, overlooked the obliqueness and complication with which the artist may criticize life, and assumed that what Hemingway saw or what he put into his stories he wanted to have exist in the actual world.

In short, the criticism of Hemingway came down to a kind of moral-

political lecture, based on the assumption that art is—or should be—the exact equivalent of life. The writer would have to be strong indeed who could remain unmoved by the moral pressure that was exerted upon Hemingway. He put away the significant reticences of the artist, opened his heart like "a man," and the flat literalness, the fine, fruity social idealism, of the latest novel and the play are the result.

The Fifth Column is difficult to speak of. Summary is always likely to be a critical treachery, but after consulting the summaries of those who admire the work and regard it as a notable event, it seems fair to say that it is the story of a tender-tough American hero with the horrors, who does counterespionage in Madrid, though everybody thinks he is just a playboy, who fears that he will no longer do his work well if he continues his liaison with an American girl chiefly remarkable for her legs and her obtuseness; and so sacrifices love and bourgeois pleasure for the sake of duty. Hemingway as a playwright gives up his tools of suggestion and tone and tells a literal story—an adventure story of the Spanish war, at best the story of the regeneration of an American Scarlet Pimpernel of not very good intelligence.

It is this work which has been received with the greatest satisfaction by a large and important cultural group as the fulfillment and vindication of Hemingway's career, as a fine document of the Spanish struggle, and as a political event of significance, "a sign of the times," as one reviewer called it. To me it seems none of these things. It does not vindicate Hemingway's career because that career in its essential parts needs no vindication; and it does not fulfill Hemingway's career because that career has been in the service of exact if limited emotional truth and this play is in the service of fine feelings. Nor can I believe that the Spanish war is represented in any good sense by a play whose symbols are so sentimentally personal* and whose dramatic tension is so weak; and it seems to me that there is something even vulgar in making Spain serve as a kind of mental

*In fairness to Hemingway the disclaimer of an important intention which he makes in his Preface should be cited. Some people, he says, have objected that his play does not present "the nobility and dignity of the cause of the Spanish people. It does not attempt to. It will take many plays and novels to do that, and the best ones will be written after the war is over." And he goes on: "This is only a play about counterespionage in Madrid. It has the defects of having been written in wartime, and if it has a moral it is that people who work for certain organizations have very little time for home life." I do not think that this exempts the play from severe judgment by those who dislike it, just as I think that those who admire it have a right to see in it, as they do, a "sign of the times."

hospital for disorganized foreigners who, out of a kind of self-contempt, turn to the "ideal of the Spanish people." Nor, finally, can I think that Hemingway's statement of an antifascist position is of great political importance or of more than neutral virtue. It is hard to believe that the declaration of antifascism is nowadays any more a mark of sufficient grace in a writer than a declaration against disease would be in a physician or a declaration against accidents would be in a locomotive engineer. The admirable intention in itself is not enough and criticism begins and does not end when the intention is declared.

But I believe that judgments so simple as these will be accepted with more and more difficulty. The "progressive professional and middle-class forces" are framing a new culture, based on the old liberal-radical culture but designed now to hide the new anomaly by which they live their intellectual and emotional lives. For they must believe, it seems, that imperialist arms advance proletarian revolution, that oppression by the right people brings liberty. Like Hemingway's latest hero, they show one front to the world and another to themselves, know that within they are true proletarian men while they wrap themselves in Early American togas; they are enthralled by their own good will; they are people of fine feelings and they dare not think lest the therapeutic charm vanish. This is not a political essay and I am not here concerned with the political consequences of these things, bad though they be and worse though they will be, but only with the cultural consequences. For to prevent the anomaly from appearing in its genuine difficulty, emotion—of a very limited kind—has been apotheosized and thought has been made almost a kind of treachery; the reviewer of *The Fifth Column* to whom I have already referred cites as a virtue Hemingway's "unintellectual" partisanship of the Spanish cause. The piety of "good will" has become enough and fascism is conceived not as a force which complicates the world but as a force which simplifies the world—and so it does for any number of people of good will (of a good will not to be doubted, I should say) for whom the existence of an absolute theological evil makes nonexistent any other evil.

It is this group that has made Hemingway its cultural hero and for reasons that need not be canvassed very far. Now that Hemingway has become what this group would call "affirmative" he has become insufficient; but insufficiency is the very thing this group desires. When Hemingway was in "negation" his themes of courage, loyalty, tenderness, and silence, tangentially used, suggested much; but now that they are used lit-

erally and directly they say far less than the situation demands. His stories showed a great effort of comprehension and they demand a considerable effort from their readers, that effort in which lies whatever teaching powers there are in art; but now he is not making an effort to understand but to accept, which may indeed be the effort of the honest political man but not of the honest artist.

An attempt has been made to settle the problem of the artist's relation to politics by loudly making the requirement that he give up his base individuality and rescue humanity and his own soul by becoming the mouthpiece of a party, a movement, or a philosophy. That requirement has demonstrably failed as a solution of the problem; the problem, however, still remains. It may be, of course, that politics itself will settle the problem for us; it may be that in our tragic time art worthy of the name cannot be produced and that we must live with the banalities of *The Fifth Column* or even with less. However, if the problem will be allowed to exist at all, it will not be solved in theory and on paper but in practice. And we have, after all, the practice of the past to guide us, at least with a few tentative notions. We can learn to stop pressing the writer with the demand for contemporaneity when we remember the simple fact that writers have always written directly to and about the troubles of their own time and for and about their contemporaries, some in ways to us more obvious than others but all responding inevitably to what was happening around them. We can learn too that the relation of an artist to his culture, whether that culture be national or the culture of a relatively small recusant group, is a complex and even a contradictory relation: the artist must accept his culture and be accepted by it, but also—so it seems—he must be its critic, correcting and even rejecting it according to his personal insight; his strength seems to come from the tension of this ambivalent situation and we must learn to welcome the ambivalence. Finally, and simplest of all, we can learn not to expect a political, certainly not an immediately political, effect from a work of art; and in removing from art a burden of messianic responsibility which it never has discharged and cannot discharge we may leave it free to do whatever it actually can do.

T. S. Eliot's Politics

1940

It is a century ago this year that John Stuart Mill angered his Benthamite friends by his now famous essay on Coleridge in which, writing sympathetically of a religious and conservative philosopher, he avowed his intention to modify the rigid materialism of utilitarian thought. Mill did not speak out for Coleridge for what are sometimes called "romantic" reasons—that is, because he thought transcendentalism was warmer and more glowing than utilitarianism. He did think so, but the reason he urged attention to Coleridge was that he thought Coleridge's ability "to see further into the complexities of the human feelings and intellect" offered something practical to add to Bentham's too "short and easy" political analysis. And he told his radical friends that they should make their prayer this one: " 'Lord, enlighten thou our enemies' . . . sharpen their wits, give acuteness to their perceptions and consecutiveness and clearness to their reasoning powers: we are in danger from their folly, not from their wisdom."

The book of Coleridge's which Mill mentioned most often was the volume usually referred to as *Church and State*; its full title is *On the Constitution of the Church and State, According to the Idea of Each*, and it is from this work that T. S. Eliot's newest essay, "The Idea of a Christian Society," takes not only its special meaning of the word "idea" but also its whole

inspiration. Mr. Eliot has always said that a connection with the past, more or less consciously maintained, is necessary for intellectual and artistic virtue. For reasons which scarcely need exploration he himself has found his own most useful affinity with the seventeenth century and the thirteenth. Yet for all his enmity to Romanticism, his own true place in politics and religion is in the Romantic line of the nineteenth century. He continues the tradition of Coleridge and, after Coleridge, of Newman, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Matthew Arnold—the men who, in the days of Reform, stood out, on something better than reasons of interest, against the philosophical assumptions of materialistic Liberalism. Their very language, if we except Carlyle's, is commemorated in his prose, and to their thought this book is the tragic coda.

A century has not seen the establishment of this line of thought, but then neither has that same century seen the establishment, though it has surely seen the dominance, of the thought it opposed. What we see at the moment is the philosophy of materialism—of the Right, the Left, and the Center—at war with itself. In that war many of our old notions have become inadequate and many of our old alliances inoperative. We all of us, from our own feelings, can understand Mr. Eliot when, in giving up *The Criterion* after his long editorship, he spoke of a "depression of spirits so different from any other experience of fifty years as to be a new emotion." But a really new emotion implies a modification of all other existing emotions and it requires a whole new world of intellect to accommodate it. Certainly the old world of those who read what I am now writing cannot give it room. Indeed, can we say that that old intellectual world of ours any longer exists? Disordered as it always was, it seems now almost to have vanished.

I am far from thinking that Mr. Eliot supplies a new world, yet in this troubled time when we are bound to think of eventual reconstructions, I should like to recommend to the attention of readers probably hostile to religion Mr. Eliot's religious politics. I say no more than *recommend to the attention*: I certainly do not recommend Mr. Eliot's ideas to the allegiance. But here we are, a very small group and quite obscure; our possibility of action is suspended by events; perhaps we have never been more than vocal and perhaps soon we can hope to be no more than thoughtful; our relations with the future are dark and dubious. There is, indeed, only one connection with the future of which we can be to any extent sure: our pledge to the critical intellect. Of the critical intellect a critic has said

that "it must be patient and know how to wait; and flexible and know how to attach itself to things and how to withdraw from them." Perhaps Mr. Eliot's long if recalcitrant discipleship to Matthew Arnold gives me some justification for quoting Arnold once again: of criticism he said that "it must be apt to study and praise elements that for the fulness of spiritual perfection are wanted, even though they belong to a power which in the practical sphere may be maleficent." It is with this sentence in mind that I urge the importance of Mr. Eliot's book.

In the imagination of the Left Mr. Eliot has always figured with excessive simplicity. His story was supposed to be nothing more than this: that from the horrible realities of the Waste Land he escaped into the arms of Anglo-Catholic theology. This account may or may not be adequate; but as we review the ten years in which Marxism flourished among the intellectuals and then decayed, we can scarcely believe that this story, if true, is the worst that could be told of a man in our time. Whatever is censurable in it depends on the blind power of that weary word "escape" and on our attitude to theology. For theology I certainly do not make a stand, but when Mr. Eliot is accused of "faith," of the "surrender" of his intellect to "authority," it is hard to see, when the accusers are Marxist intellectuals, how their own action was always so very different. If we have the right to measure the personal and moral value of convictions by the disinterested intellectual effort through which they are arrived at, we might find that Mr. Eliot's conversion was notably more honorable than that of many who impugned his decision.

Mr. Eliot's book is a small one, it is not overtly dramatic and it does not have an air of "power." To readers of a different persuasion it cannot offer a solution that will seem more comprehensive or more practicable than their own; it can only serve them by questioning their assumptions. Its point of departure is simple, even obvious. Mr. Eliot, believing that a nation's political philosophy is not to be found in the conscious formulation of its ideal aims but, rather, in "the sub-stratum of collective temperament, ways of behaviour and unconscious values" which go to make up the formulation, is unable to find, what most people so easily find, a polar difference between the political philosophy of the Western democracies and that of the totalitarian states. He does not say they are the same; their forms differ and their qualities differ. Yet the difference seems to him not one of principle but of degree; and when he considers how democracy is forced to defend itself from totalitarianism by adopting the

totalitarian forms, he cannot think that the differences are dependent on more than time. To be maintained, the differences must be more than temporal, they must be principled, and Mr. Eliot cannot believe that the principles to be put in opposition to the totalitarian principles can be those of liberalism and democracy. Liberalism is a necessary negative element in politics but no more than that; as for democracy, Mr. Eliot says that it is so praised by everyone that its mention makes him think of the Merovingian Emperors and look around for the Mayor of the Palace.

But because totalitarianism is what he calls "pagan," the only possible opposing principle Mr. Eliot can find is that of Christianity. He cannot yet account England—the England which responded as it did to the events of September 1938—a pagan state, though he cannot call it actually a Christian one; it has a culture "which is mainly negative, but which, so far as it is positive, is still Christian." But because the situation no longer permits a negative culture, the choice will have to be made "between the formation of a new Christian culture and the acceptance of a pagan one."

More than once in the brief course of his book we hear from Mr. Eliot that he is not interested in Christianity as revivalism and he quotes a "distinguished theologian" to the effect that the great mistake made about Christianity is to suppose it primarily a religion and emotional when in truth it is primarily dogma and intellectual. We are not, then, to be concerned with Christianity as pietistic feeling but with Christianity as a precise view of man and the world, which implies a social form. But as we prepare to hear the Idea* of a Christian society we have surely the right to ask the proposer what, in his opinion, caused the failure of such previous Christian societies as may be said to have existed. We have, too, the right to ask him what it is in the nature of Christianity which brought it to the condition in which men and nations, trained in a wholly Christian culture, felt constrained to discover the inadequacy of the dogmas which are now expected to save the world. He might perhaps answer that Christianity is right but not all-powerful and that there are human impulses with which it cannot easily deal. Or if, like Mr. Eliot, he admits a dialectical-materialistic interpretation of the past but not of the future, he might find a material cause which explains the past failure without limiting the future hope. Well, we must not put inadequate answers into Mr.

*"By an idea I mean . . . that conception of a thing . . . which is given by the knowledge of its ultimate aim."—Coleridge.

Eliot's mouth, but it is indeed hard to imagine the answer that will satisfy our historical skepticism, a skepticism which is aroused, too, by Mr. Eliot's unexpressed sense that there was once a past whose political virtues are worthy and possible of recapture.

So much for our premissed objections. They are certainly not diminished by the particular recommendations which Mr. Eliot goes on to make. He projects a society which will exist in three aspects—what he calls the Christian State, the Christian Community, and the Community of Christians. This more or less Platonic triad exists, as we cannot help observing, on a rather minimal Christianity. For of the heads of his Christian State Mr. Eliot demands no more than that they be educated to think in Christian categories; for the rest, the criterion of their value is to be the same to which statesmen have always submitted—not devoutness but effectiveness. "They may," Mr. Eliot says, "frequently perform un-Christian acts; they must never attempt to defend their actions on un-Christian principles." The State, we are told, is Christian only negatively and is no more than the reflection of the Christian society which it governs. Yet this society itself is not permeated by a very intense Christianity. The mass of its citizens make up the Christian Community and their behavior is to be "largely unconscious"—for, because "their capacity for *thinking* about the objects of faith is small, their Christianity may be almost wholly realised in behaviour: both in their customary and periodic religious observances and in a traditional code of behaviour towards their neighbours."

What is left, then, to give the positive Christian tone to the Christian Society is what Mr. Eliot calls the Community of Christians, a group reminiscent of Coleridge's "clerisy" but more exclusively an elite, constituted of those clerics and laymen who consciously live the Christian life and who have notable intellectual or spiritual gifts. It is they who, by their "identity of belief and aspiration, their background of a common system of education and a common culture" will collectively form "the conscious mind and conscience of the nation." They are not to constitute a caste and so are to be loosely joined together rather than organized, and Mr. Eliot compares them in their possible wide effectiveness with the segregated intellectuals who now write only for each other.

Of the specifically and immediately practical, Mr. Eliot says little beyond submitting his Christian Society to judgment according to its success in carrying out the reforms projected by Christian sociologists. The natural end of such a society is man's "virtue and well-being in commu-

nity"; this is "acknowledged for all" but "for those who have eyes to see it" there is also the supernatural end of beatitude. Culturally such a society is to be pluralistic—perhaps in a limited sense of that word, though we are told that the Community of Christians will include minds indifferent or even hostile to Christianity. There is a certain faith in the good effect of smaller units of social organization than we now have; production for use is spoken of as natural and moral; the abolition of classes is mentioned as not an impossibility.

This, it is clear, is not a social vision likely to heighten anyone's ardor, but perhaps this is not wholly a fault when we remember that neither is it likely to engender despair by raising unrealizable expectations. Of its obvious inadequacies, some may be said to arise from certain deficiencies of Mr. Eliot's temperament where it joins with certain aspects of strict and theological Anglicanism, giving us such things as the cold ignorance of what people are really like, or a confusion of morality with snobbery or conformity, or even with a rather fierce Puritanism. More important than these, however, are the inadequacies which come from an insufficient view—insufficient even when we consider the self-imposed limitations of the work—of the relation of social forms to power and of power to wealth. Without a specific consideration of this problem even a religious politics—and even the most theoretical treatment of such a politics—must seem evasive.

Yet when we have recognized all the inadequacies of Mr. Eliot's conception there still remains a theoretical interest which in the long run has, I think, its own practical value, and this lies in the assumption upon which Mr. Eliot's society is based. Mr. Eliot has not written his apologia and has not, so far as I know, made a systematic statement of belief; but I think a sentence in his essay on Pascal makes clear what the grounds of his belief are. Mr. Eliot is talking about the "unbeliever's" inability to understand the way the "intelligent believer" comes to his faith; the unbeliever, he says, "does not consider that if certain emotional states, certain developments of character and what in the highest sense can be called 'saintliness' are inherently and by inspection known to be good, then the satisfactory explanation of the world must be an explanation which will admit the 'reality' of these values." This sentence, which could not have been carelessly written, indicates that Mr. Eliot is perhaps closer than he would admit to the pragmatic theology of Matthew Arnold which he so much disdains. But the exact nature of Mr. Eliot's theology is not for the

moment important. What touches our problem of a whole new intellectual world and what I should like to take hold of, not only for itself but for what it indicates beyond itself, is the morality with which Mr. Eliot is concerned. "I am inclined," he said some time ago, "to approach public affairs from the point of view of the moralist," and over and over again he has insisted that to think of politics and economics as independent of morality is impossible: impossible in an ethical sense—the political and economic theorist *should not* so consider them; and impossible in a practical sense—the theorist *cannot* construct his theories except on the ground (often unexpressed) of moral assumptions. "I feel no confidence in any scheme for putting the world in order," Mr. Eliot said, "until the proposer has answered satisfactorily the question: What is the good life?"

Everybody, of course, approves of morality. Even Leon Trotsky, who was suspicious of the morality of all moralists, spoke well of it. But, like Trotsky, most people think of morality in a somewhat ambiguous fashion: it is something to be cultivated after the particular revolution they want is accomplished, but just now it is only in the way; or they think of it as whatever helps to bring the revolution about. But Mr. Eliot thinks of morality as absolute and not as a means but an end; and, what is more, he believes that it is at every moment a present end and not one indefinitely postponable. He does not mean merely social good and the doing of it (though this enters, too) and he does not mean anything which is to be judged only from a utilitarian point of view. He means something which is personal in a way we have forgotten and which, in a way we have denied, connects personal action with the order of the universe. When he says that he is a moralist in politics he means most importantly that politics is to be judged by what it does for the moral perfection, rather than for the physical easement, of man. For the earthly good of man—the localizing adjective is important for Mr. Eliot—is moral perfection; what advances this is politically good, what hinders it is politically bad.

Now I do not think, with Mr. Eliot, that morality is absolute but I do believe that his way of considering morality has certain political advantages over Trotsky's way or the Marxist way in general. If one thing more than another marks the culture of radicalism in recent years it is that a consideration of means has taken a priority over the consideration of ends—or perhaps, to avoid the chances of a means-and-ends misunderstanding, we might rather say that immediate ends have become more important than ultimate ends. The radical intellectual of today differs

from his political ancestor of even twenty-five years ago in the interest he finds in the immediate method as against the ultimate purpose. And if we take a longer period we find an even greater difference. The preparatory days of revolution—I mean the days from Montaigne to Rousseau and Diderot—were the days in which men projected a great character for man. The social imagination, when it was fresher, gave the worlds of the future a quality which our projected worlds can no longer have. The French Revolution was advanced on the warmest considerations of personality—one thinks of Montaigne's Montaigne, of Rousseau's Rousseau and his Émile, of Diderot's d'Alembert and his Rameau's nephew. And it is incidentally significant that, after this time, in every nation touched by the Revolution, the novel should have taken on its intense life. For what so animated the novel of the nineteenth century was the passionate—the "revolutionary"—interest in what man should be. It was, that is, a moral interest, and the world had the sense of a future moral revolution. Nowadays the novel, and especially in the hands of the radical intellectuals, has become enfeebled and mechanical: its decline coincides with the increasing indifference to the question, What should man become?

