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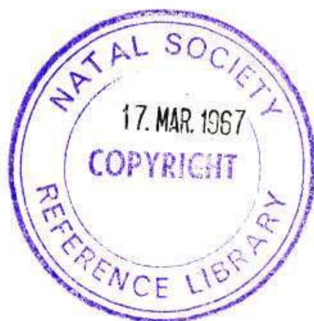

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EDITORIAL

OUR REGULAR READERS and our prospective contributors will find their interests affected by two recent administrative decisions.

Of importance to our regular readers is the decision to raise the subscription rate from 50 cents to 60 cents *per annum*. We regret this, but take comfort in the thought that *Theoria's* role in combating inflation must be unique in the annals of South African publishing: during ten years of rocketing costs, the price of our journal has remained unchanged.

Of importance to our prospective contributors is the decision to advance the dates for the submission of material from 1st April to 15th March and from 30th August to 15th August. Those who find themselves goaded or stimulated by the contents of the first number will thus have a slightly longer interval in which to prepare their ideas for print. The new arrangement will also, we hope, enable us to deliver the second number of *Theoria* into the hands of our university readers before they become embattled behind examination scripts.

With the first of the new dates in mind, we take this opportunity of wishing our contributors an inspired Christmas vacation.

MODERN POETRY IN ENGLAND*

by F. T. Prince

My subject is not the poetry that is being written by our contemporaries, nor even a comprehensive view of the poetry of the last generation or two. I am concerned with the 'modern movement' which, in England, manifested itself in poetry between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Second. The conclusion to which I come, tentatively, is that social realism is unsatisfactory as a basis for poetry, except at times of crisis, such as a great war or a period of social conflict.

First of all, we must see that it was part of an international movement, and that in this respect it differed somewhat from the last poetic revolution in England, that of Wordsworth and Coleridge. But the more markedly international character of modernism in poetry, as in the visual arts and in music, was a natural consequence of the expansion of the English-speaking world in the nineteenth century. The Romantic revolution in poetry was made by native Englishmen; the twentieth-century revolution was to be made by two Americans, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, though in order to make it they had to leave their native country for England.

An international view is essential, but of course only to help us to understand what happened in England. If we place the modern movement between 1918 and 1939, granting it a preparatory phase going back to about 1910, and a vastly spreading succession of writers who are still with us, we see that it has coincided with a period of tremendous change, sometimes approaching disaster, for Western civilisation generally, but for England in particular. The excitement, the intensity of experiment, which entered English poetry for about twenty years, was precipitated by one great war, and by the prelude to another. Eliot and Pound represent the first phase; the poets of the 1930s the second. Before 1914, and since 1945, we have something different: a sense of unease, but no powerful, shaping convictions: either, before 1914, the uneasy sense that 'something must happen'; or, since 1945, the uneasy sense that 'something may happen' or 'something ought to be done': but nothing happens and nothing is done.

Before coming to more detailed analysis, we might ask, what was the problem which made a 'modern movement' in English poetry essential? It was the need to liberate poetry from the obviously

* Lecture delivered in Pietermaritzburg in August 1966

effete and constricting traditions of the nineteenth-century school. Life and thought had changed, and were changing ever more rapidly, in the first years of this century. The most obvious weakness of the Victorian tradition was that its forms of verse, its language and rhythms, seemed to exclude the treatment of new material, and particularly of the new intellectual interests: poetry had lost touch with common life, the life of the people, and it had ceased to be able to express the thought of the cultivated minority. It is true that the nineteenth-century poets themselves had derived from a poetic revolution—that initiated by Wordsworth and Coleridge at the end of the eighteenth century. Wordsworth had sought and found a new language, a new range, for poetry, which could convey the new feelings for men and society and nature associated with the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. But that impulse had worked itself out in the next half-century. By 1900 it was obvious that another linguistic and technical revolution was needed; a new Wordsworth must invent new rhythms, and open up a new vocabulary, by finding a new 'selection of the language really used by men'. The new movement, when it came, turned out to be even more radical than its predecessor, since it abandoned even the metrical foundations on which English verse had rested since the sixteenth century. But Pound and Eliot set out with a purpose strictly comparable to Wordsworth's—to bring back into poetry the speech rhythms of ordinary, living people, both cultivated or simple.

It is interesting to see that the problem had been pondered, and was stated in his own terms, by so characteristically a late Victorian poet as Robert Bridges. A lifetime of writing in the traditional metres, as well as in some new ones, had left him dissatisfied; and in an essay of 1912 (published in *Collected Essays and Papers*, Volume XIII) he implied that a new system of metre would be needed before English poetry could use the full resources of living language. His own new measure (in 'neo-Miltonic syllabics') was designed to solve the problem; and we may see in *The Testament of Beauty* that it did indeed enable him to discuss in appropriate varied language a range of topics that could never have been touched by his earlier verse.

There had indeed been poetic 'movements' in the Victorian period which claimed for themselves the distinction of being the modern movements of their time. Such was the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, who gave a new direction to both poetry and painting. Such were the young poets of the 1890s, who organised themselves into the Rhymers' Club, and had the laudable purpose of purging and reforming Victorian poetry by applying the more self-conscious theories of French Symbolism. But by the end of the century nothing was left of these movements but the dissatisfaction which had inspired

them, and a few individual talents, like that of Swinburne, which continued to function in isolation. It was characteristic of the period that there was widespread but mainly undistinguished poetic activity, and that the outstanding individual talents—Thomas Hardy, A. E. Housman, Kipling, or Yeats—seemed to have nothing to do with one another, and to indicate no clear line of advance.

It was therefore a significant development that, by 1914, we had what must be recognised as a native 'modern movement', however limited in its potentialities we may think it was. This was the group who were called by their sponsor—Edward Marsh—the Georgians, and who were destined to be caught up in the turmoil of the War, and to be swept out of fashion by the change of mood it brought about.

Yet we must give them their due, and it is the recognition that they too were, for the most part, trying to be 'modern'. They included of course a diversity of talents, and laid claim to no common doctrine. They are popularly thought of now as conservative middle-class poets, whose taste for the English country-side was a mere evasion, a cosy appreciation of birds and flowers and picturesque survivals, which betrays the attitude of town-dwellers spending week-ends in comfortably modernised cottages. Indeed the only convictions which unite them seem to be a hatred and fear of industrial civilisation, and a yearning for the 'simple life' in one form or another. Yet if we look more closely we can see that they represent an attempt to return to Romantic origins, to the primitivist mood of Wordsworth and Coleridge, to simpler, cruder language and more permanent, more basic themes than those of the richer, more refined Victorian heritage. Thus John Masefield wrote of the experiences of a merchant seaman in a vessel rounding Cape Horn; he had 'roughed it', and tried to extract the poetry from working-class life and language. W. H. Davies was himself the incarnation of a 'hedge poet', a rough uneducated man who had been a tramp in Britain and North America, and wrote little lyrics of a genuinely flower-like simplicity. Such associates gave the Georgians the sense, quite rightly, of belonging to a new era, of new directness, even crudity, in spite of the sophistication of most of the company. But their vitality and promise lay chiefly in their dissatisfaction with themselves, their consciousness of being smaller, less ambitious, less convinced, than the great Victorians, and of being in some way unequal to the new age. The Victorians too had written their sort of poetry, the intimate, middle-class reflection of English life, taking in the life of the poor and the social problems of industrial society: as we may see in Tennyson, for example in *English Idylls* or *Locksley Hall*. But in the Victorians, as in the Romantics, it was all dominated by a typically English prophetic strain, by the aspiration towards a

national ideal, a national vision, which we in England have grown accustomed to expect from our poets; and it was precisely this sense of urgency, of striving after new convictions and a new philosophy, which the Georgians lacked—and the lack of which made them feel something was missing.

The first World War was to bring the sense of urgency, and force people into decisions and convictions, as we shall see. But what I have said about the 'modernity' of the Georgians, if it needs to be supported, may be shown by the case of Rupert Brooke, quite the most brilliant, most restless, and most self-conscious of the group. Rupert Brooke's image has been falsified, like that of most poets. The group of ardent sonnets he wrote in 1914, and his death early in the War—together with his golden-haired English beauty—have fixed him as the type of the youthful idealist, the dreaming, doomed, young poet of the old order. Frances Cornford was to write:

> A young Apollo, golden-haired,
> Stands dreaming on the verge of strife,
> Magnificently unprepared
> For the long littleness of life.

But his reponse to the War was in reaction to his established sense of dissatisfaction with himself and the world of his time; had he lived through the War, he might have written of its horrors and sufferings in the same spirit as the later war-poets did. And all his pre-war poetry is a microcosm of the uncertainties and gropings of his contemporaries towards a new realism, away from the worn-out conventions of the previous century. His restlessness, and the widening world in which young English poets had to find their feet, are apparent in his verse, as in his travels. His best known celebration of the charm of England, *Grantchester*, is written in a café in Berlin. His journeys across North America to the South Seas hint that Europe was not enough—far less England. The *Poems* of 1911 are full of attempts to substitute what he calls 'abortive poetry' for 'literary verse' (*Memoir*, lxx). He is fighting against 'the rosy mists of poets' experiences' (*Memoir*, lxvii), against a sense of the unreality of his medium and his environment.

War is its own poetry, in which everything we do and feel is raised to a moving intensity; our lives in wartime become parts of a comprehensive drama, and in this atmosphere poetry becomes natural, is read and written by people who would normally be indifferent or inarticulate. Those Georgian poets who were young enough to be combatants found themselves trying to write poetry of a new kind; by the end of the War Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen had tapped the new and terrible experiences of the time, writing war-poetry which was anti-war poetry. The desperate, blind rage and

torment of trench warfare had forced them beyond literary conventions and inhibitions, into a direct assault on reality.

The conscious technical revolution therefore did not occur, was not even envisaged, in war-poetry; but this was a poetry of crisis, like the poetry of the 1930s which might also be called war-poetry: and it was indeed the first War which opened the way to modernism in poetry as in all the arts.

The effect of 1914-1918 was to rouse even the older radical writers to the pitch of prophecy. H. G. Wells wrote his *Outline of History*, Bernard Shaw *Back to Methusaleh*. The Victorian period was attacked with disgust and fury. The War had released destructive forces and endowed them with self-righteous convictions. As for the English poetic tradition, it was now examined with a new scepticism, a new ruthlessness; for a time English taste and thought were radical enough to sympathise with the detached criticism of the two aliens, who were opportunely ready to exert a decisive influence: Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot.

I need scarcely glance at the extraordinary divergence in the subsequent fates of these two men. Eliot was to remain in England, adhere to the English Church, adopt British nationality, dictate to English poets and critics; become, in short, the revered figure we know. Pound, who had been in England since 1908, before Eliot arrived, was to find England intolerable after the War, take refuge in Italy, be converted to Fascism, co-operate with the enemy, be tried for treason, be imprisoned for long years in a lunatic asylum—only lately to be released, though never to recant.

Yet both had come here for the same reasons—to find the last remnants of a living literary tradition; for only in such conditions could their poetic revolution take effect. The revolution needed an *ancien régime*, with all that implies of taste and active interest: it could not take place in the barbarous vacuum of America, as it then was. On the other hand, it was to be a genuine revolution, and so it was to be faced very soon, like all others, with the choice between perpetual revolution or compromise—consolidation. Pound made the first choice, Eliot the second.

The revolution in technique was now accomplished, or at least made manifest. The sign of it was the sudden spread of free verse, legitimised by the experiments and triumphs of the two Americans, who had discovered a wide range of new rhythms, and new methods of building on them. I cannot go into technical details of the new 'free verse'; at its best it was founded equally on modern speech rhythms and on Old English alliterative verse—intimately related to the grain and substance of the language. Pound had been hammering away at the problem since 1908 or so; his discoveries had provided Eliot with a continuous stimulus since 1914 when Eliot came to

England. Much of the 'free verse' written in the wake of the movement was deplorable; but that of the two masters was so sensitive and so controlled by an inner discipline as scarcely to be 'free' in the way most people imagined. These technicalities can only be noted; but noted they must be, for they made possible the ruthless revison of accepted poetic attitudes, the hard or indignant scrutiny of things as they really are, which is of the essence of modernism. And all this went together with a vision of a wider world than England, with the conviction that we were passing through a world crisis.

In Eliot's first volume, the townscapes against which Prufrock languishes are anonymous, unlocalised, as valid for New York and Boston as for London, Berlin, Paris, or Manchester. The cosmopolitan confusion of the Anglo-Saxon world is overpowering in *Gerontion* of 1920; while *The Waste Land* is essentially a poem of London, but also of 'the decay of Eastern Europe' and beyond,—'Jerusalem Athens Alexandria Vienna',—and the valley of the Ganges.

The first effects of the revolution were liberating, as of course they should have been. Poetry and ordinary life seemed to draw together: there seemed to be a great extension of material for poetry; and the next generation of English poets, those of the 1930s, were able to make use of the Eliot-Pound revolution with various and striking success.

Auden, Spender, Day Lewis, MacNeice—these are the names of the 1930s; and the greatest of these is Auden, who was the originator of the new poetic programme. What these young writers did was to anglicise the modern movement, with the result that it assumed a predominantly political and social content. Naturally they could hardly have done this, if the world about them had not proffered the occasion, in the international and domestic crises of the 1930s. The economic depression, vast unemployment, the rise of Fascism in Europe; the struggle between Communism and Fascism in Spain; these were the preludes to a new war; and what the young English poets did was to write in advance the poetry of that war. To the radical critique of Western civilisation represented by *The Waste Land* and by Pound's *Cantos* they added Communism and the 'deep psychology' of Freud or Groddeck—the mixture was powerful, even explosive. It had a greater effect on their contemporaries than any English poetry had had since Byron or Tennyson. The fact that they were as young in mind as in years, rash and ignorant as well as really irresponsible—the fact that their notion of Communism was wildly unreal—made no difference, in the atmosphere of those years. There was something unreal about their aims and exhortations; but then there was something unreal about life itself, about England, about Europe, in that unlucky period.

Looked at from the purely literary point of view, the work of these young poets was a vulgarisation: a *haute vulgarisation*, perhaps, at its best; but nevertheless an exploitation, a cheapening, of the poetic advances made by the great writers of the previous twenty years. One cannot but wonder what Eliot really thought of the way in which his technical innovations, so rigorous, so exacting in their demands for economy of word and thought, were taken over and 'put across' by so voluble, so volatile, a writer as Auden.

I must round off my argument with the assertion that the life went out of the modern movement with the coming and the consequences of the second War. The poetry we have been describing was inspired by crisis. England met the crisis; both wars were won; but they brought about a complete change in English conditions. After 1945, European civilisation, the world itself, might have entered on a new phase of cataclysmic change; but England would never again hold the key position she did in 1914 and 1939. Socialism after the war set out to remove those domestic troubles which had excited so many English writers for two generations. The destruction of Fascism in Europe, its replacement by Christian Democracy, and the emergence of Communism as the new enemy, were merely baffling and confusing to intellectuals steeped in Socialist doctrine. It is not surprising that since 1945 English poetry has returned to a state of uneasiness, a sense of frustration, not unlike that at the beginning of the century.

