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NEOCONSERVATISM: PRO AND CON
Nathan Glazer & James Q. Wilson
Peter Steinfels & Norman Birnbaum

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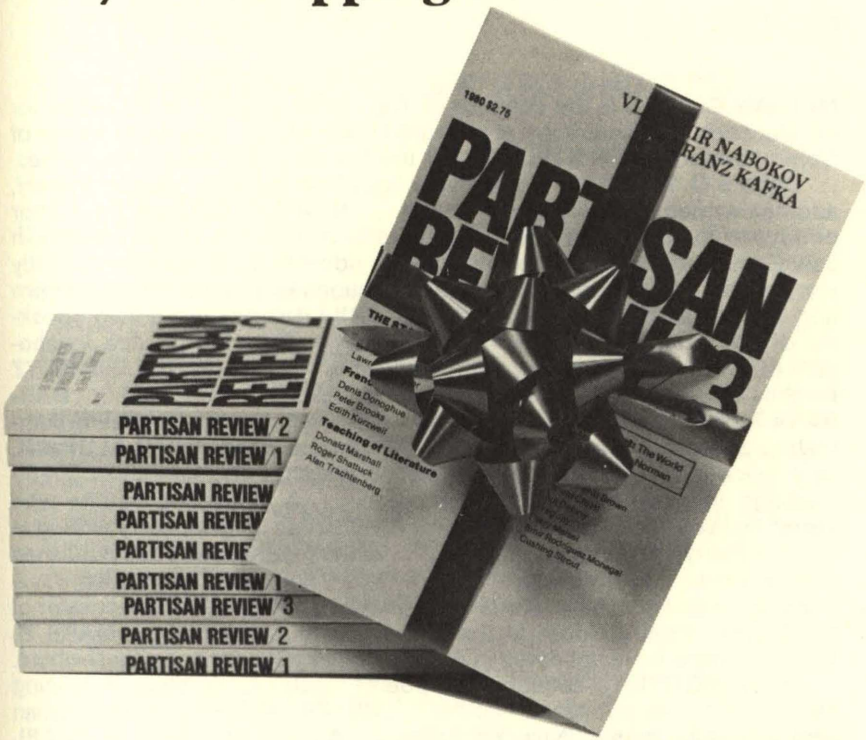

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NOTES

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NEOCONSERVATISM: PRO AND CON*

William Phillips: Welcome to tonight's discussion of neoconservatism, one of a series of meetings conducted under the auspices of *Partisan Review* and Boston University. This evening has been partially funded by the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy, and of course we're very appreciative of that.

Conservatism, which used to be a dirty word in intellectual circles, has now become quite popular and even respectable. For the first time in this country, there has arisen a new conservative movement led by intellectuals and addressed to the educated public. It has been advanced by such well known writers as Irving Kristol, Nathan Glazer, Martin Lipset, Robert Nisbet, Daniel Bell, James Q. Wilson, and Norman Podhoretz, and is promoted by such publications as *Commentary, Public Interest,* and *The American Scholar.* Nevertheless, the fact that many conservatives, or neoconservatives, still deny that they are conservatives would suggest some uneasiness in accepting their success. In fact, one of the strategies of conservatism is to deny that the old categories of conservative, liberal, radical have much meaning today because there have been some crossovers and reversals of positions. *Commentary* magazine had two symposia on some aspects of this question. In the first, known conservatives argued that the term "conservatism" had no meaning. Without going into the merits of the argument, I might simply say that common sense tells us that there are conservatives, liberals, and radicals in the world today even though, through the perversions of contemporary politics, many liberals hold some conservative positions and vice versa. The second symposium in *Commentary*, aimed mostly at discrediting the idea of liberalism, asked whether liberalism is good for the Jews. That is like asking whether jogging or wholewheat bread is good for the Jews. This is indeed an age of specialization, especially when we remember that we used to ask whether a social movement or outlook was good for humanity, not for the Jews or the Catholics. Generally, neoconservatives have

*This discussion took place last April.

different views from liberals and radicals on such issues as the communist threat, the Third World, welfare, feminism, affirmative action, the role of the state, the quality of existing society, crime, etc. There are also cultural differences on the question of authority, elitism, mass culture, and modernism. And *Commentary* has even reviewed fiction ideologically. I suppose too, some of the speakers will want to talk about the relation of neoconservatism to old-fashioned, traditional conservatism.

The main question, however, is whether the views of neoconservatism are helpful in solving the enormous domestic and foreign problems this country faces. This is what I expect will be explored this evening. Nathan Glazer will begin.

NATHAN GLAZER

This is only the second time in my life I've stood in front of an audience to defend or expound neoconservatism, both times reluctantly, because while I am happy to defend my own positions, and attack those I disagree with, I am allergic to all-embracing labels, whether applied to me, or others. Nevertheless, I am here to talk about neoconservatism because I have the feeling that I would be considered evasive if I didn't rise to this occasion. They are after all talking about me and my friends when they say "neoconservatism," even though we didn't invent the term. Pat Moynihan says it was Michael Harrington who did. There is hardly one of us who has written an article explaining what neoconservatism is. We do squirm a bit, but it's not because of the conservatism—actually I rather like that word—it's the "neo" part. There is something denigrating about "neo." Think for example of a neoliberal, who is not really a liberal. I find it hard to label the people I disagree with, and I reject most of the labels people try to pin on me.

This began with socialism. I was a socialist in my youth—as who was not?—but after a while all possible meaning disappeared from it. Despite that, people who continue to call themselves socialists maintain an air of superiority over those of us who no longer do, and expect suitable moral obeisance, even though the fact that Sidney Hook is still sticking to the term hardly helps him. I find it more and more mysterious to understand why socialists feel superior, for it seems to be the case that socialists and nonsocialists agree on more and more. Neither of us think that nationalizing industry, which used to mean

socialism in my youth, is a good idea anymore. Neither of us think the states that call themselves socialist are models of either justice or equality or freedom. Neither of us—of course—believes in imperialism or colonialism. It is very hard for us to define what it is that divides us, in any centrally principled way. We might, depending on which socialists, and which neoconservatives are arguing, disagree about the details or the scope of health insurance plans; or about the level of taxation that should be imposed upon corporations; or how much should be going into social security; or whether unemployment insurance contributes to unemployment and how much. But where are the principles that separate us? On the socialist side of such arguments, we will hear that Germany—that model of socialism!—provides a much higher replacement of wages and unemployment insurance than we do, and imposes a much heavier tax burden for social purposes. And these may be very good things to do, and there may be very good arguments for us in the United States to follow Germany in this respect.

But to me the issues appear pragmatic, while to others they are ideological. The arguments with socialists have more or less come down to the question, "Why aren't we more like West Germany or Sweden or Denmark?" They used to be, "Why aren't we more like England?" Well I wish we were more like West Germany in some respects, with a higher and a more rapidly growing per capita income, a higher rate of productivity, better social services, less crime. But I don't think the difference has anything to do with socialism or capitalism.

The issue, of course, is not Soviet Russia or Cuba or even China. Most of the socialists we argue with or are denounced by, for example, the editors and writers of *Dissent*, don't think any better of these dictatorships or whatever they are called than we do. I don't think I have any distinctly neoconservate positions in that area.

Thus our disagreements do not have anything to do with deep underlying philosophical positions. They have to do with facts and common sense. Very often the people we disagree with, or who disagree with us, don't seem to have the facts. I've worked my way through many fields of domestic social policy over the last twenty years, and again and again found that if I've disagreed with people who are on the left, it was simply because they didn't know enough.

Now I know that sounds terribly arrogant, and I will simply have to expose myself to that charge. But let me give you a few examples. Take welfare. People thinking themselves on the left and on the right

have for a long time been talking of welfare reform. The left wants to raise welfare benefits, sometimes the right does, too. Welfare as you know goes primarily to mothers and children, children whose fathers have either died—that's not too common—or left. The details of welfare reform have gotten complicated, but mostly the proposals consist of raising the benefits, nationalizing them so they are the same in Mississippi as in New York, making them more a matter of right, reducing the aspect of detailed investigation insofar as it still exists, and introducing some element of incentive to work or to get off welfare by reducing benefits only gradually as the recipients earn income, so that earned income does not simply substitute for welfare. If it does do that, if your welfare goes down a thousand dollars every time you earn a thousand dollars—which is called a hundred percent tax rate—what are you getting? And so all agree, whether fervent advocates of the expansion of welfare benefits, or their opponents, that the one hundred percent tax is not a good idea.

Now the problem with welfare reform is that it raises benefits in many states above what poorly skilled workers can earn. If going on welfare is a rational response to a situation in which if you work or stay with your husband you get x, and if you don't, you get x plus y in addition, that's not a very good reform. The problem is that in the argument over welfare reform, the left thought that it was not enough to provide x plus y, but that we should provide x plus 2y.

Ideologies seem to become relevant to the problems of welfare only insofar as they prevent people from looking at the facts. Another, and local, example—subsidized housing. We have an area in Boston, the South End, of red brick townhouses which people with sufficient energy or money are rehabilitating. It also has many housing projects; another is planned. I was asked by a lawyer who represents those who opposed the new housing project—the rehabilitating home owners—to testify against it before a federal judge. I asked on what grounds. They told me that the federal government requires an environmental impact statement for each federally funded program, and there had been no such statement for this project. I said that I thought the law was to protect us against smoke, noise, and dirt, and not against low-income tenants. They told me that a federal judge in New York had already ruled that it could be so used, and was required for low-rent housing projects. But standing by one of my few modest principles, that is, that judges should not expand the law and take it into their own hands, I said I would not testify on that ground. Then they said it also destroys historic buildings. Well, that interested me more. But when I saw the

few survivors of urban destruction in that area, I didn't think that was a very good reason to prevent public housing there. But then I looked at the figures for the project, and this is what I mean by a fact, and it turned out that each unit in this project was going to be subsidized by the federal government to the tune of $5,500 a year. There is nothing exceptional about that subsidy. This is not what the low income family would pay; they pay additional rent, depending on their circumstances.

These projects also provide tax shelters to investors and thus reduce their tax liability; and Boston foregoes the higher property taxes it could get if it continued to allow middle-class rehabilitators to invest their money in improving the area. The simple irrationality of this kind of expenditure to subsidize housing would have been enough to persuade me, but I thought further. This project is organized by an Hispanic community group. So I wondered whether the project would help Hispanics. They were probably living in the three deckers, the typical working class housing of Boston in which the Irish and the Jews and others had lived before them. Hispanics were probably doing the same, living in one unit, renting out the others. What was the point of this entire enterprise, I asked myself. It seemed an irrational form of public policy, whose end effect was to spend a lot of public money to hurt those few Hispanics who were buying and renting out housing, and replace them with those few other Hispanics who would be better off by running this housing project on federal money.

My problem is that theory is short—that is, simple, principled, ideological—social policy is long—that is, complicated, and even dull. It's not that I think the profit motive is great and noble, but it does seem to impose a modest economy and efficiency. A private landlord, if you look at all of the figures, does a better job with old housing, better for the tenants in terms of the resources being put in, than the public landlords do. He might do even better if he had part of those subsidies that we give to public landlords.

I began by saying my views have come out of experience with public policy. Those I disagree with, socialists and others on the left, seem to have inherited their views along with a pristine distance from these grubby issues. I have ended up, alas, generalizing, and I suppose this makes me conservative, and if people add neo I'll have to suffer it. This brings me to one definition of the term: a neoconservative is someone who wasn't born that way or didn't start that way. He stumbled upon the principles of conservatism when he became involved in the real world.

Now there are two other broad policy areas—and I'll say almost

nothing about them—that are spoken about in articles and books that take us to task for being neoconservatives. One is economic policy. There I'm even more innocent of theory than in social policy. But there too I have reluctantly come around to the position, as so many people have, even *The New Republic* in recent editorials, that Keynesianism, which I once took to be gospel, is badly flawed, and that the economists who emphasize the need for investment in productive resources to control inflation, have a great deal going for them. It is not economic theory which has convinced me of all of this, but the examples of Japan and Germany, and the recent figures on how little we save in this country for investment. In the third area in which a neoconservative position has been discerned and attacked, foreign policy, I remain skeptical of many of the positions of my friends. But here I will follow the advice I would give to our State Department: Don't issue a report on the state of the world or on the state of human rights in each of the 150 countries in the world—it will make too many enemies.

William Phillips: There is one question I want to ask you, and I hope you will answer when it's your turn to speak again. You seem to say that the left got the facts all wrong. Does the left have a monopoly on ignorance and does the right always get the facts right? Peter Steinfels is the next speaker.

PETER STEINFELS

Having arrived late, I did not hear Nathan Glazer's definition, or I suspect nondefinition, of neoconservatism. Almost everybody claims that he or she is following the facts rather than bringing their preestablished ideas to interpret the facts. And I certainly don't have Nathan Glazer's experience or knowledge about social policy to challenge him on those grounds. I do know, however, that when I was reading for my book on neoconservatism, although I did not find what might be called a strict ideology, I did find a school of opinion possessing certain common themes. One of them was the need for stability—in no way was social instability regarded as an opportunity for useful change. Second was the theme of a cultural crisis, a crisis of authority and legitimacy. Unlike various left critics the neoconservatives did not locate the sources of this crisis in the social-economic structures, but treated them as mainly arising from the cultural

condition itself, from the state of our mores and beliefs. Neoconservatives hardly varied at all in their analysis of this cultural crisis. One favorite category in their analysis was Lionel Trilling's idea of the adversary culture, an oppositionist mentality critical of all authority and institutions, which had once been in the possession of the avant-garde minority, but, through mass higher education, had recently spread to great numbers of individuals in what was termed the "new class," a group reportedly having a great impact on the media and on social policy. In neoconservative eyes, the interaction of this "new class" with a vaguely defined group called the "underclass" produced social demands, in the name of the underclass and under the banner of egalitarianism, that the government was simply unable to meet. The result was what neoconservatives called overload, namely the inability of government to meet these claims, with a consequent undermining of legitimate government authority. Similar themes of adversarial mentality, egalitarianism, and a loss of confident authority were voiced in the area of foreign policy, which I'm not going to expand upon now. These are the themes which inspired the neoconservatives' interpretations of facts determined, for example, by their tendency to examine bureaucratic failings in the government sector far more than in the private sector. In short, neoconservatism is not a simple movement from facts to knowledge, instead a preexisting viewpoint that interprets reality.

Now I found a number of virtues in neoconservatism, at least enough for one neoconservative reviewer to suggest that I was actually a closet neoconservative. But the virtues of neoconservatism are going to be well represented this evening, so I would like to stress criticism.

There are two familiar reactions to neoconservatism One claims that neoconservatism is irrelevant: a bunch of eastern academics carrying on their old quarrels in a new form, divorced from real politics and the rest of the country. On the right Kevin Phillips is an articulate spokesman for this point of view, and there are others who say much the same on the left. Their position is reinforced by the striking fact that here we have what both neoconservatives and non-neoconservatives recognize as one of the most influential movements of intellectual opinion, and yet you cannot clearly identify a single neoconservative policy on the major issues facing the country. There is no neoconservative energy policy; there is no neoconservative unemployment policy; there is no neoconservative inflation policy.

On the other hand, you can find a set of cues which neoconservatives use to establish which participants in the discussions of major

questions come in with two strikes against them, which are to be considered as having the burden of proof on their shoulders rather than on other shoulders. In this sense I belong to the second family of critics, those who think that neoconservatism is extremely important as a cultural force.

It has been and will be important for two reasons. The first has to do with the contradictory impulses of the American public on such questions as containing the size of government and tax expenditures, and on a whole series of citizen concerns, from education, to health, to environment, and so on. In a situation where the citizenry seems to be pulled in two different directions, a set of selective views which can shape the discussion has a particularly powerful place.

Second, neoconservatism is especially important in relation to the existence of the so-called "new class." It is true that, however vaguely defined, some large group of people, who are relatively affluent and educated, and who work in large organizations, seems to be so located as to have their shifts in opinion magnified by the media; and they are an important element in the legitimation of various social concerns and social programs. In linking the significance of neoconservatism to the existence of a "new class" I am not endorsing the neoconservative theory of the "new class." In fact, that theory is an example of how little facts may have to do with this discussion. That is, the idea of the "new class" was set forth by neoconservatives long before any of them, as far as I know, made any effort to get the facts. This effort was made only recently in a volume edited by Bruce-Briggs.

The notion of the "new class" as a highly adversary oppositionist group in society was from the beginning contradicted by available facts including those gathered, for example, by Seymour Martin Lipset and Everett Ladd in the late sixties, at the high point of volatility in American politics. Their study of academics, who should have been the heart of the "new class," found out that while busing, to take one instance as a test case, was much more popular among college professors than among the general public, it was still opposed by over half of the professors. Fifty-eight percent of the professors disapproved strongly of student and faculty radicalism, and almost all of those who approved did so with reservations. Only three percent had no reservations. Finally Lipset and Ladd concluded, after redoing some of this study several years later, that although American academics constitute the most politically liberal occupational group in the United States, they are not in any way radical. "They manifest values, expectations, orientations to governments, moods, and concerns that broadly reflect

those of the American public. Most faculty liberals are far from supporting demands for basic changes in the society, and most of them, like their fellow citizens, support the prevailing economic and political order."

If problems are not arising from this adversarial "new class," where are the problems in our society arising from? By and large, neoconservatives do not examine this question. Yet a number of theories can be proposed to answer it. They are expressed in terms such as the "era of limits," and the title of Lester Thurow's book, *The Zero-Sum Society*. My own term has been "the veto society." In any case, all these theories recognized that the magic of economic growth no longer works. We've reached the point where it has become obvious that any social or economic policy will have clear winners and losers. Pick any energy policy, whether it's nuclear, coal, or oil, and you'll quickly be able to see who will gain from it and who will lose from it in disproportionate ways. Investment policy, too, will require winners and losers, and so will ecological concerns. In any case the sticking point is that today the losers, or rather potential losers, are able to veto the initiatives that would make them losers, even if they cannot impose their own alternative policies. The result: we're paralyzed in many areas of national policy.

This has implications for questions of equality and of democracy. In terms of equality, what has kept the distribution of income equal, and furthermore has improved the lot of most households during recent years, are three things. The first is government transfer of income. In that sense, our government social policies have been very successful. It's also true that neoconservatives who advised us to follow what they called an income strategy rather than a service strategy were giving good advice, because the transfer programs have made the difference between what would otherwise be a slightly increasing inequality and the actual maintenance of equality. The second thing that has maintained the level of equality or even improved it is the emergence of second wage earners within the family. The third thing, of course, is government employment, which has played a particular role among the middle class, especially among women and minorities.

Today all of these factors, it seems, are threatened with limits if not actually with decrease. Income transfer programs are being tightened, squeezed, taxed. There is no longer a reservoir of spouses, or second income earners, who can go to work to maintain household income levels. In fact from here on, those spouses who go to work are largely from more highly educated groups, and the effect of the second income

for most families will be to increase rather than decrease inequality. And finally there will most likely be cutbacks in government employment, disproportionately affecting women and minorities in the middle class. In other words, the eighties and the nineties are very likely to be decades of growing inequality and perhaps even absolute drops in the standard of living for the lower sixty percent of the American population.

What does all of this have to do with neoconservatism? They have described today's situation as one of a "new class" battling with the business class for leadership in our country. But I think we are seeing, instead, a revolt of the nobles, a reassertion of business leadership in an attempt to bulldoze its way out of the veto society. This effort will have a political component, and we've seen the vast expansion of political action committees and direct electoral activity by corporate leadership. It will also have an ideological component sounding certain themes. One will naturally be a steady disparagement of government which, after all, is the main source of transfer payments and equalizing jobs. Another will be the effort to honor the market as the only guide to efficient and legitimate distribution. A third will be a distinction between the "productive" and the "unproductive" as a justification for increasingly unequal distribution, with the understanding, of course, that the "productive" are those with sufficient income to save and to invest. It is difficult to get figures on exactly how much is being invested in this ideological effort. One figure is a minute per working day. In short, in order to legitimate continuing and, in all likelihood, increasing inequality, business leadership is beginning to launch an all-out political and ideological offensive that, in my opinion, threatens to eviscerate our democracy.

In this effort, neoconservatism, to my disappointment, has almost entirely linked itself to business leadership. I could cite someone like Michael Novak, who in an Exxon-funded publication for the American Enterprise Institute provides an appendix advising corporations on ways in which business can hire intellectuals to carry on ideological warfare. Though Novak is perhaps an exaggerated instance, what neoconservatism does, it seems to me, is first, habitually ignore the capitalist and economic sources of our problems, including those cultural problems it has had the good sense to focus attention on. I hasten to add that Daniel Bell is an exception. Second, neoconservatism has proclaimed egalitarianism and redistribution to be dangerous and unjustified goals of public policy at a time when growing inequality is apt to be the problem. Third, neoconservatism has

announced a need to save democracy by having a little less of it, continually offering criticism of programs of citizen participation. Fourth, it wants to construct a positive correspondent to what it claims (wrongly, I think) is the negative "new class." The positive correspondent is some kind of militant clericy which will do the work of cultural discipline in order to keep social thought from growing too turbulent and boiling over into mischievous and dangerous initiatives. The power of "new class" in the symbolic and ideological arenas will then be mobilized to reinforce rather than counter-balance the power of corporate wealth. In my estimation—and this does have a lot to do with one's overall judgment of the leading issues—this neoconservative effort is likely, by and large, to narrow the range of alternatives the society would have before it, socially, economically, and politically.

William Phillips: Peter Steinfels has made an interesting and balanced criticism of the positive aspects, the programmatic aspects, of neoconservative thought. But there's another aspect here. In my opinion, the main contribution of neoconservatism has been to point out the foolishness of a good deal of liberal and radical opinion. Our neoconservatives here should be pushing that side of it. Perhaps Norman Birnbaum and Peter Steinfels might be responding to that. Anyway, the next speaker is James Q. Wilson.

JAMES Q. WILSON

I was struck by our moderator's suggestion that one of the purposes of tonight's meeting was for neoconservatives to explain how they are going to solve the problems of the country. I find that odd. I would think that those who propose changes have the principal obligation to defend them, to explain how they might work, and to explain the errors of the past, almost all committed in the name of liberalism. Neoconservatives, I suppose myself included, point out that these errors are primarily with the use of facts and, as Peter Steinfels has rightly pointed out, with the dispositions behind those facts.

We are contributing to a discussion. Now in bringing my views to this I'm at a profound disadvantage. I was not given the benefits of being raised in New York or in other places where one is a participant from early childhood in the struggles and factional quarrels of the left.

My friend Nathan Glazer says we were all socialists when we were young. I was not.

I didn't know what a Trotskyite was until Dan Bell explained it to me. I'm still not sure I can repeat the definition. I was raised in Southern California, in Los Angeles, where people don't ordinarily say you're beautiful unless you are, but where a large proportion of the people are. I was raised in a Catholic family of parents who were from the south and the west in a community overwhelmingly midwestern and Protestant in its orientation. The only distinctive ethnic group was the Mexican-Americans, whom we didn't understand, and who didn't understand us.

Coming to the east, coming to the University of Chicago, and then at Harvard, I discovered that the things I had learned about politics in my life—what I was brought up to believe in my home, church, and community—were not believed by my intellectual peers. I came to realize I was a dissident, a heretic. I had wandered (many of my colleagues assumed by accident) into a citadel of orthodoxy. If you held the views that are characteristic of most Americans, the citadel either tolerated you kindly, or placed on you (somewhat benign) labels, such as neoconservative. And you were expected to justify yourself. I've been teaching now for nearly twenty years at Harvard. I am struck by the relationship between my opinions, which I am told are neoconservative, and popular opinions. That relationship is formed by my own experiences, not in the eating halls of CCNY, but on the playing fields of David Starr Jordan High School in Long Beach, California. In both the popular views and in neoconservative opinion are certain tensions and ambiguity.

First, people in general have due regard for their self-interest; when they engage in that sober reflection which is required by citizenship, they think of their self-interest, rightly understood. They wish freedom, but they wish amenity—personal benefits—as well. When intellectuals state this, they discuss the virtues and defects of the market; when they speak of amenity they debate alternative ways of achieving it. Conservative or neoconservative intellectuals are interested in achieving amenity in ways that are consistent with the market, if possible produced by the market, because we feel that the market tends to produce, if properly induced and constrained, solutions that are more desirable than planned solutions. This is not how the average citizen would state it. He is concerned about his job, the security of his home, his environment, and the quality of his schools. Intellectuals discuss the matter in somewhat more abstract ways.

Secondly, the public is concerned about family, religion, community, and decency. The public has become quite tolerant of things that seem to threaten those values, but never mistake their great instinctive loyalty to them and the importance of these institutions and values in shaping their lives. To most people, most of the time, the government is far less important. Neoconservatives share these concerns, though we phrase them differently. We speak of traditional values; of mediating institutions; of taking crime seriously (and not regarding it as a code word for racism as so many liberals did in the 1960s).

And finally, the popular mood is pragmatic; it wants to know what works. It judges what works in its own daily environment, and it is dismayed that governmental things often don't work. But as Peter Steinfels rightly pointed out, they want the government to keep trying because they do want clean air, safe food, pure water, decent schools, and safe streets, and they hope that smart people are trying not only harder but more intelligently.

Neoconservatives seek to provide an intellectual statement of this concern and try, as Nathan Glazer says, to get the facts, comprehensively and systematically. But note how the tensions which are implicit in popular opinion become explicit in intellectual opinion. There is a great tension between libertarianism and self-interest on the one hand, and the concern for traditional values, family, mediating structures, continuity, and history on the other hand. There is a great tension between the desire to see your own circumstances improved dramatically, and a realization that the government programs often do not work well. As a result, there is no such thing as a neoconservative manifesto, credo, religion, flag, anthem, or secret handshake. As a tendency, it is shot through with inner tensions. The magazines to which I contribute are edited and written by people who in most cases are aware of these tensions, and usually find easy answers hard to come by. This often leads to the statement that neoconservatives never favor anything. That's untrue. But they are rarely in favor of things that can be stated simply. Neoconservatism is a mood, not an ideology, and a mood that has not only intellectual sources, but popular ones as well.

To me, and I suppose to most neoconservatives, Alexis de Tocqueville is one of the most important authors. So is Aristotle. But I think what I find in de Tocqueville, in the Federalist Papers, and in Aristotle, is a combination of theory and practice, a desire to test ideas by the sober second thought of a decent citizen—to ask whether institutions can be made to display the best qualities of people without imposing upon people the worst qualities of the institutions.

Peter Steinfels concluded by mentioning that the two major contemporary issues are democracy and equality. He is quite right. He has pointed out the ways in which equality has been helped by government transfer payments, second wage earners, and public employment. I would add that it has also been helped, decisively, by a (until recently) growing economy. A zero-growth society is a society that will not only condemn all of us to suffer a bit, it will condemn the weakest among us, the least advantaged, the poor, the blacks, to suffer the most. Businessmen must be encouraged to invest. But there are important limits as to the appropriate form of the encouragement. Indeed, the whole relationship between neoconservatism and the business establishment is an uneasy one. I don't feel very comfortable before business audiences because I know that in many ways they are part of the problem. Given a large government they will attempt to seize control of some of its parts to use for their own advantage. One of the arguments for a modest government with modest ambition is that it provides fewer points at which any interest group—political or economic or Ralph Nader—can seize control of some bureau and turn it to its own advantage.

The other issue is democracy. Democracy is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. The ends to which it is a means are listed in the preamble to the Constitution. There are six of them, and they involve domestic tranquility, justice, liberty, and the national defense. This view should guide us as we judge democracy as the principle for governance for any institution: the university, the corporation, or the labor union. The question is not whether democracy should exist in order to "achieve democracy," but rather, what internal arrangements are best suited to the nature of an institution so that it can perform its proper social function and serve its highest purposes. Sometimes the answer is democracy, almost always in voluntary associations, and sometimes it is not. But you'd never know this if you read the statements that have been made by many anti-big business groups. Of all of the criticisms of big businesses that can be made, and I have made many, the notion that the corporation is insufficiently democratic strikes me as one that is least helpful and flows most clearly form an *a priori* political position which has not been tested either by popular concerns or by the facts.

William Phillips: I'm puzzled by two statements that James Wilson made. One is that he seems to assume that there is no obligation on the part of neoconservatives to offer any program or any type of

solution for the problems confronting us. That strikes me as quite significant. I think it's the first time any social intellectual movement was not able to justify itself on the basis of what ideas or programs it had for the solution of existing social problems, for the improvement of existing society. The second thing that puzzled me is the definition of democracy. Maybe I misunderstood James Wilson, but it does seem to me that from what I know of history, most, if not all antidemocratic movements got their source, their energy, and their rationale from the idea of the slogan that democracy wasn't working, that democracy was not achieving superior ends which were of greater value to society. Anyhow, Norman Birnbaum is the next speaker.

NORMAN BIRNBAUM

It seems to me that so-called neoconservatism is an incomplete or unachievable amalgam of very diverse themes and very diverse groupings and movements, of different impulses, and I think James Wilson was quite right to contrast his own background with that of the cultural background of some of the other proponents of what can hardly be called a movement. It is, rather, a tendency, a mood, a tempo, or even a fashion. However, if we try to analyze that, a number of themes emerge.

The first theme is the primacy of the market, that is to say, a belief in the efficacy of the free market and of a relatively unregulated form of corporate capitalism. And the arguments are made in the first instance from efficiency, that this is the best way to get goods produced and distributed, and secondly from liberty, the maintenance of an extremely strong private sector is indeed a guarantor of political liberty. And of course in these arguments the negative sides tend to be overlooked, in some cases jeered at: mainly the argument that a pure cost benefit or social market cost benefit analysis would not necessarily produce or give us socially valuable or desirable goods and services, and second that the present structure of the American economy entails an enormous concentration of decision-making power in the economic sector, and a large capacity to influence the political sector of government, politics, and opinion formation.

The second theme is the critique of large government, or centralized government, of government initiative. The critique of big government rests on several familiar ideas: bureaucratization, the autonomy

of bureaucrats, their remoteness from popular will or legislative control, deficiencies of decentralization. And here some of our neoconservative thinkers exhibit a frightening provincialism which is evident in Nathan Glazer's litany of the difficulties with socialism, and in the repudiation of nationalization by the democratic socialist parties of western Europe. And it is interesting that the critique of government in neoconservative thought in many instances takes no account of our own political tradition.

A third theme of the neoconservatives has to do with the fear of egalitarianism. Peter Steinfels has pointed out in his book how the publication of John Rawls's book produced a kind of ideological St. Vitus reaction on the part of some of our conservative thinkers. And here a series of rather contradictory arguments again make their appearance: in the first place, a great fear of the destruction of elites, and indeed a threat to western culture. Secondly, the notion of an enormous wave of unnatural egalitarianism, a leveling downward. This theme coincides with the belief that the classification of people by racial and sexual groups is bad, but the classification of people by neighborhood groups, certain kinds of class coherence, is somehow good.

The fourth theme is the familiar phrase about the adversary culture, and the notion that modernism has taken to the streets. At the same time there is in fact a very old-fashioned defense of progressivism, of the historical value of technology, of productivity. Here neoconservatives are at one with Soviet leaders, with very old-fashioned nineteenth-century Marxists like those to be found in the Soviet and French communist parties.

They also defend what could be called traditional familial values which the neoconservatives don't always practice in their own lives, but which they think are certainly good for others. But the defense of traditional culture, of course, comes up against the difficulty that there is no traditional culture to defend, and that it is quite true that the fragmentation of our kind of cultural existence, its division into competing and fragmented class, ethnic, and regional notions, makes the defense or the consolidation of a national community about one set of cultural values exceedingly difficult and artificial.

Finally, there is the maintenance, or defense of American power in the world, and again in the area of foreign affairs, very different themes emerge. One is the notion of the United States as the best, or the most important bastion of freedom in the world. This is generally accompanied by a systematic campaign of disparagement of the western

Europeans, who are thought to have no experience, for being somewhat cowardly and retrograde, as Dr. Brzezinski suggested of the West Germans and others.

On the other hand there's a kind of hard-headed realism expressed by Robert Tucker, a professor of International Relations at Johns Hopkins, who several years ago proposed the occupation of the sources of oil in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East and argued that this was in our national interest. One of the aspects of the debate of American power is the extent to which it is not so much about concrete issues of foreign policies, defense policies, and so on, but about the nature of American Society. And the debate about foreign policy is really an extension of the debates about America's position in the world.

Now if we look at the groupings that seem to be united in what is called neoconservatism, or the publics to which this grouping appeals, there are in fact very different groupings. There are traditional conservatives, generally Protestant, antisecular, committed to what could be called an individualistic and familial model of a society, believing in the free market, and an uncomplicated notion of American society. There are others, and I hope James Wilson will pardon me if I've put him in this category to some degree, whom one might call technocratic, or technocratic liberals, who think that social experiment for the time being demands nothing so much as a pause for reflection, and who appear to preclude much further social experimentation or institutional change and concentrate on trying to make the system work. Irving Kristol frightens businessmen with the "new class," who to some extent are proponents of the radical social programs, but who are quite content to work in the professional and managerial hierarchies of our society, and who pose no danger. There are also the theological conservatives, if we take theology in a philosophical sense, and I think some of the ex-radicals fit here. They seek a coherent and enlarged vision of American society, and they see not the system that needed changing when they were younger, but America as a realized utopia, and they resist even minor changes which might be in order from time to time.

On our position in the world, there's a group we might call the liberal imperialists, a word first used to describe Max Weber and his generation in Imperial Germany. They are liberal insofar as you find a lot of them in the coalition for a democratic majority, and grouped around figures like John Kennedy or Hubert Humphrey, as well as in some sections of the AFL and CIO. There are also conservative realists who don't much care about the liberal or libertarian content of foreign

policy, but who are interested in defending what they take to be concrete and visible national interests. And there are also messianics who think of an American mission in the world. Finally, of course, we come to the business of the corporate elites, some of whom are very glad to purvey these ideas, and some of whom have their doubts.

It seems to me that the neoconservatives in a sense are not conservatives at all. It's very hard to trace a direct line of descent from Edmund Burke and Joseph De Maistre to the more vulgar of our contemporaries. In any case their espousal of certain notions of the free market also marks a break with profound American tendencies in conservatism. These were perhaps better expressed by theologians like Niebuhr. Obviously they ignore the threats to liberty, and to choice, and to the forging of a more equitable, a more just, a more sane, national community.

There seems to be a compulsive note of affirmation in much of what the neoconservatives say, or at least a withdrawal from the problems posed not alone by the eighties but by the foreseeable human future—a kind of sacrilization of the present.

I have disagreed with Peter Steinfels on this before. I am not convinced the movement is important. I think it will probably fragment and regroup in ways that at the moment are very difficult to foresee.

