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Moods of Creation

TO one general class of writers of the prose we loosely characterize as fiction, the important thing is the transcription of life itself, the noting of its actual humors and ironies "just as they are, without one plea." These are those to whom the daily succession of incident, the daily evidence of their eyes and ears is absorbing enough in contemplation without necessitating recourse to imaginings of another world. The real, material world, with its mixture of pain and happiness, of loathsomeness and beauty, is a constant spur to their curiosity and gadfly to their progress through ream on ream of copy paper. We speak of such writers as "creators." But are they really creators? Are they not rather, at their best, sublime recorders? Have not our terms become a little twisted? For we do not regard as nearly so creative the second large class of tale-tellers whose vision of the real world is seen through colored glasses of a childish fancy. A defence might hereby be concocted for our "unreal" novelists, our masters and mistresses of the happy ending, our marionette-managers, our golden-glow and purple-patch experts. They, truly, create—not life as it is, but life as it might be if every honest working girl were a Cinderella and every Western lad a nature's nobleman in bronze. Yet we do not intend to concoct that defence!

These two types of writers deal with life. There is a third class that deliberately adventures into fantasy, into the veiled satiric parable or the rainbow parabola for the mere fun of the thing, those to whom writing is a spectacle to be enjoyed for itself, for the dance of the colors of words, the glitter of witty phrase, the imagining of many things that "might be" (for the sheer fun of the thing, and with the perfectly sane realization that such things never were and never will come to pass.) With these deliberate fantasists we have no concern in this musing. We confine ourselves to the two other types of "creators."

One could easily drift into metaphysics over the question. For the evidence of the splendor, of the gloom, of human life strikes very differently upon the eye and ear of any two chosen observers. And into all recording of life's evidence creeps another element, the particular mental and spiritual state of the recorder. The most truthfully compounded stories, of which we say, "Here is human life, here are real people, here is the scene and here are the characters presented 'convincingly,'—here is a perfectly recognizable coil of circumstance with a verifiable progress and conclusion of incident,"—yes, the very stories for which we make these claims reveal an unaccountable admixture of—something—in their fullest analysis. This "something" is the creative force of the writer, the quality of his or her interpretation, the colour of his or her spirit. Not even the most detached author can escape conveying this.

In such quality, then, must reside "creation." Creation is in the style and treatment, in the selection and arrangement of incident, in all the phrases of characterization. And it is wrought of the author's ardent sincerity. This is literary creation in its finest sense,—and it shows itself also in the use of intuition and imagination concerning people who must be composites of many real people the author has closely observed, concerning happenings

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The Pioneer

By EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

UPON this marble bust that is not I
Lay the round, formal wreath that is not
fame;

But in the forum of my silenced cry
Root ye the living tree whose sap is flame.
I, that was fierce and valiant, am no more,—
Save as a dream that wanders wide and late,
Save as a wind that rattles the stout door,
Troubling the ashes in the sheltered grate.

The stone will perish: I shall be twice dust.
Only my standard on a taken hill
Can cheat the mildew and the red-brown rust
And make immortal my adventurous will.
Even now the silk is tugging at the staff;
Take up the song,—forget the epitaph.

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Modern English Literature

By JOHN MIDDLETON MURRY

IN this matter of literature, as in most others, classification by centuries is arbitrary. If the end of a century coincides with the end of a literary movement, and the beginning of a century with the beginning of a new one, it is by accident. The accident happened at the end of the eighteenth century, when the "Age of Reason" in English literature finally began to give way before the upsurge of English Romanticism in Scott and the Lake Poets. But at the end of the nineteenth century, things did not arrange themselves so neatly.

The main division of which we are conscious is that between English literature after the war, and English literature before it. Up to 1914 the slow evolution seems, in retrospect, to have been steady: suddenly we are faced with a gap in the process. By using such language, we exaggerate; but exaggeration is inevitable in the effort to give definite shape to an essence so elusive as the characteristics of a literature. And the fact is that as we try to describe modern English literature, we find we are dealing not with one thing but two—literature before the war, and literature after it. But that division is complicated by the fact that pre-war literature did not cease when the European war began.