The heightened tempo of events will go far toward explaining the change—the speed with which calamity approached, our sense of the ship sinking and our no doubt natural giving to survival the precedence over the quality of the life that was to be preserved. Much of the change can be laid to the account of Marx, for it was Marx, with his claim to a science of society, with his concept of materialistic and dialectical causation, who, for his adherents, made the new emphasis seem unavoidable. Considerations of morality Marx largely scorned; he begins in morality, in the great historical and descriptive chapters of *Capital*, but he does not continue in it, perhaps because he is led to believe that the order of the world is going to establish morality. He speaks often of human dignity, but just what human dignity is he does not tell us, nor has any adequate Marxist philosopher or poet told us: it is not a subject which comes within the scope of their science.

Yet not merely upon the tempo of events nor upon Marx himself can we lay the indifference to morality and to aims. It must fall on something of which Marx was indeed a part and of which the tempo is of course a part but of which each of us is also a part: on the total imagination of our time. It is the characteristic of this imagination so to conceive the human

quality that it diminishes with ever-increasing speed before the exigencies of means.

Lenin gave us the cue when, at the end of *The State and Revolution*, he told us that we might well postpone the problem of what man is to become until such time as he might become anything he chose. One understands how such a thing gets said; but one understands, too, that saying it does not make possible a suspension of choice: it is a choice already made and the making of it was what gave certain people the right to wonder whether the ethics and culture of Communism were anything else than the extension of the ethics and culture of the bourgeois business world. For many years the hero of our moral myth was the Worker-and-Peasant who smiled from the covers of *Soviet Russia Today*, simple, industrious, literate—and grateful. Whether or not people like him actually existed is hard to say; one suspects not and hopes not; but he was what his leaders and the radical intellectuals were glad to propagate as a moral ideal; that probably factitious Worker was the moral maximum which the preoccupation with immediate ends could accommodate.

The diminished ideal which was represented by that Worker is what Mr. Eliot would perhaps call, in his way, a heresy. But from another point of view it is also a practical, a political, error. It is the error which lies hidden in materialist and rationalist psychology. Against it a certain part of the nineteenth century was always protesting. Wordsworth was one of the first to make the protest when he discarded the Godwinian view of the mind, advanced a psychology of his own and from it derived a politics. No doubt his politics was, in the end, reactionary enough; but it became reactionary for this reason as much as any other: that it was in protest against the view of man shared alike by Liberal manufacturing Whig and radical philosopher, the view that man was very simple and individually of small worth in the cosmic or political scheme. It was because of this view that Wordsworth deserted the Revolution; and it was to supply what the Revolution lacked or, in some part, denied, that he wrote his best poetry.

What the philosophy of the Revolution lacked or denied it is difficult to find a name for. Sometimes it gets called mysticism, but it is not mysticism and Wordsworth is not a mystic. Sometimes, as if by a kind of compromise, it gets called "mystery," but that, though perhaps closer, is certainly not close enough. What is meant negatively is that man cannot be comprehended in a formula; what is meant positively is the sense of

complication and possibility, of surprise, intensification, variety, unfoldment, worth. These are things whose more or less abstract expressions we recognize in the arts; in our inability to admit them in social matters lies a great significance. Our inability to give this quality a name, our embarrassment, even, when we speak of it, marks a failure in our thought. But Wordsworth was able to speak of this quality and he involved it integrally with morality and all the qualities of mind which morality suggests. Eventually he made morality absolute and admittedly he engaged it with all sorts of unsound and even dangerous notions. But, as he conceived the quality, it was a protection against the belief that man could be made into a means and it was an affirmation that every man was an end.

It is a tragic irony that the diminution of the moral possibility, with all that the moral possibility implies of free will and individual value, should spring, as it does, from the notion of the perfectibility of man.* The *ultimate man* has become the end for which all temporal men are the means. Such a notion is part of the notion of progress in general, a belief shared by the bourgeois and the Marxist, that the direction of the world is that of a never-ceasing improvement. So far as Marxism goes, this idea seems to have a discrepancy with the Marxist dialectic, for it depends on a standard of judgment which, if not an absolute, is so close to an absolute as to be indistinguishable from it—the judgment of direction, the certainty of what "higher" signifies and what "better" signifies. One has only to hear a Marxist defend (as many a Marxist will) the belief that through the ages even art shows a definable progress and improvement to understand how untenable the notion is in any of its usual statements. And the progress which is held to be observable in art is held to be no less observable in human relations.

*I leave it to some novelist to explore the more subtle results of the confused denial of the moral possibility as it appears in the personal lives of radical intellectuals. They have used the denial, of course, to explain the conduct of men less equipped than themselves for thought; they have declared that the mass of men are not to be held morally responsible for their own deeds and that only history and environment are accountable. I think no one can reject this generous assumption. But questions must arise concerning what method we are to use in the judgment of men who are our equals in moral and intellectual training. And the same question about a method of judgment must arise about oneself, for in actual practice we do not easily tolerate people who are content to ascribe their personal—I do not mean their practical—failures to circumstance alone. That novelists have not dealt with this problem seems to me to bear out what I said about the failure of the novel in the hands of the radical intellectual. Two exceptions must be noted: Malraux's *Man's Fate* and Silone's *Bread and Wine*.

And from the notion of progress has grown that contempt for the past and that worship of the future which so characteristically marks the radical thought of our time. The past is seen as a series of necessary failures which perhaps have their value as, in the dialectical way, they contribute to what comes after. The past has been a failure: the present—what can it matter in the light of the perfecting future? And from—or with—a sense of the past as failure, and of the present as nothing better than a willing tributary to the future, comes the sense of the wrongness of the human quality at any given moment. For, while they have always violently reprobated any such notion as Original Sin and by and large have held the belief that, by nature, man is good, most radical philosophies have contradicted themselves by implying that man, in his quality, in his kind, will be wholly changed by socialism in fine ways that we cannot predict: man will be good not as some men have been, but good in new and unspecified fashions. At the bottom of at least popular Marxism there has always been a kind of disgust with humanity as it is and a perfect faith in humanity as it is to be.

Mr. Eliot, as I have said in passing, has his own disgust; his later criticism has shown his pained surprise at any manifestation of life that is not canonically correct. But at least Mr. Eliot's feelings are appropriate to the universe he assumes, and at least he is aware of them and makes provision for them. Of his universe Mr. Eliot predicates two things: a divine ordination and an absolute morality. From these two assumptions spring two practical conclusions which are worthy of note. The first is that the life of man involves a dual allegiance, one to the Universal Church which represents the divinely ordained universe and one to the nation and the National Church which represents temporal necessities; and the commitment of the National Church to an absolute morality makes, within the nation itself, a dualism, for the National Church, in its function, may be in disagreement with the national state. This dualism constitutes, Mr. Eliot believes, a barrier against monistic solutions of political problems such as statism or racism, and the tensions it creates are, for him, the distinguishing mark of a Christian society. The second thing implied by Mr. Eliot's assumptions is that there exists a moral goal never to be reached and a political ideal never to be realized. The world, we are told, will never be left wholly without glory, but all earthly societies are sordidly inadequate beside the ideal. This moral Platonism puts, of course, a check upon the hopes of man and restricts the possibility of "progress" yet its

tragic presuppositions have this good result: that they bar any such notion as that of a *final* conflict and prevent us from envisaging any such ultimate moral victory as will permit the "withering away of the state"; they make us admit that the conflict is everlasting and in doing so they permit us to exercise a kind of charity by which we may value the humanity of the present equally with that of the future.

We say that our assumptions arise from our needs and must suit our intentions, and so they must; and perhaps in relatively recent times intelligent men of religion have been more honest in admitting the necessary assumptive elements in thought than have the radical philosophers with their tendency to hold all assumption illegitimate. Mr. Eliot shares this honesty and his thought benefits from it and our thought may benefit from the virtues his thought has. But if our assumptions spring from our needs, it is nevertheless still true that the validity of our needs and the relations between our intentions and our needs may be logically and empirically tested. So tested, Mr. Eliot's polity will not, I think, stand. If, for example, he believes that there is an historical instance or a practical likelihood of a church effectively providing the "tensions" he speaks of, he is, I think, deceiving himself. I think, indeed, that, whatever his intentions, the ecclesiastical instrument upon which he relies is, in "the practical sphere," bound to be maleficent. If I have tried to say that the assumptions of materialism have largely failed us, it was surely not to conclude that the assumptions of supernaturalism can aid us. Based as it is on supernatural assumptions, Mr. Eliot's politics is no doubt thoroughly vulnerable. But I have spoken of it with respect because it suggests elements which a rational and naturalistic philosophy, to be adequate, must encompass.

The Immortality Ode

1941

I

Criticism, we know, must always be concerned with the poem itself. But a poem does not always exist only in itself; sometimes it has a very lively existence in its false or partial appearances. These simulacra of the actual poem must be taken into account by criticism; and sometimes, in its effort to come at the poem as it really is, criticism does well to allow the simulacra to dictate at least its opening moves. In speaking about Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," I should like to begin by considering an interpretation of the poem which is commonly made.* According to this interpretation—I choose for its brevity Dean Sperry's statement of a view which is held by many other admirable critics—the Ode is "Wordsworth's conscious farewell to his art, a dirge sung over his departing powers."

How did this interpretation—erroneous, as I believe—come into being? The Ode may indeed be quoted to substantiate it, but I do not think it has been drawn directly from the poem itself. To be sure, the Ode is not wholly perspicuous. Wordsworth himself seems to have thought it difficult, for in the Fenwick notes he speaks of the need for competence and attention in the reader. The difficulty does not lie in the diction, which is

*The text of the poem is given at the end of this essay.

simple, or even in the syntax, which is sometimes obscure, but rather in certain contradictory statements which the poem makes, and in the ambiguity of some of its crucial words. Yet the erroneous interpretation I am dealing with does not arise from any intrinsic difficulty of the poem itself but rather from certain extraneous and unexpressed assumptions which some of its readers make about the nature of the mind.

Nowadays it is not difficult for us to understand that such tacit assumptions about the mental processes are likely to lie hidden beneath what we say about poetry. Usually, despite our general awareness of their existence, it requires great effort to bring these assumptions explicitly into consciousness. But in speaking of Wordsworth one of the commonest of our unexpressed ideas comes so close to the surface of our thought that it needs only to be grasped and named. I refer to the belief that poetry is made by means of a particular poetic faculty, a faculty which may be isolated and defined.

It is this belief, based wholly upon assumption, which underlies all the speculations of the critics who attempt to provide us with explanations of Wordsworth's poetic decline by attributing it to one or another of the events of his life. In effect any such explanation is a way of *defining* Wordsworth's poetic faculty: what the biographical critics are telling us is that Wordsworth wrote great poetry by means of a faculty which depended upon his relations with Annette Vallon, or by means of a faculty which operated only so long as he admired the French Revolution, or by means of a faculty which flourished by virtue of a particular pitch of youthful sense-perception, or by virtue of a certain attitude toward Jeffrey's criticism, or by virtue of a certain relation with Coleridge.

Now no one can reasonably object to the idea of mental determination in general, and I certainly do not intend to make out that poetry is an unconditioned activity. Still, this particular notion of mental determination which implies that Wordsworth's genius failed when it was deprived of some single emotional circumstance is so much too simple and so much too mechanical that I think we must inevitably reject it. Certainly what we know of poetry does not allow us to refer the making of it to any single faculty. Nothing less than the whole mind, the whole man, will suffice for its origin. And such was Wordsworth's own view of the matter.

There is another unsubstantiated assumption at work in the common biographical interpretation of the Ode. This is the belief that a natural

and inevitable warfare exists between the poetic faculty and the faculty by which we conceive or comprehend general ideas. Wordsworth himself did not believe in this antagonism—indeed, he held an almost contrary view—but Coleridge thought that philosophy had encroached upon and destroyed his own powers, and the critics who speculate on Wordsworth's artistic fate seem to prefer Coleridge's psychology to Wordsworth's own. Observing in the Ode a contrast drawn between something called "the visionary gleam" and something called "the philosophic mind," they leap to the conclusion that the Ode is Wordsworth's conscious farewell to his art, a dirge sung over departing powers.

I am so far from agreeing with this conclusion that I believe the Ode is not only not a dirge sung over departing powers but actually a dedication to new powers. Wordsworth did not, to be sure, realize his hopes for these new powers, but that is quite another matter.

2

As with many poems, it is hard to understand any part of the Ode until we first understand the whole of it. I will therefore say at once what I think the poem is chiefly about. It is a poem about growing; some say it is a poem about growing old, but I believe it is about growing up. It is incidentally a poem about optics and then, inevitably, about epistemology, it is concerned with ways of seeing and then with ways of knowing. Ultimately it is concerned with ways of acting, for, as usual with Wordsworth, knowledge implies liberty and power. In only a limited sense is the Ode a poem about immortality.

Both formally and in the history of its composition the poem is divided into two main parts. The first part, consisting of four stanzas, states an optical phenomenon and asks a question about it. The second part, consisting of seven stanzas, answers that question and is itself divided into two parts, of which the first is despairing, the second hopeful. Some time separates the composition of the question from that of the answer; the evidence most recently adduced by Professor de Selincourt seems to indicate that the interval was two years.

The question which the first part asks is this:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

All the first part leads to this question, but although it moves in only one direction it takes its way through more than one mood. There are at least three moods before the climax of the question is reached.

The first stanza makes a relatively simple statement. "There was a time" when all common things seemed clothed in "celestial light," when they had "the glory and the freshness of a dream." In a poem ostensibly about immortality we ought perhaps to pause over the word "celestial," but the present elaborate title was not given to the poem until much later, and conceivably at the time of the writing of the first part the idea of immortality was not in Wordsworth's mind at all. Celestial light probably means only something different from ordinary, earthly, scientific light; it is a light of the mind, shining even in darkness—"by night or day"—and it is perhaps similar to the light which is praised in the invocation to the third book of *Paradise Lost*.

The second stanza goes on to develop this first mood, speaking of the ordinary, physical kind of vision and suggesting further the meaning of "celestial." We must remark that in this stanza Wordsworth is so far from observing a diminution of his physical senses that he explicitly affirms their strength. He is at pains to tell us how vividly he sees the rainbow, the rose, the moon, the stars, the water, and the sunshine. I emphasize this because some of those who find the Ode a dirge over the poetic power maintain that the poetic power failed with the failure of Wordsworth's senses. It is true that Wordsworth, who lived to be eighty, was said in middle life to look much older than his years. Still, thirty-two, his age at the time of writing the first part of the Ode, is an extravagantly early age for a dramatic failure of the senses. We might observe here, as others have observed elsewhere, that Wordsworth never did have the special and perhaps modern sensibility of his sister or of Coleridge, who were so aware of exquisite particularities. His finest passages are moral, emotional, subjective; whatever visual intensity they have comes from his response to the object, not from his close observation of it.

And in the second stanza Wordsworth not only confirms his senses but also confirms his ability to perceive beauty. He tells us how he responds to the loveliness of the rose and of the stars reflected in the water. He can deal, in the way of Fancy, with the delight of the moon when

there are no competing stars in the sky. He can see in Nature certain moral propensities. He speaks of the sunshine as a "glorious birth." But here he pauses to draw distinctions from that fascinating word "glory": despite his perception of the sunshine as a glorious birth, he knows "That there hath past away a glory from the earth."

Now, with the third stanza, the poem begins to complicate itself. It is *while* Wordsworth is aware of the "optical" change in himself, the loss of the "glory," that there comes to him "a thought of grief." I emphasize the word "while" to suggest that we must understand that for some time he had been conscious of the "optical" change *without* feeling grief. The grief, then, would seem to be coincidental with but not necessarily caused by the change. And the grief is not of long duration for we learn that

> A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
> And I again am strong.

It would be not only interesting but also useful to know what that "timely utterance" was, and I shall hazard a guess; but first I should like to follow the development of the Ode a little further, pausing only to remark that the reference to the timely utterance seems to imply that, although the grief is not of long duration, still we are not dealing with the internal experiences of a moment, or of a morning's walk, but of a time sufficient to allow for development and change of mood; that is, the dramatic time of the poem is not exactly equivalent to the emotional time.

Stanza IV goes on to tell us that the poet, after gaining relief from the timely utterance, whatever that was, felt himself quite in harmony with the joy of Nature in spring. The tone of this stanza is ecstatic, and in a way that some readers find strained and unpleasant and even of doubtful sincerity. Twice there is a halting repetition of words to express a kind of painful intensity of response: "I feel—I feel it all," and "I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!" Wordsworth sees, hears, feels—and with that "joy" which both he and Coleridge felt to be so necessary to the poet. But despite the response, despite the joy, the ecstasy changes to sadness in a wonderful modulation which quite justifies the antecedent shrillness of affirmation:

> —But there's a Tree, of many, one,
> A single Field which I have looked upon,
> Both of them speak of something that is gone:

The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat.

And what they utter is the terrible question:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

3

Now, the interpretation which makes the Ode a dirge over departing powers and a conscious farewell to art takes it for granted that the visionary gleam, the glory and the dream, are Wordsworth's names for the power by which he made poetry. This interpretation gives to the Ode a place in Wordsworth's life exactly analogous to the place that "Dejection: An Ode" has in Coleridge's life. It is well known how intimately the two poems are connected; the circumstances of their composition make them symbiotic. Coleridge in his poem most certainly does say that his poetic powers are gone or going: he is very explicit, and the language he uses is very close to Wordsworth's own. He tells us that upon "the inanimate cold world" there must issue from the soul "a light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud," and that this glory *is* Joy, which he himself no longer possesses. But Coleridge's poem, although it responds to the first part of Wordsworth's, is not a recapitulation of it. On the contrary, Coleridge is precisely contrasting his situation with Wordsworth's. As Professor de Selincourt says in his comments on the first version of "Dejection," this contrast "was the root idea" of Coleridge's ode.* In April of 1802 Wordsworth was five months away from his marriage to Mary Hutchison, on the point of establishing his life in a felicity and order which became his genius, while Coleridge was at the nadir of despair over his own unhappy marriage and his hopeless love for Sara, the sister of Wordsworth's fiancée. And the difference between the situations of the two friends stands in Coleridge's mind for the difference in the states of health of their respective poetic powers.

*Ernest de Selincourt, *Wordsworthian and Other Studies*, Oxford, 1947.

Coleridge explicitly ascribes the decay of his poetic power to his unhappiness, which worked him harm in two ways—by forcing him to escape from the life of emotion to find refuge in intellectual abstraction and by destroying the Joy which, issuing as "a light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud," so irradiated the world as to make it a fit object of the shaping power of imagination. But Wordsworth tells us something quite different about himself. He tells us that he has strength, that he has Joy, but still he has not the glory. In short, we have no reason to assume that, when he asks the question at the end of the fourth stanza, he means, "Where has my creative power gone?" Wordsworth tells us how he made poetry; he says he made it out of the experience of his senses as worked upon by his contemplative intellect, but he nowhere tells us that he made poetry out of visionary gleams, out of glories, or out of dreams.

