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## In Memory of T. E. Hulme

(September 16, 1883—September 28, 1917)

By MONTGOMERY BELGION

IT is approximately the tenth anniversary of the death of Captain Thomas Ernest Hulme, Royal Garrison Artillery, who was blown to pieces near Nieuport on the coast of Belgium on September 28, 1917. I want to seize the occasion of this anniversary to say by way of a sort of tribute to Hulme's memory a few words about the intellectualist movement in England of which he—who, as a civilian, was a philosopher and a critic of art and society—was the pioneer. There is the more reason for doing so that in the decade which has elapsed since Hulme was killed this movement has attained to considerable importance. It is the movement which is now directed, on the one hand, by the American, Mr. T. S. Eliot, and his disciples, Mr. Herbert Read, Mr. F. S. Flint, Mr. W. A. Thorpe, and so on, and, on the other hand, by Mr. Wyndham Lewis. Most competent English people would agree that it is the outstanding movement in England, and as to its ambitions, it aims at no less than dispelling "the fever and delirium" of the age. Yet little seems to be written or talked about it in this country.

That is curious, because there was something in Hulme which should particularly interest Americans. He was so emphatically anti-American. I do not mean that he condemned everything American *qua* American, nor that he was prone to those cheap sneers about America in which just now many smart English book-reviewers are wont to indulge. America is not mentioned in his writings so far as I know, and I doubt if it ever cropped up in his profuse talk. I mean that Hulme's attitude to life was the direct antithesis of the attitude which may be termed Americanism.

But what is Americanism? One gets, I think, an excellent notion from these words attributed to William James: "Our nation has been founded upon what we might call the American religion, has been baptized in the faith that a man needs no master to take care of him, and that ordinary men are very well able to take care of their own salvation by their own efforts." Americanism, in fact, goes further than Protagoras. Protagoras said that "man is the measure of all things." Americanism holds that *each* man is the measure of all things. It is not merely that every American considers himself as good as his neighbor; every American has a complete and unshakable faith in the validity of the individual judgment. This is shown every day, for instance, in the American attitude to books: every American takes it for granted that the worth of a book is decided by each individual's "reaction" to it. That Americans also show an amazing docility in accepting the opinions of certain critics about books does not falsify this: it merely indicates how great is the prevalent confusion. For although Americans are in truth docile and will read a book because they are told they should read it, they insist, once they have done the reading, on expressing their own opinion which, as I say, they deem a perfectly valid criterion of the book's worth. In short, all Americans are (by nature, one is tempted to say) subjectivists, individuals, Pragmatists.

In addition to this absolute trust in the individual judgment, every American believes in progress. He is convinced that the world in general and America in particular are rapidly growing better and better. Likewise he believes in social evolution: human beings—he does not believe, he knows—are rapidly drawing nearer and nearer to perfection. Witness how they improved during the nineteenth century!

And it is something which Americans may well glory in, that this American religion, as James called it, is today the religion of the greater part of the civilized world. It did not, as a matter of fact, originate in America; it originated in France, or, if you like to go far enough back, in Italy and Germany. In a measure it can be said to be due to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who was a Frenchman more than he was a Swiss; but it can also be ascribed to men such as Pico della Mirandola of whom Pater writes in "The Renaissance" and who was an Italian, and to Luther and Melancthon, who were Germans.

And according as to whom you choose, Rousseau or Pico, so will your diagnosis of the evil be. Both Mr. Irving Babbitt and Mr. Mencken, in America, are the enemies of Rousseau. Mr. Babbitt condemns subjectivism which very properly he calls Romanticism, but he believes, like all

true Americans, in progress. Mr. Mencken denies progress, but he is a Romantic. But Hulme was not satisfied with the head of Rousseau; he demanded also those of Pico and Luther and Melancthon; and he denied the validity of both subjectivism and progress.

The difference between Mr. Babbitt and Hulme may appear clearer if European history be described succinctly thus: In the thirteenth century man, thanks to the Church, could obtain peace outside himself; then, at the Renaissance the worship of Humanity was substituted for the worship of God; finally, in the nineteenth century—after Rousseau—man went a step further and adopted the worship of the Ego. Mr. Babbitt is satisfied with condemnation of the worship of the Ego. Hulme would have neither the worship of the Ego nor the worship of Humanity.

Not that Hulme urged a return to medieval Catholicism. He wanted to revive an awareness of the importance of dogma: not to revive what he called myth. As to dogma, he set down in his note-book that "certainly very few inside the Churches of recent years have really understood it."