If we sum up the shift of thought it comes to this: Victorian culture, like nineteenth-century Western society as a whole, assumed as its common faith what we may call (with Ibsen and Shaw) 'Romantic idealism': the culture of twentieth-century Europe and England is dominated by 'social realism'. (In each case I refer only to the most widely diffused common assumptions, not to any deep or clear unity of belief.) Now social realism faces poetry with peculiar problems; it lays down that ordinary life must be the material of creative art; but ordinary life, except in times of crisis, war or revolution, does not in fact provide the emotional intensity needed to beget a living work of art.

English poets now accept as a dogma that ordinary everyday life, the life of English people, should be their inspiration. This is what their masters have taught them. For example, T. S. Eliot's poetry from the beginning seemed to face resolutely the grim, drab or insipid aspects of our society; his formal experiments, and his criticism, stressed the need for a technique which could make plain direct statements about the normal contents of men's lives. But in fact that deliberate ordinariness in Eliot is nothing but a mask: Eliot is not ordinary, nor is his poetry. Its sobriety and realism are achieved by an almost desperate concentration of mind and emotion, an

almost visionary intensity. Hence the peculiar fascination of his verse, its 'deadpan' irony, corresponding to the irony of his earlier prose, where revolutionary critical values are conveyed in the smooth conventions of high class literary journalese.

But, while not really ordinary itself, Eliot's work opened up the way to ordinariness in others—many of whom would be really more ordinary than he was. Here is one of the ways in which 'modernism' defeats itself and leads to mediocrity. What presents itself as a liberation becomes a new tyranny. The turning to ordinary life can indeed be a liberation to an artist who has already laid the foundations of his art, perhaps in the isolation of a dream-world, or a system of insubstantial ideals: the material of everyday life then becomes a new resource and a corrective, an incitement to fresh discoveries. Such a process is most apparent in the poetry of Yeats, among the great poets of the last hundred years.

But social realism is valuable if it is accepted as only one resource among many, an addition to other ways of seizing living experience. English poets have never ceased to use the older, un-modern methods, and to use them sometimes in new and original ways; for example, the poetry of Dylan Thomas, though fused with many of the modern interests, really represents a different stream—the sensual and spiritual life of the individual, his irrational passions and desires; it falls within the tradition of Yeats, the Romantics, Blake and the Elizabethans. But as yet no modern writer has come forward to assert a counter-doctrine to the predominant artistic philosophy, at least in England. Individuals will go on writing diversely, in ways which often imply a challenge to accepted critical dogmas. But the spirit of conformity which is always so powerful in England—and which is never so dangerous as when it represents itself as a spirit of forward-looking, adventurous, open-minded, experiment—is likely to inhibit any ruthless examination of what I have called 'the modern movement' for many years to come.

THE ORIGINS OF THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR: A RE-INTERPRETATION*

by C. de B. WEBB

On 3rd July 1870, the news became public that a scion of the Prussian royal house, Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, was to mount the vacant Spanish throne. The bursting of the 'Spanish bomb' shook all Europe; but it was in France that the reaction was most violent. The press mounted a fiercely anti-Prussian campaign, and in the legislature the Foreign Minister, the Duc de Gramont, made a fiery declaration in which he warned that France would not tolerate another Power's disturbing the European balance by placing one of its princes on the throne of Charles V. Almost from the start there were signs of a plunge towards war.

On 12th July, Prince Leopold, hoping to prevent a major European conflagration, withdrew his candidature; but his gesture failed to save the situation. On the following day, Benedetti, the French ambassador in Berlin, visited the Prussian King, William I, who was taking the waters at Bad Ems, and requested that he give his personal guarantee that the Hohenzollern candidature would not be renewed. The King declined to pursue the matter and, from Ems, telegraphed a report of the interview to the Prussian Chancellor, Count Bismarck. That same evening, an edited version of this telegram was made available to the press by Bismarck. In its edited form, it suggested that Benedetti had insulted the Prussian royal house, and that the king on his side had reacted with cavalier indifference to the interests of France. Public anger, already roused on both sides of the Rhine, spilled over with the publication of the Ems telegram. The French, smarting from the past inglories of Napoleòn III's foreign policy, had raised the cry 'Enough of humiliation!'; the government found that it dared not set a course contrary to the swelling tide of anti-Prussian feeling; and on 19th July war was declared.

It was a momentous war: it resulted in the fall of the Bonaparte dynasty, in humiliating defeat for France, and in the establishment of the Third French Republic; it enabled Bismarck to complete

* Address delivered to the John Bird Historical Society, Durban, in October 1960.

Prussian hegemony in Germany by incorporating the still independent South German states in a new German Empire; it led to the 'rape' of Alsace and Lorraine; and it left a legacy of bitter feelings in France which profoundly influenced the alliance diplomacy that preceded the First World War.

Partly because the repercussions were so far-reaching, debate has flourished, for almost a century, around the question whether or not the Hohenzollern candidature was a Prussian political manoeuvre, inspired by Bismarck, with the cold-blooded purpose of provoking the French to war.

Both at the time, and subsequently in his memoirs, Bismarck denied that this was so. The candidature, he claimed, never constituted a matter of Prussian state policy. It was a purely private, family matter, in which he, as Chancellor, had very little part.

However, his denials of guilt did not go long unchallenged. As research progressed on the origins of the war, doubt began to accumulate about Bismarck's honesty. The view gained currency, and eventually found converts, even among German historians, that Bismarck was deeply involved in the Hohenzollern candidature, and that his purpose all along was the ulterior one of provoking France to war. Behind this interpretation lies the assumption that Bismarck was not content with the North German Confederation which he had created after the Austro-Prussian war of 1866. He still hoped to bring the South German states into a greater German Union. But to do this, France had first to be knocked out of the game, for the French stood in the front line of those opposing any further expansion of Prussian power.

This interpretation, in its turn, has had numerous critics; none, however, so redoubtable as the Oxford iconoclast, A. J. P. Taylor, who took up his cudgels in 1955, bent on destroying it completely. According to Mr Taylor, Bismarck lacked the prescience or the power to control human destinies in terms of his own will. He had no clear policy after 1866; he merely wanted to be left alone. Even the completion of German unification was not an object of policy, but something which he believed would come in its own time. Mr Taylor's examination of the evidence carries him back to a position very close to the original one taken up by Bismarck. There is not a scrap of evidence, he claims, that Bismarck worked deliberately for a war with France. The approach of the war took him, frail mortal that he was, completely by surprise. His only deliberate contribution to the war was the publication of the Ems telegram, an attempt to secure the initiative for Germany once war was already on its way. In Mr Taylor's hands, the Bismarckian myth crumbles. The superhuman Bismarck, holding the years in his hands, shrinks to human proportions again. Instead of Bismarck

the master-planner, we are shown Bismarck the opportunist, adjusting to events, not creating them. Instead of the architect of German unity—the man with the blue-print of the future in his pocket—we are shown the builder, working almost haphazard, doing what he could with the materials that lay to hand. Instead of the apostle of German nationalism, we are presented with the egocentric Prussian junker, placing his own interests before those of the people whose national hero he was to become.[1]

Such radically conflicting interpretations are bewildering, to say the least. Yet, in the midst of the confusion, one thing can no longer be disputed. Bismarck was being untruthful when he asserted that the Hohenzollern candidature was a private family matter in which he, as Chancellor, had very little part. Browning perhaps believed that 'truth never hurts the teller'; Bismarck knew that in his case it would. On many occasions in his long career he was at pains to cover up his tracks. The Hohenzollern candidature provided him with one of these occasions.

Far from playing practically no part in the promotion of the candidature, he was very probably the prime mover on the German side.

In 1868, the Spanish throne had fallen vacant as a result of the expulsion of the dissolute Isabella II. Early in 1869, the provisional Spanish government, pursuing its search for a new royal dynasty, turned its attentions to the Princes Leopold and Frederick of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, a Catholic branch-line of the Prussian royal house. Shortly afterwards a Prussian, Von Bernhardi by name, left Berlin for a tour of Spain. Ostensibly, Bernhardi's visit was a private one. Even his memoirs, published in 1903, give no indication that he was acting on Bismarck's behalf in connection with the vacant throne. Yet there can be little doubt that he was. He had been employed on other special missions, not only by Bismarck, but by Von Moltke, the Prussian Chief of Staff. Furthermore, it is known now that before Bernhardi's memoirs were published they were submitted to the German Foreign Office for scrutiny, and that certain passages were suppressed on the grounds that they would give rise to the impression that Bismarck and the German government had been planning the candidature from the beginning of 1869.[2] There is also the testimony of the English historian, Lord Acton. On his evidence, Bernhardi carried with him a vast sum of money—the equivalent of £50,000—which had been made available to him by Bismarck.[3] If this is true, only one conclusion seems possible: so great was the Chancellor's interest in the future of the Spanish throne, that even bribery was to be used to ensure support for the Hohenzollern candidature.

Exactly what Bernhardi accomplished it is impossible to say. Very clearly, however, the negotiations began on the level of secret

diplomacy and only later became a family matter. In June, 1869, Berlin was already regarded in Spanish diplomatic circles as 'a centre of active policy with regard to Spain';[4] yet it was only in September that the first formal approaches were made to the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen family. In that month, Don Salazar y Mazarredo, a member of the Spanish Cortes, went to Germany on behalf of the provisional government of Marshal Prim. There, under arrangements made by Count von Werthern, a senior member of the Prussian diplomatic service, he visited Prince Karl Anton von Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, the father of the prospective candidate, and put to him the proposal that his son should be offered the Spanish throne. Significantly, the approach was unfruitful. Aware that acceptance might involve serious risks, Prince Karl Anton insisted that the matter could not be pursued until Salazar had secured the approval of the Prussian king. And 'with that categorical declaration' (according to the Prince) the interview was terminated[5].

The issue, however, was still far from dead. In February 1870, it was suddenly raised again, and this time on a level of the most complete formality. The President of the Spanish Council of Ministers, Marshal Prim, despatched letters simultaneously to the Prussian king, to the prospective candidate, Prince Leopold, and to the Prussian Chancellor and Foreign Minister, Bismarck. At the same time, Salazar, the Spanish envoy, arrived in Germany with full powers to negotiate the candidature on behalf of His Highness, the Regent of Spain, and his Council of Ministers.[6]

The very formality of this approach—the fact that Salazar was there, not on a new exploratory mission, but to negotiate the candidature—suggests strongly that one of the German principals had encouraged the Spaniards to expect success. If this was so, it could only have been Bismarck, for neither the king nor the candidate was enthusiastic about the offer. Certainly, from this point forward the negotiations were 'official'. They were conducted through the German Foreign Office, and it was the Chancellor who controlled and sustained them until the conclusion.

He did so with a determined hand. By the beginning of March it was already known in Berlin that Prince Leopold had declined the Spanish offer.[7] However, the German Foreign Office withheld the news of a refusal from Madrid. Instead, pretexts were found for postponing the final settlement which Marshal Prim and his Council were so impatient to secure; two Prussian special envoys were hastily packed off to the Spanish capital; and in Germany a new assault was made on the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen stronghold—this time with the object of persuading Prince Frederick to accept the crown which his brother had refused.[8] It was unsuccessful.

Much to the relief of the king, who had opposed the candidature from the start, Prince Frederick declined as his brother had done.[9] Yet, even at this stage, the issue was not closed. Late in May, without the king's approval, Bismarck informed Prince Karl Anton that William had modified his views, and that interests of state made it highly desirable that Leopold should accept the proffered throne. He wrote:[10]

> Today no less than before I feel no doubt that Germany has a vital interest here (i.e. in Spain), and that at critical moments the pointer on the scales might well register differently according as we know Madrid to be a friend or an enemy. I have once more begged H.M. the King to reconsider the question . . . and have received the answer that as soon as any Prince of the House of Hohenzollern showed any inclination to accept the crown he would raise no objection whatever to this inclination. This I regard as the fullest reply which can be expected from H.M. in the present state of things, since the King will never . . . *command* a member of the Royal House to undertake a mission the success of which lies predominantly in the sense of *vocation* personally felt by him who undertakes it.

No doubt, William had stated that he would not stand in the way of the inclinations or ambitions of a young prince of his house. What is certain, however, is that he had not intended his statement to be used to re-open the closed negotiations. A few weeks later, one of Bismarck's confidants at the Foreign Office reported to him:[11]

> . . . the King said to me that he was unpleasantly surprised by the revival of the question of the Spanish throne. Luckily H.M. asked me no questions about the details which would have put me in an awkward position.

Deception had been used to lubricate the clogged negotiations. And it had worked. Bismarck's patriotic appeal to Prince Karl Anton had had the desired effect. Prince Leopold was persuaded to accept the offer he had declined only a few months before; and the king, knowing only of the latter's change of mind, gave his approval 'with a heavy heart'.

Soon the telegraph lines between Madrid and Berlin were humming again. On 2nd June, Bismarck received from Madrid the cable: 'Engineer will be able to assemble the two machines at the same time on the appointed day if there is good hope of casting

tubes of the diameters numbered four and six in Hanover'.[12] The engineer was Salazar, the two machines were the Spanish Cortes and Council of State, the two tubes were the two prospective candidates, Prince Leopold and his younger brother Prince Frederick. The next day the reply went back: 'Mould No. 6 no longer exists. Manufacture of tube number four begun but would be speeded up by personal supervision of fitter.'[13] Mould No. 6 was Prince Frederick. He was no longer to be considered for the vacant throne, as Mould No. 4, Prince Leopold, had already accepted. However, the preparation of Mould No. 4 would be speeded up if Salazar, the fitter, could come to Germany to make final arrangements.

By 21st June, the arrangements were complete; the tube had been fitted. Salazar, working through the German foreign office, despatched a telegram to Prim, informing him of success, and stating that he would be back in Madrid by 26th of the month. At the German embassy in Madrid the telegram was wrongly deciphered. In the form in which it reached Marshal Prim, the message was to the effect that Salazar could not be expected back until 9th July.[14]

The mistake was momentous in its consequences. Had Marshal Prim received the correct information, that Salazar would be back within five days with the formal acceptance of Prince Leopold in his pocket, he would have kept the Cortes in session to secure its immediate approval of the candidature. Instead, thinking that several more weeks were to elapse before Salazar returned, he prorogued the Cortes. Salazar arrived back to find Madrid empty and the opportunity lost for securing the confirmation of the candidature. Something like panic followed. It was feared that the secret might leak out, and that in the long interval before the Cortes reassembled, forces hostile to the new dynasty might organize. The decision was taken, therefore, to recall the Cortes immediately. Reasons had to be given, however, for the change of plan, and the fact of Prince Leopold's acceptance of the Spanish crown became known in Madrid on 2nd July. Before the matter had been dealt with by the Cortes, the news had been conveyed to Paris, and the candidature had become an international issue. After that, it mattered little whether the Cortes approved or not. Prussia and France were already drifting towards war.

If one thing emerges from the long negotiations that lay behind the bursting of the 'Spanish bomb' it is the decisive role which Bismarck played. Far from having had little part in the issues which lay behind the crisis of July 1870, he had in fact forced the candidature on an unwilling king and an unwilling candidate.