For the seven writers who began definitely to "arrive" at the beginning of the twentieth century—Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, J. M. Barrie, Arnold Bennett, Joseph Conrad, and John Galsworthy—all men of about sixty years of age—are still a constellation apart. No younger writers are generally acknowledged to have joined their ranks. Some of the younger writers are popular and successful enough, more popular and successful perhaps than their seniors; but not one of them has attained a position of recognized equality with these older men. There is a gulf between the men of sixty and the men of forty.

The gulf is the European war. The seven established writers whom I have named possess in common a characteristic which has been scared out of the younger men. They are confident. They believe (or cannot disbelieve) in that prosperous society of England from 1890-1900 in which their young manhood was passed. However critical of established conventions their work may be, it is based upon a solid foundation of social acceptance. Shaw and Wells and Galsworthy, for example, believe that a change in the mechanism of modern society is sufficient to secure the millennium; Kipling's creed is romantic Imperialism—the mission of the Englishman to colonize the world; Barrie is the apologist for the more sentimental Victorian conventions, about which he skilfully casts a veil of glamour and romance; Bennett is the laureate of modern industrialism, who proves to his own satisfaction and the reader's enjoyment that great hotels and the life *de luxe* of industrial plutocracy are really highly desirable things; while Conrad, who was a Pole by birth, had all a foreigner's romantic admiration for the great tradition of the English sea-service.

What was, and still is, common to all these writers—save Conrad, who lately died—is a fundamental optimism. They may not go on to lengths of Dr. Pangloss in holding that "all is for the best, in the best of all possible worlds," for three of

them—Shaw, Wells, and Galsworthy—are professed reformers; but they do believe that the best is not far off. Nothing, certainly, is radically wrong in the scheme of things: a few generations more, a little more common-sense in the organization of life, and the conditions of human existence will be perfect. While Barrie and Kipling and Bennett are not far from believing that things are well-nigh perfect as they are.

In this they differ most strikingly from the one writer remaining of the generation before them—Thomas Hardy. Thomas Hardy was born and lived remote from the centres of high industrial civilization. He was unaffected by that curious, almost galvanic fervor, with which the dweller in a great city is infected. He was not distracted by the clamor of commerce, the whirr of machinery, or the multiplicity of mere invention, from regarding the substance of life; and from his saturation in the unchanging life of the English peasantry he had come to feel that life was too big, too formidable, and too inscrutable to be easily shaped according to man's purposes. The idea that the millennium might come the day after tomorrow was fantastic to one who, within the narrow circle of his experience, had intensely regarded human destinies. Guided by some sure instinct Hardy turned away from the all-comprehending and intoxicating vistas of a world united in pursuit of progress which a high industrial civilization seemed to offer, to the contemplation of a small part of life which he really knew. He did not concern himself with empires, like Kipling, or with universes, like Wells; but with a few square miles of the English west country. What his chosen scene lacked in mere superficiality, it gained a thousandfold in intensity. With the instinctive conviction that human life was essentially much the same in all its parts, Hardy surrendered himself to the task of knowing to the uttermost what lay to his hand and revealing what he learned. He did not gain much comfort from his study, save the one great reward of having served the truth. Having found no cause for overweening confidence, but rather some for dismay, he said so plainly, and was called a "pessimist" for his pains.

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Thereby he became unpopular, since his final and most outspoken word as a novelist was uttered at the beginning of the ten years, 1890-1900, in which English optimism and self-confidence reached an extreme. The English public turned away from him to a rising generation of writers more in harmony with its mood; it did not mind being joked at by Shaw, or preached at by Wells, because it knew that Wells and Shaw and itself were in fundamental agreement with itself on the cardinal point: that life, in the high mechanical perfection it had reached by the end of the nineteenth century, was a thing to be confident about. The edifice might need a little alteration here and there, but the alterations necessary would be in the spirit of the thing—a few extra machines and a few extra liberties—and, on the whole, it was a famous affair.