To be sure, he writes very often about gleams. The word "gleam" is a favorite one with him, and a glance at the Lane Cooper concordance will confirm our impression that Wordsworth, whenever he has a moment of insight or happiness, talks about it in the language of light. His great poems are about moments of enlightenment, in which the metaphoric and the literal meaning of the word are at one—he uses "glory" in the abstract modern sense, but always with an awareness of the old concrete iconographic sense of a visible nimbus.* But this momentary and special light is the subject matter of his poetry, not the power of making it. The moments are moments of understanding, but Wordsworth does not say that they make writing poetry any easier. Indeed, in lines 59–131 of the first book of *The Prelude* he expressly says that the moments of clarity are by no means always matched by poetic creativity.

As for dreams and poetry, there is some doubt about the meaning that Wordsworth gave to the word "dream" used as a metaphor. In "Expostulation and Reply" he seems to say that dreaming—"dream my time away"—is a good thing, but he is ironically using his interlocutor's depreciatory word, and he really does not mean "dream" at all. In the Peele Castle verses, which have so close a connection with the Immortality Ode, he speaks of the "poet's dream" and makes it synonymous with "gleam," with "the light that never was, on sea or land," and with the

*We recall that in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* William James speaks of the "hallucinatory or pseudo-hallucinatory luminous phenomena, *photisms*, to use the term of the psychologists," the "floods of light and glory," which characterize so many moments of revelation. James mentions one person who, experiencing the light, was uncertain of its externality.

"consecration." But the beauty of the famous lines often makes us forget to connect them with what follows, for Wordsworth says that gleam, light, consecration, and dream would have made an "illusion," or, in the 1807 version, a "delusion." Professor Beatty reminds us that in the 1820 version Wordsworth destroyed the beauty of the lines in order to make his intention quite clear. He wrote:

> and add a gleam
> Of lustre known to neither sea nor land.
> But borrowed from the youthful Poet's Dream.

That is, according to the terms of Wordsworth's conception of the three ages of man, the youthful Poet was, as he had a right to be, in the service of Fancy and therefore saw the sea as calm. But Wordsworth himself can now no longer see in the way of Fancy; he has, he says, "submitted to a new control." This seems to be at once a loss and a gain. The loss: "A power is gone which nothing can restore." The gain: "A deep distress hath humanized my Soul"; this is gain because happiness without "humanization" "is to be pitied, for 'tis surely blind"; to be "housed in a dream" is to be "at distance from the kind" (i.e. mankind). In the "Letter to Mathetes" he speaks of the Fancy as "dreaming"; and the Fancy is, we know, a lower form of intellect in Wordsworth's hierarchy, and peculiar to youth.

But although, as we see, Wordsworth uses the word "dream" to mean illusion, we must remember that he thought illusions might be very useful. They often led him to proper attitudes and allowed him to deal successfully with reality. In *The Prelude* he tells us how his reading of fiction made him able to look at the disfigured face of the drowned man without too much horror; how a kind of superstitious conviction of his own powers was useful to him; how, indeed, many of the most critical moments of his boyhood education were moments of significant illusion; and in *The Excursion* he is quite explicit about the salutary effects of superstition. But he was interested in dreams not for their own sake but for the sake of reality. Dreams may *perhaps* be associated with poetry, but reality *certainly* is; and reality for Wordsworth comes fullest with Imagination, the faculty of maturity. The loss of the "dream" may be painful, but it does not necessarily mean the end of poetry.

4

And now for a moment I should like to turn back to the "timely utterance," because I think an understanding of it will help get rid of the idea that Wordsworth was saying farewell to poetry. Professor Garrod believes that this "utterance" was "My heart leaps up when I behold," which was written the day before the Ode was begun. Certainly this poem is most intimately related to the Ode—its theme, the legacy left by the child to the man, is a dominant theme of the Ode, and Wordsworth used its last lines as the Ode's epigraph. But I should like to suggest that the "utterance" was something else. In line 43 Wordsworth says, "Oh evil day! if I were sullen," and the word "sullen" leaps out at us as a striking and carefully chosen word. Now there is one poem in which Wordsworth says that he was sullen; it is "Resolution and Independence."

We know that Wordsworth was working on the first part of the Ode on 27 March, the day after the composition of the rainbow poem. On 17 June he added a little to the Ode, but what he added we do not know. Between these two dates Wordsworth and Dorothy had paid their visit to Coleridge, who was sojourning at Keswick; during this visit Coleridge, on 4 April, had written "Dejection: An Ode," very probably after he had read what was already in existence of the Immortality Ode. Coleridge's mental state was very bad—still, not so bad as to keep him from writing a great poem—and the Wordsworths were much distressed. A month later, on 3 May, Wordsworth began to compose "The Leech-Gatherer," later known as "Resolution and Independence." It is this poem that is, I think, the timely utterance.*

"Resolution and Independence" is a poem about the fate of poets. It is also a poem about sullenness, in the sense that the people in the Fifth Circle are said by Dante to be sullen: " 'Sullen were we in the sweet air, that is gladdened by the sun, carrying lazy smoke within our hearts; now lie sullen here in the black mire!' This hymn they gurgle in their throats, for

*I follow Professor Garrod in assuming that the "utterance" was a poem, but of course it may have been a letter or a spoken word. And if indeed the "utterance" does refer to "Resolution and Independence," it may not refer to the poem itself—as Jacques Barzun has suggested to me, it may refer to what the Leech-gatherer in the poem says to the poet, for certainly it is what the old man "utters" that gives the poet "relief."

they cannot speak it in full words"*—that is, they cannot now have relief by timely utterance, as they would not on earth. And "sullenness" I take to be the creation of difficulties where none exist, the working of a self-injuring imagination such as a modern mental physician would be quick to recognize as a neurotic symptom. Wordsworth's poem is about a sudden unmotivated anxiety after a mood of great exaltation. He speaks of this reversal of feeling as something experienced by himself before and known to all. In this mood he is the prey of "fears and fancies," of "dim sadness" and "blind thoughts." These feelings have reference to two imagined catastrophes. One of them—natural enough in a man under the stress of approaching marriage, for Wordsworth was to be married in October—is economic destitution. He reproaches himself for his past indifference to the means of getting a living and thinks of what may follow from this carefree life: "solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty." His black thoughts are led to the fate of poets "in their misery dead," among them Chatterton and Burns. The second specific fear is of mental distress:

> We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
> But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.

Coleridge, we must suppose, was in his thoughts after the depressing Keswick meeting, but he is of course thinking chiefly of himself. It will be remembered how the poem ends, how with some difficulty of utterance the poet brings himself to speak with an incredibly old leech-gatherer, and, taking heart from the man's resolution and independence, becomes again "strong."

This great poem is not to be given a crucial meaning in Wordsworth's life. It makes use of a mood to which everyone, certainly every creative person, is now and again a victim. It seems to me more likely that it, rather than the rainbow poem, is the timely utterance of which the Ode speaks because in it, and not in the rainbow poem, a sullen feeling occurs and is relieved. But whether or not it is actually the timely utterance, it is an autobiographical and deeply felt poem written at the time the Ode was being written and seeming to have an emotional connection with the first

*The Carlyle-Wicksteed translation. Dante's word is "*tristi*"; in "Resolution and Independence" Wordsworth speaks of "dim sadness." I mention Dante's sinners simply to elucidate the emotion that Wordsworth speaks of, not to suggest an influence.

part of the Ode. (The meeting with the old man had taken place two years earlier and it is of some significance that it should have come to mind as the subject of a poem at just this time.) It is a very precise and hard-headed account of a mood of great fear and it deals in a very explicit way with the dangers that beset the poetic life. But although Wordsworth urges himself on to think of all the bad things that can possibly happen to a poet, and mentions solitude, pain of heart, distress and poverty, cold, pain and labor, all fleshly ills, and then even madness, he never says that a poet stands in danger of losing his talent. It seems reasonable to suppose that if Wordsworth were actually saying farewell to his talent in the Ode, there would be some hint of an endangered or vanishing talent in "Resolution and Independence." But there is none; at the end of the poem Wordsworth is resolute in poetry.

Must we not, then, look with considerable skepticism at such interpretations of the Ode as suppose without question that the "gleam," the "glory," and the "dream" constitute the power of making poetry?—especially when we remember that at a time still three years distant Wordsworth in *The Prelude* will speak of himself as becoming a "*creative* soul" (Book XII, line 207; the italics are Wordsworth's own) despite the fact that, as he says (Book XIII, line 281), he "sees by glimpses now."

5

The second half of the Ode is divided into two large movements, each of which gives an answer to the question with which the first part ends. The two answers seem to contradict each other. The first issues in despair, the second in hope; the first uses a language strikingly supernatural, the second is entirely naturalistic. The two parts even differ in the statement of fact, for the first says that the gleam is gone, whereas the second says that it is not gone, but only transmuted. It is necessary to understand this contradiction, but it is not necessary to resolve it, for from the circuit between its two poles comes much of the power of the poem.

The first of the two answers (stanzas V–VIII) tells us where the visionary gleam has gone by telling us where it came from. It is a remnant of a preexistence in which we enjoyed a way of seeing and knowing now almost wholly gone from us. We come into the world, not with minds that

are merely *tabulae rasae*, but with a kind of attendant light, the vestige of an existence otherwise obliterated from our memories. In infancy and childhood the recollection is relatively strong, but it fades as we move forward into earthly life. Maturity, with its habits and its cares and its increase of distance from our celestial origin, wears away the light of recollection. Nothing could be more poignantly sad than the conclusion of this part with the heavy sonority of its last line as Wordsworth addresses the child in whom the glory still lives:

> Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
> And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
> Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

Between this movement of despair and the following movement of hope there is no clear connection save that of contradiction. But between the question itself and the movement of hope there is an explicit verbal link, for the question is: "Whither has *fled* the visionary gleam?" and the movement of hope answers that "nature yet remembers/What was so *fugitive*."

The second movement of the second part of the Ode tells us again what has happened to the visionary gleam: it has not wholly fled, for it is remembered. This possession of childhood has been passed on as a legacy to the child's heir, the adult man; for the mind, as the rainbow epigraph also says, is one and continuous, and what was so intense a light in childhood becomes "the fountain-light of all our day" and a "master-light of all our seeing," that is, of our adult day and our mature seeing. The child's recollection of his heavenly home exists in the recollection of the adult.

But what exactly is this fountain-light, this master-light? I am sure that when we understand what it is we shall see that the glory that Wordsworth means is very different from Coleridge's glory, which is Joy. Wordsworth says that what he holds in memory as the guiding heritage of childhood is exactly not the Joy of childhood. It is not "delight," not "liberty," not even "hope"—not for these, he says, "I raise/The song of thanks and praise." For what then does he raise the song? For this particular experience of childhood:

> . . . those obstinate questionings
> Of sense and outward things,

> Fallings from us, vanishings;
> Blank misgivings of a Creature
> Moving about in worlds not realized.

He mentions other reasons for gratitude, but here for the moment I should like to halt the enumeration.

We are told, then, that light and glory consist, at least in part, of "questionings," "fallings from us," "vanishings," and "blank misgivings" in a world not yet *made real*, for surely Wordsworth uses the word "realized" in its most literal sense. In his note on the poem he has this to say of the experience he refers to:

> . . . I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own material nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. At this time I was afraid of such processes.

He remarks that the experience is not peculiar to himself, which is of course true, and he says that it was connected in his thoughts with a potency of spirit which made him believe that he could never die.

The precise and naturalistic way in which Wordsworth talks of this experience of his childhood must cast doubt on Professor Garrod's statement that Wordsworth believed quite literally in the notion of preexistence, with which the "vanishings" experience is connected. Wordsworth is very careful to delimit the extent of his belief; he says that it is "too shadowy a notion to be recommended to faith" as an evidence of immortality. He says that he is using the idea to illuminate another idea—using it, as he says, "for my purpose" and "as a poet." It has as much validity for him as any "popular" religious idea might have, that is to say, a kind of suggestive validity. We may regard pre-existence as being for Wordsworth a very serious conceit, vested with relative belief, intended to give a high value to the natural experience of the "vanishings."*

*In his *Studies in the Poetry of Henry Vaughan*, a Cambridge University dissertation, Andrew Chiappe makes a similar judgement of the quality and degree of belief in the idea of pre-existence in the poetry of Vaughan and Traherne.

The naturalistic tone of Wordsworth's note suggests that we shall be doing no violence to the experience of the "vanishings" if we consider it scientifically. In a well-known essay, "Stages in the Development of the Sense of Reality," the distinguished psychoanalyst Ferenczi speaks of the child's reluctance to distinguish between himself and the world and of the slow growth of objectivity which differentiates the self from external things. And Freud himself, dealing with the "oceanic" sensation of "being at one with the universe," which a literary friend had supposed to be the source of all religious emotions, conjectures that it is a vestige of the infant's state of feeling before he has learned to distinguish between the stimuli of his own sensations and those of the world outside. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* he writes:

> Originally the ego includes everything, later it detaches from itself the outside world. The ego-feeling we are aware of now is thus only a shrunken vestige of a more extensive feeling—a feeling which embraced the universe and expressed an inseparable connexion of the ego with the external world. If we may suppose that this primary ego-feeling has been preserved in the minds of many people—to a greater or lesser extent—it would co-exist like a sort of counterpart with the narrower and more sharply outlined ego-feeling of maturity, and the ideational content belonging to it would be precisely the notion of limitless extension and oneness with the universe—the same feeling as that described by my friend as "oceanic."

This has its clear relation to Wordsworth's "worlds not realized." Wordsworth, like Freud, was preoccupied by the idea of reality, and, again like Freud, he knew that the child's way of apprehension was but a stage which, in the course of nature, would give way to another. If we understand that Wordsworth is speaking of a period common to the development of everyone, we are helped to see that we cannot identify the vision of that period with his peculiar poetic power.

But in addition to the experience of the "vanishings" there is another experience for which Wordsworth is grateful to his childhood and which, I believe, goes with the "vanishings" to make up the "master-light," the "fountain-light." I am not referring to the

> High instincts before which our mortal Nature
> Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised,

but rather to what Wordsworth calls "those first affections."

I am inclined to think that with this phrase Wordsworth refers to a later stage in the child's development which, like the earlier stage in which the external world is included within the ego, leaves vestiges in the developing mind. This is the period described in a well-known passage in Book II of *The Prelude*, in which the child learns about the world in his mother's arms:

> Blest the infant Babe,
> (For with my best conjecture I would trace
> Our Being's earthly progress), blest the Babe,
> Nursed in his Mother's arms, who sinks to sleep,
> Rocked on his Mother's breast; who with his soul
> Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye!
> For him, in one dear Presence, there exists
> A virtue which irradiates and exalts
> Objects through widest intercourse of sense.
> No outcast he, bewildered and depressed;
> Along his infant veins are interfused
> The gravitation and the filial bond
> Of nature that connect him with the world.
> Is there a flower, to which he points with hand
> Too weak to gather it, already love
> Drawn from love's purest earthly fount for him
> Hath beautified that flower; already shades
> Of pity cast from inward tenderness
> Do fall around him upon aught that bears
> Unsightly marks of violence or harm.
> Emphatically such a Being lives.
> Frail creature as he is, helpless as frail,
> An inmate of this active universe:
> For feeling has to him imparted power
> That through the growing faculties of sense,
> Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
> Create, creator and receiver both,

> Working but in alliance with the works
> Which it beholds.—Such, verily, is the first
> Poetic* spirit of our human life,
> By uniform control of after years,
> In most, abated or suppressed; in some,
> Through every change of growth and of decay
> Pre-eminent till death.

The child, this passage says, does not perceive things merely as objects; he first sees them, because maternal love is a condition of his perception, as objects-and-judgements, as valued objects. He does not learn about a flower, but about the pretty-flower, the flower that-I-want-and-that-mother-will-get-for-me; he does not learn about the bird and a broken wing but about the poor-bird-whose-wing-was-broken. The safety, warmth, and good feeling of his mother's conscious benevolence is a circumstance of his first learning. He sees, in short, with "glory"; not only is he himself not in "utter nakedness" as the Ode puts it, but the objects he sees are not in utter nakedness. The passage from *The Prelude* says in naturalistic language what stanza v of the Ode expresses by a theistical metaphor. Both the *Prelude* passage and the Ode distinguish a state of exile from a state of security and comfort, of at-homeness; there is (as the *Prelude* passage puts it) a "filial bond," or (as in stanza x of the Ode) a "primal sympathy," which keeps man from being an "outcast . . . bewildered and depressed."

The Ode and *The Prelude* differ about the source of this primal sympathy or filial bond. The Ode makes heavenly pre-existence the source, *The Prelude* finds the source in maternal affection. But the psychologists tell us that notions of heavenly pre-existence figure commonly as representations of physical prenatality—the womb is the environment which is perfectly adapted to its inmate and compared to it all other conditions of life may well seem like "exile" to the (very literal) "outcast."† Even the secu-

*The use here of the word "poetic" is either metaphorical and general, or it is entirely literal, that is, it refers to the root-meaning of the word, which is "to make"—Wordsworth has in mind the creative nature of right human perception and not merely poetry.

†"Before born babe bliss had. Within womb won he worship. Whatever in that one case done commodiously done was."—James Joyce, *Ulysses*. The myth of Eden is also interpreted as figuring either childhood or the womb—see below, p. 51, on Wordsworth's statement of the connection of the notion of pre-existence with Adam's fall.

rity of the mother's arms, although it is an effort to re-create for the child the old environment, is but a diminished comfort. And if we think of the experience of which Wordsworth is speaking, the "vanishings," as the child's recollection of a condition in which it was very nearly true that he and his environment were one, it will not seem surprising that Wordsworth should compound the two experiences and figure them in the single metaphor of the glorious heavenly pre-existence.*

I have tried to be as naturalistic as possible in speaking of Wordsworth's childhood experiences and the more-or-less Platonic notion they suggested to him. I believe that naturalism is in order here, for what we must now see is that Wordsworth is talking about something common to us all, the development of the sense of reality. To have once had the visionary gleam of the perfect union of the self and the universe is essential to and definitive of our human nature, and it is in that sense connected with the making of poetry. But the visionary gleam is not in itself the poetry-making power, and its diminution is right and inevitable.

That there should be ambivalence in Wordsworth's response to this diminution is quite natural, and the two answers, that of stanzas V–VIII and that of stanzas IX–XI, comprise both the resistance to and the acceptance of growth. Inevitably we resist change and turn back with passionate nostalgia to the stage we are leaving. Still, we fulfill ourselves by choosing what is painful and difficult and necessary, and we develop by moving toward death. In short, organic development is a hard paradox which Wordsworth is stating in the discrepant answers of the second part of the Ode. And it seems to me that those critics who made the Ode refer to some particular and unique experience of Wordsworth's and who make it relate only to poetical powers have forgotten their own lives and in consequence conceive the Ode to be a lesser thing than it really is, for it is not about poetry, it is about life. And having made this error, they are inevitably led to misinterpret the meaning of the "philosophic mind" and also to deny that Wordsworth's ambivalence is sincere. No doubt it

*Readers of Ferenczi's remarkable study *Thalassa*, a discussion, admittedly speculative but wonderfully fascinating, of unconscious racial memories of the ocean as the ultimate source of life, will not be able to resist giving an added meaning to Wordsworth's lines about the "immortal sea/ Which brought us hither" and of the unborn children who "Sport upon the shore." The recollection of Samuel Butler's delightful fantasy of the Unborn and his theory of unconscious memory will also serve to enrich our reading of the Ode by suggesting the continuing force of the Platonic myth.

would not be a sincere ambivalence if Wordsworth were really saying farewell to poetry, it would merely be an attempt at self-consolation. But he is not saying farewell to poetry, he is saying farewell to Eden, and his ambivalence is much what Adam's was, and Milton's, and for the same reasons.*

To speak naturalistically of the quasi-mystical experiences of his childhood does not in the least bring into question the value which Wordsworth attached to them, for, despite its dominating theistical metaphor, the Ode is largely naturalistic in its intention. We can begin to see what that intention is by understanding the force of the word "imperial" in stanza VI. This stanza is the second of the four stanzas in which Wordsworth states and develops the theme of the reminiscence of the light of heaven and its gradual evanescence through the maturing years. In stanza V we are told that the infant inhabits it; the Boy beholds it, seeing it "in his joy"; the Youth is still attended by it; "the Man perceives it die away, And fade into the light of common day." Stanza VI speaks briefly of the efforts made by earthly life to bring about the natural, and inevitable, amnesia:

> Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
> Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
> And, even with something of a Mother's mind,
> And no unworthy aim,
> The homely Nurse doth all she can
> To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
> Forget the glories he hath known.
> And that imperial palace whence he came.