Equally significant is the fact that all through the long preliminaries a violent French reaction had been feared amongst the

German principals. Right at the start of the official negotiations, Prince Karl Anton anticipated that a Hohenzollern in Spain would give rise to a wild outcry in anti-Prussian Europe, and either precipitate or defer the solution of many pending questions.[15] France was recognized as the Power most vitally interested in the future of Spain; the government of Napoleon III was known to be anxious to prevent the accession of a dynasty that might serve anti-French interests; and, long before July 1870, it had already been rumoured that the French would regard Prussian intervention in the affairs of Spain as a *casus belli*.[16] For these reasons, no doubt, Bismarck, all through the negotiations, resorted to the most elaborate precautions to ensure that the French should gain no hint of the plot until the arrangements for the accession of Leopold were complete.[17]

It is this background that must be taken into account in any attempt to assess the purposes which Bismarck had in mind in pressing the candidature. Considering the determination with which he directed the negotiations, and considering the dangers which he recognized, one can only conclude that he must have had some fairly considerable political purpose in view.

Yet only one document survives from the period of the Berlin-Madrid negotiations in which there is a full and explicit statement of the results which he anticipated. It is a letter which he wrote to William I in March 1870, and it is significant because it contains no indication that he was seeking to use the candidature to precipitate a war with France. On the contrary, his arguments are all of the most pacific sort. A Prussian prince on the Spanish throne would, he claims, enhance the prestige of the Hohenzollern house, perhaps even consolidate popular opinion in Germany behind Prussian leadership; it would eliminate the danger of the Spaniards turning to republicanism or selecting an ultramontane candidate inimical to Prussian interests; it would probably bring desirable economic advantages to Germany; and it would reduce, if anything, the risk of a Franco-Prussian war, for with a pro-Prussian government in Spain, the French would have to reckon on deploying one, or possibly two, of their army corps for the defence of their southern frontier—a consideration that might well restrain them from plunging into hostilities.[18]

Mr A. J. P. Taylor, in his determination to prove that Bismarck was neither planning for war with France, nor for the further aggrandizement of Prussia, accepts this testimony at something very near face value. His explanation of Bismarck's interest in the Hohenzollern candidature becomes, in fact, a set of variations on the four themes developed by the Chancellor in his letter to the king.[19]

The result in the case of the first of those themes is hardly harmonious, for if Bismarck was the hard-headed realist that Mr

Taylor claims he was, it is improbable that ephemeral considerations of dynastic prestige would have weighed towards the undertaking of a risky foreign venture. On no other occasion in his long career did he play the game of high politics with dynastic interests as one of his stakes, and it is particularly unlikely that he would have done so in this case, as it was quite uncertain whether any increase of prestige would result. In fact, William feared the reverse —that Leopold's accession would be unpopular in certain quarters in Spain, that a struggle would follow, and that the dignity of the Prussian royal house would 'be profoundly shaken and damaged'.[20]

In the case of the second of the themes, the result is almost equally unhappy, for again it seems improbable that Bismarck, the realist, would have risked grave international complications in order to strike a blow at republicanism and ultramontanism in Spain. The possible triumph of undesirable causes in a corner of Europe as remote as Spain was hardly an immediate menace to Germany's interests. Certainly, it was far less of an immediate threat than the triumph of republicanism in France, which Bismarck accepted quite placidly after the fall of Napoleon III's regime. Furthermore, as William pointed out, Bismarck's fears were purely hypothetical. Neither ultramontanism nor republicanism was bound to triumph simply because Leopold declined the Spanish offer. Other dynasties had been approached and had declined without producing the adverse results anticipated by the Chancellor; and there were other possible candidates in view if Leopold should demur.[21]

Rather more plausible, at first glance, is the economic argument. Yet it too does not stand up well to scrutiny. The Golden Age of Spain had passed centuries before. Even the king, with little nous for international commerce, was doubtful whether Leopold's presence in Spain would provide the 'new openings' for 'a prosperous German trade' of which Bismarck spoke.[22] If the Chancellor had received information to persuade him of some special advantage to be derived from the establishment of German political influence in the Iberian peninsula, the risks involved in the Hohenzollern candidature might have been worth taking. But his information was all to the contrary. In fact, he eventually had to hint broadly to the Prussian ambassador in Madrid to report favourably on the prospects of commercial relations, for the despatches arriving in Berlin indicated conditions of chaos and dislocation—a country suffering from 'stagnation of commerce and enterprise'.[23] Such a country was no prize; certainly it was not an adequate prize when the risks to be counted included the danger of an angry French reaction.

And there is a similar speciousness about the military argument—the claim put forward by Bismarck and repeated by A. J. P. Taylor, that Prince Leopold's presence in Spain would serve to restrain the French by forcing them to face south as well as east. Such an adjustment of the European balance depended on Leopold's establishing a stable Prussian-orientated regime in Spain. Yet no one familiar with conditions south of the Pyrenees could seriously have calculated on such an outcome. The king, for one, expected Leopold's position to be extremely insecure. He even doubted whether the Spanish army would be loyal to its new king.[24] And Bismarck knew more about conditions in Spain than did his royal master. By May 1870, when he began to force the candidature, he knew that the kingdom being offered to Leopold was politically explosive, that republicanism was strong, that the provisional government of Marshal Prim was maintaining itself by slender threads, and that even if the Cortes approved Prince Leopold's candidature, opposition could be expected both from the revolutionary and republican elements, and from factions supporting the claims of pretenders to the throne.[25] In short, he knew that Prussia was likely to find herself entangled in the turbulent politics of Spain. Far from the French having to divide their strength by keeping regiments stationed on the Spanish frontier, there was the prospect of Prussia having to deploy troops to maintain Leopold on his throne. And, attractive as such adventures might be to a gambler such as Napoleon III, they never held any appeal for the arch-exponent of *realpolitik*.

All in all, there is a decidedly false ring about Bismarck's letter to his king. Mr Taylor would have done well to be a little more sceptical about Bismarck's honesty; he might also have given a little more consideration to conditions in Spain. Doubtful commercial gains, improbable military advantages, ephemeral considerations of dynastic prestige, hypothetical calculations about ultramontanism and republicanism—these were not the considerations that were likely to persuade Bismarck to support a costly and risky enterprise in a distant and turbulent land. His letter cannot be treated as a sincere statement of his views. Almost certainly, it was an essay in propaganda: an attempt to persuade the king to give his blessing to the enterprise by appealing to William's dynastic pride, his Prussian patriotism, and his sense of monarchical responsibility.

But beyond this, there is another consideration; for all the results envisaged by Bismarck in his letter to the king depended for their accomplishment on the existence in Spain of a securely established Hohenzollern dynasty. Yet the correspondence that passed between the Chancellor and his subordinates suggests strongly that it was

the *claim* to the throne that interested him, not the establishment of the dynasty in Spain.[26] The difficulties that Leopold was likely to encounter, the factors that were likely to make for unrest and political instability, the potential strength of anti-Hohenzollern and anti-monarchist forces—these should have been matters of deep concern to Bismarck, if precautions were to be taken to prevent the dynasty's foundering in the first days of its existence. Yet at no stage did he show any interest in these questions. On the contrary, when Baron von Canitz, the Prussian ambassador in Madrid, attempted to inform him of the dangers that might be anticipated, the Chancellor reprimanded him for doing so, and advised him to confine his reports to other matters.[27] It was with reluctance that Canitz complied. In *his* opinion, Leopold's accession was likely to be a disaster and could be supported only if it was calculated to bring some great advantage to Prussia elsewhere.[28]

This indifference to the fate of the dynasty destroys much of the fabric of Mr Taylor's argument, and reinforces the older view that Bismarck, all along, contemplated something very like the result which actually followed after the 'Spanish bomb' had burst. If the survival of the dynasty was something that mattered little to him, his interest in the candidature could have derived only from the results which he anticipated at the moment when the news of Prince Leopold's election became public. And, significantly, the only reaction which could be anticipated with any certainty was the French one, which was expected to be violent.

Clearly, therefore, a re-examination is necessary of Mr Taylor's thesis that Bismarck desired neither war with France, nor the incorporation of the still independent South German states. True, he did not proclaim these things as objects of policy. But what statesman of any wisdom would? Publicly, he had to deny that he desired war with France, as he had to deny any intention of forcing the southern states into a Prussian dominated union. Yet there is little doubt that in these years he was interested in the completion of German unification, that he anticipated a war with France, and that he very probably regarded such a war as necessary if the South German states were to be incorporated on terms satisfactory to Prussia.[29] Indeed, it would have been remarkable if he had failed to make such a calculation. For the Austro-Prussian war of 1866 had already revealed the intensity of anti-German feeling in France. It had also revealed that the government of Napoleon III would almost certainly put its troops into the field to prevent Prussia advancing into Southern Germany and establishing herself on the Rhine.

After 1866, there were only two paths to be taken if German unification was to be completed: either the South German states

had to be persuaded voluntarily to surrender their independence, or Prussia had to prepare for a war with France. And by 1869, it was beginning to seem probable that the latter was the course that would have to be chosen; for while the mood of 1866 persisted in France, the rulers of the southern states were provided with a shield for their particularist interests.

In the peace negotiations after the Austro-Prussian war, the southern states had accepted military alliance with the north, agreeing, in the event of war, to place their armies and their railways under the supreme command of the Prussian king. This, however, was as far as they were willing to go. By 1869, it had become clear that the two major southern states, Württemberg and Bavaria, were unlikely to associate themselves with Bismarck's German Confederation except under the very loosest of federal arrangements. Public opinion in both kingdoms was particularist and anti-Prussian; and the governments, although recognizing that some sort of accommodation might have to be sought with the north, were determined to secure that accommodation on their own terms, not on terms dictated to them by Bismarck.[30]

It was France that gave the southern kingdoms this bargaining strength. So long as France could be counted on to oppose any extension of Prussian power, Bismarck could not dictate to the south; he could only woo. And while he could only woo, the south could demand its own marriage settlement.

There was also another consideration. For the moment, only the French shield was available for the South German states to shelter behind. Given time, however, a second shield might be raised; for if Austrian power should recover sufficiently for the Hapsburgs to risk a new trial of strength, their opposition might be added to that of France.[31] In fact, Prussia might find her ambitions thwarted by a League of states reaching from the Rhine in the west to the Danube in the east.

Thus, by 1869, all the indicators were beginning to point in the same direction. If the unification of Germany was to be completed, delay might be dangerous. France had to be crippled. And she had to be crippled on an issue quite unrelated to the future of Germany; for then, instead of the southern states being ranged against Prussia, they would be formed up behind her in a national war.

The Hohenzollern candidature provided such an issue.[32] It is true, Bismarck could not have been sure that the accession of Prince Leopold would precipitate the government of Napoleon III into a declaration of war. He could be sure, however, that there would be an angry outburst of chauvinism across the Rhine, and that if Napoleon III attempted to beat a diplomatic retreat on the

Spanish question the result would almost certainly be the collapse of his already unpopular regime.

No great prescience was needed to make such a calculation; to realise that one way or the other, whether by war or internal upheaval, France was likely to be disabled. The only qualification needed was a thorough acquaintance with European affairs; and that the Prussian Chancellor most certainly had.

NOTES

Unless otherwise indicated, the documents referred to are now to be found in the compilation made by Georges Bonnin, *Bismarck and the Hohenzollern Candidature for the Spanish Throne*, (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1957). For convenience, the documents are referred to by the numbers under which they are listed in this compilation.

To avoid extensive footnoting, references have been given only where they are directly relevant to the Bismarck controversy.

[1] Taylor, A. J. P., *Bismarck* (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1955), Ch. V, passim.
[2] Bonnin, p. 19.
[3] Lord Acton, *Historical Essays and Studies* (Macmillan, London, 1908), p. 204.
[4] Bonnin, p. 44.
[5] No. 5.
[6] Nos. 1, 2 and 3.
[7] No. 6, Annex, and No. 25.
[8] For the developments summarized here, see Nos. 70, 79, 82-4, 87, 88, 90, 91, 95-103, 106 and 125.
[9] Nos. 100, 116, and 123.
[10] No. 135.
[11] No. 191. For further evidence of the success of Bismarck's deception of the king, see Nos. 141 and 204, and Appendix pp. 295-6.
[12] No. 147.
[13] No. 149.
[14] No. 221.
[15] Nos. 5 and 252.
[16] Nos. 103 and 112.
[17] Nos. 56, 81 and 82.
[18] No. 9.
[19] Taylor, op. cit., pp. 117-8.
[20] No. 9. King's marginal comments.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Nos. 82 and 145. See also No. 55.
[24] No. 9, King's marginal comments.
[25] Nos. 12, 20, 29, 43, 55 and 181.
[26] Appendix, p. 289.
[27] Nos. 34 and 145.
[28] No. 181. See also Nos. 20, 29 and 55.
[29] See Hohenlohe, *Memoirs of Prince Hohenlohe* (Heinemann, London, 1906), Vol. I, pp. 280-4 and 350-2, and Bismarck *Reflections and Reminiscences* (Smith, Elder, London, 1898), Vol. II, p. 56.
[30] *Memoirs of Prince Hohenlohe*, Vol. I, pp. 258-9, 262 and 340-1.
[31] Ibid., pp. 320 and 345.
[32] It is significant that the German Foreign Office kept a consistent and very close watch over publications relating to the Hohenzollern candidature, and was advised to withhold the documents from historians on the grounds that their perusal might lead to the conclusion that Bismarck had 'created the occasion for the war' of 1870. See Bonnin, p. 34.

VAUVENARGUES AND HIS WORK

by Y. LAINEY

LUC DE VAUVENARGUES, the French writer of the first half of the XVIIIth century, did not have a fortunate life. Being the son of the Marquis de Vauvenargues, he could proudly say to himself 'Noblesse oblige', but because his family had neither the required social pre-eminence nor the necessary wealth to facilitate the 'Cursus Honorum' of its members, he was doomed to disillusionment. Moreover, though he never enjoyed good health, he spent nine years in the Army as a professional officer and had to endure the hardships of war. After his resignation, he fell a prey to illness and caught smallpox, which made him still weaker and annihilated his last hope of becoming a successful man of action by entering diplomacy. Nevertheless, when he died in 1747 at the age of thirty-one, he had already started a promising literary career.

Though it is not exactly known when Vauvenargues began writing, one may say, roughly speaking, that he produced his books between 1737 and 1747. His first work was a *Treatise on Free Will*, which was certainly written at an early age. But it was only in 1746 that part of the moralist's work was published. The publication was anonymous and consisted of a small essay called *Introduction to the Knowledge of the Human Mind*, *Reflections on Various Writers* and *Reflections and Maxims*. After the author's death more complete editions were compiled, including *Dialogues* and part of his correspondence.

Admittedly, Vauvenargues is essentially a moralist. As such, one of his main characteristics is that he spoke much about himself, and in a discreet, indirect, veiled manner, quite different from that of Montaigne, but, in fact, more personal. I do not think that one might say about the former what is said of the latter: that, speaking about himself, he spoke of man generally. I would rather say that, unable to resist the temptation of speaking about himself, Vauvenargues disguised and generalized his own experience of life. Unfortunately we do not know much about his character and personality apart from what we may guess while reading his work. For this reason, to study Vauvenargues is to put oneself in a dilemma, as one has either to ignore the moralist's character and personality at the risk of misunderstanding what he meant, or to indulge in hazardous conjectures.

