HUMANITIES

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Desmond MacCarthy

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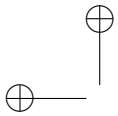
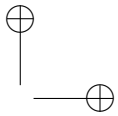

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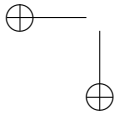
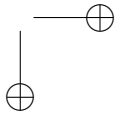

PREFACE

BY LORD DAVID CECIL

Desmond MacCarthy did not think much of his own work. In his later years, he would with smiling, rueful sadness compare the novels, biographies, dramas he had once dreamed of writing with what he had in fact achieved; a handful of short stories and reminiscences, a heap of reviews. The thought of this contrast did not sour him: he was too sensible and too unegotistic to allow it to do so. But remembering it cast a shadow over his spirit.

It need not have done so. Desmond MacCarthy's achievement was one to be proud of. Moreover, the form it took was in fact the form most suitable to his talent. The long single book was not the right unit for this to display itself, any more than it was for Addison or Hazlitt. Perhaps he had not the faculty for design on a big scale that was needed for it; and certainly it would not have given him the chance to exhibit the variety of his interests and sympathies. This was extraordinary. He is usually described as a literary critic. Indeed, he was one of the best that England ever produced. But the phrase does not portray him completely; for it implies one primarily interested in the art of literature, whereas Desmond MacCarthy, like Dr. Johnson, was first of all a student of human nature. Because he loved and appreciated good writing, he particularly enjoyed studying men as they revealed themselves through the medium of books. But he was just as ready to study them directly in actual persons and events and just as equipped to record his observations in the form of a memoir or a short story. This collection of tales and reviews and reminiscences by him is no heterogeneous hotch-potch, but a unity. For in it he employs different forms to achieve

the same end, which was to express his own profound, acute, individual vision of human nature.

It was individual because it was the product of a very individual blend of elements: detachment and sympathy, moral sense and a sense of pleasure. The detachment showed itself in his realism. By birth half Irish, half German-French, he had none of the Englishman's instinctive flinching from painful fact. No doubt much in life was ugly and baffling and disillusioning, but that only made it more interesting to him, only intensified his curiosity to explore it further. To shroud the disagreeable in deceptive and idealising dreams was feeble and futile. For Desmond MacCarthy a grain of fact, however harsh, was worth a ton of daydream, however beguiling.

This sense of the value of fact had been increased by the mental atmosphere in which he grew to maturity. His years at Cambridge had affected him deeply, and Cambridge in the early part of this century was the home of a liberal rationalism which made it a man's first obligation to search for truth by the light of reason, however chilly might be the conclusions to which it led him. Integrity, rationality, truthfulness – these were the watchwords of the circle in which Desmond MacCarthy moved. They are rather depressing watchwords, and on many of his companions they had a depressing effect; imbuing them with a conscientious joyless pedantic agnosticism, more respect-worthy than inspiring. Not so Desmond MacCarthy! He accepted the Cambridge principles of thought; intellectually and morally he remained all his life a liberal. But temperamentally he was very unlike the typical English liberal. Here again, his foreign blood may have affected him, Not only was he inexhaustibly inquisitive about life in its every manifestation, but he delighted in it. Seldom can so unworldly a man have taken so much pleasure in the world. Let it be as irresponsible and flamboyant as

it pleased; he only responded to it the more. Liberals for the most part are more tolerant politically than personally. They believe that everyone should be permitted to do as he pleases, but they seldom take pleasure in watching him do it. Desmond MacCarthy did. He enjoyed his fellows all the more because they were diverse.

Further, he liked them. He was not at all put off by the spectacle of human imperfection. The worried, undignified animal called man, bustling about with his unwieldy bundle of inconsistent hopes and fears, virtues and weaknesses, stirred in him the amused sympathetic affection of one who feels himself akin to him and, therefore, has no reason to look on him with dislike or contempt. Or even disrespect: there was nothing of the sentimental cynic about Desmond MacCarthy. His firm grip on fact made him recognise the existence of human virtue, and he had a sharp eye to discern it. Instinctively he was always seeking to do so. Life interested him because it exhibited human character; and for him the centre of every character was its moral centre. After he has noted keenly and with enjoyment a man's idiosyncrasies of aspect or temperament, Desmond MacCarthy always goes on deeper to discover the moral nature behind them. Then, justly but ruthlessly he makes his judgment. The canons he judges by were appropriate to his own mixed nature. On the one hand he believed in honesty, good sense and the courage to face facts; on the other in a readiness to respond to life and to feel deeply and delicately. No amount of brilliance could reconcile him to silliness or false sentiment or hard-heartedness. Least of all, hard-heartedness: for all that he appreciated Proust's sensibility so subtly, he could not bring himself to like him for he perceived in him a fundamental coldness. He found Carlyle more lovable, because he discerned, glimmering through all the acrid clouds of bigotry and bias which billowed smokily forth from his personality, the fitful flame of a passionate heart.

It is necessary to stress this moral strain in Desmond MacCarthy because it was this which turned his intelligence into wisdom, which gave depth and significance to his charming, humorous, acute observation of men and things. *The Mark on the Shutter*, is, for me, the best short story ever written about a school. Never was there a truer or more entertaining description of boys and masters. But the story is more than a picture of school. For Desmond MacCarthy has the penetration to see this particular school drama as an illustration of laws governing the human drama in general. "Freddy learnt at the time, or thought he had learnt, nothing from all he had been through"; so runs the final paragraph, "but in later life when, either for fun or from curiosity, he would sometimes travel back into the past, he found his experience had taught him three things: that a good conscience is a very private source of happiness in which others can never be much interested; that people have short memories, even for what they once thought important; and that the outraged moral sense of a community is in proportion to the inconvenience suffered at the moment from the delinquent."

A similar wisdom reveals itself in his account of a Labour Party meeting, or his comments on Anglo-Irish relations. But, of course, it is in his criticism that he displays his talents and his view of life most fully. Though he could write shrewdly and sensitively on any play or book, inevitably he liked some sorts better than others: and it is about these that his criticism is most memorable. His preferences were typical. He says somewhere that literature can be divided into the kind that adds the force of reality to imagination, and that which lends the charm of imagination to reality, and that the second is the kind he himself enjoys most. This is true. The books he valued most were those that extended and illuminated his knowledge of human beings. He preferred realism to fantasy; he is more concerned with a writer's matter than

his manner, though anything he says about his manner is always acute. For this reason he is more characteristically successful on prose than on poetry. His mode of criticism exhibits first his imaginative sympathy and then his power of judgment. He starts by "placing" his author, defining his point of view and the range of his talent, He then goes on to examine how far the picture of life revealed in his work squares with the facts of experience as he has himself observed them. Finally, he makes a judgment on the quality of the author's moral reaction to life as shown in his picture of it. Tested by such a process, some authors pass, others, though gifted, fail. D'Annunzio fails. The spell he casts by his mastery of language and imaginative exuberance were in Desmond MacCarthy's eyes insufficient compensations for a basic silliness of soul. Swinburne, on the other hand, though apparently a spell-binder of a similar kind, comes off better: "If one has kept one's intelligence alert in spite of the overpowering swing of his verse, one is often surprised at the subtlety and coherence of the poet's thought."

Desmond MacCarthy is most at home, however, with the writers who do not go in for spell-binding; with Tolstoy and Trollope, Ibsen and Chekhov. These last two particularly; for, when Desmond MacCarthy wrote about them, they were still relatively uncharted ground for the critic to work on, and he therefore got a chance to display his greatest gift, which was the capacity to understand and expound some new, fresh vision of reality. Desmond MacCarthy is often counted as a conservative critic. And it is true that he was repelled by the deliberate obscurity and oddness of some modern authors: he thought it cut literature off from the central stream of life. But to the end of his days he welcomed any author who ventured out to explore new territories of human experience: and he had an extraordinary power of discovering what they were after. Of Chekhov and Ibsen he has written more

penetratingly than any other Englishman. Read the passage in his review of *The Cherry Orchard* in which he examines in detail a piece of dialogue between Madame Ranevsky and the student Trofimov; see how delicately he interprets each casual, fleeting phrase of their conversation thus teaching us to discern the modulation of mood which directs it. He explains to us Chekhov's mode of expression, and makes us see how it is the perfect vehicle to convey his unique vision of life. Chekhov was the ideal author for Desmond MacCarthy to criticise; for, like his critic, Chekhov combined an unillusioned realism with an unfailing affectionate amusement at the spectacle of the human comedy. No one could better appreciate Chekhov's ruthless charity than Desmond MacCarthy.

Moreover, he approached him from a point of view acquired by a lifelong acquaintance with the great literature of the past; and was thus able to relate him to it. Because he knows his "classics," he can judge in what sense Chekhov is the writer of classic quality. There has been a lot of talk about classical criticism of late years. Mr. T. S. Eliot, to mention no lesser name, has eloquently preached the importance of maintaining a classical standard of criticism. It comes a little oddly from Mr. Eliot, for his own criticism, subtle, idiosyncratic and perverse, is both in its strength and its weakness, highly romantic. But Desmond MacCarthy really was a classical critic. He examined literature always in relation to important and permanent aspects of man's experience, and estimated it by rational and timeless standards deeply grounded in the European tradition of culture and not biased by the prejudice of any school or period. Cocteau is not too modern for him or Ruskin too old-fashioned: nonsense is equally deplorable whether he observes it in an Elizabethan playwright or in Gertrude Stein. If would-be critics to-day genuinely want to acquire a classical point of view, they should study Desmond MacCarthy.

They would learn how to express it too. For Desmond MacCarthy was himself an artist. His writing is a model of what critical prose should be. For he was without the conceit that inspires some critics to expect to find readers, when they have taken no trouble to make their books readable. Desmond MacCarthy was a famous talker, and his style is a talker's style; easy, casual, parenthetical, its unit the sentence rather than the paragraph. But it is conversation glorified and transfigured and purged of its characteristic vagueness and diffuseness. Every sentence is firm and lucid; it gleams at every turn with some picked felicitous phrase – "Swinburne's strong, monotonous melodies," "Hawthorne's pensive, delicate, collected prose," "the passion which smoulders in the dark impersonal eyes" of Rembrandt's Jewish portraits. How delightful too it is when the steady, substantial good sense of Desmond MacCarthy's discourse is lit up by the flicker of his playfulness. "I myself enjoy Swinburne's prose very much, but this is so exceptional a taste that I have been tempted to insert an Agony Column advertisement 'Lonely literary man of moderate means wishes to meet friend; must appreciate Swinburne's prose.' "

It is unlikely that any critic of a future generation will want to insert a similar advertisement about Desmond MacCarthy's prose. There will surely be far too many people still enjoying it for such an appeal to be necessary.

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EARLY STAGES

APPRENTICESHIP

(1935)

I expect it was Shaw who suggested that I should be the dramatic critic of *The New Statesman*.

I had previously written dramatic criticism for *The Speaker*. Lawrence Hammond* had in 1899 been appointed editor of this Liberal weekly, originally founded in order to balance *The Spectator* after the Home Rule split in the Liberal Party. He began employing me in 1903 as an occasional reviewer, soon more regularly as the paper's dramatic critic, and finally also as a weekly contributor of notes and articles. I was then about to be married, and a fixed salary of £100 year was a boon.

The Speaker had had many remarkable contributors; on politics, of course, Hammond himself, one of the most eloquent of leader-writers; F. W. Hirst, the future editor of *The Economist*, Simon, the future Lord Chancellor; Belloc and Chesterton, who wrote chiefly for the literary side, for which Masefield also wrote, and Arthur Clutton-Brock and Edward Garnett (who, as a publisher's reader, "discovered" Conrad, and W. H. Hudson), not to speak of the occasional essays contributed by Robert Bridges and Augustine Birrell. Yet the circulation was only, I think, about three thousand copies. *The Speaker* was vigorously anti-Imperialistic. During the South African war it had been the most emphatic voice of the "pro-Boer" minority in the country, and afterwards it hotly

*J. L. Hammond, the historian.

opposed Milner and the Conservative Government's policy towards the conquered. Here Belloc's gift for satire was very useful.

It was at 12 Henrietta Street, at the top of a flight of dark, dusty, carpetless stairs, in a narrow room, with two windows and three tables, one for Lawrence Hammond, one for Clutton-Brock and, latterly, one for myself, that I first learnt to honour and enjoy my profession. There was no telephone; had we possessed that cursed convenience, we could have done no work. No typewriters; not even Hammond possessed one. He suffered from writer's cramp, and had to use a cork pen-holder the shape of a torpedo.

At the back of the editor's room was a still smaller one furnished with a few wooden chairs and an office boy. There callers waited. Compared with corresponding editorial premises today, those of *The Speaker* were incredibly shabby and inconvenient. Yet the spirit which radiated from the editor himself makes those premises in retrospect seem all a journalist who took a pride in his work could desire.

When speaking with the utmost conviction, or arguing about what he had at heart, Hammond's voice was invariably soft; there was a gentle, sometimes almost desperately gentle ardour in it. While, on the other hand, his laughter – and he was alert to the comic side of life and of his friends – was loud. It never hurt, though it might be directed at oneself. He was a support when things were going badly not because he was one of those whose spirits tower at a crisis – the stimulus they give may be immense, but it is apt to be evanescent; nor because he was possessed by a faith that things *must* come right in the end – optimism one cannot share is apt to be depressing; but because he made others feel that whatever happened it was always worth while to have lived to be on the side of right.

In 1906, however, *The Speaker* was converted into *The Nation* under the editorship of H. W. Massingham, and the new editor had no use for me.* *The Eye Witness* on which I next depended to save me from nibbling away too fast my small capital, was most erratic in its remunerations. We were all of us, Belloc, the two Chestertons, Maurice Baring, Eccles and I, paid at irregular intervals. We tried to think of an explanation which would account for these incalculable but blessed spates of money. Oddly enough, they seemed to coincide either with our employer's buying yet *another* paper, or with his starting a publishing business, or with abrupt disappearances abroad – in fact at precisely those moments at which we might have expected money to be tight. We entertained the idea that he must be the illegitimate son of a Russian countess of immense wealth living on the Riviera, whom he could periodically tap or blackmail. He was an open-handed man. The only benefit he ever got himself out of feeding us was one review of his own book of verses which all other papers had ignored. It was a difficult review to write, still we had three men of genius (who were poets too) on the staff, and between them, and with Cecil Chesterton also pulling his weight, that review got written. However, the real explanation of the money-situation proved to be different. Suddenly, our employer was charged with bigamy and embezzlement. I was left with a stumer of thirty-odd pounds (two months earnings); a sum which I gratefully recall was made up to me by a subscription among my friends. So I lost nothing – not even my job, for the paper turned into *The New Witness* and continued to employ me until it lost the Marconi libel-case, after which it became an intermittent and shakier support.

*Massingham said later that not using MacCarthy was one of his few mistakes as an editor.

Now all this leads up to explaining what *The New Statesman* was to me when it started: it meant Security (in so far as that is to be obtained by journalists), and it was – Opportunity. I had a high opinion of myself as a critic, which was only occasionally shaken, and I knew that I sometimes wrote well, though at other times with an involved limpness distressing to me. I thought I could hold the job: two guineas a thousand plus ten shillings extra for attending theatres (extracted from Sharp while strolling on the cliff-top of Beachy Head), reviewing at the two-guinea rate. It was a beautiful prospect. It promised not only security but that constant delight of expressing oneself before an audience which would see when one had hit, or missed, a mark. And there was another aspect agreeable to me. *The New Statesman* was out to improve the world, to correct the injustices of the social system, to stick up for the have-nots. I had, and have, the vaguest notions as to the best means of accomplishing these ends: but provided that I am not obliged to help myself, I like to be associated with others intent upon them. It was therefore delightful to me that Shaw and the Webbs should be directors of this new paper and that the editor himself was an ardent Fabian. The atmosphere of the other papers for which I had worked, had been radical, not socialistic. Temperamentally, they suited me better. But so far as I gave social questions a thought (and I did so only in connection with the study of human nature) I was prepared to believe that the Fabians knew what was what, that true statesmanship was a dull grammatical kind of business (I still believe this), that all sorts of rules and regulations (and prohibitions alas!) were absolutely necessary if more people were to have elbow-room and a fairer chance on this over-crowded competitive planet.

The New Statesman was destined sometimes to shock by its line on certain questions, or, more accurately to prompt the reflection, "O dear, that would surely mean the end of a

good many things I care about. What a world we shall end up with – if they get their way!" However, the paper cared about justice, and that was all-important.

I found, when I got to know them, that the Webbs were less unfair to my friends, though they were decidedly firm about them, than my friends were about the Webbs. In their company I came across a kind of purposeful magnanimity – not at all imposing, almost mechanical – which impressed me in the end as one of the most genuine things I had struck in human nature; also, a persistence of purpose which, though it arranged experience in perspectives not alluring to me, made flashes of generous indignation about social conditions, to which I responded readily, look rather cheap. And then there was Bernard Shaw! For him I had – and still have – a hero-worship; one to which no amazed exasperation at either some of his utterances or certain limitations of his genius, seems to make the slightest difference. In the heyday of his narrower but more select fame, he was known as the "inimitable" G.B.S.; to me he was the "indispensable" G.B.S. What indeed shall we do when there is no one left recklessly, gaily, truculently to blow the gaff!

When recalling what *The New Statesman* has meant to me, these things are important. Of course to some certain extent I was a fish out of water in such company – or rather not out of water, for I was always easy and interested, but a fish in a strange tank. When I used to lunch with the Webbs the talk took for granted knowledge I did not possess. References by means of initial letters were often bewildering to me. I remember once enquiring what "the L.G.B." was, and a note in Webb's voice when he replied – I will not call it either impatience or contempt for those were entirely absent from his conversation – fixed the information forever in my memory.

I recall a week-end at Beachy Head, shortly before the paper started, to which the Webbs had invited its future staff; Squire, the literary editor, whom I already knew rather well from working with him on *The New Witness*, and of course Clifford Sharp, whom I then met for the first time, and others. What has stuck in my memory are the two scraps of conversation. H. G. Wells, as we are all aware, had guyed the Webbs in *The New Machiavelli* some time before, and he had recently published another novel. I remember Beatrice Webb saying cheerfully, "I'm in it; I'm the woman whose voice is described as 'a strangulated contralto,' but you are not, Sidney." "Oh yes, I am," said Webb, speaking from the sofa on which his legs and feet looked absurdly small in comparison with his broad brow and head, "Oh yes I am, I'm described as one of those supplementary males often found among the lower crustacea." This smiling serenity made me feel that I was indeed in high and good company.

I have mentioned memories which may seem irrelevant, but they strike me as akin to the spirit of *The New Statesman* itself during its early years – high, dry detachment from personal and (above all) from self-delighting emotions, which if bracing was certainly austere. I was to feel inclined occasionally to start chanting, "Come down O Maid from yonder mountain height For Love is of the valley" etc. *The New Statesman* invariably emphasised the least moving reasons it could discover for any generous policy. In this respect it contrasted with its rival, *The Nation*, now happily united to it in holy wedlock. Both papers often advocated the same views, but while *The Nation* supplied arguments which encouraged its readers to feel that they were the salt of the earth, the tone of the *Statesman* in arguing the same point would be, "If you want to escape being a short-sighted fool, this is the line you must take." This austerity was as marked in the admirable articles of our Editor, taut arguments released at

the end with a whizz like steel spring, as in the atmosphere which he created. That atmosphere never permitted us to forget that whatever our own work might be for the paper, it was nothing compared with what the paper was doing for *us*. This was salutary for writers like Squire, Lynd and myself whose contributions took the form of exploiting our personalities. We were never encouraged to think ourselves indispensable; a persuasion to which journalists of our type are too prone. True, it made the atmosphere a trifle wintry, and Jack Squire, Robert Lynd and I used very occasionally to give *each other* little warm shower-baths of praise as a relief. At the same time we felt complete confidence in our editor's loyalty to us, while in his and in L. M. Lloyd's anonymous work every week we had before our eyes an example of the possibility of keeping apart the satisfaction of doing one's best and the desire to get personal credit for it – a dichotomy upon which the whole of civilisation depends.

Clifford Sharp possessed in an extraordinary degree two of the rarest qualities in an editor: Creativeness (the power of blending a whole paper into a publication with a homogeneous character) and Decision. He never waited for the cat to jump, but sprang to conclusions. He was also, not so rare, absolutely devoted to the interests of his paper. After I became Literary Editor in 1920, this business of maintaining a pervasiveness of tone led to differences between us, in which I was often exasperatingly elusive and he was often very rude. Seated opposite each other at the make-up hour, he would glare and I would despair – but not reform. He wanted the literary side of the paper to be readable from beginning to end. I did not care if there were chunks in it which the average intelligent educated person skipped, as long as most of the paper appealed to him. It seemed to me in the long run better for our prestige that some authors should say "Of course the reviews have been piffle – except perhaps the one in *The*

New Statesman which showed the man had some notion what my book was about," than that the A.I.R. (the Average Intelligent Reader) should be deluded on every page into supposing himself interested in and instructed in a subject about which he would really remain for ever as ignorant and indifferent as an owl. Again, Sharp insisted on a firm macadamised surface, while I quite liked it to be broken by those wild green sprouts of folly such as are apt to appear in the work of writers when they care about their subjects. I didn't mind (or notice) a little bad grammar, especially when due to a quiver of sensibility, and to call Professor Housman "Professor" and then in the next sentence "Mr" if I did observe it, did not seem to me to matter. But to Sharp these were blots on the paper, symptoms too of a confounded inefficiency, which I exhibited in other departments of my work. Still, we had in common a strong dislike of every type of brilliant, pretentious nonsense, and a well-concealed respect for each other which made our collaboration interesting as well as tolerable. Besides this tugging between us was, I believe, very good for the paper. If Sharp had not been the editor he was, the literary side would have been slovenly; if I had not been – well, what I was, readers of that part of the paper might have often hardly known whether they were reading a current issue or one a month old. But as it was, occasionally the result of our combination was an issue which, as a whole – from the first note to the last shorter notice – was actually better than any single item in it, and that might be saying a good deal.

Architecturally, our editorial premises rested of course on business offices below, and I was ever conscious on my top-floor of the Atlantean support from below of Roberts and his (sometimes) gloomy men. Still more often present to me was *The New Statesman's* debt to its secretary, especially perhaps my debt to her. Mrs. Vincent was not only equably and

promptly efficient, but as far as I was concerned she developed an extraordinary instinct for distinguishing beforehand between the kind of engagements I would, and those I would not keep, thus saving others from inconvenience and me from remorse. "O no," she would say gaily, over the telephone in answer to some reasonable or even delightful request, "that's no good. He won't do *that*," long before I had any notice of it myself. Those awful Literary Supplement and Library-list rushes, too – I remember them well. How she would stay with me till after eleven at night, doing my work with me, seeing that Edmund Gosse did not figure as Edmund Goose, and that other hardly less disastrous errors were avoided. When, at this moment, I think back into the past, specimens of that impassive race, the Printer's Boy, also rise up before me, contemplating for hours with the resignation of a disillusioned sage a few yards of gritty stair. Those narrow stairs! Perhaps I can best sum up "what *The New Statesman* has been to me," by saying that though I seldom mount them now, I expect to continue to do so intermittently even when I have to pause and pant on my way up, for it is the glory and curse of my profession to go on till we drop – or are dropped.

A GLIMPSE OF THE LABOUR PARTY

IN 1917

I attended the Labour Congress at the Central Hall, Westminster, with a view to describing the proceedings, but my impressions were so numerous and varied that as soon as I had walked down the marble staircase of that useful but cumbrous structure, out of the shadowy noisy hall into the sunny, noisy streets, I knew already that as a reporter's "piece of graphic" my article was doomed to failure. One must have some kind of focus; I had none. The only way of dealing with such a plethora of observations would be, I realised, to talk about myself. And so I shall. Before the proceedings began I settled into my seat with the excitement of a girl at her first ball. You may open your eyes at this. "Certainly," you will say, "the occasion was an interesting one; but, surely. . . ." Yes, it is no exaggeration; let me explain. The word "Labour" in the political sense, to a man like me, is a word of mysterious significance. It suggests to me hopes for humanity, fears for much that makes life delightful to me, the righting of enormous wrongs and the infliction of many injuries or individuals with whom my nature is in sympathy, the possibility of a dull, lustreless civilisation, but the only chance of a really noble and dignified one. Therefore to me the spectacle of "Labour" in council was moving and august, and the ordinary appearance of the delegates could not hide that from me. The subject under discussion also interested me, and the manner in which it would be discussed and the conclusion which would be reached upon it would

be some measure, I thought, of the diameter of the brain of this leviathan, Labour. I regret to say it turned out to be some thirteen hundred thousand inches shorter than I hoped. "Canst thou take leviathan with a hook?" When it was all over, the answer to Job's question, I feared, must be in the affirmative; though it could be added, with truth, "but the hook is very liable to come out before the monster is fairly landed."

When we all dismissed for lunch I was in good spirits; but when the Conference was over I was in dreary spirits. It was not that at 1 P.M. I was full of hope that the voting would be to my mind (the miners' rock-over to an anti-Conference attitude precluded such hopes), but I had just heard a speech which had put a glow into me: a sharp sensible speech with self-forgetful passion in it, very different from the mouldy *bravura* of personal explanations. That phrase is not a direct dig at Messrs Henderson and Barnes, who on this occasion were right to put their own cases. But I have often noticed at public meetings of any kind, and the Conference was no exception, that when the speaker turns from what he stands for to defending his own conduct, a peculiar energy is infused into his gestures and words. He seems to speak with freshness and will, while the audience wakes up with an eagerness which seems to say, "Ah! ah! this is the real thing." Undoubtedly they share emotionally the same sense of proportion. When the speaker is a working man, transition to this, deeper animation, because the method of oratory is then simpler and more transparent, is still more noticeable. The people's orator cannot resist the cries of "Good old So-and-so!" "Stick it out!" etc., etc., which his first words about himself elicit; and on the whole I prefer the bursting vehemence of self-justification which follows to the polished perturbation as of one unaccustomed to speak of himself, or to the self-contained detachment as of one who does so

only as a necessary duty, so familiar to us in the orators of the governing classes when they begin by saying, "To touch on a personal matter." I was struck at the Conference by the absence of shyness and nervousness in the speakers; the naturalness with which most of them began to speak and the naturalness with which they stopped. This was heartening to me. For apart from that estimate of our civilisation which is summed up in the saying of Tolstoi's, "The rich will do anything for the poor except get off their backs" – an arrow I shall never be able to pull out of my conscience – the principal consideration which makes me democratic in feeling is a preference for the plain claptrap of the semi-educated to the more insidious and perfect humbug of the well-to-do. If a man is going to pretend to be better than he is, *sans peur et sans reproche*, perfectly pure, perfectly disinterested, adequately informed on every necessary point, quite unbiased in judgment and all the rest of it, I prefer that the result should not be much more plausible than a child dressed up as a Red Indian.

But to return to the subject of personal explanations, which were so important a part of the day's proceedings and form invariably so large a part of public life. When we are all in heaven, and when the works of the Recording Angel, miraculously indexed, and doubtless, if I do not misunderstand human nature, by far the most popular volumes in the heavenly library, are consulted by orators, I can imagine most of them passing a perplexed hand over their foreheads as they read the fascinating pages containing their own records, and muttering to themselves: "Why, I thought I spent my whole life in advocating this or that, attacking this or that; but, good heavens! what pages and pages and pages there are merely about how I behaved in such and such circumstances, how right I was to do this or say that in spite of appearances! Perhaps these repeated and repeated explanations were neces-

sary, but I never guessed they would in the end bulk so large." On this occasion everyone was expecting a personal explanation from Mr. Henderson. It was necessary. All I wished was that his statement had not been so "statesmanlike," and delivered at moments in a manner almost archidiaconal. I wanted him to speak more out of himself. I wanted him to say straight out: "I feel bitterly about the way I have been treated. One of the things one can't get over in Mr. Lloyd George when he has tripped one up and sent one sprawling, is the advantage he takes of one's own decency. He counts, and knows he can count, on certain people 'playing the game' whatever he does. But instead of that making him treat them with more consideration, he takes it as a pull he has over them. And the damnable truth is that in the political game it is a pull. He knew I was helpless. Partly because I am the sort of man who hates to appear to act as though paying off scores, chiefly because I believe for the good of the country and the success of the war it is absolutely essential that Labour should work with the Government. I am most anxious you should not try to turn him out for that reason; but if you feel, as I do, that he would never have slammed the door of the Cabinet Council in the face of Lord Curzon and sent Barnes out like an office-boy to fetch him in at the end of two hours, and if you think, as I do, that this expresses his attitude towards Labour as opposed to Wealth – well, put it in your pipes and smoke it till the proper time comes."

Such sentiments might be divined in what Mr. Henderson said, but he spoke more in grave sorrow than in anger, and for this I was sorry. I missed the democratic frankness, the democratic passion. That was the flavour which exhilarated me in a speech which soon followed; the speech which sent me out to lunch with a glow in me. Several speakers had spoken after Mr. Henderson, and the motion before the Council was that the Labour members of the Government should be at

once withdrawn. I had looked away from the platform to survey the restless rows of simmering delegates behind me, when a curiously urgent, slightly veiled voice made me turn my head towards it sharply. A long man, flat-chested, with a loose flop of greying fair hair and ditto moustaches, was standing on the platform, grasping the rail in front of him. The hank of hair kept jerking upwards and falling forwards as he stooped to emphasise what he was saying, or drew himself suddenly up, like the crest of some excitable bird. What he said was perfectly clear, and each sentence masterfully emphatic. I turned to my neighbour: "Who's that?" "Don't you know?" he said. "That's Bob Smillie." Of course, I knew him by name, and I remembered his *mot* too, about those recruiting posters, representing a nonplussed but able-bodied and still-in-the-flush-of-youth papa being posed by a boy with the question, "Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?" "If my son asks me that," he said, "I shall say, 'My boy, I tried to stop the bloody thing.' " What he was saying was perfectly good sense. Referring to Mr. Henderson, he said "resignation" was in his case a soft word for "chucked"; and presently there was a loud roar of laughter at the story of a lodger, thrown out of the first-floor window by his landlord, who picked himself up, saying that he would not sleep in that house another night. But the object of his speech was to prevent the motion recommending the withdrawal of Labour from the Government being put: "You know perfectly well that the delegates cannot vote in favour of it without consulting their societies. It will be lost by an overwhelming majority. It will be said that is the voice of Labour. Labour has again and again been made a fool of in this way." When he slewed round to my side of the hall and I could see his face, the crying face of a man in almost mortal distress, I saw in it the same vehemence that I had felt in the swing and jerk of his gestures. Friend Smillie, I know nothing or next to

nothing about social questions or what goes on in your world; a compliment from me to a Labour Leader is worth precious little. But were I suddenly endowed with creative power to plant men, I think I would risk it, and lay down at once 20,000 replicas of you. No doubt I should have to temper the results of this fiat by a numerous creation of other reformers who see the many-sidedness and intricacy of things; but I swear you are the vital ingredient in the mixture which can move the world.

Mr. Will Thorne made an impression on me of the kind which is delightful to receive, but not so flattering to make; for those human beings who are privileged to make that impression, from a kind of modesty perhaps which is itself part of that power, are absolutely unconscious, or even rather contemptuous of its effect on others. It is possible that Mr. Will Thorne's conception of himself is as a sort of Danton or firebrand, and that he conceives his rise to eminence as due to the violence of his views and the revolutionary recklessness of his spirit. He hinted, indeed, that the *jusquaboutisme* of his Internationalism and Socialism, after the war, would be something horrific. But, if I may judge from the impression he made on me (these notes, remember, are only impressions of men seen once like characters in a play and have no more authority), he was always elected because no one could help liking him confoundedly; especially after they had laughed at his simplicity a little. There are people whom, when one has once laughed at them, one can never like quite so much again; there are others to whom afterwards it is impossible not to remain attached. I could not help thinking what a splendid Duke of Beaufort or some such personage he would have made. He would have roared at you loud enough to make you jump in your saddle if you rode too near the hounds, but it would leave no soreness or sense of humiliation behind. In fact, I saw him best in some such circumstances, the

amplitude of which would give wing-space to the sweep of an easy kindliness, simple loyalty and a still more simple obstinacy; I saw him better, thus, at any rate, than in the bewildering, cross-purposed world of politics.

I admired Mr. Purdy in the chair. A good many things must have astonished the Russian delegates on the platform during the course of the proceedings, but none probably more than the way in which Mr. Purdy controlled an assembly which at times reached a pitch of disorder dismaying even to a baited fourth-form master, by tapping the neck of a water-bottle with a penknife. The English are a race with a great calm and sense of order at the bottom of them. They are also a reasonable people. I only wish they were not so self-righteous. In that respect they are mad and most difficult to deal with.

Before the voting took place I went up into the gallery that I might see the many as one. It was like looking down on the hide of some agitated animal, bristling in places, placid in others, undulating with the play of muscles beneath an animal emitting an extraordinary jumble of purrings, snarlings and yappings. When the result of the voting was given out, both sides were pleased, and the uproar was commensurate. The strains of the Internationale and Keep the Home Fires Burning struggled for predominance amidst miscellaneous bawling stronger than either. But the excitement was by no means over. There were the amendments to discuss, among them the question of proportional representation at Stockholm. Before this was put to the vote there was a virulent and hearty Pandemonium – both adjectives are required. I could not make out what it was all about. I perceived, as in the end did the chairman, who was as busy as a conductor at a Wagnerian climax, that Mr. Ben Tillett was anxious about an amendment of his. One of the small impressions I carry away with me the picture of him advancing up the gangway,

in a neat grey suit of remarkably smart cut, bawling to the point of congestion and with both hands round his mouth: "Point of Order." Suddenly he sat down, with the repose, I thought, of a man who has made a great speech.

REFLECTIONS OF AN ANGLO-IRISHMAN

(1920)

I

The Irish problem is largely a psychological one; temperament, ideals, traditions are the very stuff of it. And, that being the case, the recent impressions on these points of a temporarily repatriated Anglo-Irishman may have an interest for English readers; for Irish ones probably none at all.

Irishmen are so used to discussing each other. Dublin is the city of criticism and conversation. It would be hard to note anything in the temper, merits, inconsistencies of any leader or party which had not been marked down before. Everything is talked out, and will be again to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow. There are no established reputations; reputations are remade and unmade every night. Each time a man of importance appears he is measured with a fresh eye, and every celebrity or statesman lands upon the Irish shore as bare of prestige as when he began his career. In the store set upon freedom of the tongue and in the honour paid there to an expert use of it Dublin resembles ancient Athens; it also was a city of criticism and discussion. The Irish, too, like the Athenians, are an intensely "political" people. When they are accused of lacking "the political instinct" this, I believe, is what is meant. It is another way of saying that there are too many politicians among them, too large a proportion in the population of men who are interested in the discussion, for its own sake, of political ideas, to make them a people easy to govern.

The love of discussion, and the critical and yet enthusiastic atmosphere discussion generates, must be taken into account when watching Ireland from here. This passion is one of the main causes of the temperamental want of sympathy between Englishmen and Irishmen. "A talker" in an Englishman's mouth is a term of contempt. He himself talks to conclude, and his respect goes out to the man who, having concluded, considers the topic closed. Parnell was the Irish leader he most respected. The Irish strike him as being in general suspiciously articulate, and since perpetual discussion means viewing convictions in the light of many moods, they strike him consequently as fantastic. Convictions so aired must surely evaporate. Events prove him wrong about that, but he remains surprised.

This habit of perpetual discussion has a profound influence on the way public opinion in Ireland moves. Perpetual discussion does not necessarily lead to agreement, all the world knows, but it intensifies the self-consciousness of everybody's convictions. Through it the timid become more timid, the logical even more logical than they want to be, and the forceful tend to entrench themselves more uncompromisingly than ever behind principles and defensive irony and scorn. Now, one side of the Irish problem is the question how far Ireland has really gone solidly and permanently Sinn Fein, and what, consequently, are the chances of any scheme put forward by a party, moderate in its demands from an English or Ulster point of view, of satisfying the national movement.

When I imparted my own views on the Irish question I found they were discounted by English officials as those of "a sea-divided Gael" and by Sinn Feiners as those of a man with obliterated national instincts. Everyone had his label; I had mine – I had two. Other people had two or more; some were as much covered with labels as a well-travelled railway trunk. "West Briton," "Anglo-Irish," "Sinn Fein,"

"Plunkettite," "Nationalist" – the label depended upon the opinions of the person who stuck it on, and though Sinn Fein was the commonest it by no means always covered the most definite opinions. Apparently and on the surface Ireland was in no mood to favour the go-between. In England he gets an easy hearing, but it is not there he can be most useful. It is in Ireland he is most wanted, and all honour to men, like Sir Horace Plunkett, who are trying to explain extremists to each other. To do so requires, in times of political passion, that rare kind of courage which does not mind seeming to be a Laodicean assuming airs of inhuman superiority.

Men in a passion do not wish to be reconciled; they want complete sympathy. The tendency of both sides is to turn on the conciliator with "If you feel so little, at least have the humility not to meddle in this quarrel," and to turn from him to face each other again, saying with relief, "My enemy at least understands something. He does not pretend to be himself or expect me to be reasonable." I heard a Sinn Feiner express the opinion that the only English paper that had shown any grasp of the Irish question was the *Morning Post*; it at least knew what Ireland wanted. With regard to the prospects of a thoroughgoing Dominion Home Rule scheme in Ireland, the chief obstacle to its finding popular backing is, I believe, the dread of seeming lukewarm in the national cause for which patriots have died and extremists have done most.

Meanwhile England is watching for signs of the spread of "reasonable" opinion in Ireland. An atmosphere created by tanks, machine-guns, an army of occupation on one side, and by sporadic murder and intimidation on the other, is not favourable to it. Sinn Fein has still the *beau rôle*. And what makes the task of Dominion Home Rulers or moderates particularly difficult is that Irishmen have lost faith in England's good faith. They suspect her still of subconsciously having

made up her mind to do nothing. It is no use Englishmen, or those who do not in Ireland hate them, explaining that England is just, generous, and filled with good intentions towards Ireland. England's consciousness of her own rectitude, her belief that if things go wrong in Ireland it must really be the fault of Irishmen, appears not only the most absurd but the most dangerous delusion. She always had it; she had it in the past, when, as she now admits, she often treated Ireland shamefully. The only result of that sort of talk is to rouse in the Irishman desperate feeling that he is up against a power which, in that case, simply does not know what it is doing. Some image as of Watts's picture of the Minotaur, gazing with benevolent, bovine blankness upon the sky while one paw is crushing a bird, may rise before his mind. What, then, can the bird do but peck till blood is drawn and some tingle of consciousness runs up the nerves of that heavy hand?

That metaphor covers, he is aware, a hideous injustice – the death of individuals when it is England who is to blame. But unless he feels passionately that there are acts no man may commit, even for his country, his attitude towards such crimes is one of passive disapproval. He regrets such things should happen, but he cannot be sorry if the perpetrators escape. He observes that it is the kind of argument England has listened most readily to in the past. That is the attitude of the majority of Irishmen, I believe, towards extremists. It was their attitude towards the Fenians. (It is, by the way, not the Sinn Fein organisation which is responsible for the murders; they are the work of secret societies and small groups of exasperated men.) Irishmen recognise themselves as Sinn Feiners, not because they will accept nothing short of an independent republic for an undivided Ireland, but because they are ashamed not to support with their votes and voices men who have supported with their lives the cause of Ireland. I have no doubt that in some districts of Ireland

the predominance of Sinn Fein has forced allegiance from others, but to think that in any important measure their strength is due to intimidation would be a bad mistake.