"Imperial" suggests grandeur, dignity, and splendour, everything that stands in opposition to what, in *The Excursion*, Wordsworth was to call

*Milton provides a possible gloss to several difficult points in the poem. In stanza VIII, the Child is addressed as "thou Eye among the blind," and to the Eye are applied the epithets "deaf and silent"; Coleridge objected to these epithets as irrational, but his objection may be met by citing the brilliant precedent of "blind mouths" of "Lycidas." Again, Coleridge's question of the propriety of making a master *brood* over a slave is in part answered by the sonnet "On His Being Arrived at the Age of Twenty-three," in which Milton expresses his security in his development as it shall take place in his "great Task-master's eye." Between this sonnet and the Ode there are other significant correspondence of thought and of phrase, as there also are in the sonnet "On His Blindness."

"littleness." And "littleness" is the result of having wrong notions about the nature of man and his connection with the universe; its outcome is "deadness." The melancholy and despair of the Solitary in *The Excursion* are the signs of the deadness which resulted from his having conceived of man as something less than imperial. Wordsworth's idea of splendid power is his protest against all views of the mind that would limit and debase it. By conceiving, as he does, an intimate connection between mind and universe, by seeing the universe fitted to the mind and the mind to the universe, he bestows upon man a dignity which cannot be derived from looking at him in the actualities of common life, from seeing him engaged in business, in morality and politics.

Yet here we must credit Wordsworth with the double vision. Man must be conceived of as "imperial," but he must also be seen as he actually is in the field of life. The earth is not an environment in which the celestial or imperial qualities can easily exist. Wordsworth, who spoke of the notion of imperial pre-existence as being adumbrated by Adam's fall, uses the words "earth" and "earthly" in the common quasi-religious sense to refer to the things of this world. He does not make Earth synonymous with Nature, for although Man may be the true child of Nature, he is the "Foster-child" of Earth. But it is to be observed that the foster mother is a kindly one, that her disposition is at least quasi-maternal, that her aims are at least not unworthy; she is, in short, the foster mother who figures so often in the legend of the Hero, whose real and unknown parents are noble or divine.*

Wordsworth, in short, is looking at man in a double way, seeing man both in his ideal nature and in his earthly activity. The two views do not so much contradict as supplement each other. If in stanzas V–VII Wordsworth tells us that we live by decrease, in stanzas IX–XI he tells us of the everlasting connection of the diminished person with his own ideal personality. The child hands on to the hampered adult the imperial nature, the "primal sympathy/Which having been must ever be," the mind fitted to the universe, the universe to the mind. The sympathy is not so pure and intense in maturity as in childhood, but only because another relation grows up beside the relation of man to Nature—the relation of

*Carlyle makes elaborate play with this idea in his account of Teufelsdröckh, and see the essay on *The Princess Casamassima* in this volume, p. 149. The fantasy that their parents are really foster parents is a common one with children, and it is to be associated with the various forms of the belief that the world is not real.

man to his fellows in the moral world of difficulty and pain. Given Wordsworth's epistemology the new relation is bound to change the very aspect of Nature itself: the clouds will take a sober coloring from an eye that hath kept watch o'er man's mortality, but a sober color is a color still.

There is sorrow in the Ode, the inevitable sorrow of giving up an old habit of vision for a new one. In shifting the center of his interest from Nature to man in the field of morality Wordsworth is fulfilling his own conception of the three ages of man which Professor Beatty has expounded so well. The shift in interest he called the coming of "the philosophic mind," but the word "philosophic" does not have here either of two of its meanings in common usage—it does not mean abstract and it does not mean apathetic. Wordsworth is not saying, and it is sentimental and unimaginative of us to say, that he has become less a feeling man and less a poet. He is only saying that he has become less a youth. Indeed, the Ode is so little a farewell to art, so little a dirge sung over departing powers, that it is actually the very opposite—it is a welcome of new powers and a dedication to a new poetic subject. For if sensitivity and responsiveness be among the poetic powers, what else is Wordsworth saying at the end of the poem except that he has a greater sensitivity and responsiveness than ever before? The "philosophic mind" has not decreased but, on the contrary, increased the power to feel.

> The clouds that gather round the setting sun
> Do take a sober colouring from an eye
> That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
> Another race hath been and other palms are won.
> Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
> Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

The meanest flower is significant now not only because, like the small celandine, it speaks of age, suffering, and death, but because to a man who is aware of man's mortality the world becomes significant and precious. The knowledge of man's mortality—this must be carefully noted in a poem presumably about immortality—now replaces the "glory" as the agency which makes things significant and precious. We are back again at

optics, which we have never really left, and the Ode in a very honest fashion has come full circle.

The new poetic powers of sensitivity and responsiveness are new not so much in degree as in kind; they would therefore seem to require a new poetic subject matter for their exercise. And the very definition of the new powers seems to imply what the new subject matter must be—thoughts that lie too deep for tears are ideally the thoughts which are brought to mind by tragedy. It would be an extravagant but not an absurd reading of the Ode that found it to be Wordsworth's farewell to the characteristic mode of his poetry, the mode that Keats called the "egotistical sublime" and a dedication to the mode of tragedy. But the tragic mode could not be Wordsworth's. He did not have the "negative capability" which Keats believed to be the source of Shakespeare's power, the gift of being able to be "content with half-knowledge," to give up the "irritable reaching after fact and reason," to remain "in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts." In this he was at one with all the poets of the Romantic movement and after—negative capability was impossible for them to come by and tragedy was not for them. But although Wordsworth did not realize the new kind of art which seems implied by his sense of new powers, yet his bold declaration that he had acquired a new way of feeling makes it impossible for us to go on saying that the Ode was his "conscious farewell to his art, a dirge sung over his departing powers."

Still, was there not, after the composition of the Ode, a great falling off in his genius which we are drawn to connect with the crucial changes the Ode records? That there was a falling off is certain, although we must observe that it was not so sharp as is commonly held and also that it did not occur immediately or even soon after the composition of the first four stanzas with their statement that the visionary gleam had gone; on the contrary, some of the most striking of Wordsworth's verse was written at this time. It must be remembered, too, that another statement of the loss of the visionary gleam, that made in "Tintern Abbey," had been followed by all the superb production of the "great decade"—an objection which is sometimes dealt with by saying that Wordsworth wrote his best work from his near memories of the gleam, and that, as he grew older and moved farther from it, his recollection dimmed and thus he lost his power: it is an explanation which suggests that mechanical and simple notions of the mind and of the poetic process are all too tempting to those

who speculate on Wordsworth's decline. Given the fact of the great power, the desire to explain its relative deterioration will no doubt always be irresistible. But we must be aware, in any attempt to make this explanation, that an account of why Wordsworth ceased to write great poetry must at the same time be an account of how he once did write great poetry. And this latter account, in our present state of knowledge, we cannot begin to furnish.

ODE: INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY FROM RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.

I

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

II

The Rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the Rose,

The Moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare,
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

III

Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,
And while the young lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound,
To me alone there came a thought of grief:
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong:
The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep:
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong;
I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,
And all the earth is gay:
Land and sea
Give themselves up to jollity,
And with the heart of May
Doth every Beast keep holiday;—
Thou Child of Joy,
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy Shepherd boy!

IV

Ye blessèd Creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;
My heart is at your festival,

My head hath its coronal,
The fulness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all.
Oh evil day! if I were sullen
While Earth herself is adorning,
This sweet May-morning,
And the Children are culling
On every side,
In a thousand valleys far and wide,
Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm,
And the Babe leaps up on his Mother's arm:—
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!
—But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

V

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east

Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

VI

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a Mother's mind,
And no unworthy aim,
The homely Nurse doth all she can
To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came.

VII

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
A six years' Darling of a pigmy size!
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,
With light upon him from his father's eyes!
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral;
And this hath now his heart,
And unto this he frames his song:
Then will he fit his tongue
To dialogues of business, love, or strife;

But it will not be long
Ere this be thrown aside,
And with new Joy and pride
The little Acorn cons another part;
Filling from time to time his 'humorous stage'
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
That Life brings with her in her equipage;
As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation.

VIII

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul's immensity;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,—
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest.
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by;
Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

IX

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:—
Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realized,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
To perish never:
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy.
Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,

Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

X

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
And let the young Lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound!
We in thought will join your throng,
Ye that pipe and ye that play,
Ye that through your hearts to-day
Feel the gladness of the May!
What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

XI

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinguished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway.
I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,

Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
Is lovely yet;
The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears.
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Kipling

1943

Kipling belongs irrevocably to our past, and although the renewed critical attention he has lately been given by Edmund Wilson and T. S. Eliot is friendlier and more interesting than any he has received for a long time, it is less likely to make us revise our opinions than to revive our memories of him. But these memories, when revived, will be strong, for if Kipling belongs to our past, he belongs there very firmly, fixed deep in childhood feeling. And especially for liberals of a certain age he must always be an interesting figure, for he had an effect upon us in that obscure and important part of our minds where literary feeling and political attitude meet, an effect so much the greater because it was so early experienced; and then for many of us our rejection of him was our first literary-political decision.

My own relation with Kipling was intense and I believe typical. It began, properly enough, with *The Jungle Book*. This was my first independently chosen and avidly read book, my first literary discovery, all the more wonderful because I had come upon it in an adult "set," one of the ten green volumes of the Century Edition that used to be found in many homes. (The "set" has become unfashionable and that is a blow to the literary education of the young, who, once they had been lured to an author, used to remain loyal to him until they had read him by the yard.)

The satisfactions of *The Jungle Book* were large and numerous. I suppose a boy's vestigial animal totemism was pleased; there were the marvellous but credible abilities of Mowgli; there were the deadly enmities and grandiose revenges, strangely and tragically real. And it was a world peopled by wonderful parents, not only Mother Wolf and Father Wolf, but also—the fathers were far more numerous than the mothers—Bagheera the panther, Baloo the bear, Hathi the elephant, and the dreadful but decent Kaa the python, a whole council of strength and wisdom which was as benign as it was dangerous, and no doubt much of the delight came from discovering the benignity of this feral world. And then there was the fascination of the Pack and its Law. It is not too much to say that a boy had thus his first introduction to a generalized notion of society. It was a notion charged with feeling—the Law was mysterious, firm, certain, noble, in every way admirable beyond any rule of home or school.

Mixed up with this feeling about the Pack and the Law, and perfectly expressing it, was the effect of Kipling's gnomic language, both in prose and in verse, for you could not entirely skip the verse that turned up in the prose, and so you were led to trust yourself to the *Barrack Room Ballads* at a time when you would trust no other poetry. That gnomic quality of Kipling's, that knowing allusiveness which later came to seem merely vulgar, was, when first experienced, a delightful thing. By understanding Kipling's ellipses and allusions you partook of what was Kipling's own special delight, the joy of being "in." Max Beerbohm has satirized Kipling's yearning to be admitted to any professional arcanum, his fawning admiration of the man in uniform, the man with the know-how and the technical slang. It is the emotion of a boy—he lusts for the exclusive circle, for the sect with the password, and he profoundly admires the technical, secret-laden adults who run the world, the overalled people, majestic in their occupation, superb in their preoccupation, the dour engineer and the thoughtful plumber. To this emotion, developed not much beyond a boy's, Kipling was addicted all his life, and eventually it made him silly and a bore. But a boy reading Kipling was bound to find all this sense of arcanum very pertinent; as, for example, it expressed itself in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, it seemed the very essence of adult life. Kipling himself was not much more than a boy when he wrote these remarkable stories—remarkable because, no matter how one judges them, one never forgets the least of them—and he saw the adult world as full of rites of initiation, of closed doors and listeners behind them, councils, boudoir

conferences, conspiracies, innuendoes, and special knowledge. It was very baffling, and certainly as an introduction to literature it went counter to all our present educational theory, according to which a child should not be baffled at all but should read only about what he knows of from experience; but one worked it out by a sort of algebra, one discovered the meaning of the unknowns through the knowns, and just as one got without definition an adequate knowledge of what a *sais* was, or a *dâk*-bungalow, and what the significance of *pukka* was, so one penetrated to what went on between the Gadsbys and to why Mrs. Hauksbee was supposed to be charming and Mrs. Reiver not. Kipling's superior cryptic tone was in effect an invitation to understand all this—it suggested first that the secret was being kept not only from oneself but from everyone else and then it suggested that the secret was not so much being kept as revealed, if one but guessed hard enough. And this elaborate manner was an invitation to be "in" not only on life but on literature; to follow its hints with a sense of success was to become an initiate of literature, a Past Master, a snob of the esoteric Mystery of the Word.

"Craft" and "craftily" were words that Kipling loved (no doubt they were connected with his deep Masonic attachment), and when he used them he intended all their several meanings at once—shrewdness, a special technique, a special *secret* technique communicated by some master of it, and the bond that one user of the technique would naturally have with another. This feeling about the Craft, the Mystery, grew on Kipling and colored his politics and even his cosmological ideas quite for the worse, but to a boy it suggested the virtue of disinterested professional commitment. If one ever fell in love with the cult of art, it was not because one had been proselytized by some intelligent Frenchman, but because one had absorbed Kipling's creedal utterances about the virtues of craft and had read *The Light that Failed* literally to pieces.

These things we must be sure to put into balance when we make up our account with Kipling—these and a few more. To a middle-class boy he gave a literary sanction for the admiration of the illiterate and shiftless parts of humanity. He was the first to suggest what may be called the anthropological view, the perception that another man's idea of virtue and honor may be different from one's own but quite to be respected. We must remember this when we condemn his mindless imperialism. Indians naturally have no patience whatever with Kipling and they condemn even

his best book, *Kim*, saying that even here, where his devotion to the Indian life is most fully expressed, he falsely represents the Indians. Perhaps this is so, yet the dominant emotions of *Kim* are love and respect for the aspects of Indian life that the ethos of the West does not usually regard even with leniency. *Kim* established the value of things a boy was not likely to find approved anywhere else—the rank, greasy, over-rich things, the life that was valuable outside the notions of orderliness, success, and gentility. It suggested not only a multitude of different ways of life but even different modes of thought. Thus, whatever one might come to feel personally about religion, a reading of *Kim* could not fail to establish religion's factual reality, not as a piety, which was the apparent extent of its existence in the West, but as something at the very root of life; in *Kim* one saw the myth in the making before one's very eyes and understood how and why it was made, and this, when later one had the intellectual good luck to remember it, had more to say about history and culture than anything in one's mere experience. *Kim*, like *The Jungle Book*, is full of wonderful fathers, all dedicated men in their different ways, each representing a different possibility of existence; and the charm of each is the greater because the boy need not commit himself to one alone but, like Kim himself, may follow Ali into the shrewdness and sensuality of the bazaars, and be initiated by Colonel Strickland into the cold glamour of the Reason of State, and yet also make himself the son of the Lama, the very priest of contemplation and peace.

And then a boy in a large New York high school could find a blessed release from the school's offensive pieties about "service" and "character" in the scornful individualism of *Stalky & Co*. But it was with *Stalky & Co*. that the spell was broken, and significantly enough by H. G. Wells. In his *Outline of History* Wells connected the doings of Stalky, McTurk, and Beetle with British imperialism, and he characterized both in a way that made one see how much callousness, arrogance, and brutality one had been willing to accept. From then on the disenchantment grew. Exactly because Kipling was so involved with one's boyhood, one was quick to give him up in one's adolescence. The Wellsian liberalism took hold, and Shaw offered a new romance of wit and intellect. The new movements in literature came in to make Kipling seem inconsequential and puerile, to require that he be dismissed as official and, as one used to say, intending something aesthetic and emotional rather than political, "bourgeois." He

ceased to be the hero of life and literature and became the villain, although even then a natural gratitude kept green the memory of the pleasure he had given.

But the world has changed a great deal since the days when that antagonism between Kipling and enlightenment was at its early intensity, and many intellectual and political things have shifted from their old assigned places. The liberalism of Wells and Shaw long ago lost its ascendancy, and indeed in its later developments it showed what could never in the early days have been foreseen, an actual affinity with certain elements of Kipling's own constellation of ideas. And now when, in the essay which serves as the introduction to his selection of Kipling's verse, Mr. Eliot speaks of "the fascination of exploring a mind so different from my own," we surprise ourselves—as perhaps Mr. Eliot intended that we should—by seeing that the similarities between the two minds are no less striking than the differences. Time surely has done its usual but always dramatic work of eroding our clear notions of cultural antagonisms when Kipling can be thought of as in any way akin to Eliot. Yet as Mr. Eliot speaks of the public intention and the music-hall tradition of Kipling's verse, anyone who has heard a record of Mr. Eliot reading *The Waste Land* will be struck by how much that poem is publicly intended, shaped less for the study than for the platform or the pulpit, by how much the full dialect rendition of the cockney passages suggests that it was even shaped for the music hall, by how explicit the poet's use of his voice makes the music we are so likely to think of as internal and secretive. Then it is significant that among the dominant themes of both Kipling and Eliot are those of despair and the fear of nameless psychological horror. Politically they share an excessive reliance on administration and authority. They have the same sense of being beset and betrayed by the ignoble mob; Kipling invented and elaborated the image of the Pict, the dark little hating man, "too little to love or to hate," who, if left alone, "can drag down the state"; and this figure plays its well-known part in Mr. Eliot's poetry, being for both poets the stimulus to the pathos of xenophobia.

Mr. Eliot's literary apologia for Kipling consists of asking us to judge him not as a deficient writer of poetry but as an admirable writer of verse. Upon this there follow definitions of a certain ingenuity, but the distinction between poetry and verse does not really advance beyond the old in-

adequate one—I believe that Mr. Eliot himself has specifically rejected it—which Matthew Arnold put forward in writing about Dryden and Pope. I cannot see the usefulness of the distinction; I can even see critical danger in it; and when Mr. Eliot says that Kipling's verse sometimes becomes poetry, it seems to me that verse, in Mr. Eliot's present sense, is merely a word used to denote poetry of a particular kind, in which certain intensities are rather low. Nowadays, it is true, we are not enough aware of the pleasures of poetry of low intensity, by which, in our modern way, we are likely to mean poetry in which the processes of thought are not, by means of elliptical or tangential metaphor and an indirect syntax, advertised as being under high pressure; Crabbe, Cowper, and Scott are rejected because they are not Donne or Hopkins or Mr. Eliot himself, or even poets of far less consequence than these; and no doubt Chaucer would be depreciated on the same grounds, if we were at all aware of him these days. I should have welcomed Mr. Eliot's speaking out in a general way in support of the admirable, and, I think, necessary, tradition of poetry of low intensity. But by making it different in kind from poetry of high intensity and by giving it a particular name which can only be of invidious import, he has cut us off still more sharply from its virtues.