This matter of dogma is the crux of all Hulme had to say. He did not bother about myth—the notions of God, immortality, etc., because he saw that mythical beliefs lead too easily to nothing except the production of pleasant sensations, they tend to degenerate into sentimentality. But, according to him, it was through the proper acceptance of dogma alone that man could achieve anything worth while, and what he meant by worth while was not making a fortune in Wall Street. The dogma he insisted upon above all others was "the sane classical dogma," as Mr. Eliot calls it, of Original Sin. This means that, for Hulme, man was "essentially bad," hence "limited and imperfect," and man always would be so. Therefore man could only "accomplish anything of value by discipline—ethical and political. Order is thus not merely negative, but creative and liberating. Institutions are necessary."

The whole trouble, according to Hulme, arose from the notion that Perfection was something attainable on this earth; the notion, in particular, that man was improving or could improve his nature. It was this notion which made values subjective. Whereas he argued, "ethical values are not relative to human desires and feelings. But something absolute and objective."

Was he right? The difficulty, as he saw it, was not in having his views admitted as right, but in getting it admitted that such views could exist. Because actually we all think certain things are true because they have always seemed true and everybody else has taken them to be true. An American, for example it might be said, does not arrive at his American religion by thought. He soaks it up unconsciously from his environment. It might be said, for one thing, that originally the conditions of life in this country compelled the American to be an optimist. Thus it is extremely difficult to show an American, not that his own views are wrong, but that there can be any other views.

Said Hulme: "It is difficult to make people realize that the humanist canons are false because they do not even recognize that they exist. Now we only become conscious of such hidden presuppositions when they are denied; just as we become conscious of the existence of air when we breathe something that is not air."

Hulme talked and lectured a good deal and also wrote a number of articles, especially in the London *New Age*. But when he was killed, all he left behind was some note-books which have been put together by Mr. Read and published posthumously in a volume entitled "Speculations." It is very hard from the fragmentary nature of these notes in "Speculations" for anyone not already familiar with the basis of Hulme's ideas to apprehend what he is driving at. It is much easier and indeed in every way better to go to the writings of Mr. Eliot and Mr. Wyndham Lewis.

As regards Mr. Eliot, there are of course his "Poems," his long poem "The Waste Land," and his volume of critical essays, "The Sacred Wood." But in connection with the subject I have been discussing, it seems to me that some of his most illuminating statements are contained in various

(Continued on next page)

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(Continued from preceding page)

short pieces published this year in reviews. First, there is "A Note on Belief" in the first number of Mr. Wyndham Lewis's review, "The Enemy" (January, 1927), in which he argued that "doubt and uncertainty are merely a variety of belief," and that he could not see "that poetry can ever be separated from something which I should call belief, and to which I cannot see any reason for refusing the name of belief." "For those of us who are higher than the mob, and lower than the man of inspiration, there is always *doubt*; and in doubt we are living parasitically (which is better than not living at all) on the minds of the men of genius of the past who have believed something." Then, in *The Dial* for May, Mr. Eliot referred to a "literary generation" which had "come and gone—the literary generation which includes Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. Wells and Mr. Lytton Strachey," and, he added later, Mr. Ernest Hemingway. He did not explain in so many words why this generation should have passed away, and I have not space to show here why, in his opinion, it has done so. He did say: "Mr. Shaw and Mr. Wells are much occupied with religion and *Ersatz-Religion*. But they are concerned with the spirit, not the letter. And the spirit killeth, but the letter giveth life." And the meaning of the reversal of the words of St. Paul is clear enough. Mr. Shaw and Mr. Wells consider that religion consists in having agreeable beliefs, such as that man is perfectible and will soon be perfect, whereas in Mr. Eliot's view, religion is ritual, that is to say, discipline, a perpetual struggle; and, moreover, a discipline based on intelligence, which is dogma.

Finally, in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, also for May, Mr. Eliot complained that the contemporary English novel was not in tune with the time. Being under the combined influence of one side of Dostoevsky and of psycho-analysis, it was superficial and fatalistic. In other words, the contemporary English novel has no hierarchy of moral values, it misses "that deeper psychology which was the goal of Henry James." It goes without saying that Mr. Eliot might have made a similar reproach to the American novel.