William Phillips: Our speakers have waived their rights of argument and refutation and have suggested that we open up the discussion. I have one question. What I find missing from Norman Birnbaum's strong criticism of the neoconservative position is any indication why the neoconservatives have attracted so much intellectual support. They must be responding to or putting their finger on some problems in our society that are not being responded to properly by the liberals and the left. Also, I disagree with Norman Birnbaum's view of culture in its historical or experimental forms. One of the illnesses of our time is the breakdown of the traditional culture, the fragmentation of tradition, the loss of intellectual authority. The answer is not in "cultural pluralism," which is the slogan of people who have no use for intellectual traditions. Also, America is not solving its foreign policy problems. Therefore, unless we believe the neoconservatives have some kind of validity, we must ascribe their influence on other intellectuals to stupidity.

Robert Nozick: William Phillips said that the neoconservative movement is the only movement that he has ever heard of that doesn't

propose answers to social problems, and is just saying how hard the answers are. And we know that there are problems with liberal answers and with radical answers.

I would like to ask, and I hope that this doesn't sound boringly philosophical, how one decides what a problem is, and what a social problem is, as opposed to just a fact out there that one accepts. What are the criteria for deciding what social problems are, and presumably for deciding what social problems are within the proper orbit for the government to handle? I constructed a list of problems. Inequality of income: is that a social problem or just something that's happening out there that arises by a certain process that's perfectly okay? Fewer than one hundred percent of the young people go to universities: is that a social problem or not? Many people think that being overweight is a social problem in the United States. Ought one to propose solutions for it or not? Or for the current divorce rate? These are things that are addressed in social problem text books, but do government programs cause the problems that they're supposed to cure?

But Irving Kristol has proposed that there are ties, and has talked seriously about one apparently governmental problem, namely censorship to preserve certain bourgeois and middle-class virtues, virtues that one might find admirable. But is it a social problem that there are changes taking place in some of those? Is a difference between the average age of men and women in the United States a social problem? It causes some problems about insurance policies. . . . And that is a social fact. These things can be altered in various ways. One can go either for great expenditures in raising the average age of men, or in handicapping women in various age groups to lower their life expectancy, to eliminate that inequality. Is it a social problem that sport is a common bond that brings out more crowds than would ever show up in a meeting like this? That only fifty percent of the people vote in presidential elections? Or that the weather is worse in the northeast than it is in California?

Hanna Papanek: I think, to come back to an earlier point, the appeal of the neoconservatives may be that they fail so singularly to put their finger on any of the social problems of the future. I'm appalled by the omissions both of the neoconservatives and of their critics. I don't know what vision of the future you people have, but to my mind, the world includes parts that go beyond western Europe and the United States. What are the neoconservatives and their critics thinking about a major issue, that is the North-South dialogue? Another problem you seem to have conveniently overlooked has to

do with women. I'd like to know what your position is on the Equal Rights Amendment, or on the fact that women get fifty-nine cents to every dollar that men earn.

James Q. Wilson: I'll start. One of the tendencies of public discourse that I find most lamentable is that everybody must have an instant opinion on issues, and the list of issues could go on and on. I'm not sure I'm obliged to have an instant sloganized opinion on those questions. The North-South question, that is to say the relationship between rich and poor nations, is a question on which a different answer must be given depending on the country and the commodity. To generalize about it would deny everything that is important to intellectuals. With respect to women it would do little good to give my views on the Equal Rights Amendment. I signed a petition to have it placed on the ballot. On the whole I think I'm in favor of it. On the other hand I really don't think that is what you're getting at, because you're really getting at the status of women in society as a social fact and not as a legal hypothesis. This social fact is an issue that cannot be summarized by asking people to raise their hands to vote for or against women. Or to say that it is lamentable that women earn fifty-nine percent of men's salaries. I don't know all of the reasons for those facts. Some may be lamentable. Some may be explicable. Some, probably the largest number, are unknown.

Norman Birnbaum: I'm not sure that Hanna Papanek is right in saying that the neoconservatives have an appeal precisely because they don't have answers to these questions. There is, sometimes by implication, a neoconservative program as inchoate as the different components of the movement are. It seeks a break on further movement toward equality, income redistribution, and economic planning. It seeks an end to, or at least a slowing down of, movements like the women's movement. With respect to foreign policy, the North-South issues are very important to neoconservatives who are for regrouping the Atlantic alliance into a global one for defending the United States against "excessive demands" by the Third and Fourth Worlds. I think the program will fail, because it entails not only starting another set of journals like *The Public Interest,* which cannot be created by funding from the American Enterprise Institute. It involves the forging of a political consensus in the United States, which members of the intelligentsia and other groups are not prepared to go along with. That is why we have many hawks who are perfectly willing to demand action against Iran but refrain from volunteering for military service, and who are unwill-

ing to provoke the domestic consequences of conscription. So it seems to me that we get a program unlikely to be put into effect even if Ronald Reagan were elected. If his election were to produce a decade of unprecedented civil strife and social turbulence in this country, the neoconservatives would learn that there is, in fact, a difference between advocating moderation and stability and so on, and in enforcing it.

Nathan Glazer: Nobody is enforcing anything on anyone. Norman Birnbaum really does get carried away, and I don't know what carries him away. There is no movement. I am not on the road plugging anything, and I don't think James Wilson is either, even if I talk to audiences about things I know about, like affirmative action and a few other modest topics. I think he feels that we're not rising to his grand views of the world, all stemming out of the great socialist tradition in which everything is connected to everything else. I'm not rising to this grand view, and I'm certainly not engaged in some monumental power struggle. I find it odd that he insists I am.

Leon Wieseltier: I'm rather disturbed by James Wilson's particular defense of neoconservatism. But I would like to make one brief comment on Norman Birnbaum's defense of liberalism. I think liberals should be candid about the failings of liberalism. It's difficult when you're faced with liberals like Ramsey Clark not to go with people who write in *Commentary* on this issue. But more generally I am very concerned with the kind of defense James Wilson makes for neoconservatism. I agree with him and probably with all the people on the panel that the famous adversary attitude did not deserve the glamour that it won on the upper west side. And yet I'm troubled by the idea that one should recommend any particular position because of the extent to which it is in harmony with what are the perceived wishes or ideas of large groups of people. It confirms my main impression that one of the attractions of neoconservatism, certainly in the case of certain Jewish intellectuals, is that it has finally allowed the middle class and the intellectuals to kiss and make up. To James Wilson, Rousseau is the enemy, and yet I find that his defense of neoconservatism relies to a certain extent upon some notion of a general or common will. I'm not sure where this will exists. In the first place, popular attitudes change. But more specifically, at any given moment, the political perceptions of Jordan High School in Long Beach are not the perceptions of Erasmus High School in Brooklyn. And it seems to me that there is a kind of spurious notion of commonalities you're operating with,

which leads to a certain amount of sentimentality. If one is going to defend neoconservatism, then either one speaks to the merit of the argument itself, or one should be more candid about calculating which groups or constituencies benefit from which principles or programs, and then perhaps advance the argument that the benefit of a specific group enhances the welfare of the larger community or group.

James Q. Wilson: I certainly agree with what you've just said, and I don't think my views were meant to persuade you that I didn't agree. I suggested that men and women are by nature social and political communal creatures who do not have wholly idiosyncratic, random, ephemeral values; that some of these core values tend to be permanent and unchanging, or change very slowly. And to identify those and to understand them more fully is, I think, where classical political philosophy began, and where much contemporary political thought could probably return. I think there is a long way between that view and whatever people want at a particular moment. Then I went on to say that given the instincts that come from what I regard as natural sentiments evinced by men and women living in communities, one tries to make an intellectual defense of core values, and to see how they influence policy. But first you must examine evidence and describe consequences because now you have responsibility for affecting many people. Secondly, you quickly become aware of the tensions and inconsistencies in those views, and reconciling tendencies and inconsistencies intellectuals have been trained for. We are simplifiers; we tend to be doctrinaire. It is a sobering experience when you realize that you can't do that and be truthful to the core values. Now all of this strikes me as common sense. My colleagues on the panel describe it as an "ism," as a movement, so that they can point out that it is either trivial or irrelevant or wrong. I don't think of it as a movement or as an ideology. They disagree as to whether it is important. The one who thinks it is important thinks it is wrong. The one who thinks there may be something to say for it thinks it is unimportant. I don't think it really makes a lot of difference, because, as you rightly said, each argument has to be judged on its merits, and what I find attractive about the magazines I write for is that one attempts to make an argument that is capable of being judged on its merits, and one expects it to be criticized on its merits. And one is not expected to subordinate that argument to some larger theoretical interest.

Norman Birnbaum: I think, too, that the failure of liberalism might

have generated some of the different approaches. It seems to me that this question may suggest at least implicitly that there may be more continuity amongst the so-called neoconservatives than we generally think, and that this continuity also accounts for the success of the neoconservative movement, particularly after the mistakes and excesses of the sixties, some of which were due to the absence of a long socialist tradition in this country. A great many were due, as well, to the absence of a strong organized union component in a movement for social change.

Jean Layzer: I wanted to reclaim Nathan Glazer for the liberals, because I consider myself liberal, and I find that when I read him on the subject of welfare policy I believe him to be just a smarter liberal than I am. I find that he informs my views. I think we part company where we view what is happening, and what it is we are reacting against. I believe that we either ought to include work, or have a much more sweeping welfare policy rather than the weak and ineffective one that isn't put into effect either by radicals or by good liberals, but by very placating neoconservatives. They have no long-range goals for many problems. But there are no long-range liberal goals either. So I think we're coming from pretty much the same position.

Nathan Glazer: I have the problem of always being overwhelmed by the complexity of small issues, let alone large ones. I think that welfare, compared to some of the things that we are talking about tonight, is small, although it is a big issue. For a lot of issues there is the problem of premature analysis. Inevitably, if you look at the history of any of these problems, they have gotten more complicated in our understanding, even such issues as how you look at a policy, or whether it helps the capitalists or the poor. It may be true that cutting fifty billion dollars from corporation income taxes may be doing more for the poor than distributing fifty billion to them. It is hard to give fast answers.

Eugene Goodheart: I'd like to pursue the line that Leon Wieseltier took in questioning James Wilson. I think it is pretty clear that one understands what neoconservatism is about negatively—a resistance to certain liberal pieties of the past fifteen to twenty-five years. But there is also a desire to know what neoconservatism stands for. And when neoconservatives are asked that, they feel that this is a question about a theory or system. I think it is fair for neoconservatives, and even for certain liberals, to resist this desire for a systematic response. But I think it's also perfectly understandable that one wants some

sense of a positive idea, because without it you don't have a critical stance. All you have is some kind of instinctive resistance. In a way James Wilson dramatized the problem, because he spoke about some relationship between popular feeling and neoconservatism. Then, under questioning, he retreated and said that he doesn't mean popular feeling at any given moment, but something more traditional; and then he speaks of core beliefs. Core beliefs, I suppose, have always characterized society. But once he invokes the idea of core beliefs, it seems to me that he has concealed a philosophical idea, and he goes to the philosophers for that. One of them is de Tocqueville. In his talk I found a very facile conflation between his notion of popular feeling as it exists in America today, and de Tocqueville's idea of the citizen which was often the basis for a critique of popular feeling and of popular passion. And the neoconservatives can't just say we know facts, and the liberals have historically or traditionally been ignorant, and we'll give them the facts, and somehow together we will work out some solution to the problems we all recognize.

James Q. Wilson: I can see why they call it the *Partisan Review*. There are two levels at which I can make a brief response. The first is that since I do not think of myself as a philosopher, or as a person who has an ideology that is worked out with respect to political objects, I don't feel myself under an obligation to have those views that many intellectuals feel all intellectuals must have. I find that stifling. Secondly, with respect to the question of core beliefs, you put your finger on an essential point. And it becomes incumbent upon persons who are evaluating public policy and using facts to be explicit about what those beliefs are that lead them to make judgments. Most people develop very early in life an almost instinctive sense of justice which informs virtually everything they judge. Much of public policy today does serious violence to this elemental sense of justice. That equals should be treated equally is an empirical question which most people can agree on. This leads to the following problem, which is one of the reasons why people are called neoconservatives instead of frustrated liberals. And that is the issue of integration. When I formed views on this subject, they were based on the principle of equal opportunity to all, and on proportional division of benefits. With respect to political things, most people were equal, and therefore most things distributed politically should be distributed equally. This implied that you favor civil rights laws, you favor ending inhibitions on people expressing political rights, you opposed manifestly unjust distributions of public goods and

services. Now suddenly comes the arrival of quotas and goals, affirmative action, and a form of advanced ethnic political patronage in which what is being sought for is more, not the good but the more. And at this point most people in society feel that an elemental standard of justice has been either violated or made obscure. Now that is an area in which one can show the linkage between a philosophical conception that is not trivial, a set of empirical observations, and a comment on public policy.

Norman Birnbaum: The sense of justice exists, but its structure, content, and concrete application varies from group to group in such a way that we do have political conflict and controversy of an implicitly philosophical nature.

Joan Axelrod: Nathan Glazer, I imagine that your transition from socialism to neoconservatism has been a gradual one. I was wondering if you could briefly outline the little bends and twists along the road that have brought you this far. And do you think this movement, which is really a nonmovement, is going to last?

Nathan Glazer: No, but fortunately I can give you a reference for the first question. It is a book of essays I published called *Remembering the Answers.* I will mention one key moment. It was when I read the first issue of *Dissent,* maybe in 1956, and I found one socialist attacking another socialist for having sold out. I won't say who the two were; they're both well known sociologists. But as I knew at the time, the first one was making more money than the second. I felt that was a rather odd form of polemic which turned me somewhat against the first socialist who was attacking the second. I must confess I've seen some of it in Norman Birnbaum, whose insinuation was that we are serving power. I don't feel we do.

Henri Zerner: I have a very distant point of view. I'm not a native, so I'm a little puzzled. The alternatives seem to be between liberalism and neoconservatism. Now it seems to me to be pretty clear that neoconservatives are very liberal. My question would be rather to the representatives of liberalism, which is that since liberalism seems to have posed very serious problems, and many liberals apparently go so far as to talk about the failure of liberalism, which I would sympathize with, maybe the alternative is not neoconservatism, but rather a left.

William Phillips: Since both representatives of liberalism here call themselves democratic socialists, they probably ought to make some effort to explicate and defend these positions. But that ought to be the subject of a future *Partisan Review* panel.

STORY

Ira Sadoff

UNCOUPLING

Evelyn's wish for children is granted, though not with me. She moves into the uptown apartment of a lawyer named Ross and his twelve-year-old boy, Benny. Ross's marriage went bad several years before and he wooed my wife while working on her boss's case. There are no hard feelings now: I know that if it hadn't been Ross it would have been someone else.

The day she left me she said, "I want a child."

There was so much determination in her stance, in the way she held her hands to her thin waist, in the way she pursed her lips, she was difficult to refuse. "I'll give you a child," I said.

"Your heart's not in it, Michael. It won't work."

Her heart, it must be said, was already at Ross's thoroughly modern and sophisticated apartment, with its chrome and canvas furniture, ceiling-to-floor aluminum lamps and African knickknacks. When Evelyn moved in, she contributed an assortment of plants: ferns, jades, ivies, exotic flowering cacti. The clash between plants and chrome, humidity and austerity, took some getting used to, as did seeing Evelyn with another man. Fortunately Evelyn and I seem to be on good terms, and though it was something of a shock when she first opened the door to Ross's apartment, adorned in a new, short, Dorothy Hamill haircut, Evelyn makes me feel comfortable whenever she invites me to dinner, which is often. In fact, I feel perversely curious watching Ross and Evelyn interact, the way Evelyn handles her role as substitute mother. She makes it look so attractive I'm forced to wonder whether I might not have been happy with this pastoral family landscape. And while in our arguments I'd maintain parents and children had nothing in common, watching Benny I can admit to the continuities—his impatience to be excused early from dinner, his desire to be taken seriously, are all too recognizable. In short, Benny and I get along surprisingly well.

At the dinner table I watch Ross and Evelyn call each other "dear," complain about the price of car insurance, discuss Benny's progress in

school. They seem so comfortably domestic it's difficult to believe Evelyn had a life before Ross, that she was once married to me. I sit back in my canvas chair and try to figure out what she sees in Ross. Visually, Ross is much more attractive than I am: he's tall and thin, a self-consciously conservative dresser (he wears those alligator shirts and Brooks Brothers khaki pants while lounging around the house), but there are other, more central differences between us. Ross has been "in therapy" for a number of years, ever since he and his wife split up. When Evelyn tells him, "Ross, I wish you'd clear away the dishes," or "Tell Benny to turn the TV down before we all go deaf," Ross comes over to her, puts his arm around her waist and says, "What are you angry about?" If at first she resists, if she says, "I want the TV turned down," he says, "Come on now, really," and eventually she breaks down. "I had an impossible day at work," she says, and proceeds to tell Ross all about it.

The first time they invite me to dinner, Evelyn proudly proclaims that she did not sleep with Ross until the night she left me. Ross verifies this interesting fact when they begin to discuss what went wrong between Evelyn and me. "What went wrong with our marriage," I tell them, feigning romanticism, "is a mystery which will unfold only over time. There are no easy answers."

"You seem so removed from it," Ross says. "Aren't you pained by it? Doesn't it hurt you to see Evelyn and me together?"

"Of course it hurts," I say. "Do you need an affidavit?"

"We have no right to pry into Michael's life now, Ross," Evelyn says as though I weren't there. "Though Ross *has* been through this before, Michael, and I'm sure he only wants to be helpful."

"Let's leave Ross out of this, Evelyn. He wasn't an eyewitness. . . ."

"Let's be friends," she says, walking over to hug me. For a moment I forget, kissing Evelyn on the forehead, that Ross is in the room, that it's Ross's room, that I've been sitting on his leather chrome couch, that Evelyn is no longer my wife. I feel totally disoriented, don't know what I'm doing here. But Evelyn takes me by the hand to the dinner table, shows me where to sit, and without saying a word, I lift my fork to my mouth, I eat.

When Benny is in the room during these discussions, as he often is, I have the persistent desire to remove him from these domestic encounter sessions. Once I ask him to show me around his room: I dutifully admire his posters of Tom Seaver, Wonder Woman, the Bee Gees, and

his hundreds of outer space toys: robots, plastic spaceships, polyethylene monsters. Benny is a well-behaved boy, a little shy, reticent but attentive around strangers. He gets straight As in school, loves history and social studies. In a serious moment I can picture him in khaki pants, a button-down shirt, long dark hair, books under his arm, walking along some Ivy League campus with a girl friend who admires his sensitivity. Is this what Ross looked like some twenty years ago?

When we walk from his room into the hallway, we catch a glimpse of Ross and Evelyn in the living room, holding hands on the couch. When Ross leans over to kiss Evelyn on the neck, Benny and I both cringe a little: I can feel our bodies freeze simultaneously. We look at each other, break into nervous laughter, then cup our hands over our mouths and retreat to his room. "Do they do this often?" I ask him.

He thinks for a moment, then says, "All the time. Didn't you and Evelyn?"

"In the beginning, yes. And your mother?"

Benny does not answer. He leans back on the bed, hands folded behind his head, lost in thought. I think I can detect the discomforting sting of memory in his distracted expression: the effects of family conflicts, the way I might have felt after arguments with Evelyn, or after witnessing my own parents' arguments. I want to reach out to him, but fear I've already gone too far. "Do you want to talk?" I ask him.

"About what?" he says, turning on his portable television. It's time for "Space 1999," one of his favorite shows, so I lean back on his bed with him and watch it.

I take Benny to the Park, to the Cloisters, to the movies to see *Star Wars* (his seventh time, my first). At first Evelyn seems pleased by the attention I give Benny, but on the night of the TV volume discussion, when I suggest taking Benny to a Mets game, she eyes me suspiciously and asks, "Why are you taking Benny so many places, Michael? I thought grown-ups and children had nothing in common."

"No fair," I say. "That was a long time ago."

"And why, of all things, a baseball game?"

"You know how much I like baseball."

"No I didn't," she says, but as we're edging toward the door she shrugs her shoulders and lets us go.

Actually I haven't been to a ballgame since I was thirteen, a time when I ate, slept, and breathed baseball. It was the only game my father ever took me to, the Giants' last at the Polo Grounds. "This is not just

a baseball game," my father tells me, "it's history being made." Apparently my father has little interest in history, though, for after he dutifully explains what he knows of the rules of the game ("Three strikes and you're out, except for a foul tipper.") he takes to reading his trade newspaper, *Variety*, circling in red ink whenever his name is mentioned as so-and-so's accompanist, or as an up-and-coming executive at NBC. He does buy me all the peanuts, hot dogs, and Cokes I can eat, and when he takes out his wallet I notice a photograph of a woman who looks like a movie star, a picture taken with one of those fuzzed-up lenses, the kind they put in wallets when you buy them, only I don't recognize the woman's face.

The Giants win in a rout, scoring thirteen runs. As soon as the game ends, fans rush onto the field, tearing up pieces of sod for souvenirs, fighting one another for second base, ripping out grandstand seats with their bare hands. In this mayhem I ask my father to get me Frank Thomas's autograph (he's the last place Pirates third baseman and their only decent ballplayer—now he owns a bar and grill in Queens). My father takes me by the hand and drags me to the first row of the third baseline, elbowing his way through the crowd. "Thomas, hey Thomas," he yells out, "my kid wants your autograph." Thomas looks over to us and glares: he's just gone o-for-four and has a look on his face which suggests, *Please Lord, let me be traded.* My father annoys him like a high fly in the sun field. I ask my father if we can please go, I'm dying of embarrassment, but my father is persistent. "Come on, for Christ's sake," he says, holding out my program, "give the kid a break."

As Thomas passes us on the way to the clubhouse, his red face no more than inches away from my father's extended hand, he spits on the program and continues walking. My father is speechless, stares at the program in disbelief while fans push past him to grab players' hats, uniforms, spiked shoes; then he takes me by the hand to the car. We sit silently in our '51 green Chevy while traffic crawls out of the stadium, my father honking the horn and sticking his head out the window, shouting, "Come on, you sons-of-bitches, clear out of here." When we get home, my mother, cheerful and innocent, asks us how we enjoyed the game. My father runs upstairs to their bedroom and slams the door. "The Giants lost," I say, but I can hear my voice rising as though I were posing a question and my mother stands, puzzled, open-mouthed, by the stairway, looking at the closed bedroom door.

Two weeks after the game my father takes me to his office at Rockefeller Center. This is the first time he's brought me to work with

him—my memories of him are of the man who works past my bedtime, who often stays in midtown on weekends to take my mother to show business parties, or stays out late working club dates by himself.

On the elevator he proudly introduces me to his colleagues. And when he opens the door to his private office, there is a very attractive woman sitting on his desk, her legs crossed self-consciously like Bette Davis in a forties movie, her wavy brown hair covering one eye, her black dress sequined at the neck line, apparel obviously inappropriate for daytime wear. I know immediately this is the woman whose picture is in my father's wallet: she is his mistress.

"This is Melissa," my father says. "A good friend of mine."

Melissa gets off the desk and pats me on the top of the head. In a throaty voice she says, "Allie, he's so tall for his age." A lie: I'm short for a thirteen-year-old.

"You don't have any kids of your own, do you?" I ask.

"No, why?"

"I didn't think so."

My father kisses her on the forehead, a gesture of intimacy I try not to register on my face. At thirteen, I'm trying to learn how to be sophisticated, grown-up. But all my hormones are working against me—I nestle against my father, wrapping his arm in mine. I know it's only a matter of time before he will leave my mother for this attractive young woman, this woman who holds some charm for my father I don't yet understand. And I wonder if she'll like me, if they'll take me with them.

My father suggests we all go out for breakfast. Outside, it's an extraordinarily breezy day, a man is chasing his Panama hat down the street, and the wind lifts Melissa's dress above her knees. She says, and I remember the exact words, "Oh, it's snowing down south," a remark I'd expect one of my classmates to make. From that moment on I resent her totally, though it's something my mother must have said more than once.

In the restaurant, my father orders French toast and orange juice for me. I eat mechanically, but I eat. Melissa talks for a while about business (she's a theatrical agent, that's how they met) and my father tries to bring me into the conversation. "Tell Melissa why you like the Yankees better than the Giants," he says. "Tell her about that lovely young girl you've been seeing. Say something, for Christ's sake, I didn't raise you to be a mute." I speak, nervously and frenetically, about everything I can think of, gauging their facial expressions after every

sentence, to see if they approve. The meeting, I am sure, does not go well, but I keep talking, hoping something I say will change their minds, will live up to their expectations, whatever they are.

A month later my mother and I watch my father pack his suitcase, the silence punctuated by his practical remarks—that we should forward his mail to NBC, that he'd be in touch as soon as he got his affairs straightened out. I remember my mother's face, her eyes narrowing in anger, I remember that she does not cry, that she watches each piece of clothing being folded into the suitcase. I remember her saying, "I want to know what's going on, Allie. What's going on?" She knows less about Melissa than I do, and I feel it my duty to protect her from that terrible knowledge for as long as I can.

I am determined Benny will enjoy seeing a ballgame more than I did. In the subway on the way to Shea Stadium I go over the starting line-ups with him. Tom Seaver, his favorite ballplayer, has been traded to the Reds, the team the Mets are playing against, so Benny's loyalties are divided. I assure him it's all right to feel that way. And before the game, as a special treat, I decide to take him to Frank's Bar and Grill, the bar run by my former hero. Thomas has owned the bar ever since he retired in the mid-sixties. Eventually the Pirates did trade him, but unfortunately to the expansion team Mets, who lost as many games in their first season as any team in history. Thomas hit nearly .300, and finished out his career as the best ballplayer on the worst team in baseball. I still admire his perseverance. I point him out to Benny, this now 280-pound red-faced Irishman who stands behind the bar shaking up whiskey sours. I get up the courage to speak to him before ordering. "You were quite a ballplayer," I say.

"Uh-huh," he says. "Now what'll you and your boy have?"

I order a beer for me and a Coke for Benny, telling him that had Thomas been on the Yankees or Dodgers in those days, he'd probably be in the Hall of Fame now. Benny is singularly unimpressed.

"He sure looks awfully fat to have been a ballplayer," Benny says. "Are you sure it's the same Frank Thomas?"

"I'm sure," I say, not particularly anxious to explain the metaphysics of growing older to a twelve-year-old. "I'm sure."

Benny's first date seems occasion enough for Evelyn to invite me to dinner, provided, of course, that Benny doesn't know I'm to witness his

initiation into puberty. When Evelyn opens the door she puts her finger to her mouth to imitate a whisper. "Come on in: he's almost ready to go."

"Well, where is the birthday boy? I've got a lot of advice for him."

"Michael, be quiet. He's in the bedroom dressing. If you say one word I'll break your arm."

I sit down on one of the chrome and canvas director's chairs. "Not there," Evelyn says, "that's Ross's chair. He's very fussy about it."

"All right, I'll stand up. Can I take Benny and his date to the gymnasium?"

"They don't hold dances in gymnasiums any more," Ross, walking toward Benny's bedroom, says rather sharply. "Besides, Marion lives right in the building: they're going to walk to the dance. They won't need an escort."

"Marion," I say. "That sounds so grown-up."

"*That* sounds like something a thirteen-year-old might say," Ross says, peering from behind Benny's door.

"My, aren't we the calm and collected ones," I say. "Aren't you excited at all, Ross, or were you always too mature for childhood sweethearts?"

Benny comes out of his room accompanied by Ross. His hair is slicked down, though it curls over his ears, he's wearing a yellow oxford shirt and a crewneck sweater tied over his shoulders so he looks like he just stepped out of the Sunday *Times Magazine*. "What's everybody looking at?" he says.

"Michael's telling us all about his childhood sweethearts," Ross says.

"Childhood sweethearts. Whoaaa," Benny says, walking over to the television set and turning it on. A monster movie is on channel five, one of those pictures where a toothpick Tokyo is devoured by a caterpillar. It's usually the kind of movie Benny likes to watch, but he turns the channel to watch the "Weekend News." Evelyn and I look at each other and shrug. He turns to face us for a moment and says, "I've seen it before: it's not very good," then goes back to the news.

"You really should sit and eat with us, Benny," Evelyn says, setting the table. But when Benny insists he's not hungry Ross looks over to Evelyn and shakes his head, motioning to her to drop the subject. "But I made crêpes, his favorite . . . " she continues, her voice trailing off.

When Marion arrives, a pretty little blonde with a yellow sweater and a tartan plaid skirt, Benny motions us away, blocks her entrance.

"He's ashamed of us," Evelyn whispers to Ross, and Ross pulls me away from the front foyer by the back of my belt. "I'm ready," Benny says to her. "Did you hear what happened in Zaïre?"

"No," Marion responds. "What happened?"

"I'll tell you about it," Benny says, walking out the door, waving to us without looking behind him. His absence, as soon as the door is shut, is almost like a hole in the wall. The ritual of dinner is rendered meaningless.

Ross sits down on the couch, his hands behind his head, his legs stretched out, lost in thought. Evelyn walks in and out of the kitchen, bringing in utensils and glasses. I try to make myself invisible, pick up a copy of *The Harvard Law Review* off the cocktail table and try to read an article about civil liberties. But when Ross remains silent for a long time, I try to draw him out. "Is it hard to believe he's already so grown-up?"

Ross turns to face me, seems genuinely startled by my presence. He puts his hand to his chin and starts to stroke it as though he had a beard. A technique he might use on the witness stand. "Tell me, Michael, why do you keep coming here?"

"Because Evelyn invited me to dinner."

"No, that's not what I mean. I mean what's the attraction of it? Evelyn seems to think you get something out of it."

"Have I been interfering? The last thing I'd want to do is cause trouble between you and Evelyn."

He laughs, and at that moment I'd like to knock his meditative chin off his face. "No," he says, shaking his head, "that's not it at all. Forget it."

"Oh no, Ross. You just don't drop a bomb like that and then say 'forget it.' I want to know what you mean. I think it's something of an accomplishment for Evelyn and me to be friends. . . ."

Evelyn enters from the kitchen, her hands encased in two red potholders which says "His" and "Hers." "Dinner's ready," she says, her timing perfect.

"Michael," Ross says, "you hardly ever speak to Evelyn. It's Benny who brings you here: why don't you admit it?"

"What's to admit? You have a really nice son: you ought to be proud of him."

"That's just the point. He's *my* son. You're the one who didn't want kids, right?"

"What business is that of yours? That was between Evelyn and me."

"Don't be defensive: I'm not accusing you of anything. It's just that you're not Benny's father. He doesn't need your protection."

"Ross," Evelyn shouts, "why don't you cut it out? Unless you're jealous of Michael's affections."

"All I'm saying," Ross continues, choosing his words deliberately, "is that if he wants a family he should start one of his own. There's no future for him here."

"I'll put dinner back in the oven," Evelyn says.

"Don't bother," I say. "I think I should be going." My stomach is so tight I couldn't hold anything down anyway. Evelyn pleads with me to stay, saying Ross is upset about something but she doesn't know what it is. Ross himself seems remorseful, says, "I didn't mean to hurt your feelings."

"I didn't ask for your advice, Ross. If you didn't want me here all you had to do was say so; I was invited to dinner, not a therapy session. Tell Benny I hope he had a good time."

When I get outside, the brisk autumn air on my face is like a cool washcloth for a fever. I close the buttons of my sport coat and walk, stunned, to the subway. I know, as I stand waiting for the train to take me out of Manhattan, that I've seen my wife, excuse me, my *ex*-wife, for the last time. The correction strikes me as funny, as necessary, and I feel a smile coming to my face. I decide to take in a Mets game, to take my mind off myself.

In the subway car I think briefly of Benny, wondering if he'll kiss Marion, even once on the cheek. But of course he will—this isn't 1957. The Benny of the Ivy League shirt, with his talk of Zaïre, is bound to kiss, to be kissed. I close my eyes and feel my body being sucked forward as the car accelerates: it's an exhilarating experience.

I'm an hour early for the game, so I walk over to Frank's Bar and Grill where Thomas is mixing a drink for the woman next to me. He nods, seems to recognize me, though I can't be sure. I order a bourbon and water, happy to have his attention. "Do you know you once spit on my father?"

He looks at me strangely and says, "Listen, it's a nice night out: why don't you go for a walk and cool off?"

"I'm not angry: I'm glad you did it." I sip the drink, motion to him that it tastes good. "Remember the last game at the Polo Grounds?"

"Vaguely."

"Well, my father wanted an autograph for me, and you'd had a tough day: you spit on his program."

Thomas laughs and his 280-pound body shakes, almost quivers. "No," he says, shaking his head. "You still want the autograph?"

"Sure, why not?" The woman sitting next to me gives me a look then goes back to her drink.

Thomas scribbles his name on a napkin, saying as he writes, "It's never too late, right?"

"Right," I say, "right. Listen, tell me what it was like going out there every day and playing for a last-place club. I mean knowing it didn't make any difference. Just curious, that's all."

The heavy man sighs and shakes his head. "That was twenty years ago, buddy. I hardly remember."

"Of course. No offense. I wouldn't want you to spit on my napkin or anything."

Thomas laughs. "You're not taking your kid to the game?"

"That wasn't my kid," I say. "No, I'm nobody's father," I add, a little bit sad but just as glad not to be Ross. I turn to the woman next to me. "You know," I say, "he was an awfully good ballplayer."

The woman tilts her head to the side and shrugs, then goes back to her drink. I drink my bourbon and water, which feels good and warm going down, and get ready to go to the game: the fresh air and the time by myself will do me a world of good.

Roland Barthes

DELIBERATION

I've never kept a journal—or rather I've never known if I should keep one. Sometimes I begin, and then, right away, I leave off—and yet, later on, I begin again. The impulse is faint, intermittent, without seriousness and of no doctrinal standing whatever. I guess I could diagnose this *diary disease*: an insoluble doubt as to the value of what one writes in it.