II
WHY SINN FEIN APPEALED TO YOUNG IRELAND

Harcourt street is a long street of grey-brick eighteenth-century houses with oblong sash windows and dignified doors. The door of No. 6, Sinn Fein headquarters, is open all day. From a house opposite all who go in or out are under police observation, There are many spies in Dublin. At an evening party where host or hostess is suspected of obnoxious opinions, it does not matter how late the hour, one is sure to see from the window an anonymous looking watcher, patiently standing or loitering not far from the door.

On the ground floor of Sinn Fein headquarters is a bank, which has little in common with the precise, neat, polished appearance of other bank interiors. Several times I have noticed a child or two playing about quietly there. On the second floor are newspaper offices, where Mr. Arthur Griffith is to be found, and the upper storeys are devoted to purposes which can be roughly guesssed at from the look of the rooms. They have the makeshift air of election committee-rooms – trestle tables, plenty of wooden chairs, placards on the walls, on one of which is a roughly scrawled reminder in paint that "walls have ears." There is a desultory bustle going on all the time. Young men are working at the tables with their heads over papers, or talking to each other in quiet undertones, or smoking the casual cigarette. They look very young. Obliging, yet with a certain indifference, to a stranger supposed to be sympathetic, these slim, cool, mistrustful, and probably penniless youths are significant phenomena. I can see in my mind's eye replicas of them in the main streets of country towns all over Ireland. I know that they, or their like,

were the defenders of the Post Office during the rebellion. The sight of them recalls the fact that the tap-root of Sinn Fein is in the youth of the country. Sinn Fein is "Young Ireland" over again, only on a far more formidable scale. It resembles the Young Ireland movement both in having a literary side and in the fact that at first mutual distrust existed between Sinn Fein and the Catholic Church.

The strength of Sinn Fein is so largely derived from the young that an English official, at the end of our discussion, declared that the bottom cause of all the present trouble was that during the war emigration had stopped. "If it had not been for the war, these youths, younger sons of farmers or shopkeepers whose land or business can accommodate only one or perhaps two sons, would have now all been earning a living across the water. Here they can't earn a decent living. They are naturally discontented, and their only occupation and amusement is to go Sinn Fein and make trouble. It's the fashion. Yes, fashion, *not* passion." Naturally it would be easier to govern Ireland if a large proportion of its youth were yearly compelled to leave their country, and Ireland would be easier still to govern if it were an iceberg.

But while the English party asserts that emigration on a large scale is an economic necessity, the resources and habits of the Irish people being what they are, National Ireland claims that emigration is only a product and inheritance of English landlordism and misrule; asserting, and with contempt for those who question it, that there is room on Irish soil for Irish people. In this dispute, when one side was speaking, memories rose in me of congested districts, stony mountain-sides, little patches of corn or potatoes a few yards square, untrimmed fields, dusty, heart-broken villages, the very picture of ennui, where the only available help to reading life's riddles was to be found in such ideas as might have lodged in the head of the parish priest. Set against those memories were the economic

successes of the cooperative movement, which suits the needs and impulses of the people, and the evidence, coming from many sides, of response in rural Ireland to literature and communal interests.

Sinn Fein, in its widest sense, is the most complete expression of national self-reliance and self-confidence. That is one reason why it attracts so many and appeals so directly to the young. It has contended successfully against that self-mockery which forestalls criticism and that irony which is an insurance in advance against the humiliation of failure, tendencies too common in Irishmen, which are the legacy of many defeats. The political importance of the Irish literary movement has lain not only in its having brought into favour the ideas, values, and traditions of the old national life of Ireland, but in its fame abroad having helped to strengthen this self-confidence.

You may be surprised to find in talking to a Sinn Feiner that to him the nineteenth century is the blackest page in Irish history. The explanation is that it was the period of the most rapid and insidious Anglicisation of Ireland. The Act of Union made London the capital of Ireland, and not only the social snob but the Irish patriot look towards England. While the patriots were fighting Ireland's battle, English culture and the English language were conquering Irish culture and the Irish language behind their backs, more swiftly, too, and more effectively than the oppression of preceding centuries. Ireland during the nineteenth century was intensely conscious of its need of political freedom, but to the essentials of nationality, to language and tradition, her champions were indifferent. The date of the founding of that non-political society the Gaelic League, 1893, is therefore, to the thorough Sinn Feiner, one of the crucial dates in Irish history. It marks the beginning of conscious reaction against Anglicisation.

English people are aware that the Sinn Feiner is a protectionist commercially, but they are not aware of the extent to which he is a protectionist spiritually. They know he is politically a separatist, but they do not understand that political separation is to him only a means to fostering a new yet old civilisation. For him the "Irish Question" is not merely the problem how to get the English out of Ireland or how to keep English goods out of Irish markets, but how to eradicate English culture from Irish minds. If he could, he would pump English blood out of Irish veins!

When this is grasped, it is at once obvious why the Sinn Feiner is unwilling to accept a settlement which, though it guarantees political freedom for his country, keeps open the channels by which English influences are maintained. An Ireland which was part of the British Empire would be to him an Ireland which accepted as an accomplished irrevocable fact her Anglicisation during the nineteenth century. The Sinn Feiner is therefore indifferent to all the advantages for Ireland of a special bond between herself and England; more than that, he dreads and detests them.

The schism between Sinn Fein and Dominion Home Rulers is a divergence natural between Irishmen who want to de-Anglicise Ireland and those who, accepting the semi-Anglicised Ireland of to-day, demand that she shall be allowed to govern herself and develop henceforward along known lines.

III
GENUINE SELF-GOVERNMENT

"To bring tyranny out into the open and make it show its hand" – that is the beginning and end of Sinn Fein tactics. They want to show Englishmen and the world (for the first time in history it is Ireland, not England, which has the ear of the world) that there are only two ways of settling the Irish question – to rule Ireland by means of a perpetual

army of occupation or to give her independence. When you talk to a Sinn Feiner about the rebellion of Easter, 1916, he will tell you it was a glorious success. There never was a more hopeless enterprise, but its desperate hopelessness was the point and glory of it. "It was the example we wanted. We know England. She will never yield except to men who show that they do not need hope in order to persevere or the prospect of success in order to undertake."

Every week now brings forth two or three events which prove that Ireland is held down by force. The signs week by week are becoming more ominous. This suits the Sinn Fein plan of campaign. The leaders do not need to stimulate the people to further acts of revolt; it is the automatic result of the last row, whatever it may have been. If the temper of Ireland is brewing up for a second rebellion, that it should prove a greater "failure" than the last and lead to more bloodshed, from the point of view of Sinn Fein tactics does not matter.

And there precisely lies the danger. They know that England has far more to lose than Ireland from such an event – her good name in the eyes of the world, the sympathy of her own dominions and of America. What has Ireland to lose by such a catastrophe? The lives of some of her sons, who, dead, live on the lips of Irishmen. Men are replaced by others, but stains on national honour, though they may be whitewashed in school history-books, are never obliterated.

If an Englishman puts himself in the position of an Irish patriot and imagines himself possessed by a belief in and a love for the Irish race, he will see at once that Sinn Fein tactics are shrewd and practical. It is my belief that there are more people in Ireland who believe in Sinn Fein tactics than in Sinn Fein shibboleths. That is the ground for hoping that a solution of the Irish question may be found – soon. After all, Ireland is largely inhabited by Anglo-Irishmen who,

however much they detest English domination, are not blind to the merits of English culture nor to the advantages of an English connection.

Genuine Dominion self-government would afford opportunity for development along the lines natural to the Irish people. But stress must be laid on the adjective genuine. If the Englishman could only watch English politics from the Irish side, he would see the logic of Sinn Fein tactics. England is bored with the Irish question unless it is perpetually raised in an acute form. The moment Ireland is quiet, England self-complacently falls asleep. English politicians habitually look over the head of the rights and wrongs of Ireland to their own constituents. Unless Ireland is simmering with rebellion it is a dead issue over here compared with others; and, acute as it is at this very moment, the present Government have decided they can afford to shelve it. What is that but an invitation to Irishmen to make it more pressing?

A good, quiet, submissive Ireland will only get a measure which is a compromise arranged to fit the exigencies of English cabals and English party politics. Therefore support Sinn Fein; let loose your exasperation against military rule, keep hot your hate, emphasise every difference between Irishmen and Englishman, never mind how far you really wish English culture and the English language to be entirely superseded by Irish ditto, or desire a separate foreign policy for Ireland, back the practical men, the brave men, support Sinn Fein – that is how tens of thousands of Irishmen reason.

There are two points connected with Sinn Fein upon which people in England are hardly at all informed – namely, their economic policy and their relation to the Labour movement. On the latter point you hear often the wildest statements: "Sinn Feiners? Oh, they're a lot of Bolshevists." Bolshevist has become not only one of the commonest but one of the vaguest terms in the language. Anybody who holds views more

democratic than the person he happens to address is liable to be called a Bolshevik if he is prepared to face the possibility of the smallest row in order to get them carried through. Sinn Fein is a democratic movement; national movements usually are. Its resemblance to Bolshevism is entirely superficial and delusive. Indeed, it exists only in so far as all men in revolt against powers that be resemble each other; that is to say, in the fury of their hope or disappointment, and in their indifference to causing temporary confusion.

English people also do not estimate correctly the faith Irishmen have in the future of their own people, which naturally takes different forms, of course, in different minds. Some are convinced that there is a most prosperous commercial future before a "free" Ireland; they remind you of the excellent brains which Irish exiles have put at the service of England, the British Empire, and America; they remind you of Ireland's magnificent natural harbours and of its unworked mineral wealth – probably exaggerating that last asset. Others, when they think of the future of a "free" Ireland, have in mind a spiritual eminence. When they think themselves into the future they imagine Ireland making a unique contribution to civilisation: imaginative meditation and intellectual detachment are gifts widely spread among the Irish – they remind you of that. For centuries Irishmen have listened to "the blessed mutter of the Mass" and to the voices of tradition. There are many Irishmen who think that their fellow-countrymen have listened far too exclusively to that mutter and those voices; but the effect on Irish character has been to make it at least unlikely that they will be the dupes of a fallacious £ s. d. capitalist prosperity. England and America present the spectacle of civilisations largely at the mercy of their own technology and organisation. In many respects these are hideous, unjust, and destructive of human happiness and dignity. A "free" Ireland, these Irishmen believe, will

show mankind by example a way out of the hobble into which it has got. With a different, uncommercial tradition, a dislike of the mechanic State, a temperamental hatred of mechanical authority, and a fresh start, what might not such a nation achieve! It is a "large" hope. Such a hope does, however, underlie and form a part of that national enthusiasm which has for its other side hatred of English rule. Many of those in whom it is strongest are those Irishmen who dwell most on the ancient prestige of Ireland; that enthusiasm for an Ireland of the past is to a great extent a glow borrowed from the idea of an Ireland of the future. There is no better expression of the blending of the two sentiments than these two verses from a poem by "Æ."

We are less children of this clime
Than of some nation yet unborn
Or Empire in the womb of Time...
We hold the Ireland in the heart
More than the land our eyes have seen,
And love the goal for which we start
More than the tale of what has been.

We would no Irish sign efface,
But yet our lips would gladlier hail
The first-born of the coming Race
Than the last splendour of the Gael.
No blazoned banner we unfold –
One charge alone we give to youth
Against the sceptred myth to hold
The golden heresy of truth.

But the point to keep in view is that while the hopes of the Irish nation are variously coloured by trade-unionism, craft-Socialism, sympathy with enterprise or with agricultural life, or by discontent with modern civilisation, all are agreed that the first step is to get rid of English rule. The Labour

movement and the national movement are therefore for the time at one.

IV
ECONOMICS AND IRISH LABOUR

The recoil from English culture represented by Sinn Fein has implied a recoil also from the English capitalistic system: that, in brief, is the link between the National and Labour movements in Ireland. The life-work of Connolly and his execution after the rebellion have brought them into closer connection. Soon after the outbreak of the war he wrote:

> I make no war on patriotism – never have done. But against the patriotism of capitalism – the patriotism which makes the interest of capitalism the supreme test of right and duty – I place the patriotism of the working class, a patriotism which judges every public act by its effect on the fortunes of those who toil. That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic. . . . I regard each nation as the possessor of a definite contribution to the common stock of civilisation, and I regard the capitalist class of each nation as being the logical and natural enemy of the national culture which constitutes that definite contribution. Therefore the stronger I am in my affection for national tradition, literature, language, and sympathies the more firmly rooted am I in my opposition to that capitalist class which in its soulless lust for power and gold would bruise the nations as in a mortar.

Connolly became the leader of the Irish workers on Larkin's departure for America. He was a much more remarkable man than Larkin, but his support of Larkin strengthened greatly his influence with Labour. The national cause was as important to him as it was to Pearse. The day before his execution he wrote to his daughter: "The Socialists will never understand why I am here. They all forget I am an Irishman." It is easy to imagine that such a man has had a considerable effect on the Sinn Fein attitude towards Labour,

especially when we remember that Sinn Fein is a declaration of national rights rather than a definite policy, and therefore inclined to take its economics from others rather than to give them a lead in such matters.

The state which appeals to Irish Labour is not an industrial system directed by a body of men from given districts employed in all sorts of trades and industries, but one in which the administration will be in the hands of the representatives of various industries. "Socialism," wrote Connolly, in the *Workers' Republic*, "implies co-operative control by the workers of the machinery of production; in the absence of such control we have nought but State *capitalism*, as the Post Office at present. Socialism *is* the ownership by the State (the whole community) of all the land and materials of Labour combined with the co-operative control by the workers of such land and materials."

This passage would not appeal to many a Sinn Feiner. What would, however, appeal to them would be the distrust it shows of the mechanic State; one criticism of that passage would be, no doubt, that State ownership of all the land and materials of Labour inevitably leads to precisely the kind of Socialism which is repudiated as State capitalism. There is one word in it, however, which would have a welcome ring; that is the adjective "co-operative."

Distracted as Irish opinion is, all parties are agreed that the Co-operative movement in agricultural districts has been a wonderful success. It has kept itself apart from politics; it finds support from all parties. It has in George Russell ("Æ") an organiser who can give to those who join those imaginative "openings" as religious people used to say, which connect good business in people's minds with wider ends and larger hopes. It seems to find particularly friendly soil in the Irish temperament, in which tribal instincts still survive. To a romantic Sinn Feiner who connects up in his imagination

ancient Ireland with the Ireland which is to be, and has all Ruskin's and Morris's hatred of modern civilisation, it appeals because it is a system grafted on to the past; to Irish Labour it appeals because it is thoroughly democratic; to Unionists and landowners because it has waged successful war against the Gombeen man, and secured a better living for small holders who would have otherwise half starved on an acre or two of arable land and a few more of mountainy grazing; and to all who have imaginative schemes for Ireland's future it holds out the hope that as it grows in economic power it will exercise political power, with the result that instead of politicians representing the profiteering individualist, as they do now, they will find themselves dependent on the votes of men and women who have learnt the benefits of working harmoniously and unselfishly together.

"Democracy in our economic life and an aristocracy of character in leadership" is one of the watchwords of Sinn Fein. In itself it is a vague aspiration to which any party might assent; but the Co-operative movement is an example of what it means in practice, and, vague as the economic principles of Sinn Fein are, one thing is certain, they mean to encourage that co-operation with all their might.

V

THE ONLY SOLUTION

If there were no Ulster question, if North-west Ireland and the rest of the country could come to terms with each other, England would grant Ireland self-government of the completest kind short of independent Republicanism. The days are passed when for the sake of a handful of landlords she would deliberately oppress a people. What is it, then, that prevents the two hostile camps in Ireland coming to terms with each other? Why was the Convention a failure? Why is the task of the Moderates and Sir Horace Plunkett such

hopeless, uphill work? There are differences between the two parties, sentimental, religious, and economic differences between them, which appear hard to reconcile. But at the same time the inducements to come to an understanding are also strong on both sides.

Ulster will accept partition, but she hates it; it will cripple her in some directions and involve all sorts of vexatious complications. She is fully conscious of her own strength. She says she fears, but she cannot really fear, religious persecution. On the other hand, partition is still more fatal to the South; for economic reasons Ulster's inclusion is necessary to a self-governing Ireland and all the hopes that ideal excites in Irishmen. Numerically she is a minority, but for the purposes of bargaining over a fiscal policy she is in the strongest position, for she has only to threaten to secede. She can put up with partition, but the rest of Ireland cannot.

As for the religious question, Irishmen, though faithful to their Church, are not at all eager that its power in secular matters should extend further; the anti-clericalism of the North-east will find plenty of supporters in the South, and in increasing numbers as time goes on; for the yoke of the Church is not light upon them. Up to now it has been impossible for Irishmen to resist it, because the Roman Church has identified itself with the national cause.

What then prevents the two camps coming to an agreement? Simply this: that each still hopes by appealing to England to get *everything* it wants. It is the existence of a Court of Appeal that stiffens them both against each other. The Sinn Fein form of appeal is to intimidate the court; the Ulster method is to cajole it by professing loyalty to the Empire. The first step to the solution of the Irish question is to abolish this Court of Appeal.

Supposing France during the recent struggle between Church and State over religious orders and Church property had been

under the suzerainty of a country as large comparatively as the rest of Europe, which was also divided on that subject, what chance would there have been of a settlement between the two parties in France? None whatever. Each party would then have felt that as long as there was a chance of convincing Europe that they and not the other people were the side which would never compromise there was a chance, which only cravens would refuse to pursue, that the question would be settled wholly in their own favour. Even during the settlement of the House of Lords question in England, had England stood in that relation to a similarly divided Europe with power to decide the matter, would not "the Die-hards" have risked dying and the democrats have rioted to prove to Europe that what they were up against was a movement of the people?

The Irish question will never be settled till Irishmen have settled their own differences, and they never will as long as opinion in England is the deciding factor. The first quality any bill dealing with Ireland must therefore possess is that it should in effect abolish this Court of Appeal; all its other clauses safeguarding Ulster or conciliating national ideals in the South are comparatively unimportant.

Those points in practice will be settled by the balance of power in Ireland itself; and in so far as they do not express the compromise to which those forces naturally tend they will in any case become "scraps of paper." The merit of so-called Dominion Home Rule schemes is that they are methods of throwing the whole responsibility of working self-government on Irishmen; they imply the withdrawal of English soldiers and English interference. Once an Irish Parliament is set up, with or without the delegation of powers to provincial assemblies, it will become obvious to the South that a Republican Government pursuing an independent foreign and commercial policy which ignores the connection

of England will lose Ulster (Sinn Feiners know now, though they are reluctant to face the fact, that they are not strong enough to conquer her), while Ulstermen will be faced with this question: Is it preferable to protect ourselves by civil war or by using the control that our wealth and our organisation already gives us over the policy of an Irish Parliament whose desire is to keep Ireland united?

Both Irish parties make the same appeal to England – "Let us alone"; but both mean by this, unfortunately, "Kindly coerce the others for us." All England has to do to find a solution of the Irish question is to take the appeal literally. She need not be afraid of the results; the essence of any compromise between them, however arrived at, will be that the connection between England and Ireland will not be completely severed.

THEATRE

SHYLOCKS PAST AND PRESENT

(1920)

On returning to England I inquired whose acting was being most admired in London, and I was told that Maurice Moscovitch's acting in the part of Shylock at the Court Theatre had roused the critics into saying enthusiastic things about him. Having missed my colleagues' comments I do not know how far my praise falls short of theirs, Perhaps after their comments mine will seem cold; I do not feel coldly about his performance – far from it.

Mr. Maurice Moscovitch is, I am informed, a Russian subject and by birth a Jew. He has surmounted triumphantly the drawback of acting in a foreign tongue; proving himself the best elocutionist in the cast, only keeping a slight accent such as an actor might even assume to stress the difference between Shylock and the Venetians. His birth has given Mr. Moscovitch one huge advantage. His Shylock is a realistic Shylock; as he is himself a Jew, instinct prompts him to all those gestures and movements which an actor of another race can only acquire by painstaking mimicry. For deprecating movements of the hands, shrugs, dubious slantings of the head, agitated shakings of the wrists, for a certain pervasive subserviency of manner, for effusiveness in cajolery, for homely expansiveness in joy, for childish abandonment to weeping (poor miserable, puckered face!), for gusto in *Schadenfreude*, his Shylock is perfect. Wherever in the list of famous Shylocks you finally decide to place Mr. Moscovitch, this is certain – he is "damned good to steal from." But

I have got much more praise to give than that (see lower down). What I have said would be consistent with his having played Shylock as a little Yiddish pawnbroker, who at painful moments might squirm his way into our sympathies and at triumphant ones wake in us a desire to stamp on him. Shylock has been played like that; the text will stand it. And if then in the trial scene Portia is given a false beard and paunch, and Jessica is played as more of a sly hussy (the text will support this interpretation, too) than even Miss Nesbitt makes her, the play can be a great deal better pulled together than the Court Theatre company succeeds in doing. Their performance, however, aims at something better, but it is dreadfully out of gear. Very little imagination has been spent on the production. Mr. Fagan does not seem to have made up his mind what the total effect of the play is to be; what dominant mood should be sustained in us by it. He has merely trusted Shakespeare to muddle through to some kind of emotional result: "We'll say all the words and go on and off when Shakespeare tells us and accompany the words with more or less expected gestures, and then the glory of his creative imagination will shine upon you." Ah, if it were only as simple as that!

In conducting an orchestral symphony, it is not sufficient to see that the flutes come in at the right places, and the fiddles and trombones at theirs, and that the performers play the notes written down for them: the parts have to be blended. The composition must be interpreted. The conductor must carry the whole of it in his head, and according to his interpretation he will modify the prominence of this passage, or bring out the quality of that instrument at such and such a moment, knowing in each case it will affect the emotional value of what is past and to come. He may not be able to define what he wants to convey, or know why this or that stress is important, but he feels that it is so. He has an

emotional conception of the whole and in proportion to the fineness, sureness, and richness of that conception so (setting aside their varying skill) will the playing of the individual musicians be good.

The parallel between a symphony and a piece like *The Merchant of Venice* is close. The producer has to decide how much realism in the acting is needed in this scene, how subordinate realism must be in that; when the audience is glad to forget that all this is happening in Venice or anywhere on earth, when they must be sharply reminded again of time and place; how rampant the fun should be, not only judging it as though it were an independent comic turn, but from the point of view of its being also a transition to something else. Does it matter if Gobbo kills the casket scene when he enters? Shall we be reminded by Jessica's voice, when she speaks from the window, that she is a wily, caressing little runaway, capable of stealing her dead mother's ring from her father and exchanging it for a monkey, or is that side of her character better kept out of sight until it is wanted to bring out the pathos of Shylock? Or shall we hear first and last only the voice of a beautiful girl in love? How sympathetic is Shylock himself to be? How unreal are the Venetian gallants to appear? How simple and young or how unfeeling? How like fairyland is Portia's palace to be? How like a real court of justice the Trial Scene?

I can imagine many people, and I am tempted to include Mr. Fagan among them, saying: "But Shakespeare himself has decided all these questions; he was the greatest of dramatists; we need only read the play and go straight along." The answers may be in the written book, but it is not easy to find them. Every speech which advances a plot, or creates atmosphere or expresses character is a many-faceted thing. Take by itself a passage or dialogue – its largest facet may be obvious; but when you come to put it in its setting, it

by no means follows that the strongest beam of light should flash at that moment from that facet. I have been drawn into making these remarks because great as the pleasure is which the company at the Court Theatre have lately given to an unexacting public, they would give a great deal more if attention were directed to this side of their art.

By an irony of fate, the element in their performance (namely, the acting of Mr. Maurice Moscovitch) which makes it worth seeing, explodes the whole play as they act it. His Shylock is a piece of dignified realism introduced among the tame, histrionic conventions of the stock Shakespearean touring company. No one will blame Mr. Fagan for allowing an actor of Mr. Moscovitch's talent a free hand, but no array of terms can express the reprobation he deserves as a producer for not bringing the acting of the others into some sort of harmony with him. One adjective will suggest the quality of Mr. Moscovitch's Shylock; it is Rembrandtesque. Imagine, then, the æsthetic effect of a figure by Rembrandt introduced into a Maclise illustration of Shakespeare! His Shylock reminds one of those old Jews Rembrandt was fond of painting, of the dramatic realism of their poses, their picturesqueness, their dignity, and of the passion which smoulders in their dark, impersonal eyes. I do not myself believe that a Rembrandtesque Shylock is consistent with the finest production of *The Merchant of Venice* conceivable. To continue to use painting as an indication of a possible presentment of character, the quality which a Tintoretto figure possesses would blend better the stormy, tragic human elements of the play with the unreality, suavity, gaiety, and tenderness of the rest.

Until the ugly loud-voiced Irishman, Macklin, persuaded "Lun" Rich to try him in the part at Covent Garden in 1725, Shylock was never played realistically. The immediate effect was tremendous. Macklin's performance kept George II awake all night and moved Pope to compose a couplet which on

internal evidence no one would attribute to him. If he could see Mr. Moscovitch perhaps he would exclaim again:

This is the Jew
That Shakespeare drew.

Macready made Shylock (according to George Lewes) into "an abject, sordid, irritable, argumentative Jew"; he did not show him as a vindictive man whose vengeance is a retribution of wrongs to his sacred nation and himself, nor did his acting bring out that passionate passage (so necessary to the pathos) in which Shylock refers to his dead Leah. In both these respects Mr. Moscovitch was certainly admirable. Irving's Shylock, as some readers will remember, was extremely dignified and full of that vivid unreality which Irving infused into all his successful parts. His Shylock turned the Venetians into "a wilderness of monkeys." Baited, betrayed, forlorn, implacable, Irving's Shylock was so dignified and pathetic that it made nonsense of the play; yet in itself it was a beautiful performance. Mr. Moscovitch does not attain to that imaginative dignity; yet dignified he is – except in his exit in a sort of convulsion from the Trial Scene, half supported by Tubal. During the trial itself he has moments of true dignity; but the physical and moral collapse should come before, not after his last words:

I pray you, give me leave to go from hence;
I am not well: send the deed after me,
And I will sign.

This is important not only from the point of view of Shylock's character (for life has taught him resignation as well as cruelty), but as a means of modulating the scene into another key. It is a hopeless task to attempt to make the whole Trial Scene realistic. The only performance I have seen in which it seemed credible that a pound of flesh was actually going to

be cut from a man's breast before our eyes was a Japanese version of the play, which Sada Yacco and Kawakami brought over here nearly twenty years ago. After the Portia speeches, Kawakami, as the Shylock of the piece, made faces like a man who has swallowed bitter medicine. In their acting the emphasis on the physical was extraordinary.

Where Mr. Moscovitch excelled and other Shylocks have fallen short of him, was in exhibiting in the Jew a lurking doubt that justice will be done him; a doubt which makes him all the more resolutely implacable. Shylock's contempt for Antonio as a sentimentalist, a plunger, a bad merchant and a Christian was splendidly brought out. And a still subtler point he marked with extraordinary skill. Shylock's hatred is not a wild passion, it is a tamed passion; it is caged within another – a passion for legality. When the law will not allow him to be revenged, we feel he will not attempt to satisfy his revenge by violence – as Antonio might do. In the manner in which Mr. Moscovitch made the word bond – "my bond, my bond" – echo through the whole play, was expressed the longing for security of an oppressed people to whom the law is the only, but by no means certain, refuge. The sound of his voice at those moments will linger in my memory. His Shylock had the first quality it should possess; he was passionate in hate, in business, in family and race-feeling, in revenge and in despair.

BEN JONSON
AN OBJECT LESSON

(1921)

The Phœnix Society must be backed, and backed enthusiastically. Not only do their revivals give intense pleasure but the old plays they perform are precisely the right creative stimulant for contemporary and future dramatists. I enjoy a good realistic slice-of-life play as much as anybody can, but realism has proved an Aaron's rod which, having turned into a live serpent, has eaten up all the other serpents. Consequently, the monotony of our modern plays is deadly.

We have tied ourselves up with conventions only proper to one kind of play, and of that kind of play playgoers are getting heartily sick. What these old plays show us is, first, that the technique of the modern drama is absurdly narrow, that the taboo upon the aside, the soliloquy, the short drop-curtain scene is blighting, that these are not only legitimate but fine conventions, and that photographic similitude to life in a play may be utterly unimportant compared with loyalty to its essence. Once realism was stimulating; now it is a drug in the market. Shake ourselves free, not necessarily of it – I pray we may always have some good realistic plays – but free of the dogmatism which has sprung out of it, and we shall cheapen production, improve acting, and get on to something new.

But these old plays teach a still more important lesson that, after all, what counts in drama is dialogue. What has sickened people with contemporary drama is not that our plays deal

with men and women of to-day and their predicaments in a straightforward recognisable way, but that the modern dramatist, under the excuse of giving his characters only the words which they were in actual life most likely to speak, has let down dialogue to a flatness and ineptitude which it has never touched before. Pick up an average, good modern play – it is full of lines like "Let me make you a piece of toast."

Not long ago in these columns attention was drawn to the defects of long-winded naturalistic methods in fiction. Its practitioners pretend to make it a matter of conscience to put down all the facts; artistic principle is made an excuse for prolixity and slovenliness. The same is true of modern dialogue on the stage. Instead of attempting to express in words the fantastic genius of man's love for woman in a love scene, the naturalistic dramatist will merely order his hero and heroine to fall into each other's arms exclaiming "Mildred!" "Harry!"

When the play is printed, dots, of course, are put after the names to show us that these simple exclamations were charged with unspeakable passion.

I am not exaggerating. As early as 1913 Mr. Palmer, that excellent critic, drew attention to the scene in Mr. Galsworthy's *Eldest Son*, in which the hero, Bill, learns from the heroine, Freda, that she is about to have a child, and Bill makes the three following speeches: (1) "Freda!" (2) "Good God!" (3) "By Jove!"

Mr. Shaw alone of our leading dramatists has been all these years a bright exception. He writes sounder and more vigorous prose than almost anyone alive, and he takes care that his characters shall express themselves as well as he does. The words he puts into their mouths were never the words they were most likely to speak at that moment, but the most pointed they could conceivably utter – a more difficult thing to do, yet the one thing worth doing. His dramatic dialogues,

which critics refused to call plays, were pertinent reminders, at any rate, that, after all, words are of the very stuff of drama. A realist in thought, he has never been a slave to the pedantry of realistic technique.

In the old plays the Phœnix Society revives, this reminder strikes us still more vividly. As contributions to thought and stimulants to feeling they are often of negligible importance, but we came away from those performances longing to write a play; an impulse which only usually visits us after a long abstention from theatre-going. Why? Because we have been fired by an example of the glorious art of expression – felt what it can do, even when what is expressed is neither particularly new nor particularly true.

Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, which they acted last Sunday and Tuesday at the Lyric, Hammersmith, is a case in point. The humour of Ben Jonson is not of the first water; neither is his character-drawing first-rate. There is something coarse, thick-skinned, rough, in the temper of him (I am not thinking of the coarseness and harshness of his language); his comedy lacks the lambency of the finest humour; there is no real detachment in him; he is scornful and indifferent – two very different things; he is a son of earth, a Titan; there is nothing of Olympus in him. What he has is immense gusto and an intellectual, fundamentally hostile and contemptuous sense of human folly; he boasted himself a good hater, good fighter, and a master of his craft, and he was all three.

The classic criticism of his characters is to say that they are personifications of different humours or passions rather than complete human beings. But it is difficult to see how many an artist who has drawn characters with a hard outline and against whom this charge is not made, can, in that case, escape it. Tartuffe, for example, is hardly a more complete man than Volpone. Yet the critics are after saying something which is true of Ben Jonson's characters when they make

this charge: "In all these immortal figures (Swinburne is contrasting with Ben Jonson's some of the most famous comic characters) there is the lifeblood of eternal life which can only be infused by the sympathetic faith of the creator in his creature – the breath which animates every word, even if that word be not the very best word that might have been found, with the vital impulse of infallible imagination."

Mr. Eliot in an interesting essay on Ben Jonson has gone further into this point:

> Now we may say with Mr. Gregory Smith that Falstaff or a score of Shakespeare's characters have "a third dimension" that Jonson's have not. This will mean, not that Shakespeare's spring from feelings or imagination and Jonson's from the intellect or invention, they have equally an emotional source; but that Shakespeare's represent a more complex tissue of feelings and desires, as well as a more supple, a more susceptible temperament. . . .

He concludes that Jonson's characters are not less "alive," but that the world in which they "live" is a smaller one. Put in this way, Jonson's characters, if you think of them apart from their particular setting and their actions in it, cease to be interesting. They are rammed to the muzzle with vitality in that setting, but out of it they seem mechanisms. This seems to me much the same as saying that they are simplified down to walking monomaniacs, which is the classic criticism of them.

But Mr. Eliot is surely right in saying that Ben Jonson's "world" is comparatively a small one, and in hinting that the fault of the artist lies there. It is a fiery, vital, various world, full of glaring contrasts, bustle, cruelty and laughter, but there is something arid about it. After the third act, when even the two leagued rogues turned on each other with the ferocity of wild cats, began to feel as parched as if I were in a sandstorm. I was dazzled and delighted, but the marrow of my

humanity was scorched within me. All the characters, with the exception of a too docile wife and a too filial son, are what Carlyle would have called "unspeakably unexemplary mortals." It is no relief that terrible punishments are meted out at the end all round, a conclusion on which Jonson particularly prided himself. That curious, perfunctory, violent exhibition of moral indignation at the end only intensifies the impression of spiritual harshness and imaginative aridity. After Ben has revelled – with such enormous gusto – in the vitality of the audacious and perfectly heartless blackguardism of the whole crew, these Jehovian thunders are ridiculous and oddly sinister.

Swinburne is of the opinion that if we were to see for a moment what might possibly be said in extenuation of their villainies, the comedy would fall through and go to pieces; that the dramatic effect would then collapse, and that the instinct of a true artist in Jonson withheld him from allowing us even a momentary relation of half-sympathy or sympathetic understanding with these figures, I dispute that. I felt while watching the play that a greater artist would have done it, and also have made Bonario and Celia something more than insipid dummies of virtue and brought them nearer the foreground.

Volpone, the crafty, greedy and lecherous, rich, old man, must, of course, predominate, and let the world be by all means a world of Corbaccios (large ravens), Corvinos (little ravens), Voltores (vultures), hovering round the sham death-bed of the old fox, but a delicious fresh rill of comedy might have been introduced had Celia been the child of Corvino and Bonario her lover. Their relation would have been as the shadow of a rock in a thirsty land. We should have been in better trim to welcome again rays of the scorching brazen sun of mockery which blazes without intermission above this swarm of scrambling, biting, kicking creatures.

A work of art whatever its theme must somehow, somewhere, suggest the desirability of life. But Volpone is indubitably and splendidly a work of art. How is it then suggested? In the ingenuity of the composition? The ingenuity of that is triumphant, but it does not lie there. It is suggested by the vigour and richness and humour of the words in which these crazy Chrysophilites (they are *all* mad after gold) express themselves; in the glorious towerings of their passions and absurdities in speech.

Thus I come back to my theme: that these performances of the Phœnix Society have a peculiar value to us at the present moment, when the language of our stage is drab, shuffling and skimpy, when there is no joy, no exhilaration, hardly even colloquial hard-hitting in it. The cinema can do everything but make its figures talk; it is a dangerous rival to the theatre, as managers and dramatists know. Let dramatists see to it, then, they make it worth our while to *listen* to their characters.

The acting at the Lyric was excellent, considering how little time can be given to rehearsal. Mr. Holloway in the part of Volpone (he reminds one of Mr. Moscovitch in some of his gestures and intonations) was particularly good. Mr. Ion Swinley as Mosca (Volpone's accomplice), too, deserves praise. The part of Corbaccio is far easier; Mr. Lathbury introduced a suggestion of helpless amiability into it which perhaps ought not to have been there, but made a delightfully comic contrast to the vicious sentiments of the avaricious old gull. We should be grateful to all the actors; sometimes they did not articulate well, sometimes their movements were inexpressive and ungraceful, but these performances must be scratch performances and as such they must be judged. This one was most creditable.

IBSEN

THE DRAMATIST OF THE FUTURE

(1917)

This article is about Ibsen and *Ghosts* – now running at the Kingsway Theatre, I have put that heading at the top, hoping it may seem provocative. There are many who think the world has long ago absorbed as much "Ibsen" as the system can stand, and that, like a vaccinated person, it will not "take" again; there are others who regard him as a didactic and dingy playwright, as an egotistic and elementary thinker, and some of the *jeunes feroces*, I suspect, even suppose he was no artist. How natural it is, however, that such false opinions should be current I shall at once explain; and what follows is addressed to those who hold them. To those who at the first night felt like boys again, and glowed to find they had been no fools when they were young, I can only offer the mild pleasure of reading what they already believe, or, incidentally, perhaps the keener one of noting how much better it might have been put.

Soon after returning from the first performance of *Ghosts* I was rung up on the telephone.

Voice: "What did you think of it?"

D.M.: "Splendid play; poor performance." (*The production and the acting have improved immensely since the first night.*)

Voice: "What! Splendid? ... Pastor Manders? ... The whole thing? ... It was like hunting down a mangy old stag let out of a box for the day."

D.M. (*with the confidence of the critic whose ideas are as yet a rushing wind in his head, and seemingly irresistible*): "You just wait till you've read my article."

Voice (*expressing a mixture of patience, politeness, and scepticism*): "Well, know I'm..." (I caught a murmur, "... no artist and out of date"), "Well, good-night."

I felt every bit as polemical and confident as Mr. Archer or Mr. Shaw felt in the 'nineties. "Ibsen," I said firmly, as I replaced the receiver, "is among modern dramatists a sun among farthing dips." Not Art, indeed! Out of date! The notion that there were intelligent people who could hold such views was disgusting to me. Now, too, of all times; precisely when there was more humbug about than ever before, more need of soul-searching, more need of the kind of clinical introspection that Ibsen stimulates; now, when people were forcing themselves all day long, on principle, to forget some things and take others for granted, to feel some things and not to feel others, to steer exclusively by ideals and yet keep one eye askew on the main chance. Out of date, indeed! No artist! After the Ibsen battle had been thoroughly fought out and won too! It was disgusting.

But then it occurred to me that it was also inevitable; it was always thus things happened in the history of thought. A great man appears, or a sense of the world is born which has implications of importance (Evolution, for example), there is at once a prodigious shindy. All active minds start going for each other about it; while one writer sits forging arguments in its favour or against it, feeling he is giving his best to his generation, in the same street another is reading him and exclaiming: "The fool, the animal, the jackass!" As long as this battle rages, everyone, even if ignorant, is still intensely

aware of its importance (during this period the censorship of the Press or drama can do enormous harm), and everyone feels how much hangs upon it. At last discussion becomes a bore; a lull occurs; both sides begin to count their dead, and one to retire ("voluntary evacuation") from positions which have become ridiculous and untenable; the tone adopted being, "So that is what you meant? Why *we* drank in that with our mother's milk!" accompanied by a tacit resolve henceforth to kill only by kindness and silence.

But before this peace is patched up discussion will have raged up and down every sort of question which could possibly be connected with the new philosophy; and it is precisely over such remote practical implications that at this last stage of the controversy, discussion is likely to be fiercest and the loudest voices are likely to be raised. The consequences of this are serious. For the next generation remember consequently the artist or philosopher whose work has been alternately a weapon and a cockshy, as an *ad hoc* writer. They think of him inevitably as one whose work may once have been useful, but, since the shoe of social life pinches each generation in a slightly different place, must be now beside the point; and above all they come to regard him as a writer belonging to that inferior class of artists who find inspiration in the social problems of the moment. This has been the fate of Ibsen.