Mr. Wyndham Lewis must be almost the only living writer whom Mr. Eliot has credited with genius. This Mr. Eliot did in the *Egoist* (a now defunct London review) in 1918. Since then Mr. Lewis has considerably added to his achievement. To his paintings, his short stories, and his novel "Tarr," he has added a book on art, "The Caliph's Design," "The Lion and the Fox," a philosophic study of a great artist's relations to the great men of action, the statesmen and governors; "The Art of Being Ruled," a remarkable volume of sociological and political criticism. Moreover, just at present Mr. Lewis is constantly being referred to in English reviews as the man who has exposed the "time-philosophy," and from the point of view of notoriety that exposure is certainly his crowning performance. Before the War Mr. Lewis edited a little review called *Blast*. Since then he has edited others. Last January he produced the first number of a very large review, *The Enemy*, he himself being the author of ninety-five per cent of the letterpress and all but one of the illustrations. It was in this review that he exposed the time-philosophy. The world today, he sought to show, is obsessed by the idea of time. Nothing is fixed or spatial, everything is in flux and constantly disintegrating and reintegrating. The obsession presides over the writing of Miss Gertrude Stein, Miss Anita Loos, Mr. Ezra Pound, Mr. James Joyce. It was the source of Marcel Proust's great novel, "A la Recherche du Temps Perdu." The same obsession, according to Mr. Lewis, explains the cult of Charlie Chaplin. It permeates nearly all contemporary philosophy: Professor Whitehead and Professor Alexander are essentially time-philosophers; and so is their father in philosophy, Bergson; so, in a sense, was William James. And Spengler's theories about history likewise result from an obsession by time.

*The Enemy*, however, contained only a fragment of what Mr. Lewis had to say on the subject. The complete study will be available in book-form, under the title of "Time and Western Man," the volume will be issued shortly. To it I must refer those who may want to know how condemnation of the time-philosophy relates Mr. Lewis's views to the views of Hulme and Mr. Eliot.

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## Points of View

### The Frontier

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:  
SIR:

I'm sure your readers must be grateful for Professor Jay Hubbell's review of Mrs. Hazard's "Frontier in American Literature" in your issue of September 10th. This book is a charming reduction to absurdity of the theory that the frontier was "the largest single factor in our literary history." Mrs. Hazard makes everything a frontier—Brook Farm, the Southern plantation, the gold mines, the industries, the spiritual future. She tries to dress up in pioneer garb such men as Emerson, Cabell, and Dreiser—a moving picture that would make President Coolidge smile. Even Mr. Hubbell balks at this exploitation of his favorite thesis.

For some years past a group of young American teachers have been upset by this theory. They seem to have read an essay by Turner ("The Significance of the Frontier in American History") and very little else. They used Turner's idea by neatly substituting the word "literature" for "history," as though the two terms were interchangeable. Dominating the American literature section of the M. L. A., they inflicted their strange combinations of history and literature on the annual assemblies. It is high time that one of their own faith should stretch their theory to its absurd breaking point.

Perhaps now these scholars will deign to consider the following cautions against their frontier obsession:

(1) Certain items may be important in history but unimportant in art. Frontier life, for instance, is hostile to art and the artist. Border communities do not need and will not support artists; life there is dangerous; publishing houses are lacking; appreciation and sales are small. Such conditions stunt and destroy artists; from them the successful authors flee at first opportunity. The influence of frontiers on writers is anti-productive.

(2) So naturally Western frontier settings are not often found in our best fiction. Cooper endures with all his faults because no first-rate novelist since him has offered competition with Indian tales. Harte still lives because no first-rate story teller has invaded his life. Run through the list of good American novels, short stories, and poems, and note the small number that are laid in Western border settings.

(3) If the frontier means so much in American literature, then in Europe frontier literature should be still more important. There each small country has its frontier, constantly alive, throbbing with suppressed desires, and subject to sudden change. Yet no European scholar suggests that "the frontier is the largest single factor in the literary history" of France, or Germany, or Italy, or Russia. The frontier is a narrow border and the heart of the country lies within.

(4) Almost all literature is concerned with struggle of various sorts. But wherever two parties clash, there a frontier is created. The sequence is natural: literature deals with struggles, struggles occur at frontiers, then literature is full of frontiers. These dividing lines are religious, political, economic, physical, psychological, and what-not. They are a natural part of life and literature. But their connection with our Western border and Professor Turner's essay is a jump of imagination that only American pedagogues, unhampered by facts and logic, could make.