Kipling, then, must be taken as a poet. Taken so, he will scarcely rank very high, although much must be said in his praise. In two evenings, or even in a single very long one, you can read through the bulky Inclusive Edition of his verse, on which Mr. Eliot's selection is based, and be neither wearied, in part because you will not have been involved, nor uninterested, because Kipling was a man of great gifts. You will have moments of admiration, sometimes of unwilling admiration, and even wish that Mr. Eliot had included certain poems in his selection that he has left out. You will be frequently irritated by the truculence and sometimes amused by its unconsciousness—who but Kipling would write a brag about English understatement? Carlyle roaring the virtues of Silence is nothing to it—but when you have done you will be less inclined to condemn than to pity: the constant iteration of the bravado will have been illuminated by a few poems that touch on the fear and horror which Mr. Wilson speaks of at length and which Mr. Eliot refers to; you feel that the walls of wrath and the ramparts of empire are being erected against the mind's threat to itself. This is a real thing, whether we call it good or bad, and its force of reality seems to grow rather than diminish in memory, seems to be

greater after one's actual reading is behind one; the quality of this reality is that which we assign to primitive and elemental things, and, judge it as we will, we dare not be indifferent or superior to it.

In speaking of Kipling's politics, Mr. Eliot contents himself with denying that Kipling was a fascist; a tory, he says, is a very different thing; a tory considers fascism the last debasement of democracy. But this, I think, is not quite ingenuous of Mr. Eliot. A tory, to be sure, is not a fascist and Kipling is not properly to be called a fascist, but neither is his political temperament to be adequately described merely by reference to a tradition which is honoured by Dr. Johnson, Burke, and Walter Scott. Kipling is not like these men; he is not generous, and, although he makes much to-do about manliness, he is not manly; and he has none of the *mind* of the few great tories. His toryism often had in it a lower-middle-class snarl of defeated gentility, and it is this, rather than his love of authority and force, that might suggest an affinity with fascism. His imperialism is reprehensible not because it *is* imperialism but because it is a puny and mindless imperialism. In short, Kipling is unloved and unlovable not by reason of his beliefs but by reason of the temperament that gave them literary expression.

I have said that the old antagonism between liberalism and Kipling is now abated by time and events, yet it is still worth saying, and it is not extravagant to say, that Kipling was one of liberalism's major intellectual misfortunes. John Stuart Mill, when he urged all liberals to study the conservative Coleridge, said that we should pray to have enemies who make us worthy of ourselves. Kipling was an enemy who had the opposite effect. He tempted liberals to be content with easy victories of right feeling and with moral self-congratulation. For example, the strength of toryism at its best lies in its descent from a solid administrative tradition, while the weakness of liberalism, arising from its history of reliance upon legislation, is likely to be a fogginess about administration (or, when the fog clears away a little, a fancy and absolute notion of administration such as Wells and Shaw gave way to). Kipling's sympathy was always with the administrator and he is always suspicious of the legislator. This is foolish, but it is not the most reprehensible error in the world, and it is a prejudice which, in the hands of an intelligent man, say a man like Walter Bagehot or like Fitzjames Stephen, might make clear to the man of principled theory, to the liberal, what the difficulties not merely of government but of *governing* really are. And that is what Kipling set out to do, but he so

charged his demonstration with hatred and contempt, with rancour and caste feeling, he so emptied the honorable tory tradition of its intellectual content, that he simply could not be listened to or believed, he could only be reacted against. His extravagance sprang from his hatred of the liberal intellectual—he was, we must remember, the aggressor in the quarrel—and the liberal intellectual responded by hating everything that Kipling loved, even when it had its element of virtue and enlightenment.

We must make no mistake about it—Kipling was an honest man and he loved the national virtues. But I suppose no man ever did more harm to the national virtues than Kipling did. He mixed them up with a swagger and swank, with bullying, ruthlessness, and self-righteousness, and he set them up as necessarily antagonistic to intellect. He made them stink in the nostrils of youth. I remember that in my own undergraduate days we used specifically to exclude physical courage from among the virtues; we were exaggerating the point of a joke of Shaw's and reacting from Kipling. And up to the war I had a yearly struggle with undergraduates over Wordsworth's poem "The Character of the Happy Warrior," which is, I suppose, the respectable father of the profligate "If."* It seemed too moral and "manly," the students said, and once when I remarked that John Wordsworth had apparently been just such a man as his brother had described, and told them about his dutiful and courageous death at sea, they said flatly that they were not impressed. This was not what most of them really thought, but the idea of courage and duty had been steeped for them in the Kipling vat and they rejected the idea with the color. In England this response seems to have gone even further.† And when the war came, the interesting and touching phenomenon of the cult of Richard Hillary, which Arthur Koestler has described, was the effort of the English young men to find the national virtues without the Kipling color, to know and resist their enemies without self-glorification.

In our day the idea of the nation has become doubtful and debilitated all over the world, or at least wherever it is not being enforced by ruthless governments or wherever it is not being nourished by immediate danger or the tyranny of other nations. Men more and more think it best to postulate their loyalty either to their class, or to the idea of a social organiza-

*The war over, the struggle is on again.

†George Orwell's essay on Kipling in *Dickens, Dali and Others* deals bluntly and fairly with the implications of easy "liberal" and "aesthetic" contempt for *everything* Kipling stood for.

tion more comprehensive than that of the nation, or to a cultural ideal or a spiritual fatherland. Yet in the attack which has been made on the national idea, there are, one suspects, certain motives that are not expressed, motives that have less to do with reason and order than with the modern impulse to say that politics is not really a proper human activity at all; the reluctance to give loyalty to any social organization which falls short of some ideal organization of the future may imply a disgust not so much with the merely national life as with the civic life itself. And on the positive side too something is still to be said for nations, the case against them is not yet closed. Of course in literature nothing ever is said; every avowal of national pride or love or faith rings false and serves but to reinforce the tendency of rejection, as the example of the response to Kipling shows. Yet Kipling himself, on one occasion, dealt successfully with the national theme and in doing so implied the reason for the general failure—the "Recessional" hymn is a remarkable and perhaps a great national poem; its import of humility and fear at the moment of national success suggests that the idea of the nation, although no doubt a limited one, is still profound enough to require that it be treated with a certain measure of seriousness and truth-telling. But the occasion is exceptional with Kipling, who by utterances that are characteristic of him did more than any other writer of our time to bring the national idea into discredit.

Reality in America

1940–46

I

It is possible to say of V. L. Parrington that with his *Main Currents in American Thought* he has had an influence on our conception of American culture which is not equalled by that of any other writer of the last two decades. His ideas are now the accepted ones wherever the college course in American literature is given by a teacher who conceives himself to be opposed to the genteel and the academic and in alliance with the vigorous and the actual. And whenever the liberal historian of America finds occasion to take account of the national literature, as nowadays he feels it proper to do, it is Parrington who is his standard and guide. Parrington's ideas are the more firmly established because they do not have to be imposed—the teacher or the critic who presents them is likely to find that his task is merely to make articulate for his audience what it has always believed, for Parrington formulated in a classic way the suppositions about our culture which are held by the American middle class so far as that class is at all liberal in its social thought and so far as it begins to understand that literature has anything to do with society.

Parrington was not a great mind; he was not a precise thinker or, except when measured by the low eminences that were about him, an impressive one. Separate Parrington from his informing idea of the economic and social determination of thought and what is left is a simple in-

telligence, notable for its generosity and enthusiasm but certainly not for its accuracy or originality. Take him even with his idea and he is, once its direction is established, rather too predictable to be continuously interesting; and, indeed, what we dignify with the name of economic and social determinism amounts in his use of it to not much more than the demonstration that most writers incline to stick to their own social class. But his best virtue was real and important—he had what we like to think of as the saving salt of the American mind, the lively sense of the practical, workaday world, of the welter of ordinary undistinguished things and people, of the tangible, quirky, unrefined elements of life. He knew what so many literary historians do not know, that emotions and ideas are the sparks that fly when the mind meets difficulties.

Yet he had after all but a limited sense of what constitutes a difficulty. Whenever he was confronted with a work of art that was complex, personal and not literal, that was not, as it were, a public document, Parrington was at a loss. Difficulties that were complicated by personality or that were expressed in the language of successful art did not seem quite real to him and he was inclined to treat them as aberrations, which is one way of saying what everybody admits, that the weakest part of Parrington's talent was his aesthetic judgment. His admirers and disciples like to imply that his errors of aesthetic judgment are merely lapses of taste, but this is not so. Despite such mistakes as his notorious praise of Cabell, to whom in a remarkable passage he compares Melville, Parrington's taste was by no means bad. His errors are the errors of understanding which arise from his assumptions about the nature of reality.

Parrington does not often deal with abstract philosophical ideas, but whenever he approaches a work of art we are made aware of the metaphysics on which his aesthetics is based. There exists, he believes, a thing called "reality"; it is one and immutable, it is wholly external, it is irreducible. Men's minds may waver, but reality is always reliable, always the same, always easily to be known. And the artist's relation to reality he conceives as a simple one. Reality being fixed and given, the artist has but to let it pass through him, he is the lens in the first diagram of an elementary book on optics: Fig. 1, Reality; Fig. 2, Artist; Fig. 1′, Work of Art. Figures 1 and 1′ are normally in virtual correspondence with each other. Sometimes the artist spoils this ideal relation by "turning away from" reality. This results in certain fantastic works, unreal and ultimately useless.

It does not occur to Parrington that there is any other relation possible between the artist and reality than this passage of reality through the transparent artist; he meets evidence of imagination and creativeness with a settled hostility the expression of which suggests that he regards them as the natural enemies of democracy.

In this view of things, reality, although it is always reliable, is always rather sober-sided, even grim. Parrington, a genial and enthusiastic man, can understand how the generosity of man's hopes and desires may leap beyond reality; he admires will in the degree that he suspects mind. To an excess of desire and energy which blinds a man to the limitations of reality he can indeed be very tender. This is one of the many meanings he gives to "romance" or "romanticism," and in spite of himself it appeals to something in his own nature. The praise of Cabell is Parrington's response not only to Cabell's elegance—for Parrington loved elegance—but also to Cabell's insistence on the part which a beneficent self-deception may and even should play in the disappointing fact-bound life of man, particularly in the private and erotic part of his life.*

The second volume of *Main Currents* is called *The Romantic Revolution in America* and it is natural to expect that the word romantic should appear in it frequently. So it does, more frequently than one can count, and seldom with the same meaning, seldom with the sense that the word, although scandalously vague as it has been used by the literary historians, is still full of complicated but not wholly pointless ideas, that it involves many contrary but definable things; all too often Parrington uses the word "romantic" with the word "romance" close at hand, meaning *a* romance, in the sense that *Graustark* or *Treasure Island* is a romance, as though it signified chiefly a gay disregard of the limitations of everyday fact. Romance is refusing to heed the counsels of experience (p. iii); it is ebullience (p. iv); it is utopianism (p. iv); it is individualism (p. vi); it is self-deception (p. 59)—"romantic faith . . . in the beneficent processes of trade and industry" (as held, we inevitably ask, by the romantic Adam Smith?); it is the love of the picturesque (p. 49); it is the dislike of innovation (p. 50) but also the love of change (p. iv); it is the sentimental (p. 192); it is patriotism, and then it is cheap (p. 235). It may be used to

*See, for example, how Parrington accounts for the "idealizing mind"—Melville's—by the discrepancy between "a wife in her morning kimono" and "the Helen of his dreams." Vol. II, p. 259.

denote what is not classical, but chiefly it means that which ignores reality (pp. ix, 136, 143, 147, and *passim*); it is not critical (pp. 225, 235), although in speaking of Cooper and Melville, Parrington admits that criticism can sometimes spring from romanticism.

Whenever a man with whose ideas he disagrees wins from Parrington a reluctant measure of respect, the word romantic is likely to appear. He does not admire Henry Clay, yet something in Clay is not to be despised—his romanticism, although Clay's romanticism is made equivalent with his inability to "come to grips with reality." Romanticism is thus, in most of its significations, the venial sin of *Main Currents*; like carnal passion in the *Inferno*, it evokes not blame but tender sorrow. But it can also be the great and saving virtue which Parrington recognizes. It is ascribed to the transcendental reformers he so much admires; it is said to mark two of his most cherished heroes, Jefferson and Emerson: "they were both romantics and their idealism was only a different expression of a common spirit." Parrington held, we may say, at least two different views of romanticism which suggest two different views of reality. Sometimes he speaks of reality in an honorific way, meaning the substantial stuff of life, the ineluctable facts with which the mind must cope, but sometimes he speaks of it pejoratively and means the world of established social forms; and he speaks of realism in two ways: sometimes as the power of dealing intelligently with fact, sometimes as a cold and conservative resistance to idealism.

Just as for Parrington there is a saving grace and a venial sin, there is also a deadly sin, and this is turning away from reality, not in the excess of generous feeling but in what he believes to be a deficiency of feeling, as with Hawthorne, or out of what amounts to sinful pride, as with Henry James. He tells us that there was too much realism in Hawthorne to allow him to give his faith to the transcendental reformers: "he was too much of a realist to change fashions in creeds"; "he remained cold to the revolutionary criticism that was eager to pull down the old temples to make room for nobler." It is this cold realism, keeping Hawthorne apart from his enthusiastic contemporaries, that alienates Parrington's sympathy—

> Eager souls, mystics and revolutionaries, may propose to refashion the world in accordance with their dreams; but evil remains, and so long as it lurks in the secret places of the heart, utopia is only the shadow of a dream. And so while the Concord thinkers were

> proclaiming man to be the indubitable child of God, Hawthorne was critically examining the question of evil as it appeared in the light of his own experience. It was the central fascinating problem of his intellectual life, and in pursuit of a solution he probed curiously into the hidden, furtive recesses of the soul.

Parrington's disapproval of the enterprise is unmistakable.

Now we might wonder whether Hawthorne's questioning of the naïve and often eccentric faiths of the transcendental reformers was not, on the face of it, a public service. But Parrington implies that it contributes nothing to democracy, and even that it stands in the way of the realization of democracy. If democracy depends wholly on a fighting faith, I suppose he is right. Yet society is after all something that exists at the moment as well as in the future, and if one man wants to probe curiously into the hidden furtive recesses of the contemporary soul, a broad democracy and especially one devoted to reality should allow him to do so without despising him. If what Hawthorne did was certainly nothing to build a party on, we ought perhaps to forgive him when we remember that he was only one man and that the future of mankind did not depend upon him alone. But this very fact serves only to irritate Parrington; he is put out by Hawthorne's loneliness and believes that part of Hawthorne's insufficiency as a writer comes from his failure to get around and meet people. Hawthorne could not, he tells us, establish contact with the "Yankee reality," and was scarcely aware of the "substantial world of Puritan reality that Samuel Sewall knew."

To turn from reality might mean to turn to romance, but Parrington tells us that Hawthorne was romantic "only in a narrow and very special sense." He was not interested in the world of, as it were, practical romance, in the Salem of the clipper ships; from this he turned away to create "a romance of ethics." This is not an illuminating phrase but it is a catching one, and it might be taken to mean that Hawthorne was in the tradition of, say, Shakespeare; but we quickly learn that, no, Hawthorne had entered a barren field, for although he himself lived in the present and had all the future to mold, he preferred to find many of his subjects in the past. We learn, too, that his romance of ethics is not admirable because it requires the hard, fine pressing of ideas, and we are told that "a romantic uninterested in adventure and afraid of sex is likely to become somewhat gravelled for matter." In short, Hawthorne's mind was a thin

one, and Parrington puts in evidence his use of allegory and symbol and the very severity and precision of his art to prove that he suffered from a sadly limited intellect, for so much fancy and so much art could scarcely be needed unless the writer were trying to exploit to the utmost the few poor ideas that he had.

Hawthorne, then, was "forever dealing with shadows, and he knew that he was dealing with shadows." Perhaps so, but shadows are also part of reality and one would not want a world without shadows, it would not even be a "real" world. But we must get beyond Parrington's metaphor. The fact is that Hawthorne was dealing beautifully with realities, with substantial things. The man who could raise those brilliant and serious doubts about the nature and possibility of moral perfection, the man who could keep himself aloof from the "Yankee reality" and who could dissent from the orthodoxies of dissent and tell us so much about the nature of moral zeal, is of course dealing exactly with reality.

Parrington's characteristic weakness as a historian is suggested by his title, for the culture of a nation is not truly figured in the image of the current. A culture is not a flow, nor even a confluence; the form of its existence is struggle, or at least debate—it is nothing if not a dialectic. And in any culture there are likely to be certain artists who contain a large part of the dialectic within themselves, their meaning and power lying in their contradictions; they contain within themselves, it may be said, the very essence of the culture, and the sign of this is that they do not submit to serve the ends of any one ideological group or tendency. It is a significant circumstance of American culture, and one which is susceptible of explanation, that an unusually large proportion of its notable writers of the nineteenth century were such repositories of the dialectic of their times—they contained both the yes and the no of their culture, and by that token they were prophetic of the future. Parrington said that he had not set up shop as a literary critic; but if a literary critic is simply a reader who has the ability to understand literature and to convey to others what he understands, it is not exactly a matter of free choice whether or not a cultural historian shall be a literary critic, nor is it open to him to let his virtuous political and social opinions do duty for percipience. To throw out Poe because he cannot be conveniently fitted into a theory of American culture, to speak of him as a biological sport and as a mind apart from the main current, to find his gloom to be merely personal and eccentric,

"only the atrabilious wretchedness of a dipsomaniac," as Hawthorne's was "no more than the sceptical questioning of life by a nature that knew no fierce storms," to judge Melville's response to American life to be less noble than that of Bryant or of Greeley, to speak of Henry James as an escapist, as an artist similar to Whistler, a man characteristically afraid of stress—this is not merely to be mistaken in aesthetic judgment; rather it is to examine without attention and from the point of view of a limited and essentially arrogant conception of reality the documents which are in some respects the most suggestive testimony to what America was and is, and of course to get no answer from them.

Parrington lies twenty years behind us, and in the intervening time there has developed a body of opinion which is aware of his inadequacies and of the inadequacies of his coadjutors and disciples, who make up what might be called the literary academicism of liberalism. Yet Parrington still stands at the center of American thought about American culture because, as I say, he expresses the chronic American belief that there exists an opposition between reality and mind and that one must enlist oneself in the party of reality.

2

This belief in the incompatibility of mind and reality is exemplified by the doctrinaire indulgence which liberal intellectuals have always displayed toward Theodore Dreiser, an indulgence which becomes the worthier of remark when it is contrasted with the liberal severity toward Henry James. Dreiser and James: with that juxtaposition we are immediately at the dark and bloody crossroads where literature and politics meet. One does not go there gladly, but nowadays it is not exactly a matter of free choice whether one does or does not go. As for the particular juxtaposition itself, it is inevitable and it has at the present moment far more significance than the juxtaposition which once used to be made between James and Whitman. It is not hard to contrive factitious oppositions between James and Whitman, but the real difference between them is the difference between the moral mind, with its awareness of tragedy, irony, and multitudinous distinctions, and the transcendental mind, with its

passionate sense of the oneness of multiplicity. James and Whitman are unlike not in quality but in kind, and in their very opposition they serve to complement each other. But the difference between James and Dreiser is not of kind, for both men addressed themselves to virtually the same social and moral fact. The difference here is one of quality, and perhaps nothing is more typical of American liberalism than the way it has responded to the respective qualities of the two men.

Few critics, I suppose, no matter what their political disposition, have ever been wholly blind to James's great gifts, or even to the grandiose moral intention of these gifts. And few critics have ever been wholly blind to Dreiser's great faults. But by liberal critics James is traditionally put to the ultimate question: of what use, of what actual political use, are his gifts and their intention? Granted that James was devoted to an extraordinary moral perceptiveness, granted, too, that moral perceptiveness has something to do with politics and the social life; of what possible practical value in our world of impending disaster can James's work be? And James's style, his characters, his subjects, and even his own social origin and the manner of his personal life are adduced to show that his work cannot endure the question. To James no quarter is given by American criticism in its political and liberal aspect. But in the same degree that liberal criticism is moved by political considerations to treat James with severity, it treats Dreiser with the most sympathetic indulgence. Dreiser's literary faults, it gives us to understand, are essentially social and political virtues. It was Parrington who established the formula for the liberal criticism of Dreiser by calling him a "peasant": when Dreiser thinks stupidly, it is because he has the slow stubbornness of a peasant; when he writes badly, it is because he is impatient of the sterile literary gentility of the bourgeoisie. It is as if wit, and flexibility of mind, and perception, and knowledge were to be equated with aristocracy and political reaction, while dullness and stupidity must naturally suggest a virtuous democracy, as in the old plays.