And, for the fifteen years or so between the beginning of the twentieth century and the outbreak of the war, that was the general opinion. The blatant excess of self-confidence which reached its apogee at the time of the South African war, when Kipling (in his most unchastened mood) was the sole spokesman of the nation, had been mitigated. It was not quite so easy as all that to run the universe. There had to be a certain modesty; some minor improvements were doubtless necessary; and the nation gave a half-serious, half-amused, but altogether sympathetic attention to the writers I have named, who in their various fashions assured it that, with the various improvements they suggested, life would be nearly all that could be desired. Ultimate problems of life and death of the kind that Thomas Hardy had raised disappeared from our literature; it was concentrated upon secondary problems—the "sex question," marriage reform, medical reform, penal reform—all excellent things, no doubt, but things having this shortcoming, that they might all have been secured tomorrow, without preventing the catastrophe or adding a grain of strength to man's power of resisting it.

The catastrophe was the war. Under its compelling influence, the writers who had superseded Thomas Hardy in the general esteem began to appear as tinged with insignificance beside him. He had dug his foundations deeper than they; he had built upon real bed-rock. Whereas they began to "date," he began to emerge as dateless, and to oc-

cupy his now unchallenged and unchallengeable position as the greatest of modern English writers. Therefore, though the greater part of his work—his novels—belong to the nineteenth century, he inevitably occupies the chief position in a consideration of the characteristics of English literature of the twentieth century. For he alone, of English writers living and famous in 1914, was adequate to that scrutiny of life which the war thrust upon the nation at large.

I would not imply that the experience of the war left the middle generation of writers undisturbed; they were disturbed—Wells was profoundly disturbed in "Mr. Britling"—but their attitudes to life were formed. They could not change essentially. Wells became a chief propagandist for the League of Nations—another mechanical improvement to prevent another conflagration: and when that phase was over, he turned to more education. Of them all perhaps Shaw was most deeply changed. His evolution from the nihilism of "Heartbreak House," through the merely scientific meliorism of "Back to Methuselah," to the religious mysticism of "Saint Joan," is significant enough. But even Shaw has not been able to transcend his own limitations: "Saint Joan" is rather an intellectualist's admission of the necessity of mysticism, than the active promulgation of a felt necessity.

For the youngest generation these comparatively superficial solutions were impossible. Its members themselves were involved in the war. If they themselves had the luck not to die, their brothers did. From the very beginning they had to face ultimate questions. That whole civilization which had been taken for granted by their elders was to them an object of suspicion and a cause of despair. A civilization which could culminate in the European war seemed to them by the very fact utterly condemned. The criticism of their elders appeared shallow, and the doctrine of amelioration by mechanical change illusory. They did not become revolutionary, for revolution seemed to them as futile as war itself. They became nihilists; they touched the bottom of an abyss of despair. They found but one contemporary hero. He was Thomas Hardy.

It is not easy to create out of despair. The most facile of the younger writers turned to a cynical hedonism which, though familiar enough out of England, was novel in English literature; and this cynicism proved to be the manifestation of the post-war attitude most popular with the general public, to whose war-weary nonchalance it makes the same appeal as the night club or jazz music. But even by the general public itself this literature of cynicism is felt to be somehow unworthy; no one would dream of mentioning its successful practitioners in the same breath as the older writers.

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The real literary effort of the younger writers is more arduous. They are struggling to create for themselves a basis for creation—a philosophy of life by which they may live; they are trying to discover for themselves a justification of their own activity. Such was the effort of the most exquisite artist among them, the late Katherine Mansfield, whose death two years ago deprived England of her only short-story writer of genius since Kipling. No one was plunged deeper into despair than she: no one more evidently won a victory over it: she succeeded in justifying her exquisite art to herself only by transforming it into the utterance of a complete acceptance of human destiny. Mr. D. H. Lawrence, the most greatly gifted of all the younger English novelists, is less balanced and restrained, but his impassioned criticism of the sham idealism which contaminates English life and his advocacy of a return to the instincts, is at least adequate to the distress of his generation. He seeks to overcome a profound despair by a search for the profound springs of life.