This presentation of Vauvenargues and his work aims only at bringing out the interest of a French moralist of the 'Age of

Enlightenment', whose originality and literary value are well established, while the moralist himself and, consequently, his thought are still open questions.

I shall deal first with what may be called the traditional image of a 'noble' Vauvenargues. Then I shall attempt an assessment of the moralist's thought before speaking briefly on his originality as a writer.

There is something in Vauvenargues which frequently inspires affection, admiration and even respect. This is partly due to the fact that he appears to have been an unlucky man whose noble ambition was frustrated by adversity. But obviously, pity and regret are far from being the main motives of the elevated feeling he aroused in such different men as Marmontel, Voltaire, Sainte-Beuve, Paléologue, Prévost-Paradol and Lanson.

Marmontel, who met him in Paris, said in his *Memoirs*:

> It was at this time [1] that I met, at his house, with the man of all others whom I have loved most—the worthy, the virtuous, the wise Vauvenargues. His person had been cruelly treated by Nature, but his soul was one of her rarest works. [2]

Commenting on Voltaire's attitude, G. Michaut wrote:

> Voltaire—who cannot be said to have had the gift of respect—seems to have had towards Vauvenargues, not only literary admiration but a kind of respect. [3]

Sainte-Beuve's criticism of Vauvenargues is especially interesting. In 1850, the great critic wrote an article in which literary esteem was coupled with unlimited admiration for the writer as a man. From the very beginning he depicted him as:

> Both proud and modest, stoic and tender-hearted, [4] then he praised him at length, and, towards the end he stated:
>
> He set a rare example, that of a superior man, long humbled, restrained, overwhelmed by misfortune, and who, growing neither bitter nor resentful, took his revenge in a noble manner and re-opened a career for himself in the field of intelligence with a serene vigour.

In 1857, Sainte-Beuve wrote another article to comment on Vauvenargue's recently published correspondence with Saint-Vincens and the Marquis de Mirabeau [5]. One of those letters was disturbing for a critic who had contributed, without reservation, to make a much admired figure of Vauvenargues. In this letter [6], which then started to cause ink to flow, one can read the following surprising statements:

> . . . What is more advisable in view of the money I want to borrow . . . is to know who has money . . . poor people, rich people, servants, old priests, . . . everybody will serve my purpose. Something occurred to me concerning Mr

> d'Oraison. He has a son and would have him join the 'Régiment du Roi' [7]; I dare Mr d'Oraison to get him there . . . if, however, he insisted that his son should be with us, I would undertake it and would be as good as my word; but how to tell him . . .? It also came to my mind that . . . (Mr d'Oraison) has two daughters. I could commit myself to marrying one of them in two years' time, should she get a reasonable marriage-portion, if he would lend me the money I need, and, in case I should fail to pay back the money in due course.

Sainte-Beuve's commentary clearly shows that he did not try to minimize the moral implications of such suggestions. He remarked that Vauvenargues:

> was of the opinion that Mr d'Oraison should be tempted.

The critic, however, though he admitted that the moralist was a more complex man than it looked at first sight, did not cease to admire him, mainly because, in the light of many letters written to Mirabeau, Vauvenargues continued to appear admirable. Commenting on one of those letters, Sainte-Beuve said:

> Such was Vauvenargues as a man, or, at least, such was the man he wanted to be. What is certain is that greatness put a sign on his brow, which is the stamp marking his nature. [8]

Of course it has been suggested [9] that Sainte-Beuve was prejudiced by his former appreciation of an idealized Vauvenargues. But many others who had read the letter quoted above did not hesitate to express their affection and admiration for the culprit.

At the beginning of the century, Paléologue and Prévost-Paradol spoke both respectfully and affectionately of the moralist. The former ended the book [10] he devoted to Vauvenargues with the following sentence:

> Had Vauvenargues not lived, the greatness of our literary tradition would lack something and the nobility of the French soul would count a quartering less in her blazon.

Prévost-Paradol in his *Studies of the French Moralists* [11] spoke about the 'noble' existence of Vauvenargues. As for Lanson, [12] who was very fond of Vauvenargues, he called him 'this gentle, proud, firm, generous, ambitious soul.'

The tradition of a noble Vauvenargues is supported by what seem to be autobiographical elements in the writer's work. Among those elements, a 'Character' called 'Glazomène' and a dialogue between Brutus and a 'young Roman' are particularly notable for their resemblance to what is known or assumed about Vauvenargues.

In *Glazomène* the moralist wrote:

> . . . (he) had elevated feelings and was ambitious though he was poor . . . Though gifted and always diligent and well-

> meaning, he met with an adamant fate. Though wise he could not avoid committing irreparable faults . . . After destiny seemed to have wearied of hounding him, he was obliged to contemplate death. His eyes closed in the prime of his life and when a tardy hope began alleviating his sorrow, he experienced the unbearable pain of not leaving enough to discharge his debts, and so was unable to protect his virtue from this blemish . . . However, don't think that Glazomène would have accepted to exchange his misfortune for the prosperity of weak men. Fate may play with the wisdom of the virtuous, but it is not within its power to make them less courageous.

That, of course, looks like a good summary of the moralist's life, and, if we take for granted that he depicted himself accurately, we shall imagine a man not faultless, but of good will, and firm enough to have been always morally superior to his destiny.

One gets the same impression of being admitted into the author's secrets when one reads the following dialogue:

> *The young man:* Illustrious ghost, condescend and love me . . .
>
> *Brutus:* How were you entitled to demand success? Were you born of famous blood?
>
> *The young man:* I was born of an unknown family and wanted to ennoble myself through virtue and glory.
>
> *Brutus:* What course did you take to exalt yourself?
>
> *The young man:* I had some knowledge of the human heart; I was fond of intriguing; I hoped to master others' minds, this is the way to meet success everywhere.
>
> *Brutus:* Yes, when you are already advanced in your career and known to the Great . . . Had you distinguished yourself in war?
>
> *The young man:* Every danger I faced in cold blood, my duties I fulfilled; but for my routine duties I had no liking. Thinking I could do well in elevated positions, I did not care to gain a reputation in humble ones.
>
> *Brutus:* . . . You would have succeeded, had times been more favourable, for your soul is Roman.
>
> *The young man:* Then, dear Brutus, I have no regret, Fortune is partial and unfair, failure is no great sorrow if you can say rightly to yourself that you deserved what you failed to achieve.

Again the application of this dialogue to Vauvenargues is not only easy, but tempting. The temptation is the stronger, because the young man's confession concerning his taste for intriguing and his capacity for influencing others is similar to what is to be found on the subject in Vauvenargues's correspondence with Mirabeau.

Though it is difficult to test the value of the so-called autobiographical elements, they cannot be neglected in any attempt to throw some light on Vauvenargues. They must be considered as data requiring interpretation. Similarly Vauvenargues's thought can also be said to require interpretation.

In his *History of Philosophy*, Emile Bréhier made a synthetic assessment of what he called 'Vauvenargues's doctrine', and drew the conclusion that the moralist's thought was 'stern and haughty'.[13] Bréhier's synthesis, which emphasizes Vauvenargues's determinism and rejection of absolute moral value, is based upon the assumption that the moralist had a systematic mind. Such an assumption may be well grounded, but, because we are in fact confronted with views which are often loosely connected or even unrelated, it seems safer to resort to a more analytical and detailed assessment of Vauvenargues's thought. Should it be contended that this method is not safer because the analysis of loosely connected thoughts may lead to arbitrary selection, the result would still appear more gratifying because it would become easier to qualify stern and haughty statements by humane and modest ones.

Needless to say, the following assessment of Vauvenargues's thought will be brief and tentative.

Young Vauvenargues was an enthusiastic admirer of great men of Antiquity and his first philosophic fervour was stirred by stoicism. The *Treatise on Free Will* bears the stamp of this juvenile enthusiasm. However, Vauvenargues thought better of it soon. In an amusing letter to Mirabeau, he wrote:

> I became a stoic in very good faith, but my stoicism made me as mad as a hatter . . . It was so for two years and then I said after Brutus: 'O Virtue! Thou art but a ghost . . .'

Of course this apparently humorous statement must not be taken literally; it is not easy to know to what extent stoicism ceased to appeal to Vauvenargues. What is certain is that he rejected the concept that Free Will is above passion. Indeed in the *Introduction to the Knowledge of the Human Mind*, he put so strong an emphasis on the importance of man's desires, feelings, affections and aversions, that sometimes one wonders if man is anything other than a few passions. Nevertheless, I think that, as a whole, the essay does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the tyranny of passion is absolute.

It is a small book divided into three parts entitled: concerning the mind in general, concerning passion and concerning good and evil. The object of the first part is, through 'definitions and reflections based upon experience', to make known all the different faculties which are called 'the mind'. The author's aim is to cause many apparent contradictions to vanish. Had he concluded, against

Pascal, that there is no mystery about man, but only ignorance of his true nature? In my opinion, such an interpretation of his thought would be rash. Vauvenargues was not a man who believed that everything can be explained.

The second part of the Treatise deals with the passions. In the first chapter, Vauvenargues shows what they are. Then he proceeds to define them and finally devotes a chapter to 'Passion generally'.

Referring to Locke, Vauvenargues begins by saying that 'every passion is caused by pleasure or pain.' There are only two 'organs' through which comes all that is enjoyable or painful: the senses and reflexion. The impressions caused by the senses are instantaneous and their 'springs' are unknown. On the other hand, we know something about passions which come through the 'organ of reflexion'. From the experience of our being we get an idea of greatness, of pleasure, of power, which we always want to increase, and from the imperfection of our being we get an idea of smallness, of subjection, of misery, which we endeavour to stifle: 'such are our passions'. However, reflexion restrains the weak impulses of dispassionate people and stirs the ardour of others by feeding their illusions. This is the reason why the passions of men who have profound minds are more difficult to overcome; in such men, reflexion nourishes desire.

The subsequent chapters dealing with the different passions contain other important statements. In particular, Vauvenargues contrasts 'self-love'[14] with 'our love for ourselves.'[15] When we yield to 'self-love', we become exclusively self-centred. On the contrary, 'our love for ourselves' may drive us to seek for happiness outside ourselves.

Commenting on this passage, Bréhier said that Vauvenargues was very near Nietzsche's 'Will for Power'. What is sure is that Vauvenargues rejected La Rochefoucauld's theory according to which 'self-love', i.e. selfishness, is always at the root of our 'so-called virtues'. Moreover, he thought that the moral value of our passions depends upon our character. For instance, ambition may lead to vice or virtue.

Again the importance of passions is emphasized in the last chapter, in which it is said: 'passions are opposed by passions, but the "predominant one" rules the will despotically'. However, the moralist ends this part of his book with the following statement:

> . . . That does not exempt anybody from struggling against his habits and should not cause men's dejection or sadness. God can do everything; virtue, when it is sincere, does not forsake her lovers; vice can lead to glory a well-born man.

It would be interesting to know what Vauvenargues had in mind when he wrote: 'God can do everything'. Certainly, before

speaking about virtue, for logic's sake, he must indicate that the tyranny of passion does not necessarily exclude moral responsibility. Nevertheless, because the moralist was brought up in a Catholic family[16] and was never hostile to religion, one cannot draw the conclusion that, in this passage, God is no more than a mere *deus ex machina*.

The last part of the book, under the heading 'Concerning good and evil', is devoted to virtue. It is the shortest part, but perhaps the most significant one. The moralist attempts to prove the reality and excellence of virtue without acknowledging the existence in ethics of anything which would be good or bad in itself. He bases his distinction between Good and Evil on the common interest. What is advantageous to society is good and what is damaging is bad. But society cannot achieve equality among its members, because inequality is inherent to man. Consequently the object of law is to maintain the 'reciprocal rights' of the citizens.

The subject is promptly dismissed. Obviously, Vauvenargues was eager to turn to virtue. He writes:

> . . . It is clear that I am thinking of virtues; their nobility and excellence are the object of my discourse.

Vauvenargues makes a distinction between 'natural virtues' and those which are 'the painful fruit' of reflexion. The latter should not be considered as more meritorious because more costly, or held in higher esteem because they are the result of our 'fragile reason', which is no more infallible than our inclinations. After dismissing the idea that virtue is necessarily something painful, the moralist enlarges upon the specific character of virtue as opposed to vice.

Let us add that despite his 'Love for Glory', Vauvenargues has explicitly rejected any identification of virtue with greatness of soul. He wrote:

> Greatness of soul is a high instinct through which men are drawn towards great things, whatever they may be, but through which they are induced to good or evil, according to their passions, their education, their wealth, etc. . . .

The author adds:

> How beautiful it (greatness of soul) is when virtue controls all its movements. How dangerous when it absconds from the rules.

It is clear that Vauvenargues did not confuse passion and virtue, though he was obviously more optimistic than Pascal and La Rochefoucauld about human nature. But in final analysis what did virtue mean to him?

The *Reflexions and Maxims* are neither a confession nor a code of moral rules. However, they are undoubtedly related to Vauvenargues's life and may throw some light on what he stood for. They

often give the impression that the author was both firm and kind and, in any case, do credit to his lucidity. I shall confine myself to giving some instances.

Vauvenargues stated that life is worth living despite the fact that, generally speaking, men are mediocre. He wrote:

> The thought of death deceives us, because it prevents us from living.

But he said also:

> Men have great pretensions and little schemes.

In his opinion, Great Men are rare, but there is no denying their existence. He said:

> Great men are sometimes great even in little things.

The following reflexion is especially interesting:

> I wish, very sincerely, that we had all the same station in life; I should be very pleased to have no inferior, because I would not have to acknowledge a single man above me. Nothing is more attractive in speculation than equality, but nothing is less practicable and more unreal.

It is likely that Vauvenargues's acceptance of inequality did not arise merely out of class convention.

Speaking about the higher circles as compared to the people, the moralist said:

> In society, the upper classes don't speak about the same trivialities as the lower ones; but the latter are not concerned with matters as frivolous as the former.

Vauvenargues expressed our unfairness towards the unfortunate very convincingly:

> We censure the unfortunate severely for their smallest faults, but we pity them little for their greatest misfortunes.

He said also:

> One cannot be just if one is not humane.

Of course, a different portrait of the moralist could be sketched by selecting other reflexions or maxims. Both abruptness and pride are suggested by the following statement:

> Magnanimity has no account to give to prudence,

and there is something disquieting in the following affirmation:

> We must allow men to commit great faults against themselves, to avoid something worse: servitude.

In this maxim one may see an inclination towards ideological ruthlessness coupled with moral laxity.

Shall I confess that I believe neither in a ruthless Vauvenargues, nor even in a haughty one. I do believe, however, in an aristocratic, but gentle Vauvenargues.

Whatever the 'real Vauvenargues' may have been, his literary value has never been denied.

In 1743 Vauvenargues sent some reflexions on Corneille and Racine to Voltaire whom he had never met. This was the beginning of a friendship born of mutual literary esteem, which lasted until Vauvenargues's death. Sainte-Beuve admired Vauvenargues's style. In the *Causeries du Lundi*,[17] he wrote:

> . . . he is, above all, an excellent writer.

Vauvenargues who aimed at reconciling simplicity and eloquence, has a style both graceful and natural. He liked images and metaphors borrowed from nature. For instance he wrote these two famous maxims:

> The first days of spring are less graceful than the awakening virtue of a young man.[18]
>
> The blaze of dawn is not as sweet as the first glance of glory[19].

However, I think it permissible to prefer the clear terseness and the striking simplicity and power of such statements as:

> Great thoughts rise from the heart;[20]

or:

> Constant moderation in admiration is an unmistakable sign of mediocrity.[21]

Let us add that Vauvenargues's literary opinions have the merit of gentlemanly vigour. He found Corneille bombastic and disliked Molière's comedy and mockery, but had the highest regard for Racine, Bossuet and Fénelon. He strongly reacted against Pascal's pessimism, but admired the strength of his thought and the beauty of his style.

In his *Cahiers*, speaking about the relation between a writer and his work, Valéry said that it is in the essence of Literature to deceive. To be sure, we cannot take for granted that the relation between Vauvenargues and his work is a simple one. The 'real Vauvenargues' may have had little in common with Glazomène and the Young Man entertaining Brutus or even with the moralist who wrote the *Maxims*. However, Vauvenargues left us a message whose originality, vigour and beauty are undeniable. The message is the more moving because it obviously reflects the fluctuations of a lucid man desperately in need of greatness.

NOTES

[1] During the last years of Vauvenargues's life, which he spent in Paris.
[2] *Memoirs of J. F. Marmontel*, translated from French and published by H. S. Nicholas, London. Vol. I, p. 98.
[3] *Vauvenargues, Reflexions and Maxims*, by Gustave Michaut, 'Les Cours de Sorbonne', 1937-1938.
[4] *Causeries du Lundi*, Vol. III, p. 123, Garnier Paris, 3e ed.
[5] The father of the famous revolutionary orator.
[6] My translation from Sainte-Beuve's quotation. Op. cit., Vol. XIV, p. 11.
[7] Vauvenargues's regiment.

[8] Op. cit. Vol. XIV, p. 45.
[9] *Vauvenargues Without His Legend*, by Giacomo Cavallucci, Naples and Paris 1939.
[10] *Vauvenargues*, published in 1909 by Hachette in 'Les Grands Ecrivains Français'.
[11] *Etudes sur Les Moralistes Français*, Paris Hachette, 1906.
[12] *Histoire Illustrée de la Littérature.*
[13] *Histoire de la Philosophie*, Vol. II, p. 431.
[14] 'amour-propre.'
[15] 'l'amour de nous-mêmes'.
[16] See *Notes sur la Jeunesse de Vauvenargues*—Extrait des Mémoires de l'Institut Historique de Provence, par Paul Ardoin, éd. J. Vrin, Paris 1949.
[17] Op. cit. Vol. III, p. 136.
[18] 'Les premiers jours du printemps ont moins de grâce que la vertu naissante d'un jeune homme.'
[19] 'Les feux de l'aurore ne sont pas si doux que les premiers regards de la gloire.'
[20] 'Les grandes pensées viennent du coeur.'
[21] 'C'est un grand signe de médiocrité de louer toujours modérément.'

THE NOVELS OF V. S. NAIPAUL

by R. H. LEE

IN *An Area of Darkness*[1]—his book of rediscovery of India—V. S. Naipaul discusses his peculiar background (for a writer in English) as an Indian of Hindu family living in Trinidad. His family left India two generations before his birth, and, yet, never really arrived in Trinidad. He writes thus of his grandfather:

> He had abandoned India; and . . . he denied Trinidad. Yet he walked on solid earth. Nothing beyond his village had stirred him; nothing had forced him out of himself; he carried his village with him . . . We who came after could not deny Trinidad. The house we lived in was distinctive, but not more distinctive than many. It was easy to accept that we lived on an island where there were all sorts of people and all sorts of houses.[2]

Naipaul's comparison here of his generation with his grandfather's clearly defines the central area of interest of all his early novels. It is an interest in the change occurring in his own generation from a dominating respect for the past, to an acceptance of a new world, geographically and philosophically. The main interest of the first novels lies, in fact, in the way in which Naipaul defines his own attitude, and that of the society he portrays, to this inevitable change. A whole range of responses is given, some—comprising the readier acceptance—being plainly autobiographical in origin, while others are presented in characters created by the author's critical detachment and emotional sympathy.

It is the documentation of this sociological phenomenon in individual cases, and in society in general, that provides the material, the basic stuff, of the novels. It is the attempt to control the ready proliferation of character and incident in the books that provides some of the main critical interest. There is considerable pleasure to be gained in the observation of Naipaul's increasing ability to bring under control the vivid life that surely and pervadingly fills the books, and gives the work cohesion and unity. In this sense, Naipaul's work shows a line of development something like that from *Pickwick Papers* to *Hard Times*: he has moved from the episodic, eccentric character novel (*Miguel Street*[3] and *The Suffrage of Elvira*[4]) to the sparse, strictly necessary detail of *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion.*[5]

Though we may find it a praiseworthy development in Naipaul that the fertile imagination is becoming harnessed to dramatic significance in creation of detail, we must immediately recognize that his success rests firmly upon this very ability to create unlimited incident and memorable character, and, in recognizing this, do justice to the often indicated affinities in this field between Naipaul and Dickens. Such a comparison is useful only for indicating characteristics in Naipaul's work, and not as a judgement of value; but it does serve to bring out characteristics of his work that might be missed if it were analysed only along the lines already suggested. The comparison brings out, for instance, Naipaul's gift for social satire and his intricate awareness of social class, and a gift for the grotesque detail. There is an abundance of double-edged satire in this description (from *The Mystic Masseur* [6]) of a dinner-party given by the Governor to the newly-elected Members of the Legislative Council. The hero of the book, Ganesh, elected on the slogan 'A vote for Ganesh is a vote for God,' is hesitant about the correct use of the cutlery. So are the other guests.

> The members looked at the waiters who looked away quickly. Then the members looked at each other.
> The man in jodhpurs muttered 'Is why black people can't get on. You see how these waiters behaving? And they black like hell too, you know.'
> Nobody took up the remark.
> Soup came.
> 'Meat?' Ganesh asked.
> The waiter nodded.
> 'Take it away,' Ganesh said with quick disgust.
> The man in jodhpurs said, 'You was wrong there. You shoulda toy with the soup.'
> 'Toy with it?'
> 'Is what the book say.' . . .
> No one near Ganesh seemed willing to taste the soup. The Christian Indian placed his daughter on his left knee, and, ignoring the others, dipped a spoon in his soup. He tested it with his tongue for warmth and said 'Aah.' The girl opened her mouth to receive the soup. 'One for you,' the Christian said. He took a spoonful himself. 'And one for me.'
> The other members saw. They became reckless and ate. [7]

Naipaul succeeds well in giving the right balance of irony to the ignorance of the members, and the absurdity of colonial dining ritual.

Naipaul's talent for grotesquely humorous detail can be shown on almost any page, though perhaps nowhere as interestingly as in this extract from *A House for Mr Biswas.*[8] The career of the hero as a newspaper reporter reaches its apogee with this report:

> DADDY COMES HOME IN A COFFIN
>
> U.S. Explorer's Last Journey
> on Ice
>
> by M. Biswas.
>
> Somewhere in America in a neat little red-roofed cottage, four children ask their mother every day, 'Mummy, when is Daddy coming home?'
> Less than a year ago, Daddy—George Elmer Edman, the celebrated traveller and explorer—left home to explore the Amazon.
> Well, I have news for you, kiddies.
> Daddy is on his way home.
> Yesterday he passed through Trinidad. In a coffin.[9]

The Dickensian comparison can serve, finally, to bring to our notice the way in which Naipaul creates the life and vital confusion of the families he describes. There is much basically in common between Dickens's London and Naipaul's Port of Spain, and in details, a more than vaguely reminiscent note is often struck, as it is here, in the description of the family in *A House for Mr Biswas,* bearing distinct resemblances to the village school in *Great Expectations,* and the widow, Basdai, to 'Mr Wopsle's great-aunt':

> The children (living in the yard of the house shared by Biswas) were divided into residents and boarders, and subdivided into family groups. Clashes were frequent . . . and all evening, above the buzzing, there were sounds of flogging (Basdai had flogging powers over her boarders as well), and Basdai cried, 'Read! Learn! Learn! Read!'[10]

The comparison with Dickens, then, has its use as a suggestion towards the interests and strengths of Naipaul's work, but is obviously not applicable as a comparison of achievement. Let us turn, then, to an estimate of this achievement.

The least impressive of Naipaul's five novels are, without doubt, *Miguel Street* and *The Suffrage of Elvira.* Both gain their interest almost solely from quaint dialogue and the eccentricity of the characters inhabiting them, and *Miguel Street* especially is heavily derivative of Steinbeck's *Cannery Row.* The book consists of short

chapters describing various characters inhabiting the street, and demonstrates some accuracy of observation, and a flair for the telling of anecdote. There is, however, (as in Steinbeck's book) a sentimentality in the approach which shows in the author's personal involvement in the story and in the use of anecdote and quaint language for their own sake. The book lacks a developing narrative, and succumbs to bittiness, and to the creation of weird and eccentric characters simply to populate the street, and hold the reader's attention by their weirdness and eccentricity alone. It demonstrates also the same spurious attraction to laziness and easy living that distinguishes *Cannery Row*. In all, it represents the least satisfactory relation between Naipaul's obvious talent for creating character by the eccentric touch or two, and the need to bring this gift to the service of a narrative and an ordered artistic whole.

The narrator of the incidents is also an ephemeral personage, having abdicated any powers of assessment and judgement, and the final chapter, which shows how he escapes Miguel Street by means of a scholarship obtained by bribing a member of the Legislative Council, serves only as a sentimental and incredible end to the book. It is obviously a belated attempt to give retrospective narrative unity to the collection of anecdotes, but it comes too late, and the narrator is too shadowy a figure, for it to have this effect.

It is strange that this should be so, since *Miguel Street* is the third of Naipaul's novels, having been written after *The Suffrage of Elvira*, and the more ambitious and superior novel *The Mystic Masseur*, which though full of life and 'characters' has a definite and even portentous claim to a wider purpose and significance than an interest in anecdote and eccentricity. Early in the book Naipaul makes these claims for his novel:

> Nineteen forty-six was the turning-point of Ganesh's career, and, as if to underline the fact, in that year he published his autobiography, *The Years of Guilt* (Ganesh Publishing Co. Ltd., Port of Spain $2.40). The book, variously described as a spiritual thriller and metaphysical whodunit, had a considerable success of esteem in Central America and the Caribbean. Ganesh, however, confessed that the autobiography was a mistake. So, in the very year of publication, it was suppressed, and the Ganesh Publishing Co. itself wound up. The wider world has not learnt of Ganesh's early struggles, and Trinidad resents this. I myself believe that the history of Ganesh is, in a way, the history of our times; and there will be many people who will welcome this imperfect account of the man Ganesh Ramsumair, masseur, mystic, and, since 1953, M.B.E.[11]

The apparent pretentiousness of the claim is, of course, greatly modified by the mock-historical tone of, and consequent irony directed towards, the narrator. Yet 'in a way', the novel is being advanced as a history of our times; and 'in a way', though not entirely the way the author intended, the claim is valid.

Ganesh Ramsumair, formally educated to only a low level, but reading widely, and making use of his reading, is able to set up first as a masseur, and finally a religious and psychological adviser, a pundit. His fame spreads over the whole of Trinidad and, in 1946, when the first elections are held, Ganesh is able to turn his religious following into votes, and become a Member of the Legislative Council. In his new role, he is first a defender of the people, refusing (as in the passage already quoted) to participate in the rituals of the British governors. He even champions a strike of sugar workers, on a platform vaguely Marxist; but when he is roughly handled by the crowd, his sympathies turn quite the other way, he adopts the clothes and attitude of the Governors, becomes an appointed, no longer elected, member, is awarded the M.B.E., and finally appears in England as G. Ramsay Muir. In each step of this career, Naipaul is parodying, mildly, the rise to power of a perhaps representative representative of the people in a newly independent state.

Yet, accurate and pleasing in its percipience and humour as the account often is, it remains, in a sense the author has not intended, only a 'history'. There is a sparseness of concrete detail, not of Ganesh's life and career, but of the society of which he is representative, that gives finally an air of unreality, and makes this more a history of, than a novel about, profound change in a society. Ganesh acts his representative part against the sketched-in backdrop of a society, rather than as a person involved in that society, and one feels by the end that some slick manipulation of events has produced Ganesh as a representative of a society we are told little about. There is simply not sufficient detail of the interaction of the society to carry conviction for the claim that the book is a history of our times; and, perhaps more damagingly, the deflatory tone of the narrator renders us unsure, from time to time, whether the claim is advanced seriously or not. One does not know where to have Naipaul here, for sometimes the narrator himself, and his pompous significance, are the butt of the satire, and at other times, he is himself given a sure comic touch, or even an ability to present emotion convincingly. Naipaul has not entirely solved the problem of using a narrator who is technically someone other than Naipaul himself, and the ironic placing of this personage clashes often with a strength of perception which, though attributed to the narrator, plainly comes straight from Naipaul himself.

For instance, the narrator's pomposity can be deftly placed in one passage, and, then, not twenty pages later he can suddenly change from an insensitive moralist to the possessor of an effective comic touch of his own. In the first passage, Ganesh is a boy undergoing the traditional Hindu initiation ceremony.

> The initiation ceremony was held that very week. They shaved his head, gave him a little saffron bundle, and said, 'All right, off you go now. Go to Benares and study.'
> He took his staff and began walking away briskly from Fourways.
> As arranged, Dookhie the shopkeeper ran after him, crying a little and begging in English, 'No, boy. No. Don't go away to Benares to study.'
> Ganesh kept on walking.
> 'But what happen to the boy?' people asked. 'He taking this thing really serious.'
> Dookhie caught Ganesh by the shoulder and said, 'Cut out this nonsense, man. Stop behaving stupid. You think I have all day to run after you. You think you really going to Benares? That is in India, you know, and this is Trinidad.'
> They brought him back home. But the episode is significant.[12]

The heavy underlining of the moral is obviously ironic at the expense of the underliner, and thus we are surprised in another passage to find, in the same person, a light comic touch. Ganesh has a brief friendship with a Mr Stewart, who is momentarily caught up in Eastern mysticism, and despises the West.

> Before Ganesh left, Mr Stewart presented him with twenty copies of *The Science of Thought Review*.
> 'They have given me a great deal of comfort,' he said. 'And you may find them useful.'
> Ganesh said in surprise, 'But is not an Indian magazine, Mr Stewart. It say here it print in England.'
> 'Yes, in England,' Mr Stewart said sadly. 'But in one of the prettier parts. In Chichester, in Sussex.'[13]

One of the weaknesses of the book, then, is this inconsistency in the literary power granted to the narrator.

In the character of Ganesh himself, we find very satisfactorily presented the dilemma that Naipaul often returns to in his novels; the problem of reconciling what are, at a fairly elementary level of development, two conflicting views of life. During Ganesh's early

career, events happen to him, he makes no effort to order or control them, and even marries Leela Ramlogan because her father has decided he should. His attitude is mildly fatalistic, justifying his lack of initiative and success by reference to God's will.

However, success does come to him, and under its impact, he begins to see that advances can in fact be achieved, that success can be the result of a plan, correctly thought out and energetically executed. From this point, his success grows and, in the context of the book, is manifested symbolically by the acquisition of western goods and products. His house expands, he moves into business ventures related to his success as a pundit (a taxi-company to transport his clients, a restaurant to feed them) and finally, the triumph of western civilization, the installation in his house of a refrigerator full of Coca-Cola.

Ganesh now plans, looks ahead, sees opportunities, where before he accepted events. The whole thing is done lightly, the novel being primarily comic in intention (though the subject is plainly one Naipaul takes seriously), and for a full serious treatment of this conflict between accepting events as happening to you, and working to make them happen for you, we must turn to Naipaul's longer novel *A House for Mr Biswas*.

Mr Biswas' house, which is not acquired until near the end of the book, after three other unsuccessful attempts at building, is the primary symbol of the novel, and represents the hero's furthest success in turning the traditional passivity of his religion and society into some purposive activity. As an almost archetypal symbol, the house would have connotations of stability and permanence, something solid as an achievement in life; and, in the context of this novel, it certainly carries these ideas—and others. It represents, also, Mr Biswas' partially successful attempt to escape from the ancient, matriarchal order of his family—here represented by his wife's relations, the Tulsis, and all their almost medieval dependants—into a more western, private and, frankly, bearable state of life. The Tulsis, after all, do themselves have a house; but as it belongs to them, not to him, and is inhabited by a large number of families, it offers no refuge to Mr Biswas. It is his own house, occupied by his family alone, that is his aim.

While he is struggling to assert his independence, we see also the decline of the Tulsi family, the breakdown of their self-sufficiency and family ties, and their absorption into a larger community. The novel thus continues Naipaul's interest in the social change of his society.

Early in his life, Mr Biswas[14] begins to associate his feeling of personal unreality with the large number of houses, none belonging to him, that he has lived in:

> Suppose, Mr Biswas thought in the long room, suppose that at one word I could just disappear from this room, what would remain to speak of me? A few clothes, a few books. The shouts and thumps in the hall would continue; the puja would be done; in the morning the Tulsi store would open its doors.
> He had lived in many houses. And how easy it was to think of those houses without him . . . In none of these places was he being missed because in none of these places had he ever been more than a visitor, an upsetter of routine. Was Bipti (his mother) thinking of him in the back trace? But she herself was a derelict. And, even more remote, that house of mud and grass in the swamplands: probably pulled down now and ploughed up. Beyond that, a void. There was nothing to speak of him.

He lives his whole life, until he buys his own house, in this state of semi-permanency. He is never really at home anywhere, and has no stable relation with anyone until late in his life. He wears himself finally to death in a struggle to find his personal identity.

Yet, despite this, he has a singularly tenacious hold on life, a refusal to give in, no matter how difficult things are. This tenacity, in Mr Biswas and most of the family, pervades the book, and gives it a final sense which, even though Mr Biswas' own story is a tragedy, is far from bleak. This comes partly from Naipaul's own vitality of creation, and partly from the clear recognition, in author and character, that difficult as Mr Biswas' life is, it is not as bad as it might be, and his family will survive. He often reminds himself of this point, and it is reinforced by the episode in which, as a reporter, he investigates cases of destitution far worse than his own. The combination of hard-headed realism about, and sympathy with, his character's struggles, is beautifully conveyed by Naipaul:

> And now Mr Biswas began to make fresh calculations, working out, over and over, the number of years that separated each of his children from adulthood. Savi was indeed a grown person . . . Anand was more than halfway through college. Soon, Mr Biswas thought, his responsibilities would be over. The older would look after the younger. Somehow, as Mrs Tulsi had said in the hall of Hanuman House when Savi was born, they would survive: they wouldn't be killed. Then he thought: 'I have missed their childhoods.'[15]

The tenacious hold on life and the infinite creativity of man and nature underlie the whole story, and in this sphere, Naipaul has full

scope for the creation of the character and incident with which the book overflows. The incredible Tulsi family, a whole array of eccentric pundits, settings extending all over Trinidad, a member of the family known as W. C. Tuttle because of the books he reads; they leap from every page, all obviously delighting the author. Yet, the main aim is not lost sight of: the minor tragedy of Mr Biswas proceeds realistically, and not without humour, amid the luxuriant growth of jungle, character and incident.

It is a tragedy of a man who wears himself out trying to adjust himself to a profound change in his society, and in his personal outlook, and who, before he is forty, considers his career closed, and rests his ambition on his children. Mr Biswas himself achieves little (even the house is jerry-built and only fractionally paid for when he dies) but he leaves his children in a better position to go on into a changing society. He himself is a first generation casualty of the change. He begins with nothing, and achieves only a little. Early in the book, he had been taught to recite his multiplication tables beginning 'Ought oughts are ought', and this idea that 'nothing will come of nothing' haunts his life. It is his achievement to make a little (a house) come of nothing. There are two great obstacles Mr Biswas has to overcome in order to achieve more than 'ought'. The first is to conquer the fatalistic, passive attitude bequeathed from his ancestors; the second is to break away from an oppressively traditional society, itself in the process of decay.

The hostility, or, at best, indifference of fate is an idea handed down in Mr Biswas' family, his maternal grandfather having greeted Mr Biswas' own birth as another manifestation of it:

> Bipti's father, futile with asthma, propped himself up on his string bed, and said, as he always did on unhappy occasions, 'Fate. There is nothing we can do about it.'[16]

Mr Biswas' father inherits the idea:

> Though he saved and made himself and his family go without many things, he never ceased to feel that destruction was very nearly upon him. The more he hoarded, the more he felt he had to waste and to lose, and the more careful he became.[17]

Mr Biswas spends most of his life struggling against these forces, and only holding his own. This symbolically-rendered struggle with an age-old philosophy reaches its height in a nightmare-like sequence[18] in which Mr Biswas, momentarily deranged, experiences the active hostility of all things:

> He was rocking hard on the creaking board one night when he thought of the power of the rockers to grind and crush and inflict pain, on his hands and toes and the tenderer parts of his body . . . On the wall he saw a nail that could puncture his eye. The window could trap and mangle. So could the door. Every leg of the green table could press and crush. The castors of the dressing-table. The drawers. He lay face down on the bed, not wanting to see.[19]

The episode reaches its culmination in a terrifying storm which almost drowns him and Anand, and destroys the house he has currently under construction, and he has to be rescued by the Tulsis. He survives, though, physically and mentally, and shortly afterwards moves, significantly, into the city, becomes a reporter, and breaks finally with the old order of his life. From now on, his thoughts turn to positive means of success. It is as if the forces of his past had had one last destructive fling at him.

His struggle with society, in the form of the Tulsi family, continues simultaneously, and is never really resolved. The close, communal life of the traditional Hindu family is remarkably conveyed, and Mr Biswas' struggle against it, which lapses occasionally into grateful acceptance of its warmth and protection, is shown to us in a combination of incident and symbol. Fights, arguments and reconciliation abound, in all detail, as the Tulsi family life is intricately analysed. It is a life based on an accepted ritual and feeling:

> . . . there was no doubt that this was what Shama (Mr Biswas' wife) expected from life; to be taken through every stage, to fulfil every function, to have her share of the established emotions: joy of a birth or marriage, distress during illness and hardship, grief at a death. Life, to be full, had to have this established pattern of sensation. Grief and joy, both equally awaited, were one. For Shama and her sisters and women like them, ambition, if the word could be used, was a series of negatives: not to be unmarried, not to be childless, not to be an undutiful daughter, sister, wife, mother, widow.[20]

This established pattern is decaying, and the disastrous interlude where the family moves to the villa at Shorthills,[21] gradually lets it decay and fall until, productive as it is, it can no longer support them, and they have to move back to town, symbolises the gradual decay and fall of the family itself. It is not coincidental that the Shorthills interlude ends with the deaths of several of the oldest and most respected members of the family. Death is in the air.

As the Tulsi family decays, Biswas' escape is made easier—though the fact that he and other members of his generation are trying to escape is one cause of its decay. As the larger family ties disappear, so those of Mr Biswas' own immediate family increase in importance, both to him, and in the structure of the book. His relations with Shama, Anand and Savi are distinctively modern by the end of the book. They treat each other as different, equal human beings, rather than father, husband, wife, children, their traditional relation to each other. By the time of his final illness, even Shama has deserted the old pattern:

> (Mr Biswas) didn't now care to do anything against his wife's wishes. He had grown to accept her judgement and respect her optimism. He trusted her. Since they had moved to the house, Shama had learned a new loyalty, to him and to their children; away from her mother and sisters she was able to express this without shame, . . . and to Mr Biswas this was a triumph almost as big as the acquiring of his own house.[22]

At the same time, we sense in the author a movement of interest towards presentation and analysis of this kind of relation. Mr Biswas and his family emerge from their background, do not simply move across it, as Ganesh does. And as Naipaul's interest in and ability to deal with psychological analysis and close personal relations grows, and his interest in the panorama of society diminishes, we see the direction pointed to his final novel, *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion*.

In this final novel, Naipaul moves from his native West Indies to an English setting (the novel was actually written in India), with the attendant difficulties of transition, and of coming to understand another society in the depth required to place a novel in it. Naipaul undoubtedly succeeds in the transition: there is little that can be faulted in the Englishness of the setting or the tone.[23] From the point of view I have taken, however, it is the continuity of interest, rather than the transition, that is of importance: the way Naipaul deals with similar concerns in a situation widely different from his earlier novels, and with entirely new technical aims. Mr Stone and Mr Biswas obviously have much in common. They share certain attitudes to life, are buffeted about by fate, achieve little in their lives. It is the style of the novels that shows interesting differences in the technique and approach of the author. *Mr Stone* is, like the life of its hero, exceptionally well-ordered, even to the point of tedium. It has a clear, almost parable-like structure, in which the creative exuberance of the author of *Mr Biswas* has been carefully subdued to the requirements of the pattern

and the moral. Some of the talent for eccentric characterization shows through, as in Whymper, the lecherous P.R.O., in Miss Millington the maid, and in Grace Tomlinson. But it is momentary, and never gratuitous: there are no more Basdais or W. C. Tuttles. The structure of the book is also plain. It portrays a climactic change in the life of an ageing librarian, in which a very late marriage (Mr Stone is 62) and the consequent emotional upheaval, lead him to a sudden flash of insight into human relations, and the production of an idea. Then, as the idea is put into action, Mr Stone sees it becoming distorted and changed, loses interest in it and his marriage, and returns easily to his original state. This structure is summarized for us in Mr Stone's thoughts following a party at which he and his 'idea' have been lionised:

> . . . the further the brilliance (of the party) receded the more clearly he recognized its unusual quality. It was a brilliance which was incapable of being sustained, yet a brilliance of which every diminution was a loss to be mourned, a reminder of darkness that had been lived through and a threat of the darkness that was to come.[24]

The novel itself opens and ends with Mr Stone sitting alone in the dark; at the beginning, lying in wait for a predatory cat which haunts his house; and, at the close, sitting in his study waiting for his wife to return from a shopping expedition. In between, is the brilliant episode of the one original idea of his life, betrayed by the compromises of action, and the incomprehension of the people who use it. Within this pattern, Naipaul has linked his interest in the struggle between an active and a passive role in life, with an analysis and documentation of the process of growing old, and the relation between ideas and action. The result is a work of considerable complexity.

Mr Stone is himself aware of the complexity of his situation:

> . . . he saw that, in that project of the Knights Companion which had contributed so much to his restlessness, the only pure moments, the only true moments, were those he had spent in the study, writing out of a feeling whose depth he realised only as he wrote. What he had written was a faint and artificial rendering of that emotion, and the scheme as the unit had practised it was but a shadow of that shadow. All passion had disappeared . . . All that he had done, and even the anguish he was feeling now, was a betrayal of that good emotion. All action, all creation was a betrayal of feeling and truth. And in the process of that betrayal his

> world had come tumbling about him. There remained nothing to him to which he could anchor himself.[25]

He differs then from Mr Biswas in having both his dilemmas (youth/age, idea/action) clearly in his mind. He differs also in living in a society whose ethos is one of activity, and Mr Stone, content to play a role of quiet passivity, finds himself the odd-man-out. He is reminded daily of this, by the view from his bathroom window of trees and flowers growing and changing: by his neighbours, the Monster ('. . . wielding a watering-can . . . like a choric figure'), and the Male ('. . . always hanging out of windows, painting, sawing, hammering, running up tall ladders, making improvements to his nest'); and above all by Whymper, whose activity and lust are positively frenetic. Mr Stone's idea projects him into the active world, and he is temperamentally unable to keep up. Part of his distress at the corruption of his idea by action is hostility to any action at all. He is aware of this, is uneasy about it, but is unable to change. His involvement in passivity is a whole view of life:

> Life was something to be moved through. Experiences were not to be enjoyed at the actual moment; pleasure in them came only when they had been, as it were, docketed and put away in the file of the past, when they had become part of his 'life', his 'experience', his career. It was only then that they acquired colour . . .[26]

He has little hope of, or interest in the future. Yet he is disturbed, as the book begins, by the coming of spring (Naipaul cleverly using the advertising prose of a London Transport poster to suggest how Mr Stone is moved), and by the advent of the symbolically named Mrs Springer (connotations of rebirth and bounciness!) erupting into his life. He marries her, and regrets it:

> . . . communing with his tree, he could not help contrasting its serenity with his disturbance. It would shed its leaves in time; but this would lead to a renewal which would bring greater strength. Responsibility had come too late to him. He had broken the pattern of his life, and this break could at best be only healed. It would not lead to renewal. So the tree no longer comforted. It reproached.[27]

He immediately begins to feel caged, controlled, a plaything of women. And this feeling grows in him until the strange experience on his honeymoon in Cornwall, when he sees an old man, just retired, between two blooming women in a tea-shop, obviously

their captive. Out of the turmoil of this vision—ultimately a vision of his own position—arises the one original idea of his life. It is quite a simple idea; that the large firm for which he works should establish a system of pensioned ex-employees visiting each other with gifts supplied by the firm, and reporting any cases of hardship which the firm then alleviates. It is an attempt to establish some personal relations in a commercial world, a final gesture of solidarity with other people arising out of Mr Stone's own isolated state. All the flashy externals, the pretentious name, the mock-medieval ceremonies, the favourable publicity, are the work of Whymper, whose joy it is to 'lick the idea into shape'. For Mr Stone, the action only betrays the idea. And through the inevitable compromises, the tedious routine work, the pressure of other interests, he becomes disillusioned, and his life declines again into darkness. His temporary spurious involvement in the activity of the world is destroyed, and in his finding comfort only in the ephemerality of all life, and the idea of destruction as the only lasting action, the disturbing negativity of his character and Naipaul's vision in this book, becomes clear:

> He stripped the city of all that was enduring and saw all that was not flesh was of no importance to man. All that mattered was man's own frailty and corruptibility. The order of the universe, to which he had sought to ally himself, was not his order. So much he had seen before. But now he saw, too, that it was not by creation that man demonstrated his power and defied this hostile order, but by destruction. By damming the river, by destroying the mountain, by so scarring the face of the earth that nature's attempt to reassert herself became a mockery.[28]

These are Mr Stone's thoughts, yet there is no indication that Naipaul disagrees with them. Indeed, the sad but strong emotion roused by the final picture of Mr Stone indicates Naipaul's agreement:

> He was no destroyer. Once before the world had collapsed about him. But he had survived. And he had no doubt that in time calm would come to him again. Now he was only very tired. In the empty house, he was alone.[29]

Mr Stone changes little in the course of the novel; and the tone even of that small change is muted. Naipaul subordinates all his creative flair to the order of the book, and, though he certainly makes us feel the reality of Mr Stone's mildly tragic view of life,

he himself nearly becomes tedious in trying to portray tedium. The style is too often excessively narrative, we are told things that we should see:

> From the office then, once the source of so much excitement, source of his new vigour, he turned once more to his home. Here everything spoke of the status he could not fully feel in the office: the redecorated rooms, the organization of his household, Miss Millington's banging of the dinner gong . . . Margaret's dinner parties.[30]

Mr Biswas would have lived these scenes through for us, in all their lively detail.

The book easily survives this criticism: the sympathy created in us for Mr Stone's dilemma, and the clearly representative nature of it, are sources of great interest. There are brilliantly observed scenes (the Tomlinsons' parties, for instance) and many a satisfying insight into the English middle-class social order. I would not suggest that the book lacks solidity of presentation, or a sense of creating its world; but we may see that Naipaul has not yet entirely solved the balance of what Arnold Kettle calls 'life and pattern'. *A House for Mr Biswas* overflows with life, bursting the seams of the pattern; *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion* has just enough to animate the carefully contrived structure. Having successfully negotiated the transition to an ordered English pattern, Naipaul must now infuse it with some West Indian life.

REFERENCES

[1] Published by Andre Deutsch, 1964.
[2] *An Area of Darkness*, pp. 32-3.
[3] Published by Andre Deutsch, 1959.
[4] Published by Andre Deutsch, 1958.
[5] Published by Andre Deutsch, 1963.
[6] Published by Andre Deutsch, 1957. The quotations are from the Penguin edition, 1964.
[7] *The Mystic Masseur*, p. 208.
[8] Published by Andre Deutsch, 1961. The quotations are from the Fontana Library edition, 1963.
[9] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 283.
[10] Ibid., p. 379.
[11] *The Mystic Masseur*, p. 28.
[12] Ibid, p. 21.
[13] Ibid, p. 41.
[14] He is referred to in this way from his birth, the incongruity suggesting that, child as he is, an adult's responsibilities descend upon him from the first.
[15] *A House for Biswas*, p. 462.
[16] Ibid., p. 13.
[17] Ibid., p. 18.

[18] In the chapter entitled 'Departure'.
[19] *A House for Mr Biswas*, p. 199.
[20] Ibid., pp. 139-40.
[21] In the chapter entitled 'The Shorthills Adventure'.
[22] *A House for Mr Biswas*, pp. 7-8.
[23] V. S. Pritchett discusses the point in his review of the novel: *New Statesman*, 31/5/63.
[24] *Mr Stone and the Knights Companion*, pp. 124-5.
[25] Ibid., p. 149.
[26] Ibid., pp. 18-19.
[27] Ibid., p. 45.
[28] Ibid., pp. 158-9.
[29] Ibid., p. 160.
[30] Ibid., p. 129.

FALSTAFF AND FREDERICK MANNING

by J. A. VAN ZYL

ALTHOUGH I AM SURE they would be the last to admit it, war novelists of the Second World War such as Norman Mailer and Irwin Shaw are much closer to Hotspur than to Falstaff in their attitude to war. Hotspur's attitude is, of course, exemplified by his moralising about the virtues of heroism and honour in the speech:

> By heaven methinks it were an easy leap
> To pluck bright honour from the pale-fac'd moon,
> Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
> Where fadomline could never touch the ground,
> And pluck up drowned honour by the locks . . . [1]

Furthermore, this attitude is carried to such an extreme that Tillyard can justly accuse him of lacking *sprezzatura*, ease, nonchalance. Mailer and Shaw are most notably lacking in *sprezzatura*.

Falstaff's attitude, on the other hand, is biological, as Bernard Bergonzi points out:

> Falstaff embodies the biological virtue of cowardice: he combines the blind impulse to survive of a low writhing organism with the human burden of consciousness. [2]

His words on honour, then, should have a modern ring about them. Their cynicism has an echo in the knowledge we have gained of the effects of two great world wars, and a number of little world wars, on countries and populations and minds. However, when we come to examine the novels of Mailer and Shaw we find the same platitudes that Hotspur uttered.

The consciously constructed quality of *The Young Lions*—one ex-Communist American intellectual, one ex-Communist German soldier, one persecuted Jewish soldier, whose paths cross and recross as the author directs them—obscures any valid statement about war or humanity. In any case, war is only shown to be brutalising in the case of the German, who becomes increasingly inhuman with the passage of the war until he is defeated and killed. The two Americans become positive saints, which works absolutely against the inner logic of the novel. But the author's intention, conscious or unconscious, shines through: war purifies, it reawakens dormant honour.

The Naked and the Dead was hailed in these terms by J. W. Aldridge, 'To account for the remarkable success of a book so full of bitterness and horror as this one is, it is necessary to remember that there had been no book like it . . .'[3] Aldridge rather conveniently forgets about *War and Peace*, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, and, as I shall hope to show, Manning's *Her Privates We*.

Mailer's narrative style is vivid and graphic enough in a tough, journalistic way, but it is utterly graceless, and takes refuge in rhetoric whenever the finer emotions are being stalked. Besides, he finds the horror of war, not in the inhuman demands made by the men *of themselves*, but in the military ideology of war, and criticises the bureaucracy of war. The most damning aspect of the composition of the novel lies in the series of flashbacks which fill in the background of each character. These have no reference to the war itself, except to cater for some impulse which drives some novelists to compulsive sociological filling. Still, the conduct of the men is measured against discipline and honour, against proper conduct in battle as defined by certain rules.

Manning sees war in terms of Falstaff's biological response. Soldiers have to find somewhere an overriding will that will force them through battle. A soldier has power, almost unlimited moral power, if power be reckoned by the amount of resistance that it overcomes. He is able to overcome the greatest resistance, that of being unwilling to die, or, even worse, of being mutilated in battle.

While a soldier is alive he is immortal, and even chooses the type of death he would like to die. A nice, clean bullet, instead of being eviscerated by a shell. But, once he has lost even the smallest part of that power, is even slightly wounded, he has lost everything. Therefore, a soldier's first task is to stay alive and all other considerations pale beside it.

Manning is perhaps the last person one would expect to cleave to Falstaff rather than to Hotspur, for this aesthete's aesthete, delicate in health, was better known as a classical scholar and poet.

At the outbreak of the First World War he enlisted in the ranks of The King's Shropshire Light Infantry, and the result of these experiences is *Her Privates We*, possibly the best war novel in English. He did not put his name to the book originally, preferring to affix his regimental number, 19022, to the first edition in 1930. The title is, of course, a sardonic *double entendre* derived from Hamlet, and Manning's recreation of the Somme campaign in the summer and winter of 1916 proves the aptness of the title. In contrast to the officers who commented angrily on the waste and destruction of war (Graves, Sassoon, Blunden) Manning could comment as a private: an educated, observant private, a cut above his comrades in social status and perception, yet able to identify

himself with them and to win their affection through unselfishness and courage.

Manning's experiences are cast in the form of a novel, with a central character by the name of Bourne closely resembling what one would expect Manning to be like. He reflects Manning's education and status and takes part in the battles that Manning took part in. In this, the novel resembles Truman Capote's account of the Kansas murder trial, *In Cold Blood*, which he terms a 'non-fiction novel'. By this he means a documentary tale handled with the psychological insight and creativity of a novelist. To this form Manning has added observations of the utmost profundity about warfare and the behaviour of human beings during battle. This creative use of actuality, and above all, complete lack of sentimentality, places the novel above Hemingway's accounts of warfare in Spain and Italy. It also differs from Sassoon's Sherston trilogy in that we know Sherston is Sassoon, even to the extent of the pacifist protest, while we assume Bourne to be reflecting Manning's ideas.

Bourne is a private by choice, and running through the book is the question of his motives for not accepting a commission. It comes to a head when Captain Malet, who has rather a liking for Bourne, asks Sergeant Tozer for his opinion of Bourne. Tozer says that he is obviously a gentleman, is friendly, well-disciplined, yet seems out of place in the ranks. Malet agrees that Bourne seems to be shirking his responsibilities and might, in fact, be harming his companions by unconsciously influencing them, and therefore offers Bourne a commission. The reply he receives is symptomatic of Bourne's recognition of the wider issues involved in warfare, and of the responsibility that rests on the leaders and strategists. He says he had refused a commission originally since he wanted to acquire experience of men and of soldiering. But

> I have only taken on the colour of the ranks. It would be difficult for me now to look at war . . . from the point of view an officer is bound to take.[4]

Bourne has become too involved in the biological struggle to keep alive to be able to reduce life and death to a question of tactics, or of statistics. He is too aware of the struggle within each man, and also of the men that have lost the struggle.

Manning has created in Bourne the perfect vehicle for his thoughts, for his observations and thoughts are recorded with such clarity and so naturally that the reader has to remind himself constantly that the narrative is in the third person singular. The 'apparent first-person' narration results in Bourne's death coming as a shock, for the reader has become entirely familiar with his personal vision.

Manning, defending this creation in his *Note*, contradicts himself. He maintains, 'I have drawn no portraits' and 'the characters are fictitious'. He also states, 'in recording the conversation of the men I seem at times to hear the voice of ghosts'. Besides, he admits that the events described in *Her Privates We* 'actually happened', which we appreciate when we read the opening chapters which describe a night-raid:

> He (Bourne) neither hurried nor slackened his pace; he was light-headed, almost exalted, and driven only by his desire to find an end . . . The world seemed extraordinarily empty of men, though he knew the ground was alive with them.[5]

This animal-like creature is scurrying back to its burrow, to the protection of the trench and dugout. There he finds an officer, Clinton, who remarks:

> You and I are two of the lucky ones, Bourne; we've come through without a scratch; and if our luck holds we'll keep moving out of one bloody misery into another, until we break, see, until we break.[6]

Bourne's reply is succinct:

> Don't talk so wet, you'll never break.

Having come thus far, the struggle is acknowledged by the men like Bourne, and Clinton's histrionics are shown to be unacceptable. In his *Note* Manning says, 'War is waged by men; not by beasts, or by gods. It is a peculiarly human activity. To call it a crime against mankind is to miss half its significance; it is also the punishment of a crime'. With these words Manning lifts war beyond mere patriotism, or national retribution, to a divine retribution, or even a William Golding-like acknowledgment of the beast within ourselves.

After the raid, the men try to relax in their billets and a grotesquely realistic description of the after-effects of a battle follows:

> . . . lips parted with the sound of a bubble bursting, teeth met grinding as the jaws worked, there were little whimperings which quickened into sobs, passed into long, shuddering groans, or culminated in angry, half-articulate obscenities . . .[7]

Bourne, from his vantage point of greater perception and analysis, tries to persuade himself that these are but reflex actions, disordered

nerves trying to readjust themselves to the overriding will that had forced them through the battle. They are also an acknowledgment of evil, of death given and encountered, perhaps a stirring of the conscience. The moans and twitchings were a response to 'something diabolically evil (which) probed curiously to find a quick, sensitive nerve and wring from it a reluctant cry of pain.'

His mind reaches back to the past storm of steel, and in this passage Manning gives, to my mind, a description of battle probably unequalled in English literature:

> The air was alive with the rush and flutter of wings, it was ripped by screaming shells, hissing like tons of molten metal plunged suddenly into water . . . The conflict and tumult of his mind had gone, his mind itself seemed to have gone, to have contracted and hardened within him . . . fear seemed to have become beaten and forged into a point of exquisite sensibility and to have become indistinguishable from hate.[8]

How different from Graves's journalese, his lucid, opinionated style, his sometimes unfeeling remarks and anecdotes, besides his rather odd sense of pride in the reputation of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, as we see for instance in:

> Freeman had to admit that he had lost most of his company. He felt this disgrace keenly; it was the first time he had commanded a company in battle . . . he blew his whistle and charged. They were stopped by machine-gun fire before they got through their own entanglements. Freeman himself died—oddly enough—of heart-failure—as he stood on the parapet.[9]

And how different from Sassoon's more delicate sense of occasion:

> Almost at once the short, preliminary bombardment began and the darkness became diabolic with the din and flash of the old, old story. Not for the first time I wondered if shells ever collided in the air . . . While we hesitated some shells crashed all around us with the effect of crushing stupidity.[10]

But then, both Sassoon and Graves were officers, with the detachment, advantage and time of being able to comment on those less fortunate than themselves, further up front. Graves' slight irony 'oddly enough' or Sassoon's speculations about shells colliding in

mid-air illustrate, by default, Bourne's involvement with fear and death. Besides, Graves and Sassoon do not have to kill as Bourne does, insane with rage after the death of little Martlow. Graves remarks once, distastefully, that he dislikes killing a man having a bath, when he sights a naked soldier in the telescopic sights of his sniper's rifle.

Closer to Manning's impassioned descriptions are those of Henry Williamson in the mouth of Phillip Maddison, especially the graphic description of the ambulance post, when Maddison is wounded, in *A Test to Destruction.*

Perhaps, in an autobiography, soldiers are reluctant to express the true circumstances, in case they might be thought to be exaggerating to impress the reader with their bravery under fire. This the novelist is never constrained to do.

Bourne shares with Sassoon the feeling of disproportion between the moral and physical conflict within himself, and the abject, ridiculous figure he knows he cuts when he runs like a jerky clockwork toy towards the enemy lines. This is the split between the petty, unheroic figure he cuts, and the agony of conflict within himself. He was 'an act in a whole chain of acts'.

The chapter ends with Bourne thinking of the horribly distended and corrupted corpses in Trones Wood, and on this awful note, the novel leaves the battlefields to observe the men during their brief period of rest behind the lines. Away from the lines the men have 'sad, pitiless faces' and they evoke in the new recruits 'a kind of primitive awe'. Manning makes the point clearly that the actual battle brings out a sort of nobility in the men—bad humour, threats, quarrelling, these are all sublimated and washed out by the tempest of steel.

Together with the re-awakened personal animosity comes the sex hunger, which swings between the extremes of sticky sentimentality and rank obscenity. 'The same mind warping both ways in the attempt to throw off the obsession'. The act of sex is seen by them as a re-affirmation of self, a moving back to the borders of civilised life, after the business of keeping alive in the trenches.

Bourne's only contact with a woman comes when a French girl, with whose family he is billeted, asks him to translate a letter she had received from a British soldier she had met a few weeks before. As Bourne translates the stumbling phrases, a spark of jealousy awakens and he kisses her. However, it is not pure jealousy, it was rather as if Bourne, placing himself in the absent soldier's place, had kissed her for him. 'His own desires become involved with those of the other man, even a sense of antagonism possessed him'. For the knowledge he bore of the other man was more direct than his knowledge of the girl. She knew nothing of their twilight life

at the front, the fact that there 'they moved as so many unhouseled ghosts'.

An interesting character is introduced near the end of the novel. Weeper Smart is, as Bergonzi points out, the original for Yossarian in Joseph Heller's *Catch* 22. The latter is, of course, more ironical and intelligent, but he echoes Smart when he says, 'Open your eyes, Clevinger. It doesn't make a damned bit of difference who wins the war to someone who is dead.' Smart is a pale, hairless, lugubrious fellow, with a face which 'would have been the face of an imbecile but for the expression of unmitigated misery in it, or it would have been a tragic face if it had possessed any element of nobility, but it was merely abject, a mask of passive suffering, at once passive and repulsive.'

The men revile him, and find in him a personification of all their snivelling should they let their guard down. But it is made clear that he is no coward, no Falstaff, he is courage without pretence, bravery in its most animal-like form. He agrees fully with Yossarian that the true enemy is death:

> 'The enemy,' retorted Yossarian with weighted precision, 'is anyone who is going to get you killed, no matter which side he is on, and that includes Colonel Cathcart.'[11]

The final quarter of the novel slowly prepares the reader for the culminating battle. As they are about to move to the front a shell falls on a battalion of Scots queueing for breakfast and decimates them. This incident echoes the unnecessary death of two men, when a bomb drops onto a platoon of men being paraded in the open *place* of a village, because they were becoming 'slack'. Death erupts with added harshness when the men think they are having a respite from it.

The weather changes, it begins raining and the added curse of mud is described, 'life was now one unresisting struggle against the encroaching mud.' With the coming offensive and the mud, the men seemed to be withdrawing into themselves. The problem of the affirmation of their will in the face of death obsessed them.

In the last movement of the novel Weeper comes into his own. Bourne realises that the unbounded pity he (Weeper) felt for himself extended to others. 'He dreaded the thought of killing . . . and yet there was a kind of fatalism in him now, as though he were the instrument of justice.' Chapter Sixteen is perhaps the best of the novel, beginning as it does with the frightful evocation of shellfire, followed by the fear of the men as they wait before going over the top, and ending with the death of little Martlow, and Bourne's frenzy.

The writing is so tightly packed with images of death and destruction, and sweeps the reader along the terrain of battle so graphically, that the reading of it becomes physically exhausting. It is almost Shakespearean in its apocalyptic vision linked to human observation.

Bourne's death comes unexpectedly, and, as I indicated earlier, because of the close identification between Manning and Bourne it also comes as a tremendous shock. The final image of Bourne sitting 'his face plastered with mud, the blood drying thickly about his mouth and chin, while the glazed eyes stared up at the moon' is unbearably pathetic.

One cannot help feeling that Bourne might have been one of Falstaff's 'hundred and fifty tattered prodigals lately come from swine-keeping' and that the comment by Death itself might be, 'I have led my ragamuffins where they are peppered: there's not three of my hundred and fifty left alive; and they are for the town's end, to beg during life.'

FOOTNOTES

[1] *Henry IV*, Part I, Act I, Sc. III.
[2] *Heroes' Twilight*, Bernard Bergonzi. (London, 1965), p. 11.
[3] *After the Lost Generation*, J. W. Aldridge. (New York, 1958), p. 133.
[4] *Her Privates We*, Frederick Manning. (London, 1930), p. 99.
[5] Ibid., p. 1.
[6] Ibid., p. 4.
[7] Ibid., p. 7.
[8] Ibid., p. 8.
[9] *Goodbye to All That*, Robert Graves. (London, 1929), Penguin, p. 130.
[10] *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, Siegfried Sassoon. (London, 1930), Faber softcover, p. 62.
[11] *Catch 22*, Joseph Heller. (New York, 1962).

CORRESPONDENCE

BLAKE'S 'MY PRETTY ROSE TREE'

To the Editors of *Theoria:*

I read Mr Thompson on Blake's *My Pretty Rose Tree* (*Theoria* 24) just over a year ago, and I can remember agreeing with the general tendency of his reading of it. Something, however, troubled me about this reading; something weighed it down, limited its scope, froze it in the gesture of its own assertions; it left one with a feeling of cosy but constricting finality and without the energy that a great poem, rendered in all its complex harmonies, can liberate. How was it that something I was in general agreement with could seem so banal? Plainly, my own reading of this and other *Songs*—perhaps of much else in literature besides—was at fault. Successive re-readings have, then, been acts of self-criticism as much as criticism of another, and in the process two main lines of objection have sorted themselves out.

First, the approach, which treats the personages of the poem as idiosyncratic human personalities, as characters, is quite alien to the kind of thing Blake is doing: it is as if eyes trained exclusively in the naturalism of the domestic interior were brought to bear on the Sistine ceiling. The short monological form of the poem is itself a clear hint of the poet's intention, and this intention approximates more closely that of the writer of *Everyman* than that of most novelists. A Blake who had wanted to do what Mr Thompson implies he is doing would not commit himself to the special discipline this form demands; but then his name would probably not have been Blake.

Secondly, the tone is too detachedly moralistic by far: nothing is revealed—indeed little is even suggested—of the tragedy of the speaker's predicament. We aren't meant, surely, to look down on this poor deluded bourgeois from Freudian or Laurentian heights, condemning as vice in the speaker what our grandfathers thought virtuous. This is the answer of anarchism, whose role it has always been to err on the other side, and yet seem to itself of all positions the most emancipated. Discussion is at an end when we say, with Mr Thomspon, that 'vice receives its just deserts'; it really only begins in the recognition of this man's tragedy and it will never end as long as human hearts beat.

I shall attempt to enforce these objections by examining those

statements in the article which illustrate in their irrelevancy the unfortunate misdirection of the whole.

'His comparison of the first woman with a flower suggests that she was delicately beautiful with freshness and vitality'. Now this identification of the flower with a woman (and, moreover, a woman of a particular character), if not absolutely wrong, is limiting and irrelevant. What is needed is a close look at the phrasing of the line. 'She' doesn't 'offer herself', as Mr Thompson goes on to suggest; she *is offered to* the speaker: these terms are irreplaceable. The flower is an unsolicited and ostensibly unmerited favour—an act, it seems, of 'grace'. No giver is mentioned, and the omission is significant. Quite simply, the giver is a state of responsiveness in the speaker himself, his own heightened capacity to receive. The spontaneity of the offer is only Blake's way of expressing the spontaneity of the recipient—or, more precisely, the spontaneous state he remembers momentarily to have been in: it is the anonymity of the offerer that makes this transference possible for us. All we can know, all we need to know, of the speaker's former innocence is here. What richer earnest of its genuineness could we wish for than those first two lines? Here is no 'extravagant praise', no 'romantic excess', but the characteristic speech of a man at once self-forgetful and self-fulfilled. Must we search every corner for signs of his corruption? Certainly we should try; and if the poem were the uniformly and homogeneously tainted statement Mr Thompson thinks it is, we shouldn't fail. But the conventional limitations of the monologue—limitations which the great turn into strengths—preclude any going back in time: we aren't presented with a whole history, only with the past recollected in the present. Such recollection must be accepted as faithfully re-enacting a former state of being; we need not resort to arguments from vulgar credibility; we don't have to say that the woman's 'attractions' for the speaker have been 'intensified' by his sense that she is now irretrievably lost. He *is* his former self in these lines. Or rather absence of 'self'; for what strikes us is the contrast between the relative unimportance of himself and his later morbid insistence upon himself. The flower is introduced first, suggesting that it is there that his attention is centred—on her beauty, and nowhere else; and the line ends with an unobtrusive 'me'. No surrounding circumstance is noted, because none matters. Innocence involves a release from inessentials; our attention, like his, is wholly occupied; we know with the directness of immediate experience what his state must have been. It is a state in which there is nothing but the delight itself and the woman is here the source and focus of delight.

'The significant contrast between a flower of May and a perennial rose-tree implies that a relationship with the former woman would

for some unspecified reason (my italics—G. K. P.) have been a transient one'. To need a reason in the first place is to betray one's bedevilment by the naturalistic heresy; the only reason is a poetic reason. Something like a reason (of precisely the wrong sort) is offered later: 'she seems to live . . . for the present and to be recklessly impulsive'. I think enough has been said to show that this emphasis upon the woman's character—a hypothetical creation of the critic's fancy—is misplaced: she has no real being apart from the state of perfect receptiveness in which she came to the man.

'Though a spring flower is the only thing in nature that in any way approaches her beauty, no known one, not even the best ever produced on earth, can convey an adequate impression of it'. Innumerable other expressions of this idea might easily be devised. What the image expresses (and 'Such a flower as May never bore' *is* an image, with an image's special working, not a paraphrasable idea) is the speaker's sense of the uniqueness of his experience. Any adjective would tend to suppress this uniqueness, suggesting by its easy applicability to almost any other flower that this one is comparable to them: only a line of such absolute and unconditional praise will serve. It is a moment of suspension; the narrative is interrupted and no *fact*, no mere link in a chain of recounted events, is given us, but a self-sufficient *truth* passionately expressed. Every other line (even the first) states such a fact, dutifully carries the narrative forward, is there for that reason only. It is in the gradually intensifying contrast of this line with the rest that the man's tragedy unfolds—until, with that cruel twist at the end, almost a self-inflicted wound, it is as complete as it may be. The stages of this contrast are worth examining.

The mood of the opening is sharply broken: a succession of 'I's' chimes stridently in, insisting on being heard, and with that 'pretty Rose-tree' we feel ourselves entering a tightly constricted little net. And now an adjective *will* serve—there's nothing to suggest there aren't hundreds of trees drearily like the one this man so perversely cherishes. His words are those of the child with the bigger toy, of all who measure experience by any criterion other than the quality of life it can yield, indeed of all who measure experience at all. Joy was there for all to take in the world of the opening lines; the world we are now precipitated into is the stifling personal hell of property-greed. Our position *vis-à-vis* the speaker now becomes the position of the spectator of Faustus: sympathy must not abate as we listen for the unmistakable notes of a corruption which is at bottom self-delusion; and we recognize them by their difference from the rapturous unselfconscious singing of 'Such a flower as May never bore', which rings in our ears till the end, an echo subtly qualifying and placing all else. So that, for example, 'sweet

flower' now seems a lukewarm compliment patronizingly bestowed, deliberately meant to downgrade and minimize her beauty. One part at least of the speaker knows that to remember her uniqueness *now* would make the loss too terrible. The whole line moves luxuriously: forced by the rhythm into a languid cherishing of the words, we enact his sense of the luxury of 'free' choice and of superiority in being able to reject. A third 'I' enters in two short lines; the attention is almost hypnotically on the act of rejection. It is the delicious easiness of it all that fascinates him. The rhyme works here with peculiar force, and prompts the reflection that the poem's short compass is the source of its tragic power. 'Bore' is full and resonant; 'o'er' *lingers* merely. The tragedy is there for us in the feeble, simply aural echo of the rhyme, a poignant reminder; it isn't wholly there for him: awful unintentional ironies begin mockingly to hedge his complacency about. Dramatic irony expresses the character's lack of control over things impersonally working themselves out, and this is plainly an instance of such irony. *He* isn't aware of the falling-off that the rhyme points up. And here is a further irony, deeper and crueller than any so far: precisely at the moment of feeling most free, with an illusory freedom of choice, he is delivered into bondage. Real freedom was once in his grasp, but now he feels safer, 'better' for having been a good boy. He prefers to truly free love (in the Blakean, not the Shelleyan, sense) the crass prostitution of a conventional marriage. True, our sympathies are strained; we almost despise him; but is this not an element in our response to many another tragic figure? The poet makes him reveal himself to us, and we are kept from despising him by knowing the conditions of his being. We know him as we know ourselves in our innocent moments: a vision all great art helps us to. We recognize in this man movements which we have all felt in ourselves and which only the self-righteous will deny. The position of moral anarchism is a position of self-righteousness.

Telling his tragic tale is all the speaker can do: he is bound to the narrative in a bondage which expresses the bondage of his state. Blake 'places' him, of course, with that implicit commentary which is the poem itself. With Blake's help, we see jealous self-indulgence wearing its unconscious moral mask of duty and fidelity. He is anxious to make amends; guilt-feelings plague him; he begins to show a more than ordinarily husbandly solicitude towards his wife. Essentially, he calculates: calculation, we must remember, is appropriate to Experience. He goes out of his way to get a response, doesn't depend upon its coming spontaneously, and so is rewarded with its ghastly opposite. He is self-deceived.

'Indeed all this part of the poem is rich in brilliant irony'. This is Mr Thompson's cool summary of the situation. Of course, we all

admire Blake's 'brilliance'—but we must be able to do this without forgetting the speaker's tragedy. Mr Thompson is content merely to indicate the ironies, on the assumption, it seems, that our response will be his; that the speaker will be for us, as he is for him, an object of something very near cruel fun and derisive laughter—or at best of such cool neutrality as this: 'significant too, is his use here of the term "rose" for the first time, for now that he has lost her, he seems to be more appreciative of her delightful qualities'. Is it not tragic that at this moment—though the proprietary attitude is still there, and though she is no wild-flower—a healthier impulse should fleetingly show itself? It makes no difference: she turns away: the damage is done. He is punished by the very code he sought refuge in. Jealous possessiveness, appearing in the guise of duty, prompts him to crush an innocent impulse; and jealousy, because it sustains a system that has both man and wife in thrall, returns to plague him. She would have been jealous had he succumbed; she is jealous because he was prompted to succumb: the irony makes Blake's point—that conventional morality is both wicked and absurd, a tragic distorter of individual lives. Men are made powerless by their subservience to it—it diminishes their humanity—and they can't say why.

'And her thorns were my only delight': now he can only bring out the worst in her. That is a way of putting it; she is less herself, however, less an independent character, than a materializing of the harm he did himself in that first proud act of rejection. Her thorns are simply his own possessiveness become hurtful, external to him, quite out of his control. We don't have to 'explain' her conduct or dilate on her character: Mr Thompson attempts no explanation—at least I can't find anything that looks like one—and it is his approach that is to blame; but an 'explanation' is what it logically drives him to.

What is produced at last is a horrible perversion of genuine delight, a corruption from which (witness the hopeless, inconclusive ending) there seems no escape. But is the speaker's 'humour (in sarcastically calling thorns a delight) . . . sardonic and bitter'? Humour? The very word 'delight' is ironical in this context; but there is nothing so detached as humour, nor can there be. Certainly, there is comedy of a sort: the 'comedy of the grotesque' recognized by Wilson Knight in *King Lear*, which is a vehicle of tragedy. 'The comic and the tragic', he says, 'rest both on the idea of incompatibilities, and are also, themselves, mutually exclusive: therefore to mingle them is to add to the meaning of each; for the result is then but a new sublime incongruity'. Here, in this last line, is the kind of comic absurdity the Fool tries time and again to make the King realize; the difference is that here the monologue makes

the speaker his own unintentional Fool, though he can never know it, and will never laugh at himself.

I leave it to your readers to see how my two main lines of objection (and the errors they point to) are intimately linked, and I urge them to ponder the connection.

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