Such doubt is insidious: it functions by a kind of delayed action. Initially, when I write the (daily) entry, I experience a certain pleasure: this is simple, this is easy. Don't worry about finding something *to say*: the raw material is right here, right now; a kind of surface mine; all I have to do is bend over—I don't need to transform anything: the crude ore has its own value, etc. Then comes the second phase, very soon after the first (for instance, if I reread today what I wrote yesterday), and it makes a bad impression: the text doesn't hold up, like some sort of delicate foodstuff which "turns," spoils, becomes unappetizing from one day to the next; I note with discouragement the artifice of "sincerity," the artistic mediocrity of the "spontaneous"; worse still: I am disgusted and irritated to find a "pose" I certainly hadn't intended: in a journal situation, and precisely because it doesn't "work"—doesn't get transformed by the action of work—*I* is a *poseur*: a matter of effect, not of intention, the whole difficulty of literature is here. Very soon, continuing my reperusal, I get tired of these verbless sentences ("Sleepless night. And the third in a row." etc.) or whose verb is carelessly condensed ("Passed two girls in the Place St.-S.")—and try as I will to reestablish the propriety of a complete form ("I passed. . . ," "I spent a sleepless night"), the matrix of any journal, *i.e.*, the reduction of the verb, persists in my ear and exasperates me like a refrain. In a third phase, if I reread my journal pages several months, several years after having written them, though my doubt hasn't dissipated, I experience

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a certain pleasure in rediscovering, thanks to these lines, the events they relate, and even more, the inflections (of light, of atmosphere, of mood) they bring back. In short, at this point no literary interest (save for problems of formulation, *i.e.*, of phrasing), but a kind of narcissistic attachment (faintly narcissistic—let's not exaggerate) to *my* doings (whose recall is inevitably ambiguous, since to remember is also to acknowledge and to lose once again what will not recur). But still, does this final indulgence, achieved after having traversed a phrase of rejection, justify (systematically) keeping a journal? *Is it worth the trouble?*

I am not attempting any kind of analysis of the "Journal" genre (there are books on the subject), but only a personal deliberation, intended to afford a practical decision: should I keep a journal *with a view to publication*? Can I make the journal into a "work"? Hence I refer only to the functions which immediately come to mind. For instance, Kafka kept a diary in order to "extirpate his anxiety," if you prefer, "to find salvation." This motive would not be a natural one for me, or at least not a constant one. Nor would the aims traditionally attributed to the intimate Journal; they no longer seem pertinent to me. They are all connected to the advantages and the prestige of "sincerity" (to express yourself, to explain yourself, to judge yourself); but psychoanalysis, the Sartrian critique of bad faith, and the Marxist critique of ideologies have made "confession" a futility: sincerity is merely a second-degree image-repertoire. No, the Journal's justification (as a work) can only be *literary* in the absolute, even if nostalgic, sense of the word. I discern here four motives.

The first is to present a text tinged with an individuality of writing, with a "style" (as we used to say), with an idiolect proper to the author (as we said more recently); let us call this motive: poetic. The second is to scatter like dust, from day to day, the traces of a period, mixing all dimensions and proportions, from important information to details of behavior: don't I take great pleasure in reading Tolstoy's journal to discover the life of a Russian nobleman in the nineteenth century? Let us call this motive: historical. The third is to constitute the author as an object of desire: if an author interests me, I may want to know the intimacy, the *small change* of his time, his tastes, his moods, his scruples; I may even go so far as to prefer his person to his work, eagerly snatching up his Journal and neglecting his books. Hence I can attempt—making myself the author of the pleasure others have been able to afford me—I can attempt in my turn to seduce, by that swivel which shifts from writer to person, and vice-versa; or, more

seriously, I can attempt to prove that "I am worth more than what I write" (in my books): the writing in my Journal then appears as a *plus-power* (Nietzsche: *Plus von Macht*), which it is supposed will compensate the inadequacies of public writing; let us call this motive: utopian, since it is true that we are never done with the image-repertoire. The fourth motive is to constitute the Journal as a workshop of sentences: not of "fine phrases," but of correct ones, exact language: constantly to refine the exactitude of the speech-act (and not of the speech), according to an enthusiasm and an application, a fidelity of intention which greatly resembles passion: "Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things" (*Proverbs* 23, xvi). Let us call this motive: amorous (perhaps even: idolatrous—I idolize the Sentence).

For all my sorry impressions, then, the desire to keep a journal is conceivable. I can admit that it is possible, in the actual context of the Journal, to shift from what at first seemed to me as improper in literature to a form which in fact rallies its qualities: the individuation, the scent, the seduction, the fetishism of language. In recent years, I have made three attempts; the first and most serious one—because it occurred during my mother's last illness—is the longest, perhaps because it corresponded in some degree to the Kafkaesque goal of extirpating anxiety by writing; each of the other two concerned only one day: they are more experimental, though I can't reread them without a certain nostalgia for the day that has passed (I give only one of these, the second one involving others besides myself).

I

U . . . , July 13, 1977

*Madame ***, the new cleaning woman, has a diabetic grandson she takes care of, we are told, with devotion and expertise. Her view of this disease is confused: on the one hand, she does not admit that diabetes is hereditary (which would be a sign of inferior stock), and on the other, she insists that it is fatal, absolving any responsibility of origin. She posits disease as a social image, and this image is beset with pitfalls. The Mark certainly appears as a source of pride and of pain: what it was for Jacob-Israel, dislocated, disconnected by the Angel: delight and shame of being* re-marked.

Depression, fear, anxiety: I see the death of a loved one, I panic, etc. Such an imagination is the very opposite of faith. For constantly to imagine the inevitability of disaster is constantly to accept it: to utter it is to assert it (again the fascism of language). By imagining death, I

discourage the miracle. In Ordet *the madman did not speak, refused the garrulous and peremptory language of inwardness. Then what is this incapacity for faith? Perhaps a very human love? Love, then, excludes faith? And vice-versa?*

Gide's old age and death (which I read about in Mme van Rysselberghe's Cahiers de la Petite Dame*) were surrounded by witnesses. But I do not know what has become of these witnesses: no doubt, in most cases, dead in their turn: There is a time when the witnesses themselves die without witnesses. Thus History consists of tiny explosions of life, of deaths without relays. Our human impotence with regard to transition, to any science of degrees. Conversely, we can attribute to the classical God the capacity to see an infinity of degrees: "God" as the absolute Exponential.*

(Death, real death, is when the witness himself dies. Chateaubriand says of his grandmother and his great-aunt: "I may be the only man in the world who knows that such persons have existed": yes, but since he has written this, and written it well, we know it too, insofar, at least, as we still read Chateaubriand.)

July 14, 1977

A little boy—nervous, excited, like any number of French kids, who so quickly pretend to be grown up, is dressed up as a musical-comedy grenadier (red and white); doubtless he will precede the band.

Why is Worry harder to bear here than in Paris?—This village is a world so natural, so exempt from any extravagance, that the impulses of sensibility seem entirely out of place. I am excessive, hence excluded.

It seems to me I learn more about France during a walk through the village than in whole weeks in Paris. Perhaps an illusion? The realist *illusion? The rural, village, provincial world constitutes the traditional raw material of realism. To be a writer meant, in the nineteenth century, to write* from *Paris* about *the provinces. The distance makes* everything signify. *In Paris, in the street, I am bombarded with information—not with signification.*

July 15, 1977

At five in the afternoon, how calm the house is, here in the country. Flies. My legs ache a little, the way they did when I was a child and had what was called growing pains—or when I was getting the grippe. Everything is still, peaceful, asleep. And as always, the sharp awareness, the vivacity of my own "seediness" (a contradiction in terms).

X visits: in the next room, he talks endlessly. I do not dare close the

door. What disturbs me is not the noise but the banality of the conversation (if at least he talked in some language unknown to me, and a musical one!). I am always amazed, even flabbergasted by the resistance of others: for me, the Other is the Indefatigable. Energy—and especially verbal energy—stupefies me: this is perhaps the only time (aside from violence) when I believe in madness.

July 16, 1977

Again, after overcast days, a fine morning: lustre and subtlety of the atmosphere: a cool, luminous silk. This blank moment (no meaning) produces the plenitude of an evidence: that it is worth-while being alive. The morning errands (to the grocer, the baker, while the village is still almost deserted), are something I wouldn't miss for anything in the world.

Mother feeling better today. She is sitting in the garden, wearing a big straw hat. As soon as she feels a little better, she is drawn by the house, filled with the desire to participate; she puts things away, turns off the furnace during the day (which I never do).

This afternoon, a sunny, windy day, the sun already setting, I burnt garbage at the bottom of the garden. A complete course of physics to follow; armed with a long bamboo pole, I stir the heaps of paper which slowly burn up; it takes patience—who would have guessed how long paper can resist the fire? On the other hand, the emerald-green plastic bag (the garbage-bag itself) burns very fast, leaving no trace*: it literally vanishes. This phenomenon might serve, on many an occasion, as a metaphor.*

Incredible incidents (read in the Sud-Ouest *or heard on the radio? I don't remember): in Egypt, it has been decided to execute those Moslems who convert to another religion. In the USSR, a French agent was expelled because she gave a present of underwear to a Soviet friend. Compile a* contemporary *dictionary of intolerance (literature, in this case Voltaire, cannot be abandoned, so long as the evils subsist to which it bears witness).*

July 17, 1977

As if Sunday morning intensifies the good weather. Two heteroclite intensities reinforce each other.

I never mind doing the cooking. I like the operations *involved. I take pleasure in observing the changing forms of the food as they occur (colorations, thickenings, contractions, crystallizations, polarizations, etc.). There is something a little perverse about this observation. On the other hand, what I can't do, and what I always do badly, are propor-*

tions and schedules: I put in too much oil, afraid everything will burn; I leave things too long on the fire, afraid they won't be cooked through. In short, I'm afraid because I don't know *(how much, how long). Whence the security of a code (a kind of guaranteed knowledge): I'd rather cook rice than potatoes because I know it takes seventeen minutes. This figure delights me, insofar as it's precise (to the point of being preposterous); a round number would seem contrived and just to be certain, I'd add to it.*

July 18, 1977

Mother's birthday. All I can offer her is a rosebud from the garden; at least it's the only one, and the first one since we're here. Tonight, M. is coming for dinner and will cook the dinner itself: soup and a pimento omelette; she brings champagne and almond cookies from Peyrehorade. Mme L. has sent flowers from her garden, delivered by one of her daughters.

Moods, *in the strong, Schumannian sense: a broken series of contradictory impulses: waves of anxiety, imaginations of the worst, and unseasonable euphorias. This morning, at the core of Worry, a crystal of happiness: the weather (very fine, very light, and dry), the music (Haydn), coffee, a cigar, a good pen, the household noises (the human subject as caprice: such discontinuity alarms, exhausts).*

July 19, 1977

Early in the morning, coming back with the milk, I stop in the church to have a look around. It has been remodelled according to the prescribed New Look: now it resembles nothing so much as a Protestant establishment (only the wooden galleries indicate a Basque tradition); no image, the altar has become a simple table. No candle of course: too bad, no?

Around six in the evening, I doze on my bed. The window is wide open, the gray day has lifted now. I experience a certain floating euphoria: everything is liquid, aerated, drinkable *(I drink the air, the moment, the garden). And since I happen to be reading Suzuki, it seems to me that I am quite close to the state that Zen calls* sabi*; or again (since I am also reading Blanchot), to the "fluid heaviness" he speaks of apropos of Proust.*

July 21, 1977

Some bacon, onions, thyme, etc.: simmering, the smell is wonderful. Now this fragrance is not that of food as it will be served at table. There is an odor of what is eaten and an odor of what is prepared (observation for the "Science of Motley," or "diaphorology").

July 22, 1977

For some years, a unique project, apparently: to explore my own stupidity, or better still: to utter *it, to make it the object of my books. In this way I have already* uttered *my "egoist" stupidity and my "lover's" stupidity. There remains a third kind, which I shall someday have to get on paper: political stupidity. What I think of events politically (and I never fail to think something), from day to day, is stupid. It is a stupidity which I should now* utter *in the third book of this little trilogy: a kind of* Political Diary. *It would take enormous courage, but maybe this would exorcise that mixture of boredom, fear and indignation which the Politician (or rather Politics) constitutes for me.*

I *is harder to write than to read.*

Last night, at Casino, *the Anglet supermarket, with E.M., we were fascinated by this Babylonian Temple of Merchandise. It is really the Golden Calf: piles of (cheap) "wealth," gathering of the tribes (classified by types), Noah's ark of* things *(Swedish clogs to eggplants), predatory stacking of carts. We are suddenly convinced that people will buy anything (as I do myself): each cart, while parked in front of the cash register, is the shameless chariot of manias, impulses, perversions, and cravings: obvious, confronting a cart proudly passing before us, that there was no* need *to buy the cellophane-wrapped pizza ensconced there.*

I'd like to read (if such a thing exists) a History of Stores. What happened before Zola and Le Bonheur des Dames?

August 5, 1977

Continuing War and Peace, *I have a violent emotion, reading the death of old Prince Bolkonsky, his last words of tenderness to his daughter ("My darling, my friend"), the Princess's scruples about not disturbing him the night before, whereas he was calling her; Marie's feeling of guilt because she wanted her father to die for a moment, anticipating that she would thereby gain her freedom. And all this, so much tenderness, so much poignance, in the midst of the crudest scuffles, the arrival of the French, the necessity of leaving, etc.*

Literature has an effect of truth much more violent for me than that of religion. By which I mean, quite simply, that literature is like *religion. And yet, in this week's* Quinzaine, *Lacassin declares peremptorily: "Literature no longer exists except in textbooks." Whereby I am dismissed, in the name of . . . comic strips.*

August 13, 1977

This morning, around eight, the weather was splendid. I had an

impulse to try M's bicycle, to go to the baker's. I haven't ridden a bike since I was a kid. My body found this operation very odd, difficult, and I was afraid (of getting on, of getting off). I told all this to the baker—and as I left the shop, trying to get back on my bike, of course, I fell off. Now by instinct I let myself fall excessively, *legs in the air, in the silliest posture imaginable. And then I understood that it was this silliness which saved me (from hurting myself too much): I* accompanied *my fall and thereby turned myself into a spectacle, I made myself ridiculous; but thereby, too, I diminished its effect.*

All of a sudden, it has become a matter of indifference to me whether or not I am modern.

(. . . And like a blind man whose finger gropes along the text of life and here and there recognizes "what has already been said".)

II

Paris, April 25, 1979

Futile Evening:

Yesterday, around seven in the evening, under a cold rain in a bad spring, I ran to catch the No. 58 bus. Oddly, there were only old people on the bus. One couple was talking very loudly about some History of the War (which? you can't tell any more): "No distance, no perspective," the man was saying admiringly, "only details." I got off at the Pont Neuf. Since I was early, I lingered a little along the Quai de la Mégisserie. Workmen in blue smocks (I could smell how badly paid they were) were brutally stacking big cages on dollies where ducks and pigeons (all fowls are so stupid) were fluttering in hysterics, sliding in heaps from one side to the other. The shops were closing. Through the door, I saw two puppies: one was teasing the other, who kept rebuffing him in a very human manner. Once again, I had a longing to have a dog: I might have bought this one (a sort of fox-terrier) who was irritated and showed it in a way that was indifferent and yet not haughty. There were also plants and pots of kitchen-herbs for sale. I envisioned myself (both longingly and with horror) stocking up on the lot before going back to U., where I would be living for good, coming to Paris only for "business" and shopping. Then I walked down the deserted and sinister Rue des Boudonnais. A driver asked me where the BHV was: oddly enough, he seemed to know only the abbreviation, and had no idea where or even what the Hotel de Ville was. At the (crumbling) Galerie de l'Impasse, I was disappointed: not by D.B.'s photographs (of windows and blue curtains, taken with a Polaroid

camera), but by the chilly atmosphere of the opening: W. wasn't there (probably still in America), nor R. (I was forgetting: they've quarrelled). D.S., beautiful and daunting, said to me: "Lovely, aren't they?" "Yes, very lovely" (but it's thin, there's not enough here, I added under my breath). All of which was pathetic enough. And since, as I've grown older I have more and more courage to do what I like, after a second quick tour of the room (staring any longer wouldn't have done more for me), I took French leave and indulged in a futile spree, from bus to bus and movie-house to movie-house. I was frozen, I was afraid of having caught bronchitis (this occurred to me several times). Finally, I warmed up a little at the Flore, ordering some eggs and a glass of Bordeaux, though this was a very bad day: an insipid and arrogant audience: no face to be interested in or about which to fantasize, or at least to speculate. The evening's pathetic failure has impelled me to begin, at last, the reformation of my life which I have had in mind so long. Of which this first note is the trace.

(On rereading: this bit gave me a distinct pleasure, so vividly did it revive the sensations of that evening; but curiously, in reading it over, what I remembered best was what was not written, *the interstices of notation: for instance, the gray of the Rue de Rivoli while I was waiting for the bus; no use trying to describe it now, anyway, or I'll lose it again instead of some other silenced sensation, and so on, as if resurrection always occurred* alongside *the thing expressed: role of the Phantom, of the Shadow.)*

However often I reread these two fragments, nothing tells me they are publishable; nothing tells me, on the other hand, that they are not. Which raises a problem that is beyond me—the problem of "publishability"; not: "is it good or is it bad?" (a form every author gives to his question), but "is it publishable or not?" This is not only a publisher's question. The doubt has shifted, slides from the text's quality to its image. I raise for myself the question of the text from the Other's point of view; the Other is not the public, here, or any particular public (this is the publisher's question) the Other, caught up in a dual and somehow personal relation, is *anyone who will read me.* In short, I imagine that my Journal pages are put in front of "whom I am looking at," or under the silence of "whom I am speaking to."—Is this not the situation of any text?—No. The text is anonymous, or at least produced by a kind of *nom de guerre,* that of the author. This is not at all true of the Journal (even if its "I" is a false name): the Journal is a "discourse" (a kind of *written word* according to a special code), not a text. The question I raise for myself: *"Should I keep a journal?"* is immediately

supplied, in my mind, with a nasty answer: *"Who cares?"*, or, more psychoanalytically: *"It's your problem."*

All I have left to do is analyze the reasons for my doubt. Why do I suspect, *from the point of view of the Image*, Journal writing? I believe it is because this writing is stricken, in my eyes, as though with an insidious disease, with negative characteristics—deceptive and disappointing, as I shall try to say.

The journal corresponds to no *mission*. Nor is this word laughable. The works of literature, from Dante to Mallarmé, Proust, and Sartre, have always had, for those who wrote them, a kind of social, theological, mythic, esthetic, moral end. The book, "architectural and premeditated," is supposed to reproduce an order of the world, it always implies, I believe, a monist philosophy. The Journal cannot achieve the status of the Book (of the Work); it is only an Album, to adopt Mallarmé's distinction (it is Gide's life which is a "work," not his Journal). The Album is a collection of leaflets not only interchangeable (even this would be nothing), but above all *infinitely suppressible*: rereading my Journal, I can cross out one entry after the next, to the complete annihilation of the Album, with the excuse that "I don't like this one": this is the method of Groucho and Chico Marx, reading aloud and tearing up each clause of the contract which is meant to bind them.—But can't the Journal, in fact, be considered and practiced as that form which essentially expresses the inessential of the world, the world as inessential?—For that, the Journal's subject would have to be the world, and not me; otherwise, what is uttered is a kind of egotism which constitutes a screen between the world and the writing; whatever I do, I become consistent, confronting the world which is not. How to keep a Journal without egotism? That is precisely the question which keeps me from writing one (for I have had just about enough egotism).

Inessential, the Journal is unnecessary as well. I cannot invest in a Journal as I would in a unique and monumental work which would be dictated to me by an incontrovertible desire. The regular writing of the Journal, a function as daily as any other physiological one, no doubt implies a pleasure, a comfort, but not a passion. It is a minor mania of writing, whose necessity vanishes in the trajectory which leads from the entry produced to the entry reread: "I haven't found that what I've written so far is particularly valuable, nor that it obviously deserves to be thrown away" (Kafka). Like any subject of perversion (I am told), subjected to the "yes, but," I know that my text is futile, but at the same time (by the same impulse) I cannot wrest myself from the belief that it exists.

Inessential, uncertain, the Journal is also inauthentic. I don't mean by this that someone who expresses himself in one is not sincere. I mean that its very form can only be borrowed from an antecedent and motionless Form (that, precisely, of the intimate Journal), which cannot be subverted. Writing my Journal, I am, by status, doomed to simulation. A double simulation, in fact: for every emotion being a copy of the same emotion one has read somewhere, to report a mood in the coded language of the Collection of Moods is to copy a copy: even if the text was "original," it would already be a copy; all the more so, if it is familiar, worn, threadbare: "The writer, by his pains, those dragons he has fondled, or by a certain vivacity, must set himself up, in the text, as a witty historian" (Mallarmé). What a paradox! By choosing the most "direct," the most "spontaneous" form of writing, I find myself to be the clumsiest of ham-actors. (And why not? Are there not "historic" moments when one must be a ham-actor? By practicing to the bitter end an antiquated form of writing, do I not say that I love literature, that I love it in a harrowing fashion, at the very moment when it is dying? I love it, therefore I imitate it—but precisely: not without complexes.)

All of which says more or less the same thing: that the worst torment, when I try to keep a Journal, is the instability of my judgment. Instability? Rather its inexorably descending curve. In the Journal, Kafka pointed out, the absence of a notation's value is always recognized too late. How to transform what is written at white heat (and takes pride in the fact) into a nice cold dish? It is this waste, this dwindling which constitutes the Journal's uneasiness. Again Mallarmé (who moreover did not keep one): "Or other verbiage become just that, provided it is exposed, persuasive, pensive, and true when one confides it in a whisper": as in that fairy tale, under the effect of a curse and an evil power, the flowers that fall from my mouth are changed into toads. "When I say something, this thing immediately and definitively loses its importance. When I write it here, it also loses it, but sometimes gains another importance" (Kafka). The difficulty proper to the Journal is that this secondary importance, liberated by writing, is not certain: it is not certain that the Journal recuperates the word and gives it the resistance of a new metal. Of course writing is indeed that strange activity (over which, hitherto, psychoanalysis has had little hold, understanding it with difficulty), which miraculously arrests the hemorrhaging of the Image-repertoire, of which speech is the powerful and pathetic stream. But precisely: however "well written," is the Journal "writing"? It struggles, swells, and stiffens: am I as big as the

text? Never! you aren't even close. Whence the depressive effect: acceptable when I write, disappointing when I reread.

At bottom, all these failures and weaknesses designate quite clearly a certain defect of the subject. This defect is existential. What the Journal posits is not the tragic question, the Madman's question: "Who am I?", but the comic question, the Bewildered Man's question: "Am I?" A comic—a comedian, that's what the Journal-keeper is.

In other words, I never get away from myself. And if I never get away from myself, if I cannot manage to determine what the Journal is "worth," it is because its literary status slips through my fingers: on the one hand, I experience it, through its facility and its desuetude, as being nothing more than the Text's limbo, its unconstituted, unevolved and immature form; but on the other hand, it is all the same a true scrap of that Text, for it includes its essential torment. This torment, I believe, consists in this: that literature is *without proofs*. By which it must be understood that it cannot prove, not only *what* it says, but even *that* it is worth the trouble of saying it. This harsh condition (Play and Despair, Kafka says) achieves its very paroxysm in the Journal. But also, at this point, everything turns around, for out of its impotence to prove, which excludes it from the serene heaven of Logic, the Text draws a *flexibility* which is in a sense its essence, which it possesses as something all its own. Kafka—whose Journal is perhaps the only one that can be read without irritation—expresses this double postulation of literature to perfection: Accuracy and Inanity: ". . . I was considering the hopes I had formed for life. The one which appeared the most important or the most affecting was the desire to acquire a way of seeing life (and, what was related, of being able, by writing, to convince others) in which life would keep its heavy movement of rise and fall, but would at the same time be recognized, and with a no less admirable clarity, as a nothing, a dream, a drifting state." Yes, that is just what the ideal Journal is: at once a rhythm (rise and fall, elasticity) and a trap (I cannot join my image): a writing, in short, which tells the truth of the trap and guarantees this truth by the most formal of operations, rhythm. On which we must doubtless conclude that I can rescue the Journal on the one condition that I labor it *to death*, to the end of an extreme exhaustion, like a *virtually* impossible Text: a labor at whose end it is indeed possible that the Journal thus kept no longer resembles a Journal at all.

Translated by Richard Howard

Diana Trilling

AN INTERVIEW WITH VIRGIL THOMSON

Diana Trilling: I am doing an oral history of the advanced literary-intellectual culture of New York City between 1925 and 1975,* and what I want to talk about with you, Virgil, is the relation of music to that world. I define advanced literary-intellectual in a rather arbitrary way. I have in mind a small group of periodicals that were, it seems to me, definitive of the way that advanced intellectual opinion was created and disseminated in the period I'm dealing with: *Partisan Review, Commentary, The New Republic, The Nation, The New Masses* in the late twenties and thirties, *The New Leader, The Reporter* while it was in existence. Then later there is *The New York Review of Books,* of course. That's where we'll perhaps find that the musical aspect of New York artistic life was most recognized by literary people. Do you think of other magazines I've left out?

Virgil Thomson: Well, of course I lived in Europe for a great many of those years, and one read *Horizon* in the days when it was subsidized by Peter Watson and edited by Cyril Connolly, which was a quite bright literary and even political magazine.

Trilling: How much American stuff did it have?

Thomson: I don't think it had much. But the literary and political advanced movements weren't limited to America. Eliot had his own paper called the *Criterion,* and of course there were half a dozen or more very good French magazines at that time. Living in France, I read them.

Trilling: Did you know that *Partisan Review* published some of Eliot's *Four Quartets*? He sent at least one of the *Four Quartets* to *Partisan Review* but that may have been after the *Criterion* stopped publishing in 1939. "The Dry Salvages" was 1941 and "Little Gidding" was 1942.

Thomson: The Dial had published *The Waste Land* back in the twenties. They gave it a prize, I believe, or some sort of award.

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*The series, when completed, will be on deposit in the Oral History Department of the Columbia University Libraries.

Trilling: When you think of the advanced intellectual life of America between 1925 and 1975 who first comes to your mind, Virgil? Among Americans, that is.

Thomson: Resident in America?

Trilling: No, native to America even if they were resident abroad.

Thomson: Well, my closest association during those years was with Gertrude Stein. Of course I knew Ezra Pound and I read early Eliot—I never went too far with that. I'd like to point out, though, as we go into the intellectual life, particularly the poets of high repute, that whereas the magazines you mentioned tended to be liberal in politics in their editorial pages—that is to say, modified socialist—the most celebrated and probably the most advanced poets of the time—Eliot, Stein, Pound, Yeats in England—were practically all conservative to reactionary in their politics. And the same holds for the French. Claudel, who was a Catholic convert, and Cocteau, whose family was well-to-do, were politically to the right. The surrealists were socialist without being members of the Party. They were put on the spot in 1928 by the Communist Party: either join up or stop talking Marxism, and they refused to join up. I think two of them left the surrealists at that time and did join the Party, Tristan Tzara and Louis Aragon. And there were two real Trotskyites, Benjamin Peret and René Char. The rest were more or less like our American liberals, only a little more extreme because they were trying to blend Marx with Freud, and at the same time to take a classical French proto-revolutionary position, that of insulting everybody and everything. Subversiveness was their ideal and their program. There was nothing like that going on here except in the organized Communist Party.

Trilling: It was politically programmatic in this country but artistically programmatic in France, is that it? But tell me, you name these names and we're immediately very remote from the names which come to people's minds in writing about the thirties. They talk of Pound, Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence, as the influential bridge generation between the nineteenth century and the twentieth century, but their twentieth century doesn't begin with the people you've mentioned. Particularly a person like Gertrude Stein is seldom spoken of.

Thomson: You see, Eliot was considerably younger than Stein, and Pound was a little bit younger. Gertrude was born in 1874. That puts her back with the musical masters like Ives and Schoenberg, in that part of the nineteenth century when people really were radical.

Trilling: What about Stravinsky? You'd certainly think of him as

having been powerfully influential in the music world, but it wasn't until suddenly, when Auden started to write libretti for him and when *The New York Review of Books* got Craft to write for him and about him—

Thomson: I preceded him in *The New York Review.*

Trilling: —that Stravinsky was all at once voted into our literary-intellectual culture. Do you recognize what I'm saying when I say that?

Thomson: Yes, but he'd had similar relations with the French literary world.

Trilling: Who were the people in the literary world of France that he associated with?

Thomson: He had collaborated on several musical-dramatic works with Jean Cocteau, for instance, and with André Gide, when he started writing to French texts. He had composed in Russian almost exclusively, I would say, up to about 1925-6-7. Then he tried French, and then French translated into Latin. The latter was successful in *Oedipus Rex. Persephone,* in French, was less so. He was afraid of French, afraid of making errors of prosody in a language which is so rigidly governed by its living grammarians and writers. He spoke German perfectly well but he never composed in it, and German was unfavorably viewed in those days anyway, on account of World War I. And he put a few phrases of Hebrew into a Latin cantata after the war. He came to setting English late in life. Stravinsky's high point as a member of the intellectual community came, I presume, with his giving the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard, which he read in French. They were actually composed by a musician, Roland-Manuel, and a good deal of the philosophic thought in them about aesthetics was the result, if I am not mistaken, of Stravinsky's conversations with a Swiss philosopher named Ramuz; but the actual writing, I believe, was done by Roland-Manuel. He was a good writer and a good friend of Stravinsky's and he could see that it came out in proper French, which the old man could pronounce quite well.

Trilling: He was already an old man when he gave the Norton lectures?

Thomson: I'm just referring to him affectionately as the old man. In the music world one used to refer to Toscanini also as "the old man."

Trilling: When were Stravinsky's Norton lectures?

Thomson: In 1942, and he was born in 1882.

Trilling: So he was a young man in his sixties.

Thomson: He was under sixty when he wrote them.

Trilling: Were Stravinsky and Gertrude Stein close?

Thomson: I don't think they knew each other. They may have met casually, but Gertrude didn't frequent music circles.

Trilling: Weren't you a bridge?

Thomson: Well, Stravinsky had certain literary friends, but if he went out of music circles or Russian circles—which were his backgrounds—he went into the elegant world, introduced by Jean Cocteau and Cocteau's friends, and by Diaghilev. Diaghilev frequented the elegant world to get money for his ballet seasons and the elegant world—some of it—gave him money for the ballet seasons in return for access to the dancers. They could have the dancers at their parties and sometimes in their beds. Before World War I the elegant world described by Proust didn't receive artists, and after World War II the elegant world in France no longer received artists. But between the wars it did. Now it's gone back to money and yachts. And nobody of course now has to have dancers in order to get sexual exercise.

Trilling: When did you first meet Gertrude Stein?

Thomson: It was, I think, in January of 1926. I had been reading Gertrude Stein since my college days, since 1919, shall we say. I discovered *Tender Buttons* in the Harvard Library, and a few years later there came out a volume published in Boston at her expense—something I never knew at the time—called *Geography and Plays,* a much larger selection of work, although not as intensely concentrated as *Tender Buttons.*

Trilling: What about *Melanctha?*

Thomson: That was a much earlier piece, and I never saw it until later. It wasn't easy to lay your hands on. It had been published in England and languished there until Gertrude began to be a little more famous in Paris, through the publications of Robert MacAlman and with Hemingway's help. At that point I think *Three Lives,* which contained *Melanctha,* came out in an American edition.

Trilling: I think it was about 1929 or 1930 when I first came across it. It may have been published well before that. Virgil, you speak of Hemingway's having promoted Gertrude Stein's work. But for my literary generation in New York Gertrude Stein existed chiefly as the person who told Hemingway that his was a lost generation. Or maybe as the person who had collected and first appreciated Picasso.

Thomson: That places you as being a little younger than I, then.

Trilling: A little younger.

Thomson: In Paris in the middle twenties it was felt that Hemingway's

success was largely due to Gertrude's help because she read his manuscripts and encouraged him. In return he proofread the whole of her *The Making of Americans* as it went through the press. They did each other professional favors and were very close.

Trilling: When you and Gertrude Stein met in 1926 did you feel that you were meeting each other as fellow Americans, as fellow expatriates?

Thomson: Americans living in Paris never thought of themselves as expatriates. Expatriate was a dirty word used by the home folks who couldn't live abroad. If they were too rich to live abroad, or too middle class through having to earn money for wife and children by teaching in a college or something, they called us expatriates. We thought we were just Americans living in another country, in the same way that people lived in Italy or China or Turkey or India without being called expatriates. Expatriate was only applied to the Paris group. And, by the way, the term "the lost generation" is a mistranslation into English. It was *une génération perdue.* A man who manufactured things down in the country where Gertrude lived in the summer said to her after the war that the French boys who had spent four years in the Army came out a little too old to be apprenticed to a trade, a *métier,* and so, he said, they were a lost generation—"ils sont tous une génération perdue;" that is to say, *perdue* for the trade or profession. Now if he had meant that they were in any way spiritually or psychologically lost, the French would have been "une génération *de* perdus," in the plural. But these were simply a generation lost to shoemaking or whatever. They had skipped four years. When Gertrude Stein said to Hemingway and some young people one evening, quoting her friend down in the country, "Oh, you are all a lost generation," she knew perfectly well what lost generation meant in French, but she was also perfectly capable of stimulating them by the possible double meaning in English. Yet at the bottom of her mind she considered them a lost generation in the French sense, that they had fought a war and then had come to live abroad so that really about all they could do was journalism. They were lost to scholarship or research or really advanced literary work.

Trilling: I've never heard that explained. It's terribly interesting. But to go back: when you and Gertrude Stein first got to be friends, you didn't think of yourselves as expatriates but as Americans living in France.

Thomson: As I remarked in a book of memoirs I wrote, I went to

Gertrude Stein's one evening with George Antheil, being invited by George. Actually he was afraid to go alone, and she didn't care for George very much, but she was curious about him because he was a protectorate of Joyce. And I remarked in my account that Gertrude and I got on like Harvard men. We loved the Harvard affair, and we had both loved World War I. We talked about it constantly.

Trilling: Many writers I have known refer to the people who stand in back of their typewriters when they write a piece. They mean the audience to which they direct themselves. When you and Gertrude Stein worked together, or even when you worked separately, were you writing for Americans and Europeans, or were you writing primarily for Americans?

Thomson: Well, you don't write music for one country.

Trilling: A writer is likely to have a particular audience in mind, maybe a group of friends—five, eight people—and he thinks that if those people like what he's done, then he'll have done what he set out to do.

Thomson: Stein once said, "I write for myself and strangers," and I think Joyce did exactly that too. Eliot I wouldn't be sure about because, again to quote myself, between the idea and its realization comes always the shadow of his education. With Eliot, somewhere in the back of his mind he had to please Irving Babbitt or some such professor of Comp. Lit.

Trilling: Well, there's also something else. When you say that, I think not of his pleasing Irving Babbitt or whoever it was at Harvard, but of the fact that he had in back of him Mark Twain and the Mississippi River; he had an idiom available to him of this magnificent concreteness. Wherever he carried this intellectually, it had been given him by Mark Twain, an American, and you don't find it in any of the English writers. But Eliot has it straight from his American background, and it would be my guess that Gertrude Stein had it in just that sense too. She had that wonderful commonplace idiom.

Thomson: And she had read all of Mark Twain. Mark Twain and Henry James were her forbears.

Trilling: Now this is what I'm trying to get at. She was an American writer and stood in a tradition. She had a very clear awareness of her American literary heritage. Did anybody coming after her in the New York literary world that I am dealing with have a sense of her place in that heritage?

Thomson: I don't know whether they ever sensed her place in it, but believe me, the most successful and widely admired American poets of, say, around thirty-five to forty-five today—John Ashbery or Frank

O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, that particular trio, or even the San Francisco group, although there were other influences out there—all reflected Stein's literary methods. With Ashbery I am particularly aware of what you might call the late manner of Gertrude; it appears in a long poem of hers called *Stanzas in Meditation*, which again—the sound of them, the feel of them—are modeled on Shakespeare's sonnets. But you can't put your finger on the meaning very easily and I find John Ashbery very closely resembles Gertrude in his manner.

Trilling: Do you think he would acknowledge that?

Thomson: He knows it, I think, but I wouldn't ask him to admit it.

Trilling: If I think back to roughly her age group among influential American poets, of course the first name that comes to my mind is William Carlos Williams. The next generation all said they got their American speech from him. They don't mention Stein.

Thomson: They got from him the courage to use the kind of speech they knew. He didn't give them a vocabulary.

Trilling: They got their vocabulary out of something way in back of him in the American past.

Thomson: Well, the courage to use your own grass roots is the big American acquisition, if you can make it.

Trilling: One of the things that really interests me is that here in Stein we have a key figure in the American tradition who's never been given her due in the advanced literary world. To my knowledge there has never been a serious essay about Gertrude Stein in any of the literary journals. Am I mistaken about that?

Thomson: There are a couple of quite serious books. There's one by Donald Sutherland and one by a man named Richard Bridgman, from California.

Trilling: Oh, of course scholars have worked on her, and I'm sure her papers are very valuable to scholars, but that's not what I'm talking about.

Thomson: But you see, Gertrude is much harder to explicate than her rival Mr. Joyce. As Picasso said of Joyce, he's an obscure writer that everybody will end by understanding. Well, as he wrote that, a man named Sherman or something was writing a whole concordance of *Ulysses*, so *Ulysses* was explained, and *Finnegan's Wake* was about to come out and it too is reasonably clear, if you do your homework, whereas there are many passages in Gertrude Stein that resist explication. And don't forget that the ideal of the obscure artists—Picasso himself—was to conceal the message. The same with Mallarmé in French poetry. The ideal of obscurity is to produce some-

thing that will forever remain obscure. That's very hard to achieve, something you don't understand even thirty years later.

Trilling: With many obscure works you not only learn to understand them but pretty soon they become part of your received ideas, of your received culture. Did Gertrude Stein formulate a theory of the obscure? Consciously, I mean? Or did she just work that way?

Thomson: No, no, she had theories. Don't forget that she was very elaborately educated in psychology and medicine, and when she had really mastered the obscure thing with *Tender Buttons,* she described it by saying, "This is an effort to describe something without naming it," which is what the cubist painters were doing with still life.

Trilling: But it's also what musicians are always doing.

Thomson: Well, I got myself into a lovely little—shall we say controversy—with André Breton, by pointing out that the discipline of spontaneity, which he was asking his surrealist neophytes to adopt, was new for language but something that composers had been practicing for centuries.

Trilling: Of course you must always have been aware of this. But now let's get back to New York.

Thomson: Well, I had been back and forth a little bit in the thirties and in the twenties, but I came back to work here in the fall of 1940, considerably after the fall of France. I spent the first year of the war in France, and then the next year I found that I couldn't be of any use to my French friends and I couldn't make any money, so I came back to New York on borrowed money, and fell into writing as music critic of the *Herald Tribune.* I had previously written a number of articles for magazines, particularly a quarterly called *Modern Music,* and I had published a book in 1939 called *The State of Music.* It was on that evidence that I could write that I was offered the job, because of course reviewing music or reviewing anything is a writing job. It's nice if you are experienced in the field you are writing about, but writing is what you are doing.

Trilling: Well, as a composer you had been close to certain very distinguished writers when you were living in Paris. Now that you were back in America, writing for a living, did you feel connected either as a composer or a writer with the literary community of New York? So to speak, the cream of the New York literary community?

Thomson: What you're assuming to be the cream of the literary community in New York—and you may very well be right—was largely a Jewish cream, and the Jewish cream wasn't too favorable to

me as a *goy*. And at the age of forty-five I didn't very much like elbowing my way into the literary world other than by my writing. I had many friends there. Individually, I could be chummy and happy with them. But of course in literature as in music there was a kind of Jewish Mafia that passed the jobs around among themselves.

Trilling: I'd like you to talk about this very specifically, if you wouldn't mind.

Thomson: I had previously seen in New York during the early twenties and before—and this continued—that there was a German Mafia. The German musical community, which was the governing body in American music before and during World War I, was not too happy about the rise to favor of French music and, even more dangerous to them, the adoption at Columbia and Harvard of a French pedagogy. The music world in New York was still governed by German and German-educated musicians. I won't say they were not in many cases Jewish, like the Damrosch family, but it was their Germanness which was the source of their solidarity. They didn't like the idea of the Boston Symphony Orchestra having a French conductor, Pierre Monteux, and they managed, by dirty cracks and underground dealings, as far as I could figure out, to see that he didn't sell out in New York when the Boston Symphony came here. It sold out in Boston and everywhere else on tour, but not in New York. Consequently, at the end of five years Monteux was let out, and Serge Koussevitzky was employed. Serge Koussevitzky was not German, but he was Jewish and that helped, and as we were getting on into the twenties, Jewishness was approaching the sacred status that it acquired in the 1930s with persecution and martyrdom.

Trilling: You say that Monteux could not sell out his New York concerts but—

Thomson: In spite of the fact that he was Jewish. You see, his Jewishness didn't count. It was the fact that he was French and not German that mattered.

Trilling: Were there nameable individuals who subverted that enterprise? Agencies?

Thomson: Oh no, no, no.

Trilling: Critics? Who was doing it?

Thomson: The important establishments, which were the Institute of Musical Art here on Claremont Avenue, which was established by Walter Damrosch's brother Frank, and whose chief pedagogue in musical theory and composition was Percy Goetschins, a very learned German-American. The German pedagogy of composition

lost its footing during World War I. The teachers at Harvard and at Columbia who were already using French methods were there before World War I, like Archibald T. Davidson and Edward Burlingame Hill and Daniel Gregory Mason at Columbia, but they would not necessarily have been able to implant a new pedagogical method, except that the whole power basis of German groups came from their Germanness. Once we got into a war against Germany, Germanness became something they couldn't really talk about or organize too much. Before World War I, people went to Munich to study painting just as often as to Paris, you know. Of course, after World War I not only had Germany lost credit with the intellectual world, but Germany was impoverished, and continued to be so for a number of years, so that Germany could not receive students. After World War II Germany had been impoverished intellectually because Hitler had destroyed the musical movement and much of the other intellectual movements by his anti-Jewish policies, and anti-Social Democratic policies, although the victims of that were less numerous, certainly less well-known to us all, than the Jewish victims. So the preparation between the two wars—of the twenties, shall we say, and early thirties—for a new and stronger American literary and artistic development was further enriched by the German immigration of the thirties. By the time World War II was over, we had a new German establishment. But this is a German-Jewish establishment, conscious of being Jewish, not so conscious of being German—it took German for granted—and very anti-French.

Trilling: Virgil, you came back to America and New York at a moment when the influence of the radicalization of the thirties was still very strong despite the considerable ground that had been lost by the Communist Party in the Nazi-Soviet Pact.

Thomson: Yes, but our joining the war . . .

Trilling: Yes, of course, we were an ally and that made it all right again. How did this manifest itself in your personal experience in the musical world?

Thomson: Well, I was much closer to the warfare that took place in and around the Communist Party in the middle thirties than I was later. I was in the Federal Theater. I was in America, you see, from 1934 through 1935 and 1936. And the Communists were a legal party; they ran a candidate for president in 1936. Every union had Communist cells, and if I complain about the Jews squeezing me out, believe me the Communists would squeeze you out much worse.

Trilling: This is very hard for people to believe today. They think of Communists as a handful of innocent liberals who existed only to be

persecuted by McCarthy in the fifties. They can't believe they were the cultural power they actually were.

Thomson: New York was Stalinist. The Trotskyite center was Boston and, for union matters, Minneapolis.

Trilling: Yes, the Trotskyites had the transport workers in Minneapolis; that was their one strong union, the only one they really controlled. But they had great power in New York in the intellectual world. They formulated the dissident theory.

Thomson: Trotsky was a far more intelligent intellectual than Stalin, and probably even than Lenin. He was very verbal.

Trilling: How were you able to work as comfortably as you did, when you weren't a Stalinist, with all these Stalinists who were around you? What was your method?

Thomson: The same way I worked with Jesuits. I get on beautifully with Jesuits. I don't get along with Dominicans very well; I find them tricky. . . .

Trilling: Now I want to go to the forties for a minute. When you were writing for the *Herald Tribune,* earning your living as a writer, did you feel that you were part of the New York intellectual community and that you had a natural place in it?

Thomson: My fan mail told me that I did. I didn't seek to join the intellectual gatherings. Heaven knows I had enough to do to carry on my own musical life and my journalistic work.

Trilling: You didn't have a sense that the intellectual life was a coterie life?

Thomson: Oh, I did indeed.

Trilling: But you said, "I'm going to fight that." Is that the idea?

Thomson: I wasn't fighting it; I was just by-passing it.

Trilling: Did you know that at some time—I believe it was in the fifties—Robert Lowell and William Meredith were given fellowships or grants or something to go to the opera all the time in the hope that they might write libretti for operas?

Thomson: These were the Metropolitan's ideas, yes.

Trilling: This came in response to a sense that there was a great rift between poets and composers.

Thomson: There was a rift between poets and the opera, not between poets and composers. Poets' poetry is the best evidence. It's been set to music frequently by very good composers. But poets lost touch with the opera in English back in the seventeenth century. The poets that you and I have known, and even their predecessors for fifty or one hundred years, were so completely egocentric, so interested in their own position in the ideal world, that they couldn't write a

dramatic thing, because they couldn't keep themselves out of the play. That was the trouble with Auden's early work. Of course Auden had no real sense of the theater anyway, but he did a few pieces with Isherwood, who had a tiny sense of the theater. Auden never could do much with those early works; he would never have gotten into the translation and libretto business—and he wrote several librettos, as a matter of fact, for very good composers—if it hadn't been for Chester Kallman. Vulgar as Kallman's mentality was, he knew what a stage was.

Trilling: Could we talk for a moment about Marc Blitzstein's work? When he became a Stalinist, did you feel that he was using musical composition effectively for social purposes?

Thomson: His most effective work was his big Commie opera, or *Singspiel, The Cradle Will Rock.* Oh yes. And that he did within a very few months after Eva's death, as a kind of homage to her and her teaching, and to Kurt Weill, because the Kurt Weill German operas, which had been made with Brecht, were Communist morality plays.

Trilling: Did you have a sense that the Brecht-Weill team was doing very much in terms of influencing people? Were they influential when their work was first done here?

Thomson: I was present at all that, and I knew Weill from Europe. He postponed his influence deliberately, because he no sooner arrived than the whole world of music, including Broadway, wanted to use him. He had a little operation to do, which was to sever all his Communist connections, so he cut off the Brecht friendship, he cut off the collaborations, he wouldn't let his wife appear in any major role on the stage. He just sat this out; he prevented me from producing *Mahagonny* at Hartford. When we first spoke about it, he kept saying, "Yes, yes," but then he arranged so we couldn't do it.

Trilling: Mahagonny didn't begin to have any effect upon people in this country, to my knowledge, until the mid-fifties.

Thomson: No. Weill became a model of show-writing to show-writers very early. In the early forties Dick Rodgers said to me that obviously Kurt Weill was a remarkable composer of great charm and great ability. "And don't you admire him?" says he. I said, "Indeed I do. As a matter of fact, he's the only writer on Broadway who knows how to write a finale." And Dick Rodgers said, "What's a finale?" You see, Victor Herbert knew what a finale was. But there were no finales in Rodgers's time.

Trilling: Did your world of musical composition and idea have a natural connection with the world of Rodgers and Hammerstein, people like that?

Thomson: Our connection was as colleagues, and they were nice fellows. As a matter of fact, for thirty to thirty-five years I've been sitting on boards and committees with those popular writers in ASCAP and having a wonderful time, because they are loyal colleagues and intelligent people, and we are all in show business. They respect me, I respect them.

Trilling: In other words, you never had to make the kind of conscious effort that has had to be made among writers to bring into some kind of coherent association the ideas of high and popular art?

Thomson: I don't know. The writers were very early to like Ring Lardner. And before World War I, George Ade. *Fables in Slang* had a high repute in literature.

Trilling: Well, Mark Twain wrote in the tradition of the folk humorists, and of course Constance Rourke was very powerful in establishing the concept of American folk humor. But I think there's a slight condescension involved in this. I don't think there was an easy acceptance even of Ring Lardner among intellectuals.

Thomson: The idea of a group of intellectuals who are liberal in politics and presumably tolerant in art has an integral and important connection with art and music as well as with literature. It has a connection with literature because they are all writers, it's all words. But the magazines that you mentioned have never had very much space for music or a very professional approach to it.

Trilling: What I am trying to say is that, from where I'm sitting, music was peripheral, it wasn't a concern of the intellectual community in the way that literature was. Neither was painting, though painting was more connected.

Thomson: Not necessarily. Both eye people and ear people were separate.

Trilling: Many writers whom I've known in this community which I've lived in most of my life have been so ignorant about music that it's absolutely appalling. They're often more intelligent about painting, but about music they're ignoramuses. They'd be ashamed to be that ignorant about anything else.

Thomson: Joyce considered himself a musician and he could sing. He used to come to my concerts. Gertrude would come to my concerts simply because they were mine. Gertrude didn't enjoy music or have any particular sense of it. Brought up in a well-to-do Jewish family, she had gone to symphony concerts and the opera as a girl, but it didn't take. And afterward she always said music is for adolescents. Alice Toklas was a musician. She had a real education, and she played a piano concerto once with an orchestra. She could read a

score and all that, but Gertrude just liked being put to music. I don't think there's any music in Eliot. There was a bit in Pound; he actually wrote an opera on a text of Villon in old French, which he knew quite well.

Trilling: And who did the music?

Thomson: Pound.

Trilling: He knew music enough to write an opera?

Thomson: He could prosidize the vocal line and write it down, then he would add a little bit of counterpoint or a bass note here and there to make it a little fuller. He was not really trained in harmony, but he knew how to write down a prosidized vocal line. That he would do himself. So he took the text—with some cutting—of the *Testament* and made an opera out of it. I heard it. He had very good singers. It's not musicians' music, but it may very well be the best poets' music since Campion.

Trilling: In the days when there was so much Communist domination of the musical and intellectual community, was there actually a great deal of stress upon music as an instrument of propaganda, just as there had to be socialist realism in painting? You know Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, and the way it gets progressively worse as the opera goes on, and becomes more and more propagandistic.

Thomson: Well, he may have been getting ill too, because his illness was a progressive one, it was not an instantaneous stroke. I don't know whether you saw a book that was written by John Houseman, who produced plays for the Federal Theater and later the Mercury Theater, all during the thirties. He was very active. He mentions there what I knew perfectly well at the time, that you really couldn't do anything in the theater in New York without asking a certain Commissar in charge of intellectual matters. I think his name was O'Neill though I'm not sure about that; but the name's in the book, and Houseman will tell you all about him. He was a sort of *éminence grise* who could stop things. He could pull the union workers off the show if he didn't find it acceptable ideologically.

Trilling: Did you yourself have much to do with the Mercury Theater?

Thomson: Nothing at all. I left the Association before they formed that. I was with John Houseman and Orson Welles when we started the first of all the Federal Theaters, which was the Negro one in Harlem, the Lafayette.

Trilling: This is probably *lèse majesté*, but I've always thought that *Citizen Kane* was one of the most overestimated things that was ever done.

Thomson: I've never seen it. But my view is that Welles couldn't touch the theater without magic taking place. The same is true of Jean Cocteau. He often had silly ideas, but the theater came to life the minute he was there. So from the point of view of the gift, the talent, the operation, it was wonderful. And Orson could do it. He was still in his teens when he started, you know. He was done before he was twenty-five. And he could do it on radio, and he could do it with actors; he could do it with movies. He knew how to handle a camera; he knew about angles; he knew how to tell a story; he knew good from corny dialogue. Orson was an all-purpose theatrical genius with the most beautiful bass speaking voice that ever has been on the stage. He lived his life in his career. And that lasted from nineteen to twenty-five.

Trilling: Would you say something about the role of the newspaper critics and the magazine critics of music in the last ten years: has it changed?

Thomson: No.

Trilling: Just the same as it always was?

Thomson: Hasn't changed in fifty years.

Trilling: You don't feel that there has been a deterioration of standards?

Thomson: I think the *Times* has a better staff than it's had in a very long time.

Trilling: Are you kidding?

Thomson: And if you read *The New York Times* music reviews back in the 1900s—they were very spotty. Carl Van Vechten worked there for a few years, but mostly they were stuffed shirts. My colleagues on the *Times* were Olin Downes and Noel Strauss, both of whom were musicians and could write perfectly well. Beyond these two they were not musicians for the most part. Today I think they are all musicians. The weak spot is at the top: Schonberg.

Trilling: He doesn't know music?

Thomson: Oh, he can read a score, and he writes books about performance history. You know, his specialty is the history of piano playing. But I think John Rockwell is their best writer. No, I don't think that the *Times* has deteriorated. I think the *Times* since the *Herald Tribune* went out of existence has improved. Having a monopoly, it has to kind of keep things up. To my taste the most readable music reviewer in New York is Alan Rich of *New York* magazine.

Neil Schmitz

ON AMERICAN HUMOR

> My show at present consists of three moral Bares, a kangaroo (an amoozin little Raskal—t'would make you larf yerself to deth to see the little cuss jump up and squeal) wax figgers of G. Washington Gen. Taylor John Bunyan Capt. Kidd and Dr. Webster in the act of killin Dr. Parkman, besides several miscellanyus moral wax statoots of celebrated piruts & murderers, &., ekalled by few & exceld by none.
> —Artemus Ward (Charles Farrar Browne)

> Beginning with *Goodbye, Columbus*, I've been attracted to prose that has the turns, vibrations, intonations, and cadences, the spontaneity and ease, of spoken language, at the same time that it is solidly grounded on the page, weighted with the irony, precision, and ambiguity associated with a more traditional literary rhetoric.
> —Philip Roth (Philip Roth)

In the nineteenth century the sign of the humorous text in American literature iz fonetick spellin, misplaced and absent letters, the text so basically wronged that often it can not be read aright. The humorist typically rongs riting, disfigures it, and this salience, this queer style of the wrongly written, distinguishes him from the comic writer who is easily at home in literature: Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Oliver Wendell Holmes. Few humorists indeed represent colloquial speech in their spelled-out sense of the spoken word, but it is nonetheless speech they imitate, an unlettered, countrified speech that humorously violates the continuities and proprieties of written discourse and gets away with it, scoring hits. "Poetri, tew be excellent," Josh Billings wrongly writes, "wants tew be natur, but about 4 times az big." Throughout the nineteenth century the typographical clash of speech and writing in the humorous text, even when its result was trivial, greatly amused the American reading public. All the popular humorists of the age were artful misspellers, wrong writers, joshers in dialect. The style undoubtedly appealed to an ambivalent national feeling about Jeffersonian rusticity, homespun language, the specific

locality of idiom, a feeling of condescension and nostalgia that intensified after the Civil War, but in itself the style is simply, fundamentally, phonocentric. It immediately draws our attention to the difference between (natur) speech and (poetri) writing. Each contrived mistake presents the primordial innocence of speech. The speaker unknowingly writes wrongly what he wishes to say, disrupts the textual line, and forces the knowing reader to mark the error and measure his superior distance. If the speech is transcribed as it is in Thomas Bangs Thorpe's exemplary Southwestern sketch, "The Big Bear of Arkansas," which first appeared in 1841, then a writerly interlocutor carefully frames the ostensible error of its way. Because it does not see itself, speech reveals, the style sez, whereas writing, always looking at itself, poses. Children misspell words. And what such speech reveals to us, to the literate, is the absolute *other*: the illiterate. What occurs in nineteenth-century American humor as it variously imagines this illiterate, this *other* who stands on the periphery of writing, is a gradual crystallization of the humorous style into a single metaphor, Huckspeech, an antimetaphorical metaphor that is turned against metaphorical thinking, against the complicated thought that makes treaties, bills of indenture, and literature.

Portnoy's Complaint, as we shall see, turns on that single fleeting recognition of the *other* scrawled in writing. The note Mary Jane Reed leaves for the maid, that relic of dialect humor from the nineteenth century (a frail sliver of Huckleberry Finn's larynx), is enshrined in Roth's novel: *dir willa polish the flor by bathrum pleze & dont furget the insies of windose mary jane r* (.) It is here that Alex Portnoy confronts the great splendid Presence of Humor, the Priority, the Primacy of Voluptuous Speech, the *Other*, and he cannot laugh. Like Tom Sawyer, he belongs to the self-conscious rectitude of writing. A rectifier of sentences, rewriter of plots, he stares at the note, recognizing tragic difference, and is appalled. How can he have an intimate life with a woman who can not write *dear* properly, who does not think *dear* but *dir* or *deir* or *deer* or *dere*? He is like the tormented Rousseau described in Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, the writer who perversely longs for Thereal McCoy, for the near presence of speech, from the shielding safety of his writing, his analysis. "Speech," Derrida writes, establishing the awful scale of supplements, "comes to be added to intuitive presence (of the entity, of *essence*, of the *eidos*, of *ousia*, and so forth); writing comes to be added to living self-present speech; masturbation comes to be added to so-called normal sexual experience; culture to nature, evil to innocence, history to origin, and so on." The

humorist's task was to make funny the feeling of that supplementarity, the feeling of separation from, of being inside something added to the real thing, this hard feeling for Thereal McCoy, and he did so by defacing the supplement, by wronging the written word. When we see through Portnoy's slanted eyes Mary Jane Reed move her lips as she reads the movie page in the newspaper, move her lips so expressively that Portnoy can read her silent voicing of the titles, which he does with contempt, we know the realm to which she belongs—to *essence, presence, eidos, ousia,* and also we know his place. He is inside the knowledge of writing, the knowledge of misery, watching the *other.* Mary Jane's slow patient vocalization of the word as she reads, mouthing it, is Huckspeech reduced to its purest form. Undoubtedly Huck wrote his manuscript this way, speaking aloud the words he painstakingly inscribed: *considerble, nonnamous, sivilize.*

To understand how the original wrong appears in American humor, one must first recognize the severe limitation of the style, its restricted place in American literature. Most of the so-called Black humorists of the late fifties and sixties (Terry Southern, James Purdy, Joseph Heller) do not, properly speaking, belong to the tradition. Nor do Robert Benchley and James Thurber, who are essayists, sketch writers, though I realize it may seem reckless not to call these humorists humorists, but my point, after all, is not expulsion. Simply put, hypothetically put, American humor textually describes an *agon* between a native speaker (or a peripheral writer) and a literary writer, and through that struggle, always graphically present because the text is wronged, such humor (as attitude, as act) proposes two distinct worlds of value and desire. The forms this *agon* at first takes in the nineteenth century are small and economical: anecdote, aphorism, doggerel, the topical letter, and yet the energy contained is considerable, so urgent as always to make the relative form susceptible. In the Southwestern sketch, for example, the literary interlocutor who frames the sketch often regards the native speaker from an astonished distance. Augustus B. Longstreet, it might be said, broods over his rednecks in *Georgia Scenes* (1835) the way Claude Lévi-Strauss broods over the Nambikwara. In other sketches, notably "The Big Bear of Arkansas," the tall tale the speaker tells draws the interlocutor into its ruse so that ultimately it is not the anecdote that constitutes the tale, but an ambivalence about what is said. In George Washington Harris's *Sut Lovingood's Yarns* (1867), where the authorial presence is scarce, the violence of Sut's speech is clamorous, crowded, consonantal—an anticipation of the hard line, the malevolent idiom that informs the

fiction of William Burroughs. The human face of Speech in American humor, its character, appears typically in different attitudes. In James Russell Lowell's *Biglow Papers* (1846–61), there is recognizably a fussy academician, Homer Wilbur, who introduces and frequently translates the doggerel of a poetical New England farmer, Hosea Biglow, but just to the side of Biglow is his rural *doppelgänger*, a racist lout called Birdofredum Sawin. Whatever we might discern in Lena Grove's laid-back drawl, her slow sure presence, or gather from the jabbing immediacy of Mink Snopes's insistent sentences, William Faulkner's brighter and darker versions of Huckspeech, can obviously be seen at work, comprehended, exercised, in Southwestern humor, in Lowell's project, in *Huckleberry Finn*, but with this twist. The humorists were writers whose political and professional affiliation (they were primarily Whiggish journalists and lawyers) made them self-conscious defenders of their own gentility and erudition. The idiom that illuminates Faulkner's fiction, which we take as given, designated the humorist, specified the intrinsic vulgarity of his subject, and placed him beyond the pale of polite letters.

Unlettered speech, as opposed to literary speech, is therefore outside the text and can only enter the text, be written, by wronging it, by loudly announcing its difference. "Mother-wit," says Johnson Jones Hooper's infamous Simon Suggs in 1846, "kin beat book-larnin at any game." Where did this situate the speaker but in that strangest of places, *Natur*, the realm left unseen by the scan of *Nature*, the space, the milieu of Huckspeech, which is unsigned, unknown. The dropped *e* in *Natur*, an *e* every humorist dropped, comically reduces that large written transcendental abstraction, *Nature*. It is a hole poked in the symbol, in the metaphor, in the concept. *Natur* bespeaks an intimate knowledge of the natural thing, the natural process, real things, other things, mother-wit, which the humorist asserts the poet overlooks. Metaphor magnifies a thing "about 4 times az big." He who says "natur" in a text is already there in it. If *Natur* in the end generally refers to the same full sack of verities that *Nature* represents, so that Natty Bumppo can equably use both, the humorist nonetheless insists that *Natur* is differently known, differently realized. That is, Natty Bumppo can look serenely full-face at *Nature*, but at *Natur* (which is more powerful than beautiful) he must squint in the guise of the illiterate. *Natur* is not quite *Nature*. There is a consciousness, an *other*, a way of experiencing the world and the self, that is not *in* writing, whose captivity in the text is the wrong we humorously regard. Tom Sawyer corrects the grammar of Huck's existence. Portnoy construes

Mary Jane Reed's intelligence from her spelling. And we see that neither Tom nor Portnoy is a good listener. This other, he/she, can only wrongly write and the writer can only wrong his/her speech. Each yearns for the other, to be spoken, to be written, and where they meet is in the disturbed text: "I see it warn't no use in wasting words—you can't learn a nigger to argue."

From Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry* (1792–1815) through the Southwestern humorists in the Jacksonian period to *Huckleberry Finn*, the line of the style is almost pure, almost perfect. Two voices (one illiterate, the other literate) contest the determination of the real. Huck rubs and shines the "old tin lamp" that should produce a genie, "but it warn't no use, none of the genies come. So then I judged that all that stuff was only just one of Tom Sawyer's lies. I reckoned he believed in the A-rabs and the elephants, but as for me I think different." And when he himself later turns officiously upon Jim, adopting Tom's knowing tone, the response is quick: "Doan' talk to me 'bout Sollermun, Huck, I knows him by de back." To witness entire the implicit agony in this humorous *agon*, one has only to turn from the text to the ritual of the minstrel show. There, to the great delight of countless audiences in the nineteenth century, a top-hatted, formally-tailed interlocutor (by turns impatient, irate, condescending, beguiled) dealt straight lines to a row of jabbering, monkey-faced Jims. In the simplest possible terms the minstrel show projected through song and dance, through sallies of humor, a drama everyone knew by heart, the drama of resistance. It is the white and black world of master and slave, that certainly, but as well it is the white and black world of dull adult authority and free childish rebellion, a world in which the stiff confronts the supple, the head a dancing body. The writer who did dialect sketches, who marred *Nature* in his text, indeed resembled the white performer who blacked his face, who imitated, who mimicked, who stood for an idea of the black man as a feckless child of nature.

American humor therefore makes a good deal of noise in the nineteenth century. It gives us a text now difficult to read, jokes that no longer stir widespread cachinnation, and a slew of reputations now fossilized in small signatures: Madison Tensas, Orpheus C. Kerr, Petroleum V. Nasby, Dan DeQuille. It also outlines a structure, a stance, that modern humorists as writers or performers, from different angles and intensities, still assume. It gives us, in brief, the whole discourse of *Huckleberry Finn* as a single act, a single meaning. Into American literature, a logorrheic literature distorted by the prominence of the symbol, there floats airily, breezily, out of the exchanges of

colloquial humor, a style that is symbol-blind, metaphor-blind, a style in which the writer must efface, as much as he can, the trace of his writing, a styleless style that depicts with stringent clarity an extraliterary apprehension of the world, a style that is tragically overtaken. The prevalence of Huckspeech in modern American literature is so great that reference takes the form of a litany. There is Ring Lardner's Jack Keefe ("You know me Al."), there is Jack Kerouac's Dean Moriarty ("Gimme!"), there is even John Seelye's audacious enterprise, *The True Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1970), which fell like a stone to the earth. Any character in fiction, on television or in the movies, who appropriates Huckspeech immediately identifies himself/herself as a way of feeling, thinking, and seeing the world that we, as knowers of the letter, of the law, recognize as lost, as absent. *I am Humor*, this voice delicately says, *I am to be cherished.* Such figures, whether profaned or sanctified, have but to wrench their syntax, wrong a word, in order to flash this significance, to become a mythical signifier as large and imperative as Richard Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America*, a myth so sacred, so corrupt, that, clothed in tattered, faded denim, it speaks everywhere on the earth. But this Huckspeech is not the Huckspeech that Huck writes; his line is enjambed, it runs back into Tom Sawyer's script, and from there into exegesis.

The first critic of Huckspeech saw this awful recuperation as clearly as Huck sees the naked lunch on his plate and swells at us ominously at the start of the book, warning off the metaphor-makers: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot." Motive, moral, plot: nothing is herein hidden, there are no secret meanings in *Huckleberry Finn*, there is no code but that which frames what is said. Because he does not understand how genies are produced from the old tin lamp, because he has not yet learned to see the metaphorical genie and say: "Ah, this is an act of the imagination," Huck is humorous. To this extent, he is always in flight, in the speech act, in the present, privileged. Huck writes, but he is not *in* writing, metaphorical, yearning for the presence of speech. It is the literary writer who is forced to articulate his intention, his motive, or conceal it, who justifies, who plots to achieve an end, who imagines Huck and writes Huckspeech. At the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, near the Gulf of the Unfunny, Tom Sawyer busily writes a narrative in which he (as Huck) liberates Jim from slavery, imposing on the event a motive, a moral, and a plot, but it is metaphor-blind, plotless, immoral Huck who

doggedly shows us how Tom does it, who infallibly wrongs the pomp and control of Tom's writing. The *agon* that essentially determines nineteenth-century American humor reaches here its rarest, most complicated statement. Speech is no longer out there to be sketched, to be shown poorly dressed in print, often freakish, but in here, in the writer's questioning of his role as interlocutor, the one who transposes unlettered speech into the lettered text. And yet, as Richard Bridgman argues in *The Colloquial Style in America* (1966), few idiomatic writers subsequently understood the ontological tension that creates Huck's position and those who imitated the textual novelty of Huck-speech missed the attention Mark Twain had given to the rhythm and repetition of colloquial utterance. What is the *natur* of speech in the *nature* of writing? Only writers fully aware of themselves as writers, aware of the forms and linearity of writing, its motive, moral, and plot, ask this question. What is the *natur* of speech in the *nature* of writing? If one replaces the *e* the humorist dropped, the question becomes Gertrude Stein's question. How does the written text picture the silent speech of thought? Does it?

Apart from William Burroughs, whose eccentric humor deserves separate attention, no one in the modern period has understood the structure and activity of American humor better than Gertrude Stein, in whose work the humorous style realizes itself as a bonafide (wrong) philosophy of presence. Between *Huckleberry Finn* and *Portnoy's Complaint*, those two eminent prodigies in American humor, *Tender Buttons* (1914) exists as an unseen, rarely read middle term, exists possibly as a resolution. The final ecstatic third of *Tender Buttons* appropriately celebrates the beauty of wronged writing, the truth upon which it opens. "The care," the text closes, "with which the rain is wrong and the green is wrong and the white is wrong, the care with which there is a chair and plenty of breathing. The care with which there is incredible justice and likeness, all this makes a magnificent asparagus, and also a fountain." Just so *Tender Buttons* is carefully wrong, decentered, phunnily phonological, perhaps the wrongest text in modern literature. For all the dazzle of Gertrude Stein's artistic and intellectual environment, the sensibility immanent in *Tender Buttons* is as homespun and humorous as Huck's. All the text asks of the reader, Donald Sutherland wryly observes, "is a grade-school education and a decent liking for the marvelous." Indeed *Tender Buttons* is a seductive invitation to play with puns and things, with pronouns and sibilance, but the text also asks the reader, or player, to look, and look again. The idea of "present thinking" as the final reality "was the axis or pole of

Gertrude Stein's universe." Sutherland tells us in *Gertrude Stein, A Biography of Her Work* (1951), "and her work from the beginning was oriented and reoriented upon that idea." The existential fluidity of Huck's discourse, afloat on the Now, is regained in this strange book and richly elaborated, but not as Huckspeech, not as the sign of consciousness, of speech, brought into and painfully constrained by the act of writing. Here are the first two entries in *Tender Buttons*, which is itself divided into three sections: *Objects, Food, Rooms.*

A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading.

GLAZED GLITTER

Nickel, what is nickel, it is originally rid of a cover.

The change in that is that red weakens an hour. The change has come. There is no search. But there is, there is that hope and that interpretation and sometime, surely any is unwelcome, sometime there is breath and there will be a sinecure and charming very charming is that clean and cleansing. Certainly glittering is handsome and convincing.

There is no gratitude in mercy and in medicine. There can be breakages in Japanese. That is no programme. That is no color chosen. It was chosen yesterday, that showed spitting and perhaps washing and polishing. It certainly showed no obligation and perhaps if borrowing is not natural there is some use in giving.

What is before us is before Gertrude Stein in the "continuous present" of her perception and thought. An object, a substantive, the sign: *a carafe.* But the easy swing of definition (a carafe is a glass), this effortless placing of the object into the known, reveals a blind spot in the very act of its doing. One sign substitutes for the other, endlessly. The glass through which we look darkly at the thing is a blind glass. We see only *a carafe,* a sign in a system (language) that points us at difference. We are in that Derridean supplement, in written discourse, far from the original carafe, blind to the thing designated, blind to the reference, but looking absolutely, directly, at the obvious thought conceiving the carafe as it presently thinks it. A carafe, that is a blind glass, a kind in glass and a cousin, is, is, is. "All this," and not, not,

not. What the sign says: is/is not, the discourse itself shows. "The difference is spreading." In this writing, then, we read the realizing movement of a different consciousness ("not unordered in not resembling") expressing itself, as in speech, from phrase to phrase. The familiar world "out there" pictured by representational writing collapses into the final reality of "present thinking," and this is the immediate world before us.

"Nickel, what is nickel, it is originally rid of a cover." What *is* nickel? Originally it is a faceless element, unearthed ore not yet translated into coinage or plating. Originally it is without designation, without interpretation, without value. No sign covers it. No research discovers it. The gesticulating verb, *rid*, suggests the arbitrariness and possessive distortion of the sign, of the research. Nickel is thus originally in the signless breast of Nature as nickel, nameless. What nickel-thing are we considering here? We do not specifically know this, but the supple thinking of nickel is abundantly present. "The change in that," the change in the way nickel is regarded, sets before us the small value of a nickel. Those who know something about Gertrude Stein, at their own peril, can now begin to impose a recognizable face on this nickel. There are, for example, all those original Gs in Glass, Glazed, Glitter, and the small change a nickel makes: red cents, copper pennies. There are five Steins (Michael, Simon, Bertha, Leo, Gertrude), a glazed coin (Gertrude) and a glittering coin (Leo). "The change has come." The Steins are dispersed, but there are many different changes in this change, transformations as well, and these exchanges of value and meaning dominate the movement of the discourse. "There is no search" (for motive, moral, and plot), but "there is that hope and that interpretation." For her, for us, though obviously for the searched a search (discovery) is "unwelcome." This play on currency, on words, on concealment, turns "sinecure," a saving financial arrangement, into sin-cure, the cleansing redemption of a wrong. What wrong? "There is no gratitude (Gertrude?) in mercy and in medicine. There can be breakages in Japanese." The face is there, is not there. Against great pressure Gertrude Stein had abandoned her medical studies at Johns Hopkins for life in France as an artist, and against even greater pressure she had managed a break with her brilliant, glittering, convincing brother, Leo, who was a sometime Orientalist, a collector of Japanese art. In 1911, just back from Spain, secure in her footing with Alice B. Toklas, no longer dominated by her brother, pleasurably experimenting with portraiture, Gertrude Stein might well contemplate with relish the subject of mutability and ponder the notion of redemption.

But what are we doing here?We are playing hide-and-seek with Gertrude Stein. "The author of all that," we are told in *Rooms*, "is in there behind the door, and that is entering in the morning." Such beguiling duplicities, strewn throughout *Tender Buttons*, constantly beckon us to witness, to see through the text, through the glass, that emergent someone behind the door, but what appears is the mysterious glide of difference weaving through the obvious coherence of present thinking as it supposes, declares, cites, defines, questions. "I became more and more excited," Gertrude Stein later wrote, "about how words which were the words that made whatever I looked at look like itself were not the words that had in them any quality of description." At every turn in *Tender Buttons*, then, at every question (what is) and assertion (that is), we confront a swift narrative of telling signifiers, "words that made whatever I looked at look like itself," but no ascertainable signified, "not the words that had in them any quality of description." Under *A Sound* in *Objects*, Gertrude Stein characteristically writes in this daft explicit: "Elephant beaten with candy and little pops and chews all bolts and reckless reckless rats, this is this." If we abandon our search for the motive, moral, and plot in *Tender Buttons*, relinquish our demand for the actual carafe in the actual room, our desire for Gertrude Stein's face on the nickel, then the playful quality of the writer's questioning mind exhibits itself and we may simply read in *A Sound* the euphony of blank verse. To find in the text just what is there, "this is this," is to read, as in a dictionary, as in an inventory, the momentary content and knowledge of a single ex-centric consciousness. In its form and structure *Tender Buttons* indeed humorously mimics the stability of these primary forms of writing (list, lexicon, table), but with the analytic seriousness of a Cubist painter destabilizing a still life. Apart from the brief assertion, "I spy," under *Butter* and the allowance of a modest "me" at the end of *A Centre in a Table*, Gertrude Stein scrupulously avoids the positing of an *I* in the text. "Act so that there is no use in a centre." As if there were no single informing point of view in *Tender Buttons*, no established Meaning which the text recovers and elaborates from a place in time previous to the text. It is a compositional stratagem, the relative absence of this important pronoun, and along with Gertrude Stein's consistent use of the present tense, it reveals the control and intelligence at work in her discourse. That is the paradox of *Tender Buttons*. It is such a curious combination of the haphazard and the precise. If her sentence spills freely, it regularly spills brisk Baconian *sententia* and forms, almost casually, rare and compact tropes. If it strikes free from the burden of perspicuity, proper words in the proper places in the proper forms of represen-

tation, it only moves from one disciplined way of thinking the world to another disciplined way of thinking the world, not from sense to nonsense. The text, after all, is a veritable commotion of inquiry.

The sentence in *Tender Buttons* does all that: presses through a studied impersonality a fulsome subjectivity, audaciously quizzes the real, and yields above all the purity of an individual voice. In *The Colloquial Style in America* Bridgman cogently argues that Gertrude Stein is the first writer in American literature after Mark Twain to master the style, and indeed the talk in *Three Lives* (1906) is very good, but in the experimental portraiture of the later period, specifically in *Tender Buttons*, a text Bridgman treats summarily, she exhibits a transformation of the colloquial style. In this work it is no longer a question of diction and syntax, of how one stylistically approximates the idiomatic eccentricity of speech in writing, but instead a question of how the systems and rules of traditional writing extrude the volatile nature of the individual voice. No busy interlocutor is at hand to elucidate motive, moral, and plot. No supervening *I* writes *down* the course of thinking. Yet the writer who is present in his writing as a continuous voice speaking is intensely self-conscious and constantly revises. It is "beginning again" or "insistence" for Gertrude Stein, revision that is brought into the text, incorporated. The whole process of rewriting is always right before us, written, as contradiction, as repetition, as the same phrase or word turned over and over, rummaged, so that no part of her thought is absent, no part of her speech left unsaid. Nothing, of course, could be wronger in writing. "We write frankly and fearlessly," Mark Twain observes in *Life on the Mississippi*, "but then we 'modify' before we print." Gertrude Stein takes that process back a single important step: we think frankly and fearlessly, but then we "modify" *as* we write, rejecting along with the scandalous idea the errant, the interstitial, the constant shove of the inappropriate into otherwise coherent lines of thought. Speech, which the humorists conventionally exhibited as freakish, as "funny" in the text, serenely goes its unbracketed way in *Tender Buttons*.

So Gertrude Stein's sentence, which begins with a *carafe*, sinuously widens, improvising, improvising, until at length it reaches its final word, a *fountain*. The text goes round from one symbol of consciousness to another, from small, separate containment to immediate, continuous, overflowing abundance, and implicitly describes therein the writer's dream of writing: the exhilaration of eloquence, a ready flow of apt words moving across the page, pauseless seamless writing woven from the very corpuscular stuff of consciousness, et

cetera. In the context of American humor these symbols, if not the dream, have their own distinctive career. A carafe holds water, a fountain lets it go. Literary writing holds speech, colloquial writing (if truly realized) lets it go. Such is the delight of the oral tradition in American literature that its principal speakers, exemplars of fluency, are also hypersensual gourmands, large eaters of esoteric fare who have no trouble in letting it go. "A brown," Gertrude Stein writes in *Tender Buttons*, "which is not liquid not more so is relaxed and yet there is a change, a news is pressing." There is in fact a philosophy of food behind the comedy of eating in *Huckleberry Finn*, *Tender Buttons*, and *Portnoy's Complaint* that draws strict analogies between kinds of eating and modes of writing. Those who can eat anything on their plate can use everything in their discourse. Those who drink freely from the carafe of consciousness necessarily make fountains of prose. It all goes around and around. "Dirt is clean," Gertrude Stein declares with the wisdom of a child, "when there is a volume." The whole issue of the oral style in American humor is just simply the issue of ease, loose life on a raft, the issue of issuing. Both *Huckleberry Finn* and *Portnoy's Complaint* begin with a tale of eating, and food is what is on the table in the midst of *Tender Buttons*.

In *Huckleberry Finn* it is Tom Sawyer who persuades Huck that to be "respectable," he must return to the widow Douglas. Huck has been there before and knows where such identity begins. "Well, then," he tells us, "the old thing commenced again. The widow rung a bell for supper, and you had to come to time. When you got to the table you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals, though there warn't really anything the matter with them. That is, nothing only everything was cooked by itself. In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better." What Huck sees on his plate is *classification* and *teleology*, a neat sentence of meat, potato, and vegetable generated by a tidy, Bible-reading cook, a dish cooked kosher ("everything was cooked by itself"), and there it is, the right and the wrong of it, the First Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Eat. Miss Watson, speller in hand, delivers the Second Commandment: Thou Shalt Not Speak. An eater of the worst *chazerai*, of greasy slumgullions and odious stews, writhing in his chair as he is taught spelling, how to letter the word, Huck openly faces the reader and his fate at the start of his narrative is transparent.

The world is going to devour him. The life he shares with Jim on

the river, a lazy life of naked lunches of catfish, cornbread, and milk-mush, will abruptly go round the bend and into the Gulf. And surely he must eat at last that bitterest of fruits; he must see in his ego-ideal, this parading, posturing Tom, Mark Twain's creature, the betrayal of everything that is good in him: sensuous tenderness, honor, honesty, intelligence. Threatened with adoption at the end of the novel, still taking Tom seriously (Tom has whimsically proposed they all head out for the Territory), Huck decides to go first and alone. The moment it dawns on Huck in Kansas or Nevada or California that Tom had no intention to leave home, not for a moment, not with that bullet on a watch chain around his neck to exhibit, "always seeing what time it is," that moment Huck, too, becomes an interpreter of *Huckleberry Finn*. And what a dour reading that must be. It is Tom's imagination, Tom's style, that poses the greatest danger to Huck in his adventures among the rogues and brutes along the Mississippi, the imitation of which always brings Huck gratuitously near the edge of disaster. However lunatic, Tom possesses the *right*, and Huck is wrong, and that is the measure of Huck's innocence. Forced into Tom's bookish fantasy at the end of the novel, his role that of a sidekick, the lesser figure, Huck can only record the usurpation of his name and his quest, skeptically observe Tom's absurd scenario for Jim's deliverance, and set before us style within style, that old distinction in American humor between speaker and writer. Tom Sawyer effectively writes the ending of *Huckleberry Finn*, attempting an historical romance, but it is Huck who tells the story of that farce and lets us see what he himself does not fully see—how dense, how dumb, how blindly egotistical is Tom's narrative. There is in fact a significant example of Tom's writing in the text, an anonymous letter to the Phelpses warning of a "helish design" to steal "your runaway nigger," a strange letter stuffed with duplicities. It begins: "Don't betray me, I wish to be your friend," then describes a lurid plot that inadvertently betrays Tom's own confusion about which side he is on, and hypocritically concludes: "I do not wish any reward but to know I have done the right thing." It is Tom's version of what Huck has been about, escape-artistry, liberating Jim, and typically as he goes about recasting that experience, he tries to have it both ways. "I am one of the gang," he writes, "but have got religgion and wish to quit it and lead a honest life again, and will betray the helish design." Deceived, bullied, betrayed, Huck is stretched into Tom's romance and his meaning in that script (he has risked the damnation of hell to save Jim) is cruelly distorted. Just as in *Portnoy's Complaint*, almost a hundred years later, Mary Jane Reed is caught in Alex Portnoy's fantasy, in his condescension—desired, lectured, screwed.

Obviously Roth is influenced in *Portnoy's Complaint* by his reading of *Huckleberry Finn*. There is explicit reference in the text, Portnoy has been to college and knows about the River and the Shore, the novels share certain structural features, both are told in the racy first person, but their difference (beyond these similarities) is so great, Roth's understanding of the problem (the fatality of an amour with Thereal McCoy) so uniquely tortured, that the question of influence is properly beside the point. What is on Huck's plate is put before young Alex Portnoy in Newark, the same sentence, the same deprivation, but Portnoy is distinctively, decisively, not Huckish in his response. *Portnoy's Complaint* emerges from two different projects, we learn in *Reading Myself and Others* (1974), a slapstick *Great Expectations* "where the Dickensian orphan-hero (first found in a shoebox by an aged *mohel* and circumcised, hair-raisingly, on the spot) runs away from his loving stepparents at age twelve and on ice skates sets off across a Newark lake after a little blond shiksa whose name, he thinks, is Thereal McCoy," and a somewhat conventional domestic comedy, *The Nice Jewish Boy*, both of which were provocative failures. As Roth discusses his problems in writing these experimental texts, the structure, the politics of American humor, the archetypal faces of Huck and Tom, come steadily into view. Neither the "fantastic" yarn nor the "relatively measured" play satisfied Roth. Restricted in each form, in each style, to a single comic performance, he lacked the conflict that generates eloquent humor and found himself "technically" recapitulating the complaint that rips Portnoy, so Portnoy tells us, asunder. "Not until I found, in the person of a troubled analysand," he writes, "the voice that could speak in behalf of both the 'Jewboy' (with all that word signifies to Jew and Gentile alike about aggression, appetite, and marginality) and the 'nice Jewish boy' (and what that epithet implies about repression, respectability, and social acceptance) was I able to complete a fiction that was expressive, instead of symptomatic, of the character's dilemma." But it is just there, as Roth finds the appropriate voice, the right style, that all the confusion begins in *Portnoy's Complaint*. How does that "troubled," bitterly ironic voice speak *for* the self that speaks outside the language of analysis and against the discourse of introspection? This unresolved question, humorously resolved at the end of the novel by Portnoy's wordless scream, and by the subsequent article Dr. Spielvogel publishes in the *Internationale Zeitschrift fur Psychoanalyse*, frames the entire forthcoming adventure in Roth's career (*Our Gang, The Breast*, "On the Air," *The Great American Novel*), that protracted humiliation of Writerly Roth, the Serious Literary Figure.

Throughout his narrative Portnoy is greatly confused about *me* and *it* and the words that intervene. He calls his boyhood friend, Smolka, "my Tom Sawyer," although Smolka, a raffish delinquent who lives "on Hostess cupcakes and his own wits," is evidently far too swinish to pass as Tom, and when Portnoy embraces, providentially, Thereal McCoy in the palpable form of Mary Jane Reed, the "fulfillment of all my lascivious adolescent dreams," whom he takes and eats, he calls her the Monkey. Morosely defiant, bitchy, caged in this term, she is simply a projection of the meaning Portnoy assigns to his own body. Indeed a monkey, and on his back as criminal bliss, as an addiction, the object of his lust, and as a curse, the epitome of and witness to his debasement, as the very *Ding an sich.* It is a word he places between himself and the human significance of Mary Jane Reed, this certainly, and yet the term in the language of the novel is singularly apt. For if she is an incarnation of *l'enfant sauvage,* briefly down from the trees, her bestiality is only a part of her wildness. There is also the issue of her ignorance. And here Portnoy shares Tom Sawyer's dilemma: how to cherish the risk of Huck's uncivilized existence and yet do without Huck's vulnerability, without Huck's dirt, how to keep Huck Huck and yet safely delineated, fixed, rationalized? His solution is to make Huck "respectable" in the daytime but available in the evening for illicit prowls, to contrive a role for Huck in his fantasies and then persuade Huck to play that part. When we last see Mary Jane Reed in *Portnoy's Complaint,* she is clinging to a hotel window in Athens, threatening to let go and fall. She has been brought to this impasse by the manipulation of a literary fellow whose confused instruction, like Tom Sawyer's in *Huckleberry Finn,* has proved disastrous. The written word is between them. In the long run, Portnoy sees clearly enough, any mixture of right and wrong styles is inconceivable. Yet he will recite to her *Leda and the Swan.*

All these mythic tropes are present in Portnoy's terse account of his first meeting with the Monkey. There she Huckishly stands on the corner of Lexington and Fifty-second, a lissome hillbilly girl on the lam, in and out of different beds, different scrapes, still audacious, still innocent. An involuted writer, he fears disclosure—and there, a veritable Muse, she stands. "Go ahead, you shackled and fettered son of a bitch," Portnoy says to himself, "*speak to her.* She has an ass on her with the swell and the cleft of the world's most perfect nectarine! *Speak!*" His approach is lamely conventional ("Hi!" and an offer to buy her a drink), but she in turn faces him with all the directness of Huckspeech. "What do *you* want?" Everything in discourse that is

wrong, difficult, forbidden, everything that irony deflects, is right there on the tip of the tongue. What do you want? The echoing of Echo to Narcissus, it is a feminine question that reverberates throughout Roth's fiction. Go ahead, Portnoy thinks, *do it,* and Mary Jane Reed: "Go ahead." They go immediately to her apartment where, without introduction, the coupling begins.

Thinks Portnoy, *soixante-neuf*: "What a mouth I have fallen into! Talk about opportunities! And simultaneously: *Get out! Go! Who and what can this person be!*" The romance that ensues curiously recapitulates the aforesaid *agon* of nineteenth-century American humor, that single act in which a literary interlocutor (bemused, aloof, distant) characterizes the idiom of a native speaker, falls (as a writer) into a mouth at once obscene and lyrical, the delight of which is intimidating. The situation is wonderfully complex. For this "person" is the first person singular speaking from the center of desire, from the *natur* of orality, the Portnoy who has spoken and is here now, in the middle of a wet dream, in the wrong, exposed. Who therefore strives to retain a proper distance, to bracket his experience. Tom explains literature to Huck, Huck explains literature to Jim, and in each case the instructed protests, denies the knowledge expressed. The native speaker always gets to talk back, and is usually right. "Doan' talk to me 'bout Sollermun, Huck, I knows him by de back." The extent to which the native speaker's response challenges the interlocutor's ability to control the issue determines the gravity of the humorous text, measures the distance between Josh Billings and Mark Twain, between the comic ventriloquist and the humorist. In *Portnoy's Complaint* the Monkey has a great deal to say: "Look . . . maybe I don't know what I am, but you don't know what you want me to be, either!" But Portnoy's realization of her realizing capabilities, her straight talk, occurs only through the elucidation of a Freudian text. In bed with this text, masturbating, Portnoy studies the one scene in his life where Roth most impinges on *Huckleberry Finn*: the Vermont idyll. He is looking for the "sentence, the phrase, the *word* that will liberate me from what I understand are called my fantasies and fixations," without realizing that the search for the *word,* the right word, is the prime fixation, and therein comes upon the essay, "The Most Prevalent Form of Degradation in Erotic Life." Suddenly he remembers, against his ironic awareness of the "ecstasies of nostalgia for the good simple life," a brief, imperiled escape from self-consciousness in the New England countryside.

In "fully normal" love, Freud writes, the tender and sensuous

currents of feeling are united. For Portnoy, who has ruthlessly degraded either imaginatively or actually almost every woman he has known, this is telling news. Currents, streams, confluence: it is withal life on the raft, this Freudian conception of love, and what Portnoy sees, text in hand, is a vision of that other Portnoy who, for a moment, an episode, seems capable of Huckish abandonment. "And *swoosh*, there was sensual feeling mingling with the purest, deepest streams of tenderness I've ever known! I'm telling you, the confluence of the two currents was terrific!" Yet in the pastoral landscape, bathed in postcoital bliss, Portnoy still is not free. An incongruous poem predictably comes to mind and he delivers from memory the whole of *Leda and the Swan* to Mary Jane. *Did she put on his knowledge with his power/Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?* Mary Jane thinks it is his poem, but without the ironic knowledge that it *is*, in some sense, his poem, a pure reflection of his condescending attitude, his vanity. *Like unto a god*, the intellectual, literary lover. By the end of the novel, having dropped Leda, facing an indignant Israeli Juno, Portnoy is no longer capable of Jovian rape, but here he conceals himself in the swan's plumage. It is Mary Jane's patience that rescues him from the foolishness of this arrogance. She asks him to explain "what's Agamemnon," and he struggles through an explanation. Then she asks him to explain once more, but "for Christ's sake, slow." As he does so, he watches her face. "The Monkey looks like a child trying to master a multiplication problem, but not a dumb child—no, a quick and clever girl! Not stupid, at all!" Ultimately she draws his hand between her own loosening thighs. "You understand the poem!" Portnoy exclaims, failing to see that she has interpreted it, that the question has been turned. Has he put on *her* knowledge with *her* power?

What, after all, is the most prevalent form of degradation in erotic life (insofar as Portnoy is concerned) but the act of complaining, or the act of writing that places Mary Jane Reed between the hard covers of Freud and Yeats, replaces body with text, substance with shadow? Roth puts the title of Freud's essay in boldface to preface the Vermont idyll, but it is not the idyll that Portnoy first describes. He discusses instead the horror of Mary Jane Reed's handwriting, the "work of an eight-year-old." She spells clean with a *k*: "As in 'Joseph K.' Not to mention 'dear' as in the salutation of a letter: d-e-r-e. Or d-e-i-r. And that very first time (this I love) d-i-r." Everything that is culturally and morally wrong about Mary Jane Reed is humorously summarized in her offensive writing of *dir*. The whole novel draws to this point, to this word. As we have seen, Portnoy intensely believes in the power of the

word to comprehend desire, believes, that is, in the efficacy of analysis, in the power of knowledge, and so it all finally comes to this ultimate either/or: the spoken word wrongly written, but there, *dir*, and the written word somewhere in the Freudian text that will correctly define Portnoy's complaint and release him from his malady. His complaint, of course, is that he is never *there*, never free of remorse and anxiety, his fear of what *there* means. Impotent, he can no longer say *dear*. His analysis is therefore a surrender to the authority of Freud, a sophisticated transformation of his juvenile question: do we believe in winter? Yet the Freudian enterprise is itself an attempt to come to terms with the irrational meaning compacted in *dir*, an attempt to listen closely through the reverie of a free-associating analysand to the unruly speech of an unconscious self. Mary Jane Reed has herself undergone such analysis, talked interminably from the locus of *dir*, and met only helpless silence from her analyst. Knowledge collapses before the humorous manifestation of *dir*. "It nearly drove me crazy," Portnoy humorlessly reports. *Dere, deir, dir:* he spells out each error for the benefit of the silent Spielvogel.

"Beginning with *Goodbye, Columbus*," Roth writes in *Reading Myself and Others*, "I've been attracted to prose that has the turns, vibrations, intonations, and cadences, the spontaneity and ease, of spoken language, at the same time that it is solidly grounded on the page, weighted with the irony, precision, and ambiguity associated with a more traditional literary rhetoric." Roth's sentence itself is syntactically odd, strangely tensed to sustain a difficult balance, an improbable mixture. Speech is musically in the air as breath, vibrating, all "spontaneity and ease," whereas "literary rhetoric" heavily endures the drag of precise inscription (pen-pushing, key-tapping), is "solidly grounded on the page," responsive to gravity. Like *Huckleberry Finn* dragged out at the end by Tom Sawyer's busy scribbling, *Portnoy's Complaint* incloses Mary Jane Reed's wrong writing in an unbreakable parenthesis and asserts at last the fatal primacy of the interlocutor who shows us as dream, as nightmare, the slip into speech of *dir*. How to write "at the same time" in both modes, how to elevate trash, that *is* a project, and it is brilliantly, funnily, reflected in *Portnoy's Complaint*.

There are, however, other kitchens in American literature where the sentence is humorously cooked. What Gertrude Stein places on the table in *Tender Buttons*, that shaky table, is a discourse neither kosher nor *chazerai*, neither wrong nor right, a discourse that magically transforms these categories:

> Pain soup, suppose it is question, suppose it is butter, real is, real is only, only excreate, only excreate a no since.
>
> A no, a no since, a no since when, a no since when since, a no since when since a no since when since, a no since, a no since when since, a no since, a no, a no since a no since, a no since, a no since.

In that singsong of "no since when since," Gertrude Stein effectively breaks the spell of nostalgia that entrances Huckspeech as a myth of presence, and at the large risk of being thought a literary nuisance, nonsensical, admits into the empty forms of writing the amplitude of a mature, speaking consciousness. Speech no longer exists outside writing as a resource, as an origin, but is instead the very field in which writing, properly attuned, occurs. Yet the text of *Tender Buttons*, like Mary Jane Reed's misspelled note, affrights our psychic equilibrium as readers. At once promiscuous and playful, Huckish, it is also as hard as Heidegger. "Orange In" the heading of this particular entry states, and so presumably the orange goes into the sauce, simply enough, and yet orange-in beguiles us with the resonance of origin, the original orange to which orange-in murkily refers. *Tender Buttons* is a violation of the pact we all signed early in life when, having already learned what to eat, how to spoon pain soup, we next learned how to write right.

Hans Morgenthau

THE REALITY OF THE NATIONAL INTEREST*

Any rational approach to foreign policy requires the assumption that there exists a national interest as an objective datum, by which thought and action can orient themselves. Without that assumption, we could not speak of truth with regard to matters of foreign policy but only of opinion. People would take a stand according to their individual preferences, and there would be no possibility of distinguishing between correct and false opinion. One man's opinion would be as good as the next one's, and power to make one opinion prevail over the others in the contest of the marketplace would be the only applicable criterion.

It is obvious that nobody seriously concerned with foreign policy shares these sophist assumptions. We all assume implicitly that there exists a truth about matters political which is accessible to human reason. History bears that assumption out.

What strikes the analyst of foreign policy is the consistency of certain conceptions of the national interest during long periods of history. For four centuries the national interest of Great Britain has been defined in theory and affirmed in practice as the preservation and, if need be, the restoration of the European balance of power. Regardless of changes in the composition of the ruling class or in political and economic interests and ideologies, this conception of the British national interest prevailed in the theory and practice of British foreign policy from Henry VIII to the present day. What made it prevail was the objective rational element contained in this conception which no rational mind could escape. That is to say, whoever wanted to understand and further the British national interest in a rational manner had to assume that the security of Great Britain was rationally dependent upon the European balance of power.

I have tried to show elsewhere that the foreign policies of the other

*Hans Morgenthau had planned to expand this piece just before he died.

great powers, especially the United States and Russia, have been dominated during long stretches of history by similar considerations. More particularly, the parallelism between the foreign policies of the United States and Great Britain from the formulation of the Monroe Doctrine to the present—the "special relationship"—is a result of the parallelism of the national interest of both nations in the European balance of power.

It is also obvious that the conception of the national interest has been misused on behalf of special interests, trying to make it appear that they and the national interest are identical. In other words, the idea of the national interest has not been immune to ideological misuse, a source of confusion it shares with other political concepts. But the fact of misuse does not invalidate the idea itself; it only makes it necessary to separate ideological misuse from objective political fact.

The idea of the national interest is of necessity at odds with the international ideal of classic Marxism, for Marxism starts from the assumptions that socialism in one country will be followed by socialism in all the developed industrial nations, and that international conflicts result from the inner contradictions of a dying capitalism, which must export these contradictions in order to survive temporarily. In consequence, before the First World War all socialist movements believed that war had become impossible since no proletarian, in spite of his membership in a particular nation, would take up arms against a fellow proletarian belonging to another nation. In other words, the division of the political world into competing and hostile nations having divergent national interests results from the class divisions of capitalist society, to be eliminated with the disappearance of class divisions within individual nations and the growth of the international solidarity of the proletariat.

This tenet of classic Marxism has survived in an attenuated form the disavowals by historic experience. Marxist ideology and propaganda still equate capitalism with imperialism and war, and socialism with international peace. In order to make this scheme applicable to the Sino-Soviet conflict, each socialist nation had to deny the socialist character of its opponent and proclaim the identity of its national interest with the interests of all "peace-loving nations of the world." Thus a political philosophy which starts out to deny the objective validity of national interests of nonsocialist nations ends up by identifying the national interest of a particular socialist nation with the interests of humanity. This is a striking example of the ability of a convenient political concept to survive disavowals by historic experience.

I would regard the protection of the national interest as neither reactionary nor progressive. There is, however, a tendency among conservatives to embrace a narrow military concept of the national interest while liberals tend to deny the objective validity of the national interest and to reduce it to a reflection of the economic interests of a particularly influential group within the particular nation.

The question as to America's failing to protect its national interest and the interests of the West raises the issue of the character and validity of American foreign policy. It is obviously impossible to do justice to this issue within a few pages. Let me only say that one of the most drastic changes in international relations since the Second World War has been the expansion of the national interest to comprise not only the interests of a particular nation to the exclusion of the interests of all other nations, but certain interests of other nations as well. For instance, the avoidance of nuclear war and the promotion of nuclear arms control and disarmament are in the national interest of all nations. The same is true of the preservation of the natural environment and the availability and distribution of food. Thus in our age the content of the national interest in certain respects transcends the limits of a particular nation and comprises the interests of a number of nations similarly situated.

Anonymous

OPINION IN PRAGUE

An interviewer from Palach Press Limited conducted this informal public opinion survey in Prague during the trial of Vaclav Havel and other members of the Committee to Defend the Unjustly Prosecuted last October. (Palach Press disseminates information that is unavailable from official Czechoslovakian sources.)

Monday, October 22, a grey morning, Spalena Street, Prague. There's less of a stir in front of the Municipal Court than one would have expected. But one can tell that something is going on inside. In front of the entrance is a police car, several uniformed policemen, and a number of plainclothesmen are standing around. The secret police. The "backbone of the state." A lot of people of different ages enter the building in pairs and groups. I shall not go in. Others perhaps will give testimony on the political trial itself, a stage-managed totalitarian farce. I am interested in the opinions of the people here in the street. But suppose among those I interview is one of "them," or someone who is so scared that he calls. . . . I pluck up my courage.

I stop an old lady. "Good morning. I'm from Palach Press. I'd like to ask you . . . a trial of six people is being held near here. What do you know about it?"

The woman is startled, surprised. She thinks for a moment . . . "I know only what I've heard on the foreign radio stations. That they're from that committee which records cases of people unjustly convicted. This is probably another gross injustice. You know, I judge it by what happened to my uncle. During the war he was a pilot in England; he nearly lost his life, but he returned, and here they made a traitor of him. He came back after some years and in a year he was dead. It's a bit different now, and yet it's the same really. Wrongs, injustice. . . ."

"And what do you think should be done for those in prison?"

"I think that everyone should be told about them. Except that people who haven't had similar experiences will find it hard to understand. . . ."

"Thank you, goodbye."

The first ordeal is over. A man of about thirty-five is approaching. I repeat my introduction and question. The reply is brusque: "I don't know anything and I don't want to know anything. I've troubles enough of my own." I finish with him as briefly and brusquely. I walk away quickly, turn, and walk rapidly along a parallel street. There are a lot of people about, and I don't want two to stop at once. I don't want any witnesses.

A girl is standing in front of a shop window. Small, slim, smartly dressed, twenty-two, at the most twenty-six-years-old. I greet her and put my question to her. She looks at me in amazement, thinking it over. I assure her she need not be afraid of me.

Suddenly she bursts out: "I'll tell you briefly. It's an injustice, a terrible injustice. They are all excellent, courageous people. I don't know any of them personally, but I know their friends well and I hear a lot about them. What should be done? Talk to people so that they know what the trial is about. You know, apathy is widespread here. People have pulled down the shutters. Politics is a dirty word, any kind of politics. People who are active in public affairs are regarded as profiteers; those who go against the current, who criticize, like the Chartists, are considered crazy, Don Quixotes. And yet it can't go on like this. Something's got to happen. Something's got to change. After all we've got to live most of our lives in this situation!"

I ask, "Do you listen to foreign radio stations?"

"From time to time. But I get angry when frequently I learn nothing about our affairs. They give priority to their own affairs. First of all Zimbabwe, Rhodesia, then other things, and yet others, and then us. What interests us most they say in two minutes, in the tenth place."

I take a tram. I can't stay on it long. I get off at the third stop. I enter a restaurant and order tea. There are a few customers. It's ten o'clock. I sit at the same table as an elderly man. He's waiting for friends. He starts talking, joking a bit. I tell him I'm sad. He asks what's the matter, and I ask him, "Do you know anything about the political trial on Spalena Street?"

"Yes, I read something about it, there was something on our radio. But I take it with a pinch of salt. Do you know anything?"

I tell him what I think about it.

"You know, I should polemicize with you. I'm a member of the party. But I'm there because otherwise I couldn't do my job. But I'm critical as far as possible. If it's like you say, then it's absolutely filthy."

I tell him what the foreign radio stations have broadcast. He believes only part of it. He expresses doubts. "But even if it were true, as you say, there's nothing we can do. Criticism's out, especially of matters of principle; that's punishable."

I tell him that good people in the party ought to protest. He looks at me in astonishment. "My dear young lady, that's out of the question. That would be suicidal."

I ask him how long he's been in the party. Since 1967. He joined because he thought things were improving. He wasn't thrown out during the purges because they needed him. He avoids politics as best he can. I feel like arguing, but it's no good. I say goodbye and tell him to think over what he should do, so that later he shouldn't reproach himself for allowing such things to happen. I don't think I'm in any danger from him. It was a very quiet conversation.

In front of the restaurant are two laughing youths, about twenty-years-old. They part. I follow one of them. I catch up with him and ask him about the trial. He doesn't know anything. He asks, "Are you from one of our papers?" I explain where I'm from and tell him about the trial. He says, "I know such things happen but I don't know anything concrete."

I tell him it's enough to turn on the radio and twiddle the knob, if one is interested. He's surprised at my telling him this. He says goodbye quickly. Maybe I've planted an idea in his head. Maybe he'll go and . . . I don't feel too sure in this case.

Around the corner I hail a taxi. "To the Central Station." We enter Spalena Street.

"Here we go again. What a shindig!" the driver began. "That'll be another scandal."

"Do you think they'll get heavy sentences?" I ask.

"Sure, they'll pile it on. Those people are a danger to them. They speak the truth on behalf of all of us. It's not everyone who can do that. Everyone's not made like that. And then people are indifferent and intimidated. And they think it's all futile, that the only thing to do is to safeguard your livelihood. I'm a fan of the Chartists, but I too am afraid, mainly on account of my family."

We've reached our destination. I get out my fare. "Keep it, young lady. I haven't had such a good chat for ages," he says.

So far so good. It's gone unexpectedly well. Where to now? People are hurrying from the train. It's better to address one of the people who

are waiting. I walk through the station. A young mother is carrying a huge box of shoes, a sledge, and a big parcel. She stops, checks the time of the departure of her train, and sits down on a bench. I sit down next to her. I greet her and introduce myself. She must have missed the name . . . press, for she doesn't look surprised.

In answer to my question she says: "Yes, somebody mentioned at our place that there was something in the papers. But I don't know the first thing about it. If those people would only keep quiet and mind their own business!"

"Do you think that it's right for everyone to do only what's in their own interest?"

"No, someone's got to perform civic duties."

"I see. But suppose they don't do their job well in these functions. What then? Suppose people are unjustly sentenced and unlawfully persecuted?"

"You know what, young lady? I don't understand these things, and I don't want to," she replies.

I'm beginning to lose my élan. How many more like that shall I meet? Sitting over there is a sensible looking middle-aged man. I sit down next to him and introduce myself.

He asks: "You're from Brno, are you?"

"No, no, Palach Press is an agency directed by Jiri Pelikan."

"That's the first I've heard that something like that exists. Pelikan . . . oh yes, they've got it in for him, like they have for Kohout, Mlynar, and the others. But I don't believe a word of it. The papers are full of lies."

"And what do you know about the trial on Spalena Street?"

"Are they holding political trials again? Like in the fifties? You know, I don't read anything to do with politics; it only upsets me. I read sports, that's all. But if they're holding political trials again you people outside should do something!"

"We do a lot but inside people are terribly apathetic. . . ."

"That's true. But it's no wonder. They've all been given reason. They're scared. And they think that any kind of resistance is futile. That we are the plaything of the great powers. We are weak. . . ."

"We are small and weak, enough of that. Do you know who wrote it? People keep referring to it, and a few of the stronger ones have to remind us that we're not weak. I think people ought to get together. Every nation has to liberate itself through its own forces."

"My dear girl, those are merely fine words. I'm a skeptic. And I know life, believe me."

"It's an easy way out, you know," I add.

As I leave he says: "Anyway, give your boss my regards!" He winks at me merrily.

I take another tram. It's not far to the embankment. And there are few people there. I'd like to see the Vltava again. I look down from Na Frantisku. The water is murky, like the morning, but it's a bit brighter. One can still speak openly to people here. They may have pulled the shutter down, but you can raise it a bit. I'd like to hear something downright.

"So, they're recruiting women as well, are they? You're not catching me on that bait. Are you trying to kid me?"

He's indignant. I'm afraid others will hear him. I calm him down. From the word "they" I gather that he is not one of "theirs." I take a chance and tell him my name.

"That's incredible! So you're . . . our children's friend . . . from Lučenec. Say no more, or rather go on and say what you wanted to."

I know I can trust him. We talk about everything possible. Then I ask him abut the trial. "It's monstrous, what they're doing. They're testing the West, seeing what they can get away with. Until the politicians outside realize what will have an effect on these gentlemen, nothing will change."

"And what will have an effect on them, do you think?"

"One thing only: economic sanctions. Don't give them what they urgently need. Cancel agreements, don't conclude new ones. The same rules should be valid among states as among decent people and families. If I know that people are scum I don't invite them to my house. If I find out that people whom I had believed to be decent have injured someone badly I let them know that I despise them. Politics must be moral. Human politics, not a struggle among savage animals. Why do they invite Indra to Austria, Chnoupek to England? Decent people here call them by the worst names. The Czechs have never been so rude. Reality has taught them."

I can understand his indignation. And it's not only his personal attitude. Mr. V. could be living the peaceful life of a pensioner, with a not very large pension but enough to live on. But he knows what it could be like here if only. . . .

"If only it had gone the right way after 1945, then after 1968, and if they hadn't come. You know, my girl, we're an unlucky nation, if only because of where forefather Czech settled us. Battles have been fought over us from time immemorial. But we're part of Europe, after all is said and done! Not Asia with a Czarist knout and subjugated serfs. And the West should realize that the struggle those courageous people are

waging here is a struggle to preserve a European culture in this country. . . ."

I take my leave. I'm sorry not to be able to accept his invitation to visit his house. I'll write to the whole family before I leave.

I proceed along the embankment. I stop three more people. Their replies are vague, uneasy. I return to Spalena Street. There's more life there now. The police are driving away some young men and girls. Probably they weren't allowed to enter the court building. Bystanders look on, mostly in silence.

I overhear a conversation between two young men. "They've arrested Anna Sabatova, Petr Uhl's wife. She was trying to take notes during the trial. The police dragged her out of the courtroom. She's in Bartolomejska police station apparently. I hope she doesn't end up like her father . . . Otka refused to have any part in the farce, on moral grounds, she said. Petr was very brief too. So they wound it up pretty fast. . . . There were a lot of people in the foyer this morning, and police. The Charter. Journalists . . . some foreign. I'm surprised they let them in. . . . So cheerio, until tomorrow. . . ."

I like to listen to people talking. I'd like to stay here for a bit and listen. A woman addresses me: "Do you know what's going on here today?" I explain to her.

"That's terrible. They just won't leave these people alone. They'd do better to look after the economy and stop it from going downhill!" I nod in agreement.

At the tram stop are two girls. One says: "I wanted to go too, but I was scared. They'd have thrown me out. But it's awful. That Mrs. Nemcova! And Itta Bednarova! Such wonderful women. . . . They punish people for speaking the truth, and liars climb into high posts." They speak very quietly. It's safest.

It must be over. People are coming out.

"They've got it all worked out anyway. The verdict will be given tomorrow," I overhear someone say as I board the tram.

The sky is brightening, but a cloud has settled on the faces of those who have boarded the tram.

Otto Luening

LENIN IN ZURICH

This excerpt from Otto Luening's autobiography relates to the time when he was a student at the conservatory in Zurich during World War I.

Otto Strauss steered me around town between meals, and I soon felt quite at home in what appeared to be the peaceful atmosphere of Zurich. At table three days later, he suddenly leaned over to me and hissed apprehensively, "Sshh, sshh. Revolutionaries . . . over there," and pointed to three men who were making their way to a reserved table in the rear of the hall. When they were out of earshot Strauss continued: "Ulyanov, a Russian revolutionary, also known as Lenin. . . . Dón't look now." Strauss went on: "They come here almost every day for the midday meal. They just sit in the corner and eat and talk a little, and then leave."

"Do you know anything about them? Who are they?"

"Lower your voice . . . we don't want anyone to hear us."

Ulyanov, who used the cover name Lenin, had been living in Zurich for about a year. The Lenins rented a room in Spiegelgasse 14 near what is now the Jacob's Fountain in the old part of Zurich. The little street was rather dark and narrow and only a block and a half from the Restaurant Meierei where the Cabaret Voltaire, the famous Dada nightclub, held its programs.

Strauss, as a Swiss from the Ticino, had learned Swiss German and had a direct pipeline to the Swiss Social Democratic party through his friend Büttner, the kettledrum player of the opera and symphony orchestra, a radical socialist who attended every meeting of the Party. Büttner told Strauss that Lenin paid twenty-four francs for his room, that Lenin's wife sometimes made simple meals on a kerosene stove, that Lenin produced all his political manifestos in the tiny double

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bedroom, and that he occasionally ate a meal in the Restaurant Meierei, carefully avoiding the Dadaists. Although they were a quiet and unobtrusive couple, Lenin was a well-known figure in the central library, in the museum, and in the Central Archive for Social Literature. He was in close contact with Otto Lang and Fritz Platten, two prominent members of the Swiss Social Democratic party, and other radicals. In addition to the Tivoli restaurant, Lenin liked Zur Eintracht, a simple restaurant that had a private room where he could hold meetings of Russian émigrés, the Café Adler with its small lecture room, and the Odeon, which was headquarters for most of the intellectuals and artists in Zurich. Lenin, too, could spend an undisturbed afternoon reading international magazines and papers while enjoying a cup of coffee.

Lenin came to the Tivoli fairly regularly. It was whispered that he was broke and needed the credit. His entrance was always unobtrusive. He was generally accompanied by two or three other men and they passed fairly close to our table. Strauss, who was very well versed in Swiss restaurant manners, got in a *"Guten Tag!"* whenever he could catch the eye of one of them, who, in turn, might quite correctly return his greeting. I'm afraid that my own attempts on these occasions were rather furtive. Europeans had a style about their restaurant behavior that is not natural to Americans and it took me awhile to catch on and fit in.

As Lenin sat at his table, it was possible for us to observe him without being noticed. His clean, clearly sculptured features and his well-barbered Vandyke and mustache gave a certain decisiveness to his facial expression, unlike the straggly and somewhat Santa Clauslike appearances of some of the other bearded radicals in Zurich. I think it was his pale face that made him look to me like a workingman's Cardinal Richelieu. But the main impression was that of his almost marblelike forehead and his eyes, which transmitted a sense of great concentration and power. There was something statuesque about him, not a classical statuesqueness, but more that of certain Renaissance men. His appearance was neither particularly benevolent nor malevolent. He simply gave out the vibrations of a completely coordinated human being, charged with electricity, in total command of the moment, even in the relaxed and public atmosphere of a restaurant. I can't help thinking of him now as being what the yogi Patanjali called "one-pointed."

Toward the end of March, Strauss was more and more mysterious when he spoke about Lenin. But eventually I wormed out of him that

Büttner the kettledrummer had heard from Swiss socialists that they in turn had heard from Russian friends, who had the message from a Polish émigré, that Lenin was planning to leave Switzerland. Strauss, who had many connections in town, was a railroad buff who generally landed at the main depot at least once a day and had friends among the train personnel and the station administration. They told him that the German embassy in Bern was trying to make a deal for Lenin to travel through Germany to Finland and then to Russia. The Germans hoped that Russia would be thrown into turmoil and revolution and that the country would collapse and be easy to control. Lenin had lined up ten people to accompany him to Russia, and the party kept growing in size. Most of the Swiss dropped out, but some Poles joined. Strauss even whispered that Romain Rolland was supposed to go along, a completely unfounded rumor.

On April 7, Strauss said he had heard that the Russian party was actually leaving from the main railway station around noon on Easter Monday, April 9.

We arrived at the Hauptbahnhof at ten-thirty on Monday morning. It was a typical Zurich spring day—drizzly, cold, foggy, and rather dark. There was an air of great expectancy among the station personnel and the onlookers. A few of these were more conspicuous than they might have wished, but on the whole it was not an impressive group.

Lenin and his party arrived. Lenin had a knapsack on his back, crammed with books and papers. With a companion he walked briskly to the stationmaster and made the last arrangements for boarding the train. He was quite self-possessed and in passing greeted acquaintances in the group of onlookers with a smile as though nothing unusual was happening. He talked to the station master in a businesslike manner and without visible signs of emotion. What looked like about thirty, mostly Russian émigrés followed him. They were shabbily dressed and carried knapsacks, small trunks, baskets, pillows, and blankets. They looked decrepit and rather pitiful. But they were obviously moved by the thought of this new adventure and showed it, if only furtively, in their facial expressions and actions.

After Lenin had arranged matters with the stationmaster, the emigrés moved slowly toward the train. From behind the rope that cut us off from the train itself, we observed some last-minute shoving and hauling. Lenin grabbed one fellow by the collar and threw him out of the group; Strauss identified him as a Swiss socialist by the name of Blum who tried to force his way into the Party after Lenin had

forbidden him to join because he was accused of being an agent of the Russian secret police.

The small group of onlookers behind the rope shouted insults at the émigrés, bellowing at random "Rascals!" . . . "Pigs!" . . . "Spies!" . . . "German agents!"

The émigrés shouted back half-heartedly and finally sang the "Internationale." The stationmaster herded them onto the train. The Swiss railroad personnel sealed the baggage cars and we watched the train slowly pulling out through the smoke and fog until it disappeared from sight. We heard the coughing of the engine gradually fade away. For a moment, there was complete silence in the station.

The little group that had come to watch straggled away. Strauss and I, at first only curious, were now excited and disturbed. We returned to the Café Odeon for an espresso.

Barbara Rosecrance

FORSTER'S COMRADES

The news about Forster's sexual preference has been out for some time, and revision of his reputation is conspicuously underway. Not only the curious ambiguity of those sad young men, but the most fundamental aspects of Forster's themes and style are now revealed, say some recent critics, as the expressions of private predilections, private fantasies. Thus, says Samuel Hynes, Forster made "out of self-deprecation, transference, and evasion, a personal and functioning style." Cynthia Ozick goes further, asking, "does it devalue the large humanistic statement to know that its sources are narrowly personal?" to which she responds without qualification, "yes." Clearly Ozick's indictment extends beyond the declaration she is criticizing, Forster's well-known statement that he hoped he would have the guts to betray his country rather than his friend, "friend" redefined by the posthumous revelations of *Maurice* and of P.N. Furbank's excruciatingly truthful biography. Ozick's comments imply a major devaluation of what has been regarded as Forster's stock-in-trade, his liberal ideology and eclectic humanism. Furthermore, if these principles are being questioned by special definitions of the idea of humanism, then the meaning of the fiction is bound to be reexamined. How are we now to evaluate the calls for passion and wholeness, for engagement and the sanctity of personal relations that reverberate through the novels? What effect do the publications of *Maurice*, the homosexual short stories, and Furbank's biography have on our understanding of the other novels?

Attempts to defend *Maurice* as a work of art seem to me unconvincing. Samuel Hynes puts it succinctly when he observes that in *Maurice* Forster "has sacrificed all of the qualities that make his work interesting—the ironic tone, the distance, the humour, the touches of shrewd wisdom, the style." This is a great deal to sacrifice, but as Forster himself said elsewhere, absence implies presence: we may look to the other five novels with some assurance that they are not devalued by the failure of *Maurice*. To Ozick's dismissal of Forster the humanist, we may reply that it is the work, not the biography, that has usually

determined our literary response and evaluation. Emily Brontë, who, in *Wuthering Heights*, created a unique and powerful rendering of transcendent passion, was single and celibate; Jane Austen is the great and sure-voiced interpreter of a state she never entered. The ultimate reduction of this position is the argument (pressed publicly by a recent feminist writer who does no service to feminism) that men cannot write about women because they have not had the experience of being women (and, one would assume, vice versa).

The important problem is that of the artistic consequences of Forster's need, in the five novels, to disguise his personal vantage point, the implications of an attitude rendered yet more complex and problematic by its appearance in the context of a novelistic cosmos of apparently received values. It is the tension—poignant as the posthumous revelations indicate it to be—between aspiration and reality in Forster's own system of values that is really of interest. Here Cynthia Ozick is perceptive when she notes that Forster is committed to the "mainstream." Fruition and celibacy are at odds in his novels, and only in the fantasy world of *Maurice* (and there most unconvincingly) does consummation occur without procreation. Forster, whatever the facts of his private experience, is committed to "life." Furthermore, what Forster means by life is inextricable from the themes of inheritance and continuance that pervade the five major novels. In the fictional development of these themes, morality and biology combine in those encounters that embody Forster's idea of humanism. Mainstream in Forster's fiction is the operative metaphor, as for example in *The Longest Journey*, where the hapless Rickie Elliott contemplates his own separation from life: ". . . he (Stephen) would have children; he, not Rickie, would contribute to the stream; he, through his remote posterity, might be mingled with the unknown sea." In its stress on continuity and value, from mother to son, for Forster, procreation is not only essential to the process, it frequently becomes epiphany: "On the banks of the grey torrent of life, love is the only flower. A little way up the stream and a little way down had Rickie glanced, and he knew that she whom he loved had risen from the dead, and might rise again."

A preoccupation with extinction and survival, annihilation and immortality suffuses the novels; the idea of death and resurrection is a central Forsterian motif. Thus the importance of the baby in Forster's novels: reward and talisman, new life suggests hope among the prevailing contrarieties of Forster's fictional world. Gino's infant son in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* is such an emblem, and the strangely foreboding sterility of that novel has its inception in the death of this

baby. In *The Longest Journey*, Stephen's child, fulfilling Rickie's prophecy, reincarnates their mother as inheritor of England's rural values. In *A Room With a View*, victory goes to those capable of passing on the inheritance, the self-aware woman and passionately heterosexual man. *Howards End* closes with child and meadow, England's now vanishing heritage, and in *A Passage to India*, Fielding and Stella Moore await an offstage heir to mitigate the sterility of the attempts at personal relations that have consumed the novel's energy. This ending recreates the pattern of death and resurrection and the preoccupation with continuance, but it also contains an important ambiguity, a significant tension that is present in all the novels and can now explicitly be seen in relation to Forster's conflict between his private sexuality and his commitment to the values of the mainstream.

From the beginning, Forster preached "connection," and Alan Wilde's recent description of this "familiar ideal" as a "not altogether solid basis for his belief in personal relations" suggests the contradictions that Forster, like Gide and Lawrence, transformed into humanist values. The "familiar ideal" seems to present itself in the novels as a war between convention and instinct, repression and passion, as the attempt to find wholeness, a fullness of experience, in the context of close personal unions. In the novels which precede *Howards End*, the protagonists must repudiate convention and overcome repression to achieve this wholeness. In *Howards End* Forster goes further, to preach the inclusion of opposing qualities, summed up in the formula, "only connect." In both the earlier novels and in *A Passage to India*, Forster's protagonists reach for a greater consciousness of the values they need to become whole—for what Forster asserts is a commitment to "life," to its relationships and responsibilities. This is the meaning of connection, and, as I have noted, instinctual forces find their outlet in the creation or promise of new life. Wittier than Lawrence and less polemical, Forster seems close to Lawrence in his pleas for instinct and passion as the basis of wholeness in an increasingly impersonal industrial society. Forster and Lawrence did share the large theme of self-realization, as well as personal sympathy, but Forster's greater elusiveness, noted early by his contemporary John Maynard Keynes, becomes nowhere more apparent than when we confront the essential ambiguity in the "familiar ideal."

Only in *A Room With a View*, the most lighthearted of all the major novels, does this ideal approach fulfillment. Here the connection is successful as Lucy Honeychurch rejects convention and aestheticism and becomes whole, by confronting "the holiness of direct

desire." That this solution was not automatic is interestingly shown in the second "Lucy" manuscript, forerunner to the final version of Forster's first begun but third completed novel, where George Emerson, about to elope with Lucy, is killed when his bicycle is hit by a falling tree. But Forster averted this catastrophe and made *A Room With a View* an unequivocal victory for personal relationships. The ending symbolizes fruition, as the happy lovers return to their Florentine room with a view of the Arno. Detachment and celibacy, personified in the antihero, Cecil Vyse, are seen as negations of humanistic values, and Forster's castigation extends into *Howards End*, where, trying to turn her languid brother Tibby to active pursuits, Margaret Schlegel cites Cecil as a deplorable example of sterility and idleness.

Yet even the Italian victory exacts a price. A delightful tour de force, *A Room With a View* is (always excepting *Maurice*) the least complex of Forster's novels. Interestingly, Forster's dissatisfaction with his single Lawrentian resolution became explicit many years later, when with depressed charm he speculated for the *New York Times Book Review* on the mundane postmarital fates of George and Lucy and revealed the truth of his affection for Cecil, who heroically affirms the universality of art by playing Beethoven on the gramophone to British troops during World War II.

Forster kept his sympathy for Cecil from the light of artistic day. But its implications are instructive if we wish to explore the ambiguity in the "familiar ideal" and suggest its consequences in the novels. For Cecil, rejected though he is in *A Room With a View*, is a recognizable version of Forster's archetypal protagonist, the sensitive, intelligent, and perceptive character, whose education in "connection" should lead him to self-realization. The crux of that realization is the necessity for contact with what in *The Longest Journey* Forster termed "the spirit of life," affirmed through inheritance. But here the crucial ambiguity in Forster's ideal becomes manifest, for the tension that he eased in *A Room With a View* by Cecil's graceful withdrawal pervades the other major novels, from *Where Angels Fear to Tread* through his final and luminous fictional creation, *A Passage to India.*

Forster's first protagonist is Philip of *Where Angels Fear to Tread.* Philip is aesthetic, condescending, repelled by vulgarity, disinclined to action except where directed by a powerful mother who represents the repressive force of convention. Philip undertakes a journey to Italy which Forster soon reveals as a voyage of the soul no less central in its more congenial context than the quest that animates *A Passage to India.* The young hero of this first novel comes to accept responsibility

for a tragedy which his earlier involvement might have averted, and he is rewarded by an insight into the meaning of life and, as corollary gift, into his own feelings for an interesting young English woman. Philip has made the connection and, it would appear, attained the ideal. But the moment of revelation presents unexpected ironies. Philip's reward becomes punishment (or perhaps relief). The girl loves another, and as the novel ends, Philip retreats to a life of observation and passivity, an existence newly examined and informed, but detached and sterile. At the moment of his greatest insight, Philip withdraws from participation in the instinctual life whose value Forster has celebrated throughout the novel. Moreover, the detachment that was Philip's besetting sin and from which the novel's action undertook to dislodge him, appears at the end as the necessary condition for his insight.

This paradoxical conclusion is doubly consequential. *Where Angels Fear to Tread* begins a pattern of schism between explicit ideals and real energies: in this respect, the novels unconsciously subvert themselves. But the paradox exemplified in Philip's situation has in addition a larger significance. For Philip's inaction presents a paradigm that becomes the prevailing metaphysic of *A Passage to India*, where the relationship between withdrawal and the possibility of wholeness becomes fully and finally explicit.

The earnest heterosexuality of the five major novels masks the fact that, except in *A Room With a View*, the really important relationships occur between persons of the same sex. The source of energy in *Where Angels Fear to Tread* is Philip's relationship with the brash young Italian, Gino. Philip approaches salvation through the transformations of condescension to love, dramatized in his growing rapprochement with Gino. Their climactic encounter is a kind of Liebestod in which Forster's fantasy of brutality, orchestrated at some length as Gino sadistically twists Philip's broken arm, almost results in his hero's death. Caroline Abbott reveals her love for Gino, but the really telling confession is Philip's, "I love him too"; and, deprived of their Italian touchstone, Caroline and Philip unite in the reiteration which ends the novel, "all the wonderful things are over."

The Longest Journey, Forster's next published novel, enlarges on this pattern. Like Philip, Rickie Elliott is a young man in search of his soul. Unlike his predecessor he appears at the outset to be free from the pretension Philip had to overcome to "connect" with the world. But Rickie makes the fatal mistake of trying to connect inner and outer worlds (the very attempt for which Forster claims success on behalf of Margaret in *Howards End*). Rickie's imagination is no match for his

wife's brutality. His bitter and unhappy marriage takes center stage, its Shelleyan *sententia* an emblematic repudiation of the "familiar ideal." Rickie is sacrificed to the "spirit of life" embodied in Stephen Wonham, who is a peculiar amalgam of Greek god, pastoral shepherd, brutal toper, and Wagnerian hero (he was even named "Siegfried" in an earlier draft). Using as excuse Rickie's propensity to self-deception, Forster withdraws him from existence itself. A pattern is emerging, visible both in Rickie's withdrawal and in his relationship with Stephen. As in *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, the crucial connections are unisexual, the touchstone a not very believable natural man. The ideal of personal relations finds three important expressions in the novel, the first in the friendship between Rickie and Stewart Ansell at Cambridge. Pre-*Maurice* critics have noted the intensity of this relationship and how closely it resembles a love affair. Affection, jealousy, and the necessary dash of brutality characterize the friendship (for example, as the friends lie talking in a Cambridge meadow, Ansell forcibly restrains Rickie from keeping his appointment with Agnes). The most passionate outburst in a tempestuous novel is Rickie's plea for the "legalization" of friendship:

> Nature has no use for us: she has cut her stuff differently. Dutiful sons, loving husbands, responsible fathers—these are what she wants, and if we are friends it must be in our spare time. Abram and Sarai were sorrowful, yet their seed became as sand of the sea, and distracts the politics of Europe at this moment. But a few verses of poetry is all that survives of David and Jonathan.

Forster might have borrowed his admired predecessor's title, *Love and Friendship*. In the covert world of *The Longest Journey*, friendship is love. But the novel contains a unique example of successful heterosexuality in its brief portrayal of the union of Rickie's mother and Robert, a Wiltshire farmer. Their characters and relationship exemplify the ideal qualities seen only in the male friendships. The aura that envelops this couple reflects the inner dualism of Forster's position. His voice speaks with sincerity through Rickie. But shame (which can be documented at length in Forster's extraordinary humiliation of Rickie) engenders the public ideology. In addition, Forster's sense of sterility expresses itself, as elsewhere, in the obsession with continuance. Mrs. Elliott and Robert are ultimately significant as parents and spiritual progenitors. Heterosexual love is requisite for continuance, but the public and private ideologies war within the novel: Mrs. Elliott

and Robert are the rule-affirming exception, and love and friendship are implacably at odds.

The most important relationship in *The Longest Journey* develops with Rickie's acceptance of Stephen Wonham as his brother. The process of Rickie's education is analogous to Philip's regenerating awareness of Gino's attraction and power. Initially Rickie shuns Stephen's earthiness and apparent lower-class background, and the sudden information that Stephen is his illegitimate brother produces shock and rejection; but the knowledge that Stephen is his loved mother's, not his hated father's son, is redemptive for Rickie. He saves Stephen's life at the cost of his own. But uniquely cruel to the character who most resembled himself, Forster has Rickie die in disillusion and alienation. Rickie's education, nevertheless, has been a major motif; as with Philip, it is an education in friendship, not love.

The third important personal relationship follows the pattern of Philip's and Rickie's attraction, as Stewart Ansell shifts his affection from Rickie to Stephen. As the perceptive observer of this novel, Ansell is a spokesman for Forster's values, and Stephen is the touchstone. Ansell's conversion, in which he invests Stephen with the attributes of a Greek god, is followed by the novel's most operatic moment, a recognition scene in which Ansell trumpets to the assembled throng of Dunwood House Rickie's catastrophic error and Stephen's true identity. Ostensibly this is all in Rickie's interest. A stronger reed, Ansell represents one partner in the symbolic marriage of Cambridge and Wiltshire values. The covert energies of personal relations in the novel may be seen both in Ansell's shock treatment of Rickie and in his subsequent maneuvering for primacy with Stephen. With Rickie still present in the novel, Ansell defends Stephen's self-indulgences from Rickie's criticisms. With Rickie gone, Ansell and Stephen unite: Ansell has become the star boarder, witness of Stephen's final triumph over Sawston. There is also an angel in the house, for Stephen has married. But here the proper relationship between love and friendship is adumbrated, as Forster announces Stephen's formula for marital success, "keep her in line." The pleasant wife presents no threat to the maintenance of the important relationships.

But important as the friendships are, personal relations yield place to the larger question of inheritance. Apparently the tragi-comedy of a doomed marriage, *The Longest Journey* is really an anxious prospectus for the conservation of preindustrial values, allegorized in Wiltshire and its guardian, Stephen. The inheritance theme effaces the

importance of Rickie's education: this in spite of countermovements like Forster's "coinage" chapter, which envisions Rickie's salvation in terms of the familiar ideal properly applied. But Rickie vanishes to survive only in mannered short stories, minor art at best, like those Forster himself wrote. With the annihilation of the failed homosexual, idealism and the artistic imagination are also eliminated: *The Longest Journey* has succumbed to the pressures that in a prelapsarian appraisal Lionel Trilling called "the too-much steam that blows up the boiler." The search for transcendence has become self-subversive.

Howards End is a deceptively franker novel than its predecessor, for it undertakes explicitly to deal in social reality, and it attempts a synthesis that seems in clear accord with the ideals of personal relations as they may be attempted between men and women living in a society that has moved further down the road to urbanization and anomie than the world of Rickie and Stephen. Forster posits an intelligent, financially secure, self-aware woman, imaginative like Rickie, but dedicated with far greater balance and sophistication to the sanctity of personal relations. He posits also a rich businessman, imperial (Henry Wilcox exercises significant control over colonial Africa), thoughtless, paternalistic, kind, and emotionally dishonest. Margaret marries Henry to save his soul, and Forster says that she succeeds. Like *The Longest Journey*, this novel is flawed; at the same time, its insistence on the connections between money and class, money and love, money and survival renders it the most admirably tough of Forster's novels. Yet once again the real "connection" opposes the avowed one. The marriage of inner and outer, imagination and action occurs. The supreme value is still that of personal relations. But the nature of success and its ultimately negative implication show *Howards End* to be in the ambiguous pattern of the earlier novels.

The usual criticism of Forster's "victory" is that Margaret, instead of effecting a synthesis with the Wilcoxes, triumphs over them by emasculating them. Henry at the end is feeble and broken, dependent on Margaret; Charles, his son, is in jail. Forster is explicit about the conditions under which Schlegels and Wilcoxes can live together: ". . . her only hope was to break them." "She had . . . charged right through these Wilcoxes and broken up their lives." But if Margaret's solution is not a triumph for the values of personal relations, is there such a victory in the novel? Yes, and its source is in the subplot, subordinate to the Schlegel-Wilcox marriage, but insistent and dynamic in its movement to climax. It is the story of the relationship

between Margaret and her sister Helen. Here then is another couple, another friendship. The supremacy of personal relations is asserted early in the novel by the sisters themselves.

> "I remember Paul at breakfast," said Helen quietly. "I shall never forget him. He had nothing to fall back upon. I know that personal relations are the real life, for ever and ever." "Amen."

The climax occurs after Margaret has violated the integrity of her relationship with Helen by tricking her sister into coming to Howards End so that she and Henry may discover the secret of Helen's eight-month disappearance and whisk her off to physical or mental "help." Margaret's shame at her own behavior, and the strength of past love, symbolized by the Schlegel possessions which have mistakenly (from the Wilcox point of view) been unpacked at Howards End, bring about a return of confidence and engender Forster's most direct affirmation of the humanistic ideal.

> And all the time their salvation was lying around them—the past sanctifying the present; the present, with wild heartthrob, declaring that there would after all be a future, with laughter and the voices of children. Helen, still smiling, came up to her sister. She said: "It is always Meg." They looked into each other's eyes. The inner life had paid.

Invariably, Forster's celebration is linked to the idea of continuance: Helen's expected child, heir alike to her intelligence and imagination and to the yeoman heritage of Leonard Bast, its father, is the by now familiar expression of that theme. But the important connection, the apotheosis of personal relations, is the friendship between the sisters. The Schlegel-Wilcox connection is both unequal and sterile. Although it avows a broadly social ideal of fulfillment, *Howards End* achieves only connections that are abortive, sterile, or oblique.

But *Howards End* presents an even more significant countercurrent to its hopeful ideology. In the midst of his pleas for personal relations, Forster prepares quietly for a change in his major protagonist. Quite early, Margaret comments to her sister that she believes she may end caring more for places than people. As the catastrophe descends, Margaret's attitude presages the detachment that is the dominant mode of *A Passage to India.*

> And others—others go further still, and move outside humanity altogether. A place, as well as a person, may catch the glow. Don't

> you see that all this leads to comfort in the end? Differences—eternal differences, planted by God in a single family, so that there may always be colour; sorrow, perhaps, but colour in the daily grey. . . . Don't drag in the personal when it will not come.

Noteworthy here are the remoteness of the speaker's perspective and the muted quality of her plea for human variety. What began in Forster's fiction as a desire, even a thirst for diversity, expressed in his creation of such eccentric but wise characters as Mrs. Aberdeen, the bedmaker, and Mr. Jackson, the Greek scholar in *The Longest Journey*, and in the mischievous portraits of Miss Bartlett and Mr. Beebe in *A Room With a View*, has become the acceptance of limitation. Its converse movement is toward a conception of wholeness that has despaired of fulfillment in human terms. The opposition in *Howards End* between "gray," evoked continually throughout the novel as the homogenizing effect of London, and the "colour" described by Margaret here, is as "comfort" a rationalization for retreat from the personal ideal.

The dramatization of this new mode of speculation is reductive, for Margaret's last significant action is her gesture of irritation at Paul Wilcox's clumsy entrance into her house and her fussy removal of a Wilcox daughter's feather boa and gloves from her vase. Our last view of Margaret reveals a constriction of the generosity of spirit that has been Forster's thesis and Margaret's presumed strength. Both in her personal diminution and in the retreat from human concerns her meditations suggest, Margaret foreshadows the argument from limitation and the acceptance of paradox of *A Passage to India.*

In his final novel, Forster explores the possibilities of union between East and West, man and woman, man and man, man and nature, humanity and deity. The mode is metaphysical, the concern cosmic. In the context of many attempts at unity, the use of a male friendship to signify the East-West connection does not appear extraordinary. Nevertheless, the friendship of Aziz and Fielding is the most important personal relationship, and once again the humanistic ideal is affirmed through the vicissitudes of friendship rather than love. Fielding is the adult representative of the sensitive young man, grown into a protagonist of culture, intelligence, and rationalism. In his spontaneity and brutality, Aziz, the suspicious but passionate Muslim doctor, recalls Gino of *Where Angels Fear to Tread.* Fielding's initial detachment amounts almost to asceticism: for "a holy man minus the holiness" to plunge into personal intimacy represents a considerable victory for the Forsterian ideal. Within this context, Fielding dares much. He jeopardizes his position, estranges himself from the English

community in India, and exposes himself to the shifting and untrustworthy tides of emotion which are the natural medium of his Indian friend. Ultimately the Fielding-Aziz connection lapses. But here the interesting point is that when Fielding finally takes the path the Forster values seem to sanction, he retreats into a limitation of his being. His marriage to Stella Moore is intended to symbolize union of the best of Western rationality with Eastern intuition (for although Stella is English, like her mother she is "Oriental" in her capacity to comprehend the irrational). But the marriage is not happy. If Forster is on anyone's "side" here, it is on Stella's: Fielding's unease reflects awareness of his own limitations. Nevertheless, Forster goes out of his way to note the less than perfect quality of the connection. But more significantly, and here the subversive strain is most manifest, Fielding's loss of his single status is the abandonment of his moral independence. Commitment, the desideratum, is the giving of hostages to fortune. Once saddled with a family, Fielding becomes, as he had not been before, an Anglo-Indian, "who would not now defy all his own people for the sake of a stray Indian." Thus commitment has engendered limitation, a reversion to repression and convention, the very qualities Forster savagely satirized in his portrayal of the Anglo-Indians. The only sanctioned connection appears to be a single-sex one, although this is not what we read as the usual message of *A Passage to India.*

The tension reflected in this conflict finds larger expression in the search for harmony and wholeness that pervades the novels. Those before *A Passage to India* preach that insight is the reward, salvation the consequence of "connection." The educations of Philip and Rickie, Lucy Honeychurch's transformation, the reconciliation for which Margaret strives, all express what has usually been conceived as the substance of Forster's humanistic ideology. Yet in their enactment of the movements of the central characters toward wholeness, the major novels except for *A Room With a View* present the opposite of what they claim to demonstrate. Philip withdraws, Rickie is annihilated, in her success Margaret becomes remote from humanity. This situation partly reflects the development of Forster's metaphysical position, a course of deepening pessimism about the possibilities of personal relations that culminates in the vision of human limitation of *A Passage to India.* Among the ways in which it transcends the earlier novels, *A Passage to India* not only defines limitation but confronts its implications. But it is important to reiterate that the germ of Forster's transforming vision in that novel is already present in *Where Angels Fear to Tread.*

The paradox created by the simultaneous descent of salvation and withdrawal on Philip Herriton is, as I have noted earlier, a paradigm for Forster's fully developed position in *A Passage to India.* Paradox is the mode in the final novel, the acceptance of paradox the only hope. Commitment is no longer even faintly successful as the path to insight: the career not only of Fielding but of Mrs. Moore belies such a resolution. Instead we are given Godbole, "who had never been known to tell anyone anything." Forster has abandoned the possibility of wholeness for the supra-personal ideal of completion, and completion is possible only through abnegation of every active effort to achieve it.

> Thus, Godbole, though she was not important to him, remembered an old woman he had met in Chandrapore days. Chance brought her into his mind while it was in this heated state, he did not select her, she happened to occur among the throng of soliciting images, a tiny splinter, and he impelled her by this spiritual force to that place where completeness can be found. Completeness, not reconstruction. His senses grew thinner, he remembered a wasp seen he forgot where, perhaps on a stone. He loved the wasp equally, he impelled it likewise, he was imitating God. And the stone where the wasp clung—could he . . . no, he could not, he had been wrong to attempt the stone, logic and conscious effort had seduced. . . .

Godbole represents humanity in its limitation and possibility. The idea of the Absolute can be expressed only through the transitory, and Godbole's moment of completion parallels the ephemeral but distinct descent of deity, as "Infinite Love took upon itself the form of SHRI KRISHNA, and saved the world. All sorrow was annihilated, not only for Indians, but for foreigners, birds, caves, railways, and the stars. . . ." Thus in *A Passage to India* Forster resolves the earlier contradiction of Philip's fate by enclosing it in a paradox that transcends the capacities or fates of individuals. Withdrawal is the necessary condition for insight; ultimately human love is possible only in the context of an impersonal unity.

Forster's comradely couples and the sometimes radiant energy they project in the novels may be seen as expressions of his personal and artistic dilemma: he could neither overcome inner conflict about his orientation nor write openly from the vantage point of his particular sexuality. The larger paradox within the humanistic ideal likewise reflects Forster's sense of himself as outsider. Here *Maurice* and Mr. Furbank's biography cast some light on the psychic forces that helped shape Forster's art. But from the "narrowly personal sources" of Forster's humanistic statement to its embodiment in art is a tricky leap.

Forster's honesty in *Maurice* does not make it a better novel. Nor do the ambiguities and cross-currents in the other novels, discernible, as I have tried to indicate, both in the progress of Forster's heroes and in the movement of his philosophic quest, invalidate their achievement as fiction. Forster has obviously, through his fictional strategies, transformed his personal fantasies and biases into the broader concerns of our modern world. If we reduce Forster's fiction to his particular sexuality, then it is difficult to see how we can rescue such writers as Proust or Gide or Lawrence from identification with their own special fixations. Ultimately, what remains when we have penetrated Forster's disguise are the same qualities for which we used to read the novels: the social comedy, the virtuosity of language, the understanding—most of all, the commanding narrative voice whose province is the meaning of man's fate. Between the comrades and the mainstream to which Forster aspired there is a contradiction, but the failures to connect implicate all his characters. It is not as spokesman for a private ethos but as a skilled and sensitive commentator on the human condition that Forster will be remembered.

POEMS

James Cummins

THE CASE OF THE CINCINNATI SYNDROME

Paul Drake never told Mason he was from Cincinnati.
If it came up, he'd mumble, vaguely, about the east.
Now, as he stood under a streetlight glowing blue
In the night, watching the undersides of the leaves
As they tossed, silver, in the darkness, he felt
The man he was after on this case was himself . . .

The jolt was so strong he dropped ashes on himself.
He brushed frantically at the flame. "Cincinnati—!"
He swore violently, regarding the hole in his felt
Elbow patch. A signpost shone like a tooth: "E.
McMillan"—he needed "W." As he flipped the leaves
Of his notebook, dreaming, they blended like the blue

Notes of a saxophone phrasing a passage that blew
Down the lonely streets of his past. He punched himself
In the face: his brain cells were falling like leaves
Under the spell of that old siren, Cincinnati . . .
He thought of Mason's banter, before he'd come east:
"Don't bring me a painting of a bull on black felt!"—

Then, seeing Paul's face, he'd asked how he felt.
"With my hands!" But the grin was gone, into the blue,
Rising in the west as the sun rises in the east,
Heading straight for a mid-air collision with himself
In the musical smog of the mind over Cincinnati . . .
Flying, the years fell away from him like leaves.

He crushed his cigarette. Soon the bus would leave,
Bearing him closer to the mirror image he felt
Would at last solve the mystery, the song, of Cincinnati.
Would he grab his wrist, and shout, "Okay, you blew
It, the gorilla suit fooled no one!"—enraged, at himself,
At the encounter forty years ago, here in the "east,"

When someone had used the costume of a hairy beast,
And the phrase "My little penguin" to seduce, then leave,
A mongoloid nun, her womb filled with Paul himself . . .
Finally, the hotel, the toothless night clerk—he felt
Nauseous, sweaty, as the old man fluttered his blue
Eyes, spoke: "Drake? My name, too. Welcome to Cincinnati."

* * *

In his ape mask, Paul felt the blue barrel kick, cleave
The clerk's face from east to west . . . He shook himself—
The clerk was snoring . . . It was evening in Cincinnati.

Elizabeth Spires

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE SLEEPER

> *Dreamingly the spirit projects its own reality, but this reality is nothing.*
>
> Kierkegaard

Touch
those that you love
only during sleep
when the woman sleeps
in her father's hand
and the man curls into sleep
as a bone curls into flesh.
The sleeper will come
to you then, asking
nothing, carrying
bright empty packages
that belong to no one.

Within my arms he sleeps, safe
from himself, far from what hurts him.
We walk in the dark like children, hand-in-hand,
lay ourselves down in the thin white clothes
of exhaustion. I guard his sleep with mine,
guard sleep's secrets by not moving.

Tell
no one what you did.
In the morning hide desire's
presents till it's night
again. They lie
by the bed unopened,
as if the gift of yourself
were enough to ease
the sleeper's dawn,
restore the dream, now
receding, that continues
without you or anyone.

David Schloss

THE EARTHLY PARADISE

Is it only in the mind of God?

I used to try to comprehend
The world's geography to attain
The whole creation: lakes, ponds, streams,
Growing into rivers' patternings,
Flowing to oceans, blue through green—

But now I see that paradise
Is beyond the edge of that dream,
Going past what is to be seen
Between the shades of vegetation
Mapping constant broken designs,

Circles swelling out into gulfs
Of grandeur, holding all together
Within a charmed circumference,
Like the city I was born in,
Its margins, defined spaces, clear lines,

Which, if held totally in mind,
Would be the map of my desire
To transcend or just understand
The exhaustive geometry
Of its unpremeditated plan

And all my love for this world.

Three Poems by Miklós Radnóti (1909–1944)

Translated from the Hungarian by Emery George

VARIATION ON SADNESS

Look, I came from the garden of sorrows,
across tearfilled rivers, shedding parks,
and meadows shaken with sobs,
I've come from the garden all pain,
where weeping was all that
the wind, the sun, the rain,
the fog, the moon, the snow,
the sky sky sky brought also!

And on colors of rising dawn too I wept
when as it happened a ripe apple
fell ringing, tired, from the branch
or a bird's soaring arc
swept over earth and vanished
somewhere behind the cradling green.

I just came, wordless, across tearfilled rivers,
deciduous parklands, and meadows ringing with
sobbing, too, silent; only my
weeping flowed on my virgin face,
which is now pale as the
dead moon of dawn, which spells
disgrace on the dawn dawn sky.

MAY TRUTH

I too see yesterday only today,
because my poor eyes are ill and were
born only for women and for tears,
though you know, brothers, sisters,
yesterday May truth walked
your streets, all flower-bedecked.

With a woman and with tears in my eyes
I tread the road of the truth of May
between the stone walls, with flowers, and
brown-eyed deer fawns come up to me,
lick my hanging hand, and
titmice lay a nest in my hair:
because, brothers, sisters,
my road is a cursed fall planting, late sowing
into missed Mays.

FORGIVENESS

I'm sleeping the dreams of milk-flavored white
children and by morning my heart shines
on my chest's peculiar, gleaming landscape.

Today on the hills of goodness I
tended a flock by night, but by dawn
I had lost them and now I'm alone.

Quietly I bow my head on my chest
and at such times I drop my poor heart
into this or that beggar's deadly palm.

Michael Niflis

LEONIDAS' THERMOPYLAE

> "Stranger, tell the Spartans
> we behaved as they would wish
> us to, and are buried here."

Now silent and no one there
yet still indisputably his . . .
and in the day this descendant
of Hercules turned to stone

never had he seen such an army
as told by the distant glints
of approaching sunlit steel.

And as he moved his body
this way, then that to see,
thoughtfully shading his logistic brow,

those beside could hear
his leathers of war straining
against the song
in his body
and his long spear
scraping against stone.

All there to hold were fathers
of living sons. Yet many
he sent away—then held it
fifty to one for days.

Xerxes, having many soldiers
but few warriors, leaped
three times from his throne
in amazement at the Spartan handiwork—
faking retreats, slaying his "immortals."

But as always, sniffing out enemy
gold, the traitor came to kiss,
and led whispering Persians over the cliffs
at night.

Betrayed, the glinting
Greeks combed their lovely hair
and moved silently into the open
for the right performance
the day the steely king of Sparta
turned to singing stone.

Jerome Rothenberg

A POEM IN YELLOW AFTER TRISTAN TZARA*

angel slide your hand
into my basket eat my yellow fruit
my eye is craving it
my yellow tires screech
o dizzy human heart
my yellow dingdong

*Refer: "Poème pour une robe de Mme Sonia Delaunay"

Mark B. Derr

THE HOUR BEFORE MIDNIGHT

What is left of this day and what do I want of it—
the clarity of vision to finish this letter to her,
begun so often I have forgotten its purpose,
as I have forgotten the act that demands it?

If I could find the place . . . but the fields
we once wandered are paved
and forested with apartments, each fenced,
each gate opened with coded plastic slipped in a slot,
and the beaches are now private property.

This haunted morning like an echo and pain
that flares in an old scar, the waning moon
at false dawn briefly glimpsed, a thin strip of light
like her naked body bent around its shadow,
her name framing an obscured face.

The first osprey I have seen in years dove
and rose screaming, a bass clutched in its talons.
Would I had its sharp eyes, its singleness of purpose,
I could spot my prey from such distance and dive

through lengthening shadows to pull it,
alive and bleeding, from the murkiness within.
But I am a nearsighted, plodding man,
in the hour before midnight clutching at ghosts
that have names but no home,

floundering in a heap of images that scatter
leaving only a residue, and I cannot bind them together.
So I seal this beginning in an envelope with the others,
against the day I can complete it, and walk away,
filled with a dull ache like hunger.

Jerry Benjamin

NO UNHAPPY REASON

there was the world which seemed to be hovering on the
brink of
thought. Reaching rope's end with several apparent things
drifting away.
Such occurences form convenient spots for highlighting the
second half.
Coincidences with genuine history. In this case, the line
has been more than merely arbitrary.
A painted black and white curtain.
Blood might be the ultimate fountain of youth.
The elixir Ponce De Leon craved coursed through his veins.

Peter Leight

LEAVING AIOLIA

Silver wires of wind, and west wind
lofted in soft quartering breeze.
Aiolia—thy delicate white
sands pressed to the sea going out,
covering the dead from me, thy
drifting shores and flared metallic
walls lifted toward a wall-eyed
land where life is holding and the
dark years have thrown less dark shadows—
lift me to windward: it is a
wanderer's rhythm to find home last.

Ralph Angel

ANXIOUS LATITUDES

Up here, I am hyperactively farsighted.
My brain weighs three pounds and
when the show got on the road
my body was a mere appendage of it.

On a clear day, I'm busy directing landscapes,
not really shoving the shrubs around,
not ordering pastel houses from the hillsides,
but carrying them with me like a frayed

photograph in my wallet, so that I might read it
as a small corner of its vaster itinerary.
How the background shows through, blank smudges
and the so many time-connecting dots,

with all I have come to expect deferred to some
higher order, place or pocket-watch ticking together,
both of this world and on that side of the fence.
By now, judging from here,

the rewards must be enormous. Though
my body weighs as much as fifty brains,
always doing, always feeling, mostly feeling
(to get gushy), the traffic bangs and

snarls around me, and the collapsed pause
absents all passing scenery before it moves on,
now farther away. This happens every yesterday
and pained expressions linger on our faces.

We can be thankful for that, each one dying
to talk with somebody, just the two of us
bringing it all home, putting together
the movable parts on their merry way.

But time is short, only twenty minutes (we have
the sandwiches to eat) until the loudest voice
coheres as many, lacquering the politics
of company policy, and its words greet us

not with love, but from fear
that repeated toil simply hardens the argument
that work is all there is, like the whistle
signaling a return to designated places.

So when the paychecks are spooned out, I'll take mine
as if to tell you, "O.k., you're right!
You're the victor, now write the history, please."
You see, I don't even know what clothes

I'm wearing, whether or not they are comfortable
or stylish. Just too nervous to care
and I'm on an extended vacation,
sweating in the balance.

Paul Hoover

CONCERNING THE THE

"Where is it one first heard of the truth? The the."

It's a shadow standing in the shade.
Or an apple reflecting an apple.
The the makes a thing like an apple,
but two identical things, placed side by side,
make one abstraction. Two toasters, say.
The writer has his objects. He does admire.
He fills a field with man-made things,
conundra of tools and lace.
Everything they are he is again: the the,
the very specific. Include perhaps
a sandstone lion, some plastic fruit,
and at their edge a man-made lake
meant to be the mind. Wind up the fish!
Send them across it, to give the mind
its banal climate. Banal is always better.
And play Chopin on your winter piano,
let the light come down, both yes and no,
as it won't without you. The mind is climate, too.
Say it's cold and the leaves are brittle,
noisily surviving. That is your clearest moment,
intellect like an emptied forest.
Spring is the absence of thought; the mind
picks up a frog and throws it, a green blur
over the water. You "thought" it was a rock.
Or poke them both with a serious finger.
They are more they than you.
When "the" meets its beautiful second
it's like the reader diving into an absent page.
You see his shoes for an instant.
Then they disappear.
Truth is only the half of it.

Whenever you ride a horse
you're always falling halfway off,
halfway getting back on.
That's the way it happens.
But landing hard or staying surely on
are fictions the leafy mind prefers.

Elizabeth Aldrich

I AM HELIOS

I am Helios,
I go everywhere and am forever fixed,
The light I shed I cannot comprehend,
For I see however brilliant is that light,
Deeper the attendant shade;
    I am of two minds,
    Sometimes I see my light and know it,
    Sometimes I see only shade and know this;
The warmth I give consumes me,
And my laughter is a handful of flowers
Torn from a bush of thorns,
My tears the song of sorrow
For the man of being, who cannot simply be;
    What light is this that casts so long a shade?

BOOKS

NYET

THE YAWNING HEIGHTS. By Alexander Zinoviev. Translated by Gordon Clough. Random House. $15.

During the five months that I spent in Moscow as visiting professor of American literature I was often taken to tour all sorts of places. Such outings invariably occurred on the spur of the moment; even those scheduled weeks in advance had to be regarded as spontaneous, as if only the accidental could be enjoyed.

I tended to regard this as evidence of the general organizational disarray of Soviet society as well as a further protest against planning—and so it was—but there was more to it than this, as I learned one day from Tatjana Efimovna, one of my graduate students. Her inordinate curiosity about my activities led me to conclude that from time to time she filed reports on them with the Foreign Office as one of her duties as a candidate for Party membership. Her official responsibilities did not by any means dampen her good spirits, and she often surprised me by doing little favors for me and even arranging impromptu excursions.

One day she hung back after class and chirped:

"Professor Martin! Isn't it lucky? Today we have a splendid opportunity to visit the Palace of Pioneers."

"Is it interesting?"

"Oh very. It's our paradise for children, you know."

"And is it far?"

"Only a few blocks. Surely you've noticed the splendid modern complex just off Lenin Prospect?"

"Then we can go over now?"

"Yes, certainly. But in this freezing weather—and it's nearly lunchtime—well, perhaps on our way we should pause for just a bite at the professors' dining room."

Why not? She knew that as a professor I could simply walk to the head of the line there, and the prospect of participating in special privileges dazzled her no less than it did every other Soviet I met. And so we walked across the campus to the little low building, checked our coats, and stepped to the front of a long line to get a table and eat a dish of grilled meat—variety unidentifiable.

Later, in the Palace of Pioneers, the elevator broke down while we were inside it. I was dismayed and muttered something ungracious about Soviet machinery. But Tatjana was ecstatic at the chance to have a little talk without surveillance.

"Professor dear," she said, "you above all persons, you a scientist of literature, will understand a private theory of mine. I call it the *Theory of Mistakes*. You know, I'm interested only in mistakes. Writers, the good ones, are, for instance, always mistaken. That's what I like about them. Computers, mathematical formulas, public pronouncements—these are invariably correct, but not amusing. Man is amusing, and the amusing *is* the authentic, because only he has the capacity, and the destiny, to make mistakes."

She peeled an orange which she drew from her purse.

"I call my Theory of Mistakes apocalyptic because in stating it I might be mistaken. If my theory is proved wrong, I would be unconsolable. Yet if I am *not* mistaken, am I human?"

I was interested in her chatter but not comforted.

"You're in a terrible trap, aren't you?" I grumbled. "Just like this elevator!"

To approach an understanding of this anecdote would require nothing less than a complete reading of Alexander Zinoviev's 829-page *The Yawning Heights*, a book which caused a greater sensation in the U.S.S.R. than any of Solzhenitsyn's works, and resulted in Zinoviev's being stripped of his citizenship by decree of the Praesidium of the Supreme Soviet.

The book itself is a gigantic collection of anecdotes, written in prose and verse and embedded in an enormous variety of forms: comic aphorisms, social analysis, conversations, beast fables, scholarly articles, interviews, allegories, ballads, letters, dreams, excerpts from wall newspapers, parables, parodies, Utopian or dystopian forecasts, rogues' songs, and legends. *The Yawning Heights* is certainly not a novel; it is not even a book in the ordinary sense; like Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, it is "libel, slander, defamation of character," a "gob of spit in the face of Art," a dark mirror, and a kick in the pants of the State.

Western readers are likely to get a perspective on *The Yawning Heights* by placing it in the company of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, *Gulliver's Travels*, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and the thieves' poems of François Villon; and such comparisons would be helpful, since, like these, the fundamental appeal of *The Yawning Heights*

consists in its dazzling play of mind—expressed in ideas, inventions, and obscenities—rather than in the play of narrative expressed in characters. Readers with some familiarity with Soviet satire will certainly recognize that the book is a monstrous—and magnificent—outgrowth of two related imaginative streams: *Vranyo*, elaborately artificial jesting; and *Zaviratsya*, the telling of tall tales beyond the capacity of belief. Readers who also remember the period of the so-called "Thaw" may also understand this book as the artistic culmination of the experimental improvisations which suddenly, at that time, formed so large a part of literary expression. "Anecdotes," Zinoviev himself observes, "sprang up in amazing numbers on subjects which it might have seemed were wholly inapplicable to anecdotes or to humor of any kind." These retold everyday events from Soviet life in a brief, aphoristic, and concentrated form.

Since the classic anecdotes of the period were outlawed and punishable, something of the character of a riddle always hovered about them. *The Yawning Heights* is, even in its punning title, a series of anecdotal conundrums, the key and meaning of which arise from repetition, parallelism, and accumulation. Though in this "exhaustively incomplete and rigorously unsystematic book" there is no continuous story in any usual sense, there is what may be called an orchestration of a structure of themes. Everything comes at us masked. Place and person are anonymous. The setting is called Ibansk not to conceal the fact that the Soviet Union is the subject of the satire, but to suggest that *in reality* the U.S.S.R. is a truly pseudonymous state. Most of the people are called Ibanov precisely because such a state turns people into interchangeable units in a series: "Many years later Fellow-worker met the famous Writer Ibanov (Ibanov is a pen-name—his real name is Ibanov)." The central characters meet in archetypal places—in the Bar or the "Cooler" or on the site of the legendary "Shithouse"—and they are called by the typical names of their activities (as understood from the point of view of Ibanskian officialdom). Supporters of the State are the likes of Leader, Boss, Writer, Colleague, and Careerist; while the dissident outlaws are labelled Schizophrenic, Slanderer, Bawler, and Chatterer. These latter characters, too, are interchangeable, each one derived from an aspect of Zinoviev's own career. Easily identifiable historical characters are also given archetypal names—Stalin (Boss), Khrushchev (Hog), Solzhenitsyn (Truth-teller), Yevtushenko (Writer)—not because Zinoviev wished to protect himself against charges of libel, but because such persons played archetypal roles. Very clearly, Zinoviev is suggesting, the reality of Soviet life is

its masquerade, its duplicity. To tell the truth he concocts anecdotes about masquerades.

The Yawning Heights consists of four books. In the first, a series of heroic men who "didn't like writing and didn't want to write," even men who have lost belief in their responsibilities to others, are forced by their own fierce integrities to speak out in protest. At the request of Dauber, Schizophrenic sets forth his Theory of Disinformation in a book called *Socio-Mechanics*; this composition calls attention to the fact that Schizophrenic has written an earlier subversive treatise. After both books are quoted and discussed in Book I, sections 1 and 2, Schizophrenic is removed to a sanitarium. As Deleuze and Guattari argue in *Anti-Oedipus*, anyone who protests against the conditions of the modern technologization of desire and refuses to adjust to them is likely to be labelled ill. To remain free the individual must be willing to be regarded as schizoid. Without equivocation, this is crucial to Zinoviev's critique of Soviet society. The sections that explore Schizophrenic's anger and hostility also contain snatches of a supposedly legendary obscene, insane poem called "The Ballad," which mocks everything and leaves no bridge between dissidence and adjustment. Even the "Communist Manifesto" is not exempt from Satire in "The Ballad":

> My little sweetheart often talks
> About her arsehole's schism;
> Once again through Europe stalks
> The spectre of the Ism.

Though Schizophrenic is placed safely away, other critics arise to fill his place. Book I, 3 is dominated by Slanderer, and "The Ballad" is replaced by a book titled "The Rats," which transparently comments on post-Pavlovian social organization. Following Slanderer's imprisonment, Chatterer appears, and his book on the dissident sculptor Neizvestny, *The Legend of Dauber*, celebrates artistic independence. The structure of *The Yawning Heights*, then, is a series of boxes, one inside the other; and each separate character is merely one in a sequence of avatars of the quintessential Man-Who-Protests.

Bawler, the ironic, theatrical figure based on the comic victim in Russian puppet shows, dominates Book II. Even more than the earlier avatars his biography approximates the autobiography of the young Zinoviev, who was expelled from the Komsomol for protesting against Stalin's cult of personality. This bumptious, indomitable character arrives on the scene to replace Schizophrenic, Slanderer, and Chatterer

after these have been weakened by the Sanitarium and the Cooler or disillusioned by the defection of comrades to the Party line. Eventually Bawler himself is arrested, declared mentally unfit, and brought to a psychiatric hospital to be shown patients who have already suffered the "cure" for which he is scheduled. "'What's the state of people who've been treated?' asked Thinker. 'Oh,' said Brother, 'they've got that well worked out. A death sentence would be child's play compared to that.'" In Book III "The Ballad" is updated by the modern "Poem on Boredom." Both are lavatory poems. "The Ballad" had been scribbled on "that most ancient monument of Ibanskian culture, the Shithouse." Now, with "a rusty twelve-inch nail which was allegedly from that first Shithouse" (the Revolution), on the plastic wall of the new Shithouse (U.S.S.R. in the 1970s) is scratched "the words of a folk-song of the distant future":

> I tried to clear my intestine
> But first they made me stand in line
> With the builders of socism.
> They ordered me to shout 'Hooray!
> Life's getting better every day!'
> And show no cynicism.
>
> 'That is no art,' said Bug, wiping Lediban's arse with a progressive editorial from the Journal which had been specially written for this purpose.

Toward the end of *The Yawning Heights* the Thaw is over ("Ibanskian society expelled the elements which were alien to it, and reverted to its course toward a monolithic homogeneity") and the best men acquiesce to Party doctrines while the worst rise to new positions of sodden prominence. Dauber himself recants and now declares the works of his earlier artistic allies, Slanderer and Schizophrenic, to be "only superficially serious," interesting to no one. Only Chatterer objects:

> 'You're wrong. . . . monstrously, offensively wrong. They did arouse interest. That is why their authors were so speedily and unanimously eliminated and why no one ever mentions their names.'

Utopia itself has been a masquerade: anti-Utopia, like a baboon wearing a crown, is cheered as emperor. The pall of a death wish—death of society, death of man—begins to throb through the book like a muscle twitching in a corpse. Neurasthenic puts the situation ex-

actly: "One generation and no one will understand Truth-teller anymore." Chatterer, the last surviving avatar of freedom, sees not the slightest hope for a reversal of Soviet society's descent into a miasmic nightmare. He decides to commit suicide to as to cease, at least, to see "how the living are treating each other on earth."

And then, in a moment of final clarity he offers his last testament:

> What is the foundation of the foundations of human existence? Alas, the answer is a commonplace. It's been clear from the very start. Why did I have to live my life through to be sure of it? I don't know. I know only one thing: truth is the foundation of any truly human existence. The truth about oneself. The battle for truth and against it is the most ferocious and profound battle fought in society. And from now on the level of the development of society from the point of view of its humanity, will be defined by the degree of truth it allows.

Chatterer is right: the central conviction of the book *is* a commonplace, yet human history has consisted of forgetting that truth *is* at the heart of human existence. Regarded from the point of view of its effect upon the reader, *The Yawning Heights* is best understood not as a novel, but as an education, a museum, an archive, a cathedral, a gargantuan insistence on the Theory of Mistakes. Reading narrative fiction, after all, we always remain at a distance, merely suspending our disbelief as the plot unfolds within characters. But to read *The Yawning Heights* is to be educated by a text and absorbed into it. A text so directed neither displays nor argues: it attacks mental processes directly by unfolding within the reader's perceptions and obliging him to face his own easy compromises of self with "soc-ism" (the reverse of individualism). Again and again, the reader is made to follow sham thoughts—then to face them as his own, until he is forced to conclude that a proper society does not derive from its modern idols: mathematical models, historicism, symbolic logic, linguistic paradigms, philosophical idealism, poetic techniques, socio-mechanics, psychiatry, politics, or economics. From these may be deduced nothing more than a simulacrum of society, the masked ball from which all the other distortions of human existence are projected. Only that organization which is derived directly—and exclusively—from the individual's will and moral principles may be called a real society. Anything less offers merely a problem in control. Schizophrenic put the case very concisely:

> And then a special kind of society is brought into being, in which hypocrisy, oppression, corruption, waste, irresponsibility (individual and collective), shoddy work, boorishness, idleness, disinforma-

> tion, deceitfulness, drabness, bureaucratic privilege, all flourish. These societies betray a distorted evaluation of personality—nonentities are elevated to great heights, exceptional people are debased. The most moral citizens are subjected to persecution, the most talented and efficient are reduced to the lowest common denominator of mediocrity and muddle. It is not necessarily the authorities who achieve this. A person's own colleagues, friends, work-mates and neighbours bend all their efforts to deny a man of talent the possibility of developing his own individuality, or an industrious man the chance of advancement. All this takes on a universal character embracing every sphere of activity, and particularly the spheres of government and of creative activity. Society is threatened with being turned into a barracks. This threat determines the psychological state of the citizens. Boredom and anxiety prevail, and a constant fear of worse to come. A society of this kind is condemned to stagnation and to a chronic putrefaction if it cannot find within itself the strength to resist these tendencies.

A fashionable cliché in literary criticism since the middle of the nineteenth century holds that though society is degenerate, the writer and artist can lift us above social corruption through their postures of opposition to society. But while various artist-figures fill Zinoviev's book, he decisively repudiates this claim, being utterly clear about the fact that artists are always among the first to join the thoughtless social file. "Once Dauber said jokingly that there was only one rule in art: the higher placed the arse you licked, the better artist you were"; and in the end Bawler recognized that "there's nowhere you'll find as many degenerates as in the ranks of the Arts and Sciences." Yevtushenko and Voznesensky are excoriated; Neizvestny's defection is noted with sadness. Solzhenitsyn is labelled "Truth-teller" to stress the primacy in his vision of morals over aesthetics. Schizophrenic, Slanderer, and Chatterer write not to produce an artistic commodity fit for social consumption, but because their fossil individuality is obliged, from within, somehow to find expression. Even so, at last the book ends with them all destroyed—in a rubble of lost lives, lost hopes, lost visions.

And yet not lost, perhaps, not entirely lost. *The Yawning Heights* itself was published in France in 1976 and since then in several countries, causing a sensation wherever it has appeared. The episodes and ideas in it are like lava flows intruded through the softer earth and left to cool and harden just below the surface of the Shithouse swamp of soc-ism. Truth, after all, is a very hard substance. Chatterer, let us hope, was less right in his despair than in his original conviction that the words of Schizophrenic and his heirs would prevail. As he once told Dauber, though the spokesmen were eliminated, "the works themselves

were pillaged by everyone. And then their ideas spread. Today they're being chewed over in the most widely varying circles without anyone ever thinking where they came from." We must pay attention to Chatterer's hope equally with his despair.

Even my friend Tatjana, loyal Party member though she believed herself to be, had been infected by these ideas, as her Theory of Mistakes demonstrated. Everyone in the Soviet Union has a *doppelgänger* who knows the works of Schizophrenic by heart.

It hardly seems an overstatement to call *The Yawning Heights* the most important book of this decade. The job of the next decade will be to pillage it thoroughly and from its rocky truths to get some new foundations laid.

JAY MARTIN

TWO LIVES

CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD: A CRITICAL BIOGRAPHY. By Brian Finney. Faber & Faber.

THE 30s AND AFTER: POETRY, POLITICS, PEOPLE, 1930s-1970s. By Stephen Spender. Random House.

Christopher Isherwood's books are so autobiographical—it is many years since he gave up trying to be a novelist—that there seems no point in writing a life of him unless the biographer takes a radically different view of the material. And Brian Finney hardly does this, for, as he explains, he has had Isherwood's help and cooperation in preparing his book, and his approach throughout is entirely sympathetic to his subject. He occasionally corrects the facts, taking note of Isherwood's dictum that "the real truth to the writer is not the same as what actually happens to him. He only uses his experiences to create a myth which corresponds to his inner reality." Yet sometimes we feel that the biographer has not dug very deeply. Nor does he offer to supplement Isherwood by a fuller, or different, account of the other people in the story. The hero (or anti-hero?) remains the one distinctly outlined figure. But the book is clearly and unpretentiously written, and the critiques of Isherwood's work which intersperse it are intelli-

gent and often provoked me to reconsider books I had remembered as not worth rereading.

The account of the younger Isherwood is largely based on his recent *Kathleen and Frank* and *Christopher and his Kind,* together with the earlier *Lions and Shadows.* Here again, then, are Isherwood's school days; we breathe again the atmosphere of that strange upper-class hothouse. Here is the early friendship with Auden, the eccentric schoolmasters, the rebellion against the ethos of the public school (in the British sense, of course)—all grist to the mill of Cyril Connolly's "Theory of Permanent Adolescence." George Orwell, Connolly's fellow-Etonian, laughed at the Theory, but I must say that the rereading of Auden and Isherwood largely confirms it. Then there is Cambridge, Edward Upward, the campaign against the Poshocracy, the "Mortmere" game with its surrealistic fantasies, the famous "Test" (for strength and manhood). We are given the impression that the young Christopher was more a secret romantic about the "Test" than Upward. In the background to all this is the psychological struggle between Isherwood and his mother. He formed the belief that his "choice" of homosexuality was in some way a rebellion against her. Finney does not go into the general implications of this, but sociologists of protest might find it significant that Isherwood's revolt was against both the Christian and the military traditions of his family. The Church and the Army, male-dominated hierarchies, have been traditionally hostile to homosexuality, perhaps because it breaks down barriers of rank and status and so undermines discipline.

Isherwood began to emerge as a writer by discovering, through Upward, the possibilities in his adored E.M. Forster's "tea-table" technique—the deliberate playing down of the violent and spectacular element in Forster's stories. And there were other, more technically "modernist" influences in Isherwood's early novels. At the same time he renewed his association with Auden, now an arcane, cryptic poet under the influence of T.S. Eliot. His literary career began with the decision of Edward Garnett, an unrivalled talent-spotter, to advise Jonathan Cape to publish *All the Conspirators*—that odd period piece, Isherwood's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* "My Generation—right or wrong!" as he himself summarized it in 1958. His fiasco in the Tripos (final examination) at Cambridge was followed by his abandonment of his medical studies in London and departure for Berlin in 1929, his head full of the psychoanalytic theories of Homer Lane, got from a follower of Lane's, John Layard—Auden's "loony Layard." From now on the legend begins. By the end of the 1930s it was usual to

link Isherwood's name with Berlin. The idea got about that he had been "a beleaguered reporter" warning a deaf world of the dangers of Nazism. Auden and Spender did much to reinforce that view. Auden wrote in *The Orators*:

> And in cold Europe, in the middle of autumn destruction,
> Christopher stood, his face grown lined with wincing
> In front of ignorance—'Tell the English,' he shivered,
> 'Man is a spirit.'

This has been ridiculed by the later Isherwood in *Christopher and his Kind*. He went to Berlin, he says, because it "meant Boys"—it was a society in which homosexuality was publicly accepted. Whether or not this is really an adequate account of his reasons at the time, he was introduced to bar-boys by Auden, and a good deal of this biography is concerned with his affairs with them. Isherwood left Berlin in 1933 to spend some wandering years with the German boy Heinz. We have now come to the years of Auden's and Isherwood's collaboration on plays influenced by Brecht, and the contemporary *succès d'estime* of the Berlin stories; and so to the last years with Heinz, the break with Europe, and the journey to China with Auden to have a look at the Sino-Japanese war ("everyone" was going to Spain, said Auden; he and Christopher wanted a war of their own). This was followed by their final departure for America in January 1939. Later chapters deal with Isherwood in California, his submission to the influence of Heard-Huxley "mysticism" and Vedanta, the decline of his literary reputation, and the adverse reception of books like *The World in the Evening*. Finally, the third phase of Isherwood's career is surveyed, the musical and film treatments of his Berlin stories, his renunciation of quasi-autobiographical fiction for a more complete and frank kind of self-exposure. In line with the contemporary change in mores Isherwood now not only openly acknowledges his homosexuality but has become a militant propagandist for the homosexuals' cause.

Finney offers no general reevaluation of Isherwood's literary achievement, but it can be inferred from his particular discussions that he thinks more highly than many readers have done of the later books. He makes great claims especially for *A Single Man* as a study of middle age, praising its "detached narrative voice." Here at least, he seems to say, Isherwood has really grown up. *A Single Man* is indeed very readable and interesting, especially perhaps to the foreigner who has taught at an American university. But there is something ominous in the hero's complacency about his own "silliness." And in the end I am

not convinced of the wrongness of the view of Isherwood's literary career, widely current at least till recently, which sums it up as "Thirties: Failure: What Did You Expect?" On this view only the Berlin sketches and stories, together with *Lions and Shadows*, are likely to have permanent literary value. Finney does not, I think, distinguish sharply enough between documentary and literary interest. I suspect that a lasting interest in much of Isherwood's work can only be sustained by those who either have a personal sympathy for him, or are concerned with diagnosing some of the psychological and cultural aspects of the decline of the British ruling class. Much of his weaker work lapses embarrassingly into silliness, infantilism, and false simplicity, and seems to lack irony even of the defensive kind—what a contrast *Lions and Shadows* is, in this respect, with *Down There on a Visit*! And there is a suggestion of chronic immaturity in his habit of treating questions of serious general human interest wholly in terms of his opposition to his father and mother. His lack of any real power of invention is surely a great failing in a novelist. And the plays written with Auden seem today rather thin extravaganzas; even the best of them, *The Dog Beneath the Skin*, is too irresponsible to be taken seriously, while not funny enough to be good light entertainment.

But those of us who had a youthful enthusiasm for his work were not, I think, mistaken. Isherwood's gifts as a writer are real. His neat, spare style looks easy to do, but it is not, as many imitators have unintentionally shown. The famous "I am a camera" is of course misleading, since Isherwood had to choose where to turn his camera, and he turned it to Mr. Norris and Sally Bowles and the rest of them, all in their various ways cases of arrested development which fascinated him because, as he now recognizes, he was one himself. The social realism of his 30s stories is, then, very limited, and the political significance of the Berlin work has been exaggerated; its real center of interest is the author's equivocal attraction to "innocent" depravity, childlike selfishness, or psychopathic amorality. Isherwood himself has criticized these stories sharply. His youthful alter ego, the "young foreigner," is, he says, "The only genuine monster in them." But here he is too harsh. In the best pages of the Berlin stories the documentary and the literary interest are at one, because of the young Isherwood's extraordinary eye for significant detail and his inimitable comic touch. From his own admittedly specialized point of view he has given posterity an utterly convincing glimpse of the Weimar Republic in its death-throes. We remain grateful above all for *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*. It continues to deserve its place among the "modern classics."

Readers of *Lions and Shadows* will remember "Stephen Savage,"

"an immensely tall, shambling boy of nineteen, with a great scarlet poppy-face, and eyes the violent colour of bluebells." "Savage" (Stephen Spender) appears a good deal in the Finney biography as a sympathetic but not uncritical friend of Isherwood's. This new book of his consists of extracts from private journals and book reviews and other journalism, which he has revised and abridged, and stitched together with a retrospective commentary. We are by now familiar with Spender's view of the Red Thirties and his part in them. One good point he makes is that his set's absorption in "causes" at that time has always been common among European writers generally, though rare among British writers; and he sees his friends as successors to poets like Osbert Sitwell, Sassoon, Graves, and Owen, who, he observes, were all Socialists in 1918. He emphasizes that his group continued to admire the great "modernists," such as Eliot, Joyce, D.H. Lawrence or the later Yeats, though disagreeing with them politically; and it is relevant here to note his high estimate of Wyndham Lewis as a poet. And there are other things of historical value in the book. For example, his review of D.H. Lawrence's posthumous prose collection *Phoenix* is an implicit refutation of the Leavis view that Lawrence was despised or ignored by the young writers of the 1930s. And it is clear that in many ways he was a shrewd critic, even in his "Left" days. He despised the crude Stalinist propaganda of writers like Aragon. And, as also appears in the Finney book, he made acute criticisms of the Auden/Isherwood plays at the time, showing that his group was not just a mutual admiration society. The section on the thirties is perhaps the most interesting. Thereafter we are escorted on a tour of the forties, the war years, Spender's service as a fireman, the time when he was a "drinker of *Horizon*'s fluid line," and postwar Germany; then on to the fifties, the years of *The God that Failed* and *Encounter* and the row over its CIA involvement. In the sixties he is very much the elder statesman of literature, rather unenthusiastic about student revolt but genuinely seeking to understand it, willing to discuss his own early work with great frankness, offering respectful recollections of his friend Eliot and incisive memorial accounts of Cyril Connolly, MacNeice, and Auden. With their deaths, he says sadly, he feels himself to have entered the area of the posthumous. But happily it is clear that his mind is still lively and his sense of humour still keen.

Spender, like Isherwood, is primarily a restless autobiographer. He was not gifted by nature with Isherwood's terse and vivid style, and we soon tire of the trends and movements and ups and downs of literary politics which this book constantly presses on us. But despite all the awkwardness, an innate honesty and decency come through which

remind us of the early poems and *Trial of a Judge*, and make us respect Spender; together with, through all the decades and "periods," a persisting element of genuine idealism.

W.W. ROBSON

THE USES OF LANGUAGE

COMMUNICATION AND THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIETY. By Juergen Habermas. Beacon Press. $11.95.

Over the last fifteen years, Juergen Habermas's writings have earned him a secure place in the front ranks of European social thought. Building on the work of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, from Horkheimer to Adorno and Marcuse, his wide-ranging mind has managed to profit from encounters with an extraordinarily large number of thinkers in the continental but also the English-American tradition. He has attempted to arrive at a synthesis of Marx, Freud, Dilthey, Peirce, British linguistic philosophy, the hermeneutic tradition of Gadamer, and the genetic psychology of Piaget and Kohlberg.

Habermas sees his work as grounded in a tradition of critical enlightenment. Freudian psychoanalysis serves him as an example. He is not particularly interested in Freud's substantive theorizing, but believes that the Freudian approach yields most from it when it is conceived as a method to overcome "systematically distorted communication" through a critical dialogue between analyst and analysand. Both collaborate to arrive at a reconstruction that is free from distortion of the patient's life history. Only if and when this reconstruction has been consensually validated, when the patient has appropriated the undistorted view of himself that emerges from the dialogue, has enlightenment been reached.

Taking his cue from the structure of psychoanalytical therapy, Habermas then contends, more generally, that a great deal of current and past human misery and alienation has its roots in distorted communicative patterns. Hence, he argues in the first part of the present work, what is needed is the development of "universal pragmatics," able to identify and to reconstruct the universal conditions of

possible understanding between human actors. Undistorted truth between human actors can only be attained when not only language but also speech is purged of distorting elements so that fully communicative competence can be attained. The notion of communicative competence closely parallels Chomsky's notion of linguistic competence. But while Chomsky wants to explain the skills of each particular language user, Habermas is concerned with the skills that underlie the dialogical utterances of interacting speakers. As Norbert Hiener once put it (with much greater clarity than Habermas), "Speech is a joint game by the talker and listener, against the forces of confusion." Habermas assumes, counterfactually, an ideal speech situation in which complete understanding has been achieved, and uses this as a baseline against which barriers to communicative patterns can be measured. His is a consensus theory of truth which has, at the same time, a critical edge in as far as it rejects all elements, such as coercion and ideological distortion, which interfere in the rational pursuit of dialogical communication.

In later portions of this volume, Habermas supplements his theory of communicative distortions and their overcoming by borrowing from Piaget and his Harvard disciple Kohlberg a theory of the ontogenetic stages of moral development. Here he argues that the ability to make autonomous moral judgments, far from being "given," arises only in the last stage of a person's moral development which starts with an egocentric view, in the early years, and proceeds by several stages, through communicative interactions with others, to reach a flexible, autonomous and post-conventional maturity. Pushing beyond Piaget and Kohlberg, Habermas then proceeds to argue that a fully mature and autonomous ego development can only be attained in an emancipated society of the future that does away with blocked communications and distorted forms of human interaction.

The next two chapters of the work constitute an ambitious attempt to develop a novel theory of human evolution. This theory is meant to supplement historical materialism, but seems, in fact, largely to supplant it. Stressing parallels between individual (ontogenetic) development and the evolution of the human race, Habermas argues that Marxism, by putting undue emphasis on the development of productive forces and productive relations, has failed to take into account the evolutionary maturation of structures of thought and of norms of behavior. "I am convinced," he writes, "that normative structures do not simply follow the path of development of productive processes . . . but have an internal history." Though aware of the pitfalls that have attended previous attempts to draw parallels between individual and

social development, Habermas contends nevertheless that it is possible to find "homologous structures of consciousness" in the history of the individual and of the species. Social evolution is conceived as a learning process which involves both technical/cognitive and moral/practical aspects, the stages of which can be described structurally, and ordered in a developmental logic. To simplify: the human race on the road to emancipation follows roughly the stages that Piaget and Kohlberg describe for the individual.

In assessing Habermas's contribution as a whole, one is forced to comment on his extremely involved, turgid, and imprecise style. The elephantine heaviness of his presentation and the fogginess of his argumentation owe nothing to the great expository tradition of Marx, or of Heine and Nietzsche. Instead, this author, who puts such store in the emancipatory potential of language, is given to an academic jargon cultivated in the German academy which has shielded the arcana of the professoriat from the intrusive gaze of the vulgar. Habermas writes about enlightenment in a most unenlightening manner.

As to the substance of his thought, definitive judgments would be premature. Habermas has stressed that his present writings are only the first fruits of a much larger intellectual program for the future. Much of what he has to say seems at present less than persuasive. The parallels between ontogeny and phylogeny, for example, run counter to the findings of most specialized scholars in this area. Nevertheless, what makes Habermas so appealing is his continued attention to the "big questions" that most academics eschew in their quest for narrow, but fully documented, results. One can only wish that he might manage in the future to demolish the formidable linguistic barriers that he has erected between his discourse and his audience, so that he can contribute to that enlightenment he so ardently wishes to provide. In any case, nothing that he writes should go unattended. His is a significant voice that needs to be listened to, even if it sometimes seems to speak in riddles.

LEWIS COSER

OLD AND NEW CLASSES

THE FUTURE OF INTELLECTUALS AND THE RISE OF THE NEW CLASS. By Alvin W. Gouldner. Seabury Press. $8.95.

Nearly as old as the notion of the class struggle, the role of a New Class of intellectuals has been discussed by every self-respecting political thinker since Marx. Joseph Schumpeter, for instance, saw intellectuals as undermining the capitalist system, as adversaries, as staffers of political offices, speech writers, and newspeople; F.A. Hayek maintained that the move towards socialism was governed by intellectual leadership in corporate managers; and Milovan Djilas talked of party leaders and bureaucrats after a revolution as the New Ruling Class. Most New Class hypotheses about the West denied an impending class conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat, and those about the East proved that even the revolution cannot abolish classes. But currently, in America, some have used the term "New Class" as a catchall designation for neoconservatives, for former liberal and socialist thinkers such as Daniel Bell, Irving Kristol, Seymour Martin Lipset, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and Norman Podhoretz—most of whom not only theorize about the existence or nonexistence of this New Class but are also close to power.

In this company, Alvin Gouldner's *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class* represents a departure: he takes on all these theorists and also steps outside the fray to argue that the New Class is composed of two major segments—intellectuals and a technical intelligentsia—and that the radical components of their ideas, though badly flawed, eventually will revolutionize our society. Gouldner supports this position with sixteen closely reasoned theses, beginning with the defects in the Marxist scenario which forgot to account for the vanguard position of the peasants in Russia and China, for the revolutionary theorists in a revolution, and for the transition from the old state apparatus to a new and nonrepressive one. But Gouldner's "end of ideology" bypasses the ritual indictment of communism and the glorification of the status quo (however qualified), if only because he perceives technocratic consciousness and scientism as ideologies shared by both Marxists and their opponents. And he does not consider the New Left and the counterculturists of the late 1960s as a dangerous political force. Some of them, however, he argues, may belong to the Vanguard of the New Class, having become politically radicalized—

not through economic deprivation but through *political* suffering. They overcome alienation by doing political work, subverting conservative ideology, and mediating the radical political practices of the New Class.

In sweeping Hegelian fashion, Gouldner proceeds to show how the New Class in advanced industrial societies, where production increasingly depends on technical skills, at times is politically revolutionary yet constantly helps improve the mode of production (this enhances their importance); how it simultaneously accepts and resists subordination to the old moneyed class; how it pursues its own aggrandizement; and how it progressively arrogates more and more decisional, legal, and administrative competence to itself. Gouldner illustrates—in broad strokes—how some members of the New Class harass the old class, periodically ally themselves with the working masses or peasants, or use the "welfare" or "socialist" state strategically for their own ends. Arenas of controversy include issues of academic freedom, consumer rights, scientific management, unionization of civil service employees, honesty in government, ecology, nuclear energy, and many more. But this class does not seek struggle for its own sake: it is concerned with securing more of its own ideal and material interests with a minimum of effort.

Trained either in the enterprises controlled by the old class, or, increasingly, through specialized systems of public education, the New Class values autonomy and professionalism; its power and privilege are grounded in the individual control of special cultures, language, and techniques; and the New Class's fundamental objective is to increase its own share of the national product, so that it can afford to be egalitarian about old class capital (rent, stocks, profits, etc.), but antiegalitarian in its wish for special guild advantages based on the possession of cultural capital. Gouldner defines such capital as produced by the New Class, as knowledge rather than as "natural" raw material or even inborn talent; it is a "product of both human labor and culture whose income claims are socially enforceable and culturally recognized."

Inserted in many spheres of activities, Gouldner's New Class is linked through its speech, through its culture of careful and critical discourse (CCD) which suspects all authority, questions even its own methods, and provides a common ideology based on the importance of modes of justification, of expression, of impersonal speech. This discourse also serves as a bond between humanistic intellectuals and the technical intelligentsia. Versed in all the "two culture" arguments, Gouldner refutes opposing views: Shils, for instance, by postulating

several cultural sources for modern intellectuals as foundation is said to neglect the impress of their own status group, that is, of contemporary intellectual ideology; Parsons is alleged to revitalize the foundering of the old class by uniting it with the New Class and professionalizing it. And Chomsky, who, unlike Shils, is said to overemphasize the alienating disposition of intellectuals, overstresses their subservience to power. By perceiving even opposition to the system as an integrative mechanism, Gouldner questions whether this renders Chomsky's politics useless, or places him at the very Vanguard of the New Class.

It is impossible even to name all the issues Gouldner touches—on education and the reproduction and subversion of the New Class through education, on old line bureaucrats and new staff intelligentsia, on elitism, Maoism, Cuba, revolutionary intellectuals, Cambodia, Marx and Engels. Nor is it feasible to show how carefully he argues the cultural contradictions of both capitalism and communism. Since the capital of Gouldner's New Class is expertise—the most important commodity to improve economic production and political organization—in both capitalist and communist systems, all those who possess it can be thought, ultimately, to share power. And this, I believe, is precisely where definitions of the New Class, and of its location, and its potential for action, impinge on politics. If the neoconservatives alone are defined as the New Class, this would not only point to the fact that *they* are the intellectuals who wield political power, but would also disenfranchise critical or revolutionary thought. If, however, the New Class, as Gouldner maintains, encompasses all those who share a common language and culture, then the current neoconservatives' closeness to power would be incidental, a passing phenomenon. For the real issue underlying *all* the New Class theories is power.

Even though most of these theories now reject "traditional" Marxism, they accept the notion of the revolutionary Vanguard or at least the idea that intellectuals influence politics. Thus Daniel Bell's perception, for example, of the New Class as a new cultural stratum and attitude that lacks class unity, reaffirms his conservative biases and politics. And Andrew Hacker's focus on salaried managers who are part of a growing upper middle class of bit players rather than potential rulers, or Irving Louis Horowitz's rejection of class analysis in favor of a theory of privilege also play down the New Class's potential to induce radical change. Yet Gouldner might consider Michael Harrington's call to the New Class to participate in a new democratic Left as too ideological, though helpful to New Class radicalization. Grounded in the belief in the power of the words of Vanguard intellectuals, he is critical of all dogmatism.

Gouldner, too, rejects the possibility of a revolutionary struggle (his reformism has been coming for some time), declaring Marx the last of the Utopians instead of the first scientific Marxist. Inevitably, Marxists tend to lump him with the other defectors. But Gouldner, ever eager to perfect a theory of theories (his most recent book shows how each theory, and particularly Marxism, contains the seeds of its own destruction), is concerned with the Vanguard position of the theorists, and/or the maintenance of this position. Yet his conception of the New Class as dynamic, and as busily undermining the system which pushed it to the top, assumes that the growing numbers of educated and technically trained experts will mobilize against their increasing alienation; that they will organize around their lack of autonomy and their discontent, using their own progressive potential and ethics to supersede the old class. Gouldner "overcomes" utopian implications by maintaining the tension between the New Class's fight for goodness and morality for all, and its propensity to push the advantage of its own culture. Such an assumption, I think, expects critical discourse to remain strong enough to withstand political repression and cooptation. It also expects that the Vanguard will be of the Left rather than the Right—a notion Daniel Bell has recently attacked by showing that in the past right-leaning intellectuals frequently used to lead. In addition, Gouldner assumes that intellectuals and the technical intelligentsia have the potential eventually to act as a class—an assumption the Right dismisses as utopian and the Left as reformist. We would, of course, prefer his crystal ball to be more clairvoyant than Bell's. But whatever happens, he has worked out the most comprehensive and lucid theory to help us understand our very confused class structure.

EDITH KURZWEIL

REACHING

THE COLLECTED POEMS OF MURIEL RUKEYSER. McGraw-Hill. $17.50.

In a "Preface to the Reader," Muriel Rukeyser describes her *Collected Poems* as "a film strip of a life in poetry," rooted in

> two kinds of reaching . . . one based on the document, the evidence itself; the other kind informed by the unverifiable fact, as in sex, dream, the parts of life in which we dive deep and sometimes—with strength of expression and skill and luck—reach that place where things are shared and we all recognize the secrets.

That alternating quest characterizes the tensions between moral passion and personal concern that enliven all of her poems. Her work is documentary in the sense that it deals with half a century of national issues and world affairs: the Tennessee Valley Authority; the Gauley Bridge and industrial silicosis; the fall of Barcelona; World War II; Korea; Vietnam; and, in *The Gates* (1976), the poet's own journey to plead for the freedom of Kim Chi Ha, the Korean writer condemned to death for asserting his political beliefs. Her "documents" portray, as in "The Book of the Dead" (*U.S. 1*, 1938), the lives and manners of people affected by disaster, hearing their speech accurately, probing their intimate griefs.

In her earlier work she depicts American disasters with a flatness that approximates archival records. Occasionally she employs a tangled, associative tone, as in the "Elegies" of *A Turning Wind* (1939), when exploring the connection between private despair and the world's misery, or expressing her dismay at human suffering, as in "Who in One Lifetime" (1941). Antithetical to the poems that deal with public issues are the personal lyrics, such as "Song" (1944), and "Song, the Brain-Coral" (1939). The second poem begins:

> Lie still, be still, love, be thou not shaken,
> it is for me to be shaken,
> to bring tokens.
>
> Among the yellow light in the hot gardens,
> the thinned green light in the evening gardens,
> I speak of gladness.

The importance of Muriel Rukeyser's poetry, though, is not defined by her subject matter. Nor is it, as some critics have said, in her "feminine voice." It is in the struggle to preserve a vision of human integration in a life of fragmentation: Rukeyser affirms the splendor of all forms of life, as in "St. Roach" (1976), for example, where the speaker examines an insect:

> Today I touched one of you for the first time.
> You were startled, you ran, you fled away

> Fast as a dancer, light, strange and lovely to the touch.
> I reach, I touch, I begin to know you.

And in a major sequence, "Waterlily Fire" (1962), she builds an image of "the long body"—the physical being—as a ribbon of images, incorporating change.

> This journey is exploring us. Where the child stood
> An island in a river of crisis, now
> The bridges bind us in symbol, the sea
> Is a bond, the sky reaches into our bodies.
> We pray: we dive into each other's eyes.

Muriel Rukeyser writes of the gradual emergence of self through opposites, making original use of a tradition that recalls William Blake's perception that "Without Contraries is no Progression." It is reminiscent also of Walt Whitman's discovery of unity through contrasts ("I am of the old and the young . . . of the woman the same as of the man") and Melville's aesthetic of discordant parts, as expressed in his poem, "Art." Her conviction of personal wholeness has an organizing power, for it enables her to order modern experience by perceiving the linkages between people.

In the later poems, especially, Muriel Rukeyser has written forcefully about unity, fusing a natural, conversational style with a tone of vatic urgency. "Are You Born?" (1957) embodies a vision of nature as an organic part of the soul. And in "Breaking Open," the speaker contemplates enclosures we make for ourselves, considering real prisons for antiwar protestors as well as imaginary "prisons" we devise.

Rukeyser's poems do not fit easily into any stylistic mode, and have been criticized for their occasional lack of quickness and of grace. But this volume displays a tough-minded compassion that is never merely sentimental.

GRACE SCHULMAN

SUMMARIES AND EVIDENCE

NEW AND SELECTED POEMS. By Irving Feldman. Viking Press. $15.

SELECTED POEMS. By Donald Justice. Atheneum. $10.95.

SELECTED POEMS 1950-1975. By Thom Gunn. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $10.95.

UNCERTAINTIES AND REST. By Timothy Steele. Louisiana State University Press. $9.95.

THE VENETIAN VESPERS. By Anthony Hecht. Atheneum. $10.

What may originally have been a felt crisis or mere coincidence eventually became a literary convention—that an autobiography is undertaken when its author (Augustine or Rousseau, Gibbon or Newman) turns fifty. Among poets, it is a common practice at that age—and for reasons beyond the exigencies of personal vanity or a publisher's stock—to issue a *Selected Poems* as a kind of retrospective self-definition. Irving Feldman is now fifty-one, Donald Justice is fifty-four, Thom Gunn is fifty. Each has decided that he wants his new work seen less as an addition to than as an extension of his career, his literal lifework. And the very process of his selection is meant to impart a shape to the body of his work, to highlight and thereby confirm its dominant themes and recurring strategies, its stylistic changes and maturing temperament.

Irving Feldman is one of those poets whose work, because of its unevenness, benefits by selection. If he has not, in his *New and Selected Poems*, culled only his best, he has chosen an array of his strongest characteristic work. I hesitate to use the word "characteristic" precisely because most of the poems in Feldman's early books lacked any distinctive, consistent character. Or rather, each poem had its own, each recomposed the poet's style—now droll, now plaintive, now ceremonial, now querulous. With one hand he could write a straightforward poem—its subject clear, its details in order—and the result was dull. With the other he wrote a more difficult poem—its occasion and narrative suppressed, its momentum and often its meaning that of its voice alone—and the result was problematic, alternately exciting and exasperating. "I love dialectic and song," he said fifteen years ago in *The Pripet Marshes*; as often as not, that dialectic was one-sided or

unfocused, the song too nervous and guttural. But all along he was drawn to harsh incongruities, to the hapless, homely, suffering, or grotesque, to material that resists neat designs or pat conclusions. He dared to write, with a confessed inadequacy but with genuine power, of the Holocaust—as in "The Pripet Marshes," "To the Six Million," and the masterful "Beethoven's Bust." He wrote of immigrant plights and urban horrors, of suicides and God, of the unruly self—in short, of history itself, its tales and toll.

Feldman's last collection, *Leaping Clear* (1976), despite a few lapses, displayed at last the mature rhetorical control and eloquent invention necessary to articulate his wry or harrowing subjects, and revealed him as an accomplished, important artist. The eleven new poems he has added to those selected from the past confirm that impression and his stature. He remains primarily a celebratory poet, even when lamenting the heart's bafflement and duplicity, or the dead as our "emissaries to absence." In the extraordinary "Elegies," an ambitious eight-part meditation that embodies all of Feldman's philosophic poise and patient, shrewd humanity, he offers an account of art: "our tales are such late echoes of loss,/but a promise of recovery,/the deeper dream come back as the common place." I read that as a testament to his own poetry's ability to define what, in another poem, he calls "the human circle," in which the stories of the dead are given a living speech, in which both poet and reader are "revealed to the world of revelation." It is astonishing to see, in such work as this, what grandeur Feldman has by now achieved, and it is very gratifying to have this major collection by a major poet.

Donald Justice is an elusive poet, esteemed but not widely read, and it is a convenience to have so much of his work brought together in one volume: generous helpings from his first three books (many poems in slightly revised versions), and seventeen uncollected poems dating from 1948 to the present. Whatever the convenience, a new book by Justice is always likely to be a notable event; his output has been slight and infrequent, his work fastidious. In fact, as a poet he is that rarity—an artist at once deeply traditional and resolutely newfashioned. He sometimes writes (as in "Bus Stop") in an intentionally flat style, whose effects are predictable and tiresome. He also writes the trendy kind of expressionist poem—though he usually does it better than his peers or imitators—that heaps up portentous images with all the automatism of a school exercise. "Hands" starts this way:

> No longer do the hands know
> The happiness of pockets.

Sometimes they hang at the sides
Like the dead weights of a clock

Sometimes they clench into fists
Around the neck of anger.

But his richest work is in neither of those veins. As his *Selected Poems*' chronological rearrangement makes clear, he has been most successful when his dry, *raffiné* intelligence is in command. I admire those poems—like "Fragment: To a Mirror," "The Assassination," "Portraits of the Sixties," "Sonatina in Green," or his wonderful new pastoral memory-poem, "Childhood"—that indulge in metaphysical repartee, or in what Justice himself calls, with an apposite allusion to Wallace Stevens, "Mordancies of the armchair!" He is a poet of invention rather than of vision—the impetus for a poem often coming from, say, themes in a French poem, or the format of a sonnet or sestina, or some compositional gimmick. Still, the results have the fine authority—simultaneously unnerving and satisfying—of a canny poet working, if not at the heights of the art, then at least at the height of his powers.

For his *Selected Poems 1950–1975*, Thom Gunn has drawn from six previous books (his insubstantial 1966 collection *Positives* has been wisely excluded). Gunn has chosen sparingly; roughly half of his old work is here and, flouting a current custom, he has added nothing new. Evidently he was determined to represent himself by his most "serious" and composed work. Gone, fortunately, are most of his early starter-poems, and those wilder, later poems set in leather bars or set up by LSD. Gone too, unfortunately, are some of his more interesting recent long poems, such as "The Geysers" and the title poem from his best book *Jack Straw's Castle* (1976). As a result his talent and achievement seem even more modest than they are. To say that Gunn began as and remains a minor poet is not to denigrate his craftsmanship, which is always alluring and sometimes arresting, nor to deny that he has written a handful of superb poems—among them, the Audenesque "In Praise of Cities," "Misanthropos," "Moly," and "For Signs." His poems are each a clean, well-lighted place; they value and strive for lucidity of conception and integrity of sentiment. What they lack is any sustained, even unwieldy ambition; there is never very much urgency or wit, beauty or surprise.

Gunn has always been an anomaly since moving here from England a quarter-century ago. In many ways he has been a deliberate outsider in this country of willful, swaggering poetic presences. He has

been cautious, precise, diffident. He never lets mere personality overwhelm a poem's patient care, nor do the strictures of his verse undermine its dramatic appeal. Rather like Chekhov or Frost, he has taken up ordinary, unpromising material—a sleeping lover, a dog out for a walk—and tried to describe it freshly, or has reimagined some mythological event. Over the years, his voice has put on weight, his verse become more free. But the poems themselves have not changed much. They will always—*should* always—be admired, not by a very large audience but by those who care for what Gunn himself calls the "dark exactitude that light delivered."

Those poets who have persisted in Yvor Winters's discipline and prejudices have produced a poetry that seems to me pinched and crabbed, neither heartfelt nor mindful of the expressive and emotive extremes poetry can deftly accommodate. But Timothy Steele's first book *Uncertainties and Rest* should not pass by unnoticed merely because he resumes a Wintersian mode. True, his prosody is traditional and strict, but it is deployed in an entirely engaging, convincing manner. And yes, the kind of poetry he now writes is neither ambitious nor pretentious; it has its limitations, but its advantage lies in knowing what they are. His book fairly sparkles with its acknowledged predilections and its own bright promise. It has given me, in short, more pleasure than any other first book I have read this year. It comes equipped with all the modern conveniences—cocaine and Chardonnay, jeans and jogging, even a neighborhood deli—but they are in service to something more than its altogether smart surfaces, more even than its common nostalgias and uncommon ideas. Whether, in his guise of detached, lonely observer, he is writing thoughtful poems that contemplate the possible joys of abandoning thought (as he does in "Rural Colloquy with a Painter" and "For My Mother"), or drawing on deep reserves of sense and sensibility (as he does in his bravura "Three Notes Toward Definitions"), the emphasis throughout is on a clear-eyed estimate of the contemporary intelligence at odds now with itself, now with everything else. Steele's book also includes a waggish series of epigrams in the manner of J.V. Cunningham—a stinging manner one might have thought it impossible to emulate. This example is called "Reading Habits":

> A devotee of Sylvia Plath,
> She had a mildly chilling laugh.
> I offered her Donne, Ralegh, Martial,
> But she declined them, being partial

To "modern life"—surrealist dreams,
The existential at extremes,
Group sex and its well-planned disasters.
I wound up with Johnson's Masters.

There are only a half-dozen poets writing today with the technical prowess, moral intelligence, and exuberant gravity of Dr. Johnson's masters. Anthony Hecht is one of them. Much of his new book started elsewhere, and he has made his own—a brace of caustic imitations of Horace, one of Ronsard, and two padded but affecting translations from the Russian of Joseph Brodsky. There are ten original poems as well, four of some length. The shorter poems show off Hecht's celebrated ability to move through a network of images and abstract ideas—whether exotic or familiar—by means of nimbly rhymed, occasionally very intricate stanzas, each an added shade of feeling or feat of association. But longer poems have always elicited—in these new instances, in a cultivated but pulsing blank verse—his most intriguing and commanding work. The four in this book all, in one way or another, conform to a model established earlier by Hecht, from "A Hill" in *The Hard Hours* (1967) to "Apprehensions" in *Millions of Strange Shadows* (1977). Each turns on an unexpected but sad or even grotesque epiphany, some dark transformation scene during which is revealed the world's horror or the speaker's dread. In "The Grapes," for instance, a no longer young chambermaid in a two-star French resort hotel, leafing through an old glossy magazine and daydreaming about a bellboy who has taken no notice of her, suddenly sees her future in a crystal bowl of grapes: "And I seemed to know/In my blood the meaning of sidereal time/And know my little life had crested./There was nothing left for me now, nothing but years." Nothing but tears, she might have said, since time has stopped for her, fixed in memories of old images. That is the case, too, with the forlorn protagonist of "The Short End," an overweight, alcoholic, empty-headed housewife who wears double knits and sits alone in a conversation pit. The harshness of Hecht's Swiftian satire nearly overwhelms the care and concern of his character study. So too, when the impact of his poems depends on raw sensationalism, on sheer pity and terror—as "The Deodand" does—then I find them less sympathetic and illuminating than merely lacerating.

"The Short End," though, also reminds one of Hecht's capacity for the irrational or demonic as both subject and effect—a capacity usually unacknowledged by his critics, who prefer to praise (or not) his

polish and equanimity. After several disconcerting episodes, the poem rises to an eerie, gripping hallucination. The reader is left unnerved, without knowing quite how or why. Just the reverse is true of the long (809 lines) title poem, also episodic but built to a resonant, plangent finale. The speaker is a retired American failure, living out his days in Venice ("The world's most louche and artificial city") and indulging a series of voluntary memories—the deaths of his parents, of a fellow soldier—that keep returning him to the "wilderness/Natural but alien and unpitying" that is his personal history. Set against that are the city's own past history and present blandishments. Like many other Hecht poems, this is a poem about survival, the unwitting, even unwanted survival of those spots of time that constitute the self. It is also a poem—more keen and magnanimous than any Hecht has written before—about salvation and paradise, the lost paradise that Proust says is the only true one. Like Proust, Hecht—or rather, his speaker of whom we grow so fond—searches for it in art itself, in the dome of St. Mark's or the furnaces of Murano. And finds it finally in himself, in the primary artistic act of attention—as when he contemplates the clouds out his window:

> Great stadiums, grandstands and amphitheaters,
> The tufted, opulent litters of the gods
> They seem; or laundered bunting, well-dressed wigs,
> Harvests of milk-white, Chinese peonies
> That visibly rebuke our stinginess.
> For all their ghostly presences, they take on
> A colorful nobility at evening.
> Off to the east the sky begins to turn
> Lilac so pale it seems a mood of gray,
> Gradually, like the death of virtuous men.
> Streaks of electrum richly underline
> The slow, flat-bottomed hulls, those floated lobes
> Between which quills and spokes of light fan out
> Into carnelian reds and nectarines,
> Nearing a citron brilliance at the center,
> The searing furnace of the glory hole
> That fires and fuses clouds of muscatel
> With pencilings of gold. I look and look,
> As though I could be saved simply by looking. . . .

The description having saved the moment, it saves—or so we deem it should—the man. And to have drawn us into that redeeming enterprise, as Hecht has so intimately, is only permitted the finest artist.

J.D. McCLATCHY

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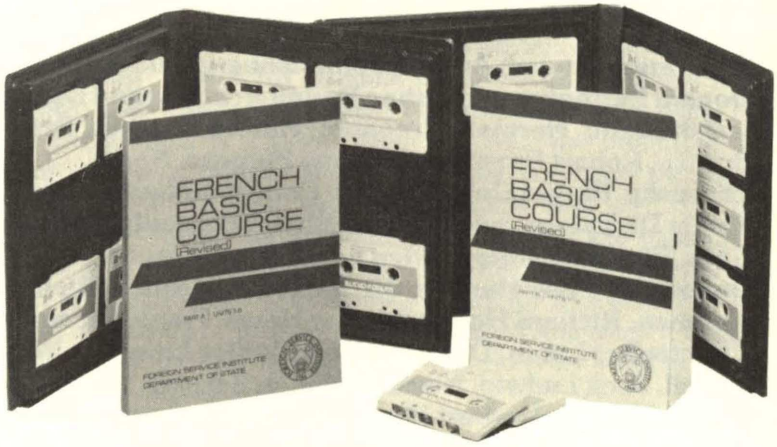

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a friend and valued contributor.

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