One could multiply examples of this radical self-questioning; but the point is that the whole impulse of modern English literature is intensely critical, to such a point indeed that at the present time literary criticism, in so far as it is not merely day-to-day journalism, is an integral part of creative literature. The perennial academic question: What is the function of art? has suddenly taken on an almost agonized actuality. Among all the more serious of the younger writers the two incessant questions are: Why live? Why write? and all their energies are intent upon finding some answer to them. So long as this effort at criticism remains purely intellectual, a cynical pessimism is its inevitable conclusion, and the function of the writer is fixed as one of mere

amusement. That phase is the most obvious in contemporary English literature, and the one which would be most evident to the superficial observer. But the more important younger writers are precisely those who know that their attitude cannot be purely intellectual because their activity itself is not purely intellectual. Certain things have to be accepted as beyond the scrutiny of the intellect; chief among these is life itself. And by life I mean not merely the vast complex of human destinies, but also the vital urge within the individual himself. The system or the society of which the individual is a member is profoundly mistrusted; to it belongs the blame of the catastrophe of the war. But the individual himself remains. He cannot trust the system; he must trust himself. So that the great critical problem with which modern English literature is trying to grapple is two-fold. Is there a meaning in life? Is there a meaning in a man's share of it? Is there in the universe at large a general process man may trust? Has he a self which he can trust?

Such a search tends to become mystical or religious; and certainly mysticism or religion play a far greater part than appears at first sight in the thought of modern English writers. Even the older generation is by no means immune, as we have seen in the case of Mr. Bernard Shaw. But the younger generation is less intellectual and less tangible than Mr. Shaw, and it would be extremely shy of appearing under so definite and even sectarian a banner as that of Mr. Shaw's "Saint Joan." It mistrusts the old religious formulations quite as deeply as the old social commonplaces; its religion is most closely allied to the religion of the great individualists—something which is by nature inexpressible and can certainly not be fully expressed in creeds and theologies. It is along this path that the effort of the younger generation in literature seems likely to reach a culmination of permanent value.

Two Dublin Plays

TWO PLAYS. By SEAN O'CASEY. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1925. \$2.25.

Reviewed by JOSEPH CAMPBELL

AN American friend who was recently in Dublin made the remark to me: "Your capital, you know, is an eighteenth-century city, and many of its modern social problems must be approached from that angle." "How do you mean?" I asked. "I mean that the actual physical fabric of the city has served its purpose. It is outworn. Public buildings, rich houses, tenements are alike in this; a sort of psychic evil—it's worse than inertia—exudes from the walls."

The eyes of a stranger are sharp: I confess I never saw the city quite in that way before.

The past, of course, dominates Ireland; but in no country in the world have the people such a persistent vitality, such sheer animal youthfulness. One has only to meet them in a place where mixed nationals resort to see the truth of what I write. On a west-bound Atlantic liner, for instance, the deck where the reels and jigs are danced is the sun-deck of the ship, and dark-browed Italians, phlegmatic Germans, and querulous Poles will gather round to watch and applaud. Dublin's educated classes are wittily charming. Dublin's poor folk are cheerful in the face of a political history and of economic conditions that would make of any other slum-dwellers a race of morons and suicides.

The action of these Two Plays is almost contemporary. "Juno and the Paycock" is dated 1922, "The Shadow of a Gunman," 1920; but in each case the setting is a Dublin tenement—antique, once splendid, the town-house, perhaps, of some buck of the wig and silk stocking period, but now squalid and tottering. Things are so bad, that it would appear difficult to make any improvement in such places, short of demolition. Both plays are labelled tragedies; rather are they ironic comedies. The fact that they mirror poverty, and poverty seen at its drabest in war, does not prevent them from being funny to the point of caricature. Hogarth might have written them, had he been a dramatist. The word tragedy, in the Aristotelian sense, implies something that cleanses through pity and terror. Shock—a thorough shaking out of my equanimity—was the vibration I got from reading the plays; Abbey Theater audiences have, I understand, laughed at them as they would at a farce of Lady Gregory's.

The plots are so immaterial, as to make one won-