The liberal judgment of Dreiser and James goes back to politics, goes back to the cultural assumptions that make politics. We are still haunted by a kind of political fear of the intellect which Tocqueville observed in us more than a century ago. American intellectuals, when they are being consciously American or political, are remarkably quick to suggest that an art which is marked by perception and knowledge, although all very well in its way, can never get us through gross dangers and difficulties. And

their misgivings become the more intense when intellect works in art as it ideally should, when its processes are vivacious and interesting and brilliant. It is then that we like to confront it with the gross dangers and difficulties and to challenge it to save us at once from disaster. When intellect in art is awkward or dull we do not put it to the test of ultimate or immediate practicality. No liberal critic asks the question of Dreiser whether *his* moral preoccupations are going to be useful in confronting the disasters that threaten us. And it is a judgment on the proper nature of mind, rather than any actual political meaning that might be drawn from the works of the two men, which accounts for the unequal justice they have received from the progressive critics. If it could be conclusively demonstrated—by, say, documents in James's handwriting—that James explicitly intended his books to be understood as pleas for cooperatives, labor unions, better housing, and more equitable taxation, the American critic in his liberal and progressive character would still be worried by James because his work shows so many of the electric qualities of mind. And if something like the opposite were proved of Dreiser, it would be brushed aside—as his doctrinaire anti-Semitism has in fact been brushed aside—because his books have the awkwardness, the chaos, the heaviness which we associate with "reality." In the American metaphysic reality is always material reality, hard, resistant, unformed, impenetrable, and unpleasant. And that mind is alone felt to be trustworthy which most resembles this reality by most nearly reproducing the sensations it affords.

In *The Rise of American Civilization*, Professor Beard uses a significant phrase when, in the course of an ironic account of James's career, he implies that we have the clue to the irrelevance of that career when we know that James was "a whole generation removed from the odours of the shop." Of a piece with this, and in itself even more significant, is the comment which Granville Hicks makes in *The Great Tradition* when he deals with James's stories about artists and remarks that such artists as James portrays, so concerned for their art and their integrity in art, do not really exist: "After all, who has ever known such artists? Where are the Hugh Verekers, the Mark Ambients, the Neil Paradays, the Overts, Limberts, Dencombes, Delavoys?" This question, as Mr. Hicks admits, had occurred to James himself, but what answer had James given to it? "If the life about us for the last thirty years refused warrant for these examples," he said in the preface to volume XII of the New York edition,

> then so much the worse for that life. . . . There are decencies that in the name of the general self-respect we must take for granted, there's a rudimentary intellectual honour to which we must, in the interest of civilization, at least pretend.

And to this Mr. Hicks, shocked beyond argument, makes this reply, which would be astonishing had we not heard it before: "But this is the purest romanticism, this writing about what ought to be rather than what is!"

The "odours of the shop" are real, and to those who breathe them they guarantee a sense of vitality from which James is debarred. The idea of intellectual honor is not real, and to that chimera James was devoted. He betrayed the reality of what is in the interests of what ought to be. Dare we trust him? The question, we remember, is asked by men who themselves have elaborate transactions with what ought to be. Professor Beard spoke in the name of a growing, developing, and improving America. Mr. Hicks, when he wrote *The Great Tradition*, was in general sympathy with a nominally radical movement. But James's own transaction with what ought to be is suspect because it is carried on through what I have called the electric qualities of mind, through a complex and rapid imagination and with a kind of authoritative immediacy. Mr. Hicks knows that Dreiser is "clumsy" and "stupid" and "bewildered" and "crude in his statement of materialistic monism"; he knows that Dreiser in his personal life—which is in point because James's personal life is always supposed to be so much in point—was not quite emancipated from "his boyhood longing for crass material success," showing "again and again a desire for the ostentatious luxury of the successful business man." But Dreiser is to be accepted and forgiven because his faults are the sad, lovable, honorable faults of reality itself, or of America itself—huge, inchoate, struggling toward expression, caught between the dream of raw power and the dream of morality.

> The liability in what Santayana called the genteel tradition was due to its being the product of mind apart from experience. Dreiser gave us the stuff of our common experience, not as it was hoped to be by any idealizing theorist, but as it actually was in its crudity.

The author of this statement certainly cannot be accused of any lack of feeling for mind as Henry James represents it; nor can Mr. Matthiessen be

thought of as a follower of Parrington—indeed, in the preface to *American Renaissance* he has framed one of the sharpest and most cogent criticisms of Parrington's method. Yet Mr. Matthiessen, writing in *The New York Times Book Review* about Dreiser's posthumous novel, *The Bulwark*, accepts the liberal cliché which opposes crude experience to mind and establishes Dreiser's value by implying that the mind which Dreiser's crude experience is presumed to confront and refute is the mind of gentility.

This implied amalgamation of mind with gentility is the rationale of the long indulgence of Dreiser, which is extended even to the style of his prose. Everyone is aware that Dreiser's prose style is full of roughness and ungainliness, and the critics who admire Dreiser tell us it does not matter. Of course it does not matter. No reader with a right sense of style would suppose that it does matter, and he might even find it a virtue. But it has been taken for granted that the ungainliness of Dreiser's style is the only possible objection to be made to it, and that whoever finds in it any fault at all wants a prettified genteel style (and is objecting to the ungainliness of reality itself). For instance, Edwin Berry Burgum, in a leaflet on Dreiser put out by the Book Find Club, tells us that Dreiser was one of those who used—or, as Mr. Burgum says, utilized—"the diction of the Middle West, pretty much as it was spoken, rich in colloquialism and frank in the simplicity and directness of the pioneer tradition," and that this diction took the place of "the literary English, formal and bookish, of New England provincialism that was closer to the aristocratic spirit of the mother country than to the tang of everyday life in the new West." This is mere fantasy. Hawthorne, Thoreau, and Emerson were for the most part remarkably colloquial—they wrote, that is, much as they spoke, their prose was specifically American in quality and, except for occasional lapses, quite direct and simple. It is Dreiser who lacks the sense of colloquial diction—that of the Middle West or any other. If we are to talk of bookishness, it is Dreiser who is bookish; he is precisely literary in the bad sense; he is full of flowers of rhetoric and shines with paste gems; at hundreds of points his diction is not only genteel but fancy. It is he who speaks of "a scene more distingué than this," or of a woman "artistic in form and feature," or of a man who although "strong, reserved, aggressive, with an air of wealth and experience, was *soi-disant* and not particularly eager to stay at home." Colloquialism held no real charm for him and his natural tendency is always toward the "fine."

> Moralists come and go; religionists fulminate and declare the pronouncements of God as to this; but Aphrodite still reigns. Embowered in the festal depths of the spring, set above her altars of porphyry, chalcedony, ivory and gold, see her smile the smile that is at once the texture and essence of delight, the glory and despair of the world! Dream on, oh Buddha, asleep on your lotus leaf, of an undisturbed Nirvana! Sweat, oh Jesus, your last agonizing drops over an unregenerate world! In the forests of Pan still ring the cries of the worshippers of Aphrodite! From her altars the incense of adoration ever rises! And see, the new red grapes dripping where votive hands new-press them!

Charles Jackson, the novelist, telling us in the same leaflet that Dreiser's style does not matter, remarks on how much still comes to us when we have lost by translation the stylistic brilliance of Thomas Mann or the Russians or Balzac. He is in part right. And he is right, too, when he says that a certain kind of conscious, supervised artistry is not appropriate to the novel of large dimensions. Yet the fact is that the great novelists have usually written very good prose, and what comes through even a bad translation is exactly the power of mind that made the well-hung sentence of the original text. In literature style is so little the mere clothing of thought—need it be insisted on at this late date?—that we may say that from the earth of the novelist's prose spring his characters, his ideas, and even his story itself.*

*The latest defense of Dreiser's style, that in the chapter on Dreiser in the *Literary History of the United States*, is worth noting: "Forgetful of the integrity and power of Dreiser's whole work, many critics have been distracted into a condemnation of his style. He was, like Twain and Whitman, an organic artist; he wrote what he knew—what he was. His many colloquialisms were part of the coinage of his time, and his sentimental and romantic passages were written in the language of the educational system and the popular literature of his formative years. In his style, as in his material, he was a child of his time, of his class. Self-educated, a type or model of the artist of plebeian origin in America, his language, like his subject matter, is not marked by internal inconsistencies." No doubt Dreiser was an organic artist in the sense that he wrote what he knew and what he was, but so, I suppose, is every artist; the question for criticism comes down to *what* he knew and *what* he was. That he was a child of his time and class is also true, but this can be said of everyone without exception; the question for criticism is how he transcended the imposed limitations of his time and class. As for the defense made on the ground of his particular class, it can only be said that liberal thought has come to a strange pass when it assumes that a plebeian origin is accountable for a writer's faults through all his intellectual life.

To the extent that Dreiser's style is defensible, his thought is also defensible. That is, when he thinks like a novelist, he is worth following—when by means of his rough and ungainly but no doubt cumulatively effective style he creates rough, ungainly, but effective characters and events. But when he thinks like, as we say, a philosopher, he is likely to be not only foolish but vulgar. He thinks as the modern crowd thinks when it decides to think: religion and morality are nonsense, "religionists" and moralists are fakes, tradition is a fraud, what is man but matter and impulses, mysterious "chemisms," what value has life anyway?

> What, cooking, eating, coition, job holding, growing, aging, losing, winning, in so changeful and passing a scene as this, important? Bunk! It is some form of titillating illusion with about as much import to the superior forces that bring it all about as the functions and gyrations of a fly. No more. And maybe less.

Thus Dreiser at sixty. And yet there is for him always the vulgarly saving suspicion that maybe, when all is said and done, there is Something Behind It All. It is much to the point of his intellectual vulgarity that Dreiser's anti-Semitism was not merely a social prejudice but an idea, a way of dealing with difficulties.

No one, I suppose, has ever represented Dreiser as a masterly intellect. It is even commonplace to say that his ideas are inconsistent or inadequate. But once that admission has been made, his ideas are hustled out of sight while his "reality" and great brooding pity are spoken of. (His pity is to be questioned: pity is to be judged by kind, not amount, and Dreiser's pity—*Jennie Gerhardt* provides the only exception—is either destructive of its object or it is self-pity.) Why has no liberal critic ever brought Dreiser's ideas to the bar of political practicality, asking what use is to be made of Dreiser's dim, awkward speculation, of his self-justification, of his lust for "beauty" and "sex" and "living" and "life itself," and of the showy nihilism which always seems to him so grand a gesture in the direction of profundity? We live, understandably enough, with the sense of urgency; our clock, like Baudelaire's, has had the hands removed and bears the legend, "It is later than you think." But with us it is always a little too late for mind, yet never too late for honest stupidity; always a little too late for understanding, never too late for righteous, be-

wildered wrath; always too late for thought, never too late for naïve moralizing. We seem to like to condemn our finest but not our worst qualities by pitting them against the exigency of time.

But sometimes time is not quite so exigent as to justify all our own exigency, and in the case of Dreiser time has allowed his deficiencies to reach their logical, and fatal, conclusion. In *The Bulwark* Dreiser's characteristic ideas come full circle, and the simple, didactic life history of Solon Barnes, a Quaker business man, affirms a simple Christian faith, and a kind of practical mysticism, and the virtues of self-abnegation and self-restraint, and the belief in and submission to the hidden purposes of higher powers, those "superior forces that bring it all about"—once, in Dreiser's opinion, so brutally indifferent, now somehow benign. This is not the first occasion on which Dreiser has shown a tenderness toward religion and a responsiveness to mysticism. *Jennie Gerhardt* and the figure of the Reverend Duncan McMillan in *An American Tragedy* are forecasts of the avowals of *The Bulwark*, and Dreiser's lively interest in power of any sort led him to take account of the power implicit in the cruder forms of mystical performance. Yet these rifts in his nearly monolithic materialism cannot quite prepare us for the blank pietism of *The Bulwark*, not after we have remembered how salient in Dreiser's work has been the long surly rage against the "religionists" and the "moralists," the men who have presumed to believe that life can be given any law at all and who have dared to suppose that will or mind or faith can shape the savage and beautiful entity that Dreiser liked to call "life itself." Now for Dreiser the law may indeed be given, and it is wholly simple—the safe conduct of the personal life requires only that we follow the Inner Light according to the regimen of the Society of Friends, or according to some other godly rule. And now the smiling Aphrodite set above her altars of porphyry, chalcedony, ivory, and gold is quite forgotten, and we are told that the sad joy of cosmic acceptance goes hand in hand with sexual abstinence.

Dreiser's mood of "acceptance" in the last years of his life is not, as a personal experience, to be submitted to the tests of intellectual validity. It consists of a sensation of cosmic understanding, of an overarching sense of unity with the world in its apparent evil as well as in its obvious good. It is no more to be quarrelled with, or reasoned with, than love itself—indeed, it is a kind of love, not so much of the world as of oneself in the world. Perhaps it is either the cessation of desire or the perfect balance of desires. It is what used often to be meant by "peace," and up through the

nineteenth century a good many people understood its meaning. If it was Dreiser's own emotion at the end of his life, who would not be happy that he had achieved it? I am not even sure that our civilization would not be the better for more of us knowing and desiring this emotion of grave felicity. Yet granting the personal validity of the emotion, Dreiser's exposition of it fails, and is, moreover, offensive. Mr. Matthiessen has warned us of the attack that will be made on the doctrine of *The Bulwark* by "those who believe that any renewal of Christianity marks a new 'failure of nerve.' " But Dreiser's religious avowal is not a failure of nerve—it is a failure of mind and heart. We have only to set his book beside any work in which mind and heart are made to serve religion to know this at once. Ivan Karamazov's giving back his ticket of admission to the "harmony" of the universe suggests that *The Bulwark* is not morally adequate, for we dare not, as its hero does, blandly "accept" the suffering of others; and the Book of Job tells us that it does not include enough in its exploration of the problem of evil, and is not stern enough. I have said that Dreiser's religious affirmation was offensive; the offense lies in the vulgar ease of its formulation, as well as in the comfortable untroubled way in which Dreiser moved from nihilism to pietism.*

The Bulwark is the fruit of Dreiser's old age, but if we speak of it as a failure of thought and feeling, we cannot suppose that with age Dreiser weakened in mind and heart. The weakness was always there. And in a sense it is not Dreiser who failed but a whole way of dealing with ideas, a way in which we have all been in some degree involved. Our liberal, progressive culture tolerated Dreiser's vulgar materialism with its huge negation, its simple cry of "Bunk!", feeling that perhaps it was not quite intellectually adequate but certainly very *strong*, certainly very *real*. And now, almost as a natural consequence, it has been given, and is not unwilling to take, Dreiser's pietistic religion in all its inadequacy.

Dreiser, of course, was firmer than the intellectual culture that accepted him. He *meant* his ideas, at least so far as a man can mean ideas who is incapable of following them to their consequences. But we, when

*This ease and comfortableness seem to mark contemporary religious conversions. Religion nowadays has the appearance of what the ideal modern house has been called, "a machine for living," and seemingly one makes up one's mind to acquire and use it not with spiritual struggle but only with a growing sense of its practicability and convenience. Compare *The Seven Storey Mountain*, which Monsignor Sheen calls "a twentieth-century form of the *Confessions* of Saint Augustine," with the old, the as it were original, *Confessions* of Saint Augustine.

it came to his ideas, talked about his great brooding pity and shrugged the ideas off. We are still doing it. Robert Elias, the biographer of Dreiser, tells us that "it is part of the logic of [Dreiser's] life that he should have completed *The Bulwark* at the same time that he joined the Communists." Just what kind of logic this is we learn from Mr. Elias's further statement:

> When he supported left-wing movements and finally, last year, joined the Communist Party, he did so not because he had examined the details of the party line and found them satisfactory, but because he agreed with a general programme that represented a means for establishing his cherished goal of greater equality among men.

Whether or not Dreiser was following the logic of his own life, he was certainly following the logic of the liberal criticism that accepted him so undiscriminatingly as one of the great, significant expressions of its spirit. This is the liberal criticism, in the direct line of Parrington, which establishes the social responsibility of the writer and then goes on to say that, apart from his duty of resembling reality as much as possible, he is not really responsible for anything, not even for his ideas. The scope of reality being what it is, ideas are held to be mere "details," and, what is more, to be details which, if attended to, have the effect of diminishing reality. But ideals are different from ideas; in the liberal criticism which descends from Parrington ideals consort happily with reality and they urge us to deal impatiently with ideas—a "cherished goal" forbids that we stop to consider how we reach it, or if we may not destroy it in trying to reach it the wrong way.

Art and Neurosis

1945–47

The question of the mental health of the artist has engaged the attention of our culture since the beginning of the Romantic Movement. Before that time it was commonly said that the poet was "mad," but this was only a manner of speaking, a way of saying that the mind of the poet worked in different fashion from the mind of the philosopher; it had no real reference to the mental hygiene of the man who was the poet. But in the early nineteenth century, with the development of a more elaborate psychology and a stricter and more literal view of mental and emotional normality, the statement was more strictly and literally intended. So much so, indeed, that Charles Lamb, who knew something about madness at close quarters and a great deal about art, undertook to refute in his brilliant essay "On the Sanity of True Genius," the idea that the exercise of the imagination was a kind of insanity. And some eighty years later, the idea having yet further entrenched itself, Bernard Shaw felt called upon to argue the sanity of art, but his cogency was of no more avail than Lamb's. In recent years the connection between art and mental illness has been formulated not only by those who are openly or covertly hostile to art, but also and more significantly by those who are most intensely partisan to it. The latter willingly and even eagerly accept the idea that the artist is

mentally ill and go on to make his illness a condition of his power to tell the truth.

This conception of artistic genius is indeed one of the characteristic notions of our culture. I should like to bring it into question. To do so is to bring also into question certain early ideas of Freud's and certain conclusions which literary laymen have drawn from the whole tendency of the Freudian psychology. From the very start it was recognized that psychoanalysis was likely to have important things to say about art and artists. Freud himself thought so, yet when he first addressed himself to the subject he said many clumsy and misleading things. I have elsewhere and at length tried to separate the useful from the useless and even dangerous statements about art that Freud has made.* To put it briefly here, Freud had some illuminating and even beautiful insights into certain particular works of art which made complex use of the element of myth. Then, without specifically undertaking to do so, his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* offers a brilliant and comprehensive explanation of our interest in tragedy. And what is of course most important of all—it is a point to which I shall return—Freud, by the whole tendency of his psychology, establishes the *naturalness* of artistic thought. Indeed, it is possible to say of Freud that he ultimately did more for our understanding of art than any other writer since Aristotle; and this being so, it can only be surprising that in his early work he should have made the error of treating the artist as a neurotic who escapes from reality by means of "substitute gratifications."