At the present moment many people actually think *Ghosts*, though it is better constructed, a play of the same calibre as *Damaged Goods*; a pamphlet it requires only a slight alteration in our laws to render nugatory. They think it is a play with disease for a theme; Oswald, they think, is the central figure. They are wrong. Ibsen was a profound and meditative mind. Whatever his story, his theme is always of lasting interest; it is, indeed, *the* supreme interest and attraction of the intellectual vision, the individual soul. It is Mrs. Alving who is the central figure of the play; the

revolution in her its theme. Miss Darragh depicted admirably Mrs. Alving's sorrows and her tenderness; less adequately the rebel, who with a great price has won her freedom; ironically indulgent when let alone, but savage and shameless when conventions and traditions would push her again from the little bit of solid ground she has found at last in the quagmire of her life.

Ibsen's theatre is the theatre of the soul. Important as he was, and is, as a social reformer, it is that which makes him even more important as an artist. Society changes quickly; the soul hardly at all; it is that which makes his work permanent. It is that which makes his plays thrilling, gives them their curious intensity, enables him to mingle with a realism which sometimes has even a perverse kind of commonness, fantastic symbols – rat wives, wild ducks, houses with lofty towers, and so to blend both together that the ordinary takes on a strange significance (a character in his plays can hardly thank for a match without seeming also to say something more), and the fantastically fanciful becomes in them oddly familiar. An architect who falls off his own scaffold because he would show off before a young lady; a sleek, shabby photographer addicted to noble poses and to shuffling away unpleasant thoughts by fooling with rabbits in a garret, like a child (a common type); a fraudulent financier, who after prison still hugs the dream of immense possibilities, and throws the cold shadow of his egotism across the lives of two devoted women; a successful sculptor who finds fame flat and is bored with his wife; smug and stuffy homes of all sorts, with here and there a character ugly or pathetic in his or her revolt against them; what dingy, mediocre events! And yet – what tragic plays! What insolent indifference to the surface value of materials; yet what profound intensity!

If one looked only at the sequence of events in Ibsen's dramas they would seem to have small value; the spell and

the beauty lie within. He invented the realistic tragedy; but his successors have mostly not observed how he did it. A passage in one of his letters throws light:

> Everything that I have written has the closest possible connection with what I have lived through, even if it has not been my own personal experience; in every new poem or play I have arrived at my own spiritual emancipation and purification – for a man shares the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which he belongs.

It is from his own dreaming, solitary mind they derive their intensity. There was always a connection, impossible perhaps to define, but there, between the nature of the theme he chose and the adventures of his soul. The base characters are not merely observed; they are known also by their kinship to the motives he has found in himself, squatting like toads in the marble virtues which his hammer has broken; the feeble are known as only a man who has lived a meticulously strenuous inner life himself can know weakness, its protean shapes and Boyg-like quality; the strong are read in the light of his own strength; they carry about with them, too, the roughness and badgered impatience of a long struggle, and youth in his plays is the cry in himself of all he had ever given up. How he respects the aplomb of their selfishness and trusts the directness of their desires!

Ibsen is the out-and-out revolutionary. He is the militant poet of one side of man's nature, a one-sided poet therefore if you like, but by far the greatest spokesman of that side. His plays were a bag of dynamite into which any social reformer could dip, but it was not the fall of this or that institution or law that interested him. His scepticism regarding political reforms was well known; the words "a committee has been appointed," when he read them in the papers, it is said, always made him laugh. There is a queer ironical poem of

his, addressed to a revolutionary orator, in which he says: "Go on, flood the world with your eloquence; let us have the deluge by all means, but then, please, allow me to torpedo the ark." These are not the sentiments of a man who feels intensely that man is "a political animal"; though that man is indeed such an animal was about the first truth he ever discovered about himself. Let it be admitted then: as a poet, Ibsen ignored that fact. He was the spokesman of the individualistic side of man's nature. If man is by nature one of a herd and nothing by himself, he is also conscious of being in himself the judge and dispenser of values, the end for which all traditions and customs exist. "The State is the curse of the individual," he wrote to Brandes; and it is not only the State, but all ideals, all aims, which ignore the simple, solid happiness of the individual and his right to it, that are also curses.

Men, according to Ibsen, are always being led by their idealistic noses away from the places where their welfare lies. His tragedies are stories of the sacrifice of natural good, of which the individual is the only judge, to some false ideal which has no instinctive root in human nature. Sometimes the ideal is a mean one as in *Ghosts* (Respectability), sometimes heroic as in *Brand* ("all or nothing" Religion), sometimes half-and-half as in *Gabriel Borkman* (Ambition, at once beneficent and egotistic), sometimes, as in *The Wild Duck*, a craze for saving souls; but the clash and tragedy is the same. It is "the joy of life," "the love life in the individual" which it is "the unpardonable sin" for any cause or reason to destroy. In his last play he turned on himself, on the artist; and in *When We Dead Awaken* he wrote a play inspired by the feeling that the disinterested artist was just as mad as the priest or the financier, the respectable citizen or the prig. Rubeck the sculptor is a man who has sacrificed his own and another's happiness to make out of it a symbol of the ideal. "The love

that belongs to the life of earth, the beautiful miraculous life of earth, the inscrutable life of earth – that is dead in both of us," Rubeck says to Irene. The ruthless artist is also a traitor to the natural good.

But supposing everybody believed only in what was right in their own eyes? This is the question with which those who are most conscious of man as "a political animal" pose the Ibsenites. It can only be countered by another question just as disquieting: "Suppose nobody did?" Upon what a wild, fantastic dance mankind would then be led, far from the natural goods on which his happiness (and therefore ultimately his integrity of feeling and thinking) must rest.

When I wrote "The Dramatist of the Future" at the head of this article I was thinking partly, too, that many people might well be feeling that men had been lately thinking of themselves too exclusively as "political animals," and that a violent revulsion towards a philosophy which respects the individual and his happiness more might be near. There may or may not be a revolution in the streets, but in the minds of men the highways will be broken and the waters will be out. Then Ibsen will be our poet.

ROSMERSHOLM

(1926)

Rosmersholm is a magnificent play. Do not miss *Rosmersholm*. It will remind you how high dramatic art can rise, and how deeply intellectual courage can probe human nature.

We attend so many plays, we read so many books, of trifling, varying merit, that we are apt to lose our sense of real achievement. Some people hope by directing destructive sniffs at the small meritorious successes of little men to preserve that sense – usually in vain. The important thing is to respond to greatness when we meet it, and to deplore incessantly its absence does not increase our power of response.

Like nearly all fine plays, *Rosmersholm* has a vital moral interest. Ibsen's genius is inseparable from his conscience. He is, indeed, the dramatist of the Protestant Conscience ("Save his own soul he hath no star") at its highest pitch of searching intensity. For this reason his work is repellent to those who rest upon authority and to those who are bored with, or made uneasy by, moral questionings. To both these types his works must seem pernicious and even unintelligent. In so far as such people cannot escape being impressed by his power, they will attribute it to his amazing "dramatic craftsmanship": a most incomplete analysis, a shocking-bad analysis, a shirking, loose analysis. I am sorry for those who hold that the theory that morals have never anything to do with art, or conscience with creation: for Ibsen is a difficulty, and so is Tolstoy, and so are – well no matter. It is impossible not to admire their works, and yet without their passionate preoccupation with moral values where would those artists be? True, it is possible, especially in the case of Tolstoy, to point to the interruptions of the moral theoriser as blemishes in his work. They often are. But that does not get us over the fact that his sense of life, which impresses by its beauty and startles by its reality, is saturated in conscience. In Ibsen's plays, too, it is the search for the right way of living which sharpens to penetration his eye for character and dramatic situations. To think that it is possible for anyone to bend upon life the intense attention which leads to discovery and creation, without something within him far more urgent than detached curiosity or a desire to write a good play, is to betray a colossal ignorance of psychology. It is the tension within – "I must know, know or perish" – that is the driving force behind the creative faculty in these writers. And to know what? To know what is most important to man, how it can be obtained and kept. A poodle is the most teachable of dogs because it is

the most greedy; Ibsen was the greatest of modern dramatists because he was the most hungry after truth.

The "moral" of an Ibsen play is seldom the most important thing – indeed, usually it is not there, or discoverable only by ignoring part of the play. What, however, is always significant is the manner in which moral issues in his plays are juxtaposed and the tension between them exhibited. If you are rather clever you will probably think you have discovered "a moral" in *Rosmersholm*; if you are clever you will probably not. When it was first performed the representatives of a Norwegian youth-movement wrote to Ibsen asking if the call to work for mankind were not the message of *Rosmersholm*. The hungry lambs looked up (you can see their faces); the shepherd, though he seemed so grim, was kind; he nodded a "No doubt, no doubt." "But," he added, "the play also deals with the war all serious people must wage with themselves to bring their lives into harmony with their convictions. Different spiritual functions do not develop evenly and abreast of each other in any one person. The intellect hurries on from victory to victory; the moral consciousness, what we call conscience, is, on the other hand, very conservative. It has its roots deep in tradition and the past. Hence the conflict." Then he adds, and the sentence should be printed on the programmes of even the most apparently didactic of his plays: "But the play is, of course, before everything a drama of human beings and human fate."

Rebecca West is an embodiment of the vanguard intellect; "Rosmersholm" of the moral consciousness, so slow to move, so hard to justify, so strangely authoritative.

And "Rosmersholm" broke her. You remember her cry before she goes to her death. "I am under the spell of the Rosmersholm view of life – *now*. I've sinned and must expiate it." But was *that* the tragedy for Ibsen, that the self-confidence of an amoral young woman who had hitherto always made

for what she wanted and grabbed it, who had slowly and slyly lured her benefactress to suicide in order to possess her husband, should have been sapped? Only that? To answer yes is to fail to measure the diameter of her creator's mind or the profundity of his doubts. Remember, that Rosmer has changed Rebecca. Her frantic passion for him had, under his influence, changed into love, bringing with it a new sense of values. She asserts this with all the energy of a woman ready to die to convince him of it. And it was true. We have watched on the stage altruism and delicacy of feeling begin to have a meaning for her. We have seen her change; seen her reject her adored one because the words in which he urges her to take him prove it cannot be a marriage of true minds. We have heard her confess to him, in the presence of her bitter enemy, his brother-in-law; a confession which leaves not a rag to cover her hideousness in her lover's eyes, in which she takes on herself the whole responsibility for Beata's death, in order to enable him to live henceforth with self-respect, as himself – not the man she once hoped to make him, but as himself, with all his inborn moral scruples and aspirations. It is true, he had changed her. She has become an "idealist," and presently she will die to prove it.

Disbelief in the possibility of that change from passion to love, not to believe in love – however rare you may think it, however common you may know its counterfeits to be – is the sign of a vulgar soul – such scepticism is only pardonable in a Democritus or two, and Ibsen was far from being either a vulgar soul or a laughing philosopher. He is not "on the side of" the amoral egotism of the young Rebecca. Had he been, he would have soon found rest, and we should have had from him, instead of masterpieces, robust materialistic plays, with "morals" attached as legible as posters; plays as cut-and-dried and cooked as Brieux's stage-tracts for the times. Nor, either, is he "on the side of" Rosmer with his fanatic's cry, "There is

no judge over us; therefore we must do justice upon ourselves." Yet it is impossible to study Ibsen without feeling how *near* it comes to being a cry also from his own heart. Ibsen was torn between two ways of taking life.

Rosmersholm is a play which springs from the divided allegiance of the modern conscience to two different moralities; both with their beauty, both seemingly fitted (and yet also unfitted) to guide men. The tug of war between the ethics of the will to power and Christianity, between the gospel of self-assertion and of renunciation had been a vital matter to Ibsen as early as *The Vikings*. In *Emperor and Galilean* he had attempted more, but only succeeded in depicting again their struggle, not their reconciliation. "Who shall conquer, the emperor or the Galilean?" The answer was: "he who shall swallow up both," but *he* does not appear, neither then nor at any time in Ibsen's work.

In *Rosmersholm* Ibsen transfers the same struggle into a psychological drama of modern life and then – watches what will happen. The result is mutual laceration, not reconciliation – unless that climax-scene between Rebecca and Rosmer, that moment's marriage between them, is intended to be, not merely a *Liebestod*, an exalted crisis of erotomania, but a symbolic union of the forces each represents. The scene, immensely powerful to read when the imagination of the solitary reader is glowing and awake, is nearly impossible to act. The only fault Ibsen has as a stage-craftsman is that sometimes he will ask too much from actors. There are moments in his drama when the characters, whose motives and dispositions have been revealed with psychological exactness, suddenly become luminous and transparent; so that we are not so much aware of *them*, as of the forces they represent, and when the words they have to speak become expressive of their ambiguous condition. Sometimes, on the other hand, he frankly introduced a symbolic non-human figure to achieve

this effect; the Rat Wife, for example, who enters a solid suburban home. When these moments occur (they are frequent in the later drama, in *The Master Builder*, in *When We Dead Accaken*) it is important that the producer should explain to the actors that, however solidly real they have been till then, they are now also almost like figures in a symbolic drama. To modulate out of realistic psychological drama into poetic, symbolic drama puts an enormous strain upon both actors and producers; yet upon that successful modulation all depends. The beauty of Ibsen's work is at stake.

Such a moment is the suicide of the two main figures in *Rosmersholm*. There is another moment just before it in the play, in which a minor figure – Brandel, a sort of little Peer Gynt (exceedingly well played by Mr. Farquharson) should appear with the effect almost of a phantom. He crosses the scene twice. The first time he is a megalomaniac day-dreamer, who is at last prepared to thunder out his message to the world, and give away his hoarded gold of thought. He acts for the moment as a stimulant to Rosmer's courage when meeting the harsh conventionalism of Kroll, utter sham though Brandel is. (Sham prophets often help a little with people more sincere than themselves.) The second time Brandel appears it is as a self-confessed bankrupt. On Rosmer he has now the effect of a shabby spectre of all idealistic aspiration. I cannot suggest any definite alteration in Mr. Farquharson's manner, but the staging of his appearance might well help him more to achieve that spectral effect. (I am indebted for this Brandel point to Professor Weigand's excellent book *The Modern Ibsen*.)

CHEKHOV

UNCLE VANYA

(1914)

Uncle Vanya is an unforgettably good play. I do not think the Stage Society did justice to it; yet there were excellent passages of acting in their performance. The play is one of those which require, just because the dialogue is so natural, an extreme finesse if its values are to be fully brought out. I thought highly of Miss Gillian Scaife's Sonya. Indeed, my respect increases every time I see her act. She was excellent and touching as the secretary in Mr. Frank Harris's *Bucket Shop* a few weeks ago, and now in a part nine times as deep she has proved herself adequate. That cold word implies great praise in this connection. Mr. Guy Rathbone as Uncle Vanya was extremely good at moments. When, for instance, he stood at the door with the roses, and during the last five minutes, while Sonya makes her dim little speech about the happy world beyond the grave, where both will forget, she thinks, the stale ache of their disappointments. Oh, Mr. Rathbone understood his part as he sat there motionless, the pencil with which he had been totting up accounts still between his fingers, staring before him and suffering as only the passive, the empty, the weak can suffer, soothed a little – do you know the irony of that? – by consolations which do not console. . . . At least those two, the uncle and the niece,

will be sweet and patient towards each other; that is the shred of comfort we spectators carried away when the curtain fell on Chekhov's tragedy. It is a real tragedy. It has in it the flatness and poignancy of life itself. There is no depth of reflection upon humanity at which it were inappropriate to discuss this play if one were master of obedient words.

In the garden of a country house in Russia, remote and ramshackle as such houses mostly are by our standards, are gathered a strange (and yet how familiar!) set of people. There is an old lady who never has her nose out of a literary essay or a pamphlet, a middle-aged man (Uncle Vanya, her son), restless, sensitive, intellectual, a doctor who has a poetic passion for forestry, and is bored by his work (he, too, like Vanya, feels he has run to seed), a quiet girl who is withering on the stalk (Sonya), a queer, simple, gentle hanger-on, who contributes a little music and any amount of hero-worship when required (he is a peculiarly Russian type in this sense, that in our country he would not find it so easy to graft himself on to a family), a faithful old servant, and a retired professor of literature about sixty (father of Sonya by a first marriage), and his young, curiously attractive wife. These last two have a maleficent influence upon the others, and to understand how this influence affects them you must appreciate the spiritual atmosphere in which all of them, the professor and his wife included, live and move and have their being.

Chekhov follows in the steps of Turgenev. His favourite theme is disillusionment, and as for the kind of beauty he creates, beneath it also might be written "desolation is a delicate thing." He is fond of the same kind of setting for his stories as Turgenev: summer woods, an old country-house full of cultivated people, who talk and talk. There you will find the idealist who melts over the futility of his own idealism, the girl who keeps a faster clutch upon daily duties in order to forget that youth is sliding away under her feet, the slightly

stronger, clever man turned maudlin-cynical after his failure to find a purpose which can hold him – to think, so he feels, *he*, too, should be wasted! – the old woman who only wants things to go on peaceably on old humdrum lines. The current of days is slow here; the air they breathe is sultry with undischarged energy, and broken only by unrefreshing nerve-storms; it is an atmosphere of sighs and yawns and self-reproaches, vodka, endless tea, and endless discussion. These people are like those loosely agglutinated sticks and straws which revolve together slowly in some sluggish eddy. They long to be detached and ride down the rushing stream, which they imagine somewhere near sparkles for ever past them. Where it is rushing they do not know. Some day – two hundred, five hundred years hence – perhaps life *will* be life. And those blessed heirs of all the ages, will they be grateful to their poor predecessors who made them possible? It is doubtful – another reason for self-pity. Stop! This is ridiculous (so they argue). What *are* we doing for them? Absolutely nothing. Indeed, what, *what* is there to do?

That is the atmosphere in which Chekhov's intellectuals live. It differs from that of Turgenev's generation in being a still closer air, still more unresponsive to effort and hope. There are no Bazarovs or Insarovs to break its spell and bring down the violent rains of tragedy. It creeps about every man and woman of them like a warm muffling mist, narrowing the world to the garden gates. We have no right to label this atmosphere "Russian," and regard it with complacent curiosity. Have you not felt that fog in your throat on English lawns, in English houses? Indeed, the main point of difference between this spell-bound cultivated Russian society and the English variety is not in our favour. If Chekhov's intellectuals are half dead, the other half of them is very much, painfully much, alive. They suffer more consciously; there is intensity in their lassitude; at least they torture themselves, and each

other, by displaying each his own bankruptcy. They are not comatose and outwardly contented, but sensitive, self-conscious, and critical.

It is a party in a parlour,
Crammed just as they on earth were crammed,
Some sipping punch – some sipping tea,
But, as you by their faces see,
All silent, and all – damned!

– Wordsworth's description of an English family circle in Hades will not fit them. Damned they may be, but silent, no. They have a wail in them which is responsive not only to their own frustrations, but to the inevitable disillusionment of life. It is this quality in Chekhov's work, birth, though it essentially was, of a phase, a period of Russian history, which must keep it fresh:

Entbehren sollst du! sollst entbehren!
Dasist der ewige Gesang.

Indeed, when the curtain has been up a little time and we have watched the grey-haired Vanya mooning about, tortured by a tremulous passion for the professor's wife, longing to fall upon her heart, one weak wave of ecstasy, humility, and abandonment; watched, too, the restless doctor, also attracted to the house by Elena, the zest for his work ebbing out of him, we say to ourselves: "Why, these people are suffering from an unduly protracted youth!" In Vanya's elderly passion there is indeed something of the piteousness, humiliation, and beauty of a young longing that expects everything and does not understand itself. All these people, except the professor and the two old women, believe that life would be wonderful, if, if, if.... And to feel like that is to be, as far as it goes, young. It is young to want to prop your ladder against a horn of the moon, and also young not to know that though

we have immortal longings in us, there are – eternal paradox through which the work of the world gets done – wonderfully satisfying properties in a little real bread. It is like these Chekhov characters not to know that. A word or two more about them – and if I tell the story in a few sentences, the tragedy will be before you; for it is a true tragedy, lying in the persons themselves, in their passions and minds, and not in the external coincidences.

First, then, Elena. She has already played her stake. In the professor she thought – Heaven help her! – she had found a great mind, one it would be good and thrilling always to be near. Now, she has found her mistake. She is like a ship aground on a mudbank, and the only breezes which come to shake her sails are the passions she rouses in men, but she does not believe that they will blow her to any port where she would be. Like the others she has no sense of direction, no destination. Vanya's helpless passion merely pesters her, and what between that and the exactions and pomposities of her eminent husband, who, now he has retired, only wants to watch his diseases and jaw to admirers, she is almost beside herself.

The doctor, Astrov, through knowing better than the others what he wants and despising them, does move her a little. She nearly... but she is afraid. This man throws a fascination over poor, plain, dutiful Sonya, too. He has that attraction for women which the idealist a little damaged often exercises. Astrov, to Sonya, is so fine in himself; his slackness and coarseness are to her but wounds he got beneath the devil-defended walls of his peculiar virtues. He is a person to be saved (there is joy, too, in that) and comforted as well as loved; then he is handsome, and his voice is beautiful, and she is most affectionate.

Lastly, the old professor, he is an industrious and magniloquent fraud. We know his prototypes and regret that so

large a public should read again with so much admiration what has often been written before. For years Uncle Vanya and Sonya have slaved on the estate to provide tribute for the loquacious monster, the former at first with the conviction he was watering the roots of genius. On retirement the professor came to live there, bringing his beautiful, unhappy, baleful wife. That was event number one in the play; event number two, they departed. In between arrival and departure nerve-storms (one of them homicidal), exasperations, and draggle-tailed disorder. Astrov seeking to renew his capacity to feel by keeping near Elena's charms, forgets his work, Sonya is tortured by his continual presence, the long-retarded tide of youth is loosed together with a flood of bitterness in Uncle Vanya, and upstairs the tyrannic old invalid gasses and scribbles and groans among his medicine bottles.

Elena and Sonya had a *rapprochement* late one night, after the men had been drinking. Elena ever so tenderly drew from Sonya her heart's secret, and both women cried and were so happy. She undertook to sound Astrov and find out if there was any hope for Sonya. She felt very embarrassed next day when she had to speak to him; it was too exciting. Did her sensitive antennae tell her that they would soon begin to talk about themselves? Yes, no, yes; I think so; but, of course, she thought she was only thinking of Sonya. It ended by his seizing her in his arms, and that moment Vanya, who had been out to pick her a bunch of "autumn roses" (that touch of sentiment in his departing words had exasperated her), returned, stood in the doorway, and saw them. If a man of forty-six could squeal with sudden misery like a child, we should have heard him.

Then down comes the professor and summons a family conclave. He has made a resolve. The country is intolerable; they must sell the estate and all live in the town. This is too much for Vanya; he explodes at the old vampirine humbug,

and wild with hysteria, he dashes from the room, crying, "I know what must be done!" Everybody flies after him. We heard a shot. Of course, we thought he had shot himself. No; in rushed the professor leaping like a hare, coat-tails flying, mouth open, eyes goggling, and after him Vanya with a revolver and Sonya clinging to his arm. He wrenched himself free; fired missed again!

It is hard to describe the effect of this scene upon one. It hits one between wind and water – between laughter and tears. The futility! During the last act we live in poor Vanya's heart, feeling his exhaustion, and shame, and that dreariest of all sensations: the beginning of life again on the flat, when a few hours before it has run shrieking up the scale of pain till it seemed the very skies might split. If I were a painter and painted the animated features of Tragedy I should not forget the puffy, sodden-eyed familiar who peeps from behind her with a smile, something kind if it were not so vacantly meaningless; I should not forget the heavy Goddess Anticlimax.

In this act Dr. Astrov tries to get from Vanya a bottle of morphia he has pocketed: "Go out into the woods and put a bullet through your head if you want to, but give me that bottle." Vanya sullenly refuses; but one touch of affection from Sonya gets it from him. Then he has to rouse himself to say goodbye to the professor, who, of course, is leaving at once, and he receives from him a double salute on each cheek, perfunctory as the stropping of a razor. Everything has been overlooked; the old man feels now quite sure of his tribute. Elena and Astrov have their farewell scene, He tells her she has been a fool. Here were woods, even a ruin! She is sure to yield to a lover in town sooner or later, and hired rooms are not a lovely setting for a love affair. She is going, so she kisses him passionately. And at last Vanya and Sonya sit down together at the dusty table to work; work that is the only chance.

One after the other the inhabitants of the house come into the room and settle down into their old neglected habits. "They've gone," they say, one after the other, "they've gone." Astrov has gone; Elena has gone; uncle and niece are sitting side by side. It is then she comes closer to him and makes that dim little speech about the time when all tears will be wiped away, when, looking back, even the long years before them will seem beautiful. Vanya cannot say a single word.

The technical qualities of this play are superb. Note that soliloquies (there are three or four) do not conflict in the least with perfect naturalism in dialogue. Our dramatists' terror of introducing soliloquy is absurd. Mr. Granville-Barker, I implore you, put this play in your repertory.

DESOLATION IS A DELICATE THING

(1925)

The men of Leinster have a proverb "All the cows in Connaught have long horns," and doubtless many who go to the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, to see *The Cherry Orchard* come away thinking that such characters are peculiar to Russia. Of course the "atmosphere" is Russian, and this is one of the difficulties which, not unnaturally, the company failed to overcome. A Russian would no doubt smile at some of the scenes for being wrong as far as imponderables are concerned, just as an Englishman might smile at a performance of Galsworthy in Milan; but though the "atmosphere" is Russian the human-nature in the play is universal. That is what makes it moving. Take Gaev, perhaps the most fantastic character in it, who, whenever a thought stabs him or he has to make a painful decision, whisks off his mind to his favourite game, billiards, and cries out, "Cannon off the red and into the centre pocket." How very Russian! exclaims the Englishman who takes refuge from worries in cricket scores, and in the middle of a quarrel with his wife will withdraw

his mind and think of the approach shot he is going to make at the third hole next Saturday.

I have, I am glad to say, known a "perpetual student"; and surely all have met an impulsive, hazy Madam Ranevsky (Lyubov), who gives largesse instead of paying bills, is a prey to any adventurer, and slowly, tender-heartedly resigns all she loves rather than stop muddling along. No; if you regard *The Cherry Orchard* as a study in national character you will miss its point, and, worse loss, you will not be touched, for nothing chills sympathy so much as consciousness of superiority. There is a difference, but it is not a deep one, between these characters and ourselves: the conventional façade of self-respect is not kept up between them; they would admit to being the childish creatures they are. This atmosphere of impulsive candour is intensified by Chekhov's method of making character reveal itself casually, irrelevantly. It is a method which requires the most careful minute acting. In acting Chekhov "timing," the right pause before speaking and the right change of tone are more than usually important, since it is not so much through literal meaning of remarks as through the attitude they betray in the speakers that we are conducted into the heart of the drama.

Take one instance: Trofimov, "the perpetual student," "the mouldy young man," who has been ten years taking his degree, ex-tutor to Lyubov's boy who was drowned, is obviously in love, or about to be in love, with her daughter Anya. He has been boasting (there is some truth in the boast too) that Lyubov need not be afraid; he is above passion. He has been scolding her, as the young will do, because she will not "face facts" – the fact that she must sell her home and look forward to a new life. She has replied, as elderly people often reply, "You settle every problem so trenchantly! Dear boy, isn't that because you haven't yet understood one of your own problems through suffering? You look forward boldly.

But isn't it because you don't see and don't expect anything dreadful because life is still hidden from your young eyes? You're braver, more honest, deeper than we are; but think, be just a little magnanimous – have pity on me. I was born here, you know, my father and mother lived here, my grandfather lived here. I love this house. I can't conceive life without the cherry orchard. If it really must be sold – then sell me with the orchard. (She kisses him). My boy was drowned here. Pity me, be kind."

"You know I feel for you with all my heart," says Trofimov. And her reply shows how vital for the drama it is that there should be coldness in his voice. "Not like that" – she exclaims "you should say that so differently." Then a wave of wide, maternal tenderness sweeps over her: "Don't be hard on me, Petya – I love you as one of ourselves. I would gladly let you marry Anya – I swear I would – only, dear boy" (here the practical mother speaks), "you must take your degree. You do *nothing* – you're just tossed by fate from place to place. – And" (suddenly she sees him from outside, a poor, weedy, feckless fellow) "you must do something with your beard to make it grow. (She laughs.) You look so funny." Trofimov answers sullenly, "I've no wish to be a beauty," and picks up a telegram which her lover has sent her from Paris.

The sight of it sets her off wailing about the man whom she still loves in spite of his abominable treatment of her; and Trofimov, the remark about his beard rankling, blurts out angrily the truth: that this fellow lives on her and that she is a fool. As in real life, it is the feeling behind the words she answers. She, too, flares up. She sees again before her not the affectionate, high-minded Petya, but weedy, presumptuous, pretentious weakling. "You should be a man at your age – understand love." Wounding words pour from her lips. He is a prude – a comic fool, a freak, a scrap of a man – "At your age you haven't even a mistress." "You, *above* love!

You're a –" and Trofimov in distracted agony, crying "This is awful," dashes from the room. There is a crash and the sound of laughter outside. He has fallen downstairs! Lyubov is now very repentant, and when he enters again presently (there is an untidy party going on) she insists on their dancing together. She, like a woman, is glib in asking to be forgiven; Petya is silent and still sore.

In almost every other modern play this scene would stand out as a moment of condensed emotion and revelation of character. In *The Cherry Orchard* it is only part of a consistent perfection. There is not five minutes space anywhere in the dialogue, which would not, like a drop beneath a microscope, be found swarming with life. I have translated it here into a sort of Braille, raised letters for the blind, because those bracketed comments, insulting to the intelligence of the sensitive, bring home the special importance of "timing" and intonation in acting Chekhov. All depends upon the actors making pauses, pace, tone psychologically significant, so that we are made to feel the twists and turns of emotion within the speakers. If this is difficult in a dialogue, it is harder still when several people are speaking disjointedly and seemingly about indifferent matters. It was due to careless "timing" that passages in the play seemed at the Lyric huddled and muddled. Perfection in this respect, however, is hard to attain without the pains which, even with the best will in the world, few companies can afford to take. No work requires more delicacy in orchestration. Even the poignancy of the departure of the family at the end of the last act depends on the way in which the interjected remarks, "The things are all ready," "Here are your goloshes," the hopeful cry of Anya, "Good-bye old home," the flourish of Trofimov, fall into a deep pool of still hopeless emotion, and make rings there.

What a master Chekhov is of farewells! Recall the last act of *The Three Sisters*, when the regiment marches away, taking

with them the sisters' friends and their last hope, of the dim little speech of Sonya at the close of Uncle Vanya – "We must go on living. We shall go on living, Uncle Vanya," a speech so touching in the inadequacy of the comfort it can bring; and then that sudden rush of emotion in this play, when brother and sister fall on each other's necks; a desolation of spirit led up to with such delicate art, interrupted so naturally, and heightened so dramatically, by the constant intrusion of the commonplace. Chekhov understood better than anyone that just as walking is a perpetual falling so living is a perpetual series of good-byes, and that courage lies not so much in the power of looking forward to new things as in the power to break with the old. These two hapless elderly people could not do that. The young Anya and "the perpetual student" had unsatisfied curiosity and day-dreams to support them; the other two only their incorrigible fecklessness.

We get close to the spirit of Chekhov himself in these scenes of farewells. He could not "break the parting word into its two significant halves adieu," though the tenderness of his indulgence sprang from seeing life as a constant slipping from one good-bye into another. It is difficult to suggest a philosophy which is never formulated. It is a feeling rather than a thought which his work leaves behind, a feeling that though everything is brief, precarious and empty, just because that is all, there is a kind of sacredness about it which the angry cynic and impatient moralist are too stupid to feel. Get rid of enormous hopes, especially of exorbitant expectations regarding yourself and others, and you will share an emotion towards mankind in which irony and sympathy are so blended that it leads the living, too, beyond "a vale of tears."

I will admit no writer to be a greater writer than Tolstoy, and if as a reader of men and women I am about to compare him for a moment with Chekhov to his disadvantage, I am not forgetting Tolstoy's superiority as a poet and a creator. With

terrible insight Tolstoy puts his finger on the very spot and tells us we ail there and there. After that pitiless diagnosis, since he is wise, he too, forgives. But in Chekhov penetration and sympathy are not successive movements of the mind, but simultaneous; a single faculty, thanks to which no weakness escapes him or remains unpardoned. It is a subtler justice.

Consciousness of the futility of men and the humiliating brevity of their passions, tragedies and noble impulses, also leaves behind a kind of phantom, first cousin to hope. It is a very gentle irony which makes Chekhov put into the mouth of the ineffectual Trofimov the expression of man's hopes – a double irony, I think, which reflects as much on the practical Lopahin as on the indolent "perpetual student" himself.

In the dialogue between him and Lyubov quoted above observe how even in two such affectionate and effusive people egotism keeps them apart – to join, to part again, and so on inevitably for ever. One source of the poignant impression Chekhov's picture of life makes upon us is that justice is done in it to the isolation of human beings. Each lives in his or her bubble of egotism; only at moments do those bubbles break and join, The note is struck at the very beginning of the play when the longed-for travellers arrive.

DUNYASHA. We've been expecting you so long (*takes Anya's hat and coat*).

ANYA. I haven't slept for four nights on the journey. I feel dreadfully cold.

DUNYASHA. You set out in Lent, there was snow and frost, and now? My darling! (*laughs and hisses her*). I have missed you, my precious, my joy. I must tell you.... I can't putt off a minute.

ANYA (*wearily*). What now?

DUNYASHA. Epihodov, the clerk, made me a proposal just after Easter.

ANYA. It's always the same thing with you... (*straightening her hair*). I've lost all my hairpins... (*she is staggering from exhaustion*).

This stress upon natural universal egotism takes sublimity from the sorrows of those we watch, but it adds to the moving reality of their sufferings.

And we must not forget Chekhov's laughter. *The Cherry Orchard* is in part a comedy, and a comedy which verges, as Chekhov said himself, on farce. My general criticism of the Lyric performance is that it was too lugubrious. The comic element was submerged. The actors were too self-conscious to act the farcical passages with due extravagance, all except Mr. Alan Napier (Gaev). The rainbow effect of laughter shining through a rain of tears was lost; it would also have made the play more moving. Chekhov, as his letters show, was most insistent it should not be. Mr. Gielgud's Trofimov and Mr. Alan Napier's Gaev were the parts played best. Lopahin is an extremely difficult part, and a very important one; Lopahin is less of a piece than the rest.

D'ANNUNZIO

(1918)

Fortunate man, Signor D'Annunzio, to have enjoyed European fame before thirty, and at home that thrilling renown youth dreams of; to have been young and a nation's poet; to have been marvelled at, adored, and, thanks to possessing also the gifts of an amazing *improvisatore* and an orator's vanity, seldom to have disappointed those whom he met! For I am told that in youth Signor D'Annunzio's conversation was intoxicating to those already his admirers, that metaphor bloomed in it with the same triumphant exuberance as in his books, and that its Swinburnian-Wagnerian ecstasy carried listeners along, just as swiftly as his readers, into those regions of feeling where "the poetically nonsensical becomes good sense and the Eternal Feminine draws us aloft." Later, in middle age, to have played at a national crisis such a part as no poet has played since Lamartine, could not, after such a youth, have proved a very heady experience – if it were not Nature's rebate on his peculiar endowments that everything must fly to their possessor's head; so that, in the case of Signor D'Annunzio, one suspects that the purchase of a tiepin probably sets up there a considerable cerebral commotion.

He was lucky, again, in the moment at which he reached France, where European reputations are made. They were getting a little tired of Tolstoy and Ibsen, and all the books too comprehensively labelled "*les littératures des Nords*"; they were sick of their realistic masters and ready to hail *a renaissance Latine*. As for his introduction into England – any

moment is a happy one for a foreigner who carries credentials. For England in this respect is rather like a hospitable, inept hostess, who welcomes anyone from an unknown social world as though the cup of her admiration were at last full, never dreaming that in her own familiar circle could be found people as rare and entertaining. There is a great fluster over him while he is taking off his coat; but soon you may observe her eye roving in calculation to the door which is to admit soon the next and possibly still more exciting stranger.

Of course, Signor D'Annunzio might always have been sure among our intelligentsia of the welcome accorded to a Gorki or the most passionately confused scribblings from Dostoievsky's wastepaper basket.

He has been fortunate, too, in contingent respects. The greatest actress of her time has interpreted his women, and he has been unusually blessed in his translators. M. Hérelles' translations of his novels have the freedom and vividness of originals, and Mr. Arthur Symons has translated several of his plays with patient and delicate respect for their verbal beauty.

It was his translation of *La Città Morta* the Stage Society performed. The fluency and the richness of the dialogue were perceptible – I was about to say even through the elocution of Mr. Stack; but no one could, at those moments, have been aware of them had not the beautiful speaking of Miss Maire O'Neill shown one that they must pervade the whole play. The daring preciosity of Mr. Farquharson's utterance (half gabble, half nimblest mastery of pace, intonation and articulation) brought out the dramatic qualities in a dialogue which might easily have run too sluggishly. Indeed, the performance was the queerest mixture of good and bad.

To watch Miss Maire O'Neill as Anna (the blind wife of the poet Alessandro) made me sorry I had never seen Duse in the part; but it was her merits, not her shortcomings, which

made me regret it. The one respect in which I inferred she fell short was in a failure to express a certain mortal fatigue and intense sensitiveness; for the sadness and composure which belong to the part, and Miss O'Neill reflected so well, are those of a woman whose personal life has been almost worn out, and in whom only the nerves are still alive and a heart for others.

In the first act Mr. Farquharson was admirable. He has an imaginative technique for tortured or bedevilled characters which is very remarkable. Those who saw him as old Karamazov, or as Herod in *Salome* have never forgotten him. In this play as the brother of Bianca Maria, who is seized suddenly by an incestuous passion for her, he was too lavish of those distressing physical manifestations of inward disturbance which he can command. He did not hoard them carefully enough for the moments of acutest torture and self-disgust. The suggestion of the play is that this unclean passion is a spiritual influence breathed into him from long communion with the dead Atrides, like the very dust he has swallowed in excavating their tombs in this parched, haunted land; a torrid country where water is the very stuff of poetry, and where these four have been toiling in an atmosphere of mental excitement and emotional tension such as makes human kindness and detachment like the shadow of a rock in a thirsty land.

The most poignant beauty occurs at those moments when each in his or her separate way struggles to keep fast hold of those elements in their relations to each other, relations which are becoming so direfully entangled. For Alessandro also loves Bianca Maria, and she him.

Mr. Farquharson rendered effectively Leonardo's entrance, when he describes how he broke into Agamemnon's tomb and saw him lying there among the treasure – his wife, his children and Cassandra beside him. He rendered Leonardo's triumph,

wonder, and exhaustion finely, passionately; and he succeeded in suggesting also that lurking terror as of one who knows he is possessed by an influence he loathes, even at the moment of his triumph. In spite of blemishes the force and beauty of the play emerged – at least, they do so for me now in recollection. When Leonardo has killed his sister in order that the hideous drama from the world of the dead may not be enacted once more in the lives of the living, the play closes with Anna's cry. She knows without touching that she is stooping over the body of Bianca. Her cry, "At last I see!" expresses her sudden comprehension of what in her blindness her divining mind had long been reaching out to understand – the nature of the strange trouble which has been creeping upon them. The parallel between Cassandra and Anna is not worked out by the dramatist; he hints at it – uses it as a romantic intensification. Anna comes out of Maeterlinck; indeed the atmosphere is derived from Maeterlinck, with the addition to it of the author's own careering, quivering sensuality. The best poetry seldom springs from reflected sensibility, and it was in such passages as that describing the delight of drinking with face buried in a stream or in the exalted rhetoric of the love scene between Bianca and Alessandro that power was most to be felt. The pitch which those love scenes reach may be measured by the fact that in one of them a long passage has been inserted from Swinburne's *Triumph of Time*, and yet no one is conscious of a sudden transition to purple. I have used the words "force" and "beauty" in connection with this play, yet it left me unsatisfied, even resentful, that I should have been compelled to use them.

Signor D'Annunzio's art does not either move or delight me profoundly. From his novels I have derived a pleasure which is akin to an urchin's flattening his nose against a pastry-cook's window, coupled, of course, with delight in the spectacle of a temperament deploying itself without check and having at its

command to an astounding degree the means of expression precisely suited to it. Signor D'Annunzio is undoubtedly a great master of the decorative and the erotic.

In a fine critical essay Henry James went the round of the novels, like a plumber looking for an escape of gas which his nose tells him must exist, in a house arrased with purple like a king's. In that essay he makes the discovery that the very quality lacking in them is the defect against which the artist might have seemed to be most on his guard. In spite of being packed with beautiful descriptions of exquisite things, of the passions at their most rarefied as well as at their most devastating physical intensity, in spite of the personages concerned being the most exalted types, either in attainments, manners of tradition, the work as a whole lacks distinction. The pervading odour which fills these chambers, to furnish which history, art, archaeology, nature, have been pillaged with marvellous industry and discrimination, is an unmistakable whiff of vulgarity.

My nose does not detect that in this play, but there is about it also a too-much-ness, a kind of facility akin to vulgarity. It is effect, that effect the dramatist is thinking of all the time. When a writer sits down deliberately to move us to tears he usually fails, and when he piles beauty on beauty and aims only at beauty he is apt to make us feel a little squeamish. The reader who is treated like an organ whose stops are being pulled out can only then admire the skill with which it may be done, not the work of art itself. The charge of insincerity has only a meaning in criticism when it is equivalent to the charge of superficiality. In a moral sense Signor D'Annunzio is magnificently sincere in his interests, his admirations, his tastes, but he remains superficial. Except where the senses are directly concerned, he plays chiefly upon the prestige values of things. Gold is a beautiful metal, but how he runs the word to death in this play! His sense of the

æsthetic values of things, incidents and emotions is that of a connoisseur rather than an artist. He has felt the quality of Maeterlinck and appraised it to a nicety. Well, he will use it like a colour to tincture his drama of passion. Anna shall be blind. Why should she not be? It will give her aloofness and mystery – extra pathos. He will suggest that the fate of Cassandra is hers, yet she neither foresees anything nor understands what is going on round her. Never mind, that she should be another Cassandra carries with it a romantic association, the intensity of which is not to be lost.

Then there is the idea of fatality; of a guilty lust which possesses a man against his will. How much more romantic to connect that possession with the ashes of legendary princes whose names have been enshrined in poetry! Let, then, the fury of their dead passions blow with their dust about the world and infect people. It is a wonderful idea? Yes, but it is also rather childish.

JAMES JOYCE'S EXILES

(1918)

Exiles is a remarkable play. I am more sure of this than of having understood it. I could never undertake to produce it unless the author were at my elbow; and when a critic feels like that about a play which has excited him it means he has not quite understood it. What I can do is to give an account of the play and show where I was puzzled. But first I must come to terms with a misgiving. It is a treat to be puzzled by a play, so perhaps I overrate this one because it has puzzled me? I do not think that is the case, but that possibility is the grain of salt with which what follows must be taken.

To be made to wonder and to think about characters in a play is a rare experience – outside the drama of Ibsen. It is a pleasure far excelling the simple pleasure of delighted recognition which is all that the character-drawing in the ordinary respect-worthy play provides. On the stage temptations to superficiality and exaggeration are so many, and the drama is a form which requires so much condensation of subject-matter and imposes so many limitations that, within those limits, all except duffers and men of genius are, alas, more or less on a level! Once a certain knack is learnt the happy proficient in play-writing finds he can produce a play with an expenditure of a fifth of the intellectual energy and emotion necessary to produce a novel of the same calibre. If he has more to give, it does not show; if not, it does not matter, for what he may still be able to produce may be on a par with the work of a better intellect. Hence there is so much truth in sayings like:

"In the art of play-writing construction is everything"; "The idea of a good play should be capable of being written on half a sheet of note-paper," &c. They are certainly true of the common run of respect-worthy plays, but they are only true of them.

Exiles excited me for the same reason that the plays of Ibsen excite me – the people in it were so interesting. Ibsen's characters have roots which tempt one to pull at them again and again. And they are so deeply embedded in the stuff of experience that tugging at them brings up incidentally every sort of moral, social and psychological question, upon which those who would understand themselves and others can go on meditating, while feeling that they have still more to learn. The relations of Ibsen's characters to each other are presented with a sureness and brevity which gives the impression of masterly definition, and yet the complexity and obscurity of intimate relations between living people at intense moments are there too. If one lays finger on a spinning rainbow top one discovers that the effect has been produced by a few discs of different coloured paper (red, green, yellow, and blue) superimposed upon each other; but while it was spinning that changing iridescence had too many hues to be identified. The rainbow top will pass as an emblem of the manner in which the plays of Ibsen satisfy at once the two prime contemplative pleasures – the exercise of the analytical faculty and delight in watching the movement of life.

I do not take Ibsen's name in vain in connection with the work of Mr. Joyce. It is not (I beg you to believe) that habit so common in critics of chattering about anything but the subject in hand which persuades me to approach *Exiles* through the art of Ibsen. It is extraordinary, but the greatest of modern dramatists has as yet only had a destructive effect on the drama of this country. The plays of Ibsen have destroyed a certain amount of nonsense. Of

late years his influence has been countered by the suggestion that he is a writer of problem plays, and "problems," it is explained, have nothing to do with art. Ibsen is supposed to be out of date! Of all the verdicts which are now passed on the writers of the last century, this is the one which maddens me most. That great contemplative mind! ... But the point I wish to make is that constructively Ibsen has had little influence. Few dramatists have learnt from his example. I hail Mr. Joyce as one of the few who have grasped the value of two principles in dramatic art of which Ibsen is the master exponent.

The first is that on the stage, as in the novel, character (the individual) is the most interesting thing, the ultimate thing; for nothing *happens* at all unless it happens to a particular person, and action is dependent on character. The dramatist therefore must choose characters who illustrate his theme better and better the more he goes into them. Then, the deeper he digs the clearer will sound in our ears the running water of his theme. He cannot dig too deep, if he has chosen them well. But by what sign is he to recognise those characters? I do not know. His theme, intellectually stated, is certainly not the right clue. He usually finds them in himself – at least, a shaft which goes down any depth is nearly always, I think, opened from within, though afterwards sympathy and observation may continue the excavation and even control its direction; but that ground is not broken to any depth except by an author who has an inner life of his own to explore, is certain. Now what happens with most dramatists who are blessed with an idea is that they allow their theme to control their interest in character. In other words, either they have chosen characters which only illustrate superficially what they wish to show, or they only attempt to understand them in so far as they illustrate it. If they get really interested in human beings their theme becomes instead of clearer more

obscure. I know no better test of a dramatist's imagination than observing if this happens.

One of the qualities which delighted me in *Exiles* was that evidently nothing would induce Mr. Joyce to make his characters less complex and interesting than he saw them to be. He would rather obscure his theme than do that, and though a fault, it is a fault on the right side – on the interesting side. The second respect in which he has learnt from the master is his practice of intensifying our interest in the present by dialogue which implies a past. What a little scrap of people's lives a dramatist can show us – just an hour or two! In life it is usually what has gone before that makes talk between two people significant. If we did not add the days and months and years together our relations would be as empty as those of children, without being as delightful. The deduction is obvious: make people talk on the stage as though much had already passed between them. Dramatists are too afraid of mystifying their audience to use that obvious method of enriching their subject; for that there are not many people as quick and clever as themselves is a common delusion among them. Sometimes it may be no delusion; still, I am sure it is not necessary to temper their intelligence to the extent they commonly do. Besides, it is a writer's first point of honour not to write for people stupider than himself: let birds of a feather write for each other.

The merits of this play make it hard to tell its story. Summarised, that story would not distinguish it from many a play in which the love relations of two men and a woman wove the plot. Its distinction lies in the relations of the three points in that familiar triangle being complex and intense. Art is usually so superficial, life so profound. I admire Mr. Joyce for having tried to deepen our conventional simplification of such relations and bring them nearer to nature. Now and then I lost my way in his characters as in a wood, but that did

not make me think they were not true; rather the contrary. When I put my finger on his spinning rainbow top, I do not see the coloured rings which produced that iridescence so definitely as in the case of Ibsen. The theme of *Exiles* is not so clear to me. I conjecture that I get nearest to it in saying that the play is a study in the emotional life of an artist. (I am sure, at any rate, that I am giving the reader a useful tip in bidding him keep one eye *always* upon Richard Rowan, whatever else may be interesting him besides.) And when I say that the play is a study in an artist's life, I mean that its theme is the complication which that endowment adds to emotional crises which are common to all men. It makes sincerity more difficult and at the same time more vitally important. Imagination opens the door to a hundred new subtleties and possibilities of action; it brings a man so near the feelings of others that he has never the excuse of blindness, and keeps him at a distance, so that at moments he can hardly believe he cares for anything but his own mind.

When he acts spontaneously, he knows he is acting spontaneously – if not at the moment, the moment after – much as some people, thought modest, have hardly a right to be considered so, because they invariably know when they are. *Exiles* is a play in which two men are struggling to preserve each his own essential integrity in a confusing situation where rules of thumb seem clumsy guides; and between them is a bewildered, passionate woman – generous, angry, tender, and lonely. To understand Bertha one need only remember that she has lived nine years with Richard Rowan in that intimacy of mind and feeling which admits of no disguises, merciful or treacherous; that she has known all the satisfactions and disappointments of such an intimacy. Her nature cries out for things to be simple as they once were for her; but she, too, has eaten of the tree of knowledge and knows that they are not.

If you ask how Richard Rowan and Robert Hand stood towards each other, the answer is they were friends. There was a touch of the disciple in Robert. Richard was the intenser, more creative, and also the more difficult nature. He was an exile in this world; Robert was at home in it. But the essence of their relation was that they were friends, and friends who from youth had made life's voyage of discovery together. One was a journalist, the other an artist; but in experience they were equals. Both had lived intensely enough, and had been intimate enough to reach together that pitch of mutual understanding at which consciousness that each is still at bottom solitary is, in a strange way, the tenderest bond between them. Am I over-subtle? I think what I mean is recognisable. After all, it is in friendships of the second order (Heaven forfend that they should be held cheap!) that men are least troubled about the value of what they give. It is between these two friends that competition for the same woman rises, bringing with it jealousy, suspicion, and making candour – the air in which alone such a friendship as theirs can live – almost impossible. Well, very hard. Both make a mighty effort to preserve it; Richard succeeds best; how far Robert Hand failed is not quite clear to me. At first Richard thought his friend a common vulgar thief; against such a one he would protect Bertha tooth and nail. But he has misgivings which in different ways torture him more than natural jealousy. Perhaps Robert can give her something he cannot (O, he knows how unsatisfying and yet how much that has been!); something no human being has a right to prevent another having. This is the first thing he must find out.

The scene in Act II between the two men is wonderful in its gradually deepening sincerity. Hand is a coward at first, but he gets over that. Then Richard is tormented by misgivings about himself. Is not there something in him (for ties, however precious, are also chains) which is attracted

by the idea that Bertha might now owe most to another – now, at any rate, that their own first love is over? How far is he sincere in leaving her her liberty? Is it his own that he is really thinking of? Bertha taunts him with that. And Bertha's relation to Robert – what is that? I think it is the attraction of peace. To be adored, to be loved in a simpler, more romantic, coarser way, what a rest! Besides, Robert is the sort of man a woman can easily make happy; Richard certainly is not. Yet, just as she decided between them years ago, in the end it is her strange, elusive lover who comes so close and so far away whom she chooses. But was she Robert's mistress? The dramatist leaves that ambiguous. He does not mean us to bother much one way or another about that. Richard says at the end he will never know what they were to each other; but I do not think he is thinking of Divorce Court facts. He means how completely Bertha still belongs to him. Bertha tells Robert to tell Richard everything; but does he? She also tells him to think of what has passed between them as something like "a dream." That, I think, is the line on which one must fix one's attention to get the focus. Robert is happy; quite content with that. Perhaps because less hot for certainties in life than Richard, he thinks he has enjoyed a solid reality. I do not know.

I have left out much it would be a pleasure to mark. Richard's relation to Beatrice Justice (the other woman in the play) – I could write an article on that; but what I have written will be perhaps enough to persuade you that this is a remarkable play.

SOMERSET MAUGHAM AND NOEL COWARD

(1930)

Mr. Somerset Maugham is not an Ibsen, and Mr. Noel Coward's resemblance to Tolstoy is not striking, yet the themes of *The Breadwinner* and *Private Lives* resemble respectively those of *A Doll's House* and *The Kreutzer Sonata*; only those themes are brought up to date and turned topsy-turvy. In *The Breadwinner* a husband, not a wife, leaves a "doll's house" to live and learn; and in *Private Lives* we are invited (most successfully) to laugh over – yes, and even to envy – the violent alternations from tenderness to exasperation and back again, which between man and woman, Tolstoy felt, were so loathsomely and hideously humiliating that he saw no cure for them but to stamp sex out of life altogether. Hopeless remedy, of course – quite hopeless.

These two comedies now running in London, and with every prospect of continuing to please, are symptomatic of our times. It is not the Noras who now excite the sympathy of dramatists and audiences but the Helmers, the predicament of "breadwinners" not of wives. Isn't the slavery, we now ask ourselves, of the breadwinner to his job often as humiliating as that of woman to "the home"? And if she kicks, why should not he? So when Mr. Maugham's "Norval," as I shall continue to think of him, slips into freedom from a home in which he has been for years a mere breadwinner, slips away, after exposing the selfishness of his wife and children, the sympathies of the modern audience go with him, as they once

went with Nora when she slammed behind her the door of the "doll's house."

The shift of sympathy is significant. But the comparison between *The Kreutzer Sonata* and *Private Lives* is still more significant. To do Tolstoy's contemporaries justice, they never thought that story one of his good books. And he had a low opinion of it himself. He said he was in a bad frame of mind when he wrote it. There was a fanaticism in it far from admirable, and the deduction of a sweeping conclusion from a particular case shocked common sense. What is interesting is that Mr. Noel Coward and Tolstoy should agree about the nature of passion; only while the old prophet says, "Look, isn't this ignoble and the opposite of love?," the young writer of comedies, who does not pretend to be a thinker but, as a matter of fact, is a good deal shrewder than some who pretend to think, says, "Isn't this exciting and amusing?"

In *Private Lives* two honeymoons are entertainingly contrasted. The relation between Amanda Prynne and Elyot Chase is based upon the only kind of attraction which, in the dramatist's opinion, matters between man and woman; while their respective relations to their lawful spouses are represented as unreal, and conventional. A moment's reflection shows the weakness of both *The Kreutzer Sonata* and of *Private Lives* as pictures of life. The former is based on blind fear of sex, while in *Private Lives* we only see the beginning of the story: the worst is to come. We are told what Chapter I of the lives of Amanda and Elyot was like: their marriage had ended after exasperated quarrels in divorce and in their remarriage to other partners. Though we only watch on the stage Chapter II, namely the first three days of their joint lives after they have come together again, fresh from bilking their just-wedded partners, this glimpse shows that Chapter III will probably repeat Chapter I. We watch scenes of rapturous tenderness modulate into the exchange of such

sentiments as "You damned sadistic bully!" "You loose-living wicked little beast!" and finally into a scrimmage on the floor. True, the curtain falls on reconcilement and the audience is sent smiling away. *That* shindy has not mattered. Why should it? It is not the first or the second or even the fifth that matters. But surely and often very soon, such shindies destroy the overtones of passion and above all that mutual confidence which makes even its momentary satisfaction satisfying. Though a spit of mutual hatred, as Tolstoy knew, can be an excellent aphrodisiac, aphrodisiacs are not love's daily food. So, although his play apparently ends happily, and the story is so deftly and amusingly conducted that the audience actually envies Mr. Coward's lovers, no one can agree with Amanda's pronouncement upon their predicament: "We may be all right in the eyes of heaven, but we look like being in a hell of a mess socially." No: they are in a hell of a mess all round, and it is a proof of Mr. Coward's adroitness that he has managed to disguise the grimness of his comedy, and to conceal from the audience that his conception of love is desolating and false.

I wonder, if these lines catch his eye, what he will think of this analysis of his airy, quick little play? That I am dissecting a butterfly which was meant to amuse us with its flutterings, and that I have rubbed off its bloom in the process? Perhaps. Let me assure him, then, that I enjoyed its flutterings and bright changing colours thoroughly.

The interpretation of character and scene throughout is very good. What a talent Miss Gertrude Lawrence has! If you want unflagging vivacity in an actor or actress look for him or her among Variety Artists. They have "go," sparkle, finish. They must have them; also the faculty of making much out of hints. They have to hold attention, often alone on the stage, by making the most of comic and sentimental hints sometimes of the most perfunctory kind. They learn to be

collaborators rather than interpreters. Mr. Coward himself is almost as good as Miss Lawrence (that is praise!) and Miss Adrianne Allen and Mr. Olivier played their parts as they should have been played. They understood them and showed it. Mr. Coward's gift as a dramatist, as I have occasion to repeat whenever I write about him, is that his dialogue has the rhythm of modern life, which is more broken and much quicker than that of twenty years ago. He understands, too, that it is more important that a joke on the stage should be spontaneous than witty. If it is also a brilliant piece of wit so much the better, but the important thing is that it should seem spontaneous.

Mr. Maugham is not so deft at catching life-rhythm in dialogue, and his wit is deliberate rather than quick. Consequently, when not first-rate, it disappoints. On the other hand he has a far firmer grip of what he is writing about, and the implications of his subject. He always knows where he is. He is adept in making his characters betray themselves in typical lines. Sometimes he abuses this power, and you think, "But if that person could say that, he or she would certainly know more about themselves than the dramatist intends them to know." But at others he puts into their mouths a line which illuminates character unconsciously, and the situation from top to bottom. He has a far firmer grasp of ultimate futilities about which Mr. Coward tends to be sentimental.

Mr. Maugham's works can hardly be described as the harvest of an indulgent eye. His best jokes have grim implications; his best-drawn characters are exposures. His good people are apt to be conventional figures or hazy in outline; and he has evidently been much struck on his journey through the world by the impudent selfishness of certain types of women. In a sense he approves of selfishness. He sees it masquerading everywhere, and he has come to prefer it naked

and unashamed. But really, we seem to hear him say, some women carry selfishness too far! They are such bilkers too, taking without giving, and without a notion of fair play.

The Breadwinner is a play about a man who threw his top hat over the windmill, turned on his family (leaving them a genteel subsistence), and said, "I don't see the point of slaving for you any more. You are not fond of me and I am not fond of you; you think I'm an old bore, and I find you boring as well as inconsiderate." The comedy lies in his family, who have never felt under the smallest obligation to him, and have criticised him freely, suddenly discovering that they mean as little to him as he does to them. It is a shock. What! he doesn't think it worth his while to keep them in cars and comfort! Of course the young can't be expected to enjoy *his* company, but that he shouldn't delight in theirs or in seeing them enjoy themselves – well, that is incredible!

It is quite a good idea for a comedy, but *The Breadwinner* is not quite a good play. In the first act the dialogue, designed to showing the attitude of the young towards their parents, is not nearly entertaining enough. There are two pairs of them, male and female, and all four are cousins. The consensus of opinion among them is that after forty their elders, who have had their innings, ought to make room for the young. The dramatist's object is not only to show in this act their want of affection and gratitude, but also that these bright young things are deplorably silly and boring. He succeeds only too well. We are glad when that act is over. But the last two grip the attention; and he was blessed in Mr. Squire, with his Hawtrey methods, as an interpreter for the placid but firm Mr. Battle, also in Miss Marie Lohr who plays Mrs. Battle. The outspokenness of the "English rose" seemed to shock the audience a little. Well, she exists.

THE STAGE AND THE SPIRITS

(1931)

Three matinée performances of *The World of Light* were given under the supervision of Mr. Leon M. Lion last week. The acting came near to being as good as it could be, the audience was profoundly attentive, the play most unusually interesting, and its reception by the press favourable. A few critics, whose standards must be really higher than we supposed from their praise of other plays, ran it down; but approval was louder. Encore! Mr. Huxley, more, please more! It is to those cries he should listen, for *The World of Light* shows a remarkable talent for the stage. Lest he should pay too much attention to adverse verdicts, let me remind him that in some quarters there is a tendency to scare intellectuals off the theatre, that a play, about which it is impossible to write quickly, invariably gets some bad notices, and that it is a consolation to some critics, who feel perhaps that their average reports hardly do justice to their abilities, to show that they can at any rate despise the work of an exceptionally clever man.

Mr. Aldous Huxley's play proved what an advantage it is for a playwright to possess intellectual resources. Our stage usually concerns itself with people who are a little dull in mind. If we took a census of the stage-population over the last seven years, the proportion of characters with anything approaching to an intellect would be lower than among the same number of real people, selected presumably for the interest of their adventures in life. Now the adventures and

predicaments of the thinking sort are not more moving than those of the mindless, but they are more various and curious. Hamlets, on the whole, are more interesting than Othellos. Smashing catastrophes and violent crises are necessary to knock something startling out of plain, unreftecting blocks of humanity, while little Hamlets can exhibit their depths in quieter contacts with life. In modern realistic drama this is an advantage. But to create such characters the dramatist must be himself intellectual; so the last thing critics should do, if they want an interesting and varied stage, is to warn intellectuals off it.

Mr. Huxley is, of course, an arch-intellectual. There lies the explanation of his play being absorbing, rich, pointful, superior – and also of its close shocking me. I found myself clapping till my hands tingled at the end of every scene, every act; the acting had been so invariably excellent, the situations so taut and the dialogue so true. But when the final curtain fell I fished for my hat with a groan, "Butter-fingers! Everything prepared, led up to – and, plump, he let it drop!" I muttered indignantly, "Why in the name of common sense, proportion, art, did he let us down at the end like that? Where was the point of it? What was he afraid of? The obvious? Surely not. The obvious is the crown and glory of a work of art; subtlety only a painful necessity." Thus I soliloquised furiously. It was not until I had walked some way that I could even entertain a plausible guess at an explanation. But please note, this protesting hubble-bubble within me was a measure of the admiration and interest which the play had previously excited. No one cares a jot about mediocre work going wrong. To show why my disappointment was justified, and was at the same time a prodigious compliment to the dramatist, I must analyse rapidly a rather intricate play with about ten times as much in it as an ordinary one – and that is not easy.

Spiritualism, though there are two seances in the play, was not the theme of *The World of Light*, though some true things were said about it, and others suggested. In the first place, Mr. Aldous Huxley has science in the blood, and he is aware that the great field for new discoveries is always the unclassified residuum of phenomena; those exceptional and irregular occurrences which neighbouring sciences find it easier to ignore than absorb. In the case of Spiritualism such phenomena occur in circumstances so favourable to fraud and error that they are particularly suspect; moreover ninety-nine out of a hundred books in which they are collected and commented upon are (it is obvious the moment you poke your nose into one of them) intellectually disreputable. They are mostly written by people who appear to think that anything unusual or unexplained proves their special conclusion. In *The World of Light* the central crisis is the moment when a bereaved father and a heart-sick girl discover that the youth, son, and lover, respectively, with whom they believe they have been in communication "behind the veil," is still alive. He interrupts their seance just as the concertina, announcing the presence of his spirit, has begun to play in the dark his favourite air. This scene is not an object-lesson in complete scepticism, but it reminds us that telepathy may sometimes explain occurrences attributed to spirits. Yet the pros and cons of an open question are emphatically not the dramatic subject, and what Mr. Huxley was interested in was a far fitter subject for a drama: the appeal which Spiritualism makes to human nature and the type of person for whom it can be a substitute for religion.

To me that identification is profoundly repulsive. The connection between religion and survival after death is adventitious; the link is the goodness of God as interpreted by man. If God is good surely He will preserve my personality intact for ever and ever? But it is easy to envisage a universe

in which human beings never died, and yet religious emotions had no place. Indeed, the glimpses of the Spiritualists' heaven, vouchsafed through trances and rappings, resemble such a world. It is so pitiably like our own that one is inclined to answer the question "O death, where is thy sting?" by replying, "Up the medium's sleeve." Such a heaven only brings comfort to those whose "immortal longings" are confined to the humble desire not to die, at any rate so soon, or to see again someone who is dead. It would be disgraceful to take a superior attitude to desires so poignant and honestly human, but it is also human to remember that there is much more in religion than the satisfaction of those desires. Mysteries make an especial appeal to matter-of-fact people, whose experience has never been lit by poetry, romance or reflection; if you have never lived in the imagination you will welcome marvels at all costs. And to those who are approaching the end of humdrum experience, dimly but deeply conscious of having missed nearly everything, a mere prolongation of existence may seem a heavenly boon.

Mr. Aldous Huxley chose, therefore, for his central figure, for his Spiritualist, a tender-hearted, methodical, elderly man. Mr. Wenham, chartered accountant (Mr. Aubrey Mather's gestures, gait, and – to youth – exasperating sunset meekness of address were exactly right) has never taken a risk, never strayed off the asphalt path of duty, in his whole life; never, though he was made for intimacy, come close to children, friends, or wife. He is so modest that he even shrinks from the use of the first person, preferring to say "One doesn't do this" or "One doesn't do that" (a good touch). But he knows, at last, too well, that he exists alone in a monotonous world, a world in which responsibilities are the only realities and love cannot be found. What a susceptible subject for the appeal of religious Spiritualism! But there is a gentle, firm integrity in old Wenham too, which – *this* is what his creator

forgot at the end of his play – does link him to those who dare, and to those in whom life's sap is rising, not subsiding; who do not feel as yet the pathetic longings of a spiritual mendicant. *The World of Light* is a remarkable play if only because it brings home poignantly the difference between youth's view of death and life, and that of age.

And this is really the main theme of the play, Spiritualism being merely a means of bringing that contrast to an issue.

Old Wenham has a son. Hugo is a Hamletish youth, much inclined to exclaim: "O, what a base and peasant slave am I," because his home education has made him play, invariably hitherto, for safety. Thus, when his father, at the prompting of his stepmother (who represents complete contentment with the actual), persuades him to propose to Enid whom he does not love, Hugo does so. But his more honest, adventurous self, with the help of a little alcohol, is spurred to rebellion against his homebred "conscience" by his friend, Bill Hamblin, the life-worshipper. Hamblin persuades Hugo to fly – literally – to the South Seas with him in an aeroplane; and Enid, who knows that she has trapped Hugo into a promise of marriage by showing her passion for him, is left desolate.

The report of a crash, however, opens a new avenue of comfort to the two people to whom Hugo's presumed death meant most; to his father and to the girl. Through a medium (acted to the life by Mr. Brandon) they proceed to get into touch with Hugo's spirit, and the communications are so surprising that old Wenham publishes them in a book which makes a great impression and sells by the thousand. It is after its publication that Hugo returns with his friend. The life-worshipper had fallen into a cactus bush and been blinded. (Note here Mr. Aldous Huxley's integrity; though he sympathises with Hamblin's philosophy, he knows it cannot see a man through anything.) The gay, confident Bill Hamblin, when he reappears, is a touchy, egotistic invalid.

But what is Hugo's father to do about his book? Through that unpleasant person, the medium, he had enjoyed with his son the kind of intimacy he has missed all his life; and out of gratitude for supernatural consolations Enid has meanwhile yielded to the desires of the medium. What is the living Hugo now to them? He was everything to them while he was "dead" – but now? Enid's life is widowed. She was a maternal sort of woman always, and her happiness lay in "mothering" men, a trait in her Hugo could never bear – perhaps she will find it in cherishing the blind, impetuous Hamblin? And old Wenham? Deep in himself he feels he must recant his book; it was misleading. Perhaps, though he has lost his faith in "the world of light," he may maintain that closeness to his son he had enjoyed while he fancied his son was a spirit? Father and son talk together. The gulf between them cannot be bridged, says the son. It is true, no doubt. But still the old man's problem remains. Is he to recant? Hugo cuts the knot by voluntarily disappearing again without a word to his father, having accepted £1,000 from the publisher, who is only too glad to avoid an exposure which would destroy further profits; and old Wenham is left alone upon the stage, peering about in a bewilderment not unlike that of the old servant at the end of *The Cherry Orchard*. His problem has not been solved, but shelved.

I trust that this brief account of the play has given some idea of its merits and interests, for only in that case will the reader understand my disappointment at its close. Mr. Huxley, at the last moment, deliberately broke a bridge which can unite old and young: respect for integrity of mind, however different their several needs and sense of values may be. I do not think the dramatist realised the insufferably patronising indifference of "intellectual" youth to the problems of the simple-minded implied in Hugo's behaviour; nor did he see, or care apparently that in old Wenham's dilemma to which the whole play had led up, the issue of the intellectual was at stake.

ORPHEUS

(1928)

I did not go with any confident anticipation of pleasure. The reputation of M. Cocteau is the sort I am inclined to regard with suspicion; he has – at least to us over here – the air of being a Coterie Celebrity. People come back from Paris as pleased as little dogs that have been scratched behind the ears, when they can report that they have met M. Cocteau. I can well believe it to be a privilege. His prose has the sincerity of prompt talk. His sentences seem to be punctuated by airy and emphatic gestures. Indeed, some of them are mere gestures conveying an attitude towards the topic rather than a contribution to it: "Eclecticism is fatal to admiration as well as an injustice. But, in art, it is a kind of injustice to be just." A kind of injustice to be just! This is no contribution to the art of criticism – just a flourish which suggests sensibility.

Though M. Cocteau returns again and again to his pet points, concentration is for him a matter of seconds. He illuminates by flashes. We read by blinks of intuition; ratiocination seems to strike him as a form of insincerity. I admit I was prejudiced against him, for I understood too well how profound and sympathetic all this would appear to a generation unwilling, or unable (I don't know which it is) to think consecutively. He seemed to me no lion, I confess; rather a pretty azure dragon-fly, poising for a quivering instant in front of this art or that, and darting at it like a needle. Reading his address before the College of France,

I was reminded of Whistler's "Five o'Clock" lecture – and that, I remembered, had been a real event. In both there was a deadly, careful informality in attack; a kindred steely sincerity, the temper of which was even more impressive in M. Cocteau's "Huit minutes chez M. Barrès" – for so this interview with that slightly *passé* prophet might well be called – where with apparently casual penetration, he dealt with his host much as M. Barrès himself, in his own youth, had dealt with the dignified M. Renan. I began, therefore, to be prepared to think (I apologise for being slow) that, as a critic of both art and life, M. Cocteau was someone to be reckoned with, but whose qualities do not promise creative power. I did not go to see *Orpheus* in a hopeful state of mind.

And then I found it delightful.

It was emotionally intelligible, intellectually amusing and artistically adventurous. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Gate Theatre for giving us the chance of seeing it. As I said when I last reviewed one of their productions, these small impecunious theatrical ventures are of real importance to culture. We cannot expect managers of costly theatres to experiment (Mr. Cochran is the only one who dares) and keep us aware of developments in foreign drama. Yet even from the point of view of their box-offices these societies are useful. Just as big firms of decorators and designers of china and chairs find the studios of "impossible" artists good hunting-ground for new designs (how much upholsterers once owed to Morris and how much, more recently, Messrs – and Messrs – have borrowed from the now defunct Omega Workshops!), so, too, theatrical managers and their dramatists, even when they do not nobly dare to steal wholesale, may find in such places as the Gate Theatre Studio suggestions of new possibilities, and thus discover that there may be profit as well as truth in Jean Cocteau's epigram that "tact in audacity consists in knowing how far we may go too far." Some of them have

dim suspicions that audacity sometimes pays and would fain learn how to be audacious.

M. Cocteau thinks that the salvation of the Theatre lies in it returning to more primitive conditions. Get rid of apparatus, get rid, at least, of that air of elaborate preparation and pretension. Let everything about the theatre admit frankly to the bare-faced make-believe that a stage entertainment really is. People will enjoy themselves much more if they go in the spirit of a visit to a circus or a fair. The theatre should reek of saw-dust and orange-peel. Realism (this is a familiar cry) is played out; force the audience to collaborate in making ingenious makeshifts serve as hints to the imagination. Remember that apparent informality in stage design, in decoration, in technique, is also an opportunity for fantasy.

The play to M. Cocteau is a whole, not a book of words; it is one great conjuring trick, a work of art made up just as much from what the eye watches as the ear takes in. Mr. James Laver explained all this in an admirable short lecture which he delivered at the Gate Theatre Studio on Sunday. He defined *Orphée* as mixture of miracle play, circus and booth performance. It is a jumble of modernity, classicism and Christian symbolism. The scenes take place in Paris of to-day; the story is the death of Eurydice and her release by Orpheus from Hades – on condition that he does not look at her. The lovers are a modern youth and maiden, their guardian angel a glazier, the Greek messenger who retells the fate of Orpheus among the Bacchantes a comic gendarme. The curtain rises on a talking horse, so we are plunged in the circus atmosphere at once. Only the horse in this case is a diabolic one to which Orpheus most imprudently has recourse, in the manner of a modern spiritualist, for poetic inspiration. It talks by the approved method of stamping as he calls out the letter of the alphabet it wants; his horse has given him one line he thinks magnificently profound: "God

Ordains That Orpheus Hunt Eurydice, Long Lost." He does not perceive it is also a cryptogram, "Go to Hell."

The spectator must never press the symbolism too hard. He must enjoy himself at this show first and foremost like a child; the symbols suggest ideas, but these should only produce a pleasant suspicion at the back of the sophisticated spectator's mind that there is more in the show than meets the eye and ear.

When Eurydice licks a poisoned envelope and is about to die, Death appears. Now, Death is a cool lady in evening dress, for only in disguise could she go about the world and do her work. She enters our houses through the looking glass (look yourself in a glass if you wish to see death approaching), and she is accompanied by two hospital nurses and an apparatus for removing the soul from the body. She puts on a surgeon's white coat and indiarubber gloves. Miss Veronica Turleigh's aspect, movement and voice were exactly right, but I could have wished her manner to have been a shade more disquietingly like a priestess – after she had put on her coat. During the next few minutes a mysterious instrument buzzes on the operating table, and Death and her attendants exchange directions and replies in the cold, quick, level tones such as people use in crises. It is done; it is over. Three swift strides takes Death to the door of the room where Eurydice lies. Death turns and lo! a fluttering dove is in her hand; she opens the window and away it flies. Eurydice is dead.

Mr. Laver drew our attention to the contrast, so characteristic of the dramatist, between the sophistication of the Death symbol and his use of a hackneyed emblem for the soul. The dramatist's instinct in using both new and old symbols is beautifully sure. Death symbolised as a skeleton with an hour-glass made the Middle Ages shudder; to us a skeleton is an agreeably picturesque object; and "the dread reaper," the man with the scythe who passes, no longer disquiets us.

My favourite story of Disraeli describes him sitting in his carriage, old, tired, near his end. He is just about to start for a drive, when the footman hands in to him one of those circular air-cushions on which lean invalids like to sit. The old mummy opens an eye, and, waving the back of his hand, says, in that sombre and majestic voice he kept to the last, "Take away that emblem of mortality." What a far better emblem than a grinning skull is that ugly indiarubber object – for us! M. Cocteau knows, too, gallant, alert, half-frightened enemy of the prosaic that he is, that it is in the clinical aspect of Death, who with "his well-worn lean, professional smile" (why does nobody read Henley now?)

Comes to your bedside, unannounced and bland,

which is most disquieting to us. But when it comes to symbolising the soul, the symbol of folk-lore is still the best.

So also at the end (the curtain falls on a suggestion of heaven) why strain ingeniously after exalted, but necessarily quite inadequate metaphors? Perhaps there will be more poetry in a childish conception: a table of fruit, a gramophone playing "Home sweet home" and lovers united? It is all over in a minute. The scene moves us just enough to prevent our smiling. The whole play is light as thistledown. I found Mr. Ronald Simpson's Orpheus distinctly good, and Miss Moyna Macgill's Eurydice charming, though she grimaces a little too violently.

By the by, I am concerned to hear that the Gate Theatre Society are to be prosecuted on Monday. Some plain-clothes policemen got in by paying at the box-office. This is illegal in the case of a Society which performs unlicensed plays for subscribers alone. I am very sorry the police had the curiosity to see if such an entrance could be somehow wangled for in this rather stupid, grubby world we do not want sprouts of art and sensibility stamped upon.

RICHARD AND MR. GIELGUD

(1933)

Richard of Bordeaux is a play that prompts description rather than reflection. It has been, is, and is likely to continue to be, one of the most popular spectacles in London. The ingredients of its success are simple: a changing feast for the eye; Mr. John Gielgud's most attractive and arresting acting; a seriousness which is easy to assimilate. It is the sort of play which makes one wish one was a boy again. I could not help thinking how much more I should have enjoyed it at an age when I was so lost in any stage-scene that I never noticed whether dialogue was up to situation, nor, so long as the costumes were in keeping, whether the spirit of the period informed the whole play; when, in short, my imagination was "Shakespearian" with regard to the past, and anachronisms did not bother me.

As a matter of fact, the dialogue is very inferior to the dramatist's sense of situation. Gordon Daviot's conception of a situation is frequently dramatic, but (with the exception of Richard II himself) the words her characters utter never more than indicate with crude emphasis what she intends each of them to stand for. She has learnt a good deal from the methods of *St. Joan*, but she cannot, like Mr. Shaw, make her characters speak out of themselves or utter their minds with real cogency and point. This is particularly noticeable with the patriotic fire-caters, Gloucester and Arundel, and in the debate on peace and war.

Gordon Daviot is after something interesting in the case of "old John of Gaunt, time-honoured Lancaster," but the personality of that powerful nobleman remains not only elusive, which would not matter, but indistinct, which does. Lancaster is civilised enough to prefer his nephew to his son, the future Henry IV – we see that; but though it is obviously he who is steering Richard we never catch sight of his motives. Compare him, for example, with Warwick in *St. Joan* in this respect.

However, the dramatist has *not* failed us so far as the main character, Richard himself, is concerned. It is Richard (though in his relation to his wife he is feebly sentimentalised) who holds the play together. And what is more, Richard's character, as Miss Daviot has developed it, has the theatrical merit of giving Mr. Gielgud opportunities of acting several men in one part: Richard II, as a generous, wayward, pleasure-loving, peace-loving youth, the victim and beneficiary of an artistic temperament – running in his case too much in the direction of finery and display; Richard II, as the self-indulgent and suspicious King, capable of any duplicity and gradually turning into an erratic tyrant – though tyranny is foreign to his nature; and, lastly, Richard II, pathetic and dignified in his fall.

In Richard's first phase it is easy for an actor to please the majority, provided he has Mr. Gielgud's attractive personality, though the more exacting may be bored by an exhibition of conventional high spirits, temper, tenderness and charm. In the second, and in the third phase, Mr. Gielgud is more certain of pleasing both types of playgoer. Up to the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke Mr. Gielgud's acting is plausible and graceful. In that scene, and thenceforward, however, Mr. Gielgud was remarkable; he achieved something more striking than a handsome presence and a sympathetic airy carelessness. In the scene we watch a Richard who has tasted

blood as an autocrat and rather likes its salt flavour, and in whom the slow poison of suspicion has begun to work. There was a morbid, feline elegance about his bearing and careful movements. His expression had lost its frank gaiety and became foxy – hunted. The handsome youth, only capable of inspiring either tenderness or contempt, accordingly as he was judged as a companion or as a leader of a country in arms, had changed into a selfish, disillusioned man at bay, though for the moment victoriously at bay.

The Richard before our eyes was now a bitter artist who had lost the desire to share delightful things; the affectionate, effusive, festive youth had become one who had no longer faith in friends, but trusted only to "two thousand archers paid regularly every Friday." It was this transformation, imaginatively conceived by the dramatist and imaginatively interpreted by the actor, which animated what would have otherwise been a mere spectacle – true, a fine one – and held it together.

Mr. Gielgud acted Richard in the last phase with laudable restraint, never allowing pathos to sink into lachrymose sentiment, nor the tenderness of Richard's farewell to his page, Maudelyn, to justify that rather unfortunate surname. His aspect and attitudes during the last scene in the cold, high, dusky chamber of the Tower, where Bolingbroke and the Archbishop compelled him to sign his abdication, were striking. To look at once distinguished and crushed, to behave like a tired man of sorrows and yet be savagely ironical, is not an easy task for an actor. Mr. Gielgud triumphed, and with an economy of gesture that excited my admiration.

In my opinion he is now the first of English actors. It is far from being an age of great acting, but the range of his emotional scope, and the intelligence with which he conceives his parts, puts him right at the top of his profession. He combines the histrionic temperament with interpretative

intelligence; that is rare. Now his temptations will begin. He has the power to charm large audiences. Will he choose only plays which delight them? Apart from the character of Richard I think this play a poor one.

Miss Gwen Ffrangçon-Davies has won praise in her part of Anne of Bohemia, Richard's first queen. She deserves every word of the praise that has been given her; but what an empty little part it is! Anne is only a winning, pretty nonentity, and we are treated to the display of marital relations more than three years old, which are indistinguishable from idealised courtship.

Mr. Reyner Barton played the part of the Archbishop well, and Mr. Francis Lister, in the scene in which, as Robert de Vere Earl of Oxford, he has to confess that he ran away in battle, put a degree of unexaggerated miserable emotion that made the scene affecting. As the gay poet-courtier he was given nothing entertaining to say – alas!

EXCITEMENT SATIRE SPEED

(1933)

Dinner at Eight, at the Palace Theatre, by George Kaufman and Edna Ferber, both gifted authors (her novel, *Show Boat*, was very superior to the popular play made from it), is an exceptionally animated performance: violent, unintermitted animation – that is the outcome and the aim of this ingenious mixture of ingredients, each of which is pungent enough to flavour for some palates the whole play. I can well imagine one playgoer declaring afterwards that *Dinner at Eight* is excruciatingly funny, and another, that it is excruciatingly painful. The fact is *Dinner at Eight* is both; it is extremely amusing *and* thoroughly remorseless; which of these aspects will predominate in your own retrospect depends upon whether you happen to be tender or tough, but while you are in the theatre, in either case, you will be swept along by its vivacious velocity.

One important point at which the transatlantic stage differs from ours is *tempo*; their pace is double ours. (Of course, I am only speaking of the tip-top American play of the moment, not of such deep plays as Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude*.) Recall the rattle and flash with which *Broadway*, for example, dashed to its terminus. Now, an English audience was once content to ruminate receptively while the playwright was preparing his situations. It used to be for connoisseurs even an added pleasure to be able to observe him at it, digging with deliberation the dry trench down which the water was eventually to flow. In the well-made three-act drama the

whole of the first act, and often the greater part of the second, was devoted to this steady trenching. But the modern, and especially the American-modern, temperament hates preparation and adores – surprise. Of course, there must be some preparation, or incidents won't hold together and crescendo would be impossible; but only what is absolutely necessary and can be conveyed by hints and flashes, by a casual word dropped in the midst of chatter, by a gesture while the spectator's eye is on something else. No more preparation is allowed; it would be boring. The quality of attention demanded of the modern audience is therefore that which enables the driver of a racing car while swerving past a van to catch the name on a signpost as it whisks behind him. When I compare these methods with old leisurely ways of telling a story on the stage, I am reminded of that pathetic figure, the Baker, in *The Hunting of the Snark*, who, by the by, has some vital information to impart. He began, you remember:

My father and mother were honest, though poor –
"Skip all that," cried the Bellman in haste,
"If it once becomes dark, there's no chance of a Snark –
We have hardly a minute to waste."

Then he tried again:

"A dear uncle of mine (after whom I was named)
Remarked when I bade him farewell –"
"Oh kip your dear uncle," the Bellman exclaimed,
As he angrily tinkled his bell.

At a tip-top American play I hear perpetually the furious tinkle of that bell. Though bewildered, for I have myself a ruminating mind, I find I am often exhilarated by this speeding-up. It certainly makes me impatient afterwards of being compelled to stare at the slow evolution on the stage

of a situation all-too-clear and perhaps not important. And I am sure the movie habit has quickened considerably the rapidity of the public's capacity for attention, though we orientals must still strike western playwrights and producers as very slow in the up-take. But our own are hurrying; Mr. Noel Coward was pretty brisk in his methods in *Private Lives* – and we liked them. A London audience to-day will not find *Dinner at Eight* too fast to follow, while it is so strewn with points that if, as I did, they only take one out of five, they will find nevertheless they have a mindful.

One of the tests I apply to plays, before recommending or cursing them, is the degree to which I have lost self-consciousness myself, in the theatre. If I have been so riveted that I ceased to know that I was a human-being sitting between others, then, whatever on reflection I may think of its *value*, that performance goes straight into my category of good entertainments. The play and actors have passed the great, elementary, fundamental test. At the Palace Theatre from the rise to the fall of each curtain, and even during the short "blacking-out" intervals between the four scenes of which each act is composed, the performers succeeded in turning me into a mere characterless percipient attentive only to them. But, and this also is criticism of the play, I did not spend the act-intervals (though I was eager enough to get back to my seat to see what was coming) in that delicious state of gently-heaving emotion and astonished clarity of mind that fine drama produces. I did not wander about the lobby hoping to Heaven no one would speak to me; on the contrary, click, I was back again in myself, ready to talk about anything and wondering, not about the play, but if I was thirsty enough to enjoy a glass of beer and when I could get my hair cut. Well, if the reader thinks me a reliable thermometer, after those two statements he ought to know for himself where to place, roughly, *Dinner at Eight* as a play

and, for certain, that it was exceedingly well acted. "But what was it like? Shall *I* enjoy it?" These, too, are questions, whatever reader asks them, it is my business to try to answer.

Well, it was like Peter Arno's *Parade* come to life, with an undertow of tragedy pulling through it. Does the *New Yorker* amuse you? Do you enjoy the bite of its humour, its gay toughness, its amoral moral and anti-social satire? If you enjoyed, say, the humour of the picture of a big "butter-and-egg man" putting a detaining paw over the too-often filled champagne glass of a little "chippy" and murmuring with a leer of portentous tenderness, "Darling, don't spoil my dream"; if you have chuckled over those drawings of spoilt women and pompous men in preposterously luxurious surroundings losing all corresponding tenue, and collapsing into a native, yet not always unamiable, indignity; you have relished those grotesque pictorial contrasts between pretences and realities ("Get up, you mutt, we're to be married to-day"); if you have appreciated the economy with which a laconic legend will explode the whole satire of the picture (I wish to suggest a parallel here between the snap of the dialogue and the mordant humour of the situations in *Dinner at Eight*); if you have recognised in modern American satire of Americans – yes, through the very heyday of "bunk" and "ballyhhoo" and of a snatch-as-snatch-can society – the survival of a civilised, intellectual standard as cruel and incorruptible as that of Forain and Lautree in Paris of the 'eighties – then, you will thoroughly enjoy this play.

You will appreciate, then, the acrid pathos of the male movie-beauty (all profile, no talent) whose day is over but who with the help of gin pretends it is not (Mr. Basil Sydney's performance was perfect), and, on the very night he is invited as a lion to the dinner party, turns on the suicide's gas in his gorgeous apartments for which he can never pay. You will relish the Billingsgate back-chat spurting from the mouth of

"a dainty rogue in porcelain," and staggering, like the jet from a hose, the raging impetuosity of her millionaire husband. (One claps Mr. and Mrs. Packard wildly during their tremendous matrimonial row while dressing for *the* party.) You will not miss the subtlety of the refined doctor's infatuation (he also is invited) with the aforesaid pink and silvery little slut, or of the tableau she hastily prepares for him in bed with a book on psychology upon her knees: "not that, the big one, you nit-wit," she yells at her maid. (Kitty Packard, ex-cloak-room attendant, is an "introvert," her husband an "extrovert"; she has got those tags from her doctor-lover, and on her pearly, peevish lips they suggest the whole of the doctor's amorous technique – and his own self-deception.)

And the hostess! That agitated social climber, Mrs. Jordan, who has no need to climb, but must be in it, in it, in it; and to whom social occasions are so pre-eminently important, that when the pivots of her party, an English Lord and Lady, chuck at the last moment, she astounds us with an hysterical outburst, in the vein of, "was ever trouble like to mine?" – us who know, though she as yet does not, that one guest has suffocated himself, that her husband has been ruined by Packard and has angina pectoris, that her maid has been seduced by her butler, that her engaged daughter is in love with the movie-star, that the Packard menage is in dissolution, that the doctor's wife is miserable and the doctor ashamed of himself. Miss Irene Vanbrugh's deftness, alacrity and crescendo in this part are a treat to watch.

Is there a point of rest for the imagination in this rattling satire? Yes – a small one – her husband, the old-fashioned American man of business, played with dignity by Mr. Tristan Rawson.

T. S. ELIOT AS CRITIC

MACHIAVELLI AND ANDREWES

(1929)

In 1920 Mr. Eliot published a collection of critical reviews called *The Sacred Wood*, and in 1924 two essays called *Homage to Dryden*. These dealt with separate points in æsthetics and literary history. Between those two dates he composed his most important poem, *The Waste Land*; a series of episodes and pictures emotionally inter-connected in which many attentive readers divined an expression of spiritual tension and distress, not unlike their own. "The Waste Land" has been freely imitated. But while its obscure and intricate unity was not imitable, being the result of personal experience, its surface peculiarities proved only too easy to copy; the copies were therefore bad.

That the intensity of *The Waste Land* was neither histrionic, nor the product of pure æsthetic theory, as some of Mr. Eliot's criticism had led admirers to suppose, is corroborated by his activities since he wrote it. He has been busy orientating himself. The visible sign of the completion of this process is that he has been received into the Anglo-Catholic Communion; and his essays *For Lancelot Andrewes*, are separate rays of criticism issuing from his new central position, and falling upon such diverse subjects as Machiavelli, two seventeenth century bishops, Bradley the philosopher, Baudelaire, Middleton the Elizabethan dramatist, Crashaw, and the American critic Irving Babbitt.

For Lancelot Andrewes is to be followed by three short books, *The School of Donne*, *The Outline of Royalism*, and

The Principles of Modern Heresy. In these he will expound a point of view which for the moment he is content to describe vaguely as that of "a classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion." Readers of *The Criterion* have already some notion of what these labels mean, for in that carefully edited magazine Mr. Eliot assembled each month essays and poems with which he was in sympathy.

Mr. Eliot claims for this book that it has a kernel of consistent thought. This is true; and therefore two courses are open to its reviewer: he can either criticise that point of view, or, taking it for granted, show what things are visible and what things are hidden from one who criticises others from it. I shall choose the latter.

He says of the style of Machiavelli that "he was concerned first of all with truth, not with persuasion, which is one reason why his prose is great prose, not only of Italian but a model style for any language." Now it is not true to say that Machiavelli "makes no attempt to persuade." His "Prince" and his "Discourses" were, as indeed Mr. Eliot himself implies in stressing Machiavelli's passionate patriotism, practical in aim. The "Prince" was written to persuade Italian princes, and the Medici in particular, to imitate the policy of Cæsar Borgia in Romagna.

Persuasion was the motive; no memorandum of State could have a more immediate end. What is peculiar is his *method* of persuasion – his complete, instinctive candour. Machiavelli's presentment of a case relies upon statement, and it is entirely free from that extraneous pressure of the writer's own personality, which, while it increases the chances of convincing in one quarter and in one age, becomes an actual hindrance to convincing in others. "No one was ever less 'Machiavellian' than Machiavelli," he says. Admirably said! But it does not follow that Machiavelli did not write to persuade. "Only the pure in heart can blow the gaff on human nature," he

continues, "as Machiavelli has done. The cynic can never do it, for the cynic is always impure and sentimental." Mr. Eliot is anxious to prove that Machiavelli was not a cynic, and that the historic conception of him as a purveyor of "tips for tyrants" is silly and false. From his new point of view, what appears sympathetic and therefore important in Machiavelli is that his theory of government takes for granted the utter vileness of human nature when untouched by "grace." Machiavelli seems a sound moralist to Mr. Eliot because he thinks of him as one who grasped the dogma of original sin; a sound statesman because he valued order, whatever the means used to establish it, above liberty. Let us examine this interpretation from an angle which is not Mr. Eliot's.

What has really shocked mankind down the ages in Machiavelli is not his cynicism, though they may have called it that, but something more devastating (Mr. Eliot is right, the professed cynic who writes to cause pain is negligible in comparison), namely, his *unconscious* cynicism; though to call this "purity of heart" is to fail precisely in that quality of candour which is Machiavelli's own rare and redeeming characteristic. No one, it is true, can "blow the gaff on human nature" like the unconscious cynic.

What shocked mankind was that Machiavelli, having taken firm hold of the fact that the ethics of government are not those of private life, should show such complete indifference to the discord; that he should hold up, as an example to all rulers, Cæsar Borgia's policy in Romagna of first appointing a particularly cruel lieutenant to murder and inspire terror, and then, in order to dissociate himself from the odium, having that man murdered in his turn and his slashed body exposed in the market-place; that he should say, "here is, then, no more potent, nor more valid, nor healthier remedy than to murder the sons of Brutus" – before those young men have moved a finger against authority; that he should couple such

words as "honourable frauds," "generous cruelties," "glorious crimes," and proceed to show how completely he means what he says by giving glaring examples of model treachery and cruelty. It is true that this unconscious cynicism served to expose a problem which has not yet been solved – the relation between political and private morality; it is true, too, that contemporary conditions excused Machiavelli's interpretation of the art of government in terms of the art of ruthless war; but it is also as well to remember that it was precisely a very mild form of Machiavellianism which lately infuriated the world against the Prussians, so repulsive is that doctrine to mankind.

We seem to touch the bottom of Machiavelli in his admiration for a saying of Capponi's that those men are most admirable "who loved their country better than the safety of their souls," a maxim which still may prove the ruin of civilisation. It is, by the by, a thoroughly pagan one; and I am surprised that from his new point of view Mr. Eliot should consider Machiavelli a sound moralist.

But that new point of view has also enabled him to write a short study of Baudelaire, greatly superior to the Nineties' conception of Baudelaire as a diabolist and decadent. It reveals Baudelaire primarily as a classicist and as "a soul naturally Christian." But again that point of view leads him to call "great" a passage from *Mon Cœur Mis à Nu*, which is not "great" at all, only touching, and significant as betraying Baudelaire's tragic effort to lead a better life. The same exaggeration shows in his praise of the prose of Bishop Andrewes. "Andrewes," he says, "is the first great preacher of the English Catholic Church," and he contrasts Donne with him to Donne's disadvantage. His praise of Andrewes's sermons sent me to them; I did not find it justified. They struck me as crabbed and jerky. My experience, however, is not good evidence, for the exegesis of the seventeenth-century

divines, "squeezing and squeezing the word until it yields a full juice of meaning," must be tedious to those not extremely interested in divinity.

I appeal rather to the witness of Alexander Whyte, D.D., who has edited Andrewes's *Devotions*, and finds his sermons unreadable; and to Coleridge, who, while adoring and annotating divines of all sorts, had no praise for Andrewes's sermons. Read this passage which Mr. Eliot quotes, presumably as one of the best, and ask yourself, is it very fine?

> I know not how, but when we hear of saving or mention of a Saviour, presently our mind is carried to the saving of our skin, of our temporal state, of our bodily life, and farther saving we think not of. But there is another life not to be forgotten, and greater the dangers, and the destruction more to be feared than of this here, and it would be well sometimes we were remembered of it. Besides our skin and flesh a soul we have, and it is our better part by far, that also hath need of a Saviour; that hath her destruction out of which, that hath her destroyer from which she would be saved, and those would be thought on. Indeed, our chief thought and care would be for that; how to escape the wrath, how to be saved from the destruction to come, whither our sins will certainly bring us. Sin it is will destroy us all.

Apart from that gravity which is common to all seventeenth century prose; apart from the possibility of interpreting, in the light of the preacher's saintly character, its hitching, inhibited movement as signs of an admirable integrity, is this prose really very fine? Is it not extravagant to rate it above that of Hooker, Taylor, and Donne? Surely the importance of Andrewes as an Anglican divine has obscured Mr. Eliot's vision of him as a literary man.

POETRY AS A CRITICISM OF LIFE

(1933)

Seriousness is the quality which influences the young most; without it no writer ever made them enthusiastic. It was the seriousness of Pater's writings which, in his day, won their devotion. And those to whom the young generation now listens most attentively, T. S. Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence, have at least one quality in common – seriousness. It is a quality to which the young are quicker to respond than the old, and they at once distinguish it from its counterfeits.

I should be sorry to think – nor do I – that much reading does not improve literary judgment, or that (to quote from a poem which Mr. Eliot extravagantly undervalues) it is never true of readers that "Love, like the intellect, grows bright gazing on many truths"; but whether it is that youthful seriousness is purer, and therefore answers more unerringly to that quality in literature, or that as we get older we read with more indifference, certainly the recognition of an author's seriousness is more immediate in the young. They will forgive an artist anything except a lack of it; the accommodation of his vision to the demands of an audience or of tradition they find it hard to forgive. Once persuaded that he is incapable of such compromises, his extravagances become merits in their eyes, though with their elders they remain faults. And the reason much excellent criticism has no effect on the opinions of the young is, again, that it is not serious enough: its judgments are compromises, not personal intuitions; critics too often merely expound "case-made law." The young are

not interested in that. They feel with Joubert that taste should be the literary conscience of the soul; criticism the methodical application of it. Mr. Eliot's criticism is of this nature and I do not wonder at his influence.

In *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* I encountered a circumspect sincerity that acted upon me like a challenge: I found I was forced, as I read, to consider afresh what I thought about certain poets and the criteria which at different times have been applied to poetry. To say that Shelley's poetry is only fit for ignorant adolescence, that it is from reading the letters of Keats rather than his poems that we infer him to have been a poet of the first order, or that Goethe "made no great success" of poetry, are judgments which will probably be received with enthusiasm (though I cannot accept them) by Mr. Eliot's younger readers, since they proceed from an uncompromising personal response to poetry. A critic's aversions often indicate the short cut to the citadel of his mind, and I shall discuss Mr. Eliot's aversions after describing the drift of this extremely interesting book.

These lectures deal directly with the criticism of poetry and indirectly with poetry itself; their subject is the relation of criticism to poetry.

Mr. Eliot points out that the answers to the question, "What is poetry?" which posits the critical function, have for the most part been answers to other questions, "What is the use of poetry?" "What ought poetry to *do* for us?" He has not attempted to define poetry himself; I think he thinks it undefinable. He has shown (and he has done it with admirable cogency and clearness) what critics at different periods have expected of poetry, and how, accordingly, the estimation of different kinds of poetry has varied.

> We can learn something about poetry simply by studying what people have thought about it at one period after another; without coming to the stultifying conclusion that there is nothing to

> be said but that opinion changes. . . . The study of criticism, not as a sequence of random conjectures, but as re-adaptation, may also help us to draw some conclusions as to what is permanent or eternal in poetry, and what is merely the expression of an age; and by discovering what does change, and how and why, we may become able to apprehend what does not change.

In another place he writes:

> "Pure," artistic appreciation is to my thinking only an ideal, when not merely a figment, and must be, so long as the appreciation of art is an affair of limited and transient human beings existing in space and time. Both artist and audience are limited. There is for each time, for each artist, a kind of alloy required to make the metal workable into art; and each generation prefers its own alloy to any other. Hence each new master of criticism performs a useful service merely by the fact that his errors are of a different kind from the last; and the longer the sequence of critics we have, the greater amount of correction is possible.

These passages suggest that Mr. Eliot believes that there is an "eternal" poetry, separable from any alloy which made it appeal to contemporaries, and that criticism (progress by the elimination of errors) in time must help us to identify it.

> Amongst all these demands from poetry and responses to it there is always some permanent element in common, just as there are standards of good and bad writing independent of what any one of us happens to like and dislike; but every effort to formulate the common element is limited by the limitations of particular men in particular places and at particular times; and these limitations become manifest in the perspective of history.

However, in yet another place and speaking in dissent, he also says:

> People tend to believe that there is just some one essence of poetry, for which we can find the formula, and that poets can be ranged according to their possession of a greater or less quantity of this essence.

This looks like a contradiction – unless Mr. Eliot means us, in the last quotation, to lay particular stress on the proviso "for which we can find a formula." In that case the sentence might be read, not as a contradiction, but as an admission that we could sense this "essence" or "permanent element" in different poets, though unable to *formulate* it. But the context hardly allows of that interpretation. We are therefore left in doubt how far we can agree with him, whatever our views on this point may be.

When I once attempted to formulate the principle which had unconsciously directed my own criticism, I could get no nearer to it than this: "Æsthetic taste is only further discrimination between preferences determined by other causes."

It is part of a critic's function to explain these causes, though that power of discriminating further upon consequent preferences (with which Mr. Eliot is eminently endowed) I held to be a more important and rarer faculty in a critic. It does not seem to me stultifying to conclude from reviewing the world's literature that there is nothing in poetry to which *all* ages will respond. Must poets believe that they write for *all* times? I doubt it. Has any poet so written? It is early to conclude. Must the critic believe, or be stultified, that real poetry will always be recognised by the discriminating? The very fact that Mr. Eliot, who has such deep affiliations with our own time, cannot refrain from cooling our response to Keats and Coleridge, and chilling it to the bone towards Shelley and Arnold, indicates that good poets may meet with, at any rate, interims of comparative indifference.

In one passage in his criticism of Matthew Arnold (both as a poet and a critic he defines him as an example of "false

stability"), he speaks of his lack of "auditory imagination"; and his definition of what he means by this arresting expression is particularly interesting because Mr. Eliot is evidently writing about what he cares for most himself in poetry, and seeks himself when he writes as a poet:

> What I call the "auditory imagination" is the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and surprising, the most ancient and the most civilised mentality.

Then he adds – he has been discussing Arnold's dictum that poetry is at bottom criticism of Life – "Arnold's notion of life does not perhaps go deep enough." He has said this before more emphatically; and this aversion – equally marked in the case of Addison and Goethe, whom he cannot bring himself to treat with intellectual charity – from the poetry springing from what he regards as a "false stability," leads him into actually misreading Arnold's view of the function of poetry. The passage in question runs as follows:

> "Poetry is at bottom a criticism of life." At bottom: that is a great way down; the bottom is the bottom. At the bottom of the abyss is what few ever see, and what those cannot bear to look at for long; and it is not a "criticism of life." If we mean life as a whole – not that Arnold ever saw life as a whole – from top to bottom, can anything that we can say of it ultimately, of that awful mystery, be called criticism? We bring back very little from our rare descents, and that is not criticism.

But Arnold never said that *life* was at bottom "criticism"; he said that "poetry was at bottom a criticism of life." The

definition is not philosophically exact, but it is striking that Mr. Eliot, throughout these lectures, uses it himself as a test of the different achievements of poets. He is using it in this very passage; he is using it in that passage in which he says that without "auditory imagination" a poet cannot bring something back vitally important; he is using it when he says of Arnold that he had "neither walked in hell nor been rapt in heaven," and of Tennyson and Browning that they "had not enough wisdom, that their knowledge of the human soul was often partial and often shallow."

He uses it in the most open way when justifying his contempt for Shelley:

> When the doctrine, theory, belief, or "view of life" presented in a poem is one which the mind of the reader can accept as coherent, mature, and founded on the facts of experience, it interposes no obstacle to the reader's enjoyment, whether it be one that he accept or deny, approve or deprecate. When it is one which the reader rejects as childish or feeble, it may, for a reader of well-developed mind, set up an almost complete check.

In reading Shelley Mr. Eliot encounters this complete check; he does not accept or approve of Lucretius's view of life, but that does not interrupt his admiration, Here is a mature, coherent view founded on facts of experience, but he is disgusted by what he calls the mixture of "eighteenth-century rationalism and cloudy Platonism" in Shelley. I have no space in which to argue about Shelley, in whose poetry eighteenth-century rationalism hardly appears, though that is saturated with Platonism; but what is such criticism if it is not an application of Arnold's test? It is, I believe, one of the most crucial tests ever formulated; one which all critics must unconsciously or consciously apply who do not believe in some "pure essence" of poetry and in their possession of an unerring faculty for detecting it. Writing of Wordsworth and Coleridge,

Mr. Eliot says that "poetry was for them the expression of a totality of unified interests," and though, as I have pointed out, his own attitude towards "the pure essence" doctrine is in places ambiguous, that is what poetry seems also to him. As to the contribution of intelligible statements to poetry – that is a question of poetic method. One of the many passages in these lectures which delighted me – and this one also illuminated modern poetry for me – deals with that point. He writes:

> The chief use of the "meaning" of a poem, in the ordinary sense, may be (for here again I am speaking of some kinds of poetry and not all) to satisfy one habit of the reader, to keep his mind diverted and quiet, while the poem does its work upon him: much as the imaginary burglar is always provided with a bit of meat for the house-dog. This is a normal situation of which I approve. But the minds of all poets do not work that way; some of them, assuming that there are other minds like their own, become impatient of this meaning, which seems superfluous, and perceive possibilities of intensity through its elimination. I am not asserting that this situation is ideal; only that we must write our poetry as we can, and take it as we find it.

How often in reading modern poetry I miss my "bit of meat"! It is very hard to listen and attend for long together to what is unintelligible.

Throughout these lectures there runs a scornful denial that poetry and art are or can ever possibly be substitutes for religion. This underlies Mr. Eliot's dislike of Goethe, Shelley, Arnold, whose work in different ways, though they rejected God, seemed to offer a substitute. "Nothing in this world or the next," says Mr. Eliot, "is a substitute for anything else; and if you find you must do without something such as religious faith or philosophic belief, then you must do without it," True. But poetry can help us to do one thing which religion helps us to do, to love life spiritually, that is to say, intelligently and disinterestedly. He does not discuss

this, though he discusses many important things, beautifully, sincerely.

ON SHELLEY AS A RELIGIOUS POET

(1936)

We know so much about Shelley's adolescence and, thanks to his flawless and instinctive courage, what we know is so startling that he has been judged by those who disparage him according to what he wrote and what he did before he was of age. To no other famous figure of the past has less indulgence on the score of youth been shown. "Chatter about Harriet," the pamphlet on "The Necessity of Atheism," the "Notes to Queen Mab" (and very able they are for a youth of twenty), have been taken by adverse critics as measures of his character and mind.

With his *In Defence of Shelley*, Mr. Herbert Read flew to defend Shelley, prompted by the disparaging comments on that poet which are to be found in Mr. Eliot's *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*. Parts of his defence are sound, but, judged as a whole, as a reasoned plea addressed to Mr. Eliot, it reminds me of the kind of defence that is sometimes put up by friends on behalf of absent friends:

> Oh, no! You mustn't say that they are inhospitable! It simply is that, having for years and years got into the habit of looking at every sixpence, they have naturally come to *hate* the idea of anything – even the pleasure of having you to dine – costing more than is absolutely necessary.... And you're wrong again about her: she doesn't know what truth *is* – that's all. Her little fib about your brother was nothing at all exceptional. She has always been like that from the nursery. You're too hard on

her; you see, it is her nature to behave like that. But now I've explained them to you I'm sure you'll think better of them.

Even when well-meant, this line of defence is seldom effective; and Mr. Eliot is not likely to modify his condemnation of what he dislikes in Shelley, through being told that those characteristics were only the consequences of what happened to the poet shortly after leaving his mother's womb. Mr. Read seems simple-minded enough to hope so, or rather, perhaps, muddle-minded enough to think Mr. Eliot, and those who agree with him, ought to retract, forgetting himself that such casual explanations leave matters, as far as they are subjects for æsthetic or moral judgments, exactly where they were. An ugly woman remains an ugly woman, though you are able to prove that both her parents were plain.

Mr. Read's essay is not then, in the main, a "defence" of Shelley and his poetry, but a description of the psychological type to which Mr. Read believes he belonged. It is very wishy-washy psychology at that, though this is not so much his own fault as the fault of the condition of psycho-analysis at the present moment. Where Mr. Read is to blame is in lending too uncritical an ear to the fuddled conjectures of second-rate intellects rejoicing in, and flourishing upon, the present imprecision of psycho-analytical terminology; though, I repeat, he is illogical in supposing that if he could only show "that Shelley was suffering during the last ten years of his life (and therefore during the whole of his effective poetic period) from a well-established kind of psychosis, the paranoid type, of dementia præcox," adverse criticism of his poetry and character would stand rebuked. Alas!

Mr. T. S. Eliot's attitude towards Shelley was much the same as Arnold's and Patmore's. The proper "defence" is to be found in Mr. Santayana's *Winds of Doctrine* and in Clutton-Brock's preface to Mr. Locock's edition of *Shelley*.

I should like to enlarge on this topic; for the attitude of any typical "modern" poet to the poetry of Shelley reveals some very curious things. Mr. Eliot's view of Shelley, the man, is that he "was humourless, pedantic, self-centred, and sometimes almost a blackguard." This is a moral judgment which shocks me, and I cannot but think it the result of ignorance or forgetfulness. It would be excusable in the man of the world (who never pretends that his judgments are ultimate) to dismiss Shelley as a "crystal-clear crank," but not in one who cannot help being concerned with moral beauty. How, then, is it that Mr. Eliot has failed to see in Shelley a singular disinterestedness? If there ever was a man to whom the beatitude "blessed are the pure in heart" applied, it was Shelley. That the general temper of his mind was such that he "looked forward to the day of the last joke" (though there was plenty of laughter in him by the by) is not a characteristic to which an admirer of saints should take exception. Mr. Read did well to quote Byron as a witness to the intrinsic goodness of Shelley's nature, Byron was exceedingly sceptical about the genuineness of anyone's pretentions to be good at all, let alone to be better than the ruck of mankind; but in Shelley he came up against a selflessness and enthusiasm he could not call sham: "You were all wrong about Shelley; we are all brutes compared with him."

Why is it, then, that Mr. Eliot, and that men like Arnold and Patmore, are so reluctant to look at or to acknowledge a rare beauty of character visible also in Shelley's work? Arnold's and Patmore's essays were both reviews of Dowden's *Life of Shelley* (Patmore's was the earlier one of the two), which was a rather provocatively gushing book; and Patmore returned to the attack later in an essay on "The Morality of Epipsychidion." Here is a passage from his review of Dowden:

> What Shelley was at first he remained to the last: a beautiful, effeminate, arrogant boy – constitutionally indifferent to money,

> generous by impulse, self-indulgent by habit, ignorant to the end of all that it most behoves a responsible being to know, and so conceited that his ignorance was incurable; showing at every turn the most infallible sign of a feeble intellect, a belief in human perfectibility; and rushing at once to the conclusion, when he or others met with suffering, that someone, not the sufferer, was doing grievous wrong. If to do right in one's own eyes is the whole of virtue, and to suffer for so doing is to be a martyr, then Shelley was the saint and martyr which a large number of – chiefly young – persons consider him to have been as a man and if to have the faculty of saying everything in the most brilliant language and imagery, without having anything particular to say beyond sublime common-places and ethereal fallacies about love and liberty, is to be a "supreme" poet, then Shelley was undoubtedly such. But as a man, Shelley was almost wholly devoid of the instincts of the "political animal," which Aristotle defines a man to be. If he could not see the reason for any social institution or custom, he could not feel any, and forthwith set himself to convince the world that they were the invention of priests and tyrants.

There is hardly a word in this passage with which, I think, Mr. Eliot would not concur, as with Patmore's judgment on Shelley's poetry – "much like the soap-bubbles he was so fond of blowing – its superficies beauty, its substance wind." And there is hardly a sentence in this general charge (except the statement that Shelley had nothing to say) which cannot be justified up to a certain point. Nevertheless, as a whole, the verdict is prodigiously unfair. But whence this determined animus to destroy, at all costs, admiration and sympathy for Shelley? At the age of nineteen, and at the instigation of a matchmaking woman, he ran off with a schoolgirl of sixteen, who, by the by, was unfaithful to him, and whom he left (after providing for her) for another woman. Harriet and Shelley were children when they tried to live together. That is the only "sin" in a life otherwise beautifully generous, sympathetic and disinterested. Why has it never been forgiven by those who

find no difficulty in overlooking the adulteries of Dante or the delinquencies of Verlaine? Why has "chatter" about Harriet never ceased?

There is a reason, and a logical one, though it cannot justify a misreading of Shelley's character: Shelley never admitted that he had done wrong. "His writings," wrote Coventry Patmore ("The Morality of Epipsychidion"), "are the most powerful moral solvent which the literature of our century has produced; and that is saying much. Their power in this way lies mainly in the circumstance of the manifest absence of all malefic intention, and in their proposed enthusiasm for the very good, into the heart of which they softly and imperceptibly eat." "Absence of malefic intention" is, indeed, a mild way of describing the fervent devotion to ideals and mankind which is expressed in his work. This is the disconcerting fact, which accounts for the extreme reluctance of those who regard his poetry as dangerous to look at the beauty of his character. "Shelley was an atheist and profoundly immoral; but his irreligion was radiant with pious imagination and his immorality delicately and strictly conscientious," wrote Patmore, in a third essay contrasting him with Crabbe – Crabbe was so sound in morals and orthodox in religion. It makes matters much simpler if you can believe that there was something profoundly wrong with Shelley himself. But unfortunately he was an angel, and not an effectual one.

> It is a fact of capital importance in the development of human genius that the great revolution in Christendom against Christianity, a revolution that began with the Renaissance and is not yet completed, should have found angels to herald it, no less than that other revolution did which began at Bethlehem; and that among these new angels there should have been one so winsome, pure and rapturous as Shelley.

This passage occurs in Mr. Santayana's essay in *Winds of Doctrine*, to which I referred readers for the best defence of Shelley against the charges of emptiness and puerility which Mr. Eliot brought. Shelley is really one of the great religious poets, and his poetry could only have been written by one familiar with intense thought. It is pantheistic; hence its repulsiveness to Catholics. Actual beauty always reminds him of that reality in the existence of which he believed, where all beauties were combined. There is the emptiness not of unreality but of "a breathless flight towards the last reality" in his work. The impulse which he obeyed in those flights towards it is well deserved in that rejected fragment of "Epipsychidion":

And what is that most brief and bright delight
Which rushes through the touch and through the sight,
And stands before the spirit's inmost throne,
A naked Seraph? None hath ever known.
Its birth is darkness, and its growth desires
Untamable and fleet and fierce as fire,
Not to be touched but to be felt alone,
It fills the world with glory – and is gone.

These were the moments that he sought – in love, in the contemplation of nature, in recollection, for the sake of the transfiguration of the world that they brought with them.

"Shelley's reputation has suffered," wrote Clutton-Brock, "because, being violently unorthodox, he has always been regarded as a secular, not as a religious poet. No one would have complained of the unreality of his poetry or of its want of substance, if his subject-matter had been the Christian religion instead of that religion which he was always trying to discover and to express for himself."

There is a great deal of truth in this. Shelley sought perpetually the experience of those moments at which eternal truth seems to be present fact. If not the most philosophic of English poets, he is the one who has rendered best the rapture of contemplation.

WRITERS AND VALUES

THOUGHTS ON DE QUINCEY

(1936)

I

A Flame in Sunlight? At first I did not like that title at all as applied to De Quincey.* He was not a fiery person; he gave out no heat; you cannot warm yourself at him; his intellectual passion consumed nothing but himself. Then, the picture of a small grate filled with soft grey ashes with now and then an almost colourless transparent flicker above them – a fire "put out," as landladies call it, by the sun, rose before my mind; and I began to think the image of "a flame in sunlight" was subtly appropriate to De Quincey, and indicative of a biographer who had felt sensitively about his subject. Whose imagination was more apt than his to lose its lustre when confronted with the common light of day? His mind had been like a *camera obscura*; room, in his case, curtained by a psychological solitude and foreboding, and further darkened by opium, into which light from the outside world came through the narrowest of apertures, creating thereby dream-bright reflections of things at a far remove. And when I had finished this book, he seemed a man to whom strangely little had really *happened*.

Yet he had suffered tortures, morally, mentally, physically; he had adored and lost Coleridge and Wordsworth; he had *known* the life of utter destitution and had had a peep into

* *A Flame in Sunlight*. By Edward Sackville-West.

the *grand monde*; he had made a farmer's daughter his mistress, married her and begotten (was it six or was it eight?) children; he had lived the life of a hunted debtor and of a cosy-cottage recluse; he had experienced in their extremest and most prolonged form the miserable agitations of the hustled, unpractical journalist, but also the exquisite dilatory delights of the artist in words; he had lost a beloved wife and children dear to him; he had known the daily humiliations of the timidly refined oddity, and the perhaps still bitterer humiliations of the honourable man who finds he is perpetually breaking his word; he had won admiration and earned contempt. It seemed, then, a life of unusually varied experience. Yet how little of all it contained had penetrated the core of his being – a few incidents belonging to his childhood or adolescence. But they had made so piercing an impression that they fixed the hues of his imagination.

Never was a man to whom that saying of Goethe (true in a measure of us all), *Du bist am Ende was du bist*, was more applicable. De Quincey is the archetype of the sensitive who never change, the intelligent who never learn, the emotionally precocious who never grow up, the suffering who thrive, if thriving it can be called, on pain. Perhaps they can be psychoanalysed completely out of existence, but at what loss to the world! De Quincey in pain is the creator of tragic illimitable visions of despair, and by contrast, of harmonies of peace so fresh and tender that they breathe the soul of convalescence. But De Quincey happy? – and he was sometimes when he forgot in intellectual occupation the phantasmagoria of his intenser life – De Quincey happy provides an exhibition of arch pedantic skittishness.

The biographer of De Quincey has to compete with what is one of the most artful and strange *autobiographies* in all literature. Who can hope to rival the passionate glow of *The Confessions* and of the picturesque passages in De Quincey's

reminiscent essays? If the biographer paraphrases and condenses, the depth in them vanishes. The reader will notice this in Mr. Sackville-West's handling of the "Ann" and London episodes. He gives us fragments of them, but fragments only make us long for the whole moving, dreamy phantasmagoria, so magnificently and strangely orchestrated. Furthermore, De Quincey's meandering letters are, to use a word he liked, "torpedinous"; even his boyish diary, though queer, is unarresting. A life of De Quincey thoroughly documented induces sleep and so does his correspondence. Mr. Sackville-West has been wisely sparing of quotation from his letters.

What De Quincey's biographer has to do is to disentangle the *Dichtung* from the *Wahrheit* in his autobiographical writings. The question he must answer is: What were the facts beneath this profoundly stylised record of his experience? And this is difficult with an author in whom memory and imaginative magnification were almost one identical faculty. Mr. Sackville-West shows how a few episodes (the death, for instance, of his sister, aged eight, when De Quincey himself was six) reverberated and re-echoed through his whole life. That striking simile of the gallery in the dome of St. Paul's where a whisper at one point in the circle echoes clamorously at a far-distant one, which De Quincey added to the second and (so Mr. Sackville-West tells us) much inferior version of *The Confessions*, conveys this peculiar quality in his retrospections. Whenever he recalled what had been a whisper, he heard it again as thunder; whenever he looked back, what rose before his mind was a past sultry and ominous, heavy with storms to come, and he re-imagined that as something felt *at the time*. Nothing is more characteristic of him than that when he remembers standing in the sunlit room where the body of his sister lay, he should interpret the trance of anguish into which he fell as a meditation upon death and summer quite impossible in a child of six; or that splendid,

less-known passage, where a night spent in an empty ballroom at Shrewsbury seems charged with all his future sufferings in London.

> This single feature of the rooms – their unusual altitude, and the echoing hollowness which had become the exponent of that altitude... together with crowding, and evanescent images of the flying feet that so often had spread gladness through these halls on the wings of youth and hope at seasons when every room rang with music – all this, rising in tumultuous vision, whilst the dead hours of night were stealing along, all around me – household and town – sleeping, and whilst against the windows more and more the storm outside was raving, and to all appearance endlessly growing, threw me into the deadliest condition of nervous emotion under contradictory forces, high over which predominated horror recoiling from that unfathomed abyss in London into which I was now so wilfully precipitating myself. Often I looked out and examined the night. "Wild it was beyond all description, and dark as 'the inside of a wolf's throat.'" But at intervals, when the wind, shifting continually, swept in such a direction as to clear away the vast curtain of vapour, the stars shone out, though with a light unusually dim and distant. Still, as I turned inwards to the echoing chambers, or outwards to the wild, wild night, I saw London expanding her visionary gates to receive me, like some dreadful mouth of Acheron.

Mr. Sackville-West has disentangled fact from dreams well, and at one point he has made an important and plausibly supported conjecture. One of the most perplexing yet decisive incidents in De Quincey's life was his flight, not from school at the age of seventeen – for that truancy was condoned by his family, who then gave him a pound a week on which to wander fancy-free in Wales – but, subsequently, from all further support. Why did he spend months of miserable vagabondage in Wales, earning a few pence by writing love-letters for rustics; with winter coming on too, sleeping out, going hungry,

rather than inform his family of his whereabouts? Why did he at length borrow £10 from a chance acquaintance, and hurry desperately to London, there to come near dying of starvation while waiting in vain to borrow money on his expectations? In spite of making the utmost allowance for innate vagueness, the motive behind this crucial episode, (out of which, as an alleviation for ulcerated stomach, the opium habit sprang), has always been incomprehensible to me. Why, too, did De Quincey, when he looked back, write of his behaviour then in terms, not of regret at folly, but of bitter, bitter remorse? At last a ray of light has been thrown on that puzzle.

When he was on the point of absconding to the Lakes, a letter addressed to Monsieur De Quincey was forwarded to him from Chester post office. It contained a draft for £40 intended for a French émigré of that name. Only in the second edition of *The Confessions* is this mentioned, and then wrapped about with digressions on the illegibility of the letter accompanying it, and his dread of handing the draft over to the Manchester post office. He changed his plans and walked, a two days' tramp, to Chester, to deliver it at the place from which it came, and to see at least his sister, who was living there with his mother. He says in his *Confessions* that he gave the draft to a strange woman at Chester (together with half-a-crown) to return to the post office. The story is queer. He met her while he was watching the bore come up the River Dee. They were both frightened. She was two hours away; she returned and told him that she had given his "love" to the post office people and that all would now be well. That night he hung round "The Priory," where his mother lived; sent a note to his favourite sister; met unexpectedly his uncle from Bengal in the moonlit garden; stayed with his mother; had the question of his flight from school out with her and his uncle; lingered with them apparently, and then started on a walking-tour in Wales with the ample allowance (in those days) of a pound a week.

He never delivered the draft. Mr. Sackville-West's suggestion is that he kept it. Whether he subsequently tried to cash it, or kept it to use in some last resort, or flourished it as a credit-producing talisman on occasions, cannot, of course, be determined. But that he kept it, or even destroyed it, would at least account for that terrified flight which was the beginning of all his disasters. One can imagine how fearfully the shadow of the law would hang over the imagination of De Quincey as a boy. Perhaps when inquiries had been set on foot by the post office, he received a letter from his dominating, unsympathetic mother; that alone would have been enough to send him distracted.

II

Since reading Mr. Sackville-West's *A Flame in Sunlight* I have been haunted by De Quincey. I have watched him as Mr. Sackville-West saw him: sometimes waking in his cottage bedroom to nightmares worse than sleep had brought ,with his wife bending over him and asking distractedly, "What do you see, dear, what do you see?"; or sometimes as the child-protected but "dejected little father," relieved at last by care of that "abhorrent ogre – the business of living." But there is one point in Mr. Sackville-West's biography on which I have come to second thoughts. His conjecture that De Quincey had not delivered the letter but kept or destroyed the draft brought so many subsequent facts into focus that at first I was prepared to say that it "almost deserved the name of a discovery." But when I re-read the whole of De Quincey's account of his flight from school and of his behaviour at Chester, I changed my mind. I discovered that De Quincey's flight from school was (rationally) quite as unintelligible as his subsequent flight to London. If I accepted the first fact, why should I boggle any longer at the mystery of his having preferred to starve rather than let his family know when he was in London?

Yet Mr. Sackville-West had made out a strong case and an interesting one. His conjecture that the woman was an invention, and that he had either thrown the letter away into the river, "or (more probably) kept it and destroyed it later, after it had become obvious that he could no longer own to the possession of it without acknowledging a felony," explained so many things. Mr. Sackville-West made a list of them:

> (1) Why, since De Quincey admits having altered his plans on leaving Manchester with the express intention of taking the letter back to the Chester post office, did he not do so? What possible grounds could he have had for confiding to the hands of a perfect stranger something so precious that he had not cared to trust even the Manchester post office with it? (2) If the woman really accepted the letter and did with it as he told her – as he says she did – why did he have to pay £150 on account of the affair, when he came of age, four years later? (3) This incident is the only one of importance connected with this period that is not only not described, but not even mentioned, either in the early version of the *Confessions* or in the *Autobiographic Sketches*. (4) The account he eventually gave of it, in the 1856 edition of the *Confessions*, is inconsecutive, and is interrupted by digressions and elaborate protestations calculated to blur his real preoccupation and the actual course of events. (5) Why, if his conscience was perfectly clear, did he fly into a passion at the Bangor Landlady's harmless joke? (6) The remorse he afterwards expressed for the whole of this phase of his life is altogether disproportionate. (7) ... When in 1821 he wrote his first version of the *Confessions*, he was still too young to be able to dwell upon the subject at all – far less to explain it away: the wound in his soul had not had time to heal. But by 1856, when he re-edited that amazing document, the whole story was already so old that it had had time to acquire in his mind the colours and lineaments of a romance, and the legend, which his sub-conscious mind had been so painfully building up through the years to cover his fatal error, now slipped into place as though it had always been there.

How plausible this is! As I re-read it I am almost again converted. But I discovered (1) that De Quincey had changed his intention of going to the Lakes *before* he received the letter containing the £40. (2) That the £150 which he had to pay out of his legacy on coming of age was to meet the expense of scouring the Lake district for him before his mother knew that he was on his way home. It seems a very large sum, but De Quincey says that the moment two pieces of news reached "The Priory" a carriage and four horses, containing his sister and a friend of the family, started in pursuit of him. He had left indications that he had gone north in order not to be overtaken by the headmaster on his way to Chester. The first piece of news, conveyed by a messenger on horseback, who reached his home four hours before he did, was that he had run away; while the second was information from the Chester post office, that a draft of forty guineas had been sent him by mistake and not returned. His family, naturally perhaps, concluded that he had run away on that money. As a matter of fact, he had borrowed £10 from Lady Carbery; but the fact that he had the draft on him weighed on his mind. He could not stand the idea of being asked questions at the post office, and, with a casualness also characteristic of him, he gave it to the first stranger he met to deliver – that is his own story. Then he sent a note to his sister, who, believing in his innocence, had gone in pursuit of him to the Lakes. The family were naturally desperately anxious to save him from the consequences of what they supposed was a crime.

The matter is very obscure, but the chief reason why, on reconsideration, Mr. Sackville-West's conjecture no longer appears to me so important is that it does not now seem necessary to invoke any powerful motive at all to account for De Quincey's flight to London or, when there, his preferring to starve in the hope of raising money rather than communicate with his family. On re-reading his account of his motives for

running away from his Manchester school, it dawned on me that he was an unpredictable creature.

It was an almost perfect school from De Quincey's point of view. He was head-boarder from the day he entered it; he had a room of his own with a piano (though he never learnt to play); there were no punishments, no compulsory games, and there was no bullying. He had a subscription to the Manchester public library. He evidently did not like the old headmaster personally, but his only complaint against him was that he took the school hours at a rush; the hour's interval for breakfast and the two hours for midday dinner and recreation were often curtailed in order that the day's work might be over by five. De Quincey's liver worked badly, and when the apothecary prescribed a nauseous black draught that was the last straw. De Quincey made up his mind to decamp. As for his school-fellows, when he was first introduced to them he found them discussing why, and at what points, Grotius's *De Veritate Christianae Religionis* was inferior to Paley's *Evidences*! And he remarks that in regard to English literature he only met three or four men afterwards

> who had a knowledge which came as near to what I should consider a comprehensive knowledge, as really existed amongst those boys collectively. What one boy had not, another had; and thus, by continual intercourse, the fragmentary contribution of one being integrated by the fragmentary contributions of others, gradually the attainments of each separate individual became, in some degree, the collective attainments of the whole senior common room.

"I learned to feel a deep respect for my new school-fellows," he says; "deep it was then; and larger experience has made it deeper." Why, he was in clover! At what other school would he have been likely to find a set of schoolfellows who would have suited him as well? But that black dose and, above all, the irregular hours, were too much for him. Early

one summer morning he absconded – with tears, it is true, at leaving all that behind. He says he would have probably delayed and delayed, had it not been for the necessity of returning that £40 to the Chester post office. Well, a boy so much at the mercy of the promptings of vagabondage might as easily have taken a coach to London afterwards, without being pursued by fear. That, at any rate, is my own conclusion, on second thoughts, regarding Mr. Sackville-West's tentative but ingeniously plausible explanation. Once in London, enfeebled and nervous, he would have gone on putting off and off the horrid step of returning, always hoping to raise money on his expectations, till one of the friends of his family in London gave him away.

III

I wonder how many lovers of De Quincey there are? The injunction to take rhetoric and wring its neck has been followed by modern poets with disastrous results. Rhetoric is the necessary bedding out of which the magic flowers of the purest poetry often grow. If you examine a poem such as *Lycidas*, you will find that the bulk of it is composed of what the modern poet would condemn as "rhetoric"; yet he who does not consider *Lycidas* a splendid poem is a fool. "Shakespeare" is mostly rhetoric; if he had not been a superb rhetorician he would not have been able to soar. In prose, too, the moderns fight shy of rhetoric. The result is that, although there has been no age in which decent prose was commoner, in the finest kind of prose we are poor. There is no greatness of mind, or, if you will, greatness of attitude, behind contemporary writing; we excel only in the intimate and ironical and the purely descriptive. In this line certainly it is best to dispense with rhetoric.

To change your style you must change your way of thinking; now, the style of De Quincey is stately and inveterately

convolved. It is also prevailingly intellectual. Movement is the essence of it, and yet there is always a completely logical reticulation between sentence and sentence; moreover, unlike many gorgeous seventeenth century writers, De Quincey never ignores the fact that good prose should be easy to read aloud. There is a mysterious connection between the intelligibility of a sentence and normal human breathing. The safest way of avoiding obscurity, once all ambiguities of meaning are removed, is to write, as I am doing now, in short sentences. But that is pusillanimity; and I do not flatter myself that, except occasionally in a phrase, my own prose has any æsthetic quality. It is when the writer comes to such advanced problems as those involved in the orchestration of long periods that lung-capacity has to be taken into account. De Quincey is a master of balance, evolution and pause. He has grave defects; one of them fatal to popularity. To use Professor Saintsbury's word, he "rigmaroles," which is a defect of one of his most exquisite characteristics – that of "winding into his subject like a serpent." His ear, too, is of extreme delicacy: "Ah reader! I would the gods had made thee rhythmical, that thou mightest comprehend the thousandth part of my labours in the evasion of cacophony." The common reader knows him only in extracts, and those the towering ones; but his measure can only be taken by those who read also his long level flights.

"From my birth" (he wrote) "I was made an intellectual creature; and intellectual in the highest sense my pursuits and pleasures have been, even from my school-boy days." His diary bears that statement out; its interest is not literary but biographical. It was written between his seventeenth and eighteenth years, just after the truant had returned to his mother and made peace with his guardians; after he had rambled in Wales and starved with that frightened child in the money-lender's empty house in Greek Street, and paced and

repaced, with his lost Ann, the pavements of Oxford Street. No traces of his tribulations are to be found in his diary, only of misty and exalted literary projects and of visits to homely people who were kind to him. Nothing ever *happened* to De Quincey until it began to affect his imagination, and that process, as we all know, often requires a long interval of time. Far the most emotional passages are the unsent letters which he wrote to Wordsworth, whom he worshipped and longed to know. What we really want with all our hearts we obtain, except, perhaps, in love; and De Quincey soon became the friend of the poet and of Coleridge, whom also he had adored from afar. He was at Oxford when he made their acquaintance, and he had already taken to opium to soothe the pangs of an ulcerated stomach. De Quincey recorded long afterwards that on the occasion of their meeting Coleridge spoke of that drug with the utmost abhorrence: De Quincey probably confessed, and the agitated poet did not.

One of the most vivid descriptions of De Quincey as a man is, oddly enough, an anticipatory one, by a poet who died before De Quincey was born. It occurs in Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*:

He came, the bard, a little Druid wight
Of withered aspect, but his eye was keen,
With sweetness mixed. In russet brown bedight,
As is his sister of the copses green,
He crept along, unpromising of mien.
Gross, he who judges so! His soul was fair,
Bright as the children of yon azure sheen.
True comeliness, which nothing can impair,
Dwells in the mind: all else is vanity and glare.

This is extraordinarily close, except in respect of De Quincey's apparel, which was stranger and more miscellaneous. But the best description of all is to be found in Carlyle's *Memoirs of Edward Irving*. It is a masterpiece of pen portraiture:

> He was a pretty little creature, full of wire-drawn ingenuities; bankrupt enthusiasms, bankrupt pride; with the finest silver-toned low voice, and most elaborate gently-winding courtesies and ingenuities in conversation: "What wouldn't one give to have him in a Box, and take him out to talk!" (That was *her* criticism of him; and it was right good). A bright, ready and melodious talker; but in the end an inconclusive and long winded. One of the smallest man-figures I ever saw; shaped like a pair of tongs; and hardly above five feet in all; when he sat, you would have taken him, by candle-light, for the beautifullest little Child; blue-eyed, blonde-haired, sparkling face – had there not been a something too, which said, "*Eccovi*, this Child has been in Hell."

Had he never been in Hell, had he never taken opium, he would never have been the writer he was. Professor Saintsbury agrees: "It is just possible – shocking as the suggestion may seem to out-and-out denouncers of all *Paradis Artificiels* – that he would have had no literary merit at all, or much less of it."

SYDNEY SMITH 1771–1845

(1934)

Sydney Smith was born in 1771. When he was asked what was his coat-of-arms, he replied that the Smiths had always sealed their letters with their thumbs. He came of merchant stock. He was the second of four clever brothers. His father was a restless, speculating sort of man, in early years possessed by an itch for travel (he left his wife at the church door to visit America), and in later years for constantly buying and selling houses at a loss. Little is known of him, but we guess it must have been from his father that Sydney inherited his unconquerable buoyancy, diverting into the harmless channel of a joyous and releasing levity, that paternal passion for the erratic. Sydney Smith himself was far from being irresponsible in practical affairs, though he always put a little gaiety into them. As he said of himself, "I can't cure myself even of punctuality," Great humorists have often been somewhat melancholy men, Sydney Smith is among those who had unflagging high-spirits. No man could be more sociable and no man ever had more relish for his own jokes. The impulse to share laughter with others was irresistible to him; it came upon him wherever he might be – in a stage-coach, at home, and once at least in church. He betted his Squire a guinea that he would make him laugh during the sermon, and won his bet by simulating a succession of powerful sneezes in the pulpit, indistinguishable to the Squire at least from his own name: "Ah-h-*ker*shaw, *ker*shaw."

It was not only in the best company he uttered his best things. He was a perpetual fountain of fun; an *improvisatore*, who raised upon some shrewd comment wild edifices of exaggeration. His talk ascended from rational wit to buffoonery; yet his towerings never daunted others. He did not compete; he overflowed. As he said of Macaulay's learning, his wit "overflowed" and "he stood in the slops." What made him the most besought of all guests was the glow of good-humour he shed round him. Sometimes the company could take away with them a quick retort or comment; sometimes only a confused recollection of an evening when they had laughed themselves tired. Contemporary memoirs are full of gasping attempts to record such delighted occasions. The wit of course was portable. People could repeat Sydney's reply to a neighbour at dinner who had asked him the name of the lovely lady sitting between two bishops opposite, "I assume – Susanna"; or his retort to the rude young man who declared, "If I were a father and had an idiot of a son I should put him into the Church." "Well, your father did not apparently share that opinion." But it is seldom that in contemporary diaries or memoirs we can measure the effect of his torrent of comparisons and images. Print destroys the spontaneity which accounts for the joy-bringing potency of Sydney Smith's improvisations: "Going to marry her!" he once cried on hearing that a young man was about to wed an enormous widow twice his age. "Going to marry her! Impossible! You mean *part* of her; he could not marry her all" (imagine the dubious shake of the head) "himself. It would be a case, not of bigamy, but" (imagine the rising voice) "trigamy. The neighbourhood or the magistrates should interfere. There's enough of her to furnish wives for a whole parish." (Louder). "One man marry her! – it's *monstrous*!" (Now for the crescendo). "You might people a colony with her – or give an assembly with her! Or perhaps take your morning's walk round her, always

provided there were frequent resting places – and you were in rude health. Or" (now for the climax) "you might read the Riot Act and disperse her! In short," (he roars with laughter and subsides into chuckles) "you might do anything with her *but* marry her." Here, for once, in a contemporary record, we hear the voice of the portly divine with the Roman nose, sparkling eyes, and red pursed lips; and, at any rate, infer from it those dramatic gestures and that play of feature which accompanied all his towerings into the glorious inane.

After that, it is easier to imagine the relish with which the company must have listened one night to his reply to Macaulay, who on leaving a party at which a distinguished and invited Brahmin had failed to appear, said politely to his hostess it had been "a compensation, however, to meet Mr. Sydney Smith."

> Compensation! Do you mean to insult me? A beneficed clergyman, an orthodox clergyman, a nobleman's chaplain, to be no more than compensation for a Brahmin! And a heretic Brahmin, too; a fellow who has lost his own religion and can't find another; a vile heterodox dog, who, as I am credibly informed, eats beefsteaks in private! A man who has lost his caste! who ought to have melted lead poured down his nostrils if the good old Vedas were in force as they ought to be.

Evanescent as the joy of such occasions is, we can yet see him, on one of them, bestriding the form of Sir James Mackintosh prostrate with laughter, shouting "Ruat Justicia!"

Sydney Smith's comments on his own circle, now those men and women are dead and gone, have of course, lost some piquancy but not all their point. We can appreciate, though not like those in the habit of attending Holland House parties, his exclamation; "Macaulay is improved! Macaulay improves! I have observed in him of late brilliant flashes of silence"; or his comment on some well-known Dean that "he ought to be preached to death by wild curates"; or on

Milman's *The History of Christianity* that "he ought to have gone the whole lamb"; or his whisper on seeing Mrs. Grote enter the room in a new evening-dress, "*Now*, I know the meaning of the word grotesque!" Yet how much more we would have enjoyed it at the moment of the lady's entrance! We can trust the appositeness of his comments on men now forgotten; "He has no command of his understanding; it is always getting between his legs and tripping him up"; or on his brother Bobus, "Brother, you and I are exceptions to the law of nature. You have risen by your gravity, and I have sunk by my levity." We confidently infer them to have been pointful because when we do know enough about the person concerned, his comments always seem to fly straight to the mark. "Whewell's forte is science," said someone, "Yes, and his foible," said Sydney, "is Omni-science."

What could hit off Lord John Russell's weakness and strength, whom by the by Sydney Smith admired and liked, better than this:

> There is not a better man in England than Lord John Russell; but his worst failure is that he is utterly ignorant of all moral fear; there is nothing he would not undertake. I believe he would perform the operation for the stone – build St. Peter's – or assume (with or without ten minutes notice) the command of the Channel Fleet; and no one would discover by his manner that the patient had died – the Church tumbled down – and the Channel Fleet been knocked to atoms.... Another peculiarity of the Russells is that they never alter their opinions: they are an excellent race, but they must be trepanned before they can be convinced.

When Lord John answered in a dignified huff to the effect that Sydney Smith's pamphlet on the redivision of Church property had not convinced him, Sydney replied:

> You say you are not convinced by my pamphlet. I am afraid that I am a very arrogant person; but I do assure you that, in the fondest moments of self-conceit, the idea of convincing a Russell that he was wrong never came across my mind. Euclid would have had a bad chance with you if you had happened to have formed an opinion that the interior angles of a triangle were not equal to two right angles. The more poor Euclid demonstrated, the more you would not have been convinced.

The fashionable wit, Luttrell, was amazed by those open letters to Archdeacon Singleton: "Could you conceive," he said to the sympathetic Tom Moore, "any man taking such pains to upset a brilliant position in society as Sydney has been taking lately?" But Sydney Smith had not an atom of the toady in him. Like all true wits he was no respecter of persons or positions. There was an almost Voltairean lack of reverence in his makeup, and a Voltairean grasp of fact. These were the sources of his strength and his wit. When someone said his view of life was materialistic he replied:

> Be it so; I cannot help it; I paint mankind as I find them, and am not answerable for their defects. When an argument taken from real life, and the actual condition of the world, is brought among the shadowy discussions of Ecclesiastics, it always occasions terror and dismay; it is like Aeneas stepping into Charon's boat, which carried only ghosts and spirits.

His favourite maxim "Take short views" is in the key of that moralist. And of whom else does the ring of these remarks remind you?

> The observances of the Church concerning feasts and fasts are tolerably well kept upon the whole, since the rich keep the feasts and the poor the fasts.
>
> The Church attempting to be useful is much as if Sheridan were to take to keeping accounts – but it cannot last.

Church and King in moderation are very good things, but we have too much of both.

I must believe in the Apostolic Succession, there being no other way of accounting for the descent of the Bishop of Exeter from Judas Iscariot.

Benevolence is a natural instinct of the human mind. When A sees B in grievous distress, his conscience always urges him to entreat C to help him.

Lady Cork was once so moved by a charity sermon that she begged me to lend her a guinea for her contribution. I did so. She never repaid me, and spent it on herself.

My idea of heaven, is eating *pâtés de foie gras* to the sound of trumpets.

What a mystery is the folly and stupidity of the good!

There is not the least use in preaching to anyone unless you chance to catch them ill.

What a pity it is that we have no amusements in England but vice and religion.

England is almost the only country in the world (even at present) where there is not some favourite religious spot where absurd lies, little bits of cloth, feathers, rusty nails, splinters and other invaluable relics, are treasured up, and in defence of which the whole population are willing to turn out and perish as one man.

He put war, too, in the same place as did the sage of Ferney. "No war for me short of Piccadilly! There.... I will combat to death for Fortnum and Mason's and fall in the defence of my country's sauces." He shared the same political indignations. It was a loathing of intolerance which made him fight so fiercely for Catholic Emancipation, though he thought Catholicism ridiculous, and pernicious. It was an intense sympathy with the poor which made him fall upon the infamous game-laws of the early nineteenth century. A short letter he wrote to Lady Morpeth contained nineteen pieces of advice on the Art of Living which both in their drift and their contiguity to each other, might have been written from Ferney.

> Be as busy as you can. . . . Don't expect too much from life – a sorry business at the best. . . . Short views of human life – not further than dinner or tea. . . . Make no secret of your low spirits to your friends but talk of them freely – they are always worse for dignified concealment. . . . Live as well as you dare. . . . Keep good blazing fires. . . . Avoid poetry, dramatic representations (except comedy), music, serious novels, melancholy, sentimental people, and everything likely to excite feeling and emotion, not ending in active benevolence. . . . Do good, and endeavour to please everybody of every degree. . . . Be firm and constant in the exercise of rational religion.

These are but a handful, and with the exception of perhaps the direction regarding dramatic representations, they might have all proceeded from the mouth of Voltaire.

I began this article with a date: the date was my clue.

It is the first thirty years of a man's life that make him what he becomes: Sydney Smith belonged to the eighteenth century. He detested and ridiculed "Enthusiasm" without understanding it. Like many of the great wits, like Voltaire himself, he was a champion of bourgeois sense and rational philistinism. Like Voltaire he was intensely social and only lived intensely when he was busy or in company; like the greater man he was an admirable friend. He could hardly have been more benevolent, but he was also kinder than that prophet of eighteenth century bourgeois morality. It did not make him chuckle to give pain, though he loved a scrap. He was good-natured – in fact an English Voltaire. Not such a good writer – Heavens no! But still he could say with truth, "I never wrote anything very dull in my life."

LEIGH HUNT

(1924)

I like Leigh Hunt. It is not a taste shared by many. Of few men letters have critics and biographers said more contemptuous things, and those who knock across him when their eyes are fixed on Byron are apt to be particularly contemptuous. Hunt shows at his worst in his relations with Byron: his coy, ingratiating smirk, his "chirpy rancour" (I think that is the phrase with which Mr. Harold Nicolson hits off *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries*, a very clever book, and full of authentic observation for all that), his absent-minded coolness as a sponger, most unhappily combined with a display of jocose independence in the very act of asking for cheques – these features of his character are unpleasantly prominent in his dealings with Byron. Moreover, it is important at certain junctures to think as badly as possible of Leigh Hunt in order to excuse Byron's behaviour, notably his lack of decent generosity towards Mary Shelley, after Shelley's death – Hunt was the go-between in that matter of her journey-money. Henley almost chokes with scorn in speaking of him, and Mr. Nicolson thinks it natural that he should have got excruciatingly on Byron's nerves and dislikes him thoroughly. Henley despises him for not being manly. Well, manliness is a grand quality, but it is possible to make too much fuss about it, and it is an ingredient necessarily absent from the make-up of certain fine natures. The reason Mr. Nicolson dislikes him is that he did not know how to behave. He certainly did not in relation to Byron, who had an unfortunate knack of

bringing out the worst sides of weak, impressionable people. This is well shown in the following archly familiar little note Hunt wrote to Byron when they were at Genoa, and getting on far from well together.

Casa Negroto,
October 25, 1822.

My Dear Byron,

Thank you: I will speak to you further on that subject when I have the pleasure of seeing you.

Excuse all this talk, or rather excuse the excuse; but as something or other seems averse to my seeing you often, I love to chat with you as long as possible. Must we not have our ride? I thought to talk with you of "Liberals" and illiberals, of copy, of subjects, and absolute Johns, and Boswells and Spencers and all sorts of possible chattabilities. "Sir," as Johnson would say (or Scrope would say, before he became a fallen Arch-Davies), "the world has few things better than literary inter-chattation; but Byron, Sir, is milky: Sir, he is lacteolous, and has gone off to a young lady." I think I will be indecent, and try to hold you to your promise, especially as you need not go in about the house, nor need we look at one that day. Our motto shall be "Observation with extensive View."

Yours sincerely,
LEIGH HUNT

Admitted – the taste is deplorable. "You make me affectionate," another of these letters concludes, "when you call me Leigh, and so I feel ladylike, and insist upon your coming to my house." Hunt's letters to Byron are those of a sensitive man who is conscious of being under an obligation to one who despises him socially and whom, incidentally, he had misled on a most important point. Byron, when he invited Leigh Hunt out to Italy, was under the impression that Leigh Hunt owned *The Examiner*, and that he could count on the support of that paper in their joint campaign. But the Hunts had already disposed of it, and L. H. arrived at Pisa with a

pen, a large family of bumptious children with unwiped noses, and an ailing wife who was determined to show *her* independence by being as rude to Byron as opportunity allowed. The squalor of "Hunt's Kraal" was intolerable to Byron; never very ready in retort, he got the worst of encounters with that disagreeable woman, Mrs. Hunt, while his new ally was continually asking for money in exactly the tone which irritated him most as a man of the world. He was very down in the mouth just then about himself, his reputation, his prospects, while every week brought letters from his friends in London, telling him that this new association with a journalistic scally-wag would damage him irreparably.

It is necessary to remember that whatever else he was, Byron was not a considerate man, also his sore state of mind while they were together, in order to understand how very difficult it must have been for a feckless, gently-floating, sensitive creature like Leigh Hunt to behave towards such a patron in a becoming manner. He had no social training, and, like most impressionable people of humble origin, was something of a snob. He knew he had been deceitful about *The Examiner*; he had not pocket-money to buy an orange without "applying"; and Byron to whom the business of disbursement was always distasteful, especially in this connection, had delegated it to his Italian steward. Relief was administered in small doles which melted like snow. The humiliations, intentional (for Byron was brutally impulsive) and unintentional, which Leigh Hunt had to put up with, must have been considerable. I do not wonder that the smile on his face as he swallowed them was often not very pretty.

But let us look at him in relation with another great man, Carlyle, and take a peep at "Hunt's Kraal" in London:

> Hunt and the Hunts, as you have heard, live only in the next street from us. Hunt is always ready to go and walk with me, or sit and talk with me to all lengths if I want him. He comes

in once a week (when invited, for he is very modest) takes a cup of tea, and sits discoursing in his brisk, fanciful way till supper time, and then cheerfully eats a cup of porridge (to sugar only), which he praises to the skies, and vows he will make his supper of at home. He is a man of thoroughly London make, such as you could not find elsewhere, and I think about the *best* possible to be made of his sort: an airy, crotchety, most copious clever talker, with an honest undercurrent of reason, too, but unfortunately not the deepest, not the most practical – or rather it is the most *un*practical ever man dealt in. His hair is grizzled, eyes black-hazel, complexion of the clearest dusky brown; a thin glimmer of a smile plays over his face of cast-iron gravity. He never laughs – can only titter, which I think indicates his worst deficiency.

His house excels all you have ever read of – a poetical Tinkerdom, without parallel even in literature. In his family-room, where are a sickly large wife and a whole shoal of well-conditioned wild children you will find half a dozen old rickety chairs gathered from half a dozen different hucksters, and all seemingly engaged, and just pausing, in a violent *hornpipe*. On these and around them and over the dusty table and ragged carpet lie all kinds of litter – books, papers, eggshells, scissors, and last night when I was there the torn heart of a half-quartern loaf. His own room above stairs, into which alone I strive to enter, he keeps cleaner. It has only two chairs, a book-case, and a writing table; yet the noble Hunt receives you in his Tinkerdom in the spirit of a king, apologises for nothing, places you in the best seat, takes a window-sill himself if there is no other, and there folding closer his loose-flowing "muslin cloud" of a printed nightgown in which he always writes, commences the liveliest dialogue on philosophy and the prospects of man (who is to be beyond measure "happy" yet); which again he will courteously terminate the moment you are bound to go; a most interesting, pitiable, lovable man, to be used kindly but with discretion. After all, it is perhaps rather a comfort to be near honest friendly people – at least, an honest, friendly man of that sort.

In Chelsea, you see, as at Pisa and Genoa, poverty-stricken hugger-mugger! But in bland detachment from it, the central figure is by no means without dignity. Years afterwards, Carlyle wrote to Leigh Hunt praising his *Autobiography*, not only for its free felicity in imagining many interesting scenes and persons, but also "throughout, what is best of all, a gifted, gentle, patient and valiant human soul, as it buffets its way through the billows of time, and will not drown, tho' often in danger; *cannot* be drowned, but conquers, and leaves a track of radiance behind it." It was a letter which gave keen, unexpected pleasure to the poor, battered, elderly Ariel whose answer was a model of what you would not expect after reading about Leigh Hunt in lives of Byron and Keats – of graceful honesty and delicacy of feeling.

II

One can call Carlyle again as witness for the defence: "Leigh Hunt who lived close by, and delighted to sit talking with us (free, cheery, idly melodious as bird on bough), or listening, with real feeling, to her old Scotch tunes on the piano, and winding up with a frugal morsel of Scotch Porridge (endlessly admirable to Hunt). I think I spoke of this above? Hunt was always accurately dressed, these evenings, and had a fine chivalrous gentlemanly carriage, polite, affectionate, respectful (especially to her), and yet so free and natural.... His Household, while in 4 Upper Cheyne Row, within few steps of us here, almost at once disclosed itself to be huggermugger, unthrift, and sordid collapse, once for all; and had to be associated with on cautious terms; while he himself emerged out of it in the chivalrous figure I describe. Dark in complexion (a trace of the African, I believe), copious clean strong black hair, beautifully-shaped head, fine beaming serious hazel eyes; seriousness and intellect the main expression of the face (to our surprise at first); he would lean on his elbow against the

mantelpiece (fine clean, elastic figure too he had, five feet ten or more), and look round him nearly in silence, before taking leave for the night, 'as if I were a Lar,' said he once, 'or permanent household god here!' (such his polite aerial-like way). Another time, rising from this Lar attitude, he repeated (voice very fine) as if in sport of parody, yet with something of very sad perceptible: 'While I to sulphurous and penal fire' – as the last thing before vanishing. Poor Hunt! no more of him. She, I remember, was almost in tears, during some last visit of his, and kind and pitying as a daughter to the now weak and time-worn old man." *

Mrs. Carlyle was probably the heroine of the most charming of all. Leigh Hunt's trifles:

> Jenny kissed me when we met,
> Jumping from the chair she sat in:
> Time, you thief, who love to get
> Sweets into your list, put that in!
> Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
> Say that health and wealth have missed me,
> Say I'm growing old – but add,
> Jenny kissed me.

There are two other passages from Carlyle's letters worth noting: "Poor Hunt himself I think one of the most innocent men I ever saw in man's size; a very boy for clear innocence, though his hair is gray, and his face ploughed with many sorrows." – (Carlyle to his mother). Again, writing to his brother, Dr. Carlyle, he says: "I never in my whole life met with a more innocent childlike man; transparent, many-glancing, really beautiful, were this Lubberland or Elysium, and not Earth and England."

Now although this "innocency," this "childlike" simplicity of Hunt's was not without an admixture of guile (Harold

* *Reminiscences: Jane Welsh Carlyle.*

Skimpolism) in practical matters, and although his haziness about the distinction between *meum* and *tuum* worked out with a decided balance in his own favour, still, where things of the mind were concerned, it was a rare and genuine quality; one which goes a long way towards accounting for the most striking fact about Leigh Hunt, namely, that of all famous critics he was most nearly right about the merits of his contemporaries. Coleridge, Hazlitt, Lamb wrote profounder and more beautiful criticism, but their estimates of their contemporaries have not been so decidedly corroborated by posterity as Leigh Hunt's. Lamb's contempt for Shelley amazes us, and Coleridge's indifference to Keats is noticeable. Leigh Hunt was usually right about his contemporaries, which is a great deal rarer in criticism than being right about the famous dead. He was wonderfully appreciative not only of the new poetry but of the merits of the poetry which the new poets hoped to supersede. He loved also the wit and eloquence of Pope and Dryden. Of course, there were dumb notes on his piano. He was a cheerful man. Dante was not really to his taste. He appreciated lovely phrases like "*Dolce color d'oriental zaffiro*," but grimness was abhorrent to him, and sublimity often escaped him, or rather, with a certain ingenuous triviality he refuses to be awed by it. His comments on Dante remind one a little of Voltaire's upon Pascal – often much to the point, but missing the spirit; though of course, unlike Voltaire, Leigh Hunt has no incisive philosophy of common sense to set in opposition to his subject, only his inveterately cheerful desultory benignity. He knew all about it. With a rare detachment he laid his finger on the fundamental weakness of his own principal poem, *The Story of Rimini*, that it was merely an amplification of a story already treated with unmatched force and brevity by a great poet. Yet there are in it also charming passages of easy abandon, and welcome for everything which is pleasant and bright, a debonair quality which is rare in English poetry:

'Tis nature, full of spirits, waked and springing:
The birds to the delicious time are singing,
Darting with freaks and snatches up and down,
Where the light woods go seaward from the town;
While happy faces, striking through the green
Of leafy roads, at every turn are seen;
And the far ships, lifting their sails of white
Like joyful hands, come up with scatter'd light,
Come gleaming up, true to the wished-for day,
And chase the whistling brine, and swirl into the bay.

Already in the streets the stir grows loud,
Of joy increasing, and a bustling crowd.
With feet and voice the gathering hum contends,
Yearns the deep talk, the ready laugh ascends:
Callings, and clapping doors, and curs unite,
And shouts from mere exuberance of delight,
And armed bands, making important way,
Gallant and grave, the lords of holiday
And nodding neighbours, greeting as they run,
And pilgrims, chanting in the morning sun.

Not the finest kind of poetry, but not to be despised:

And in the midst, fresh whistling through the scene,
A lightsome fountain starts from out the green,
Clear and compact, till, at its height o'er run,
It shakes its loosening silver to the sun.

Nought heard through all our little lulled abode,
Save the crisp fire, or leaf of book turned o'er,
Or watch-dog, or the ring of frosty road.
Man's life is warm, glad, sad, twixt loves and graves,
Boundless in hope, honoured with pangs austere,

Heaven gazing; and his angel wings he craves:
The fish is swift, small-needing, vague yet clear,
A cold, sweet, silver life, wrapped in round waves,
Quickened with touches of transporting fear.

Few would deny the fine felicity of that, or of the now at last famous line describing Cleopatra:

The laughing queen that caught the world's great hands.

Perhaps his poetic talent is too slight to hold the ear of the world. But if it would be a mistake to urge Leigh Hunt's merits too emphatically, it would be a graver one to deny to him the application of three of his own lines:

And he's the poet, more or less who knows
The charm that hallows the least truth from prose,
And dresses it in its mild singing clothes.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

(1931)

There is a companion waiting for many a reader in Hawthorne's seldom opened books; a rare companion for one who is an onlooker at life, and though he cherishes it, often deplores his inner solitude. It goes without saying that such a reader will enjoy Hawthorne's pensive, delicate, collected prose, the cadences of which will transmit moods familiar to him, and in the surface of which external things are mirrored as in a deep still pool.

His novels, stories, and note-books are so full of impressions mirrored without a wrinkle that quotation from among them hardly implies preference. But here is one. It is a record of the days when Ellery Channing, one of Concord's Transcendentalists, and Hawthorne used to go fishing together on summer afternoons.

> Strange and happy times were these, when we cast aside all irksome forms and strait-laced habitudes, and delivered ourselves up to the free air, to live like the Indians or any less conventional race, during one bright semi-circle of the sun. Rowing our boat against the current, between wide meadows, we turned aside into the Assabeth. A more lovely stream than this, for a mile above its junction with the Concord, has never flowed on earth – nowhere, indeed, except to lave the interior regions of a poet's imagination. . . . It comes flowing softly through the midmost privacy and deepest heart of a wood which whispers it to be quiet; while the stream whispers back again from its sedgy borders, as if river and wood were hushing one another to sleep.

Since it is particularly as a companion to those to whom their own inner life is a matter of gravest interest, while the external world remains a source of either bewilderment or detached delight, that I recommend Hawthorne, I will continue to quote from him – in the hope of coaxing such readers to open his books. Here is an impression from his sojourn in England from 1853 to 1857, as Consul at Liverpool:

> Of all the lovely churchyards that I ever beheld, that of Peterborough Cathedral seems to me the most delightful; so quiet it is, so solemnly and nobly cheerful, so verdant, so sweetly shadowed, and so presided over by the noble minster, and surrounded by quiet, ancient, and comely habitations of Christian men. The most delightful place, the most enviable as a residence, in all this world, seemed to me that of the Bishop's secretary, standing in the rear of the cathedral, and bordering on the churchyard; so that you seem to pass through hallowed precincts in order to come at it, and find it a sort of Paradise, the holier and sweeter for the dead men that sleep so near. We looked through the gateway into the lawn, which really looked as if it hardly belonged to this world, so bright and soft the sunshine was, so fresh the grass, so lovely the trees, so trimmed and refined, and softened down, was the whole nature of the spot; and so shut in and guarded from all intrusion.

From such passages alone one might deduce that the author was of the race of "passionate pilgrims"; of those who seek repose in the past, and a refuge from a present to them too chaotically vital and barren of associations. One might surmise that his most constant effort would be to preserve a private atmosphere of security, and that, both as artist and as man, his quarrel with life would be that it gave too much in bulk, too little in perfection. To such a man living may well come to be a matter of being perpetually pelted with stones and mud and golden fruit. Of course, like everybody else, he will do his best to dodge the mud and stones, or stand up to them, for he need be no coward; but the bitter

thing to him is that he cannot catch the golden apples. They fly past his ears, they bounce off his forehead, they roll at his feet. Only if he can get out of shot of that slinging maniac Life he will be able to savour, he thinks, the deliciousness of at least a few of them, and to wonder in peace at their beauty.

For such a man the life of letters, though the creative or even the communicative impulse be slight in him, will have irresistible attraction. The Arts do not tempt us to pursue them through our vanity so much as by offering their devotees an opportunity of prolonging precious experience. We may well stare in astonishment at those who aim at adding to the world's store of literature and painting. It is so rich already, there is more than enough to read and to look at. But it is not competitive ambition which drives all poets to write, all painters to paint. Poets and painters will be content as a rule with the prospects of just sufficient success to keep them in countenance as citizens. It is the longing within them to lay a magic finger on the wheel of time; to be able to command the moment as it passes: *verweile doch, du bist so schön.*

Such an artist, at any rate, was Hawthorne – not creative, not communicative. His art was a self-communion; his way of living self-protective, cautious, shrinking, directed to that end.

There is a short passage in *Our Old Home* which considered attentively reveals, I think, his attitude towards even the sheltered domestic sphere into which he retired from miscellaneous contacts. Even within it emotion must not be allowed to press too acutely or perturb. "There is a small nest of a place in Leamington," he says, "at number 10 Lansdowne Circus, upon which to this day my reminiscences are apt to settle as one of the cosiest nooks in England or in the world; not that it had any special charm of its own, but only that we stayed long enough to know it well, and even to grow a

little tired of it. In my opinion, the very tediousness of home and friends makes a part of what we love them for; if it be not mixed in sufficiently with the other elements of life, there may be mad enjoyment, but no happiness." Existence, he is thinking, to be full must be also a little dull; he who is not bored has no time to live. In youth, however, he often found solitude of spirit an oppression hard to bear. There is a beautiful and touching passage in his early notebooks (1840) written when, on the eve of his singularly perfect marriage, he found himself once more in the house where he had begun his literary life.

> And here I sat a long, long time, waiting patiently for the world to know me, and sometimes wondering why it did not know me sooner, or whether it would ever know me at all – at least, till I were in my grave. And sometimes it seemed to me as if I were already in my grave, with only life enough to be chilled and benumbed. But oftener I was happy – at least, as happy as I then knew how to be, or was aware of the possibility of being. By and by the world found me out in my lonely chamber and called me forth – not, indeed, with a loud roar of acclamation, but rather with a still small voice – and forth I went, but found nothing in the world I thought preferable to my solitude till now.... And now I begin to understand why I was imprisoned so many years in this lonely chamber, and why I could never break through the viewless bolts and bars; for if I had sooner made my escape into the world I should have grown hard and rough, and been covered with earthly dust, and my heart might have become callous by rude encounters with the multitude.... But living in solitude till the fullness of time was come, I still kept the dew of my youth and the freshness of my heart... I used to think that I could imagine all passions, all feelings, and states of the heart and mind; but how little did I know! ... Indeed, we are but shadows; we are not endowed with real life, and all that seems most real about us is but the thinnest substance of a dream – till the heart be touched. That touch creates us – then we begin to be – thereby we are beings of reality and inheritors of eternity.

"The touch which creates us," and incidentally the work of the artist, is that of which Hawthorne's manner of living deprived him. By withdrawing from his fellow-men and from contact with the big common world, he starved his talent and poisoned his own peace of mind. The most interesting and acute pages of Mr. Arvin's criticism* are those in which he shows how inadequate the analysis is (it used to be the stock comment upon Hawthorne) which treats him as an embodiment in American literature of the old Calvinistic conscience. Hawthorne is constantly preoccupied with the inner life, with the idea of "sin" and its consequences – that is true enough. But it is only one class of consequences and one kind of sin that really interests Hawthorne.

The human predicament which inspires most frequently his powers of invention is that of human *isolation*, whether caused by a crime which separates the individual from his society or some ambition or flaw within himself. In *The Scarlet Letter* it is neither in the love story, nor in the adultery, that for the author the tragic interest rests, but in the isolation which characterises all the chief characters. Hester Prynne is isolated by her punishment. She moves henceforth as a shadow, beneficent but alone, among her fellow-men. The loneliness of her partner in guilt, the preacher Dimsdale, is even more complete; for between him and his flock stands the barrier of his own hypocrisy. "It is the unspeakable misery of a life so false as his, that it steals the pith and substance out of whatever realities there are around us, and which were meant by Heaven to be the spirit's joy and nutriment. To the untrue man, the whole universe is false – it is impalpable – it shrinks within his grasp." And in that shadowy figure, old Roger Chillingworth, who devotes himself with the interest of a vivisectionist to analysing the tortures of the pair, we

* *Hawthorne*. By Newton Arvin.

are intended to see an extreme example of cold-blooded detachment – of *the* sin against the spirit of life.

Mr. Arvin shows that what gives unity to Hawthorne's imaginative treatment of life is his preoccupation with the problem: what are the forces that abet, what are the forces that impede, a rich personal development? He remarks acutely that Hawthorne trusted his observation of life too little, and his deductions from it too much. His stories came to him as "ideas." Hence his leaning to allegory, thinly disguised as fact. But Mr. Arvin exaggerates his sense of guilt in having stood apart from life. Hawthorne's melancholy sprang from his artistic, not his moral isolation. He belonged to a type honoured and recognised in Europe but not in America. Compare his diffidence with the arrogance of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, who also wrote allegorical short stories and said, "As for living – we leave that to our servants."

SWINBURNE

(1932)

There are few experiences which I envy more than that of having heard Swinburne recite his own poetry, say such a poem as "The Triumph of Time." Sometimes, in reading, we are told, he lost control of his emotions and "he would dance about the room, the paper fluttering from his finger-tips like a pennon in a gale of wind"; but at others, though surpassingly strange, it was – and without the least tincture of affectation – a transfiguration, an ecstasy, "a case of poetic 'possession' pure and simple."

"On these occasions," wrote Sir Edmund Gosse, "his voice took on strange and fife-like notes, extremely moving and disconcerting, since he was visibly moved himself. The sound of Swinburne wailing forth in his thrilling semi-tones such stanzas as that addressed to the Sea:

I shall sleep, and move with the moving ships,
Change as the winds change, veer in the tide;
My lips will feast on the foam of thy lips,
I shall rise with thy rising, with thee subside;
Sleep, and not know if she be, if she were,
Filled full with life to the eyes and hair,
As a rose is fulfilled to the roseleaf tips
With splendid summer and perfume and pride,

is something which will not fade out of memory as long as life lasts; and, perhaps, most of all, in the recitation of the last four of the following very wonderful lines:

I shall go my ways, tread out my measure,
Fill the days of my daily breath
With fugitive things not good to treasure,
Do as the world doth, say as it saith;
But if we had loved each other – O sweet,
Had you felt, lying under the palms of your feet,
The heart of my heart, beating harder with pleasure
To feel you tread it to dust and death –"

"The Triumph of Time," one of the few of Swinburne's poems which can be traced to a powerful emotion (in this case a love-disappointment) which had its origin in life, not in his imagination; it runs on for more than fifty stanzas, each of which seems in turn to reach the acme of emotion. There is nothing in the experience of a poetry-reader quite like reading Swinburne. True, he is a poet who lends himself rather ill to cool, detached admiration. You must allow yourself to be carried away to enjoy him. And having yielded, you may then find yourself stunned in the cataract of his surging energy, or that your mind is lulled to sleep by his strong monotonous melodies. The poet himself is often swept past the subject which he set himself. His command of means is so great, his mastery over metre and rhythm so astounding, that he often loses sight of his end. His great defect is one to which all eloquent writers are liable – he could not stop. It was the defect also of Victor Hugo, whom he admired so much. I am not musical, but I sometimes guess that Wagner suffered from it. There is a too-muchness about them all. Their Niagaras go on pouring down long after our little cups are full. They pursue the unending crescendo. We are at first exhilarated and then fatigued by this miracle of inexhaustible eloquence. At first it seems a marvel that they can go on so long; presently, that they should ever come to an end. We await nervously the absolutely last chord of the apparently interminable pianoforte-player. But how magnificent the performance has been! And if one has kept

one's intelligence alert in spite of the overpowering swing of Swinburne's verses, one is often surprised at the subtlety and coherence of the poet's thought. It is impossible to find a phrase to describe him completely, but perhaps when one calls him the Rhapsodist of Freedom one comes nearest to hinting at what most distinguished him. Freedom is a vague word. That vague but real thing the brotherhood of man, the wind, the sea, the life of a sea-bird (these are symbols of liberty) – aroused in him a boundless exultation which he expressed better than any other poet. Even his sensuality is transformed into a mystical passion for release; while his political poems gain intensity – however misplaced and excessive his particular admirations and hatreds – from the idea of liberty itself: Freedom, the mother and the bride of man's soul, his implacable goddess too, demanding bitter sacrifices.

There is in modern poetry a tendency to discard formal metres altogether, and to rely instead upon changing rhythms imposed by the subject. Consequently, Swinburne is held in small honour by the new poets. But since down the ages formal metres have been found most potent aids to inducing that state of mind in which poetic intuitions become transferable, it is certain that his fame is safe.

I myself enjoy Swinburne's prose very much, but this is so exceptional a taste that I have been tempted to insert an Agony Column advertisement: "Lonely literary man of moderate means wishes to meet friend: must appreciate Swinburne's prose." That would tell me much about him. An anthology of Swinburne's critical writings would prove him a critic of rare excellence, and that as a prose-writer he had been unduly depreciated.

He possessed, in a degree never excelled, the great gift of praise, a lyric faculty of unbounded despairing admiration. "I shrieked and clasped my hands in ecstasy" – Shelley's

line will stand as a general description of this aspect of his criticism; though he could also suggest the beauty and excellence peculiar to this or that writer with the lucidity of a man of genius. Gratitude for gifts of imagination was in him equivalent to worship. When he wrote, he set up an altar festooned with alliterative sentences, looped about with garlands of fruits and flowers gathered from every clime and period of literature. Then, before the kindled fire of his own enthusiasm, he celebrated rites so exuberant and sonorous that they resembled a grand choral celebration. At such rites the bodies of bludgeoned victims were also not out of place; scalps and corpses were laid at the feet of the deity, and among them were sometimes former occupants of pedestals. Thus, at the feet of Dickens, he throws the body of Matthew Arnold, whose poems he had declared to be "in the highest tone of Wordsworth's, as clear and grave as his best, as close and full and majestic." Arnold did not admire Dickens; and his indifference, since it is now Dickens who is enthroned, must be explained to the greater honour of the creator of Mrs. Gamp. Therefore, Arnold is described as "a man whose main achievement in creative literature was to make himself by painful painstaking into a sort of pseudo-Wordsworth."

Swinburne wrote his essays in the spirit in which he wrote his sonnets and odes to great men. For the time being their country was his country, their gods his gods, their enemies his enemies. It is one method of legitimate criticism. The critic's functions are by no means limited to comparison, analysis, and judgment: he may simply make us feel what he has felt. Swinburne was the most magnificent sounding-board for rapturous admiration.

I can pardon all Swinburne's critical excesses. When he says things like, "History will forget the name of Bonaparte before humanity forgets the name of Rathbert" (perhaps I had better mention that this is a character in one of Victor Hugo's

minor works), it does not prevent me from appreciating his splendid imaginative insight. I love him, too, for the same sort of reason that men of science love Darwin – for being an example of complete and pure devotion to a pursuit. To Swinburne literature was everything; literature and art, not life, inspired him. That is his peculiarity and his glory. I know it is not quite sane to be like that; I know it implies enormous limitations, but – how thankful we should be that a Swinburne has existed.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

(1930)

I have been reading Aldous Huxley's essay *Vulgarity in Literature*. When we condemn anything as vulgar I think as a rule we imply that it is significant of certain moral faults of which the most usual are, (1) obtuseness of feeling; (2) a mean timidity of expression which amounts to false delicacy; (3) ostentation. I am not at all sure that in literature the third kind of vulgarity, the vulgarity of which the essence is swagger or display, is not the commonest form of all, and it is to be found often in writers who exhibit every grace of mind except the grace of abstaining from an ostentatious display of their own emotions or cleverness. It is this form of vulgarity with which Mr. Aldous Huxley deals and he accuses three authors of it, all famous – Edgar Allan Poe, Dickens and Balzac. What he says about Poe is far more penetrating than what he says about the other two authors. Dickens he accuses of ostentatiously displaying his own tenderness of heart; Balzac of pretending to understand mysticism when he really has as little mystical sympathy as a steam engine. I have only one point to make upon his comments upon Dickens, that I think his fault of leading us to the fountain of easy tears is in him unimportant. In dealing with no subject whatever does Dickens show the virtues of restraint. If he did he would not have his superb merits. You must take him as a whole, as he is, without any of the literary virtues of either the scholar, gentleman or tragic artist, into whose art restraint of expression inevitably enters. And if you take

him as whole his gush becomes unimportant. With regard to Balzac there again we are dealing with such a huge massive creature, gross and enormous and creative, and the fact that he was a charlatan when he pretended to understand the spiritual life – he had to because he pretended to understand every side of life – does not really seriously detract from our wonder at him or our enjoyment of him.

The case of Poe I think is somewhat different, and I must say I enjoyed thoroughly Mr. Huxley's assault upon Poe, because Poe's works in France have become objects of worship to the ultra-subtle and refined. The poet Baudelaire began this cult, it was carried on by that exquisite literary mandarin Mallarmé, and has been inherited from him by Monsieur Valéry to-day and the young French poets who think Victor Hugo noisy and vulgar. Poe has written a few poems and as many lines which are first-rate poetry – but Frenchmen have never been able to see how second-rate most of it is. Rhythms which are gross and easy to a native ear seem exquisite to a foreigner. They see only the general design. The finer shades in French poetry also escape *us*. Mr. George Moore a year or two ago published an anthology which he called *Pure Poetry* and lo and behold, short as it was, more than twelve of the fifty or sixty were by Poe! You see Mr. Moore remembers what they thought in Paris in the 'Seventies. As a critic he either trusts himself or the French artists he knew when he was a youth. I mention this to show that Aldous Huxley's destructive criticism of Poe's poetry was *wanted*. Let us hear what he says.

> It is when Poe tries to make it too poetical that his poetry takes on its peculiar tinge of badness. Protesting too much that he is a gentleman, and opulent into the bargain, he falls into vulgarity. Diamond rings on every finger proclaim the parvenu.
>
> Consider, for example, the first two stanzas of "Ulalume"

The skies they were ashen and sober;
The leaves they were crisped and sere –
The leaves they were withering and sere;
It was night in the lonesome October
Of my most immemorial year:
It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
In the misty mid region of Weir –
It was down by the dark tarn of Auber
In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.

Here once, through an alley Titanic,
Of cypress, I roamed with my soul,
Of cypress, with Psyche my soul.
These were days when my heart was volcanic
As the scoriac rivers that roll –
As the lavas that restlessly roll
Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek
In the ultimate clime of the pole –
That groans they roll down Mount Yaanek
In the realms of the boreal pole.

These lines protest too much (and with what a variety of voices!) that they are poetical, and, protesting, are therefore vulgar. To start with, the walloping dactylic metre is all too musical. Poetry ought to be musical, but musical with tact, subtly and variously. Metres whose rhythms, as in this case, are strong, insistent and practically invariable offer the poet a kind of short cut to musicality. They provide him (my subject calls for a mixture of metaphors) with a ready-made, reach-me-down music. He does not have to create a music appropriately modulated to his meaning; all he has to do is to shovel the meaning into the moving stream of the metre and allow the current to carry it along on waves that, like those of the best hairdressers, are guaranteed permanent.

A quotation and a parody will illustrate the difference between ready-made music and music made to measure. I remember (I trust correctly) a simile of Milton's:

Not that fair field
Of Enna, where Proserpin gathering flowers,
Herself fairer lower, by gloomy Dis
Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world –

The contrast between the lyrical swiftness of the first four phrases, with that row of limping spondees which tells of Ceres' pain, is thrillingly appropriate. Bespoke, the music fits the sense like a glove.

How would Poe have written on the same theme? I have ventured to invent his opening stanza.

It was noon in the fair field of Enna,
When Proserpina gathering flowers –
Herself the most fragrant of flowers,
Was gathered away to Gehenna
By the Prince of Plutonian powers;
Was borne down the windings of Brenner
To the gloom of his amorous bow
Down the tortuous highway of Brenner
To the god's agapenonous bowers.

A NEW WRITER

(1921)

This week I read a new book *Bliss* by Katherine Mansfield which knocked *Books in General* out of my head. Miss Mansfield's master in the art of fiction is Chekhov. Among her fourteen stories in *Bliss* there are only two which can be called anecdotes in the sense that many of Maupassant's short stories can be called anecdotes. Her method is to put a section of experience under the microscope and show the fibres of circumstance and the nerves of feeling which run through it – often they make strange patterns – thus exhibiting to us the kind of stuff of which the lives of the people concerned are made. She always has themes; she seldom tells "a story." Her work is finished when she has shown the texture of that specimen of experience she has focused in the bright sharp-cut circle of her extraordinary vivid attention. It is significant that measured in time none of her stories occupy more than about twenty-four hours, and that in most cases only an hour or two of the lives of her characters are under observation.

It is always emotion that alters life's value. Miss Mansfield's stories show this clearly, especially perhaps the story which gives its title to her book. In that story the heroine, for no reason she understands, finds herself in a state of happy exaltation, the secret of which turns out to be physical. Her husband, her house, her little dinner party (the author lets us see how vulgar her guests are and records their trivial conversation) seem to be lit from within by an inner glow of significant yet perplexing happiness, which really proceeds

from herself. It only seems to find justification when her attention dwells on one woman who happens to be there (she, the heroine thinks, alone understands how wonderful life is), or when she gazes for a moment from the window at the moonlit garden and sees a pear-tree in blossom. The cause of this transfiguring happiness is that for the first time she desires her husband. Before the evening is over, as the guests are departing, a sudden turn of the head reveals to her that her husband and the woman, whom, by the by, she thought he stupidly disliked, are lovers. The story stops.

It was one well worth writing, at the same time it indicates precisely the depth to which the author goes into life. She goes below the surface and keeps her head (rare gift), but she never takes us down to that level at which human beings meet below the surface, and face the predicaments in which the fact that they are puppets pulled by their nerves involve them, where they can at last touch each other intimately again. It is at that depth, however, that the most interesting stories of all begin; it is there that Chekhov finds his best subjects. Like all masterly short stories this one enables us to foresee, when we have read it, the course of the lives of the characters. The heroine will from time to time again experience those moments of exaltation at which the pear-tree in the garden will seem strangely and wonderfully significant, and they will be ever unrelated to whatever *modus vivendi* she may establish with her surroundings, with her husband, children, friends and her own little round of duties, practicalities and pleasures. When Miss Mansfield puts her ear to the door of the soul she only hears the ticking of the psychological clock.

In two other stories, *Psychology* and *Prelude*, there are moments when, while gazing into a dark garden, the heroine in each case drops for a minute or two into a world of possible and perhaps impossible intimacies and emotions, having no relation to the rest of experience, from which each is, the

next moment, hauled up again into the jerky cinematograph vividness of "reality." Such moments are presented as just different-coloured beads occurring at intervals in the long chain of external events and daydreams which together make up life – "One damned thing after another," as an American pessimist defined it. *Psychology* is a brilliant snapshot of a relation between a man and a woman, which is essentially a love-liking between two people who funk the intimacy mutual admission implies. They struggle back in conversation to the solid ground of ordinary companionship, but, having dangled over the gulf together for a moment, they are no longer on terms of comfortable sincerity with each other. There is a very characteristic touch of irony at the end. After the man has gone, a boring but devoted woman friend calls on the other, and is received with a tenderness which is not really directed towards her, but is the expression of a baffled emotion felt towards the man who has just left. The humble bore is a little perplexed but thrilled. Once more we get the impression that between human beings there is no true contact. Each lives surrounded by a bubble of his or her own private emotions; though practical matters continually keep bursting those bubbles, they never coalesce with each other. The two characters in this story are easily intimate again only when the telephone is between them. Many of Miss Mansfield's readers will recognise that "Come again soon, my friend." She says, "O, I will, I will." Their talk had been a dreadful failure.

Her world of people reminds one of Leibnitz's metaphysical conception of the universe – a number of independent monads, wound up to go like little clocks, only not as Leibnitz conceived them, striking at the same moment the same hour. It is because she conceives human beings as isolated emotionally that the material of her stories lacks interest when her theme is not itself a variation upon human isolation. The

large family in *Prelude*; the energetic, eupeptic, imperceptive husband; the dreamy wife, tired by child-bearing; the pretty commonplace sister preoccupied with hoping for a lover; the placid, sweet-natured, well-broken-in-to-life grandmother; the children, each living naturally in a little world of its own (how convincing the presentment is!) – all, though they are shaken up together in the bag, remain as separate as marbles. The husband does not know how contradictory his wife's feelings are towards him; the servant girl and "Beryl" do not know how alike their daydreams are, or, indeed, that the other has any; the children, of course, live in their fancies, fascinated by new things, playing their games; the old woman, though she does not formulate it to herself, alone knows, that it is the common lot to live alone, and, resigned, she watches and waits for the young to get used to that inexorable fate.

Prelude and another story, *A Man Without a Temperament*, are the finest in the book; and the latter too, has isolation for its theme. This is a most remarkable little story. A man has taken his sick wife abroad for the winter. He is very kind and considerate, fetching her shawl, her book, jumping out of bed to kill a mosquito in her net at night, never grumbling, never impatient. The people in the hotel are each inside their bubbles, some of them pretty sordid bubbles. But so is he. His daydreams are the hankerings of a self-absorbed exile. Gradually as we read we become aware that the fussy sick woman, who takes such a bright, boring interest in the weather and trees, is making a superficial noise to cover up the frightened ache of loneliness within her. At night she calls from her bed to him by a pet name she had not used for years. It strikes him as so odd she should suddenly use that half-forgotten word that for a moment he thinks she must be a little crazy.

Of all our thoughts our daydreams are apt to be most completely self-centred. It is Miss Mansfield's method to

introduce daydreams continually, putting them on the same level of vividness as perceptions. By this means, though she gets inside her characters, she continues to emphasise what is the distinctive note in her sense of the world – that each person lives to himself or herself alone. The filaments of thought and feeling, which we throw across the gulf to each other, figure strangely little in her picture of life. She excels in expressing a child's sense of things; a child is completely absorbed in each moment and imaginatively self-centred, and her own descriptions have the odd intensity of a child's impressions. I have said enough to show that this is a remarkable book.

REVIEWERS AND PROFESSORS

(1933)

"The English Muse" is a commentary on English poetry from the earliest to modern times, excluding that of poets still alive. It is a book of 423 pages, and those not crowded ones. Considering the magnitude of the subject, it must therefore, be classified as a rapid review of it. Professor Elton would have exceeded the six volumes of his admirable "Survey of English Literature from 1730 to 1830," had he attempted to discuss the origins of the poetry of each period; the social, moral, and intellectual influences which produced it. His latest book is a collection of comments on English poets arranged in chronological order. What he has aimed at is defining, and illustrating by brief quotation, the art of each poet in turn. It need not be read consecutively, yet it is not a book of reference. The purpose it serves is different and important. It is a book which it would be profitable to consult before reading, or, above all, before writing about, any of the poets mentioned in it. It contains concise statements of the qualities for which each poet was most remarkable, I can suggest its usefulness best by recording a reverie into which I fell after reading in it.

It seemed that I was again literary editor of *The New Statesman*, and confronted with one of the many young men who were anxious in those days to obtain reviewing from me.

Editor (after examining applicant's credentials, all excellent): "What sort of books do you think you could review best?"

Young Reviewer: "Oh, well, history and biography, criticism. – *belles lettres* of course, and fiction and poetry."

Editor (mournfully, burying his face in his hands): "You all say that. It tells me nothing, nothing – except that you are fond of reading. Many people are." (Then, brightening a little), "May I tell you how you ought to have approached me? If you want to get work on a paper, start by posing as a specialist. It may be bounce, but the standard of erudition is not high, and if you only *take trouble to read up your subject while reviewing a book upon it* – unless you have been foolish enough to pose as a specialist on a subject in which thorough grounding is essential – you can usually put up a fair show of knowing something about it. It is useless your coming up here and telling me that you can review five-sixths of the books that come out. When I asked you what you could do, you ought to have said: 'Well, I've read a good deal in a general way, but I'm afraid I can only write about Jamaica – and, oddly enough, Sir Philip Sidney. . . . Oh yes, *and* Disraeli.'

"Do you see what might happen then? The editor, it might be myself or another, would be inclined to believe you capable of reviewing books on just a few subjects. He might try you at once with, say, a new edition of *Astrophel and Stella*, and if you got up the subject thoroughly and made a good job of it, when a Life of Drayton or a collection of Elizabethan sonnets came out, he would perhaps send you those books too. You would have begun to establish yourself as a reviewer of Elizabethan literature, outside drama – already a fairly wide field. Then, if you had also taken trouble, consulted the Encyclopædia, visited public libraries, and had bounced him in the matter of the review of a History of Jamaica, then, since the editorial mind is streamily associative, you might have gradually established a lien on books upon Sugar, Negroes, British Colonies, Tropical Scenery, Governor Eyre and Carlyle, Giant Fish, and what not. Your claim to know

something about Disraeli might, in the same way, have led to ramifications – to Gladstone, Corn Laws, Oratory, the Berlin Congress in one direction, and to political satire, Victorian fiction and Heaven knows what in the other. In short, starting from three subjects, you would have been on the way to obtaining that roving commission to comment on books at large to which your intelligence, no doubt, but not your knowledge, entitles you."

At these words the dejected countenance of the applicant rose before me, and I added, "Well, I'll give you a trial in spite of your not having bounced me. You are exactly in the position I was at your age. You are enthusiastically and ignorantly interested in literature. Your enthusiasm is to the good; your ignorance to the bad. But that can be overcome – if you condescend to crib from critics who know much more than you do. You say you can review criticism and poetry. Here is a monograph on Webster – try your hand at that. You have read *The Duchess of Malfi*? Good. His other plays?"

Young Reviewer: "No; one need not drink a cask of wine to sample a vintage."

Editor: "Quite so. Yet one can't value a house by peeping into the dining-room window. You had better see what the house-surveyors have to say. An editor does not want merely *your* reaction to Webster. I can't fill these columns week after week with thoughtful idiosyncratic nonsense. You must find out, as well, what *others* have thought and felt about him. Your own sensibility is to the good – I don't want macadamised reviews. But you must also consult the Professors. And, if it came to a choice, I would rather that you took your review wholesale from them than *entirely* out of your own head; though the good review springs from both sources. Yes; if you are going to be a literary reviewer you must start by acquiring a Library of Criticism. You must lay down the Professors. Whom do you suppose Professors

Saintsbury, Grierson, Elton, Mackail, Raleigh, Ker, wrote their books for? If you imagine that they wrote for pupils, you are mistaken. They wrote in order to keep people like you and me *straight*. They believe in learning and culture. Therefore, when I send you a book on a literary subject, go first to the Professors. They are men with a passion for literature which (you may find this difficult to believe) probably once exceeded your own. But being, however, in positions of responsibility they could never allow themselves – simply because, say, they admired Dryden – to sniff at Milton. They had to cultivate a sense of proportion. And to be of any use to me, *you* must show it – even before you have earned the right to it. Meanwhile, be humble – crib."

Then, in my reverie, I found myself antedating this book by Professor Elton. "Here," I said, "is a book which will help you. Suppose I were to send you a book on Drayton? I could hardly expect you to read Drayton's works through before reviewing it. (You would starve.) But I bet anything all you know of Drayton now is a sonnet or two, 'Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part,' etc. You would therefore do well to look at his *Nymphidia*, keeping what Elton says of it in mind; 'everything is on the midget scale, has the precision and matter-of-factness that children ask for in such stories.' You have probably come across Drayton's 'Ballad of Agincourt' in Henley's *Lyra Heroica*. But you had better note that *The Virginian Voyage*, which you have never read, recalls Marvell's *Bermudas* and follow Professor Elton's summary:

> Drayton's poetry is like a broad low plateau singular and pleasant to explore, though it sinks away into featureless plain; with a rich flora, often beautiful, and always strongly rooted; with many streams and meadows, and fairy rings where little beings can be watched at their tournaments; and with a high crest or two, jutting up abruptly. It is all good travelling, for the devout.

"That's central. Make for the centre – though, as an ignoramus, I know you've no right to. I'd rather print the truth than what is original any day. Suppose I send you a new edition of Suckling to review – 'natural easy Suckling?' *You* don't know that Congreve's Millamant praised him admirably, but Elton does. You don't know either that Lovelace in his *Lines to Lucasta* spoilt one of them, by altering it in a later edition, from 'the birds that wanton in the air' to 'the gods,' significantly condescending to fashion – but Elton *does*. Crib from him. That is what he is there for; that's why he wrote – to make the culture of the average critic a little more thorough.

"Do you want to write about Hudibras Butler? You will probably wish to distinguish his merits, without ignoring them, from those of greater satirists; well, Elton will help you. He will draw your attention to the purely intellectual interest of Butler's verse, to his habit of mind at once 'detached and destructive.' And so on down the poets. Beddoes? Listen: 'Often his words are parted, by that thinnest film which makes all the difference, from a pure series of beautiful sounds.' There's a theme for you! And it will be Elton who gave it you. Beddoes's resemblance to Poe as well as to the Elizabethans? You'll find it hinted at. Tennyson? You don't know that 'Tears idle tears' and 'Now sleeps the crimson petal' were 'a *new* species of lyrics springing at once into perfection' – you haven't read enough. And, again, note the importance of 'the wonderful surface in Tennyson's work, which, as in Pope's, covers a varying depth of soil.' You will react to Tennyson and dozens of poets as a man from Mars, if you are not nudged. Buy this book. I won't employ you unless you read the Professors. They – we – are coral insects building the reef that protects the lagoon of literature from the restless sea of nonsense and confusion. Strong waves will burst against it, and part of them foam over. That is well;

but the reef must be built. If you are not content to be an insect too, I won't employ you, and you must try your luck as a genius. My dear, the sensibility of your own generation is only the tick of a minute-hand. If you set up to read the clock, you must watch the hour-hand as well."

OUT OF THE LIMELIGHT
(VERNON LEE)

(1941)

In the week-end library of The Bodley Head you will find three books by Vernon Lee. The first was added as long ago as 1927, and is called *The Handling of Words*. The second is her exquisite little play *Ariadne in Mantua*, bound up with Limbo, a volume of essays; and the third, entitled *A Vernon Lee Anthology*, consist of selections from her earlier works. The quotation at the beginning of this Anthology is a reference to the author, from Browning's "Asolando":

"... No, the book
Which noticed how the walled growths wave," she said,
"Was not by Ruskin." I said, "Vernon Lee?"

Yes, she was already famous so long ago as that.

If I ever wrote a series of articles called "Out of the Limelight," I should begin it with Vernon Lee. The difficulty of writing about her is that she is such a various author. I can only define her by saying that she is an essayist who is at once an æsthete, a psychologist and an historian.

Mr. Birrell once said that a man could live like a gentleman for a year on the ideas that he would find in Hazlitt; and the remark applies also to her. Her essays swarm with ideas. Like Blake, she is "dam' good to steal from."

There is no doubt that Vernon Lee will be read by posterity, for her work is a rare combination of intellectual curiosity and

imaginative sensibility. The majority of readers to-day are not aware of the stimulus and satisfaction they might obtain from her books. Many are out of print, others forgotten. Fame to-day requires careful tending if it is to flourish, and Vernon Lee has been careless of hers. Possibly because fame came to her so easily in early youth, but chiefly, I think, because the disinterested ardour of attention which is the life-breath of her prose is apt to make its possessor oblivious of the chessboard on which the game of reputation is played. When Vernon Lee first began to write, good work looked after itself. The public was smaller, and listened to the voice of authority; the rumour that Browning and Pater admired her was then enough to secure for her books respectful attention. Now in the roaring babel of evanescent praise the verdicts of authority are hardly heard. Every recent book of Vernon Lee's has been well reviewed; but alas, the effect of a good review nowadays is made nugatory by equal praise being given to books almost worthless! It is not from lack of praise that good authors suffer, but from the currency of praise being debased. In her travel sketches she has again and again hunted and captured the *genius loci*. In the art of weaving a delicate net of words in which to catch the spirit of place, not even Henry James is more skilled. It can only be done by one who has an imaginative sense of the past, and an analytic interest in immediate impressions. Vernon Lee is gifted in both these respects; and also in her later essays, "The Spirit of Rome," "The Sentimental Traveller," "The Haunted Woods," "The Tower of the Mirrors," "Genius Loci," she found a style peculiarly adapted to this end. At first she wrote with Ruskinian and Pateresque elaboration, but her later manner has something of the looseness of talk – let us call it an epistolary. Let me give one example of her impressionism, and determination to define the source of some sensation. The following passage describes a visit to a small immensely ancient Italian church:

> Towards sunset there came a long and heavy shower.
>
> The steps one goes down to the House of Pilate church, and the little paved hole in which it stands deep below the level of the present city, were muddy and full of pools. The church itself was dark, but for what came from the ill-lighted cloister within; and the great altar with its stairs and balconies, its look of being a temple, and a triumphal stage, and yet at the same time a pillory of some sort, loomed white in the dusk. At its foot, in an embrasure, flickered the only lamp, a glass cup with a nightlight, flat on the marble slab. There, I felt, was *It*. *It*. What? The something whose white drapery hangs limp like a corpse over the arms on the cross on the top of that church inside a church. The whole place was full of *It*: *It*, a vague terror and sorrow. But what frightened me was none of all this, but just a human being, a man, perhaps a tourist, standing still in the dusk before the altar. The sight of him almost made my heart stop. All that is what religion must have been for primeval man; and this little Templar's church (or whatever in Italy takes the place of such) seems to be oozing with the mysteries of times long before Christianity or even paganism; the terror and sorrows of a nether world and of a nethermost soul.

On abstract subjects, too, she "talks" with her pen, though her thinking is precise. In *Vital Lies*, in which she examines current philosophies of life, her style is certainly redundant, but it conveys the excitement of impromptu discussion. In *The Handling of Words*, she has followed a new line of enquiry. In one essay she examines in turn a page from Meredith, Kipling, Stevenson, Hardy, Henry James and Hewlett, to discover what kind of grammatical construction each favoured, and how far the author attained his effects through diffusion, concentration or repetition. The results are curious, also in the case of the syntax of De Quincey, the rhetoric of Landor, and the dramatic use of the present tense in Carlyle. They are extremely interesting to writers, and the essay on "The Nature of the Writer" is interesting to readers too.

> To be more interested in the world, unselfishly, platonically, passionately; to understand more and more quickly; to feel things into their furthest ramifications, this is, indeed, the characteristic of the great Writer, but 'tis his human superiority, not, believe me, his literary talent... a thing most difficult of definition, because the order of the universe, finding it vain in itself, has on the whole not given it a chance when separated from the human worth of the Writer. Yet we occasionally get a glimpse of it; either when the mere poverty of thought and feeling, the vacuity of the man, as in Gautier, d'Annunzio, and, I grieve to say, Swinburne and Landor, show it through rents and threadbareness.

This is a most important truth, often ignored by the æsthetic; and here lies the justification of that criticism which seeks for the Man behind his Work. It is of course, not his behaviour in private life which is evidence of his value, but the personality which acts upon us through his works. The passage expresses her central point of view as a critic; and what makes her so remarkable as a critic, whether of literature, painting, architecture, or music, is that her power of analysis is accompanied by great æsthetic sensibility.

If there has been a development in her work it has been in the direction of becoming more psychological. "We live in a historical age," nineteenth century critics, conscious of their preoccupation, with the past, used to say, the influence of science upon letters being tardy. Vernon Lee has written her later books during a period which, certainly with equal accuracy, can be described as a psychological one. The two main characteristics of her books are that they are the work of a writer at once sensitively receptive and passionately curious. It is the blend of the restless intellectual analyst and the aboundingly grateful æsthetic observer which makes them fascinating. Her curiosity has of course made her susceptible to the influence of contemporary theory and investigation. No science is changing more rapidly or is really at bottom

in a greater state of confusion than psychology, and some of her work based upon what was once the latest theory has been undercut by later investigations. To a certain extent some of the great mass of notes and disquisitions in which the comparatively brief "Ballet of the Nations" in *Satan the Waster* is embedded, have suffered from being undercut by recent explanations of the unconscious. But the book remains the most thorough literary analysis of war neurosis. When it was first published in 1920 the reading public were not at all inclined for self-examination. It is an armoury stuffed with sharp pacifist weapons, a classic among anti-war books; a work of ardent reasoning, eloquent and shrewd.

It was inevitable that Vernon Lee should be one of the older writers most affected by the war. Her book strikes at the enemies of culture and in defence of that disinterested interest in men and times, in customs and ideas which are different from those contemporary and national; and that conception of life which lies at the root of all culture – that appreciation and learning are ends in themselves. The object of *Satan the Waster* is to show by allegory and discourse how easy it is to enlist the virtues themselves on the side of the powers of destruction. One impression it cannot fail to leave behind, an uneasy distrust and possibly downright contempt, for that glowing and dangerous emotion – moral indignation.

A QUESTION OF STANDARDS

(1929)

Many thousands of people read Mr. Arnold Bennett's weekly article on new books in the *Evening Standard*. Nobody who has not tried to do this sort of work knows how difficult it is not only to write such articles, but to choose the proper book to write about. I am a fairly constant reader of articles; at least, if I want an evening paper, and I usually do, I buy on Thursdays the *Evening Standard* for his sake. And the impression that I have got from reading him, over what is now a considerable stretch of time, is that he has been a most effective influence on the side of the better fiction as against average or inferior fiction. He has a cluster of qualities which fit him admirably to exercise such influence: his immense knowledge of the art of fiction; his intellectual honesty, which is visible in his own novels, and his sympathy, both with the point of view of a writer and of a reader. He will stick up stoutly for a book, though it must disconcert the average reader, if he perceives in it talent or an interesting or an original intention; on the other hand, he never forgets that the reader also wants to be amused, stirred, carried out of himself as well as to read what he may believe, either on trust or from inspection, to be remarkable. I pay this tribute, which is no more than bare obvious justice, the more readily because I am about to attack him.

Every now and then, however, he will write something – usually in the form of a casual passing remark – which lets literature down badly. The Thursday before last (July 11th)

I was walking along the street, reading my just purchased copy of the *Evening Standard* when a sentence in his article brought me to a stop. It ran as follows: "I cannot understand why... Mr. Boas, in his essay on criticism, should be so forbearing to Leslie Stephen, who was immensely tedious as a critic, if fairish as an editor." Let me break off in order that this remark may sink into the minds of my readers.

That was not only a silly thing to say, not only a statement about as far from the truth as the assertion that Mr. Bennett cannot describe the Five Towns, but it was also a most pernicious thing to say. Everyone who knows the difference between good criticism and bad, or between a rapid personal impression which may pass as a decent review and a balanced analysis of the qualities peculiar to a writer, knows that Leslie Stephen's work comes very high indeed in the latter class. Anybody who has attempted to write an essay on any of the authors whom Leslie Stephen has discussed knows that what he has written about them is always worth consulting; and that having consulted, say, *Hours in a Library*, or looked up his monographs on Johnson or George Eliot in The English Men of Letters' series, he has always found something straight to the point; expressed, too, with such vigour and precision – and yet without exaggeration – as to inspire despair in anyone who attempts to state it better. The virtue of Leslie Stephen's criticism is that there is so much intellectual hard work in it, and that its acuteness is always controlled by a steady sense of proportion. He has, of course, like every critic, his limitations. His criticism was never impressionistic and he never relied on his sensibility alone. He knew his limitations well. With the exception of Wordsworth, whom he treated from the ethical and philosophical point of view, he confined himself, as far as poetry was concerned, to the eighteenth century poets – to Crabbe and Pope, or, as in the case of Donne, treated them biographically. Like Faguet he is as a

critic, an amateur of ideas and human nature. He is the best critic in that line England has produced.

He also wrote two books which cannot be superseded: *The History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* and *The History of Utilitarianism.* The prevailing characteristic of these books is an intellectual vivacity which lightens with wit and epigram (never employed to the detriment of accuracy) subjects which are usually heavy and dry. I do not know what Mr. Bennett's idea of intellectual entertainment is, but if hitting the right nail on the head repeatedly without swagger is part of it, let me recommend him to take up again *Hours in a Library* and read Leslie Stephen's analysis, say, of Defoe's talent or Richardson's or De Quincey's – indeed, almost any essay in these volumes. If he gets no intellectual satisfaction from the power of definition visible on every page, or from such accurate condensations of systematic thought as abound in the two long works, I am at a loss to suggest where he is likely to find it; or, for that matter, where if he dismisses the editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography* as a "fairish editor," he is likely to find a "good" one.

If I thought Mr. Bennett's estimate of Leslie Stephen's work was merely inexcusably wide of the mark, I should just have given him a bad one as a critic and held my tongue. But it is precisely the sort of unfair blow which, in these days especially, does harm. And I found another instance of pernicious comment in that article. Mr. Bennett says he has "failed to read Henry Kingsley's *Ravenshoe* or *The Hillyars and the Burtons* simply because of their atrocious writing." Well, those books are badly written. But when he goes on to say, "I would almost as lief read Walter Pater as Henry Kingsley – and that is saying a great deal" – consider the implication and the advice to readers which it gives.

There is no particular reason why we should expect that Mr. Bennett would enjoy Pater. He has not written a page

which suggests that his imagination is open to the impressions which Pater was born to impart. There are dumb notes on everyone's piano, but those who live, even in a modest degree, the life of the mind ought to be able to see, even if they do not feel it, that there is in Pater's work an exquisite and serious excellence. Has not Mr. Bennett praised, with a fervour which it would be hard to heighten, the style of Mr. George Moore? Having read Mr. Moore he presumably knows the latter's opinion of Pater as a writer though he may not have read Pater attentively enough to see how much that he admires in Mr. Moore is based upon what he despises in Pater. The fact is, it is supposed to be a fine independent gesture to turn up your nose at Pater (the inevitable reaction). Mr. Bennett seems proud of his insensibility, for such comments tell us nothing about Pater, though they keep those who might read Pater with profit from doing so. The destructive sniff directed at Leslie Stephen is of the same nature. These overconfident side-blows are pernicious because it is precisely the standard of what is excellent in criticism, biography and history and thought that is to-day so confused. The rewards of putting fundamental brainwork and precisely expressed sensibility into such works are slender enough already, for in the spate of books good and bad tend to be washed past us together. If men like Mr. Bennett do not stop to notice in Leslie Stephen the ponderable merits of intellect, integrity and thoroughness, our culture is in a bad way; and it is after all the "culture" of an age which contributes most to making the lives of its children worth living.

TWO STORIES

THE MARK ON THE SHUTTER
OR, A SMALL BOY'S CONSCIENCE

It was mid-winter term at Lentfield House and a Saturday morning. The sky had at last cleared after a three-days storm, during which strong winds had flung the rain against its seaward windows. Football had been impossible. The school was in that state of nerves which results from keeping boys boxed up together; the silly were at their silliest, those who took pleasure in teasing were at their worst, and the bored were so exasperated by the few who wanted to read that the latter had no peace. Collectors of stamps, shells, skins, crests, picture postcards, who had looked forward to arranging their collections and perhaps doing a little "swopping," found it risky to expose their treasures. At any moment anything was liable to be snatched by a bored marauder who would either hold it up to public auction by shouting "Quis?" or dash away with it in the hope of being pursued; leaving the unhappy owner torn between the desire to recover his property and a dread of leaving the rest of his treasures unprotected. One little boy had taken nearly two days to finish a tear-stained letter home – it had been "bagged" so many times. Once to his agony a passage had been read aloud; but this had been instantly stopped. It had been voted "not funny," but "caddish." After that "Swotty" was allowed to finish in peace his interminable letter.

He was the most persecuted and unpopular boy in the school. He was miserably short-sighted and he was accused of smelling; a charge for which there was some foundation. He was one of those little boys who learn late how to wash; there was always orange-coloured wax in his pale ears and stale grime behind them. Moreover, he was not nice-natured, and his schoolfellows instinctively felt this. There was a cringing cheekiness in him which froze pity, even in those who thought that his persecutors went too far; and if any one did stick up for him, his familiarity became offensive. Freddy Somercote ("Coat" or "Goat" for short) had suffered from this. He hated the sight of Swotty's misery, and he had sometimes shielded him; but his own popularity was precarious and during these last wet days it had sunk alarmingly low. He had for some time past been aware that a set was being made against him, and to his dismay he had discovered that he was now charged with "swaggering." He had even found jeering notes addressed to "The Duke of Lentfield" in his locker, which he had opened carefully, read, and then fastened up again, so that his enemies should not have the satisfaction of knowing that he had read them. But they had caused him some pain and more uneasiness.

Much was going on inside him. He had been deeply impressed by the Head Master's sermons; he had "found religion." What high, sad, splendid future lay in front of him he did not know, but this he did know, that from now onwards he must be heroically good. One of those wet afternoons (the library was a bear-garden, of course) he had spent in his dormitory reading the Bible. But to go there during the day was strictly forbidden, and when discovered he had concealed his employment. He had been given a long punishment. This had provoked in him no resentment, only an exquisitely patient sense of being misunderstood.

That seriousness which had lately made life grave and beautiful to him had, no doubt, reflected itself in that change of manner which others interpreted as condescension. The change had been all the more noticeable because up till then he had been a droll, vivacious little boy. Thus, at a time when he was longing to love everyone and make his friendships better and better, he found them all beginning to dislike him. Still, he had the Head Master; the Head Master whose exhortations had so profoundly affected him.

The Rev. Walter Orum, Head Master of Lentfield School, was not only a fine scholar but a splendid actor. His voice and features could express not only the sternest resentment but every shade of tender approval. He had no idea of the weight of his glare, or of the heart-shaking power of his voice, otherwise he would not have used them so often. Indeed, the last thing he wished – except of course when his boys did something really wrong – was that they should be afraid of him. In goodness and refinement he was superior to the people most of the boys saw at home, including their parents; sensitive boys felt this without exactly making comparisons. And while this made it thrilling to please him, it also made those moments more awful when suddenly the smile was struck from his face, and such expressions as "shuffler," "wretched ignoramus," "unhappy boy," shot from his lips, accompanied by a gesture of contempt which would have made his fortune on the stage. The boys had no notion that shortly after such scenes he would be laughing over them with his staff; and he, on his side, had no idea of the profound admiration he had inspired in at least one of his pupils.

Shortly before the lunch hour an order was received in each classroom, that the boys, instead of going straight to lunch, were to assemble in the Big Playroom; and when it was read out, many looked up from their work uneasily. Yet such an order did not necessarily mean trouble. It might even betoken

something pleasant. A dead whale, for instance, had been washed up some miles farther down the coast. Perhaps the school was going to be taken to see it? All would depend on the way the Head began to speak, and it was no use worrying till that moment came. But everybody, from the captain of the school, who was over fourteen, to the youngest who was not yet nine, knew from experience that if the Head's first words were, "I have to make a statement," then the worst might be expected; a "row" of some sort or size was certainly brewing.

The Big Playroom, at the end of which stood a stage used for concerts, lectures and entertainments, filled quickly, and the hum of forty little boys' chattering arose. What was up? Could it be the whale? Perhaps the smuggling trade in chocolate and acid-drops, carried on through a well-bribed boot-boy had been discovered? Awful thought! That would be a row of huge dimensions, for nearly a quarter of the school was involved. The guilty tried to derive some comfort from their numbers: "I'll own up if you will," "I bet that little beast Binker won't," "Oh, won't he! I'll bet I'll made him," "*Cave*! Old Orum!"

The door was flung violently open and the Head, his black gown flying, strode towards the platform. There was a sudden hush. Leaning against a wing of disused scenery with a careless elegance which contrasted with the gravity of his face, he pronounced the ominous words, "I have to make a statement."

There was a short pause before he proceeded, when he began, so to speak, with first principles.

"You are gentlemen and the sons of gentlemen." (At this pronouncement every heart sank.) "It is on that supposition this school, *our* school, is carried on. We have no machinery of discipline – I would scorn to use it – of punishing any boy

who does not possess some of the rudimentary instincts of a gentleman. If there are *cads* among us, let them – go.

"I will not labour a definition of the type of mean undesirable person who is thus curtly and adequately described. It is sufficient to remind you that he is known by his boorishness, his want of respect for the feelings and property of others, and a complete lack of gratitude. His nature is often betrayed by his dirty habit of defacing public monuments and things of beauty with disgusting scribblings of his own ignoble name. If the ocular evidence before me, that such a one is indeed among us, were of the *latter* kind," (here he paused and added with a concentrated vigour that Chatham or Gladstone might have envied), "I should then know with whom I had to deal. As it is, the offence is anonymous."

"It has been almost a matter of pride to me that your surroundings here should not be quite unworthy of your own homes. For the forethought and expense involved, I should not think of asking gratitude; I prefer that such things should be taken for granted between us. But some respect for my property, such as a host expects from his guests, I am at least entitled to demand. You must all have noticed at the beginning of term that the library had been repainted and decorated – for you. The shutters of the window nearest the door" (at these words Freddy Somercote experienced midriff-anguish) "have been foully defaced. The precise nature of the drawing, or inscription, is no longer decipherable." (Freddy remembered with horror having given a lecture on physiology, the fruit of holiday reading, and having illustrated it by a diagram on a shutter); "but there are indications that it was of a nature to inspire, even in *that* boy, some sense of shame, for he has clumsily obliterated it. If I am right in supposing that he is capable of shame, he will now stand up; otherwise" – and his voice became disquietingly matter-of-fact – "there will be no half-holiday this afternoon."

Suddenly Freddy was aware that he was on his feet. In his ears there was a rustle, like a vast composite sigh of relief, and the Rev. Walter Orum had apparently exhausted his oratorical indignation: "I am at least glad. . . " he began almost mildly – then, apparently changing his mind, he descended quickly, and as he passed Freddy he turned towards him a face in which disgust and grief magnificently contended: "*You!*" he said, "I was never more surprised in my life." He could hardly have devised a more acute, instantaneous punishment; Freddy's self-respect crumbled.

As soon as the doors closed a hubbub of relief broke out. There remained half an hour before lunch, and everyone rushed to the library to see with his own eyes the desecration. Freddy had some difficulty in edging through the crowd of boys round the window. Yes, there it was, his diagram, still, in spite of having been scraped away by a pocket-knife, intelligible to anyone who had followed the lecture. But – something struck him – Had it not been the shutter *nearest* the door that "the statement" had been about? And was not his diagram on the shutter of the third window, *farthest* from the door? Another group was gathered at that first window; they, too, were examining a similar but smaller diagram. Well, if that was the one which the row was about he had not drawn it! He explained the facts excitedly to those nearest him and dashed from the room; relief filled his breast, he could put himself right with the Head, now – at once.

He knocked at the study and entered: "Sir," he panted, "I've seen that mark on the shutter. I didn't do it after all." The Rev. Walter Oram slowly lowered his *Times*, and like Sol emerging from a cloud his countenance gradually shone upon the little boy. "I knew it," he said affectionately, "I knew that there must be some mistake." With the radiant happiness of the freshly shriven, Freddy skipped back to the library and announced what he had done. There his happiness found no

reflection. His information was glumly received. Everyone recognised his perfect right to retract his confession, since his own crime, though exactly similar, had not yet been discovered. But then, what about the half-holiday? Unless the culprit was found and forced to confess before two-thirty, they would all be marched into class after lunch. Groups instantly formed to discuss who could be guilty, and the idea spread that it must be Swotty. It was only suspicion but it was something to go upon, and the longer it was entertained the more reliable it seemed to become; and what one boy in particular said, almost strengthened it to a certainty. He was a simple straightforward boy whom everybody called "Oats": "I'm sure," he said, "I saw some fellow sitting in that window the first evening, drawing on the shutter." There were cries of "What was he like?" "I think," was the reply, "he was small and had dark hair." Now half the school was small and had dark hair, but the description fitted Swotty. On Freddy, however, his words had a very different effect. For the fraction of a second, rapid as the blink of a Kodak, he too, saw that boy – and it was himself! The flash of the certainty was gone again like lightning, but it had been. In a desperate flurry he began rummaging among his memories of that first evening, but he could recall nothing which linked on to such an action. The physiology lecture, delivered some time later, he remembered perfectly; he could even repeat it now. But when and why had he drawn a picture of human organs for himself? The moment he compared his other memories with that instantaneous sensation provoked by those words he was no longer sure that such a thing had ever happened.

He could not recapture that flash of certainty, but it had left behind something as disturbing as itself, the feeling that he had been certain. Though he did not know it, what was really preventing him from recapturing it was the obligation on his conscience to go again to the study. To go in and

say: "Please sir, I've made another mistake, I did do it" – that was impossible. He did not admit to himself that it was impossible, any more than he said to himself that he did not remember; but he said to himself that he knew Swotty had not done it.

And where was Swotty? In spite of the failure of the group round the reliable Oats urging him to say that the boy he saw wore spectacles, that suspicion was hardening; the discovery of Swotty's absence confirmed it. Of course it was a guilty conscience that had prevented his rushing to look at the mark on the shutter like everybody else! They did not remember that it was one of Swotty's cautious customs to slip into the dining-room last of all, as a precaution against playful, if not painful, kicks; and that he never foregathered in the library. Where was Swotty? Two ardent servants of justice were just starting in search of him, when the gong roared, and the whole school, still simmering with indignation, trooped in to lunch. As the Head rose to say grace, Swotty slid quietly into his place.

The meal was a gloomy one, the elder boys ate ferociously and in silence. It ended with another brief statement from the Head: since it had turned out that Freddy Somercote had been mistaken in thinking that he was responsible for the damage, and no one else had come forward, the afternoon would be spent as though it were a whole school day. They would be expected to be in their form-places at half-past two. He was glad to think that there was at any rate one boy in the school who had the manliness to own up when he thought he was in fault, and he pitied from the bottom of his heart the coward who had preferred that all should suffer rather than that he himself should run risk of punishment.

All eyes were fixed on the unconscious Swotty, and for the first time the Head Master's praise failed to make Freddy happy.

They all trooped out, towards the Big Playroom, Freddy among them in a daze. He was roused out of it by the sound of a squeal; Swotty had been cornered against one of the walls. His clever little spectacled face was festered with anxiety and spite: "I didn't, I didn't," he kept screaming, "and I won't." Freddy pushed his way through the others, saying that there was no proof and that it was a beastly shame. There were answering cries of "He *did* do it." "Oats *said* he saw him, the little sneak," "He must own up," "We're going to build a Tower of Babel on him."

"The Tower of Babel" was a sort of "ordeal by pressure" the victim having been knocked down, the rest then threw themselves on top of each other across his body. It was really more terrifying than painful, for the bottom boy, save for anguish of mind, suffered almost as much as the victim himself, and soon holloed out, when the "Tower" at once went to pieces amid shouts of laughter.

Freddy succeeded in turning the attention from Swotty to an argument about him. Oats was summoned, and the discussion was becoming animated when Swotty, who was an adept at such manœuvres, made a sudden dive for the door of the lavatories and reached it; from that place he did not emerge until school had begun. A punishment for being late was a trifle to Swotty, who could not resist cocking a snook at Freddy as he settled into his place beside him. Freddy was beyond resentment, and used most of the hour in racking his brains to discover a way of protecting the poor wretch during the break between schools. He was given two bad marks for inattention. Finally, he scribbled on blotting-paper that it would be as well to ask "to leave the room" just before the hour came to an end, "P'raps and p'raps not," Swotty sniggered. However, he took the hint, and the future Colonial Governor spent the next hour in his favourite resort.

By five o'clock the school, with the practical stoicism of boys, had ceased to resent the inevitable: it was a whole school day like any other, that was all, and its unusualness was forgotten. To Freddy, the afternoon and evening passed slowly and he was dreading the night. The persecution of Swotty had had the effect of removing every shadow of doubt from his mind that he was also the maker of the second mark on the shutter, and he dreaded lying awake in the dark a prey to conscience. But oddly enough he fell asleep instantly, and when he woke the next morning the incidents of the day before seemed to have happened long ago. He merely felt depressed and slack.

Though he had not really forgotten them, it was his body that remembered them best; he felt very tired. He tried to work, but his work though painstaking was full of mistakes from that day onwards. He grew hardly to care whether his school-fellows were friendly or not, and, from having been one who "counted" in the school, he slipped into being a mere nonentity. His shining dramatic inner life also stopped. The lights were turned down in the theatre of his soul which was covered over with dust sheets, and he could no longer imagine himself in the divine limelight.

One morning during construing he had a violent fit of coughing, at the end of which he found it difficult to recover his breath. In his effort to do so he was aware that he was making an odd crowing noise; then, without feeling in the least squeamish, he was suddenly sick. "Old Orum" looked up over his spectacles with an expression of mild concern: "Young man, you've got the whooping-cough. Go to Miss Tay." The black-board duster was thrown over the mess he had made, and the lesson continued. Freddy went to the matron, who took a half-amused professional "tut-tut-tut" view of his misfortune. This was the beginning of six weeks' segregation. It was a considerable comfort to be made rather

a fuss of. Afterwards from time to time a fellow "whooper" joined him joyfully in the Sanatorium. They were not boys he particularly liked, but it was not a bad life; one could read stories and play chess and cards, and then one's people sent one grapes and good things to eat. It was even rather fun being sick without feeling sick, and exaggerating crowings over the basin. As soon as he was no longer infectious he was sent home, and it was during the holidays that he made his resolve.

It became clear to him that he must confess. He knew this was necessary because the moment he had made that resolve the lights in his soul were turned up, and he became again interested in himself. But it did not seem so easy to do when the holidays were over and he found himself back again at Lentfield House. To begin with, he discovered he was enjoying the term thoroughly. The charges of "swaggering" had blown over, and having made a one-handed catch in the slips at a critical juncture in a match against another school and also taken two wickets in one over, his status was most honourable. Then, summer itself had a debilitating effect on his conscience. When the sky is blue and the evenings are delicious, it seems nonsensical to do anything to make oneself unhappy. Even Swotty was benefiting from the balmy weather, and a passing kick with the flat of the foot was all he had to complain of.

It is true, Freddy had every now and then a feeling that he was enjoying his prestige with masters and boys on false pretences, but this only bothered him intermittently. What was more serious was that he could not help noticing that his beautiful serious moments, when they did occur, were always somehow mixed up with this obligation. While enjoying the moonlit garden from the dormitory window, he would suddenly think of that; and he could not even read a life of the Duke of Wellington, at least with any genuine hope

of emulating that hero, without being reminded of what was in front of him. And although his religious meditations were now vivid again, whenever he withdrew into himself, a Divine face always seemed bending above him with an expression of expectant, if merciful, concern. Night after night he attempted after school prayers to say the decisive words: "May I speak to you, sir, in the study?"; again and again he came near to saying it, but invariably the Head Master's smile and the kind pressure of his hand defeated him. At last one night – it was the night on which the boys were always asked to contribute to Dr. Barnardo's Home ("the forced loan" as those who remembered their history rather pointedly called it) – he plucked up courage. His own subscription had literally been "a widow's mite" and a handsome one at that, twenty-three shillings – all he possessed. His generosity produced such an inward sense of joy in him, and of faith in his own goodness, that after prayers the request to speak to the Head Master slipped out almost unconscious.

But the moment he was in the study he began to cry and tremble. The Head was sitting in his chair reading *The Times* – just as he had been sitting that fatal morning the term before; again he lowered his paper.

When he saw the state the little boy was in, he drew him affectionately to his side and put his cheek against his head; but at this, Freddy's sobs shook him worse than ever, and it was some time before he could jerk out the words: "I made – the mark – on the shutter." "A mark on a shutter? Well, dear child, that isn't a very dreadful thing to do. Show it to me to-morrow if you like."

"Oh, but *I* did it – after all," sobbed Freddy. That smiling face so near him shone, for Freddy, with such divine radiance – and it was no longer expectant but triumphant – that he did not perceive what any other person would have seen, that its expression was, if very kind, also very blank, Freddy ran

upstairs to the dormitory still crying, but with the heart of a bird.

To confess also to the leaders of the school was comparatively easy. But these confessions fell very flat. They had to be gone through, but there was no exhilaration after them. The Captain of the eleven, for instance, kept tossing up and catching a cricket ball all the time, and at the end of Freddy's story merely remarked: "Oh, I thought Swotty did it. Who do you think I ought to put in fourth wicket, Oats?"

Freddy learnt at the time, or thought he had learnt, nothing from all he had been through; but in later life when, either for fun or from curiosity, he would sometimes travel back into the past, he found his experience had taught him three things: that a good conscience is a very private source of happiness in which others can never be much interested; that people have short memories, even for what they once thought important; and that the outraged moral sense of a community is in proportion to the inconvenience suffered at the moment from the delinquent. And when, afterwards, he was sometimes rather surprised to find himself chilled, rather than excited, by public outbursts of moral indignation, he would say to himself: "Ah, yes! of course – the mark on the shutter."

THE BEAR

It was the hour for confidences, and the talk had turned on Remorse. Each person in the small company round the fire had wanted several times to get up and go, but the impulse had always ended in lighting another pipe or in filling another glass, and in restating an opinion already repeated. That vague feeling of shame at having talked overmuch, which makes it harder than ever to leave one's company, had descended upon them. But not upon the host. He delighted in such moments. Standing by the mantelpiece, a tumbler of claret in one hand and a slice of cake in the other, he beamed upon the rest lounging in attitudes of sombre prostration.

"And you, S–," he said, turning to a long neat youth in a pepper-and-salt suit and a black satin stock, "what crime weighs most on your conscience?" S–, whom even two-in-the-morning exhaustion could not make natural, pulled himself together, lit another cigarette, and proceeded to elaborate lightly an idea for a story, which he had vulgarised in order to make money for a trip to Dieppe. He had deliberately chosen a smug ending for it. Of this, he said, he would be ashamed to the end of his days. During the silence which followed, unfavourable opinions were coldly and privately registered against him. It was broken by a youth, obviously very communicative by desire and by nature shy. There was an episode in his life he said, which was always bothering him; at the oddest moments, too, staying his hand in the act

of sponging himself in a bath, or making him stamp suddenly at evening parties, and recurring also in his dreams with grotesque details. It appeared that he had been loved by a plain and already once disappointed girl. He had great difficulty in bringing himself to say anything about her, especially that she was plain, but he evidently conceived that he had unintentionally destroyed the convalescent self-confidence of a modest and lonely soul. Unfortunately, in the middle of his story he remembered his own personal appearance, and, losing confidence in the possibility of his audience believing that any woman could have passionately longed for him, he grew embarrassed, and told his story so badly that he created an impression that he had been trying to show off his own delicacy of feeling. "When next he stamps," thought the host, reading his mind, "it is quite likely to be at the recollection of this confession."

A wicker chair creaked ominously, but no one got up.

"I have been trying to get you to see," began the host again, "that what is called a 'bad conscience' is made up of feelings which we must disentangle. We ought to classify these painful uneasy emotions according to their causes. For instance, there is remorse at having done something base, and remorse at having hurt someone else; you can be very susceptible to one kind of remorse and yet insensitive to the other. Take myself, for instance, my self-respect is extraordinarily recuperative. Like the vampire it has been dead many times. But I have only to behave decently on one or two subsequent occasions and it revives as fresh as ever. It is not the sins I have committed that go on rankling, but those occasions on which, more or less wantonly, I have injured someone else; rubbed salt, like poor B–, into an unhealed wound; dismissed a fellow creature, with whom I had enough imagination to sympathize, thinking more wretchedly than ever about himself. Oh, it's having kicked, even inadvertently, someone already down,

lacerated someone who had given me pleasure – not even my little *well*-remembered acts of loving-kindness obliterate those memories for me.

"I'll tell you what I did once; it's twenty years ago, so I can tell it now. Only please believe, so that you may understand how those events affected me at the time, that I am naturally very fond of animals. If I am in a room with a dog, for instance, I can't rest till I have made it put up its paws and push its nose between my hands. As for killing an animal like a bear I would sooner shoot an old lady toddling down the street in furs!

"When I was eleven years old, I once spent a summer holiday in Wales, in a village – I suppose I must call it, though it was more like a small town – among the mountains at the foot of a large slate quarry. Nominally I was staying with my uncle, but he came down so seldom that I was really staying with my cousins and their friends. The oldest of them was not much over twenty. They were all extremely energetic and passionately addicted to climbing. Three or four times a week they would start off with white ropes over their shoulders, their pockets bulging with sandwiches, for day-long expeditions far beyond the stretch of my small legs. I don't know if it was more depressing to watch them start and wave genially back to me on the road, or on their return, sometimes long after the stars were out, to see them tramp heavily back into the house and fling themselves down before supper with the air of weary Titans. How I admired and envied them – especially when they talked about 'rock-work'!

"On those days, I was naturally left to my own devices. There was a small boy lodging in the twin semi-detached villa next door, and I usually played with him. His name was Monty, a name which for years afterwards I could not hear without stab.

"Our villas were the only respectable residences in the long street of small stone houses, and the road widened in front of our two gardens. At dusk, when work was over, this space would be noisy with the tired shouting of children and dotted with quarrymen loitering outside uninviting little pubs, while in every kitchen dinner was on the stew. Imagine such a scene: the sky just emptied of a glorious sun, the mountain tops weighed down to earth and looking blacker, steeper, nearer; their dark sides veiled by smoke rising from a hundred hearths. And into this scene comes – from where? Heaven knows from where – down the steep white road, between the staring houses, the queerest pair of travellers; a little jaunty-stepping man in a red sash carrying a long pole and at his heels, trundling softly through the dust, a coffee-coloured bear.

"Monty and I were alone the evening they came. We were up in his sitting-room, talking about cricket, and trying which of us could put the most leg-break on one of those small solid indiarubber balls. The little man and the bear had stopped, though we did not know it, opposite our villas, as the most prosperous-looking houses in the street. It was the gathering noise of foot-steps that drew us to the window. Presently, there was a stampede of children, clamorously shrill; stout aproned matrons appeared in every doorway; loutish boys came ragging and jostling up, and pipe-sucking labourers, trying to seem indifferent, lurched heavily into what was rapidly becoming a crowd.

"The moment we appeared at the window the little man took off his cap with a most engaging smile and nodded at us twice, as much as to say we should soon see what we should see. His face was tanned, his round black head so closely cropped that it looked as glossy as a mole's. Smiling more than ever, he began to speak in some unintelligible tongue (I think now he must have been a Basque), at the same time

lifting his elbow in the manner of one draining a glass to the last drop. I ran down to the kitchen to fetch some beer, and when I brought it out I found Monty had already fastened himself to the garden railings. The little man tossed off the beer as expertly as he had drained the imaginary glass; then after wiping his lips with the back of his hand, and making another bow, he pointed to the bear.

"The bear stood with its toes turned in, its head swinging slowly between its bandy forelegs. It was caked with mud and powdered with dust and obviously thirsty; from the corners of its mouth hung down two long strings of dusty slobber. But never did a lovely princess find any one more willing to run an errand for her. In I dashed again panting out, 'the bear, the bear – a pail – water.' And it proved even more worthwhile than I had expected; for, encouraged by a gesture from the little man, who was now smiling more than ever, it was I who gave the water to the bear. While it was drinking we looked at each other across its back.

"There is, you know, also friendship at first sight. Unlike passion, it does not spring up between two people out of a sudden, vivid, mutual discovery of each other, but from a sudden awareness between them that they each have some other love in common. The little man and I looked at each other and then at the bear; and then again at each other; we became friends. When it had at last finished sucking the water through its muzzle, he gave its rope a jerk and uttered a sharp guttural cry. I thought I saw resentment in its small choleric eye, but nevertheless it raised itself up on to its short hind-legs, and stood, tottering a little. It was now much taller than its master, who, after placing his own cap on its head, proceeded to push the crowd into a semi-circle in front of our garden; while Monty and I took up our position again at the railings to watch.

"Bruin on hind legs with pendent paws, twirled ponderously to the monotonous traditional rhythm.

"Da Doddy, dong Doddy, da Doddy, dong, used to be a fairly common street show in my childhood, certainly as common as Punch and Judy are now; most towns of any size were visited sometimes or other by a bear-leader and his bear. There was something endearing in the clumsy good nature of the beast, and in its willingness to attempt a grace of movement it could never achieve, which made the performance popular. In a quarry-village in Wales it had, of course, also the charm of complete novelty.

"The sight of this strange, massive, shaggy animal, with a cap perched askew between its blunt round ears, attempting to balance its weight first on one foot and then on the other as it revolved to the rhythm of a song, produced much laughter. But a bear's accomplishments are limited and the entertainment would have soon begun to pall, had not the crowd itself improvised a new diversion. Someone threw a crust of bread which was instantly caught and swallowed – the bear nearly, but not quite, losing its balance. Others followed suit; and while the little man was going round for pennies it sat up begging like a dog, continuing, to the delight of everybody, to catch adroitly whatever scraps were thrown at it.

"It was then that Monty spoke the fatal words: 'By Jove!' he exclaimed, 'dashed if that bear couldn't field "point" at Lord's.'

"Now in excitement one either flings away the very thing one wants to keep, or continues to clutch whatever happens to one's hand. In my left hand I was still holding the small solid indiarubber ball, and without thinking, I tossed it to the bear: a gulp – a rather difficult gulp – it disappeared.

"A surprisingly loud shout of laughter made the little man turn quickly round, but after a moment's perplexity, still

jingling coppers in his cap and smiling acknowledgements, he proceeded with the next part of the entertainment. Monty and I had exchanged a glance of deep uneasiness, but we were somewhat reassured by the bear's appearing none the worse for that awful mouthful. In obedience to a series of staccato cries from its master, it now went through its drill; shouldering the pole like a rifle, presenting arms, and ending up by turning a series of very slow somersaults in the dusty road. The crowd then dispersed, and Monty and I went indoors; I, with a feeling inside me itself not unlike solid indiarubber ball. I remember Monty tried to cheer me up by assuring me that bears were the same as ostriches and could digest anything, but, like the children we were, we took a surer – perhaps after all the only road to consolation: we began to think of something else.

"My cousins returned early that evening, and they brought with them a piece of news which ought to have delighted me. On their way back they had discovered an interesting little climb, not too difficult for me and not too far off. For once, and on the next day, I could accompany them. I don't think any of them noticed that a chance which would have normally set me skipping and squealing with delight, now only provoked signs of temperate gratitude. I said of course that it would be 'most awfully jolly,' but one can't feel enthusiastic when there is a dread inside one heavy and hard as a lump on one's stomach. We were to breakfast at half-past seven, as some of the party intended to take the climb on the way to larger achievements, so I was sent early to bed. Young as I was, I had discovered that troubles were worse at night, and I went very reluctantly, resolving to get up still earlier than the others to set my mind at rest. If only Monty were right in his natural history, how happy I should be! How much I should enjoy the expedition! I could not say my usual prayers, for there was only one in my heart, 'O God, make

it all right,' which I repeated many times. Oddly enough, I slept well and I woke even earlier than I had intended.

"It was a lovely summer morning. The quarry men had not yet started for their work and the wide road was empty. How was I to find out where the little man and his bear had spent the night? The first person I saw was the postman, who could tell me nothing. I began to knock at one cottage-door after another, each of which opened directly on the same scene: a small kitchen where a rather drowsy man, surrounded by children and waited on by his wife, sat sipping at a table a cup of steaming tea. After a stare of surprise they all behaved in the same way. First they laughed; then man and wife said something unintelligible to each other in Welsh, and then they laughed again. I had begun to despair when I caught sight of a publican sweeping out his dirty sawdust into the street. Perhaps the man and the bear had put up at the inn? They had not; but he told me I would find them at a small farm among some fields, to which he pointed on the slope above. I ran up the hill – because running stopped my thinking – and reached it out of breath. In the first stable into which I looked a girl was milking a cow with her forehead pressed against its flank; behind the door next it I could hear the stamping and munching of horses. I was going to open it, though it was not likely that a farmer would ever put a bear among his horses, when, at the bottom of the yard my eye was caught by a small windowless tarred shed, the door of which was half open. That would be the place! I approached it cautiously and peeped inside. The shed was dark, but in an instant I had seen everything. The bear was lying on its back and the little man beside it, on the straw on which they both had slept. The man was rubbing its chest and belly, which were drenched with slobber from its mouth. One glance was enough; I stood petrified for one timeless instant, then turned

to run down the hill again. As I turned I was aware that the man was trying to pour something into the bear's mouth.

"My cousins had nearly finished breakfast; I was asked where on earth I had been and reproved for being a bad starter. I mumbled some excuse, gulped my tea, stuffed my mouth and declared I had had enough. It must have been obvious that I was in a rather tense condition, but it was attributed to childish excitement. 'Look at little Peter, too excited to eat,' said one of my cousins with a grin. On the road I was given a chaffing but severe lecture: I would never make a mountaineer, if I got excited and neglected to 'stoke up' before an expedition. But later in the day I won golden opinions – there is nothing like misery for making one fearless. I believe I behaved as though I were in high spirits most of the time, but that expedition was like a dream to me, and is so still. The only solid moments in it, so to speak, were those at which, intermittently, the scene in the shed came back to me, and I saw again the slobbered breast of the bear and the little man trying to unclench its jaws to pour down its throat the contents of a green bottle.

"We picnicked on the top of our little mountain, on the other side of which we found so fascinating a 'chimney' that my cousins decided to give up the longer expedition. I remember being lowered down it, dangling at a rope-end like a spider on its thread. When we had all got down it we started at once to climb up again – in short, the afternoon was spent in 'rock-work.' It was a happy thing for me, for it meant complete distraction. Where I should ordinarily have been afraid, where foot-holds only accommodated the side of one's boot, I had only to think of the bear to become perfectly calm. Even my eldest cousin, who was after all responsible for me and had been reluctant to allow me to try one or two climbs, became reassured. His praise gave me a sweet sad feeling, like the comfort a grown-up person receives from a

child who does not understand calamity. I felt that I loved him very much.

"The long summer evening had begun and in a sky still lit the moon was gathering a white brilliancy, when we struck our homeward road again. The moment my feet were on it, my spirits drooped. The change was so noticeable – and, of course, it was attributed to fatigue – that my cousin stopped a cart and asked the man to give me a lift; and when I was seated beside him I realised that this was just what I had wanted: to arrive before the others, to find out quickly what had happened, and to get my money to give to the little man. The driver put me down at our villa; I rushed upstairs; I thrust all I had in my pocket, and hurried, limping, up to the farmyard I had visited that morning.

"There I found the door of the tarred shed wide open. They're gone, I thought. Yes, it was empty; only the green bottle was still lying in the straw. This was a good sign; the bear must have recovered, or they could not have taken the road again; and at that thought my heart was instantly filled with an adoring thankfulness. Without stopping to ask questions I ran down the hill again to the village; I found I was no longer footsore. To give the little man my money was all I could do in return for an answered prayer. I should find out in the village, perhaps, if they had gone up the road, or down it towards Portmadoc. If I did not find him, perhaps I could find out where he had gone – anyhow I would ask at the first pub. The bar-room was full of quarry-men talking Welsh. It would have been difficult to make my way to the counter, where the landlord was rinsing glasses and pulling taps, but fortunately a man near the door was able to tell me what I wanted to know. 'There will be no performance of bear to-night whatever,' he said in his curious sing-song pattering English. He told me he had passed him on the Portmadoc road about half-an-hour ago. That was enough

for me; I did not stop to hear any more. If I ran I should catch him up; the road was all downhill, which was lucky, too.

"The broad white road wound along, skirting the promontories of the mountains down into the flat valley; and round each turn in it I expected to see two figures – that little jaunty man and behind him, trundling through the dust, the bear; each time I was disappointed. I must have covered the best part of three miles and yet the road was still empty. My eyes were invariably fixed so far ahead in search of them that, on turning a rather sharp corner, I hardly noticed the man sitting on the wall until I was close up to him. He was looking down, rolling a cigarette between his fingers and swinging his feet backwards and forwards. But the moment I looked at him I recognised the round, blue, brimless cap, and stopped a yard or two off, panting. He looked up indifferently. Then he, too, recognised me, and a smile, very different from the grin with which he had collected his coppers, different, too, from that smile which we had exchanged across the bear's back, just moved the corners of his mouth. He looked steadily at me for a moment and nodded his head. Beyond him on the wall I saw a piece of brown fur; it was the bear's skin.

"When I gave him the money (I think it was about seven shillings) he took it without change of expression; then he laid his hand on the skin beside him and stroked it; stroked it and nodded again. If we could have spoken the same language, I am sure a confession would have burst from me; but all he understood was that I was a little boy who was sorry that the bear was dead."