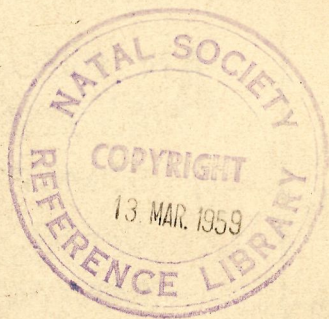


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# THEORIA

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
EDITORIAL COMMENT	ii
THE COGNITIVE VALUE OF NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY	
<i>W. Yourgrau</i>	1
LITERÊRE INLEGGUNDE	<i>C. J. M. Nienaber</i> 10
PAUL CLAUDEL POETE CHRETIEN (I)	<i>M. L. Tricaud</i> 15
CORRESPONDENCE:	
WORDSWORTH AND THE QUIET	{ <i>T. Whittock</i> 27 { <i>F. Langman</i>
LAWRENCE, LAST OF THE ENGLISH	
<i>C. van Heyningen</i>	34
CONSULE PLANCO	<i>A. Petrie</i> 35
THE AXE IN SPRINGTIME	<i>P. Warner</i> 41
ANDRE GIDE'S FAUX MONNAYEURS—AN INTRODUCTION	
<i>K. Greshof</i>	58

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## EDITORIAL COMMENT

There are to be two numbers of THEORIA this year; this one (THEORIA 10) and THEORIA 11, which we hope will appear in September.

Contributions to THEORIA 11, dealing with any subject in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, should be submitted as soon as possible to The Editors, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. Critical and controversial letters will also be welcomed.

THE EDITORS

# THE COGNITIVE VALUE OF NIETZSCHE'S PHILOSOPHY

by W. YOURGRAU

MANY ACADEMIC MINDS have evaded a systematic formulation of Nietzsche's philosophy by reason of its apparently incoherent congeries, with its burden of contradictions, not mitigated by his puckish delight in admitting to them, and because of its poetic and prophetic garb, its unorthodox submergence in desultory and emotional vacillation. Conflicting personalities strove in him for expression. Sublime visions of the future executed in luxuriant pictorial strokes commingled with incisive psychological, aesthetic criticism: a complexity reminiscent of Oscar Wilde, but always sounding greater depths. 'The idealist is incorrigible; if one casts him out of his heaven, he makes an ideal of his hell.' 'The philosopher has to be the bad conscience of his age.' 'The most important fruit of human effort in the past is that we need no longer live in dread of wild beasts, barbarians, gods and our own dreams.'

Indeed, it must be conceded, he who jettisons the criteria of truth and error, of logical deduction and the traditional method of epistemological inquiry, cannot be adequately and exhaustively interpreted in a methodical dissertation. Many a critic has attacked Nietzsche's philosophy with the weapons of psychology and sociology, gaining access to the philosopher *via* the man and his background. Fruitful as such an approach may be, it is but a prelude to deeper comprehension of Nietzsche's philosophic legacy.

It is through Jaspers and Cassirer that light is shed upon this problem. But where Jaspers carefully unravels selected passages and chapters to disclose their intricacies and implications, Cassirer though not a Nietzschean scholar, points broadly the right direction when defining anthropological philosophy. On closer inspection it will appear that this new orientation corresponds exactly with the many elusive and involved facets of the poet-philosopher.

'Anthropological philosophy . . . exhibits a quite different character. If we wish to grasp its real meaning and import, we must choose not the epic manner of description, but the dramatic. For we are confronted, not with a peaceful development of concepts or theories, but with a clash between conflicting spiritual powers. The history of anthropological philosophy is fraught with the deepest human passions and emotions. It is not concerned

with a single theoretical problem, however general its scope; here the whole destiny of man is at stake clamouring for an ultimate decision.'

The singular character of Nietzsche's philosophy could not be better presented. Such an anthropological orientation would link pre-Socratic with modern thought, incorporating science, psychology, ethics and aesthetics. The main emphasis would lie on principles and general trends, the long lost meaning of 'theory' being revived as compassionate discernment instead of abstract, bloodless speculation. Unhappily, most modern philosophers—by virtue of their scientific training and ineradicable belief in the superiority of logical, methodical reasoning—are debarred from participating in philosophic activity of this nature.

A further characteristic of such a philosophy is that it is incommunicable; it can only be intimated through clues, hints, atmosphere, innuendoes and suggestions. Yet, although it may be deemed unacceptable, dare one ignore the right of that philosophic outlook to be ventilated? It will be but rarely that a philosopher of Nietzschean stamp is heard in our midst: in him is revealed a thinker who might be accounted one of anthropological philosophy's contemporary protagonists. And to his lapidary, rhapsodic form of presentation should be assigned perhaps the main reason why he eludes apprehension by sober, analytical, pedestrian minds.

One need not venture far into Nietzsche's work before encountering abundant testimony to the anthropological essence of his philosophy. Lofty enthusiasm succeeds in turn irascible despair; sympathy and antipathy are distributed in equally lavish and spontaneous fashion. While his writings often exhibit uncontrolled rage and passionate fervour, he was in his personal relations of an affectionate, gentle disposition—in sharp contrast to Schopenhauer whose personality was harsh, inconsiderate and repulsive, and whose generous charitable sentiments were perceptible in the printed word alone. The most perplexing of all contradictions in Nietzsche is his sudden conversion from nightmarish pessimism to celestial optimism. 'Give heed to the living of life! (*memento vivere!*). Let not the past weigh upon you too heavily, so that instinct, personality, art and thought suffer under it. Otherwise—as Hesiod feared aforetime—a time will come when men shall be born greybeards!' And all these inner conflicts, contradictions, contrasts—the totality of internecine dispositions, as Höfding first recognized—were never integrated; there was in him no reconciliation within, be it through humour or melancholic resignation.

How could such a volcanic mind evolve a detached system? It was not given him to flout the testimony of emotions; the teachings of human experience were shaped into philosophic canons; the anguish of existence spake its warning like the voice of a doomed prophet. Life itself, not logical, ethical or metaphysical notions and postulates, was the one and only reality. He disclaimed the actuality of a metaphysical world, abjuring all possibility of things-in-them-

selves behind the phenomenal world. He reckoned but with this universe which sustains our being, and he repudiated any form of existence beyond.

There is no common ground for academic philosophy and the mercurial messages of Nietzsche. On one hand, the determinist might claim him for his cause; on the other, one can find ample support for a strong adherence to indeterminism. Epistemologists in general have dealt ineptly with Nietzsche's wayward views on the process of knowing. It accords well with indeterminism for a staunch exponent of a philosophy of life to argue that during the act of acquiring knowledge the object under investigation becomes distorted. The impossibility of attaining to absolute truth in the realm of cognition is precisely the failure mooted and experimentally exposed by modern physicists. Nevertheless, this coincidence, this similarity of conclusion is purely fortuitous and can therefore not serve as a basis for further philosophizing.

It is thus not without a certain piquant irony that Heidegger, above all, urges us to acknowledge Nietzsche's manner of reasoning as not less objective and rigorous than Aristotle's. And only recently did W. A. Kaufmann, another Nietzschean scholar, persuade us of the logical pattern prevailing in his doctrines. In *THE WILL TO POWER* Nietzsche disputes the validity of the laws of thought handed down to logicians from Aristotle. Building a formidable case against the impregnable axiom of identity, he reiterates 'that identical things and identical cases exist is the basic fiction, first in judgment and then in inference'. Nietzsche's contention is quite feasible within the bounds of traditional formal logic and has been independently corroborated by the French logician Goblot. In mathematical logic, however, the arguments of Nietzsche become invalid as the principle of identity does not rest upon the assumption of the actual existence of identical entities; it postulates a purely noetic, normative identity as part of an imaginary, i.e. symbolic universe.

At the same time, when he refers to 'the value of regulative fictions, e.g. the fictions of logic', he transgresses the sacrosanct Aristotelian logic and, though unwittingly, faintly discerns the problematic nature of symbolic logic. In defining logic as a 'consistent sign-language', he commits the error so emphatically denounced by Kant: equating the word 'sign' to the term 'symbol', contrary to the present-day usage. Like geometry, arithmetic and any other science based upon ideal states, logic too is not merely an *ars inventiva*, but a useful instrument, created for man's better orientation in an abstract universe. And yet, to the 'invented, rigid, conceptual' realm of logic nothing in the 'real' world corresponds. Is it not common experience that in everyday practice the fictive rules of logic are not obeyed? Devoting attention to Nietzsche's reflections on logic, at present a proscribed subject, Vaihinger penetrates the seeming ambiguities to the true significance of the basic fault which underlies 'logicality'. He convincingly imparts the view that the 'cult of error', the 'will to illusion'—*hic et nunc* logic—is an inseparable portion of Nietzsche's

metaphysics, agreeing fundamentally with the philosophy of 'As If'.

Particularly did Nietzsche challenge the law of contradiction (perhaps more properly entitled the law of non-contradiction), condemning it summarily.

'We fail to assert and deny one and the same thing: that is a subjective principle of experience, in it no "necessity" is expressed, but only an incapacity . . . . The principle thus contains no criterion of truth, but an imperative, about what is to be accepted as true . . . .

In reality we believe in the principle under the influence of infinite empiricism which seems to confirm this principle continually.'

From the evidence yielded by recent research in formal logic, especially in axiomatics, it is patent that Nietzsche had virtually anticipated modern arguments in logical analysis. In accordance with the foregoing, F. C. S. Schiller at Oxford also held that the so-called laws of thought should not be regarded as self-evident revelations of absolute truths, but merely as postulates, as ideal demands, or, to use Nietzsche's term, as imperatives. Similarly, but with a different aim in view and considering the subject epistemologically rather than logico-mathematically, Brouwer denied and Russell raised some doubts as to the traditional, dogmatic interpretation of one of the 'sanctified' axioms of thought, the law of excluded middle. Hence, though Nietzsche may not have proceeded with an austere and rigorous method, his excursus into logic too, nevertheless, proved once more that true philosophic spirit and intellectual acumen were potent in him.

It has been maintained that Nietzsche's philosophy of life is in a deeper sense an effort at translating biological principles into cultural and ethical doctrines. 'Body am I entirely, and nothing more; and soul is only the name of something in the body.' In this view there is only one criterion for moral evaluations: whether they foster or curb life and living. Further, virtue is not ἀρετή, that is perfection or goodness of quality, nor *virtus* nor Christian uprightness and chastity, but the fulfilment of physiological functions. Did he not proclaim that war and struggle were biologically necessary, in human society not less than in the animal kingdom? That society could progress provided there was radical decimation of the unfit and degenerate? Certain authors were indeed tempted to decry in the idea of the superman and his *Herrenmoral* an undercurrent of Darwin's theory of natural selection through the survival of the fittest. Nietzsche actually did refer to Darwin in *THE WILL TO POWER*, but in a disparaging sense. In *THE JOYFUL WISDOM*, he attributes the Darwinian emphasis on competitive impulse to the 'suffocating air of over-crowded England, something of the odour of humble people in need and in straits'. A brief glance at the relevant paragraphs will suffice to refute the misconception regarding Nietzsche's opposition. It is not true that Nietzsche altogether failed to realize the significance of the English naturalist's theory of evolution. Yet is he not justified in baring the difficulties encountered when the theory is applied to human society, where the weak are



protected? Once again, the non-expert, the poet-thinker, accused of romantic dilettantism, impresses with his shrewd realism, his instinctive gift for penetrating to the core of a problem. Anyone acquainted with recent genetic research on the survival value of genes and the differential viability of species would know that some of the ideas underlying Nietzsche's criticism of the theory of natural selection as a whole have been borne out, at least in part, by experiment.

'Our way goes upward from species to super-species!' It would seem to follow from this that Nietzsche forcibly champions the doctrine of evolution. By importing the factor of human initiative into Darwin's conception of development based upon fortuitous differences within a population, he showed, however, that man could govern the direction of his advance and so control the selective process begun by nature. Perhaps his tendency to accept the theories of adaptation to environment and of the inheritance of acquired characters brings him close to the Lamarckian school, although in his last critical years he apostrophized Lamarck with no less abuse than he did Darwin. The conflict between these views is resolved in the consideration that where the biologist conceives of a single, uniform species, two disparate types of men exist for Nietzsche. The lower ranks of humanity share with the animals certain adaptive properties which, in the human race, are among others manifested as 'moral cowardice'. This propensity—as was to be expected—is not found in the higher orders of man which alone, through their power to change the environment, can elevate the human race to a 'super-species'. Assuming premises antithetical to Darwin's, Nietzsche posits a world of abundance, of 'plenty' instead of the Malthusian scarcity that for Darwin furnished the background for the competitive drive called 'struggle for existence'. And in such a world, of course, the superior individuals freed from the yoke of daily toil for mere subsistence could now devote themselves to the pursuit of power, to the enhancement of personal might. Nothing more was needed to facilitate the error of adjudging him a pioneer in eugenics, on a level with Galton. But it besmirches a laudable human ideal to deduce therefrom that Nietzsche anticipated the fascist doctrine of racism, with its air of scientific veracity.

These disjointed pronouncements supply evidence of his vision portending the unforeseen ascendancy of biology, which he regarded as the leading discipline among the 'exact' sciences. His attitude deserves the more attention since he, a classical scholar, seized upon the so-called science of life as the main province of reason. Even now biology has scarcely usurped such a position, notwithstanding its clamant aspiration to autonomy, experimental verification and mathematization. Yet without the slightest skill in biological technique, he undertook to centre his whole philosophy upon physiological principles, changed (transvalued!) in accordance with his line of thought. 'We know that even reason and logic are but higher spiritual shapes in the development of the physiological function of

digestion, which compels an organism to make things "like" before it can absorb them.' What a startling disruption of man's abstract accomplishments! One hesitates to face the consequences of a philosophy that reduces the highest activities of the mind to a chemical assimilation of organic units. As if one could appreciate, as the only possible manifestation of the reasonable and logical, a projection of the exact pattern of organization prevailing within the human organism! The age-old problem of whether the orderliness in the universe, postulated by the rationalists, is discovered as a *vérité de fait* or read into nature to satisfy man's predilection for order, has found so bleak a solution. Is it not uncanny that many years before biochemists postulated the production of replicas as the manner in which nearly all vital processes function—that an outsider, a dilettante like Nietzsche should have chosen this physiological definition as the *causa operandi* of reason and logic?

Another feature of his 'biological bent' and a more weighty one by far, was his anti-rationalism (wrongly termed irrationalism) with its abrupt and powerful reaction against the idols of the age of *Aufklärung*. In place of the predominance of reason, the superiority of intellect, the infallibility of logic he put the pre-eminence of vital impulses, of raw instincts, the preponderance of undomesticated passions, free rein to man's natural impetus. On this foundation he erected an edifice of new values in culture, psychology, morals, religion and art. What a prodigious, gigantic undertaking to have dared the impossible: the restoration of life to its most elemental form, its primitive rights, the return to sheer life with 'love as fate, as fatality, cynical, innocent, cruel—and just in that way *nature!* The love which in its means is war, in its ground the deadly hatred of the sexes!' Need one marvel that the school philosopher, product of a long line of sophisticated civilization with its ostracism of natural instincts and sacred aims of repressing vital urges and refining emotions, stood dumbfounded before the prophet who belched forth fire and brimstone, glorifying evil, anathematizing good? And that the academic official then, in defence of his own prosaic conception of life and philosophy, anaemic in comparison, scoffed at Nietzsche, scourged and slandered him, the traitor to his caste?

In all solemnity should it be declared: it reflects not adversely on the monumentality of Nietzsche's message that his philosophic creed had to fail. Why? Because there is no road back to the primordial well of life, the spiral of 'Becoming' (*yéveois*), of development cannot, in reality, be retraced. The achievements of man's ingenuity, of his creative and analytic intellect cannot be abrogated; they must endure and foster their like. In the imagination there may be no curb upon unbounded lusts, upon Dionysian abandon, but *de facto* the severe rational censorship of our moral and spiritual heritage does influence and, to some extent, control our instinctive forces. Further still, life in its entirety, stark life so to speak, can never be confined within the limits of a philosophy on the plane of

pure thought. Fragments of life's gamut may be integrated into a scientific, coherent system, into a theory. Life as a whole, however, always resists relegation to the level of mere biological functioning as well as thorough and complete rationalization. And so Nietzsche's intrepid venture was bound to fall short of its goal. In all, during the manifold journeys of his restless mind he succeeded in compassing only one province of thought, but this he did with zeal and perfection unprecedented in the history of philosophic search.

Who else could say of himself that he philosophized with a hammer? Who else, among the illuminati, felt compelled to write in blood? Such metaphors may flow effortlessly from a facile pen, aesthetic highlights as it were. But in Nietzsche they symbolized self-immolation, the consuming flame of inner turmoil corroding and sapping his physical and spiritual strength. Aware only too painfully of the strife, the twist in his yearning existence, he nourished the hazardous thought that 'a certain "healthiness"... is the eternal enemy of deeper philosophy'. Following the advent of psycho-analysis, the discovery of pathological traits in many outstanding creative minds has become almost a common practice. Since Freud, a generation of writers has succumbed to this pathographic tendency and some philosophers have interpreted Nietzsche according to a theory of compensation not unlike Adler's doctrine of *Organminderwertigkeit*, the notorious slogan of the inferiority complex.

I refuse to accept the view that Nietzsche subjected himself to a form of autotherapy, donning a multiplicity of masks to conceal his self-doubts, his fear of life, his impotence during contact with the world about him. To be sure, it boasts the simplicity of Occam's razor to argue that in his writings he lauded cruelty, because he, personally, was kind and tender-hearted; that he renounced pity because he was compassionate; that he praised strength and bravery, because he was weak and sensitive; that he eulogized life in its Dionysian vigour, because he was a decadent intellectual. With all these reciprocal associations, intriguingly paired and bearing the façade of exact scientific analysis, though each factor taken alone is verifiable, there is yet not the slightest justification for assuming a cause-effect relationship between his personal deficiencies and the tragi-heroic nature of his work. How could an inferior type conceive the magnificent idea of the superman, of Zarathustra? Was his lack of subservience to convention, tradition and the sheltering discipline of society really the inverted reaction of a weakling? Did he worship at the shrine of the 'great man', the genius, for the simple reason that he was a small man?

In fine, neither the couch of the psycho-analyst nor the microscope of the clinician is the proper instrument for uncovering the deep roots of his philosophy. The originality of his thought, despite its un-academic form, should be appreciated by philosophic analysis alone; the story of the man is in great measure elucidating, though no more than concomitant to a comprehensive study of his writings. There is without doubt the temptation to become submersed in the matchless

wealth of biographical material and thus to emphasize the psychological at the expense of the philosophic content. Lavrin wanders even further: in imagination he identifies Nietzsche's personal conflicts and ailments with the decadence of his times and the disintegration of European culture. Certainly, objective factors, namely the degeneration of European and especially of German society, as well as Nietzsche's malady and his unorthodox temperament, cannot be gainsaid. But to read into these a causal relationship, a conscious or unconscious identification of Nietzsche with the fate of European culture is exceeding the evidence available. References to himself as 'the summit of all the moral reflection and toil in Europe' can be found many times over, but these should not be taken literally; they signify his passionate belief that he had an urgent mission to proclaim in the service of occidental civilization. Morgestern is among the few who give an inkling of the right interpretation: he who thinks with Nietzsche will also contradict himself with him. And he who takes offence at his contradictions has never thought with him, better still, never felt with him, never soared with him. Philosophizing cannot in a single lifetime, maintains Jaspers, develop into a completely rounded system of thought and yet remain true!

At this stage, it is right to examine Nietzsche's criteria of truth. He has by rote been dubbed a pragmatist, for at first sight his views bear a certain affinity with those of Peirce and James. Indeed, his work is pervaded by pragmatist conceptions of truth, without exhibiting the implications and consequences of pragmatic method. 'What then is truth?' Nietzsche replies:

'A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations, which become poetically and rhetorically enhanced, changed, adorned, and which after long use seem to a people fixed, canonical and binding: truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, worn-out metaphors powerless to affect the senses, coins which have lost their image and are now to be taken into account only as metal and not as coins.'

What a superb formulation for the disenchanting insight that there is no absolute truth and that the mind can gain no other knowledge than subjective, relative and contingent information! With assiduity Vaihinger and others have culled a plethora of examples appearing to substantiate the oft-heard contention that Nietzsche was a pragmatist. But in actuality he refused to subscribe to the exclusively utilitarian conclusions of pragmatism. He emphasized that novel conception of truth solely as an apposite instrument for reinforcing the will to power. His so-called pragmatic creed appears to be corroborated when he maintains that the credence given to an Absolute, be it eternity or an ultimate cause, is not the 'belief that is most true, but that which is most useful'. Nietzsche was adamant in his rejection of other criteria of truth and was obsessed by the self-righteous conviction, like any dogmatic philosopher, that his view was the only valid one.

On the strength of these remarks one may still be tempted to regard him as a pragmatist thinker, but on closer scrutiny of *THUS SPAKE ZARATHUSTRA* and *THE WILL TO POWER* it emerges that he merely passed through a transitory phase of pragmatism when he was evolving his revolutionary philosophy of life. 'There is neither "mind", nor reason, nor thinking, nor consciousness, nor will, nor truth.' This uncompromising negation, 'nihilism' as he called it, cannot be confounded with pragmatism! Is it not a travesty of philosophic earnestness to subsume under one denomination Dewey the educator, the epitome of common sense, the social reformer, and Friedrich Nietzsche? Inherent in the pragmatist doctrine is a positive optimistic attitude to life and its intellectual aspects, a belief in progress and rational development—all the notions and ideals devalued and relinquished by nihilism, which was itself another transient phase in the metamorphosis of Nietzsche the thinker.

# LITERÊRE INLEGGKUNDE

deur C. J. M. NIENABER

DIE kortverhaal DIE HUIS TEEN KOPPIE ALLEEN deur Toon van den Heever verdeel voortdurend sy lesers in twee hoofgroepe, en dan nie alleen wat sy letterkundige waarde betref nie. Party meen naamlik dat Annie Barret aan die slot met die rapporte na die Boere toe ry; andere meen weer dat dit Engelse toe is. Veral by die nasien van eksamenantwoorde oor hierdie slot is dit vermaaklik om te lees watter koers die kandidaat haar laat inslaan. Ewe vermaaklik is gewoonlik die motiverings—indien enige. Meestal verontagsaam die kandidaat op hierdie stadium die strakke bou van die kortverhaal en die konsekwente optrede van die hoofkarakter. Waarskynlik leef hy teen dié tyd so met die gebeure mee dat sy Boersgesindheid of sy Engelsgesindheid opgewek geraak het—en dan kies hy kant in plaas van reg te laat geskied aan die verhaal as sodanig. In elk geval bevredig hy sy wensdromery—maar die resultaat is dan literêre inlegkunde in plaas van uitleggkunde.

Hierdie verhaal open dus ons oë vir 'n baie belangrike letterkundige beginsel, naamlik om end-uit suiwer kontekstueel te vertolk en te waardeer wat ons lees, in plaas van ons eie gesindhede van 'n politieke, godsdienstige of watter aard ookal selfs in die allergeeringste graad te laat meespeel.

Oor hierdie slot beweer byvoorbeeld F. V. Lategan<sup>1</sup>: „eers net die verwarde yl-gedagtes van die sterwende burger voordat hy „aan slaap-val” en dan die ommekeer in die bedroefde meisie se binneste: die „pakkie dokumente” waarvan sy die draer in die nakoming van haar plig gedood het, dra sy nou self na die kommandant<sup>2</sup> in die volbrenging van 'n hoër pligsvolvoering in gehoorsaamheid aan die aandrang van haar hart. Maar deur die oorlog het sy haar eie lewensgeluk vernietig—eensaam moet sy bly want „ die boertjie . . . slaap op die kweek voor die huis teen Koppie *Alleen*”!”

Binne die samehang van hierdie verhaal as 'n geheel wil so 'n opvatting vir ons voorkom as 'n vorm van inlegkunde. Ons sal dit probeer nagaan en aantoon.

Eie aan hierdie verhaal, van die begin af tot aan die einde, is onder andere die skemerlig waarin die gebeure afspeel. Daarbinne voltrek 'n drama hom tussen twee mense—en terselfdertyd tussen twee mensegroepe sowel as twee stelle lewenswaardes. Die son gaan onder;

,die aandgrou slaan toe'; in die dowwe maanlig ry die rapportryer met sy perd in die draad vas, ondersoek hy die skade aan sy perd en maak hy kennis met Annie Barret<sup>3</sup>; in die lamplig eet hy, luister hy na die harmoniumspel, hou hy Annie dop, raak hy aan die slaap ná hulle in die maanlig buite op die kweek in mekaar se geselskap was, probeer Annie die dokumente in die hande kry, veins sy dat sy hom wil streel en soen, vroetel sy agter hom in die muurnessie na die horssweep en dien sy hom die bedwelmende houe toe; in die maanlig op die kweek yl hy en kyk hy op in Annie se oë bo hom, raak hy aan die slaap<sup>4</sup> en ry sy met die rapporte weg terwyl hy agterbly.

In hierdie verhaal is daar beslis meer skaduwee as lig—selfs in die gemoed van die betrokkenes. En uiteraard bly die buitelyne van alles binne hierdie dowwe ligskakerings uiters vaag. Van die rapportryer verneem ons nie eers die naam nie. Boonop kyk hierdie *afgematte* man byna orals met dowwe oë na die dinge om hom heen. Hy merk trouens self reeds vroeg op: ‚Dit lyk vir my ek moet ’n pampoensbril aanskaaf’, en so pas daarna laat blyk hy sy onkunde oor die feit dat hy met ’n Engelse meisie gesels, want hy vra vir haar: ‚Maar u is gelukkig dat die Kakies nog nie die huis afgebrand het nie. . . . Het die kolonnes nog nie hierlangs getrek nie?’ Ook gaan die flouheid van haar verduideliking aan hom verby as sy antwoord: ‚Ag-wat . . . ons huisie is te klein, hulle kan dit nie raaksien nie.’

Alleen Annie Barret bly meestal naby aan die dowwe lig waarbinne sy optree, sodat ons uiterlik sowel as innerlik meer aan haar kan onderskei, soos die ratsroerende breinaalde en die lang swart wimpers wat donker skaduwees werp oor oë wat troebel van gedagtes is. Ook kry ons die geleentheid om betreklik diep in haar hart te kyk, terwyl ons van die boertjie alleen verneem hoe hy verlang na rus en vrede binne ’n gelukkige gesinsverband: ‚Sy dink aan die oorlog en die dienste wat sy aan haar nasie moes bewys, verpligtinge wat haar vader haar steeds op die hart gedruk het. Sy wonder waarom die vader so verbitterd teenoor die Boere kon wees. Sy het onder hulle opgegroeï, met hulle saamgespeel; sy het geleer om hulle taal te praat en hulle gewoontes te respekteer.’ Dit hoort ook so, dat Annie telkens die naaste moet kom aan die dowwe lig wat deur die verhaal heen skyn. Sy is die hoofkarakter. In háár binneste word die stryd verhewig tussen geneentheid tot die Boere en trou aan haar Engelse volksgenote. Daarteenoor verlang die rapportryer alleen na rus en vrede in plaas van oorlog te voer, en hy moet maar net kies tussen uitrus in die huis van Koppie Alleen of aanry met die rapporte. Ook haar vader ken geen werklike innerlike stryd nie, want hy het klaar onvoorwaardelik kant gekies: hy is en bly trouens Engelsman. Maar sy *moes* ook al dienste aan die Engelse volksgenote bewys; en vandat ons die eerste keer met haar kennis maak, leef sy daarvoor in kwellings.

Juis op hierdie stadium, wanneer daar ’n swikkende ewewig in haar gemoed aan die ontwikkel is—,sy wonder waarom die<sup>5</sup> vader so verbitterd teenoor die Boere kon wees’—verskyn die rapportryer as ’n soort speelbal van die noodlot in haar lewe. Sy nader hom eers

onpersoonlik, want ,vroulike hulpvaardigheid oormeester haar skrik'. 'n Halfuur later sit hy al aan tafel in haar huis, ná sy die lelike wond vir hom verbind het. Die botsende magte wat haar aandag vóór sy koms volledig in beslag geneem het, is dus nou tot 'n trillende stilstand gedwing. Maar juis op hierdie tydstip, wanneer hy hom aan haar kant skaar met sy vraag na die Kakies en die kolonnes wat haar huis gespaar het, verwyder sy haar van hom met 'n flou verduidelikinkie. Dit is 'n baie kort stappie wat sy hiermee van hom af wegstaan, sodat hy dit nie eers merk nie. Maar hiermee het haar trou aan haar vader en haar Engelse volksgenote—soos skynbaar herhaaldelik tevore—weer geseëvier oor haar Boersgesindheid. Sy handel dus nog konsekwent—en sy het nou die dramatiese ironie ingeskuif tussen haar en die burger in. Sy en al die wakker lesers sien trouens nou in die dowwe lamplig die fyn ewewigснаald van die skaal onbetwisbaar oortril na die Engelse kant toe. Net hy is salig onbewus daarvan.

Hierdie gelade atmosfeer word onmiddellik enigsins verlig deurdat die aandag nou verskuif na die harmonium, maar dit raak ook enigsins verhewig deurdat dit 'n krygslied is wat sy daarop speel. By hom wek dit tere herinneringe op aan sy gelukkige jeugjare in 'n gesinsverband—en as sy ophou met speel, is sy gedagtes by haar swart wimpers, terwyl sy haar besorgdheid oor hom oënskynlik volkome herwin het, want sy raai hom aan om eers 'n rukkie te gaan rus. Dit wil dus voorkom asof haar meegevoel met 'n afgematte rapportryer van die Boere weer sterker geword het as haar plig om dienste aan haar volk te bewys. By hom weeg aanvanklik sy pligsbesef te sterk, want op haar uitnodiging om eers te gaan rus, verduidelik hy dat hy eers die rapporte aan die Boeregeneraal moet gaan besorg. Hierdie kort episode—terwyl hy tik op die binnesak waar die belangrike rapporte is—verhewig egter skielik Annie se stryd tussen geneetheid tot die afgematte Boer en pligsgetrouheid aan haar volksgenote. Hy stel trouens die voorbeeld want hy wil liewers sy plig nakom as om te gaan slaap, en ,die lang wimpers sak, tril 'n oomblik op en neer en beskadu weer die diep oë waarin hy kyk'.

Die dramatiese ironie raak nou al hoe intenser as hulle buite in die maanlig op die kweek sit terwyl hy aan háár vertel van sy drome: , 'n wit huisie tussen hoë bome teen die hang van 'n bult en daarin 'n harmonium en iemand om die orreltjie te speel'. Die kontras van hulle gedagtes word skerp gesuggereer as ons verneem: ,En die meisie op die stoepklip het hom met wye oë aangekyk'. Hiermee sak die ewewigснаald ver af na die kant van die Engelse trou toe, en al hoe wilder word die afsakkende trillings as sy hom 'n tweede keer nog dringender soebat om eers te dut, hy slaap en sy brei, haar oë dwaal van die blonde krulkop na die borssak, die vaste trek om haar mond verskyn, sy toets of hy vas slaap, sy voetjie vir voetjie nader kom, op haar tone oor die slaper buig en hy glimlag in sy drome, die burger se oë oopgaan net toe sy aan die dokumente wou vat, sy blitssnel haar beweging verleng en sy hare streel, hy haar met 'n salige uitdrukking aanstaar, haar gesig stadiger nader kom aan sy



lippe terwyl die hand wat eers gestreel het nou in die muurnessie agter die bank vroetel na die horssweep met die swaar perdekop daaraan, dit te voorskyn kom en—net vóór hulle lippe mekaar ontmoet—die eerste hou hom teen die slaap tref.

Hierna word die burger afgemaak onderwyl hy buitentoe strompel en neersak op die kweek waar hy so pas nog geromantiseer het. Wat hierop volg, word deur sommige vertolkers gesien as 'n ommekeer. Vir ons is daar geen die minste regverdiging vir 'n derglike opvatting nie. Teenoor *ommekeer* sou ons wou stel: *verhewiging*, 'n verdieping of verinniging van Annie Barret se sielestryd. Die burger se ylgedagtes wat uiting vind in „Moedertjie, moedertjie!” laat haar nie omswaai nie, maar laat haar des te intenser besef hóe hoog die prys vir nasietrou in oorlogstyd kan wees.

Waarskynlik is veral die volgende twee sinne verantwoordelik vir die foutiewe vertolking van DIE HUIS TEEN KOPPIE ALLEEN se slot: „Krampagtig byt wit tande haar lip. Bewende lippe druk kus na kus op sy voorhoof; brandende lippe soek sy mond.” Hierdie kusse is almal wêl hartstogtelik, maar kom van iemand wat in die oorlog al baie dienste aan haar nasie moes bewys en wat die prys van hierdie een byna onbetaalbaar vind.

So gesien, met inagneming van die hele konteks, ry Annie Barret—teen enige wensdromery in—met die dokumente reguit Engelse toe. Aan die slot ontbreek nou wel die mooi bekering van Annie, want hier seëvier haar nasietrou oor haar meegevoel met die kinderlike rapportryer. Maar nou het ons aan die verhaal reg laat geskied, want ons het sy eie dimensie aan hom teruggegee.<sup>6</sup> Tot nog toe het die skaduwees van allerlei skemerligte gelê oor die gruwele van die oorlog. Daar was byvoorbeeld die troebele gedagtes van Annie en die vae hunkeringe van die rapportryer—meestal bedektelik uitgedruk in eufemistiese, ironiese en suggestiewe woorde. Maar nou kom daar skielik uit hierdie gedempte lig en die troebele gedagtes die felle insig, des te skrynder: hoe gruwelik die selfverloëning kan wees wat die oorlog, of die groep, soms van die enkeling eis.

As ons gelyk het met ons vertolking en DIE HUIS TEEN KOPPIE ALLEEN dus in ere herstel het, gaan hierdie kortverhaal langer voortleef as wat daar gemeen word, onder andere deur Hertzog Venter wat dit vergelyk met WERKSTAKING BY DIE KLEIGAT en DIE BEUKELAAR VAN OUTA SEM en wat dan tot die volgende slotsom kom: „Ook DIE HUIS TEEN KOPPIE ALLEEN het as kortverhaal verdienstes, maar vanweë psigologiese en ander troebelhede staan dit m.i. nie op dieselfde peil as bg. twee nie.”<sup>7</sup>

Moontlik is daar tot nog toe nie altyd besef watter fyn spel hier met suggestie koersvas en end-uit op 'n onderbeligte verhoog gespeel word nie—nie die spel van 'n ommekeer nie, maar van 'n toenemende verhewiging.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Om die aandag nie af te trek van die *probleem* op die *persoon* nie, sou ons liewers die skrywer se naam wou verswyg het, maar die litêre speurders sou dit tog gou onthul het: KORTPAD, Nasionale Boekhandel, Bloemfontein, 1951, bls. 220.

<sup>2</sup>Hier word *generaal* in plaas van *kommandant* bedoel. Vgl. bladsy 107 van GERWE UIT DIE ERF-PAG VAN SKOPPENSBOER, Afrikaanse Pers-Boekhandel, Johannesburg, derde druk, 1950.

<sup>3</sup>In hierdie verhaal, waarin daar ondubbelsinnig kant gekies moet word, suggereer selfs die verbinding van *Annie* met *Barret* liggies 'n onderdrukte spanning.

<sup>4</sup>Let op selfs die eufemistiese verdoeffing hier en elders in die verhaal.

<sup>5</sup>Let op die distansiërende *die* in plaas van *haar* vader.

<sup>6</sup>Vertolkings soos dié van dr. Lategan verminder hierdie verhaal verkeerdlik tot iets flous.

<sup>7</sup>Vgl. ONS EIE BOEK, jg. XIX, nr. 3, bls. 160.

# PAUL CLAUDEL POETE CHRETIEN

par M. L. TRICAUD

## I

LORSQUE NOUS considérons dans son ensemble l'oeuvre de Paul Claudel, les mots de Jacques Madaule nous viennent immédiatement à l'esprit: 'En vérité Claudel depuis qu'il écrit n'a jamais dit autre chose que Dieu'. C'est cet acheminement progressif du poète vers Dieu à la recherche de la vérité que nous allons nous efforcer de retracer dans cet article. Claudel a-t-il toujours été chrétien? Comment l'est-il devenu? Comment s'est manifesté son christianisme? Voici les trois questions auxquelles nous allons essayer de répondre.

P. Claudel voit le jour en Tardenois, province agricole de France, en 1868. Rien dans son enfance ne laisse prévoir le prophète biblique qu'il deviendra par la suite. Sa famille de bonne souche bourgeoise et paysanne, catholique parce que tout le monde l'est, semble indifférente en matière religieuse. Il fait ses études dans quelques collèges privés d'abord, laïques ensuite, puis finit au lycée Louis le Grand à Paris. A quatorze ans nous dit-il il a déjà perdu la foi. Cet athéisme se confirmera jusqu'à sa dix-huitième année. Il faut lire les pages qu'il a consacrées à cette adolescence dans 'ma CONVERSION'. Elles nous éclairent sur les influences qui se sont exercées sur Claudel enfant. Quel était alors le milieu intellectuel et spirituel de la France des années 1870—1875? Nous sommes en plein positivisme. A Comte règne en maître. Ses disciples Renan et Taine sont les apôtres de la nouvelle religion. Claudel a été leur élève, de même qu'il a été nourri de philosophie Kantienne par son professeur Burdeau alors célèbre. 'J'ai connu Paul Claudel à Louis le Grand nous dira plus tard C. Mauclair, C'était un têtue, un muet, qui ne sortait de son mutisme que pour discuter philosophie avec Burdeau'. Renan est alors un grand directeur d'âme. C'est lui qui, à la distribution des prix de 1883, couronnera Paul Claudel et l'embrassera. Le pessimisme règne en maître. Schopenhauer est à la mode. Au romantisme a succédé un réalisme outrancier, à l'insatisfaction romantique un nihilisme total . . . A 18 ans P. Claudel nous apparaît athée, nourri de positivisme et imprégné de doctrines de philosophes allemands. C'est à ce moment que se produit en 1886 l'événement capital de sa vie, celui dont il ne cessera de parler, auquel il reviendra dans tous ses poèmes ses drames et sa correspondance, l'éblouisse-

ment subit de la nuit de Noël, pendant la messe de minuit à Notre Dame. Éblouissement semblable à celui de Paul sur le chemin de Damas, à Pascal la fameuse nuit du 23 novembre 1654. Ce n'est pas le 'J'ai pleuré et j'ai cru' de Chateaubriand. Il y a quelque chose de plus profond et de plus bouleversant dans l'expérience de Claudel. Après avoir décrit l'état d'asphyxie et de désespoir dans lequel il se trouvait avant Noël 1886, il nous dit en effet: "En un instant mon coeur fut touché et je crus. Je crus d'une telle force d'adhésion, d'un tel soulèvement de tout mon être, d'une conviction si puissante, d'une telle certitude, ne laissant place à aucune espèce de doute, que depuis, tous les livres, tous les raisonnements, tous les hasards d'une vie agitée n'ont pu ébranler ma foi ni à vrai dire la toucher." Tel est le nouvel homme qui sortira de Notre-Dame au matin de Noël 1886. Est-ce à dire qu'en une minute le vieil homme ait fait place au nouveau, transformé, régénéré, purifié? Certes non, Claudel lui-même nous dit que cette minute ne devait être que le point de départ de luttes, d'études, de souffrances, de découragements, qui de ce jour-là devaient le trouver tour à tour soumis ou révolté jusqu'à ce qu'enfin la créature domptée s'agenouille au pied du créateur en une offrande totale. C'est cette série de luttes, de révoltes, de doutes, et d'offrandes qui forme la trame des poèmes de Claudel, et qui exprimée dans la langue la plus musicale et la plus belle que la poésie nous ait apportée, nous permet d'étudier pas à pas le cheminement du poète vers Dieu. Car, à l'instar de la plupart des symbolistes, et de Rimbaud en particulier, la poésie n'est aux yeux de Claudel que le moyen d'exprimer son âme, non pour parler complaisamment de lui, mais parce que la poésie est donnée à l'homme pour s'exprimer le plus sincèrement possible, pour se 'libérer'. C'est donc dans l'oeuvre entière de Claudel que nous trouverons l'âme du poète, et ses positions en ce qui concerne les problèmes les plus importants de la vie. Or pour lui un seul de ces problèmes existe: la recherche de Dieu, autour duquel gravite tous les autres, et vers lequel ils s'orientent. D'où en dépit des apparences, la création d'une oeuvre intensément humaine, et intensément douloureuse, et qui faisait dire à Claudel: 'Ce ne sont pas des saints que j'ai voulu présenter mais de simples créatures humaines aux prises avec la grâce.'

Par quelles phases a passé le poète avant d'en arriver à l'acceptation totale? C'est ce que va nous montrer toute son oeuvre, en particulier son oeuvre dramatique.

A Noël 1886, nous avons quitté le poète terrassé à Notre-Dame. De longues années devaient s'écouler avant son adhésion aux dogmes, et son entrée dans l'église catholique, et avec quelle réticence. Et combien d'autres années devront encore s'écouler avant l'acceptation totale d'une foi qui exigeait tout de l'homme. 'Je n'ai pas toujours été catholique. Je ne suis venu à la foi que par une série de réflexions et d'études très longues et très pénibles.' Et ailleurs il nous confie: 'Un converti', et il faut donner au mot converti le sens plein du terme, celui qui va du paganisme au christianisme, "est un espèce de miraculé. Dans le fond il n'y a pas de gens naturellement pieux et

chrétiens, et le retour à la foi pratique, si contraire en tant de points de vue à nos instincts est une chose étonnante que la grâce de Dieu seule explique, et qui a exigé de Lui une intervention en quelque sorte personnelle. Qu'il le veuille ou non, un converti est donc une preuve vivante, un témoin mis là pour qu'on ait recours à lui. Lui-même a à assimiler tout ce monde ancien qui l'entoure, à l'interroger avec cette lumière nouvelle placée en lui (correspondance).

Il est donc impossible de dissocier la vie de l'oeuvre 'Les trois livres les plus importants de ma carrière sont: Tête d'or, Partage de Midi, et le Soulier de satin.' Ce sont dans ces trois ouvrages principaux qu'il nous faut chercher la réponse aux différentes questions posées par l'auteur: Qu'est-ce que l'homme? C'est un être fini qui inconsciemment aspire à l'infini dans le doute, dans la lutte, dans les larmes, dans la défaite, dans la victoire sur lui-même et ses passions. Le doute nous le trouvons dans TÊTE D'OR, la lutte et la défaite dans PARTAGE DE MIDI, la victoire finale quoique douloureusement gagnée dans LE SOULIER DE SATIN. Ce sont ces trois étapes que nous allons successivement examiner.

De 1886 à 1890 s'écoule pour Claudel une période de méditations, de recherches, de lectures. Tour à tour les PENSÉES de Pascal, les MÉDITATIONS SUR L'ÉVANGILE de Bossuet, la DIVINE COMÉDIE la METAPHYSIQUE d'Aristote, L'IMITATION, Dostowiewsky, Tolstoi, se succèdent à sa table de travail. Le poète a été touché mais il ne croit pas encore. Il se débat, refusant l'adhésion à une église qui ne l'attire pas, prisonnier encore des chapelles positivistes, incertain du sens de la vie, et encore plus de celui de la mort, doutant en l'existence d'une autre vie, d'une âme et de son immortalité. C'est dans le magnifique drame de TÊTE D'OR que nous trouvons l'écho de tous ces doutes. Drame pessimiste s'il en fut résonnant des lamentations de l'Ecclésiaste, et où le poète laisse à peine percer l'ombre d'une rédemption.

Qu'est-ce que TÊTE D'OR ? un homme, un conducteur d'homme, un être bouillant de jeunesse et de vie à qui rien ne doit résister et qui doit trouver dans le monde seul, l'accomplissement de ses ambitions. Lui et son ami Cébès, le doux Cébès, pour lequel la vie n'est rien si elle n'apporte pas ce soutien d'affection de tendresse et d'amitié que tout être demande, ce sont les deux aspects de l'âme du jeune Claudel. Tête d'or, c'est le poète en 1885, celui auquel le monde appartient, parce qu'il est jeune, il est beau, il est fort et il a la vie toute à lui. Cébès c'est aussi lui, demandant sa part d'affection et de compréhension dans un monde qui n'en est pas prodigue. Le dialogue des deux hommes dans des circonstances importantes de la vie, et surtout au moment de la mort représente les lignes essentielles de la doctrine du Claudel de l'époque. L'homme est un être vide et inutile qui ne sait où il va. Écoutons Cébès:

'Me voici,

'Me voici,

'Me voici,

Imbécile, ignorant.

Je ne sais rien et je ne peux rien, que dire ?  
 Que faire ? A quoi emploierai-je mes mains  
 pendantes. Ces pieds qui m'emmènent comme des  
 songes.

O être jeune et nouveau, qui es tu ? que fais tu ?  
 Et je réponds, je ne sais pas, et je désire en  
 moi-même pleurer ou crier.'

La vie est vaine et inutile. Tout est vanité. Écoutons Avare, personnage de la 'Ville'.

'Regardez la ville des hommes, ils bâtissent des  
 maisons de pierre

Et ils y font des chambres et des étages et des escaliers et  
 ils y mettent un toit,

Et ils font une porte en bas, et l'ouvrier y pose  
 une serrure et le maître en a la clef dans sa poche.

J'ai connu un homme riche qui se construisit ainsi  
 une maison, et le soir s'étant retiré

Il creva dans les lieux d'aisances.'

Ailleurs Cébès parlant à Simon (Tête d'or) lui tient ce langage :

'Cébès Parfois quelqu'homme connaît la privation de  
 tout bonheur

Simon Parles-tu de toi ?

Cébès Je suis malheureux aussi. Toi, sauve moi si tu  
 le peux

Simon Espère

Cébès En quoi ?

Simon Dans le repos qui vient après que les yeux sont  
 fermés ?

La mort donc, et la mort seule nous délivre de l'emprise de la vie.  
 Cette vie n'a-t-elle donc aucun sens ? Non, nous dit un troisième  
 personnage de la pièce, Eumère. Voici en quels termes il nous en  
 parle :

'Souvenez-vous de votre vie affreuse et végétative  
 Habitude folle, confiez vous au pur désespoir.

L'homme mange, boit, parle, dort,

Il laboure la terre, et charrie des fardeaux pesants,

il taille la pierre, il dompte les bêtes, il tord et  
 taraude l'or et le fer, et forge les outils et les bijoux.

Il construit des ponts et des maisons, il plante des  
 mâts dans les navires, il coud des vêtements et des  
 souliers.

Or il ne sait rien. Il halète dans un travail perpétuel  
 Et s'il détourne les yeux de ses mains, il se voit  
 pris pour toujours.

Abruti de vices, chargé de ferrements de misères,  
 il désire et ne connaît point ce qu'il désire. Mais . . .

Mais le malheureux,

Comme l'ivrogne gisant dans le ruisseau qui regarde de  
 ses yeux fauves dans le blême couchant l'étoile de

mai . . . .

Il connaît le mot "Jamais" . . . .

Que l'if est aimable, et si la mort n'était plus rien,  
quel bonheur".'

L'homme, ignorant pourquoi il est sur cette terre, et ce qu'il y fait, son but sera donc la jouissance, et sa fin la mort. Cependant une lueur par moments se fait jour, un doute existe, et si en dépit des apparences il existait autre chose.

'Cébès     A qui me donner? Non pas  
              A celui qui est aussie faible que moi, car de  
              quel profit lui serai-je?  
              Et moi étant tellement plein de défauts, je  
              ne puis souffrir l'imperfection.  
              Je cherche donc celui qui est parfaitement  
              bon et juste, et en qui rien ne manque . . . .  
              Je tourne les yeux alentour, je trouve  
              Une société risible . . . .  
              Mais toi penses tu que celui que je dis existe?  
Tête        Tu fouilles en moi aussi une vieille blessure.  
d'or        Il existe  
Cébès        Il existe donc. Mais lequel de nous deux  
              parle et n'est pas entendu.  
              M'a-t-il rejeté ou suis-je moi-même entouré  
              par le reproche?  
              J'atteste la vérité même qu'il n'y a pas une  
              chose ici que je ne sois prêt à quitter comme  
              un siège.  
              Mais je vois une mouche, une herbe, une pierre,  
              Et lui si je ne le saisis point, pourquoi mes  
              yeux furent-ils doués de la faculté de voir?  
              A tout instant oublieux, j'élève les mains vers  
              ce compagnon,  
              . . . . Je me soucie peu d'être aimé, et je ne  
              sais qu'aimer comme une servante et demande  
              A celui qui aime s'il ne veut pas se repaître  
              de ce qu'il désire uniquement.  
              Mais là ou je désire avec certitude je ne  
              trouve réellement quoi que se soit, et pour-  
              quoi en serait-il plus tard autrement?'

A-t-on parlé du doute en termes plus explicites, et combien ces paroles reflètent la philosophie pessimiste de l'époque. A cet être torturé il ne reste qu'une évasion, la mort et le néant. C'est ce dont Cébès a peur lui qui va mourir.

'Cébès     Moi je meurs tout à l'heure,  
              Et après qu'y a t il?

Tête        Rien d'autre. L'homme n'a que l'heure humaine  
d'or        et meurt et n'espère plus  
              Pour toujours.'

Lorsque Tête d'or contemple horrifié le cadavre de son ami Cébès, il s'écrie :

'Je suis seul, j'ai froid.  
 Qu'est-ce-que cela me fait  
 Qu'il soit mort. Quelle différence y a t il  
 entre ce corps mort et ce meuble et n'importe quel  
 tronc d'arbre?  
 Pour quoi nous lamenterion nous? Pourquoi serions  
 nous émus par quoi que ce soit.'

Ce thème de la mort totale et définitive hante le Claudel de cette époque. Lorsque Tête d'or est lui-même sur le point de mourir, il s'exprime en ces termes :

'Ils disent que l'homme renaît  
 Je ne crois pas aux fables des mères  
 Et qu'il n'existe dans cette salle du monde  
 D'autre dieu que l'homme ignorant.  
 Même que cet enfant de la femme quand il a rendu  
 Sa forme mal assurée  
 Renaisse du sein d'Isis.  
 Je le jure ici devant toi, et j'atteste la noire  
 nuit Rien. Peu importe. Je me soucie peu de cet  
 Après  
 Qui constitue toute la chanson . . . Un seul mot.  
 Et en vérité je devais aussi peu me soucier de ce qui  
 est Avant. Et pourtant,  
 Je pourrais dire que je sors non repu du théâtre.  
 J'entre cru dans la mort et avec un désir  
 Qui vit.'

On ne peut être plus explicite. Pour Claudel à cette époque l'homme est un dieu qui se suffit à lui-même, pour lequel la mort ne représente pas un passage, mais une fin totale. Seul le doute se glisse par moments laissant percer une lueur d'espoir. Peut-être existe-il autre chose. L'homme le désire, mais n'a aucune preuve. Ces preuves ils les aura par la suite, le long d'une route tortueuse, sur une mer semée d'écueils que le poète n'évitera pas toujours et sur lesquels il a failli sombrer maintes fois. Avec moins de naïveté et beaucoup plus d'art, combien la route du poète nous fait penser à celle du 'Pilgrim' de Bunyan!

1890 voit l'adhésion définitive de Claudel au catholicisme. Il communique pour la première fois à Notre-Dame la nuit de Noël anniversaire de sa première conversion. Son confesseur l'abbé Willaume lui conseille en même temps de lire St. Thomas autre évènement important dans l'évolution de la pensée claudélienne. Il est reçu la même année premier au Concours des Affaires Etrangères et part pour les Etats Unis consul suppléant à New-York. A partir de cette date va commencer pour lui une vie remplie et mouvementée de diplomate, écrivain, poète dramaturge. Ce qui ne l'empêche pas de lire avec délices St. Thomas, le Dr. Angélique, et d'y alimenter sa foi naissante, d'y trouver la substance qui sera



celle de tout son christianisme et de toute son oeuvre. Les années 1890—95 qui sont précisément celles qui nous occupent, sont aussi celles qui vont voir la renaissance des études thomistes en France. L'on n'a peut-être pas assez souligné combien Claudel tout en devant son époque a été de son temps. Les années 1890—95 restent en effet l'âge d'or de la renaissance thomiste dans le mouvement ecclésiastique de l'époque. C'est Léon XIII qui en 1879 inaugure cette ère par l'Encyclique 'Aeterni Patris' qui devient la chartre même du néothomisme officiel de l'Angleterre. En 1890 paraît une nouvelle édition des oeuvres de St. Thomas. Les ouvrages thomistes se multiplient. St. Thomas est lu, expliqué, commenté partout. Le 4 aout 1890 le même Léon XIII proclame St. Thomas patron des écoles catholiques du monde entier. Sous son impulsion des centres d'études thomistes devaient fleurir partout. Claudel sera au coeur de ce mouvement, et bien qu'il n'en parle jamais tant la scholastique soulevait de dégoût dans les milieux intellectuels de l'époque, son oeuvre en est toute entière imprégnée.

En 1895 il revient en France pour repartir quelques temps après diplomate en Chine. C'est alors que se place pour lui le second, évenement capital dans l'histoire de sa vie et de sa pensée, après celui de la nuit de Noël 1886: la rencontre avec l'amour, mais un amour défendu qui va laisser le poète brisé, et dont nous allons trouver pendant longtemps l'écho douloureux dans son oeuvre et sa correspondance, et dont la cristallisation se fait dans le drame sublime de PARTAGE DE MIDI, où se succèdent tour à tour les thèmes passionnés les plus lyriques, les plus charnels, et l'appel de plus en plus fort au secours divin. PARTAGE DE MIDI est une date capitale dans la vie et l'oeuvre du poète. Le drame est publié en 1906. Claudel a 38 ans. Le chemin parcouru jusque là sur la voie spirituelle a été long et douloureux. Son séjour au monastère de Ligugé s'est taxé par un échec. Dieu ne semble pas vouloir de lui, l'homme est à nouveau seul. C'est à ce moment là qu'il repart rejoindre un poste diplomatique en Chine et qu'il rencontre sur le bateau qui l'amène à sa destination l'être dont il devait s'éprendre mais qui n'est pas libre. Eternelle et humaine tentation qui rejettera le poète brisé mais non vaincu sur la route douloureuse qu'il nous a si magnifiquement décrite.

PARTAGE DE MIDI et l'expérience qui a donné naissance à cette oeuvre occupent une place importante dans l'oeuvre de Claudel. Elle se place au midi de sa vie.

'Mesa	Midi au ciel, midi au centre de notre vie. Et nous voilà ensemble autour de ce même âge de notre moment, au milieu de notre horizon complet, libres, déballés, Décollés de la terre, regardant derrière et devant
Ysé	Derrière de l'eau et devant nous de l'eau encore
De Ciz	Que c'est amer d'avoir fini d'être jeune
Mesa	Qu'il est redoutable de finir d'être vivant

Almaric Qu'il est beau de ne pas être mort mais d'être  
vivant

Ysé Le matin était plus beau

Mesa Le soir le sera plus encore.'

Toute la pièce tourne autour de cette antithèse. Qu'est-ce que PARTAGE DE MIDI? Nous croyons le résumer assez justement en disant: C'est la rencontre avec l'amour, c'est le rôle joué par la femme dans la vie d'un homme, c'est encore bien autre chose: La lutte du bien et du mal, la lutte de l'homme avec sa conscience, avec son devoir, le choix qu'il est obligé de faire. Le fait-il dans PARTAGE DE MIDI? Non, l'homme est vaincu et terrassé mais sa souffrance est nécessaire pour lui faire entrevoir 'Un autre monde' Et c'est tout au long de pages denses d'émotion, de poésie et de passion que le poète nous livre son âme à nue.

Il est nécessaire de nous arrêter un moment pour considérer le rôle tenu par la femme dans le théâtre de P. Claudel. Il est capital. Episodique jusqu'à PARTAGE DE MIDI il devient essentiel dans cette pièce et ne fera que s'accroître dans tout le reste de l'oeuvre. Fidèle à la pure tradition du Moyen-Age français Claudel voit dans la femme l'être imprégné de délicatesse, de douceur et de bonté, qu'ont célébré nos cours d'amour et toute notre littérature courtoise. Si Eve a perdu l'homme et contribué à sa déchéance, c'est par contre une autre femme choisie par Dieu, qui enfantera le Sauveur du monde. La femme pour Claudel n'est pas l'être vil si souvent chanté dans la littérature réaliste et Baudelairienne. C'est au contraire l'intermédiaire entre Dieu et l'homme. De même que Jésus a dû s'incarner dans le sein d'une femme pour venir jusqu'à nous, de même l'homme a besoin de la femme pour aller à Dieu. Compagne idéale, elle est en même temps consolatrice, instigatrice, instrument dans la main de Dieu pour mener l'homme jusqu'à Lui. De là cette galerie imposante de créatures faites pour aimer et servir. Il serait trop long de les énumérer toutes, contentons nous de nommer la Princesse de TÊTE D'OR, Lala dans la VILLE, Marthe de L'ÉCHANGE, la servante au grand coeur, et plus près de nous Violaine, la douce Violaine. Nous n'en finirions plus d'énumérer les créatures exquises qui se succèdent dans ce théâtre. Toutes ont un sens, toutes sont là pour quelque chose. Toutes sont placées sur une route et à un point précis qui a une signification. Toutefois, si la princesse, Lala, Marthe et même Violaine, n'occupent encore qu'une place secondaire dans l'oeuvre du poète, Ysé de PARTAGE DE MIDI est, elle, au coeur du drame. Et c'est dans ce drame qu'il faut trouver la philosophie Claudélienne de cette époque. Elle tourne essentiellement sur le rôle de la femme, tentatrice ou expiatrice? Eve ou soeur de Marie mère de Dieu? Quelle qu'elle soit, la femme se dressera toujours sur la route de l'homme. Son rôle bon ou néfaste sera toujours voulu par Dieu. Même intensément superficielle, charnelle, et infidèle comme Lechy Elbernon de L'ÉCHANGE, elle sera l'expérience nécessaire qui permettra à l'homme de se rendre compte de la vanité des choses humaines, et d'aspirer

à quelque chose de meilleur. Même l'amour le plus parfait, le plus intense, le plus passionné que puisse connaître deux êtres se perdant l'un dans l'autre comme Ysé et Mesa de PARTAGE DE MIDI n'est finalement qu'un amour insatisfait, mais déjà préfiguratif de l'amour divin, et étape nécessaire sur la route de cet amour. Et par là Claudel rejoint les grands mystiques. La langue de PARTAGE DE MIDI évoque les strophes mêmes du CANTIQUE DES CANTIQUES :

'Mesa Tu es radieuse et splendide. Tu es belle  
comme le jeune Apollon  
Tu es droite comme une colonne, tu es claire  
comme le soleil levant  
Et où as-tu arraché sinon aux fillières même  
du soleil d'un tour de ton cou ce grand  
lambeau jaune  
De tes cheveux qui ont la matière d'un talon  
d'or?  
Tu es fraîche comme une rose sous la rosée.  
Et tu es comme l'arbre cassie et comme une fleur  
sentente. Et tu es comme un faisan, et comme  
l'aurore, et comme la mer verte au matin pareille  
à, un grand acacia en fleurs et comme un paon  
dans le paradis.'

Il faudrait citer tout au long ce magnifique et étonnant duo d'amour car nul ne peut paraphraser ou même se transposer au poète.

'Ysé Il est donc vrai Mesa que j'existe seule, et voilà  
le monde répudié, et à quoi est-ce que notre  
amour sert aux autres?  
Et voilà le passé et l'avenir en même temps  
Renoncés, et il n'y a plus de famille, et d'enfants  
et de mari et d'amis.  
Et tout l'Univers autour de nous comme une  
chose incapable de comprendre et qui demande  
la raison.

Mesa Il n'y a pas de raison que toi-même  
Ysé Moi, je comprends mon Bien-aimé.  
Et je suis comprise, et je suis la raison entre tes  
bras et je suis Ysé ton âme.  
Et que nous font les autres? Mais tu es unique  
et je suis unique.  
Et j'entends ta voix dans mes entrailles comme  
un cri qui ne peut être souffert,  
Et je me lève vers toi avec difficulté comme une  
chose énorme et massive et aveugle et desirante  
et taciturne.  
Mais ce que nous désirons ce n'est point de  
créer, mais de détruire et que ah!  
Il n'y a plus rien d'autre que toi et moi, et en

toi que moi, et en moi que ta possession, et la  
rage et la tendresse, et de détruire et de n'être  
plus gêné.

détestablement par ces vêtements de chair et ces  
cruelles dents de mon coeur,

Non point cruelles,

Ah, ce n'est point le bonheur que je t'apporte,  
mais ta mort et la mienne avec elle,

Mais qu'est-ce-que cela me fait à moi que je te  
fasse mourir

Et moi et tout, et tant pis pourvu qu'à ce prix  
qui est toi et moi,

Donnés, jetés, arrachés, lacérés, consumés,

Je sente ton âme, un moment qui est toute  
l'éternité toucher

Prendre

La mienne comme la chaux astreint le sable en  
brulant et en sifflant.'

Si Mesa et Ysé réalisent, dans ce drame, la plénitude de la possession  
charnelle et spirituelle, ils n'en restent pas moins insatisfaits. Mesa  
a cherché Dieu avant de rencontrer Ysé, il ne l'a pas trouvé. Il a  
voulu se faire moine, le monastère l'a rejeté. En route vers une  
destination lointaine, Dieu a placé cette femme sur sa voie, elle est  
mariée, elle est mère. Sont-ils nécessaires l'un à l'autre? Oui répond  
Claudé, malgré le péché, malgré le mal, car d'un mal Dieu, et Dieu  
seul, peut faire sortir un bien:

'Le mal même comporte son Bien qu'il ne faut pas laisser  
perdre.'

Lorsque dans une des scènes finales Mesa revient voir Ysé après  
l'avoir abandonnée, et qu'il lui dit:

'J'ai vu que je ne pouvais me passer de toi et tu es mon  
corps et mon âme, et le défaut de mon âme,

Et la chair de ma chair, et je ne puis pas être sans Ysé,

.... Parle seulement mon amour, et tourne toi vers moi, et dis  
moi une parole afin que je l'entende et que je meure de joie,  
Parce que je t'avais perdue et voici que je t'ai retrouvée.'

Ysé reste silencieuse, et Mesa de reprendre:

'Adieu Ysé tu ne m'as point connu! Ce grand trésor que je  
porte en moi

Tu n'as point pu le déraciner,

Le prendre, je n'ai pas su le donner. Ce n'est pas ma faute  
Ou, si, c'est notre faute et notre châtement. Il fallait tout  
donner.

Et c'est cela que tu n'as pas pardonné.'

Il faudrait citer tout ce passage admirable ou l'homme abandonné  
supplie la femme de ne pas l'oublier, supplication vaine. Non  
seulement Ysé ne répond pas, mais alors que Mesa la croit veuve  
(C'est pour lui annoncer la mort de son mari qu'il est venu, ne la  
sachant pas remariée) son second mari Almaric arrive et le terrasse

et s'enfuit avec elle. Mesa reprend ses sens, ouvre les yeux et adresse à Dieu le cantique magnifique ou se trouve résumée toute la signification de la pièce, et la raison du calvaire amoureux du poète. C'est tout le cantique que nous aimerions citer, la place nous manque, mais nous en exprimerons l'essentiel :

'Pourquoi ?

Pourquoi cette femme ? Pourquoi la femme tout-à coup sur le bateau ?

Qu'est-ce-qu'elle s'en vient faire avec nous ?

Est-ce que nous avions besoin d'elle ? Vous seul !

Vous seul en moi tout d'un coup à la naissance de la Vie, Vous avez été en moi la victoire et la visitation et le nombre et l'étonnement et la puissance et la merveille et le son !

Et cette autre est-ce que nous croyons en elle ? et que le bonheur est entre ses bras ?

Et un jour j'avais inventé d'être à Vous et de me donner, Et cela était pauvre. Mais ce que je pouvais je l'ai fait, je me suis donné,

Et Vous ne m'avez point accepté, et c'est l'autre qui nous a pris.

Et dans un petit moment je vais Vous voir et j'en ai effroi Et peur dans l'os de mes os.

Non, non, mon Dieu Allez, je ne Vous demande rien.

Vous êtes là et c'est assez. Taisez vous seulement.

Mon Dieu, afin que votre créature entende. Qui a goûté à Votre silence,

Il n'a pas besoin d'explication.

Parceque je Vous ai aimé

Comme on aime l'or beau à voir, ou un fruit, mais alors il faut se jeter dessus.

La gloire refuse les curieux, l'amour refuse les holocaustes mouillés. Mon Dieu j'ai exécution de mon orgueil.

Sans doute je ne Vous aimais pas comme il faut, mais pour l'augmentation de ma science et de mon plaisir.

Et je me suis trouvé devant Vous comme quelqu'un qui s'aperçoit qu'il est seul.

Eh bien j'ai refait connaissance avec mon néant, j'ai regouté à la matière dont je suis fait

J'ai péché fortement.

Et maintenant sauvez moi mon Dieu parce que c'est assez. C'est Vous de nouveau, c'est moi. Et Vous êtes mon Dieu, et je sais que Vous savez tout.

Et je baise votre main paternelle, et me voici entre vos mains comme une pauvre chose sanglante et broyée Comme la canne sous le cylindre, comme le marc sous le madrier

Et parce que j'étais un égoïste, c'est ainsi que Vous me punissez

Par l'amour épouvantable d'un autre.

Ah je sais maintenant ce que c'est que l'amour  
 Et je sais ce que Vous avez enduré sur Votre croix, dans  
 Ton coeur  
 Si Vous avez aimé chacun de nous  
 Terriblement comme j'ai aimé cette femme, et le rôle, et  
 l'asphyxie et l'état  
 Mais je l'aimais, ô mon Dieu, et elle m'a fait cela  
 . . . . Ah Vous Vous y connaissez, Vous savez, Vous,  
 Ce que c'est que l'amour trahi. Ah je n'ai point peur de  
 Vous  
 Mon crime est grand et mon amour est plus grand, et  
 Votre mort seule, ô mon Dieu  
 La mort que Vous m'accordez, la mort seule est à la  
 mesure de tous deux  
 Mourons donc et sortons de ce corps misérable  
 Sortons mon âme, et d'un seul coup éclatons cette détes-  
 table carcasse.  
 Est-ce que c'est moi cela de cassé  
 C'est l'oeuvre de la femme . . . .  
 Déjà elle m'avait détruit le monde et rien pour moi  
 N'existait qui ne fut pas elle et maintenant elle me détruit  
 moi-même  
 Vous voyez bien que ce n'est plus possible.  
 Et que je ne puis me passer d'amour, et à l'instant, et non  
 pas demain mais toujours, et qu'il me faut la vie même et  
 la source même  
 Et la différence même, et je ne puis plus,  
 Je ne puis plus supporter d'être sourd et mort.  
 Vous voyez bien qu'ici je ne suis bon à rien et que j'ennuie  
 tout le monde  
 Et que pour tous je suis un scandale et une interrogation  
 C'est pourquoi reprenez moi et cachez moi, ô Père en  
 votre giron.'

L'on nous pardonnera d'avoir cité en partie ce long passage, il était nécessaire à la compréhension de l'oeuvre. Nous y voyons en effet le sens même donné, à la pièce.

(La deuxième partie de cet étude sera publiée dans notre prochain numéro.)

## CORRESPONDENCE

### WORDSWORTH AND THE QUIET

To the Editors of THEORIA.

Dear Sirs,

Professor Warner, in his article WORDSWORTH AND THE QUIET (THEORIA 9), rightly emphasises the importance of quietness and stillness in the poetry of Wordsworth. 'The element of calm is more important than the element of storm in Wordsworth. This is everywhere apparent in his best poetry. His moments of vision are more often than not moments of intense stillness.' This is true and well-said. I also admire Professor Warner's article for raising so squarely the question: what can the modern reader learn from the poetry of Wordsworth? But I am not happy about Professor Warner's answer to the question. He says that the whole trend of modern literature is towards the violent and the extreme, and hence towards the neglect of what Wordsworth has to offer. But 'even in an age of violence, perhaps especially then, we shall find an appeal in images of silence and the quiet light of the common day'. Wordsworth can 'help us to cultivate the quiet eye and the quiet heart'.

It is this answer that makes me uneasy. Or rather, it is the way that the answer has been expressed that I don't like. Professor Warner's picture of Wordsworth is, as he says, a negative one: but isn't it perhaps too negative? It would seem that all Wordsworth can offer us, if I may parody Professor Warner's argument for a moment, is a quiet nook where we can escape the sound of traffic or the neighbour's wireless. God knows, such escapes are both pleasant and necessary, but are they the best a great poet can offer us? For, ultimately, this world of noise and violence is the world we all have to live in, it is

' . . . the very world which is the world  
Of all of us, the place in which, in the end,  
We find our happiness, or not at all.'

These lines from THE PRELUDE remind us that Wordsworth, as much as any writer and more than most, sought to come to terms with the world as it is. He is no escapist. Wordsworth may write poetry of quietude, but he does not write poetry of quiescence. When, in TINTERN ABBEY, he praises 'that blessed mood' and the quietness of nature, he also goes on to describe how Nature enables us to cope with the fretful stir and fever of the world:

'tis her privilege,  
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead  
 From joy to joy: for she can so inform  
 The mind that is within us, so impress  
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed  
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,  
 Rash judgements, nor the sneers of selfish men,  
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all  
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,  
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb  
 Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold  
 Is full of blessings.'

My picture of Wordsworth is a positive one then. And it is such a picture I should like to take this opportunity of briefly presenting.

Professor Warner and Lionel Trilling are not alone in seeing that the tendency of modern writing is towards 'the powerful, the fierce, the assertive, the personally heroic', with an accompanying insensibility; Wordsworth himself saw it, and spoke at length about this malady. In the PREFACE TO THE LYRICAL BALLADS Wordsworth wrote:

' . . . the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability. It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged; but this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present day. For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse. When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble endeavour made in these volumes to counteract it . . . '

The examples have changed since Wordsworth's time, but the condition is unaltered, or rather, has grown worse. This passage from the PREFACE also serves to remind us of something else: that Wordsworth lived in the time of the French Revolution and the



'Industrial Revolution'. These two events, more than any others, have shaken nations, transformed thought and behaviour, and created the modern world. One might say that almost all that has been written, from Blake to the present day, has been an attempt to come to terms with these two events and their (still continuing) consequences, or has been moulded by them. Wordsworth's 'stillness' is not the stillness of a man who has closed his mind and eyes to the world about him. His stillness is the stillness of one who has looked on tempests and is not shaken. Wordsworth saw, perhaps more clearly than any modern writer, the disorder, dismay and despair in the world, and found deep sources of strength that comfort and purify even before that sight. His main theme was the Imagination, and in the concluding book of *THE PRELUDE* he described it as follows:

'Imagination, which, in truth,  
Is but another name for absolute strength  
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,  
And reason in her most exalted mood.'

In *THE PRELUDE* Wordsworth attempted to show the course and growth of the Imagination, showing not only how 'Nature' fostered it but also how the world about him hindered, marred *and* strengthened it.

'This faculty hath been the moving soul  
Of our long labour: we have traced the stream  
From darkness, and the very place of birth  
In its blind cavern, whence is faintly heard  
The sound of waters; follow'd it to light  
And open day, accompanied its course  
Among the ways of Nature, afterwards  
Lost sight of it bewilder'd and engulf'd,  
Then given it greeting, *as it rose once more  
With strength, reflecting in its solemn breast  
The works of man and face of human life,*  
And lastly, from its progress have we drawn  
The feeling of life endless, the great thought  
By which we live, Infinity and God.' (My italics)

The period when the Imagination was 'bewilder'd and engulf'd' refers particularly to the period described in Book X, *RESIDENCE IN FRANCE AND FRENCH REVOLUTION*. Here, especially, Wordsworth explores the political anxiety and intellectual doubt of modern times when

'The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity'.

He saw, examining his own mind, how in political conflicts ideas and beliefs could come to have a strong and encrusting reality of their own:

'. . . rouz'd up I stuck  
 More firmly to old tenets, and to prove  
 Their temper, strained them more, and thus in heat  
 Of contest did opinions every day  
 Grow into consequence, till round my mind  
 They clung, as if they were the life of it.'

He observed and felt the dangerous attractiveness of political philosophies that

'promised to abstract the hopes of man  
 Out of his feelings',  
 and thus offered a region  
 'Where passions had the privilege to work,  
 And never hear the sound of their own names.'

He understood too the analytic confusion ending in despair, that so much marks our world.

'Thus I fared,  
 Dragging all passions, notions, shapes of faith,  
 Like culprits to the bar, suspiciously  
 Calling the mind to establish in plain day  
 Her titles and her honours, now believing,  
 Now disbelieving, endlessly perplex'd  
 With impulse, motive, right and wrong, the ground  
 Of moral obligation, what the rule  
 And what the sanction, till, demanding *proof*,  
 And seeking it in everything, I lost  
 All feeling of conviction . . .'

And we, with the Russian Revolution still in living memory, with colonial nations all over the world demanding rights and independence, and, where thwarted, seizing their rights and independence either with excessive bloodiness or unnecessary disorder, cannot we feel the contemporary relevance of these lines:

'When a taunt  
 Was taken up by Scoffers in their pride,  
 Saying, "behold the harvest which we reap  
 From popular Government and Equality,"  
 I saw that it was neither these, nor aught  
 Of wild belief engrafted on their names  
 By false philosophy, that caused the woe,  
 But that it was a reservoir of guilt  
 And ignorance, fill'd up from age to age,  
 That could no longer hold its loathsome charge,  
 But burst and spread in deluge through the Land.'

I have quoted at some length these 'political' passages from THE PRELUDE, not because they are the finest examples of Wordsworth's poetry (though they are very fine), but to stress the contribution Wordsworth's awareness of the violence and disorder of the world about him made towards his quiet, still vision. This contribution is further illuminated by a passage in Book X where Wordsworth, contemplating the excesses that the French Revolution

brought with it and shaken by horror, yet compares himself to the ancient Prophets:

'So did some portions of that spirit fall  
 On me, to uphold me through those evil times,  
 And in their rage and dog-day heat I found  
 Something to glory in, as just and fit,  
 And in the order of sublimest laws;  
 And even if that were not, amid the awe  
 Of unintelligible chastisement,  
 I felt a kind of sympathy with power,  
 Motions rais'd up within me, nevertheless,  
 Which had relationship to highest things.  
 Wild blasts of music thus did find their way  
 Into the midst of turbulent events,  
*So that worst tempests might be listen'd to . . .*'

(My italics)

And he goes on to say that if we do not learn and strengthen ourselves from evils and griefs 'the blame is ours not Nature's'.

I do not think that one would describe Wordsworth as a tragic poet, for tragedy implies a dramatic focus on the tragic conflict. But one can say that Wordsworth's poetry contains within it an awareness of the tragic vision. Wordsworth is capable of looking at the worst without morbidity or despair, and his piety is born out of a firm grasp of tragic possibilities. Poetry which has this quality is relevant, not only for our age, but any age. If people today, in this 'age of anxiety', find it difficult to read Wordsworth the blame is theirs not Wordsworth's.

Yet Professor Warner is right in reminding us that the centre of Wordsworth's poetry is not an interest in the *tempest* but in the *calm*. Wordsworth is a meditative poet rather than a dramatic one. Or, and perhaps this is another aspect of the same thing, he is less concerned about action than about endurance. Many of his most powerful symbols are symbols of endurance, like the Leech-Gatherer. Endurance, Wordsworth makes us realise, is also an heroic thing: perhaps especially admirable in times of change and disaster.

Endurance for Wordsworth is more than a grim (albeit heroic) hanging on. It involves a calm, deep joy in 'man's unconquerable mind', a faith (and we cannot avoid this unfashionable word when speaking of Wordsworth) neither blind nor quiescent. Professor Warner gave us his image of Wordsworth; I should like to set alongside it mine. It is the image of a man who listened to the solitary Highland lass singing:

'Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow  
 For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
 And battles long ago:  
 Or is it some more humble lay,  
 Familiar matter of today?  
 Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,  
 That has been, and may be again?'

And this man, hearing this expression of inevitable human suffering, felt assurance in the continuity of life, and rejoiced that  
 'the song can have no ending'.

Yours faithfully,

TREVOR WHITTOCK.

To the Editors of THEORIA.

Dear Sirs,

Professor Warner's article, WORDSWORTH AND THE QUIET, clearly and carefully establishes one of Wordsworth's characteristic qualities. We should be grateful to him for his fine assemblage of quotations as well as for his exact and sensitive comments. It is perhaps because the article is so very good, as far as it goes, that in the end its modesty disappoints me. I should prefer a bolder claim for Wordsworth, but not because I am unaware of the strength of persuasion in Professor Warner's restraint. Current estimates of Wordsworth being what they are, I believe it is necessary to speak out. A wizened Wordsworth is approved of everywhere, for what is pleasing in him but not for what is great. Even Dr Leavis's essay seems to me to involve an unacknowledged and perhaps unconscious *devaluation*.

Wordsworth's reverence of the quiet is a symptom, a product, of a greater quality and a deeper interest: of imaginative power and a profound exploration of poetic creativity. Professor Warner points out that in THE PRELUDE 'the element of calm is more important than the element of storm', but I think we should add that Wordsworth holds calm and storm in a more complex relationship than mere antithesis. The calm that concerns him is passionate, not passive; the calm of emotion in tranquillity, of energy controlled. This is everywhere in THE PRELUDE; perhaps most perfectly in the description of the Simplon Pass (Book VI):

' . . . The immeasurable height  
 Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,  
 The stationary blasts of waterfalls,  
 And in the narrow rent at every turn  
 Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,  
 The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky . . .  
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light—  
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features  
 Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree.'

Here we see the significance to Wordsworth of 'the outward quiet of the natural scenes he loved best'. The fixed patterns of the Universe

are created out of the unceasing processes of growth and decay, the plunging turmoil of molecules.

Professor Warner shows us that for Wordsworth quiet has a second meaning: 'The inner calm that fills his heart,

"The calm existence that is mine when I  
Am worthy of myself."

But when is Wordsworth worthy of himself? When, surely, he makes the truest use of his gifts; when his vision is most intense; when, in short, he is a poet. 'His moments of vision', Professor Warner observes, 'are more often than not moments of intense stillness.' I think we should go on to say that, as Professor Warner's quotations admirably demonstrate, the moments of vision are usually moments when stillness supervenes upon agitation, when emotion is tranquilized and shaped. William Hale White did well to remember that Caliban's dam

'Held that the Quiet made all things.'

Peace and agitation 'are sister horns that constitute the strength' not of Nature alone, but also of the poetic imagination. Tumult and peace, emotion and tranquillity, desire and discipline, beauty and fear—it is the combination of these opposites that Wordsworth uses all through to explain the growth of his mind. Both are necessary. Without the creative wind of excitement the poet's mind lies barren as if under frost. Without the restraining, shaping power of calmness, the wind becomes

'A tempest, a redundant energy,  
Vexing its own creation.'

What are these opposites but the forces that Coleridge discerned in Shakespeare's poems, where 'the creative power and the intellectual energy wrestle as in a warlike embrace'?

So far, I have taken points adumbrated by Professor Warner and tried to indicate how he might have carried them further. I very much hope that he will. There remains an issue on which I differ from him. He mentions, evidently with agreement, the point made by critics that Wordsworth's 'master figures are solitary and lonely.' My view is that in Wordsworth these terms mean rather different things. Wordsworth's characteristic figures move from loneliness which is isolation to solitude which is communion: communion if not with other men then with the universal frame of things. That is the dynamic of RESOLUTION AND INDEPENDENCE, of I WANDERED LONELY AS A CLOUD, of PEELE CASTLE, of A SLUMBER DID MY SPIRIT SEAL. Wordsworth's quiet is most often the product of a security, stability, serenity, achieved in society: what Dr Leavis calls a sense of 'belonging'. Professor Warner quotes the sonnet beginning 'I am not one who much or oft delight', and comments, 'The silence here is blank and barren'. I disagree. What I get from the lines he quotes is an impression of the silence of the self-contained, the fulfilled. To think of Rilke would not be far-fetched. But there is more to it. Surely the lines about the cottage-fire and the whispering kettle counterpoise against

the barren silence a family life that is rich, orderly, and busy. Other poems might better illustrate my argument: that Wordsworth's attitude to solitude involves acceptance of the conditions of life, acceptance of death as a finality, and yet has special value for us in its conception of desire as joy, of family life lived humbly and naturally as both fulfilled and fulfilling. I think for instance of the Lucy poems, and especially of the one that begins 'I travelled among unknown men'.

A last point. When Professor Warner noted that Trilling's lecture, WORDSWORTH AND THE IRON TIME, was the most helpful and stimulating comment he knew on Wordsworth, I wonder whether he remembered Professor Durrant's essay, WORDSWORTH AND THE SENSE OF FACT, published right here in THEORIA (1952).

Yours faithfully,

F. H. LANGMAN.

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#### LAWRENCE, LAST OF THE ENGLISH

To the Editors of THEORIA.

Dear Sirs,

A word (still in reply to Mr Littlewood) on partisanship in authors.

Good novelists (I think all will agree) are concerned with value-judgment. They judge their own characters, therefore, and by clear but subtle means convey that judgment to the reader. When a character's words and actions seem 'real' and bear out the author's judgment of him, we are satisfied; but when, as now and again in Lawrence, the author indicates a dislike or an admiration on his own part that the character's words and actions do not wholly bear out (or 'justify'), then we feel that either the author's private life has spilt over into the book, or else, instead of creating 'real' characters, he is erecting Aunt Sallies or plaster images to knock down or adore.

The Miriam of SONS AND LOVERS and the Hermoine of the first part of WOMEN IN LOVE are not treated with the strongly-judging yet scrupulous impartiality with which, say, Jane Austen's Mrs Norris, Richardson's Lovelace, or Shakespeare's Queen Gertrude are treated. It is not a mere matter of technique. Jane Austen's technique is different from Richardson's, and Shakespeare's from either. It happens, I believe, because Lawrence's feelings about certain people he has known in 'real life' have made him surround with such passionate judgments the characters intended to resemble these people that he can't see how inadequately the words and actions he invents for them bear out the judgments.

Yours faithfully,

C. VAN HEYNINGEN.

# CONSULE PLANCO

by A. PETRIE

I SEEMED to have told the story of the cradle days of the N.U.C. so often in the course of my considerable term of service that it was with some hesitation that I agreed to dish up the *crambe repetita* once again for readers of THEORIA. As the Editors, however, pointed out, with gentle insistence, there were two things to be borne in mind: first, that the story, though old to myself, was bound to be new to a great many others; and, second, that the places where it had been told were now not readily accessible. I had to concede both points, and concluded that there was nothing for it but—like Livy in commencing his monumental History (*magnis componere parva!*)—to ‘invoke the blessing of all the gods and goddesses’ and address myself to my task.

My thoughts, then, go back to the morning of Monday, the 18th of April, 1910, when two, perhaps slightly nervous, figures might have been noticed in the vestibule of the Camden Hotel in Pietermaritzburg Street. They were Dr R. B. Denison, first Professor of Chemistry, and the writer, first Professor of Classics of the recently established Natal University College. They had landed at Durban the previous day *ex* the ‘Kenilworth Castle’ and travelled up to Pietermaritzburg the same evening in charge of Mr ‘Jock’ Robertson, who had been seconded from the Education Department (of which he later became Secretary: he now lives in retirement on the South Coast) as Acting Registrar of the N.U.C. They were now, at the time and place mentioned, awaiting the arrival of Sir Henry Bale, Chief Justice of Natal and first Chairman of the N.U.C. Council, to pilot them to the Maritzburg College, which was to be the scene of their labours for the time being. There, after sundry introductions, they addressed a few words to the assembled senior pupils—the ‘N.U.C. Aborigines’, as someone christened them—from whom the members of their respective classes were to be drawn, and who had been catered for for some time by the M.C. staff pending their arrival. Nothing much more than perhaps some arranging of time-tables could have taken place that day. But, whatever happened, it was an epoch-making morning. The work of the N.U.C. had begun!

For the new-comers, who had known the venerable ‘halls of learning’ of the old country, work at the Maritzburg College had at least the attraction of the novelty of the conditions under

which it was conducted. The ancient Classics, no doubt, suffered some affront to their dignity from being housed in a humble 'tin shanty'—still, or until recently, pointed out to visiting antiquaries—which froze one on a winter morning and baked one at midday; but for practical teaching purposes, the minimum necessary 'plant'—other than the texts prescribed for the various examinations, then of course those of the old Cape University—in the shape of a blackboard and a piece of chalk, was easily supplied. But the Professor of Chemistry (*and Physics!*) had admittedly a harder task to adapt such material as was available in the school laboratory, and was no doubt adequate for school purposes, to practical work of university standard. It was obvious that advanced Science teaching must be carried on under difficulties until such time as the N.U.C. buildings proper should be available and reasonably equipped. Nevertheless the work went on, in some fashion, thanks largely to the generous co-operation of the headmaster (Mr E. W. Barns, later, for some years, Registrar of the N.U.C., and recently a nonagenarian) and his staff in reducing difficulties, of whatever kind, to a minimum.

And so, from the middle of April to the end of June, 1910, the trail was blazed at the Maritzburg College. July brought the usual suspension of our activities, and about the first of August we were reinforced by the second professorial contingent from overseas—Bews (Botany), Roseveare (Mathematics), and Waterhouse (English). Dr Warren (Zoology) had already been some years in the City as Director of the Natal Museum, and with the appointment of Professors Besselaar (Dutch) and Inchbold (Law), both already in South Africa, the college of eight professors, as originally provided for, was complete. And here it may be noted that the designation of the original chairs was comprehensive and generous to a fault. Practically all of them were double-barrelled, either implicitly (Classics) or expressly (English and Philosophy, Chemistry and Physics, Botany and Geology): indeed, a man with two barrels only was, comparatively speaking, in clover: precisely how many barrels were to be counted to 'Modern Languages and History' was a moot point! If it was a tribute to the professional versatility of the incumbents, it rather overrated their physical powers of endurance, and it is not surprising that the process of breaking up the 'amphibious' or (fearful coinage of World War II!) 'triphibious' chairs should have started almost immediately. Lectureships in History and Physics, for instance, were instituted as early as 1912, and these, along with others, have long since been erected into substantive professorships. The Chair of Education, the first entirely new creation, dates to 1921.

Simultaneously with the arrival of the full staff, the Arts subjects, and also Botany, were housed in the Town Hall, mainly on the first floor on the side adjacent to Church Street. Unfortunately, however, no steps were taken to define a 'zone of silence' in our neighbourhood: the clang of the tram gongs and the horns of passing motorists—admittedly much less numerous but far more noisy than today—



made sleep difficult even in the Latin classes. The result was that the classes were later transferred to the top floor on the opposite side, where the greater distance lent a little more enchantment to the din. Chemistry still remained at the Maritzburg College, while Zoology was conducted at the Museum; and the 'wandering scholars' of the middle ages came to life again in students whose subjects required their presence at all three places in the course of a day. But even this was not without its advantages. In the words of a stalwart of early N.U.C. Rugby: 'This peripatetic search for learning offered a splendid field for training and probably accounted in no small measure for our fitness.'

All this time the N.U.C. had been represented in its own right by some forty acres of virgin veld on the hill of Scottsville which the Corporation had gifted for our permanent habitat, and towards which we hopefully waved such as had the temerity to ask where the College buildings were situated. In the later months of 1910, however, stacks of bricks and a crane or two breaking the skyline in the direction indicated showed that something was happening there at last, and things were sufficiently advanced to allow of the foundation-stone of our future home being laid with due ceremony by H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught (then Chancellor of the University of the Cape of Good Hope, later of the University of South Africa) on December 1. On this occasion the late Dr Sormany, whose services to the College, in various capacities, were practically co-extensive with its life and overlapped into the University, was the chief spokesman for the Council, deputising for Sir Henry Bale, who, by a singular, and sad, coincidence died that afternoon. From then on the buildings were naturally the subject of frequent visits by those more immediately interested to mark the progress that was being made, and as the walls showed more and more above the veld and formed something of a landmark, the townsfolk sat up and took notice.

At length, after the winter vacation of 1912, we were able to move into our new abode, the official opening being performed on the 9th of August by the then Minister of Education (Hon. F. S. Malan) before a representative gathering which filled the Hall. The buildings, however, though occupied, were by no means finished, and in the matter of noise we were really, for some time, worse off than in the Town Hall epoch, but the thought that it was a steadily diminishing quantity enabled us to carry on. With the passage of the weeks the hammering died away, and the city on the hill settled down into the 'serene academic calm' which was more in keeping with it. In those disturbed days it behoved professors who had their pitch on the ground floor to keep a sharp eye for the possible sudden disappearance of one or more of their audience through some trap-door that had been left to give access to a fitting underneath that had still to be adjusted. On one notable occasion, at least, when unauthorised subterranean ventriloquism competed somewhat prominently with 'the master's voice', the Senate—a rare experience

in the history of the College—had to take mild disciplinary action.

The self-contained quadrangle, as completed in 1912, continued to house all the College departments, with the exception of Zoology and Law, until 1923, when the urgent need for extra accommodation, especially on the Science side, was met by the erection of the Chemistry Block near the south-western angle of the main building. Up till then, Chemistry shared the back wing with Physics—a fact which was frequently, and forcibly, conveyed to sensitive, or indeed any kind of, noses in other parts of the building. Particularly when the wind blew towards the town the Arts people would have found gas-masks invaluable; and it was actually suspected that the budding Faradays in the Chemistry 'lab.' took advantage of that atmospheric condition to let loose upon their unfortunate fellows all the weird odours ever boasted by a Cologne or a Wigan—and perhaps a few more for good measure! But it was obviously out of the question to remonstrate with the practical jokers at the source of the trouble!

Turning to the administrative side of things—Sir Henry Bale, who was succeeded in the Chairmanship of the Council by Sir (as he became later) John Dove Wilson, first Judge President of the Natal Provincial Division of the Supreme Court, was also first Chairman of the College Senate: after his death members of the staff acted in this capacity, for a year or more, in turn, and Senate meetings were held in the Director's room of the Natal Museum, as they continued to be for the duration of Dr Warren's official connexion with the College. Our first regular Registrar was J. A. P. (popularly known as 'X') Feltham, D.S.O., B.A. (Cantab.), eminently human and genial, but, without doing him injustice, somewhat casual in his methods, and soon to be succeeded by David Robb, whose steadier pace carried him, and us, to half-way through our second decade.

In regard to the social and sporting amenities of undergraduate life, hostels, of course, were the dream of a far-distant future, and students were scattered through the town in (approved) lodgings. Some half-dozen were usually to be found at the Y.M.C.A., from which missing library books were frequently recovered. Football grounds and tennis courts, too, if more practical politics than hostels, were necessarily a matter of time. Still, the very existence of the N.U.C. in visible stone-and-lime form did much to stimulate a corporate feeling among the sixty or seventy undergraduates then in attendance, and in spite of all handicaps the foundations of not a few student organisations, as we know them today, were securely laid. The Rugby and Tennis Clubs, for instance, are practically coeval with the College itself, and the Debating Society, the S.R.C., the S.C.A. and the College Magazine all date to the first decade of its history. In the sphere of sport it is almost startling to recall that the N.U.C. Rugby Team—after a hard fight for recognition as worthy enough members of the Senior League!—were actually finalists in the Senior Murray Cup of 1912 and runners-up in the York and Lancaster Cup the same season. N.U.C. Rugby, indeed, may be said to have made its debut and reached what was to be the

peak of its achievement for many years—it was not until 1930 that the College won the Murray Cup outright—almost simultaneously. One recalls such names of those early days as the evergreen ‘Bill’ Payn, doyen of Natal sportsmen, Bertram Vanderplank, Charlie (‘Station’) Norman, Sahlstrom, Lazarus, Hugh Rymer and others, several of whom qualified for Provincial and (the first two, at least) for International Caps.

And so we seemed to be settling down happily, both to work and to play, when in the first days of August, 1914, came the European Armageddon, now generally referred to as World War I. The honourable part played by the N.U.C. in the far-flung conflict is best, if sadly, told by the War Memorial in the vestibule of the main building, where, among the thirteen names recorded (together with that of a member of Council), Afrikaner as well as English, one reads those of such ornaments of our early student body as Norman Lucas and Norman Watt. The first and immediate effect of the war was to send our numbers down to the low figure of barely forty, and for the next year or two work was conducted in an all-pervasive atmosphere of tension and depression. At the end of 1916, moreover, we were saddened by the untimely death of Professor Inchbold (Law), whose memory, appropriately—for he was the life and soul of the College Debating Society—is kept green by the annual Arts v. Science debate which bears his name. Then, in 1917, the College buildings were placed at the disposal of the authorities as a soldiers’ convalescent hospital, and the Arts classes were once more housed in town—this time in the then Railway Offices (now the S.A.P. headquarters), opposite the Imperial Hotel, provision being made for the retention of access to the Science laboratories at Scottsville. However, on the historic 11th of November, 1918, came the Armistice, bringing promise of a brighter day for the N.U.C. as for the world at large, and in due course we resumed occupation of our familiar quarters. The return of happier conditions was immediately, and strikingly, reflected in our attendance graph, which soared, even more dramatically than it had fallen, to the hitherto undreamt-of figure (1919) of some 120.

The war years were trying ones in other respects for the infant N.U.C., for the problem of the future pattern of university education in South Africa, some solution of which was admitted to be overdue, was now being seriously tackled, and much of the time of both Council and Senate was occupied in scanning and considering successive commission reports or legislative proposals which were mostly abortive. It was accordingly with a sense of relief that something like stability was achieved by the (F.S.) Malan Acts of 1916, which definitely replaced the old examining University of the Cape of Good Hope by three new teaching universities, viz. Cape Town, Stellenbosch, and the federal University of South Africa, which came officially into being on ‘the appointed day’, April 2, 1918. The N.U.C. was defined as one of six constituent colleges of the last-named, and this was the status it continued to occupy until it became the Uni-

versity of Natal (March 15, 1949).

With its place in the general scheme of things thus settled, the College was able to concentrate on its own individual expansion, which was rapid and continuous, the first important development being the establishment in Durban, in 1922, of faculties of Commerce and Engineering, as well as a degree in Fine Arts (in the faculty of Arts), in co-operation with the Natal Technical College—a development which was to lead to the provision of the splendid Howard College some eight years later. From 1922 onwards the history of the N.U.C. must be largely concerned with the great expansion of the work in Durban; but as I have regarded its inception as a suitable *terminus ad quem* for the purposes of my ‘terms of reference’, the further story must be told at another time and place.

# THE AXE IN SPRINGTIME

## (THE CHERRY ORCHARD)

by P. WARNER

1.

### THE WASTE LAND

IN HIS illuminating introduction to Chekov's plays, Calderon has some interesting things to say about the nature of good and evil. He writes:

'We have been wrong, about Good and Evil. Where suffering is due to human agency we have sought in the individuals, not merely for those last movements which make the suffering actual, but for the very fount and origin of Evil itself. We have attributed it to human malevolence, to corrupt and wicked will . . . .

But the Zeitgeist is slowly bringing a new doctrine to light in our generation—revealing it to divers at one time in different places—that Evil in the world does not arise from Evil in men, but is a constant element in life, flowing not *out* of men's souls, but through them; that there are in fact no villains, or if there are, the amount of unhappiness they cause is so small that it may be neglected in the general estimate.'<sup>1</sup>

Calderon attributes to Chekov a 'new doctrine of irresponsibility' in the light of which 'the channels of Evil are innocent and lovable'.<sup>2</sup>

If we accept this point of view it seems that Chekov has abandoned the concept of original sin, so deeply rooted in our culture; that he has rejected as a pattern of human experience the emotions expressed by primitive resurrection ritual, and echoed by 'the tragic cycle' of great drama, in which feelings of guilt are relieved by violent confession or sacrifice, and succeeded by a sense of fresh life and gaiety. This would explain why his plays do not follow the tragic pattern as it is described by Tillyard. The idea that evil is something that flows through men, rather than from them, is, nevertheless, not as new in human thought as Calderon suggests. We do not always feel a sense of personal evil in Greek drama, in the *ANTIGONE* or the *PHAEDRA* for example, or even in the *MEDEA*. Yet these plays externalized man's sense of guilt. The conflict between good and evil in our nature is not necessarily shewn in plays in simple terms of good and evil characters. Chekov is not different from earlier dramatists in that he does not sum up the evil in the world in a single character. There is no 'villain' in *OEDIPUS REX*. The real

difference between Chekov and earlier writers lies in the fact that evil is too strong a term to apply to the malaise that haunts the characters in Chekov's plays. Sin has, as it were, been splintered into a thousand pieces and scattered lightly over everybody. In this disseminated form it cannot be regarded as evil, and the sense of guilt which it produces (for Chekov's characters *have* a sense of guilt), though always present, is vague and nebulous. Madame Ranevsky says:

'Oh, the sins that I have committed . . . I've always squandered money at random like a madwoman: I married a man who made nothing but debts. My husband drank himself to death on champagne; he was a fearful drinker. Then for my sins I fell in love and went off with another man; and immediately—that was my first punishment—a blow fell on my head . . . here, in this very river . . . my little boy was drowned; and I went abroad right, right away, never to come back any more, never to see this river again . . . I shut my eyes and ran, like a mad thing, and *he* came after me, pitiless and cruel. I bought a villa at Mentone, because he fell ill there, and for three years I had no rest, day or night; the sick man tormented and wore down my soul. Then, last year, when my villa was sold to pay my debts, I went off to Paris, and he came and robbed me of everything, left me and took up with another woman, and I tried to poison myself . . . It was all so stupid, so humiliating . . . Then, suddenly I longed to be back in Russia, in my own country, with my little girl . . . (Wiping away her tears.) Lord, Lord, be merciful to me; forgive my sins! Do not punish me any more?'

Madame Ranevsky's confused sense of sin equates an unfortunate marriage with living in adultery. At the end of this hazy confession she says:

'Isn't that music that I hear?'

and when Gayef replies:

'That's our famous Jewish band.'

she says, sins forgotten,

'We must make them come up sometime; we'll have a dance.'

The sense of sin of this society is perhaps summed up in Gayef's exchange with Lopakhin:

'*Lopakhin.* What sins have you committed?'

'*Gayef.* They say I've devoured all my substance in sugar candy.'

Chekov, the contemporary of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, was very well aware of the traditional pattern of human behaviour through which guilt is usually purged. Trophimof says:

'It is plain that, before we can live in the present, we must first redeem the past, and have done with it, and it is only by suffering that we can redeem it, only by strenuous, unremitting toil.'

But we know that Trophimof's redemption of the past will go no further than talk. This diffused guilt can never be canalised into remorse violent enough to evoke the death and rebirth of the spirit.

Guilt is not strongly felt in the individual but lies like a blight on the group. The group is guilty when the individual is not. In the last act of *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*, for example, Anya, Barbara and Madame Ranevsky each inquire separately about the safety of Firs; yet in the end he is forgotten by the whole group.

We find in Chekov's plays not the absence of any sense of guilt or desire for redemption, but a weakening and diffusion of this sense of guilt until it is too vague to achieve purgation. It is persistent in the plays, but shadowy. Since there is no purgation, there can be no renewal of life. When Madame Ranevsky is talking of the death of her little son, which she herself speaks of as 'my first punishment' she says:

'My little boy was drowned. Why? What was the use of that?' Clearly it was of no 'use'. Madame Ranevsky has learnt nothing by suffering. She ran away from the recognition of pain. So that Barbara's:

'It was the will of God'

is ironical. There is no will of God, no divine plan. There is only chaos.

In short, the peculiar quality of Chekov's plays, which I shall illustrate from *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*, seems to me to be their picture of an existence in which the age-old pattern of experience has been broken. There is perpetual tension, but no release. It follows that the structure of Chekov's plays must be different from the structure which we observe in Greek drama and in the plays of Shakespeare and Eliot. The sequence of emotion which the audience feels will also be different.

Yet Chekov seems to me deliberately to remind his audience of the traditional cycle of experience which no longer operates. The frustration of the natural flow of life is seen against the constant reminder of a life in which men moved responsibly in their appointed places, in a world in which there was a natural rhythm of life associated with the seasonal life of nature. In *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*, Firs, who belonged to this life, repeatedly speaks of it:

'The peasants minded the masters, and the masters minded the peasants, but now it's all higgledy-piggledy. You can't make head nor tail of it.'

The cherry orchard is a symbol. It is used continually to suggest the forgotten way of life, as in this conversation:

'Firs. The dried cherries used to be sent in wagons to Moscow and Kharkof. A heap of money! The dried cherries were soft and juicy and sweet and sweet-smelling then. They knew some way in those days.

*Mme. Ranevsky.* And why don't they do it now?

'Firs. They've forgotten. Nobody remembers how to do it.' We see the orchard in spring, covered with blossom:

'Gayef. The orchard is all white. You've not forgotten it, Lyuba? This long avenue going straight on, straight on, like a ribbon between the trees? It shines like

silver on moonlight nights. Do you remember?  
You've not forgotten?

*Mme. Ranevsky.* Oh, my childhood, my pure and happy childhood. I used to sleep in this nursery. I used to look out from here into the garden. Happiness awoke with me every morning! and the orchard was just the same then as it is now, nothing is altered. It is all white, all white! O my cherry orchard. After the dark and stormy autumn and the frosts of winter you are young again and full of happiness; the angels of heaven have not abandoned you. Oh! if only I could free my neck and shoulders from the stone that weighs them down! If only I could forget my past!

Chekov is here using nature, as he frequently does, to floodlight the mood of his characters, not by identification, as when Lear's rage is echoed by the storm, but by contrast. For Madame Ranevsky there will be no new blossoming after the frosts of winter, no release from the weight of guilt.

Spring, with its rich suggestions of renewal and rebirth, can bring no new life to the futile, aimless members of this family, and the repeated references to it remind us only of the hopeless future. When, for example, Madame Ranevsky says: 'We're going, and not a soul will be left here', Lopakhin replies: 'Until the spring'. And a little later when Trophimof says: 'Welcome, new life!' he repeats again like a refrain: 'Till the spring'. It is with this still in our ears that we hear Firs alone in the deserted house say in ironic comment:

'There's no strength left in you; there's nothing, nothing. Ah, you . . . job lot!'

The orchard itself, the symbol of the life of 'the quiet seasons'<sup>3</sup> has been sold, and Firs's words are underlined by the stroke of the axe on the trees, with which the play ends.

If, for Chekov, the pattern of life is no longer the cycle of the rebirth ritual, his plays cannot be understood without reference to it, for the rhythm of the seasons is still the norm against which we see Chekov's company of bewildered, frustrated, irresponsible beings, cut off from the roots of life. Yet we do not feel that Chekov desired any return to the established ways of the past. In its rootlessness, Chekov's world may be a waste land, but unlike Eliot, Chekov seems to feel no bitterness, no moral indignation, no passionate desire to point a way to salvation. He is content to create this world, as he saw it, with infinite pity.



## 2.

## DISPLACED PERSONS

Chekov seems to have seen the world pitted all over with round holes full of square pegs. His characters are all misfits, displaced persons. They are not particularly good nor particularly bad, but they are uprooted and bewildered by life. Their best intentions come to nothing. This maladjustment does not only apply to the upper classes of pre-revolutionary Russia; it is a general disease. It is this common disorder that gives unity to Chekov's characters, makes us aware of them as a group. As a group they are one of the protagonists of the drama; the other is Life itself.

This displacement is perhaps best summed up in the speech of the German governess, Charlotte, which opens the second act. Charlotte says to Ephikhodof:

'I have no proper passport. I don't know how old I am; I always feel I am still young. But where I come from and who I am, I haven't a notion. Who my parents were—very likely they weren't married—I don't know. I don't know anything about it. I long to talk so, and I have no one to talk to, I have no friends or relations.'

Her condition is characteristic of the entire company.

Madame Ranevsky and Gayef have the habits of the aristocracy, they are generous and charming and sensitive, but they have no sense of the responsibilities of a ruling caste. Madame Ranevsky gives a sovereign to a tramp because she has no smaller coin, while Barbara says:

'Oh, mamma, there's nothing for the servants to eat at home . . .'  
Warm in their affections, they are incapable of facing reality. One of the sources of dramatic tension in this play lies in Madame Ranevsky's continual evasions of Lopakhin's attempts to make her realise her financial position. His practical plan put forward in Act I:

'If only you will cut up the cherry orchard and the land along the river into building lots and let it off on lease for villas, you will get at least two thousand five hundred pounds a year out of it . . .'  
is rewarded by her:

'You don't know what you're talking about. If there is one thing that's interesting, remarkable in fact, in the whole province, it's our cherry orchard.'

This is followed by Gayef's mounting irrelevancy:

'Our cherry orchard is mentioned in Andréyevsky's Encyclopaedia.'

In Act II, Lopakhin returns to the attack:

'Every day I say the same thing over and over again. You must lease off the cherry orchard and the rest of the estate for villas; you must do it at once, this very moment, the auction will be upon you in two twos! Try and understand. Once you make up

your minds there are to be villas, you can get all the money you want, and you're saved . . . .'  
and Madame Ranevsky replies:

'Villas and villa residents, oh, please, . . . it's so vulgar!'

Lopakhin, the representative of the new bourgeoisie, the successful man of business who is destined to inherit the cherry orchard, is no more able to cope with life than the aristocrats he supersedes. He knows that he has climbed out of the class into which he was born without learning to belong to any other. In the second act he says:

'To tell the honest truth, our life's an imbecile affair. My father was a peasant, an idiot; he understood nothing. . . . As a matter of fact I'm just as big a blockhead and idiot as he was. I never did any lessons; my handwriting's abominable; I write so badly I'm ashamed before people; like a pig.'

When Trophimof calls Lopakhin a 'beast of prey' it is irony, for Lopakhin is more like a blundering and kindly tame bear, and he is doing his best to save his friends. When, in his excitement at buying the orchard, he cries out:

'Come everyone and see Yermolai Lopakhin lay his axe to the cherry orchard, come and see the trees fall down! We'll fill the place with villas; our grandsons and our great-grandsons shall see a new life here. . . . Strike up music!'

it is the excitement not of triumph but of despair, for as the band plays he sinks beside the weeping Madame Ranevsky and says:

'Oh, why, why didn't you listen to me? You can't put the clock back now, poor dear. Oh, that all this were past and over! Oh, that our unhappy topsy-turvy life were changed'.

The servants, Yasha, and Dunyasha, and Ephikhodof, are, like their masters, out of place. Dunyasha is neither a servant nor a lady. Lopakhin says to her at the beginning of the play:

'You dress yourself like a young lady, and look at your hair. You ought to remember your place.'

Yasha is perhaps the most unpleasant of these rootless misfits. When Barbara says to him, in the first act:

'Your mother's come up from the village. She's been waiting for you since yesterday in the servant's hall. She wants to see you.' his reply is:

'What a nuisance she is!'

This situation is repeated in the last act and we feel for a moment the brutality inherent in the delightful Mr Micawber-like irresponsibility of this family. But Yasha has gained nothing by denying his mother. He pleads with Madame Ranevsky:

'if you go to Paris again, take me with you, I beseech you. It's absolutely impossible for me to stay here.'

Ephikhodof is so ill-adjusted to life that he cannot walk about without falling over the furniture. He himself says:

'I am a man of cultivation; I have studied remarkable books, but I cannot fathom the direction of my preferences; do I want to live or do I want to shoot myself, so to speak?'

This echo of Hamlet, whose world, too, was out of joint, is caught up again later in this scene, in Lopakhin's misquotations.

It is one of the symptoms of the universal malady of Chekov's characters that although the disease is common, the individual should feel isolated, should have no sense of belonging to society. It is for this reason that the characters seldom listen to one another. Preoccupied with their own thoughts, they sometimes catch at a phrase out of what is said to them and reply to the surface meaning of the words, but there is hardly ever a spark of real contact. When, for example, Charlotte says to Ephikhodof:

'I have no friends or relations,'

he replies, picking up perhaps the mood of melancholy without the sense of the words:

'How sweet it is to play upon the mandoline!'

When Madame Ranevsky, in her anxiety about the sale of the orchard, says to Trophimof:

'My fate is being decided today.'

he replies by teasing Barbara about her backward suitor:

'Madame Lopakhin!'

It is not only in situation that the characters in this play are displaced. They are displaced also in time. For all of them the present is as Trophimof describes it:

'The vast majority of the people that I know seek after nothing, do nothing, and are as yet incapable of work . . . all our clever conversations are only meant to distract our own attention and other people's.'

Except for Firs, who has been left behind by life, they do not belong to the past any more than to the present. There is a strong desire in the play to return to the past but the aristocrats, and perhaps Firs too, throw a glamour over it. This sharpens our sense of the unsatisfactory present but it is only an illusion. Madame Ranevsky cries out with excitement:

'Look! There's mamma walking in the orchard . . . in a white frock! There she is!'

but when Gayef asks:

'Where?'

the reply is:

'There's no one there, really. It only looked like it.'

Chekov makes sure that the audience sees the past in a way that modifies this nostalgia. Firs may say with pride:

'In the old days, forty or fifty years ago, they used to dry the cherries and pickle 'em and make jam of 'em';

but Lopakhin gives us quite another picture:

'My father was a peasant, . . . all he did was to beat me when he was drunk, with a walking stick.'

To Madame Ranevsky the orchard is a symbol of the grace and security of the past, yet Trophimof says:

'Think, Anya, your grandfather, your great-grandfather and all your ancestors were serf-owners, owners of living souls. Do not

human spirits look out at you from every tree in the orchard, from every leaf and every stem? Do you not hear human voices? . . . . Oh! it is terrible. Your orchard frightens me. When I walk through it in the evening or at night, the rugged bark on the trees glows with a dim light, and the cherry-trees seem to see all that happened a hundred and two hundred years ago in painful and oppressive dreams.'

If the characters in this play have no place in the present, and the past is an illusion, the future also is a mirage. It is Trophimof, chiefly, who talks about the future. This is significant. Trophimof is the eternal student. He has knowledge, intelligence, beliefs, but all these things cover him, not like bright raiment, but like a mould beneath which he is quietly rotting. We are reminded in each act that he is growing old. Madame Ranevsky says:

'You hair's going and you wear spectacles. Are you really still a student?'

and Barbara echoes later:

'How ugly you've grown, Peter; how old you've grown!'

For Trophimof there is change but not progress. Our understanding of what he says about the future is modified by our reaction to his character. When he says:

'Mankind marches forward, perfecting its strength. Everything that is unattainable for us now will one day be near and dear . . .'

the vagueness of the language is significant. Speaking of the present he can be perfectly precise:

'the vast majority of us, ninety-nine per cent, live like savages; at the least thing they curse and punch people's heads; they eat like beasts and sleep in dirt and bad air; there are bugs everywhere, evil smells, damp and moral degradation . . .'

As soon as he speaks of the future he begins to rhapsodize:

'We march on irresistibly towards that bright star which burns far, far before us!'

and

'my soul has been full of mysterious anticipations.'

Trophimof's future is no more convincing than Lopakhin's Utopia of villa residents.

In this play, the passage of time is emphasized, but there is no sense of a rhythmic and seasonal change in which at each stage life has value. Trophimof grows older but he is never born again as an adult. He remains the perpetual adolescent; he is never initiated into manhood.

Just as Trophimof's achievement of manhood is arrested, so the other rebirth in the life of man, marriage, never takes place. There are three possible romances in this play, three situations which might end in marriage. Ephikhodof is in love with Dunyasha, there is a tender feeling between Anya and Trophimof, and everybody talks about a marriage between Barbara and Lopakhin. But in this world there can be no consummation. These three situations multiply the theme of sterility. Lopakhin and Barbara are the most practical

people in the play. Their comments on the inefficiency of the others is often a timely expression of what the audience feels. They can buy land and pack trunks, but they do not know how to talk about love. Trophimof is the exact opposite. He can express his feelings with all too easy fluency, but he is at the mercy of circumstances. *'Mme. Ranevsky* You do nothing; Fate tosses you about from place to place.'

Like the talk of spring, the talk of marriage emphasizes the actual sterility of the future. It is, as Barbara says:

'Everyone talks about our marriage, everyone congratulates me, but, as a matter of fact there's nothing in it; it's all a dream.'

Although all the characters in *THE CHERRY ORCHARD* are displaced persons they are richly individualistic; they have particular turns of speech and recognisable tricks of behaviour like 'twenty-two misfortunes'. Yet each is the epitome of the type. We perceive the misfit in infinite variations and this gives to the play the spread of universality, which in earlier drama was due in part to the high rank of the characters and the world-shaking nature of the events. Chekov extends the significance of this small group to the whole world by repeating the theme of displacement in character after character. The introduction of Pishtchik, for example, who plays no part in the plot, extends the peculiar qualities of Gayef and his sister to the entire Russian aristocracy.

Naturally the complexity of the characters varies as it does in all great drama, since tension depends upon varied degrees of reality. The individuality of some is created by giving them labels, such as 'perpetual student', reminiscent of the method of Dickens. Others, like Madame Ranevsky, have the contradictions and vagaries of real life. The diversity of character within the common mould, is one of the ways in which Chekov stresses the complexity of life. Yet this must be achieved without allowing his characters to assume heroic proportions—and in this sense Falstaff is heroic—for it would destroy the essential meaning of the plays if his characters solidified or stood out in this way.

In spite of their inefficiency, these characters retain a sense of the joy of being alive. Coming home, Madame Ranevsky says:

'I can't sit still! This happiness is more than I can bear. Laugh at me. I am a fool!'

Refusing to listen to Lopakhin's advice she cries out:

'Please don't go . . . it's gayer when you're here.'

Gayef may be so shrivelled that Lopakhin calls him 'an old woman', so helpless that Firs cannot trust him to dress himself, but even in him the spirit of life continually struggles to express itself. It pops out in bursts of oratory at all the wrong moments. It is always suppressed by his female relations, but it is inexhaustible. The German governess can dance and play stage tricks. Even Pishtchik can say: 'I am a full-blooded man'. Anya's youth and gaiety are a continual source of delight to everyone. There is, of course, irony in this aimless vitality, but it means that Chekov's characters are not

like the man and woman in Eliot's GAME OF CHESS.

'What shall we do tomorrow?

What shall we ever do?

The hot water at ten.

And if it rains, a closed car at four.

And we shall play a game of chess,

Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.<sup>24</sup>

This exuberant vitality, flourishing like weeds upon a dust heap, is important in our final estimate of the meaning of the play.

### 3.

## SYMBOL AND REALITY IN A NEW PATTERN

Chekov's vision of life is patently different from that of his predecessors, and we are therefore not surprised to find in his plays a different dramatic mood, which is neither comic nor tragic in the traditional sense. I have suggested, elsewhere, that the function of drama is not merely to present a vision of life, but to make us comprehend this vision through emotional participation. In earlier drama this was achieved by what we call 'the tragic pattern'. Is there any perceptible design in *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*? What is the effect on us of watching this play? Is there to be found in it anything comparable to the integration of symbolism and naturalism which we have seen to be the source of power in great tragedy, such as *KING LEAR*?

Before looking at the play as a whole, I think it may be worth examining the language; for it is in the language that the particular life and significance of the play will be found. Here is the conversation at the opening of the play:

*Lopakhin.* How late is the train? A couple of hours at least. (Yawning and stretching.) What do you think of me? A fine fool I have made of myself. I came on purpose to meet them at the station and then I went and fell asleep as I sat in my chair. What a nuisance it is! You might have woke me up anyway.

*Dunyasha.* I thought that you had gone. (She listens.) That sounds like them driving up.

*Lopakhin.* No; they have got to get the luggage out and all that. (A pause.) Madame Ranevsky has been five years abroad. I wonder what she has become like. What a splendid creature she is! So simple and easy in her ways. I remember when I was a youngster of fifteen my old father (he used to keep a shop here in the village then) struck me in the face with his fist and set my nose bleeding. We had come for some reason or other, I forget what, into the courtyard, and he

had been drinking. Madame Ranevsky, I remember it like yesterday, still a young girl, and oh, so slender, brought me to a wash-stand here, in this very room, in the nursery. "Don't cry little peasant", she said, "it'll mend by your wedding." (A pause.) "Little peasant", . . . . My father, it is true, was a peasant, and here am I in a white waistcoat, and brown boots, a silk purse out of a sow's ear, as you might say, just turned rich, with heaps of money, but when you come to look at it, just a peasant of the peasants. Here's this book that I was reading and didn't understand a word of, I just sat reading and feel asleep.

*Dunyasha.* The dogs never slept all night, they knew that their master and mistress were coming.

*Lopakhin.* What's the matter with you, Dunyasha? You're all . . . .

*Dunyasha.* My hands are trembling, I feel quite faint.

*Lopakhin.* You are too refined, Dunyasha, that's what it is.'

Here is the conversation when the family actually arrive:

'*Mme. Ranevsky.* (Joyfully through her tears.) The nursery.

*Barbara.* How cold it is. My hands are simply frozen. Your two rooms, the white room and the violet room, are just the same as they were, mamma.

'*Mme. Ranevsky.* My nursery, my dear, beautiful nursery! This is where I used to sleep when I was a little girl. (Crying.) I am like a little girl still. Barbara has not altered a bit, she is just like a nun and I knew Dunyasha at once.

*Gayef.* Your train was two hours late. What do you think of that? There's punctuality for you!

*Charlotte.* My little dog eats nuts.

*Poshtchik.* You don't say so! Well, I never!

*Dunyasha.* At last you've come!

*Anya.* I haven't slept for four nights on the journey. I am frozen to death.

*Dunyasha.* It was Lent when you went away. There was snow on the ground, it was freezing; but now! Oh, my dear! How I have waited for you, my joy, my light! Oh, I must tell you something at once, I cannot wait another minute.

*Anya.* (Without interest.) What again?

*Dunyasha.* Ephikhodof, the clerk, proposed to me in Easter week.

*Anya.* Same old story. . . . All my hair pins have dropped out.'

Chekov is regarded as a great exponent of naturalism and this is supposed to be ordinary conversation. It does, of course, create that illusion, but each phrase, apparently casual and natural (even

in translation this naturalness is apparent), adds its significance to some theme of the play. The lateness of the train, mentioned first by Lopakhin and echoed by Gayef, tells us that we are in a world where nothing runs to plan. Lopakhin, the successful man of business, didn't succeed in meeting the train. The exchange between him and Dunyasha reveals them both as displaced persons and so creates the mood in which the play begins, but it does much more. It builds the entrance of Madame Ranevsky. Her charm precedes her, and the casual line about the dogs helps to increase the excited anticipation.

The house, as well as the orchard, has symbolic significance in this play. Lopakhin refers to it: 'here, in this very room', and the reference is caught up on their arrival by Madame Ranevsky, Anya and Barbara. This suggests the romance of the past, but Lopakhin, with his bleeding nose, has given us a hint of its brutality.

Without using obviously 'poetic' language, Chekov exploits the associations of words. Every detail is carefully chosen to contribute to the total effect. Even the colours of Madame Ranevsky's rooms are significant. Their white and violet suggest, not the boudoir of the courtesan, but the innocence and purity of childhood. At the same time the use of detail, the bleeding nose, the hairpins, the little dog, gives a concrete particularity to the scene which builds up the illusion of reality.

There are many references in these opening speeches to people remaining the same, but not quite the same. We begin to feel, very slightly, the arrest of natural change. Dunyasha's abortive romance is also hinted at, and in her words:

'It was Lent when you went away . . . but now!  
we feel the first suggestion of a spring that will never flower.

Chekov lets everyone talk at once, as people do in real life; no one clears the stage for a dramatic speech. Charlotte interrupts Gayef to talk to Pishtchik about her little dog, and Anya breaks off Dunyasha's romantic revelation to discuss her hairpins. Yet even this is functional, for it emphasizes the isolation of these people, each in his private world. Out of the medley of conversation, the important themes emerge. The unfinished sentences also make the speech sound natural. This again is exploited to give the peculiar jerky and ragged rhythm. Chekov often allows his characters to speak their thoughts aloud. Lopakhin's speech is almost a soliloquy, telling us who is who and what is what. Once the illusion of natural speech has been created by a hubbub of talk, the audience accept the soliloquy with no sense of strangeness.

Clearly, this is language used with the concentration and suggestiveness of poetry. It differs from poetry only in its lack of formal rhythm. However, if the metrical pattern of poetry is one of the means by which man identifies himself with the traditional patterns of life of the community; if, as I have suggested elsewhere, blank verse is a successful form of dramatic speech because it combines a suggestion of the rhythms of the ritual dance with the rhythm of



ordinary speech, then it is clear that the vision of life which Chekov is trying to express, the breakdown of the traditional patterns of experience, could never be expressed in formal verse. Chekov's language, then, is not realistic for the sake of realism; it is the perfect instrument for expressing his particular perception of life. It has no metre or definite pattern, yet there is a kind of rhythm, if the organisation of emphasis and repetition so that ear and mind are both satisfied and stimulated, constitutes rhythm. Chekov could not use rich, reverberating language to express the bewilderment and the poverty of modern life, but he orchestrates his speech; it is packed with suggestion and association. Every line has undertones of meaning. It is difficult to perceive this loose rhythm in a single speech but if we think of the third act of *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*, for example we can see how the speech is, as it were, like music, now low, now high, now quick, now slow, now trembling, now crawling; ideas and associations are repeated, picked up, discarded, renewed, so that the accumulative effect is an image of the complexity as well as the futility of life.

As the conversation appears to have no significance so the scenes seem without structure. Chekov's perception of the restlessness, the triviality of existence, the frittering away of values and even desires, is conveyed by creating an illusion of the everyday, casual world, not the concentrated and organized world of drama. Yet there is pattern. In the first act, for example, a climax is reached over the discussion of the fate of the cherry orchard, which is the focal issue of the play. This is prepared for by the usual dramatic methods of mounting tension, increasing pace and significant pause, but the whole process is subdued and overlaid by a rattle of general conversation. The beginning of the act is like the opening movement of a piece of music. The mood is established. Certain motifs are introduced which will be heard again, with variations. From the entrance of Madame Ranevsky the main theme takes on a clearer and more ominous note. Above the hum of trivial conversation, in which the various motifs are nevertheless maintained, odd sentences about the fate of the cherry orchard are heard like the clear, shrill notes of the violin:

'She's nothing left, absolutely nothing.'

'Has the interest on the mortgage been paid?'

'The property will be sold in August.'

At the same time the tension mounts:

'My mistress has come home; at last I've seen her. Now I'm ready to die.'

The desultory conversation slackens, some of the characters go about their business (if they have any) and Lopakhin begins to talk in a deceptively casual way.

'I long to say something charming and delightful to you.'

It is nearly not said at all:

'I'm just off; there's no time to talk. . . .'

which delicately increases, rather than dissipates the tension. Finally it comes baldly out:

'You know that your cherry orchard is going to be sold to pay the mortgage.'

It is a climax; all the failures to make contact have led up to this major failure, to Madame Ranevsky's:

'You don't know what you are talking about. . . .'

and to the revelation of what the orchard really stands for.

In a similar way a discussion about the orchard forms the climax of acts II and III. Different as these three acts are, they follow a curiously similar pattern. At the beginnings of Acts I and II come the speeches by Lopakhin and Charlotte which I have already quoted, which include the significant phrases 'a silk purse out of a sow's ear', and 'I have no proper passport'. Act III begins with a conversation between Barbara and Trophimof in which we are reminded of the blighted romance of the one and the blighted youth of the other, while Pishtchik is talking in the background about his pedigree and his poverty. In each case, the opening note is the mood of displacement, plainly stated. This is followed by a desultory conversation which skilfully reminds us of one aspect after another of the main theme, interspersed with hints of the approaching climax. Each act ends, not on the note on which it began, but on a note of optimism and belief in the future. This is expressed in each case by Anya and it is associated with someone who already represents to us the facility of the play. At the end of Act I, Anya believes her uncle's facile promise to save them from ruin:

'What a dear you are, uncle, and so clever! Now I'm easy again. I'm easy again! I'm happy!'

and she falls asleep to the sound of the shepherd's pipe in the orchard. In Act II she accepts Trophimof's ecstatic picture of the future:

'there is happiness; it is coming towards us, nearer and nearer; I can hear the sound of its footsteps. . . .'

and in defiance of the voice of Barbara calling her to reality she replies:

'Let us go down to the river. It's lovely there.'

When the orchard is sold, it is Anya who comforts her mother and the act ends with the speech where she says:

'Come with me, darling; come away from here. We'll plant a new garden, still lovelier than this. You will see it and understand, and happiness, deep, tranquil happiness will sink down on your soul, like the sun at eventide, and you'll smile, mamma, come, darling, come with me!'

There are, of course, differences of emphasis in these acts, although all the issues are present in each. For example, in the first act the emphasis is on the contrast between the present and the past; it is here that we feel most strongly the nostalgia for the past. In the second act Trophimof glorifies the future; in the third, with the sale of the orchard, we are brought face to face with the present.

We watch Act IV with this thrice-repeated pattern of feeling in our minds. We find it curiously twisted. Trophimof still talks about

the future, Madame Ranevsky still talks about the past, Lopakhin still tries to propose to Barbara, and fails, Ephikhodof swallows a fly, but the cherry orchard is dismissed in a few words by Gayef:

'Till the cherry orchard was sold we were all agitated and miserable; but once the thing was settled finally and irrevocably, we all calmed down and got jolly again.'

Anya still has her belief in life and walks gaily into the future saying:

'a new, wonderful world will open up before us.'

But this does not end the act. It ends with the deserted Firs and the axe in the orchard.

There is, then, a perceptible pattern in *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*, although it is not the pattern of Greek or Elizabethan drama. It is this which makes Eva Le Gallienne, who looks at the plays as an actress and not as a critic, write in her preface to Constance Garnett's translation:

'Try to cut a Chekov play and, if you are sensitive to dramatic medium, you will find it impossible. You cut a small thread, seemingly unimportant, in the first act. All may be well for a time, but in the last act you will find the other end of that thread—its ultimate purpose—its profound reason, and there will be a hole in your tapestry.'<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps the most significant thing about the design of *THE CHERRY ORCHARD* is that it has pattern without progression. The play ends where it began. The characters who leave the house are the same people who entered it. They are not changed as the characters in *KING LEAR* and *ÆDIPUS REX* are changed. The wheel of destiny does not turn full circle as it does in *THE WINTER'S TALE*.

#### 4.

### RESPONSE TO THE NEW PATTERN

Because of this pattern without progression, there can be no tragic catharsis. Chekov's first play made no impression upon the audience. The satisfaction which we feel in seeing *THE CHERRY ORCHARD* is of a different kind from that experienced in the theatre of Shakespeare or Sophocles. In searching for the source of this satisfaction we find that the effect of this pattern is to emphasize the juxtaposition of different moods, to excite in the spectator ambivalent feelings. This is true of the play as a whole but I shall illustrate it from a short scene in the first act.

At the moment in Act I when Gayef and his sister are showing their crass inability to face the future with honesty, Chekov gives them most charm and makes us share their nostalgia for the past. It is at this point that Firs, always a sympathetic character, reminds us how the cherry orchard was once a source of prosperity.

This yearning for the past is not allowed to become heroic. The

romance of tradition is contained for Gayef in an old nursery cupboard:

*'Gayef.* Do you know how old this cupboard is, Lyuba? A week ago I pulled out the bottom drawer and saw a date in it. That cupboard was made exactly a hundred years ago. What do you think of that, eh? We might celebrate its jubilee. It's only an inanimate thing, for all that it's a historic cupboard.'

There is no reason, of course, why a simple cupboard should not be a symbol of a splendid past, but Gayef himself destroys its seriousness by his uncontrollable rhetoric:

*'Gayef.* Yes, it's a wonderful thing. . . . Beloved and venerable cupboard; honour and glory to your existence, which for more than a hundred years has been directed to the noble ideas of justice and virtue. Your silent summons to profitable labour has never weakened in all these hundred years. You have upheld the courage of succeeding generations of human kind; you have upheld faith in a better future and cherished in us ideals of goodness and social consciousness.'

For a moment we were in sympathy with Gayef, now he is a figure of fun, and it is precisely while we are thus distanced from the whole issue that Madame Ranevsky makes her moving speeches about the orchard which end:

'There on the right where the path turns down to the summer-house, there's a tree that leans over and looks like a woman. What a wonderful orchard, with its white masses of blossom and the blue sky above!'

The simplicity of this language and the clarity of the imagery contrast strongly with Gayef's rhapsody. We enter into Madame Ranevsky's feelings. But we have not forgotten the nursery cupboard. It is too close in time, and there is too much family likeness between Gayef and his sister for them to occupy separate compartments in our minds. Our laughter over the cupboard and our tears over the orchard are, in some curious way, fused.

I. A. Richards suggests that the catharsis of tragedy depends upon the reconciliation of discordant impulses of pity and terror.<sup>6</sup> In the same way the special quality of the dramatic tension in Chekov depends on the reconciliation of opposing impulses. It is not pity and terror that are counter-poised, and there is no tragic catharsis, but our emotional response depends on a balance of opposing attitudes; feelings of contempt, for example, are balanced by feelings of sympathy.

The dramatic method by which our feeling about Gayef and the cupboard infiltrated into our feelings about Madame Ranevsky and the orchard is characteristic. The ambiguity of mood and feeling in this particular scene is symptomatic of a wider and deeper ambiguity in the play as a whole. The play portrays people whose lives are futile and purposeless, but who, at the same time, make a living

response to circumstances. For me, there is more conviction of life in one of Madame Ravensky's speeches than in the whole of *THE FAMILY REUNION*. For example, as she is leaving her home she says:

'It's as if I had never noticed before what the walls and ceilings of the house were like. I look at them hungrily . . .'

The response to life never falters, although it may be pathetic, even ridiculous. When at the end of Act I, Anya goes to sleep believing that Gayef will save the family, we are aware of irony, but we do not feel either simple contempt or simple despair. That youth can retain hope, as Anya retains it to the end of the play, in the face of every discouragement, is a symptom of a spirit of life, not heroic, but extraordinarily persistent. We know that Anya's hopes are futile but this does not destroy the value of their existence. The effect is perhaps to some extent similar to that of the novels of Camus, where we see humanity stripped of everything, of any belief in purpose or design in this life as the next, still struggling, refusing to turn its face to the wall.

In our final response to *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*, we are simultaneously aware of the dreariness of a waste land inhabited by displaced persons, and of a persistent sense of actual vitality. This is at once a source of continued dramatic tension and of final satisfaction. We are teased by these conflicting feelings, denied every easy solution, until as Anya goes gaily out and the axe falls inexorably on the trees, we feel profoundly the paradoxical nature of truth.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Calderon. *THE SEAGULL, THE CHERRY ORCHARD*. The Travellers' Library, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup>*MURDER IN THE CATHEDRAL*, T. S. Eliot, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup>*POEMS*, T. S. Eliot, p. 91.

<sup>5</sup>*THE PLAYS OF ANTON CHEKOV*, translated by Constance Garnett, p. 245.

<sup>6</sup>*PRINCIPLES OF LITERARY CRITICISM*, I. A. Richards, London, 1944, p. 245.

# ANDRE GIDE'S FAUX MONNAYEURS— AN INTRODUCTION

'De cette oeuvre on ne peut guère parler que d'une manière injuste.'

—*Maurice Blanchot.*

by K. GRESHOF

## I

André Gide is not a great writer, in the sense that Dostoievski or Stendhal or even Malraux, is a great writer. He has not written one truly great book, and, if one reads through his collected works, from *LES CAHIERS D'ANDRÉ WALTER* to *THÉSÉE*, one is struck by a peculiar kind of thin translucent delicateness. His work is constantly intelligent but has not got that part of opaque energy which gives its solidity and its greatness to the work of a Balzac or a Flaubert. In fact, what strikes one, in spite of Gide's intelligence and the clarity of his writing, is, what one might call, the literary insignificance of his work. Yet, for anyone who studies twentieth century literature, Gide is unavoidably there. One must face him.

Gide's position in his time is similar to Voltaire's. Voltaire, although a clear mind and an admirable stylist, was not a great writer either. His work is equally thin, and of the enormous body of his complete works little remains. (And what will remain of Gide?) Yet no student of the eighteenth century can ignore Voltaire. Both Gide and Voltaire belong to that small and, in a way, privileged group of writers who, more through their personal influence than through the greatness of their work, help to make and mould their time. The eighteenth century is called '*Le Siècle de Voltaire*' and this should be taken as an indication of authorship, a part of '*Les Oeuvres de Voltaire*'; for in many ways the eighteenth century was, in fact, made by Voltaire. It is conceivable, and for similar reasons, that the first fifty years of our Century will be known as '*L'Epoque de Gide*'. For, whether one likes it or not, it is Gide who, more than anyone else, has moulded the 'moral' climate of the years after the First World War. And, in this way richer than Voltaire, Gide has not only 'made' his time, but he has reflected it, and made it by reflecting it. Gide's influence, in France and throughout Europe is widespread and impossible to define or to demarcate, it pervades the atmosphere, and whether like a fresh perfume or a poison gas it clings to every book and to every person.

In spite of this vast, ill-defined but very real influence, Gide has

had no followers or disciples, not only because he refused to become '*un chef de file*' but also because of the very nature of his mind and of his work. For who can follow a leader who firmly resolves not to decide? Gide is a wilfully complex and a calculatedly ambiguous person. He prides himself on being elusive, and the nature of his work cannot be caught in any one formula. Any label will betray him, but that poor, overworked critic's stop-gap word 'ambiguous' will betray him least. One of the most illustrative definitions of Gide's work has been given by Peter Quenell: 'There are in the pattern of Gide's work as it were two lines of feeling and imagination: the straight line (or narrow path) of restraint and rectitude and, woven round it, like the serpents round the rod of Hermes, another line, fluid, adventurous, volatile, the line of heart and temperament and poetic sensuality'. Gide himself expressed the duality of his mind when he said: '*Les extrêmes me touchent*'.

Gide is so conscious of the endless possibilities of life that he refuses to choose, because any choice would be a form of amputation. He wants to experience as much as possible, to throw himself open to life; to live, as it were, totally and endlessly multiplied, unhampered by morals or by social codes. He seeks an impossible freedom beyond good and evil. But there is another Gide, one who follows the straight and narrow path, the Puritan who feels the intense and real necessity for self-discipline, self-knowledge and self-control.

These two extremes, the hedonist and the puritan, meet in Gide, and the contradiction, unresolved, is being lived and accepted by him. Between God and the Devil Gide refuses to choose and he prefers to be the accomplice of both. This is perhaps why Gide is so disturbing, for while most of us are familiar with the experience of such an ambiguity we finally do choose. Gide, on the contrary, with a sort of forceful indecisiveness refuses to take sides. He does not want to commit himself to one attitude when so many are possible: '*J'ai la terreur des partis-pris*'. It is this fear which gives his work the peculiar character it has.

The work of a writer is nearly always a synthesis of an experience and that is what gives it its unity. But Gide's work, born less from a desire to unify than from a desire to disrupt and to disturb, has no apparent unity. Nevertheless if one reads his work in chronological order a pendulum-like pattern emerges. Always aware of both sides of a question and refusing to prefer the one to the other, he will present both sides consecutively. But this pattern is by no means regular and all that really can be said is that it is the dominant pattern of a number of patterns.

To illustrate this point let us consider two 'novels': *L'IMMORALISTE* and *LA PORTE ETROITE*. In *L'IMMORALISTE* Gide describes a man destroyed by his own freedom. Michel, gravely ill, goes together with his wife to North Africa. Here he not only recovers but also rediscovers life and with a kind of pagan joy gives himself over to it. He wants to feel life through all his pores,

he wants to live all possible experiences. Michel, carried away in his thirst for life, rejects all barriers and thus becomes a corrupting influence: indirectly he kills his wife and finally destroys himself. Here it seems as if Gide takes position, a position, which incidentally contradicts his own *NOURRITURES TERRESTRES*. But seven years later Gide publishes *LA PORTE ETROITE* in which he shows a young girl being corrupted and, in a sense, destroyed by virtuousness and self-sacrifice. In this book he takes up a position which flatly contradicts the thesis of *L'IMMORALISTE*.

If the work of Gide centres in anything it centres in contradiction. And that is what gives it its irritating mobility but also its liveliness; for, thought Gide, only the dead or the near-dead do not contradict themselves. This deliberate ambiguity and contradiction make Gide in spite of his clarity difficult to understand: because we never know where we stand. Gide himself derived an impish pleasure from the confusion of his critics: during a discussion with Gide someone said to him: 'Ah, je vous comprends', to which Gide replied immediately: 'Ne me comprenez pas si vite'. In spite of its apparent arrogance this 'boutade', like all 'boutades', contains a considerable part of truth. One can never understand Gide wholly, or rather, one can never see the whole of him at once. If to understand means to see a whole problem clearly, to have a person or an experience in focus, then it is impossible to understand Gide, for when focusing on Gide the Puritan, Gide the Hedonist is out of focus and vice versa.

## II

Gide is essentially a moralist. Throughout his work he is constantly preoccupied with moral problems, and the freedom which he preaches is never, in the eyes of Gide, moral licence; it is a means of becoming oneself. Heir to Nietzschean individualism, Gide wants the individual to be totally himself. To do this he must break the hard shell of social and moral conventions which distort him and stilt his growth. Gide wants man to escape from all conventional attitudes which betray him. In *LE RETOUR DE L'ENFANT PRODIGE* the son after having run away from his family returns, and when his mother asks him 'Qu'est-ce qui t'attirait donc au dehors?' he answers: 'Rien . . . moi-même'. The important point here is that he rejects conventions in order to become himself, but returns to them freely once he has found himself.

In at least two of Gide's major works *LES CAVES DU VATICAN* and *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS*, the heroes are illegitimate children, they are free and 'natural'. In describing in *LES CAVES DU VATICAN* the education and background of Lafcadio, what Gide stresses is the total lack of constraints of this education. Lafcadio, an illegitimate child (or as one of my students put it: 'une enfant de joie'), travels with his mother from Paris to Rome, from Rome to Warsaw to Baden-Baden, educated (or un-educated)



in an haphazard way by a bewildering variety of 'uncles' who are in reality his mother's lovers. Lafcadio is free from convention but not free from morality, and while he does not live by the conventional moral code he lives with an almost puritanical strictness according to his own morality. So that, while seeming immoral—and that is how he appears to the conventional, fatuous and false Baraglioul—he is, in fact, an essentially moral person. The case of Lafcadio illustrates admirably one of Gide's few precepts: 'Let everyone follow his inclination but up hill'. This phrase combines in a seemingly paradoxical sentence the two sides of Gide: 'follow his inclination' implies the freedom of giving way to oneself, 'up hill' illustrates the hard 'ascèse' needed to be oneself.

In order to be fully and freely oneself one must know oneself: one must know one's own masks and see through one's own excuses. A scrupulous and uncompromising integrity precedes any valid individual morality. A number of Gide's books have moral dishonesty as their theme. It is in *LA SYMPHONIE PASTORALE* that we see this type of false morality most clearly exposed. A pastor takes into his house a young, blind girl. His son falls in love with her and wants to marry her. The pastor opposes the marriage in the name of the Church, Society, Honour. But he refuses to see the true reason for his behaviour: he is in love with the girl. The pastor, in spite of his virtuousness is, in fact, an immoral person. He bluffs himself and hides behind a mask. He is, what Sartre much later will call '*un salaud*'. Gide's morality requires a perpetual vigilance against oneself and a constantly honest assessment of oneself.

In considering Gide's achievement as a novelist and in particular in trying to assess *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS*, these three elements of Gide's moral outlook should be kept in mind, since they will find in *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* their aesthetic counterpart.

First of all there is the intense love of life and the refusal to close the door on any possible experience; in other words, the refusal to limit life by forcing it in any one pattern or any one attitude.

Secondly there is the equally strong puritanical drive towards a rigid discipline. It is significant that Gide considered himself as a classical writer. And thirdly, in Gide's view an individual morality can only be based on an uncompromisingly honest assessment of oneself.

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In spite of the vast body of work which Gide has produced, he has written only one novel, *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS*. He was careful to label all his other pieces of fiction 'récit', 'sotie', 'satire', etc. Gide writes: 'Why do I call this book a "*sotie*", why did I call "tales" the preceding ones? In order to show clearly that they are not novels'. It is clear, then, that Gide has definite ideas about what constitutes a novel. These ideas we shall consider in greater detail later, for the time being let us merely say that in Gide's opinion a

novel is more complex in structure, richer in content and more serious in purpose than either a tale or a narrative or a story or a farce.

Gide's 'récits' such as *L'IMMORALISTE*, *LE PORTE ETROITE* or *LA SYMPHONIE PASTORALE*, whether written in the form of a diary, a letter or a straightforward narrative, have one thing in common: they are all 'unilinear'. There is one plot with few characters, usually two and sometimes four, and the moral issue involved is, on the whole, unambiguously suggested. (As we have seen before, however, the unambiguous stand taken by Gide in each of his books tends to be misleading.) These 'récits' have the stark, willed simplicity of a classical tragedy and Gide's bare, 'dépouillé' style suits this form admirably. The range of experience is usually narrow, not very deeply explored, but limpidly seen and clearly realised. It is obvious that Gide in his 'récits' amputates life, stylises it and encloses it in an arbitrary form. All this creates an impression of deliberate flatness and of a certain poverty of vision. But this impression although true to some extent—Gide's tales do tend to be rather tenuous—is not entirely justified. For just as the moral problem acquires its complexity from the 'other narrative' (Cf. *L'IMMORALISTE* and *LA PORTE ETROITE*), so the psychological richness of one récit is really derived from the next one. Gide always wrote one book with the next book in mind. In his diary Gide writes: 'In it (i.e. the preface to *LES CAVES DU VATICAN*) I told the reader that *LES CAVES DU VATICAN* lived in my head for fifteen years, just as I carried *LA PORTE ETROITE* for fifteen years, and a little longer the first-born *L'IMMORALISTE*. All these subjects developed concurrently and in a parallel way, and if I wrote one book before another it is because the subject seemed to be more "at hand" as the English say. If I could I would have written them together.' And Jean Hytier in his excellent study on Gide writes: 'By putting the "tales" together one could make a novel'.

By presenting a moral and a psychological problem in this 'consecutive' manner, Gide, suspends his judgment. Despairing of showing both sides of the medal at the same time, he shows, with equal objectivity, one side after the other and thus avoids choosing. And ultimately Gide says nothing or rather gives the impression of having said nothing, and that is the impression he wants to give.

The 'sotie' though different from the 'récit' is also essentially a means of avoiding a choice. Again in Gide's view, a 'sotie' is not a novel, for a novel according to Gide, reproduces reality, while a 'sotie' is a farce: a caricatural distortion of reality, in which everything, plot, characters and incident are farcical. Yet at the same time, while fooling, Gide in a 'sotie' is constantly dealing with serious aesthetic or moral questions, whose seriousness is constantly and maddeningly contradicted by the farcical form, so that once again we never know exactly where we stand. The farce allows Gide to twist out of any awkward situation. Gide is Pierrot who answers

with a pirouette and a smile, but we must not forget, and we know it, of course, that Pierrot can also be very earnest. The fact that a book like *LES CAVES DU VATICAN* or *PALUDES* (which Gide significantly calls 'cette satire de quoi? . . .') is *not* a novel implies that it is not real and that it is not meant to be real. To earnest people Gide will answer: 'But this is only a joke, it is not a novel but a "sotie".' Treating serious problems in a farcical way gives Gide the freedom not to decide, not to take sides. 'In a "Sotie"' writes Claude-Edmonde Magny, 'it is sufficient for the author to pretend that all this is merely a farce. "Let's assume that I haven't said anything", as says Prometheus in his funeral oration for Damocles in Gide's *LES PROMÉTHÉE MAL ENCHAINÉ*'. The 'sotie' is perhaps the genre best suited to Gide's literary talent and to his will to ambiguity, and it is significant that *LES CAVES DU VATICAN* was Gide's favourite book.

But, as we have noted, a 'sotie' is not a novel. To begin with it creates a purely arbitrary and artificial world, we move in universe of papier maché, the situations are fantastic, the incidents mechanical, and the characters are flat, exaggerated and they strike clowning attitudes, they are marionettes. This is precisely what Gide wanted, for one cannot make a morality play with dolls. There is in *LES CAVES DU VATICAN*, however, one character who does not share this marionette-like flatness, and that is the hero of the novel: Lafcadio. It is not merely because he is the protagonist that he has more substance, but also, because, in contrast to all the other characters, he is the only 'novel-character' in the book. Gide's treatment of him is fuller, more 'nuancé', more subtle; Lafcadio shows the *possibility* of another dimension: and this makes him the first real character created by Gide. Lafcadio, partly because of his reality, is the bridge between the 'artificial and arbitrary' 'récits' and 'soties' and Gide's only full blown novel. *LES CAVES DU VATICAN* is the last 'non-novel' piece of fiction Gide will write before *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS*.

### III

If we look at the evolution of Gide two remarkable facts emerge, first of all, that his moral outlook hardly changes, in other words there is no evolution, while, on the other hand, aesthetically there is a very marked change towards a greater technical maturity, a greater control over the various media he uses and a greater clarity of vision. If morally Gide seems to be going nowhere, aesthetically we see him move from the simple unicellular 'récit' to the immensely complex multi-cellular novel; and then, after the partial failure of *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* back again to the 'récits'. It seems almost as if the whole of the aesthetic life of Gide were geared to the writing of this one novel. All the other books, outside their own value, their own faults and qualities, appear as preludes to *LES*

FAUX MONNAYEURS. They are literary finger exercises through which Gide will acquire, what Claude-Edmonde Magny calls his 'diabolique habileté'.

For six years, from 1919 to 1925, LES FAUX MONNAYEURS was the main axis of Gide's thought, and even though he did other work during this time—large parts of his autobiography, *SI LE GRAIN NE MEURT*, were written during that period—his mind constantly returned to LES FAUX MONNAYEURS and to the baffling and almost insoluble problems its composition created. The result of this great effort is perhaps a part failure; it is nevertheless with all its shortcomings one of the most significant works of our time. LES FAUX MONNAYEURS together with Joyce's *ULYSSES* is perhaps the most important literary experiment of the last fifty years. But LES FAUX MONNAYEURS is not only an experimental novel, it is also a treatise on the novel. It is at one and the same time a theory of the novel and an attempt to apply that theory.

In order to understand the meaning and the scope of Gide's experiment one must not lose out of sight his aesthetic formation and the condition of the novel at that time. Although Gide freed himself from his aesthetic past, in the same unsatisfactory manner as he freed himself from his puritanical past, he is nevertheless essentially a nineteenth century aesthete. From his early Symbolist training he carried over a belief in formal perfection and a constant preoccupation with aesthetic problems, which made him write in his diary: 'The aesthetic point of view is the only one to take if one is to judge my work sanely'. Consequently LES FAUX MONNAYEURS is essentially an experiment with form and an essay on the form of the novel. It is only by seeing it from this purely aesthetic angle that one can judge the novel 'sanely'.

Also Gide's Symbolist formation will, to a great degree, determine his attitude towards reality; and the writer's transformation of reality is one of the main themes of LES FAUX MONNAYEURS. Above all else Gide feels himself to be an artist for whom only the work of art is real and true and who considers reality not as real but as an unfortunately necessary starting point for a work of art. Edouard, the novelist in LES FAUX MONNAYEURS, when being reproached that 'reality does not interest you', replies in the true manner of the aesthete: 'yes it does, but it irks me'. And the central character of *PALUDES*, significantly also a novelist, says: 'I arrange facts in such a way as to make them conform more closely to truth than they do in reality'. And this is precisely what Gide some seventy years later will try to do in LES FAUX MONNAYEURS: to break up what we, in our lazy way, have been used to think of as reality and to create a new and truer reality.

Purely in a literary historical sense Gide, like Joyce and Woolf in England, rebels against the eighteenth century 'realistic' novel from which our view of reality is derived; he wants to take the novel out of its realist rut ('faire sortir le roman de l'ornière réaliste'). Gide in

LES FAUX MONNAYEURS reacts sharply against those nice, good, solid novels of Bourget or Bazin (in England they were called Bennett or Galsworthy) with their neat conventional plots (beginning, climax, end), their stock characters living their well-worn, stock emotions. LES FAUX MONNAYEURS was written against those whose ambition it was to give in their novels 'a slice of Life': "A slice of life" said the realist school. The great mistake of that school is to cut its slice always in the same direction; length-wise, in the direction of time. Why not breadth-wise or depth-wise? As far as I am concerned I do not want to cut anything. Please, understand me: I would like to put everything in this novel. No cuttings to stop its substance at this point rather than at another'. These words are spoken by Edouard. For Gide, a novelist who slices life betrays its complexities and its possibilities. The endless intricacies of relationships, the infinite nuances of experience, the limitless possibilities of life are being ignored and what we are being presented with in these novels is a limited, arbitrary, simplified and falsified reality. The life of a person does not ever follow such a well-defined course, an adventure or a love affair is never so clearly plotted. Life is endlessly flexible and fluid and it is that flexibility and fluidity which the realist novelist betrays: 'But, my dear friend, you know perfectly well that nothing drags on so interminably as a misunderstanding. It is your business as novelists to solve them. In life itself nothing is ever solved, everything continues'. In this sentence the opposition between the 'realistic' novelist's representation of life and life itself is sharply brought into focus.

What Gide wants then is not to betray the elastic, haphazard nature of our living, where more often than not things are not planned but *happen* to us and where the unforeseeable has unforeseeable consequences. In order to do this Gide will have to discard the plot, which, because of its arbitrariness, destroys precisely the illusion of fluidity, yet, at the same time, he will be forced to tell a coherent tale. In the loosely constructed LES FAUX MONNAYEURS he tries to establish 'a continuous relation between scattered elements; I would like, however, to avoid that what makes a "plot" artificial, but the events should group themselves independently from Lafcadio's\* will and so to speak, without his knowledge'. The novel of which Gide dreams is a novel which has neither beginning nor end. Edouard, one of LES FAUX MONNAYEURS's central figures and Gide's spiritual half-brother, writes in his diary: 'X. maintains that a good novelist must know, before beginning a book, what its end will be. As for me, who lets his book go freely, I consider that life never offers any situation which, while it might be a point of arrival, cannot also be taken as a new point of departure. "Could be continued . . ." it is with these words that I would like to end (my book)'. And Gide himself, in his JOURNAL DES FAUX MONNAYEURS echoes this when he

\*Lafcadio, the protagonist of LES CAVES DU VATICAN, was in the early drafts the hero of LES FAUX MONNAYEURS as well.

writes: '(This Novel) will end abruptly, not because of the exhaustion of the subject-matter which must give the impression of being inexhaustible, but, on the contrary, by its broadening, by a sort of blurring of the edges. It must not be tied up, but must loosen up and disintegrate'.

At the same time, while planning a novel which will leave intact the outer complexity of life, Gide wants a novel which will not betray the inner complexity of the life of a person. Here again he feels that the conventional novel, in spite of the psychological ingenuity of some of its practitioners, reveals only the surface of human experience; it simplifies, prunes, stylises and in so doing destroys the intricate richness of emotions and thought. Gide, Virginia Woolf, and the Joyce of *FINNEGAN'S WAKE*, all three really aim at the same thing, only their means differ. For while Woolf and Joyce tend to reproduce as faithfully as possible the actual working of the mind with its fits and starts, its interruptions, etc., and in doing so tend to destroy the novel and to write a form of extremely esoteric poetry, Gide wants to preserve the novel and to try and achieve the illusion of psychological complexity through the skilful use of an intricate system of angles from which both the characters and the novel itself are seen. This system has the added advantage of enabling Gide to break open the conventional 'narrative' form of the novel. He now abandons the unilinear 'récit' for a richer and more composite form of novel: 'I spent the whole day yesterday trying to convince myself that I could not let everything go through Lafcadio, I would like a number of go-betweens; for instance these notes of Lafcadio would occupy the first book, the second book would consist of the note-book of Edouard, the third of an advocate's brief, and so on'.

There exists between Gide's moral outlook and his aesthetic ideas a high degree of correlation. The twin contradictory moral drives which motivate Gide's work and of which the 'Que chacun suive sa pente . . . etc' is the clearest expression, have their aesthetic counterparts. The desire for a sprawling, anarchistically free novel, which would be an attempt to re-create without betraying it, the wonderfully rich totality of life, comes from Gide the Hedonist, who rejects as bad anything which hampers the free flowering of a person. But there is the other face of Gide, the thin-lipped puritan: Gide with his exacting integrity, his hatred of easy hypocritical living and of sloth. This side of Gide finds its aesthetic expression in the desire for a 'pure' novel, a very strictly formal novel. The desire for a free novel is being contradicted—but also, in an odd way, enriched—by a desire for a strict form, just as the Hedonist is being contradicted—but also complemented—by the puritan.

Gide wants to 'cleanse' the novel of all its non-novel elements and at the same time wants to give it the purity of line and form of a classical tragedy. In his *Diary Edouard* writes: 'Strip the novel of all the elements which do not specifically belong to the novel. In the same way as, not so long ago, photography freed painting from

the worry of certain exactitudes, so the gramophone will no doubt cleanse the novel of those direct dialogues in which the realist so often glories.' The idea is being expressed by Edouard in a slightly exaggerated form and we shall see later the purpose of this exaggeration; nevertheless Edouard expresses, at least, part of Gide's own thought. In his *JOURNAL DES FAUX MONNAYEURS* Gide writes: 'Purge the novel from all the elements which do not specifically belong to it. Nothing good is obtained from a mixture.' It is obvious that these ideas carried to their ultimate conclusions would eventually destroy the novel: for what elements belong *specifically* to the novel? But if one disregards the absurd part of these ideas, it is still quite clear what Gide is after. He wants a 'classical' novel which will have the external simplicity of the French classical tragedy but which at the same time will not simplify and therefore destroy the life of the characters. Gide wants to do for the novel what Corneille and Racine have done for the tragedy. Edouard in a most important and famous passage of *L'ES FAUX MONNAYEURS* says: 'The novel has never known this "formidable erosion of contours" of which Nietzsche speaks, nor this voluntary brushing aside of life, which, for instance, gave the Greek tragedies and the eighteenth century tragedies their style. Do you know anything more perfect than these works? But, precisely, they are human only in depth, they do not pretend to appear real, they remain works of art.' This quotation more than any other illuminates what Gide wants a novel to be. But a word of warning is needed in relation to this and all other quotations where Edouard speaks about the novel. We must not forget that it is Edouard, Gide's creature, who speaks and not Gide himself. Edouard may resemble Gide like a brother; he is not Gide. In his *JOURNAL DES FAUX MONNAYEURS* Gide sketches the outline of the ideas I quoted above, but then he adds: 'I think that all this should be said by Edouard, this will allow me to add that however judicious his remarks are, I do not agree with him on all points'. As an example of this pure 'eroded' novel, Gide quotes *LA DOUBLE MÉPRISE* by Mérimée: 'I doubt whether one can think of a purer novel than *LA DOUBLE MÉPRISE*. But this novel is no more than a long short story. It is thin and skeletal and in spite of its subtlety both in writing and composition, rather anaemic. If Mérimée's novel is Gide's ideal it becomes obvious that this kind of classicism amputates the novel of something which seems specific to it; and that by pruning the novel to its essentials it loses also its blood: that obscure energy which runs over the edges and which gives life to the novels of Balzac, Stendhal or Dostoievsky.

## IV

Let us now consider *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* itself. It is a novel which, on first reading, appears to have no unity: 'This book has not got, properly speaking, one centre around which all my efforts converge', says Gide. It is therefore almost impossible to give a précis of the story: Gide, faithful to his theory, has given us in *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* a novel without a plot and without an immediately discernible theme. Edouard, having been asked of the novel which he is writing and the subject of the novel, replies: 'It hasn't got one'. It has instead a number of themes and a number of episodes or, as E. M. Forster calls them, 'fragments of plots', all of which are so delicately interwoven that it is impossible to unravel them without betraying their meaning.

The fragments of plot deal with a shy love affair between Edouard, a novelist, and his adolescent nephew, Olivier, the platonic love of Bernard, a 'free' illegitimate child, who has left his family, and a married woman, Laura Douviers. Bernard is Olivier's closest friend and becomes Edouard's secretary. Laura has been in love with Edouard and is expecting an illegitimate child by Olivier's elder brother, Vincent. The novel deals further with a gang of counterfeiters led by the mysterious Stroubilhou, a close friend of a writer called Passavant, who, in turn, is a friend of Vincent and who will employ Olivier as his secretary . . . , etc., etc. This very brief indication of some of the strands of the plot makes one thing immediately clear, that the book has a plot, but one which has been deliberately smashed; all the characters link up, all the divergent and apparently divergent episodes are almost invisibly tied together. The novel has in fact, Claude-Edmonde Magny points out, the rigid organisation of a detective novel. At the same time it has the appearance of being as loosely woven and as haphazard as our real lives.

*LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* is a novel without a visible axis; it has instead a number of axes, or rather it has a number of circles which are not concentric, but which intersect each other at unexpected points and which, in one way or another are all linked together. This lack of an obvious, recognisable centre does create a certain amount of confusion and is at times irritating, but that is partly what Gide wanted: to disturb us and to shake us out of our complacency.

What makes *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* still more confusing and more 'difficult', is the multiplicity of techniques used by Gide to tell his stories and the multiplicity of angles from which these stories are seen. Some chapters are straightforward narrative, some are written almost entirely as direct dialogue, other parts again consist of interior monologues and finally some of the action is revealed to us through the Diary of Edouard.

Edouard, as E. M. Forster points out, comes nearest to being the centre of the novel: all the fragments of plot meet in him. He is the uncle of Olivier, the counsellor of Laura, the friend of Bernard,



the acquaintance of Passavant, in short 'he knows everybody'. Edouard, a conscientious novelist, writes a diary in which he keeps a record of events, gives his reflections on these events and jots down notes towards his novel. This novel is called *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* and in it he will 'use' the people with whom he is being involved: Laura, Olivier, Bernard, etc. He occupies a privileged position in the novel, being at one and the same time actor and spectator. He is part of the action and therefore belongs partly to the world of fiction, but his diary situates him outside the action as well, and through this he becomes the reader's ally: he has one foot in the camp of reality (his close resemblance to the author enhances his reality) and one foot in the camp of fiction.

The function of Edouard's Diary is, first of all, simply to act as a mirror: to reflect, from inside the novel, the events and the characters. The effect is similar to that of certain labels showing, say, a nurse carrying a tray on which stands a tin whose label shows a nurse carrying a tray on which . . . , etc. This idea of hanging a mirror inside the novel in order to reflect the action of the novel is one of Gide's oldest notions. In 1893, thirty-odd years before the publication of *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS*, he wrote in his Diary: 'I rather like to find inside a work of art, but transformed and on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work of art. Nothing is more illuminating and establishes more surely the proportions of the whole work. In this way, in the paintings of Memling and Quentin Metzys a little convex mirror reflects, in its turn, the inside of the room where the scene takes place.' The mirror in *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* does not only establish proportions, but what is more important, it gives the characters another dimension: they are not only presented by the author but reflected by the diary. And this reflection admirably creates the illusion of freedom, it frees the characters from their creator. The fact that we can see them reflected in a diary makes them appear independent of fiction. This is, of course, an optical illusion—it is all done by mirrors—but it is an illusion which works. Gide is rather like the circus hypnotist who makes a person levitate. To show there are no strings and no tricks he passes the body through a hoop and this convinces us. The Diary of Edouard in *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* fulfils the same function as the hypnotist's hoop.

Edouard's Diary, however, has not merely the passive function of reflecting. In a rather complicated way it is actively engaged in the novel. First of all Gide uses it as an instrument of narration: a number of episodes are told to us through Edouard, so that the Diary dovetails with the straight narrative parts. But it also is part and parcel of the plot; the Diary, as it were, comes alive and starts playing an active part in the development of the novel: Bernard, having stolen Edouard's suitcase, discovers the writer's note-book, which he reads from cover to cover. The reader acquires through this reading of Bernard a vast amount of information about the characters and their relationships, at the same time it is through their reading of

the Diary that Bernard gets to know, and eventually meets, Edouard and Laura. Edouard's note-book, in this instance, becomes an active agent in the plot: it becomes a sort of *deus ex machina*.

Finally, the Diary being written by a novelist engaged in writing a novel called *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* provides the novel with one of its major themes and grafts on the main fragments of plot another plot, which, in turn, draws its nourishment from the first ones: the story of Edouard's struggle to write and think out his novel: 'It is around two centres in the manner of ellipses, that my efforts are polarised. On the one hand the events, the facts, the external data; on the other hand the efforts of the novelist trying to make a book with all that'. *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* is partly a novel about the birth of a novel which will use as its material the lives of the fictional characters created by Gide: Edouard's diary and his novel introduces a second degree of fiction. And it should constantly be kept in mind that, as I have pointed out, Edouard is a fictional character and is not Gide. To say, as does Louis-Martin Chauffier: 'it seems to me that whenever Edouard speaks of his art he is the reflection of the author', will lead to a complete misunderstanding of the rôle which Edouard plays in the novel. Edouard, in reality, is a kind of scapegoat, who, because of the ideas he has about the nature of the novel, will never write that novel. Now, these ideas are Gide's, but distorted by exaggeration and over-statement. Gide, in his *JOURNAL DES FAUX MONNAYEURS*, after having outlined Edouard's (and partly his own) ideas about the 'pure novel', then adds 'Moreover, this pure novel, he will never be able to write it': And in *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS*, Laura, after having listened to Edouard's explanation of his novel exclaims 'My poor man, I see that you will never write it'. Edouard then fails partly because of his own weakness, but also partly because the kind of 'pure novel' he dreams of is, in actual fact, not viable, so that Edouard's inability to write his *FAUX MONNAYEURS* implies an ironic criticism of Gide's own ideas on the novel. The true, and this time undistorted, ideas which Gide had about the novel and on *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* are to be found in the Diary which he kept while he was writing his novel. This note-book, *LES JOURNAL DES FAUX MONNAYEURS*, this time a mirror held up *outside* the novel, although published separately a year afterwards, is, in reality, an integral part of the novel: 'This note-book in which I write the very history of this novel, I see becoming in its entirety part of the novel and, to the intense irritation of the reader, becoming the principal focus of interest'. It is perhaps fortunate that Gide has resisted that impulse.

As far as *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* as a novel is concerned, what the presence of Edouard's Diary does achieve is to create an impression of freedom about the characters by making them in turn subjects of a piece of fiction. This freedom, although illusory, stems in a way from Gide's moral outlook. To force Edouard, Bernard, etc., to be what they are not would have been 'wrong'. So Gide

lets his characters grow inside him, they feed on him, but he lets them grow their own way. One sees clearly the independence of the characters of Gide, and Gide's detachment from them, in such notes in *LE JOURNAL DES FAUX MONNAYEURS*: 'Bernard; his character still uncertain. In the beginning perfectly insubordinate'; 'Olivier: his character deforms itself slowly', etc. . . . This carefully guarded pretence that his characters are foreigners to him leads him sometimes into affectation as in this note about one of the minor characters: 'I did not know him sufficiently when he threw himself in my book. He is much more interesting than I expected'. But the same pretence of ignorance which in his *Diary* becomes affected is used with admirable effect in the novel.

In order to accentuate the illusion that the people in the novel are real and free, Gide not only has them reflected in *Edouard's Diary*; he uses also an age-old novelist's trick: he, as the author, intervenes in the novel and comments on the action. But this well-worn device of Victorian novelists is slightly twisted by Gide. To illustrate the different way in which Gide uses this old technique, I shall compare two passages, one from *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS*, the other from Thackeray's *VANITY FAIR*.

In the middle of the novel, Gide stops the action and surveys the characters and the events in the novel: 'I am afraid that by leaving little Boris with the Azais, Edouard is being rather imprudent. But how to stop him? Every being acts according to his own law and that of Edouard makes him experiment continuously. He has a good heart, but for the peace of mind of others I would sometimes prefer him to act out of self-interest. Edouard has irritated me more than once, and even made me indignant; I hope I did not show it too much; now I can say it openly. His way of dealing with Laura was sometimes so generous and at other times seemed revolting. . . .

'Bernard, I think, should still be trusted. He is a generous person. I feel in him a certain virility and strength and he is capable of indignation. He likes hearing himself speak, but then he does speak well. I mistrust feelings which find their expression too readily.'

And now Thackeray: 'Rebecca is a droll funny creature, to be sure; and those descriptions of the poor lady weeping for the loss of her beauty, and the gentleman "with hay-coloured whiskers and straw-coloured hair", are very smart doubtless and show a great knowledge of the world. That she might, when on her knees, have been thinking of something better than Miss Horrock's ribbons, has possibly struck both of us. But my kind reader will please to remember that this history has *VANITY FAIR* for a title, and that *Vanity Fair* is a very vain, wicked, foolish place, full of all sorts of humbugs and falseness and pretensions. And while the moralist on the cover . . . professes to wear neither gown nor bands . . . yet, look you, one is bound to speak the truth as far as one knows it, whether one mounts a cap and bells or a shovel-hat; and a deal of disagreeable matter must come out in the course of such an undertaking.'

The passages are similar, yet their effects and the attitudes they reveal are very different, and there is also a marked difference in the way this same technique is being used. Thackeray talks about his characters with condescension, and one feels therefore very strongly that they are *his* creatures: he knows who they are, what they are and what they will do. Thackeray is omniscient. At the same time he addresses the reader, not as an equal, but uses the tone of amused contempt with which one talks to children or very old people. The effect of all this is to put the accent on the fictitious nature the people and events described in *VANITY FAIR* and Thackeray, at the same time, does not want us to forget that he is the novelist. For a brief moment the all-powerful and omniscient author condescends to play with his creatures to amuse the reader with some secrets and to become himself part of the fiction he creates. In other words Thackeray steps *inside* the novel and in doing so puts the accent on fiction.

Gide's attitude towards his characters is totally different, and he will therefore use the same technique in a different way. When talking of his characters there is, in this passage, not the slightest condescension; he talks of his creatures as equals and treats us, the reader, as adults. Gide, in contrast to Thackeray, makes us forget that the characters are *his* creatures: they appear to us as independent people with their own free will, for Gide is not omniscient, he creates the illusion of his own ignorance. He appears to know no more about Edouard and Bernard than we do, and talks about them as if they were familiar strangers. The effect of this is not to accentuate the fictional nature of the characters but to liberate them from fiction. Gide does not step inside the novel but makes his characters step out of it and for a brief, illusory moment, but one which will echo throughout the book, the characters of *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* are our equals and live in our reality.

So much then about the experiment of *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS*. Before attempting to assess the novel I want to try and examine 'what *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* is about'. When Bernard asks Edouard, who has been talking about his novel: 'Tell us, these counterfeiters who are they?' Edouard replies: 'Well, I have no idea.' Again, we can't take Edouard quite seriously, and it is obvious that Gide had at least some idea who the counterfeiters were and what he wanted to say. But, at the same time, he would like us to think that he does not know, just as he wanted to make us believe that he was as ignorant of Olivier's or Laura's next move as we were. Gide here voluntarily blurs the issue and covers his tracks: once again, he is being deliberately ambiguous.

First of all a degree of confusion is created by the number of meanings which, just like the fragments of plot, are all intertwined, although not all are of equal importance. Who then are the counterfeiters? Quite obviously the gang headed by Strouvillou which uses the schoolboys of the Pension Azaïs to pass the bad money. But there are also those who in one way or another counterfeit life,

like Passavant, the fashionable novelist, who merely wants to shock, who is superficial, morally shoddy, who corrupts Vincent and tries to corrupt Olivier. Passavant is set in contrast with Edouard, who, although he does not always succeed, tries to live with integrity. Passavant is, in a way, the counterfeit version of Edouard. It is significant that Passavant, the moral counterfeiter, should be an intimate friend of Strouvilhou, the monetary counterfeiter. They are both sides of the same counterfeit coin, and they both represent the Devil. The Devil was to have been one of the main characters of the novel: 'Last night I wrote some pages of dialogue on this subject (the Devil finds its affirmation in our negation) which could well become the principal subject of the novel, i.e. the invisible point around which everything would turn'. Both Passavant and Strouvilhou, together with their ally, Lady Griffith, corrupt life around them, by counterfeiting our real values. However this demonic side of *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* fails to come off because of Gide's timidity of treatment: 'I would like to have a devil who would circulate incognito throughout the book and who would become more and more real as people believed less and less in him'.

But the counterfeiters are not only those who corrupt others but also those who deceive themselves. Occupying a central position in the novel is a Protestant boarding school *La Pension Azais*, which is run by the family Vedel and which has a number of links with the various other plot fragments: Laura's maiden name is Vedel, Edouard is the faithful family friend, and long passages of his diary deal with the *Pension*, Bernard will become a '*surveillant*' at the school and again, significantly, the distributing centre of the coiners is established at the *Pension*.

Without the aid of any description Gide succeeds admirably in conveying to us the stale, oppressive, unhealthy atmosphere of the school 'and of the air which one breathes there under the stifling lid of morality and religion'. The family Vedel lives in an atmosphere of moral dishonesty and pious gullibility and not one of them has the strength to live in a real world. 'The Rev. Vedel is too busy, Mrs. Vedel is lost in a poetico-religious dream where she loses any sense of reality', and the old head of the clan simply does not see what happens around him and mistakes the secret gang of juvenile delinquents which is growing up under his nose, for 'the sort of little association, a league of mutual emulation'. The younger generation of the Vedels are dying of asphyxia and destroy themselves in their attempt to escape: Sarah through sterile promiscuity, Rachel through sterile self-sacrifice, Armand through sterile irony. The others, the elders, rather like the Pastor in *LA SYMPHONIE PASTORALE*, use words, well-meaning meaningless sentiments, and ready-made charity to replace real feelings. They, exactly like the schoolboys in their care, but in a different sphere, put false money into circulation.

Finally, and perhaps for Gide this is the most important, there is the novel *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* which Edouard is writing and which, like any piece of fiction, is the false coin of reality.

## V

In trying to assess *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* one should not lose out of sight the fact that Gide set out deliberately to write a novel which would be, both in treatment and in structure, entirely different from any other novel ever written: 'I have carefully avoided in my *FAUX MONNAYEURS* all those things which another could have done just as well as I, being satisfied with giving hints which would allow the reader to imagine what I did not show ostentatiously. What is easier than to write an ordinary novel? The idea quite simply repels me, and no more than Valéry can I bring myself to write: 'the Marquise left her home at five in the afternoon!' or, in quite a different order but perhaps even more compromising: 'X. wondered for a long time whether he . . . .'

With equal deliberation Gide set out to write a 'difficult' and 'intellectual' novel. He made no concession to his public, which he assumed to be intelligent and willing to make an effort: 'It would have been easy for me to gain the applause of the masses by writing the *FAUX MONNAYEURS* in the manner of the ordinary novel, describing people and places, analysing feelings, explaining situations, and protecting the laziness of the reader by displaying on the *surface* all those things which I hide between my sentences'. In 1930, while he is writing his novel, Gide notes: 'I write only for those who know how to take a hint'. Finally, one of the last entries of *LE JOURNAL DES FAUX MONNAYEURS* written a few months before he finished the novel, reads: 'First of all make the inventory, the accounts will come later. It is no good getting mixed up. Then, once my book is finished I draw the line and leave it to the reader to either add or subtract. It is not for me to do this. So much the worse for the lazy reader; I write for other readers. My function is to disturb'.

It is obvious that Gide succeeded in writing both a different and an intellectual novel. But it is equally obvious that the novel suffers from a great many faults which stem precisely from its intentions. *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* is a very self-conscious novel, it is self-consciously 'different'; it is aesthetically highly sophisticated and is a constantly intelligent piece of writing. But precisely because of that it lacks a certain simplicity. Gide with the ironic criticism of his novel which he wove into *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* had clearly seen this too. Bernard says to Edouard, after having listened to his plans for his book: 'A good novel is written more naïvely than this'. In his search for a more valid and truer form of realism Gide, paradoxically, is forced to write a novel which is 'un-natural' and to create something which is almost purely artificial, much more so than the 'slice of life' novel against which he rebelled in the name of naturalness.

*LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* is essentially a novelists' novel, or rather an artists' novel written by a man who is passionately interested in problems of aesthetics, and so the centre of the novel

tends to shift. Most, if not all, novels deal with people. But here we have a novel dealing with a novel and, at times, the characters only seem to live in relation to *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* which Edouard is writing. The centre of the novel is not a human problem but an aesthetic one. When Gide toys with the idea of incorporating his *JOURNAL DES FAUX MONNAYEURS* in the main body of the novel he hopes that it will form 'l'intérêt principal'. And the *JOURNAL DES MONNAYEURS* is essentially a book about the aesthetics of the novel. This proposition is slightly overstated but, on the whole, I think it to be true. When Laura tells Edouard that he will never write his novel he answers: 'Well, I don't care. Yes, if I do not manage to write this book it will be because its history will have interested me more than the book itself and will have taken its place and that will be all to the good'. Edouard is not Gide, and Gide will write his novel, but it is nevertheless true that, at times, the aesthetic problem tends to crowd out the characters.

Finally, there is the *JOURNAL DES FAUX MONNAYEURS*. Even though *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS* forms an autonomous whole, Gide, by publishing this running commentary on the gestation and birth of his novel, has, in an odd way, weakened the novel by shifting its centre of gravity and by creating the impression—which is sometimes justified—that the novel acquires its meaning through the commentary. Gide has a marked weakness for diaries and spontaneous notes and jottings. In *PALUDES* one of the characters says to a young novelist about to read from his works: 'Notes. Please, read them, they are always much more amusing. One sees in them so much more clearly what the author wanted to say than in the finished product.' This idea, although expressed by one of his characters, seems fairly close to Gide's own thought; and it is a dangerous way of thinking for any artist, since it tends to negate his very *raison d'être*: the work of art. Edouard was prepared for this kind of aesthetic suicide.

By publishing *LE JOURNAL DES FAUX MONNAYEURS* Gide also revealed the limitations of himself as a novelist. Edouard's incapacity to write his novel stands in direct relation to the insight he has into the problems of his novel: Edouard, as we have seen, is the failure Gide could have been. And it is true that Gide did write *LES FAUX MONNAYEURS*, but—and that *LE JOURNAL DES FAUX MONNAYEURS*'s publication reveals so clearly—he wrote the novel in the way Edouard would have written it: as an 'homme de lettres' passionately interested in the problem of the novel, but not as a novelist.

A novelist, like any creative artist, needs passion. It is with this passion that he creates his characters, and on this passion they feed. But this passion, in Gide, is, in a way, side-tracked: instead of its being used to create characters it serves another purpose: for it is with passion that Gide studies and discusses the novel. Hence the odd impression of a false perspective which *LES FAUX MON-*

NAYEURS creates: the novel itself seems to be 'à l'avant scène' while the characters are placed in the background.

This is, obviously, an overstatement: no novel built in this manner could possibly be written. Edouard knows all about that. The characters, their lives, their reactions to one another and to events do, in spite of everything, provide the novel with its framework and keep it going. But, like all Gide's previous creatures, they are strangely thin and transparent. They are not lifeless but seem to suffer from a sort of anaemia and this is no doubt partly due to Gide's absorbing interest in the novel itself, but there are other reasons.

All Gide's characters from L'IMMORALISTE's Michel to Lafcadio are characterised by the same lack of substance, so that the poverty of the characters of LES FAUX MONNAYEURS has not only to do with the nature of that particular novel. It has something to do with nature of Gide's talent. He was one of the most intelligent writers of his time and all his books were written exclusively with this intelligence. Gide's intelligence was no doubt both sensitive and supple, but it was always present and gave each object seen a sharp clear outline. His characters are clearly seen, and sharply and ironically drawn, but they lack that certain part of shade and of density which gives the illusion of life. A novelist should occasionally be the dupe of his characters and of his novel, and a certain degree of stupidity in his make-up is necessary. It is precisely that which Gide lacks and of which, in turn, he deprives his characters. They are beautifully drawn but lack substance. This simplicity of the characters of LES FAUX MONNAYEURS coupled with the sometimes irritating complexity of the novel itself, creates a disturbing effect. As far as the characters are concerned, the impressively complex structure which Gide has erected in order to present them is too vast. There is a lack of proportion between them and the novel: they are dwarfs inhabiting a gigantic, maze-like palace.

Both these factors, the false perspective and the lack of proportion leave an impression of incompleteness. LES FAUX MONNAYEURS is at the same time satisfying and irritating, and this irritation does not come only from the aggravating fragmentation of the plot, or from the great part which pure chance plays in the novel; it stems from something less superficial.

It comes partly from the fact that the novel does not ever 'come off': it never quite fulfils the promise it holds out. And even though Edouard has warned us of this, it is no less disappointing. LES FAUX MONNAYEURS seems all the time on the point of becoming something it never becomes. Hytier has seen this very clearly when he writes: 'It is not all certain whether the FAUX MONNAYEURS is really a novel. It is perhaps a work which is going to become a novel, a creation which stopped just a bit before the last stage of its evolution towards "novelhood".'

But this sense of disappointment is also due to a less objective



reason. It is difficult, if not impossible, to admit that such a wonderfully composed, such a constantly intelligent and honest piece of writing is not a great work.

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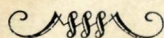
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