As Freud went forward he insisted less on this simple formulation. Certainly it did not have its original force with him when, at his seventieth birthday celebration, he disclaimed the right to be called the discoverer of the unconscious, saying that whatever he may have done for the systematic understanding of the unconscious, the credit for its discovery properly belonged to the literary masters. And psychoanalysis has inherited from him a tenderness for art which is real although sometimes clumsy, and nowadays most psychoanalysts of any personal sensitivity are embarrassed by occasions which seem to lead them to reduce art to a formula of mental illness. Nevertheless Freud's early belief in the essential neuroticism of the artist found an all too fertile ground—found, we might say, the very ground from which it first sprang, for, when he spoke

*In "Freud and Literature," *The Liberal Imagination*.

of the artist as a neurotic, Freud was adopting one of the popular beliefs of his age. Most readers will see this belief as the expression of the industrial rationalization and the bourgeois philistinism of the nineteenth century. In this they are partly right. The nineteenth century established the basic virtue of "getting up at eight, shaving close at a quarter-past, breakfasting at nine, going to the City at ten, coming home at half-past five, and dining at seven." The Messrs. Podsnap who instituted this scheduled morality inevitably decreed that the arts must celebrate it and nothing else. "Nothing else to be permitted to these . . . vagrants the Arts, on pain of excommunication. Nothing else To Be—anywhere!" We observe that the virtuous day ends with dinner—bed and sleep are naturally not part of the Reality that Is, and nothing must be set forth which will, as Mr. Podsnap put it, bring a Blush to the Cheek of a Young Person.

The excommunication of the arts, when it was found necessary, took the form of pronouncing the artist mentally degenerate, a device which eventually found its theorist in Max Nordau. In the history of the arts this is new. The poet was always known to belong to a touchy tribe—*genus irritabile* was a tag anyone would know—and ever since Plato the process of the inspired imagination, as we have said, was thought to be a special one of some interest, which the similitude of madness made somewhat intelligible. But this is not quite to say that the poet was the victim of actual mental aberration. The eighteenth century did not find the poet to be less than other men, and certainly the Renaissance did not. If he was a professional, there might be condescension to his social status, but in a time which deplored all professionalism whatever, this was simply a way of asserting the high value of poetry, which ought not to be compromised by trade. And a certain good nature marked even the snubbing of the professional. At any rate, no one was likely to identify the poet with the weakling. Indeed, the Renaissance ideal held poetry to be, like arms or music, one of the signs of manly competence.

The change from this view of things cannot be blamed wholly on the bourgeois or philistine public. Some of the "blame" must rest with the poets themselves. The Romantic poets were as proud of their art as the vaunting poets of the sixteenth century, but one of them talked with an angel in a tree and insisted that Hell was better than Heaven and sexuality holier than chastity; another told the world that he wanted to lie down like a tired child and weep away this life of care; another asked so foolish a question as "Why did I laugh tonight?"; and yet another explained that

he had written one of his best poems in a drugged sleep. The public took them all at their word—they were not as other men. Zola, in the interests of science, submitted himself to examination by fifteen psychiatrists and agreed with their conclusion that his genius had its source in the neurotic elements of his temperament. Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Verlaine found virtue and strength in their physical and mental illness and pain. W. H. Auden addresses his "wound" in the cherishing language of a lover, thanking it for the gift of insight it has bestowed. "Knowing you," he says, "has made me understand." And Edmund Wilson, in his striking phrase "the wound and the bow," has formulated for our time the idea of the characteristic sickness of the artist, which he represents by the figure of Philoctetes, the Greek warrior who was forced to live in isolation because of the disgusting odor of a suppurating wound and who yet had to be sought out by his countrymen because they had need of the magically unerring bow he possessed.

The myth of the sick artist, we may suppose, has established itself because it is of advantage to the various groups who have one or another relation with art. To the artist himself the myth gives some of the ancient powers and privileges of the idiot and the fool, half-prophetic creatures, or of the mutilated priest. That the artist's neurosis may be but a mask is suggested by Thomas Mann's pleasure in representing his untried youth as "sick" but his successful maturity as senatorially robust. By means of his belief in his own sickness, the artist may the more easily fulfill his chosen, and assigned, function of putting himself into connection with the forces of spirituality and morality; the artist sees as insane the "normal" and "healthy" ways of established society, while aberration and illness appear as spiritual and moral health if only because they controvert the ways of respectable society.

Then too, the myth has its advantage for the philistine—a double advantage. On the one hand, the belief in the artist's neuroticism allows the philistine to shut his ears to what the artist says. But on the other hand it allows him to listen. For we must not make the common mistake—the contemporary philistine does want to listen, at the same time that he wants to shut his ears. By supposing that the artist has an interesting but not always reliable relation to reality, he is able to contain (in the military sense) what the artist tells him. If he did not want to listen at all, he would say "insane"; with "neurotic," which hedges, he listens when he chooses.

And in addition to its advantage to the artist and to the philistine, we must take into account the usefulness of the myth to a third group, the group of "sensitive" people who, although not artists, are not philistines either. These people form a group by virtue of their passive impatience with philistinism, and also by virtue of their awareness of their own emotional pain and uncertainty. To these people the myth of the sick artist is the institutional sanction of their situation; they seek to approximate or acquire the character of the artist sometimes by planning to work or even attempting to work as the artist does, always by making a connection between their own powers of mind and their consciousness of "difference" and neurotic illness.

The early attempts of psychoanalysis to deal with art went on the assumption that, because the artist was neurotic, the content of his work was also neurotic, which is to say that it did not stand in a correct relation to reality. But nowadays, as I have said, psychoanalysis is not likely to be so simple in its transactions with art. A good example of the psychoanalytical development in this respect is Dr. Saul Rosenzweig's well-known essay "The Ghost of Henry James."* This is an admirable piece of work, marked by accuracy in the reporting of the literary fact and by respect for the value of the literary object. Although Dr. Rosenzweig explores the element of neurosis in James's life and work, he nowhere suggests that this element in any way lessens James's value as an artist or moralist. In effect he says that neurosis is a way of dealing with reality which, in real life, is uncomfortable and uneconomical, but that this judgment of neurosis in life cannot mechanically be transferred to works of art upon which neurosis has had its influence. He nowhere implies that a work of art in whose genesis a neurotic element may be found is for that reason irrelevant or in any way diminished in value. Indeed, the manner of his treatment suggests, what is of course the case, that every neurosis deals with a real emotional situation of the most intensely meaningful kind.

Yet as Dr. Rosenzweig brings his essay to its close, he makes use of the current assumption about the causal connection between the psychic illness of the artist and his power. His investigation of James, he says, "reveals the aptness of the Philoctetes pattern." He accepts the idea of "the sacrificial roots of literary power" and speaks of "the unhappy sources of

*First published in *Character and Personality*, December 1943, and reprinted in *Partisan Review*, Fall 1944.

James's genius." "The broader application of the inherent pattern," he says, "is familiar to readers of Edmund Wilson's recent volume *The Wound and the Bow*. . . . Reviewing the experience and work of several well-known literary masters, Wilson discloses the sacrificial roots of their power on the model of the Greek legend. In the case of Henry James, the present account . . . provides a similar insight into the unhappy sources of his genius. . . ."

This comes as a surprise. Nothing in Dr. Rosenzweig's theory requires it. For his theory asserts no more than that Henry James, predisposed by temperament and family situation to certain mental and emotional qualities, was in his youth injured in a way which he believed to be sexual; that he unconsciously invited the injury in the wish to identify himself with his father, who himself had been similarly injured—"castrated": a leg had been amputated—and under strikingly similar circumstances; this resulted for the younger Henry James in a certain pattern of life and in a preoccupation in his work with certain themes which more or less obscurely symbolize his sexual situation. For this I think Dr. Rosenzweig makes a sound case. Yet I submit that this is not the same thing as disclosing the roots of James's power or discovering the sources of his genius. The essay which gives Edmund Wilson's book its title and cohering principle does not explicitly say that the roots of power are sacrificial and that the source of genius is unhappy. Where it is explicit, it states only that "genius and disease, like strength and mutilation, may be inextricably bound up together," which of course, on its face, says no more than that personality is integral and not made up of detachable parts; and from this there is no doubt to be drawn the important practical and moral implication that we cannot judge or dismiss a man's genius and strength because of our awareness of his disease or mutilation. The Philoctetes legend in itself does not suggest anything beyond this. It does not suggest that the wound is the price of the bow, or that without the wound the bow may not be possessed or drawn. Yet Dr. Rosenzweig has accurately summarized the force and, I think, the intention of Mr. Wilson's whole book; its several studies do seem to say that effectiveness in the arts does depend on sickness.

An examination of this prevalent idea might well begin with the observation of how pervasive and deeply rooted is the notion that power may be gained by suffering. Even at relatively high stages of culture the mind seems to take easily to the primitive belief that pain and sacrifice are

connected with strength. Primitive beliefs must be treated with respectful alertness to their possible truth and also with the suspicion of their being magical and irrational, and it is worth noting on both sides of the question, and in the light of what we have said about the ambiguous relation of the neurosis to reality, that the whole economy of the neurosis is based exactly on this idea of the *quid pro quo* of sacrificial pain: the neurotic person unconsciously subscribes to a system whereby he gives up some pleasure or power, or inflicts pain on himself in order to secure some other power or some other pleasure.

In the ingrained popular conception of the relation between suffering and power there are actually two distinct although related ideas. One is that there exists in the individual a fund of power which has outlets through various organs or faculties, and that if its outlet through one organ or faculty be prevented, it will flow to increase the force or sensitivity of another. Thus it is popularly believed that the sense of touch is intensified in the blind not so much by the will of the blind person to adapt himself to the necessities of his situation as, rather, by a sort of mechanical redistribution of power. And this idea would seem to explain, if not the origin of the ancient mutilation of priests, then at least a common understanding of their sexual sacrifice.

The other idea is that a person may be taught by, or proved by, the endurance of pain. There will easily come to mind the ritual suffering that is inflicted at the tribal initiation of youths into full manhood or at the admission of the apprentice into the company of journeyman adepts. This idea in sophisticated form found its way into high religion at least as early as Aeschylus, who held that man achieves knowledge of God through suffering, and it was from the beginning an important element of Christian thought. In the nineteenth century the Christianized notion of the didactic suffering of the artist went along with the idea of his mental degeneration and even served as a sort of countermyth to it. Its doctrine was that the artist, a man of strength and health, experienced and suffered, and thus learned both the facts of life and his artistic craft. "I am the man, I suffered, I was there," ran his boast, and he derived his authority from the knowledge gained through suffering.

There can be no doubt that both these ideas represent a measure of truth about mental and emotional power. The idea of didactic suffering expresses a valuation of experience and of steadfastness. The idea of natural compensation for the sacrifice of some faculty also says something

that can be rationally defended: one cannot be and do everything and the wholehearted absorption in any enterprise, art for example, means that we must give up other possibilities, even parts of ourselves. And there is even a certain validity to the belief that the individual has a fund of undifferentiated energy which presses the harder upon what outlets are available to it when it has been deprived of the normal number.

Then, in further defense of the belief that artistic power is connected with neurosis, we can say that there is no doubt that what we call mental illness may be the source of psychic knowledge. Some neurotic people, because they are more apprehensive than normal people, are able to see more of certain parts of reality and to see them with more intensity. And many neurotic or psychotic patients are in certain respects in closer touch with the actualities of the unconscious than are normal people. Further, the expression of a neurotic or psychotic conception of reality is likely to be more intense than a normal one.

Yet when we have said all this, it is still wrong, I believe, to find the root of the artist's power and the source of his genius in neurosis. To the idea that literary power and genius spring from pain and neurotic sacrifice there are two major objections. The first has to do with the assumed uniqueness of the artist as a subject of psychoanalytical explanation. The second has to do with the true meaning of power and genius.

One reason why writers are considered to be more available than other people to psychoanalytical explanation is that they tell us what is going on inside them. Even when they do not make an actual diagnosis of their malaises or describe "symptoms," we must bear it in mind that it is their profession to deal with fantasy in some form or other. It is in the nature of the writer's job that he exhibit his unconscious. He may disguise it in various ways, but disguise is not concealment. Indeed, it may be said that the more a writer takes pains with his work to remove it from the personal and subjective, the more—and not the less—he will express his true unconscious, although not what passes with most for the unconscious.

Further, the writer is likely to be a great hand at personal letters, diaries, and autobiographies: indeed, almost the only good autobiographies are those of writers. The writer is more aware of what happens to him or goes on in him and often finds it necessary or useful to be articulate about his inner states, and prides himself on telling the truth. Thus, only a man as devoted to the truth of the emotions as Henry James was would have

informed the world, despite his characteristic reticence, of an accident so intimate as his. We must not of course suppose that a writer's statements about his intimate life are equivalent to true statements about his unconscious, which, by definition, he doesn't consciously know; but they may be useful clues to the nature of an entity about which we can make statements of more or less cogency, although never statements of certainty; or they at least give us what is surely related to a knowledge of his unconscious—that is, an insight into his personality.*

But while the validity of dealing with the writer's intellectual life in psychoanalytical terms is taken for granted, the psychoanalytical explanation of the intellectual life of scientists is generally speaking not countenanced. The old myth of the mad scientist, with the exception of an occasional mad psychiatrist, no longer exists. The social position of science requires that it should cease, which leads us to remark that those partisans of art who insist on explaining artistic genius by means of psychic imbalance are in effect capitulating to the dominant mores which hold that the members of the respectable professions are, however dull they may be, free from neurosis. Scientists, to continue with them as the best example of the respectable professions, do not usually give us the clues to their personalities which writers habitually give. But no one who has ever lived observantly among scientists will claim that they are without an unconscious or even that they are free from neurosis. How often, indeed, it is apparent that the devotion to science, if it cannot be called a neurotic manifestation, at least can be understood as going very cozily with neurotic elements in the temperament, such as, for example, a marked compulsiveness. Of scientists as a group we can say that they are less concerned with the manifestations of personality, their own or others', than are writers as a group. But this relative indifference is scarcely a sign of normality—indeed, if we choose to regard it with the same sort of eye with which the characteristics of writers are regarded, we might say

*I am by no means in agreement with the statements of Dr. Edmund Bergler about "the" psychology of the writer, but I think that Dr. Bergler has done good service in warning us against taking at their face value a writer's statements about himself, the more especially when they are "frank." Thus, to take Dr. Bergler's notable example, it is usual for biographers to accept Stendhal's statements about his open sexual feelings for his mother when he was a little boy, feelings which went with an intense hatred of his father. But Dr. Bergler believes that Stendhal unconsciously used his consciousness of his love of his mother and of his hatred of his father to mask an unconscious love of his father, which frightened him. ("Psychoanalysis of Writers and of Literary Productivity," in *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences*, vol. 1.)

the indifference to matters of personality is in itself a suspicious evasion.

It is the basic assumption of psychoanalysis that the acts of *every* person are influenced by the forces of the unconscious. Scientists, bankers, lawyers, or surgeons, by reason of the traditions of their professions, practice concealment and conformity; but it is difficult to believe that an investigation according to psychoanalytical principles would fail to show that the strains and imbalances of their psyches are not of the same frequency as those of writers, and of similar kind. I do not mean that everybody has the same troubles and identical psyches, but only that there is no special category for writers.*

If this is so, and if we still want to relate the writer's power to his neurosis, we must be willing to relate all intellectual power to neurosis. We must find the roots of Newton's power in his emotional extravagances, and the roots of Darwin's power in his sorely neurotic temperament, and the roots of Pascal's mathematical genius in the impulses which drove him to extreme religious masochism—I choose but the classic examples. If we make the neurosis-power equivalence at all, we must make it in every field of endeavor. Logician, economist, botanist, physicist, theologian—no profession may be so respectable or so remote or so rational as to be exempt from the psychological interpretation.†

*Dr. Bergler believes that there is a particular neurosis of writers, based on an oral masochism which makes them the enemy of the respectable world, courting poverty and persecution. But a later development of Dr. Bergler's theory of oral masochism makes it *the* basic neurosis, not only of writers but of everyone who is neurotic.

†In his interesting essay "Writers and Madness" (*Partisan Review*, January–February 1947), William Barrett his taken issue with this point and has insisted that a clear distinction is to be made between the relation that exists between the scientist and his work and the relation that exists between the artist and his work. The difference, as I understand it, is in the claims of the ego. The artist's ego makes a claim upon the world which is personal in a way that the scientist's is not, for the scientist, although he does indeed want prestige and thus "responds to one of the deepest urges of his ego, it is only that his prestige may come to attend his person through the public world of other men; and it is not in the end his own being that is exhibited or his own voice that is heard in the learned report to the Academy." Actually, however, as is suggested by the sense which mathematicians have of the *style* of mathematical thought, the creation of the abstract thinker is as deeply involved as the artist's—see *An Essay on the Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field* by Jacques Hadamard, 1945—and he quite as much as the artist seeks to impose *himself*, to *express* himself. I am of course not maintaining that the processes of scientific thought are the same as those of artistic thought, or even that the scientist's creation is involved with his total personality *in the same way* that the artist's is—I am maintaining only that the scientist's creation is as *deeply* implicated with his total personality as is the artist's.

This point of view seems to be supported by Freud's monograph on Leonardo. One of the problems that Freud sets himself is to discover why an artist of the highest endowment should

Further, not only power but also failure or limitation must be accounted for by the theory of neurosis, and not merely failure or limitation in life but even failure or limitation in art. Thus it is often said that the warp of Dostoyevsky's mind accounts for the brilliance of his psychological insights. But it is never said that the same warp of Dostoyevsky's mind also accounted for his deficiency in insight. Freud, who greatly admired Dostoyevsky, although he did not like him, observed that "his insight was entirely restricted to the workings of the abnormal psyche. Consider his astounding helplessness before the phenomenon of love; he really only understands either crude, instinctive desire or masochistic submission or love from pity."* This, we must note, is not merely Freud's comment on the extent of the province which Dostoyevsky chose for his own, but on his failure to understand what, given the province of his choice, he might be expected to understand.

And since neurosis can account not only for intellectual success and for failure or limitation but also for mediocrity, we have most of society involved in neurosis. To this I have no objection—I think most of society is indeed involved in neurosis. But with neurosis accounting for so much, it cannot be made exclusively to account for one man's literary power.

We have now to consider what is meant by genius when its source is identified as the sacrifice and pain of neurosis.

In the case of Henry James, the reference to the neurosis of his personal life does indeed tell us something about the latent intention of his work and thus about the reason for some large part of its interest for us. But if genius and its source are what we are dealing with, we must observe that the reference to neurosis tells us nothing about James's passion, energy, and devotion, nothing about his architectonic skill, nothing about the other themes that were important to him which are not connected with his unconscious concern with castration. We cannot, that is,

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have devoted himself more and more to scientific investigation, with the result that he was unable to complete his artistic enterprises. The particular reasons for this that Freud assigns need not be gone into here; all that I wish to suggest is that Freud understands these reasons to be the working out of an inner conflict, the attempt to deal with the difficulties that have their roots in the most primitive situations. Leonardo's scientific investigations were as necessary and "compelled" and they constituted as much of a claim on the whole personality as anything the artist undertakes; and so far from being carried out for the sake of public prestige, they were largely private and personal, and were thought by the public of his time to be something very like insanity.

*From a letter quoted in Theodor Reik, *From Thirty Years With Freud*, p. 175.

make the writer's inner life exactly equivalent to his power of expressing it. Let us grant for the sake of argument that the literary genius, as distinguished from other men, is the victim of a "mutilation" and that his fantasies are neurotic.* It does not then follow as the inevitable next step that his ability to express these fantasies and to impress us with them is neurotic, for that ability is what we mean by his genius. Anyone might be injured as Henry James was, and even respond within himself to the injury as James is said to have done, and yet not have his literary power.