W. L. WERNER.

State College, Pa.

### "Dusty Answer"

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:  
SIR:

When your reviewer of "Dusty Answer" claims that the "beautiful moments build up toward nothing," and that "the book never finishes," it seems to me that she misses the point entirely.

Judith, as anyone who has even a smattering of abnormal psychology knows, was certainly a homo-sexualist. The fact that it was not sublimated led, as a matter of course, to the inevitable mental conflicts which completely ruined her later years. Consistent with this trait was her other one of planning something but never actually doing it—she would write a novel but she didn't; she would apply for a teaching post at Cambridge but she didn't, etc. It seems to me that Miss Lehmann has been very clever in seeing to it that nothing ever did come to Judith; that she never did get any

kind of an answer. If she had gotten either one of these the story would have been untrue in its outcome. As it is, Judith is drawn splendidly, and she will wander, I feel very sure, in that uncertain fashion through all the days of her life. Only death will bring her a sense of definiteness and an answer.

FRANCIS DOVER.

### More Light

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:  
SIR:

May I not have more light (*mehr Licht*) as the dying gentleman said, on Mr. Bates's review (August 27) of F. J. Oppenheimer's "The New Tyranny"? I am a musician. We are famous for our brainlessness. I seek information, humbly. Oppenheimer lays the blame for the war at the door of "Scholarship"—my melomaniac brain got it as the cultural world. This Mr. Bates seems to resent as an intrusion on the antique stamping ground of the Kaiser and Poincaré. At least both dear *hoi polloi* and myself are exonerated by both the author and the reviewer, leaving me and humanity tired but happy. Mr. Bates says: "Hume is a skeptic only in the traditional sense," disagreeing with Oppenheimer. I have batted my poor musician's brain and wearied my bones trying to find things in English, French, German, and Italian in that pollyanna palace at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street to get the goods on this Hume—alas in vain! I ended where I began, in utter confusion and wishing I were like the doggie in the ad, satisfied just to hear master's voice even *ex machina*.

To get down to brass tacks: does Mr. Bates accept Mr. Oppenheimer's chess line up Mysticism vs. Skepticism or does he not? If he does it isn't clubby to cite Mr. Oppenheimer's label of Aristotle as skeptic where the author is in passing making a contrast with Nietzsche. If he does not why specific citations at all? It isn't cricket. Now we get real, grown-up, European cricket further when Mr. Bates declares the author has "learned nothing." *Magnifique!* Hegel is one of the men it has become positive bad form not to be mad at, so who cares about Hume or him? But that Mr. Oppenheimer, after spending a bad quarter of a century dishing up a five hundred-page *plat philosophique*, remains hill-billy above the collar surely deserves more precise dissection. Will Mr. Bates expatiate? The reviewer grants that "of recent years reason has been concerned with means rather than with ends—it has been mainly the servant of irrational forces."

Are we at a pink tea à la Bergson or out in the open of workaday life? Metaphysics, philosophy, the sweet, clean, indoor sport that some of the greatest reasoners that ever lived ridiculed I eat up hungrily, so I do not mean to emulate the Midwest child classic, "Orphant Annie," and mock and shock. I read philosophy with the seriousness of a female at bridge, and only ache to get the bill of particulars in this divorce case of Oppenheimer vs. Philosophy. Reason, Means, Ends, Forces: isn't the mere defining of the words and their works and their workings likely to start a free-for-all like the fond, familiar homo-ousian or homoi-ousian affray? Mr. Bates's Mr. Oppenheimer is "inconsistent." Gourmont, Emerson, Nietzsche—to name a few very dissimilar thinkers at random—snorted with scorn at the charge of inconsistency. That's that, as they say in Brooklyn. Anatole France regarded metaphysics as a manifestation of fatigue, and Ayres ("Science: The False Messiah") puts it in the category with art. Mr. Bates complains that Mr. Oppenheimer leaves us in the dark as to his own position. Wouldn't it be like the "Alice in Wonderland" court-room scene if the judge lost his detached calm and jumped into the roughhouse? Nietzsche ("Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen"), after pages that are a "maze of inconsistency" (cf. Bates on Opp.) gets off the following wonderful word wallop: "Nature . . . is especially perplexed in her efforts to make the philosopher useful . . . her failures are innumerable; most of her philosophers never touch the common good of mankind at all."

More light—please.

Milton moralizes: "As good almost kill a man as kill a good book."

F. J. MCNAMEE

New York.