

it was not confused with other questions. This separation was made by the American people themselves, in particular, in the mid-term elections in 1970; and, if Richard Nixon, in his immediate talk after his victory of ending the "era of permissiveness", tries to confuse the issue again, the American people are likely to pull him back into line. One would like to think that the supporters of George McGovern will now gaze with some humility at the ordinary people around them, on the institutions which they are willing to support and the leaders whom they are willing to follow, in spite of every disappointment. One hopes that they will learn that to contain one's disappointment is not always or

necessarily an abandonment of one's hopes.

IN A POEM which he must wish us to remember, since he includes it in one of his recordings, W. H. Auden talks of "our dear old bag of a democracy. . . ." That is about it: that is the tale which we have to tell of the modest little democracies of which we have no very transcendental boast to make. In fact, the whole of the poem—the Vespers in his "Canonical Hours"—might be a disputation with the supporters of George McGovern, telling them why we know they are necessary, but why we also fear them. "*O, Delegate Unseen*": what Auden could make of that!

### Sporting Occasion, Korea

In a flat freezing landscape, the wind cutting their faces,  
It was good to reach homely Northumberland voices  
And lorries that howled in the lorry park warming up.  
Newcastle United had reached the Final of the Cup  
And Brigade was flying two men, briefly, home.  
A corporal tuning a Bedford listened and shouted a name  
Who came out wiping his hands from the Spare Parts tent  
To be rightly unimpressed by this army stunt.  
The other was already dead.

#### Reluctant

To leave the bare clay field, the warm engine noises  
And, so far from home, the rooted, sceptical voices,  
The messenger walked about in his brother's old officer's coat,  
The wind flattening feathers in his Irish officer's hat.

In a far corner, in a bombed-out hut  
Among broken bricks in the wind a young woman sat  
With her breasts pulled out of her clothes nursing a child.  
She made an animal noise, she half-whimpered, half-growled.  
These were the first bare breasts he had seen  
In his life possibly, close to. He was about nineteen.  
Stopped by the sight, in his thick coat, he half stepped in.  
She scuttled away on her heels, in her throat  
Making that noise. He stepped quickly out.  
Later he lost the coat when shot through it  
And later he lost the brother. Still remembers when he'd rather not,  
Pausing, before going on, to look at a titty:  
Feeling lust, embarrassment and, afterwards, pity.

*P. J. Kavanagh*

Melvin J. Lasky

## The English Ideology (II)

*"Filled with enthusiasm, in very early youth, by the promise of a better order of society, I most unwarily ventured on publication, when my judgment and taste were equally immature. . . . The revolution continued so much to occupy my thoughts, that I could not help consistently exercising my judgment on it. I could not forget it, nor shut my eyes on its events. . . .*

*"My changes were slow, and were still more slowly avowed. . . . Like most other men, I was not very fond of owning that I had been mistaken, or of contradicting the opinion of those with whom I lived, or of adopting any part of the doctrines of those whom I had been accustomed to oppose. . . . I often reproached myself for being prevented from speaking, as I thought, by false honour and false shame. I sometimes lamented the peculiarities of my condition which seemed to make concealment a virtue. . . .*

*"I can easily see that I rebounded from my original opinions too far towards the opposite extreme. I was carried too far by anxiety to atone for my former errors. In opposing revolutionary principles, the natural heat of controversy led to excess. . . .*

*"I therefore take it upon me to rejudge my past judgments."*

SIR JAMES MACKINTOSH (1804)

### 5. On the Stage of History

IF THERE IS A NOTE of the melodramatic in such political conceptions, it is (as I have had occasion earlier to suggest) a consequence of the very theatricality which metaphor necessarily introduces into the forms of intellectual life. As fine phrases may be taken to act out a meaning, so do political rhetoricians appear to be performing on a special stage with lighting and sound-effects that contrast dramatically with the play of events in ordinary relationships and discourse. So far as the theatre of revolution is concerned, the English sensed it in the French, and the French sensed it in themselves. The perceptive remarks of Samuel Romilly, who after the first

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly* (1840), vol. I, pp. 106-7.

exciting events of 1789 "could not resist the desire of being a near spectator of them", may be offered as representative of that dawning suspicion which overtakes the civic temperament when confronted with the ambiguous realities of a revolutionary romance.

Romilly went to Paris with a letter to Necker; he made the acquaintance of Mirabeau, the Abbé de Sieyès, and the Bishop of Chartres; he heard Robespierre ("but he was then so obscure, and spoke with so little talent or success, that I have not the least recollection of his person"). His shrewd and incisive summing-up of his impression of that season when it was bliss to be alive is worth quoting, and not least because it reminds us that Tocqueville's and Flaubert's later development of this theme was not simply an exercise in national self-criticism.

What struck me as most remarkable in the dispositions of the people that I saw, was the great desire that everybody had to act a great part, and the jealousy which in consequence of this was entertained of those who were really eminent. It seemed as if all persons from the highest to the lowest, whether deputies themselves, declaimers in the Palais Royal, orators in the coffee-houses, spectators in the galleries or the populace about the door, looked upon themselves individually as of great consequence in the revolution. The man who kept the hotel at which I lodged at Paris, a certain M. Villars, was a private in the National Guard. Upon my returning home on the day of the benediction of their colours at Notre Dame, and telling him that I had been present at the ceremony, he said, "You saw me, Sir?" I was obliged to say that I really had not. He said, "Is that possible, Sir? You did not see me! Why I was in one of the first ranks—all Paris saw me." I have often since thought of my host's childish vanity. What he spoke was felt by thousands. The most important transactions were as nothing, but as they had relation to the figure which each little self-conceited hero acted in them. To attract the attention of all Paris, or of all France, was often the motive of conduct in matters which were attended with most momentous consequences.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps this touches, in the theatre of revolution, on only one small aspect of a walk-on role, a minor English glimpse of a French extra. But even Bertrand Barère, once chairman of the Revolution's Committee of Public Safety, professed himself (at least in his recollections) to