The reference to the artist's neurosis tells us something about the material on which the artist exercises his powers, and even something about his reasons for bringing his powers into play, but it does not tell us anything about the source of his power, it makes no causal connection between them and the neurosis. And if we look into the matter, we see that there is in fact no causal connection between them. For, still granting that the poet is uniquely neurotic, what is surely not neurotic, what indeed suggests nothing but health, is his power of using his neuroticism. He shapes his fantasies, he gives them social form and reference. Charles Lamb's way of putting this cannot be improved. Lamb is denying that genius is allied to insanity; for "insanity" the modern reader may substitute "neurosis." "The ground of the mistake," he says,

> is, that men, finding in the raptures of the higher poetry a condition of exaltation, to which they have no parallel in their own experience, besides the spurious resemblance of it in dreams and fevers, impute a state of dreaminess and fever to the poet. But the true poet dreams being awake. He is not possessed by his subject but has dominion over it. . . . Where he seems most to recede from humanity, he will be found the truest to it. From beyond the scope of nature if he summon possible existences, he subjugates them to the law of her consistency. He is beautifully loyal to that sovereign directress, when he appears most to betray and desert her. . . .

*I am using the word *fantasy*, unless modified, in a neutral sense. A fantasy, in this sense, may be distinguished from the representation of something that actually exists, but it is not opposed to "reality" and not an "escape" from reality. Thus the idea of a rational society, or the image of a good house to be built, as well as the story of something that could never really happen, is a fantasy. There may be neurotic or non-neurotic fantasies.

> Herein the great and the little wits are differenced; that if the latter wander ever so little from nature or natural existence, they lose themselves and their readers. . . . They do not create, which implies shaping and consistency. Their imaginations are not active—for to be active is to call something into act and form—but passive as men in sick dreams.

The activity of the artist, we must remember, may be approximated by many who are themselves not artists. Thus, the expressions of many schizophrenic people have the intense appearance of creativity and an inescapable interest and significance. But they are not works of art, and although Van Gogh may have been schizophrenic he was in addition an artist. Again, as I have already suggested, it is not uncommon in our society for certain kinds of neurotic people to imitate the artist in his life and even in his ideals and ambitions. They follow the artist in everything except successful performance. It was, I think, Otto Rank who called such people half-artists and confirmed the diagnosis of their neuroticism at the same time that he differentiated them from true artists.

Nothing is so characteristic of the artist as his power of shaping his work, of subjugating his raw material, however aberrant it be from what we call normality, to the consistency of nature. It would be impossible to deny that whatever disease or mutilation the artist may suffer is an element of his production which has its effect on every part of it, but disease and mutilation are available to us all—life provides them with prodigal generosity. What marks the artist is his power to shape the material of pain we all have.

At this point, with our recognition of life's abundant provision of pain, we are at the very heart of our matter, which is the meaning we may assign to neurosis and the relation we are to suppose it to have with normality. Here Freud himself can be of help, although it must be admitted that what he tells us may at first seem somewhat contradictory and confusing.

Freud's study of Leonardo da Vinci is an attempt to understand why Leonardo was unable to pursue his artistic enterprises, feeling compelled instead to advance his scientific investigations. The cause of this Freud traces back to certain childhood experiences not different in kind from the experiences which Dr. Rosenzweig adduces to account for certain ele-

ments in the work of Henry James. And when he has completed his study Freud makes this *caveat*:

> Let us expressly emphasize that we have never considered Leonardo as a neurotic. . . . We no longer believe that health and disease, normal and nervous, are sharply distinguished from each other. We know today that neurotic symptoms are substitutive formations for certain repressive acts which must result in the course of our development from the child to the cultural man, that we all produce such substitutive formations, and that only the amount, intensity, and distribution of these substitutive formations justify the practical conception of illness. . . .

The statement becomes the more striking when we remember that in the course of his study Freud has had occasion to observe that Leonardo was both homosexual and sexually inactive. I am not sure that the statement that Leonardo was not a neurotic is one that Freud would have made at every point in the later development of psychoanalysis, yet it is in conformity with his continuing notion of the genesis of culture. And the *practical*, the quantitative or economic, conception of illness he insists on in a passage in the *Introductory Lectures*. "The neurotic symptoms," he says,

> . . . are activities which are detrimental, or at least useless, to life as a whole; the person concerned frequently complains of them as obnoxious to him or they involve suffering and distress for him. The principal injury they inflict lies in the expense of energy they entail, and, besides this, in the energy needed to combat them. Where the symptoms are extensively developed, these two kinds of effort may exact such a price that the person suffers a very serious impoverishment in available mental energy which consequently disables him for all the important tasks of life. This result depends principally upon the amount of energy taken up in this way; therefore you will see that 'illness' is essentially a practical conception. But if you look at the matter from a theoretical point of view and ignore this question of degree, you can very well see that we are all ill, i.e., neurotic; for the conditions required for symptom-formation are demonstrable also in normal persons.

We are all ill: the statement is grandiose, and its implications—the implications, that is, of understanding the totality of human nature in the terms of disease—are vast. These implications have never been properly met (although I believe that a few theologians have responded to them), but this is not the place to attempt to meet them. I have brought forward Freud's statement of the essential sickness of the psyche only because it stands as the refutation of what is implied by the literary use of the theory of neurosis to account for genius. For if we are all ill, and if, as I have said, neurosis can account for everything, for failure and mediocrity—"a very serious impoverishment of available mental energy"—as well as for genius, it cannot uniquely account for genius.

This, however, is not to say that there is no connection between neurosis and genius, which would be tantamount, as we see, to saying that there is no connection between human nature and genius. But the connection lies wholly in a particular and special relation which the artist has to neurosis.

In order to understand what this particular and special connection is we must have clearly in mind what neurosis is. The current literary conception of neurosis as a *wound* is quite misleading. It inevitably suggests passivity, whereas, if we follow Freud, we must understand a neurosis to be an *activity*, an activity with a purpose, and a particular kind of activity, a *conflict*. This is not to say that there are no abnormal mental states which are not conflicts. There are; the struggle between elements of the unconscious may never be instituted in the first place, or it may be called off. As Freud says in a passage which follows close upon the one I last quoted, "If regressions do not call forth a prohibition on the part of the ego, no neurosis results; the libido succeeds in obtaining a real, although not a normal, satisfaction. But if the ego . . . is not in agreement with these regressions, conflict ensues." And in his essay on Dostoyevsky Freud says that "there are no neurotic complete masochists," by which he means that the ego which gives way completely to masochism (or to any other pathological excess) has passed beyond neurosis; the conflict has ceased, but at the cost of the defeat of the ego, and now some other name than that of neurosis must be given to the condition of the person who thus takes himself beyond the pain of the neurotic conflict. To understand this is to become aware of the curious complacency with which literary men regard mental disease. The psyche of the neurotic is not equally compla-

cent; it regards with the greatest fear the chaotic and destructive forces it contains, and it struggles fiercely to keep them at bay.*

We come then to a remarkable paradox: we are all ill, but we are ill in the service of health, or ill in the service of life, or, at the very least, ill in the service of life-in-culture. The form of the mind's dynamics is that of the neurosis, which is to be understood as the ego's struggle against being overcome by the forces with which it coexists, and the strategy of this conflict requires that the ego shall incur pain and make sacrifices of itself, at the same time seeing to it that its pain and sacrifice be as small as they may.

But this is characteristic of all minds: no mind is exempt except those which refuse the conflict or withdraw from it; and we ask wherein the mind of the artist is unique. If he is not unique in neurosis, is he then unique in the significance and intensity of his neurosis? I do not believe that we shall go more than a little way toward a definition of artistic genius by answering this question affirmatively. A neurotic conflict cannot ever be either meaningless or merely personal; it must be understood as exemplifying cultural forces of great moment, and this is true of any neurotic conflict at all. To be sure, some neuroses may be more interesting than others, perhaps because they are fiercer or more inclusive; and no doubt the writer who makes a claim upon our interest is a man who by reason of the energy and significance of the forces in struggle within him provides us with the largest representation of the culture in which we, with him, are involved; his neurosis may thus be thought of as having a connection of concomitance with his literary powers. As Freud says in the Dostoyevsky essay, "the neurosis . . . comes into being all the more readily the richer the complexity which has to be controlled by his ego." Yet

*In the article to which I referred in the note on p. 96, William Barrett says that he prefers the old-fashioned term "madness" to "neurosis." But it is not quite for him to choose—the words do not differ in fashion but in meaning. Most literary people, when they speak of mental illness, refer to neurosis. Perhaps one reason for this is that the neurosis is the most benign of the mental ills. Another reason is surely that psychoanalytical literature deals chiefly with the neurosis, and its symptomatology and therapy have become familiar; psychoanalysis has far less to say about psychosis, for which it can offer far less therapeutic hope. Further, the neurosis is easily put into a causal connection with the social maladjustments of our time. Other forms of mental illness of a more severe and degenerative kind are not so widely recognized by the literary person and are often assimilated to neurosis with a resulting confusion. In the present essay I deal only with the conception of neurosis, but this should not be taken to imply that I believe that other pathological mental conditions, including actual madness, do not have relevance to the general matter of the discussion.

even the rich complexity which his ego is doomed to control is not the definition of the artist's genius, for we can by no means say that the artist is pre-eminent in the rich complexity of elements in conflict within him. The slightest acquaintance with the clinical literature of psychoanalysis will suggest that a rich complexity of struggling elements is no uncommon possession. And that same literature will also make it abundantly clear that the devices of art—the most extreme devices of poetry, for example—are not particular to the mind of the artist but are characteristic of mind itself.

But the artist is indeed unique in one respect, in the respect of his relation to his neurosis. He is what he is by virtue of his successful objectification of his neurosis, by his shaping it and making it available to others in a way which has its effect upon their own egos in struggle. His genius, that is, may be defined in terms of his faculties of perception, representation, and realization, and in these terms alone. It can no more be defined in terms of neurosis than can his power of walking and talking, or his sexuality. The use to which he puts his power, or the manner and style of his power, may be discussed with reference to his particular neurosis, and so may such matters as the untimely diminution or cessation of its exercise. But its essence is irreducible. It is, as we say, a gift.

We are all ill: but even a universal sickness implies an idea of health. Of the artist we must say that whatever elements of neurosis he has in common with his fellow mortals, the one part of him that is healthy, by any conceivable definition of health, is that which gives him the power to conceive, to plan, to work, and to bring his work to a conclusion. And if we are all ill, we are ill by a universal accident, not by a universal necessity, by a fault in the economy of our powers, not by the nature of the powers themselves. The Philoctetes myth, when it is used to imply a causal connection between the fantasy of castration and artistic power, tells us no more about the source of artistic power than we learn about the source of sexuality when the fantasy of castration is adduced, for the fear of castration may explain why a man is moved to extravagant exploits of sexuality, but we do not say that his sexual power itself derives from his fear of castration; and further the same fantasy may also explain impotence or homosexuality. The Philoctetes story, which has so established itself among us as explaining the source of the artist's power, is not really an explanatory myth at all; it is a moral myth having reference to our proper behavior in the circumstances of the universal accident. In its juxtaposition of

the wound and the bow, it tells us that we must be aware that weakness does not preclude strength nor strength weakness. It is therefore not irrelevant to the artist, but when we use it we will do well to keep in mind the other myths of the arts, recalling what Pan and Dionysius suggest of the relation of art to physiology and superabundance, remembering that to Apollo were attributed the bow and the lyre, two strengths together, and that he was given the lyre by its inventor, the baby Hermes—that miraculous infant who, the day he was born, left his cradle to do mischief: and the first thing he met with was a tortoise, which he greeted politely before scooping it from its shell, and, thought and deed being one with him, he contrived the instrument to which he sang "the glorious tale of his own begetting." These were gods, and very early ones, but their myths tell us something about the nature and source of art even in our grim, late human present.

Manners, Morals, and the Novel

1947

The invitation that was made to me to address you this evening was couched in somewhat uncertain terms. Time, place, and cordiality were perfectly clear, but when it came to the subject our hosts were not able to specify just what they wanted me to talk about. They wanted me to consider literature in its relation to manners—by which, as they relied on me to understand, they did not really mean *manners*. They did not mean, that is, the rules of personal intercourse in our culture; and yet such rules were by no means irrelevant to what they did mean. Nor did they quite mean manners in the sense of *mores*, customs, although, again, these did bear upon the subject they had in mind.

I understood them perfectly, as I would not have understood them had they been more definite. For they were talking about a nearly indefinable subject.

Somewhere below all the explicit statements that a people makes through its art, religion, architecture, legislation, there is a dim mental region of intention of which it is very difficult to become aware. We now and then get a strong sense of its existence when we deal with the past, not by reason of its presence in the past but by reason of its absence. As we read the great formulated monuments of the past, we notice that we are reading them without the accompaniment of something that always

goes along with the formulated monuments of the present. The voice of multifarious intention and activity is stilled, all the buzz of implication which always surrounds us in the present, coming to us from what never gets fully stated, coming in the tone of greetings and the tone of quarrels, in slang and humor and popular songs, in the way children play, in the gesture the waiter makes when he puts down the plate, in the nature of the very food we prefer.

Some of the charm of the past consists of the quiet—the great distracting buzz of implication has stopped and we are left only with what has been fully phrased and precisely stated. And part of the melancholy of the past comes from our knowledge that the huge, unrecorded hum of implication was once there and left no trace—we feel that because it is evanescent it is especially human. We feel, too, that the truth of the great preserved monuments of the past does not fully appear without it. From letters and diaries, from the remote, unconscious corners of the great works themselves, we try to guess what the sound of the multifarious implication was and what it meant.

Or when we read the conclusions that are drawn about our own culture by some gifted foreign critic—or by some stupid native one—who is equipped only with a knowledge of our books, when we try in vain to say what is wrong, when in despair we say that he has read the books "out of context," then we are aware of the matter I have been asked to speak about tonight.

What I understand by manners, then, is a culture's hum and buzz of implication. I mean the whole evanescent context in which its explicit statements are made. It is that part of a culture which is made up of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the arts of dress or decoration, sometimes by tone, gesture, emphasis, or rhythm, sometimes by the words that are used with a special frequency or a special meaning. They are the things that for good or bad draw the people of a culture together and that separate them from the people of another culture. They make the part of a culture which is not art, or religion, or morals, or politics, and yet it relates to all these highly formulated departments of culture. It is modified by them; it modifies them; it is generated by them; it generates them. In this part of culture assumption rules, which is often so much stronger than reason.

The right way to begin to deal with such a subject is to gather to-

gether as much of its detail as we possibly can. Only by doing so will we become fully aware of what the gifted foreign critic or the stupid native one is not aware of, that in any complex culture there is not a single system of manners but a conflicting variety of manners, and that one of the jobs of a culture is the adjustment of this conflict.

But the nature of our present occasion does not permit this accumulation of detail and so I shall instead try to drive toward a generalization and an hypothesis which, however wrong they turn out to be, may at least permit us to circumscribe the subject. I shall try to generalize the subject of American manners by talking about the attitude of Americans toward the subject of manners itself. And since in a complex culture there are, as I say, many different systems of manners and since I cannot talk about them all, I shall select the manners and the attitude toward manners of the literate, reading, responsible middle class of people who are ourselves. I specify that they be reading people because I shall draw my conclusions from the novels they read. The hypothesis I propose is that our attitude toward manners is the expression of a particular conception of reality.

All literature tends to be concerned with the question of reality—I mean quite simply the old opposition between reality and appearance, between what really is and what merely seems. "Don't you *see*?" is the question we want to shout at Oedipus as he stands before us and before fate in the pride of his rationalism. And at the end of *Oedipus Rex* he demonstrates in a particularly direct way that he now sees what he did not see before. "Don't you *see*?" we want to shout again at Lear and Gloucester, the two deceived, self-deceiving fathers: blindness again, resistance to the clear claims of reality, the seduction by mere appearance. The same with Othello—reality is right under your stupid nose, how *dare* you be such a gull? So with Molière's Orgon—my good man, my honest citizen, merely *look* at Tartuffe and you will know what's what. So with Milton's Eve—"Woman, watch out! Don't you see—anyone can see—that's a *snake*!"

The problem of reality is central, and in a special way, to the great forefather of the novel, the great book of Cervantes, whose four-hundredth birthday was celebrated in 1947. There are two movements of thought in *Don Quixote*, two different and opposed notions of reality. One is the movement which leads toward saying that the world of ordinary practicality is reality in its fullness. It is the reality of the present moment in all its powerful immediacy of hunger, cold, and pain, making the

past and the future, and all ideas, of no account. When the conceptual, the ideal, and the fanciful come into conflict with this, bringing their notions of the past and the future, then disaster results. For one thing, the ordinary proper ways of life are upset—the chained prisoners are understood to be good men and are released, the whore is taken for a lady. There is general confusion. As for the ideal, the conceptual, the fanciful, or romantic—whatever you want to call it—it fares even worse: it is shown to be ridiculous.

Thus one movement of the novel. But Cervantes changed horses in midstream and found that he was riding Rosinante. Perhaps at first not quite consciously—although the new view is latent in the old from the very beginning—Cervantes begins to show that the world of tangible reality is not the real reality after all. The real reality is rather the wildly conceiving, the madly fantasying mind of the Don: people change, practical reality changes, when they come into its presence.

In any genre it may happen that the first great example contains the whole potentiality of the genre. It has been said that all philosophy is a footnote to Plato. It can be said that all prose fiction is a variation on the theme of *Don Quixote*. Cervantes sets for the novel the problem of appearance and reality: the shifting and conflict of social classes becomes the field of the problem of knowledge, of how we know and of how reliable our knowledge is, which at that very moment of history is vexing the philosophers and scientists. And the poverty of the Don suggests that the novel is born with the appearance of money as a social element—money, the great solvent of the solid fabric of the old society, the great generator of illusion. Or, which is to say much the same thing, the novel is born in response to snobbery.

Snobbery is not the same thing as pride of class. Pride of class may not please us but we must at least grant that it reflects a social function. A man who exhibited class pride—in the day when it was possible to do so—may have been puffed up about what he *was*, but this ultimately depended on what he *did*. Thus, aristocratic pride was based ultimately on the ability to fight and administer. No pride is without fault, but pride of class may be thought of as today we think of pride of profession, toward which we are likely to be lenient.

Snobbery is pride in status without pride in function. And it is an uneasy pride of status. It always asks, "Do I belong—do I really belong? And does he belong? And if I am observed talking to him, will it make me

sumes, lies hidden beneath all the false appearances. Money, snobbery, the ideal of status, these become in themselves the objects of fantasy, the support of the fantasies of love, freedom, charm, power, as in *Madame Bovary*, whose heroine is the sister, at a three-centuries remove, of Don Quixote. The greatness of *Great Expectations* begins in its title: modern society bases itself on great expectations which, if ever they are realized, are found to exist by reason of a sordid, hidden reality. The real thing is not the gentility of Pip's life but the hulks and the murder and the rats and decay in the cellarage of the novel.

An English writer, recognizing the novel's central concern with snobbery, recently cried out half-ironically against it.

> Who cares whether Pamela finally exasperates Mr B. into marriage, whether Mr Elton is more or less moderately genteel, whether it is sinful for Pendennis nearly to kiss the porter's daughter, whether young men from Boston can ever be as truly refined as middle-aged women in Paris, whether the District Officer's fiancée ought to see so much of Dr Aziz, whether Lady Chatterley ought to be made love to by the gamekeeper, even if he was an officer during the war? Who cares?

The novel, of course, tells us much more about life than this. It tells us about the look and feel of things, how things are done and what things are worth and what they cost and what the odds are. If the English novel in its special concern with class does not, as the same writer says, explore the deeper layers of personality, then the French novel in exploring these layers must start and end in class, and the Russian novel, exploring the ultimate possibilities of spirit, does the same—every situation in Dostoyevsky, no matter how spiritual, starts with a point of social pride and a certain number of rubles. The great novelists knew that manners indicate the largest intentions of men's souls as well as the smallest and they are perpetually concerned to catch the meaning of every dim implicit hint.

The novel, then, is a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the material of its analysis being always manners as the indication of the direction of man's soul. When we understand this we can understand the pride of profession that moved D. H. Lawrence to say, "Being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint,