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W. H. Auden, Edited by Edward Mendelson:

The Complete Works of W.H. Auden: Prose, Volume II, 1939-1948

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The Public v. the Late Mr William Butler Yeats

THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR.

Gentlemen of the Jury. Let us be quite clear in our minds as to the nature of this case. We are here to judge, not a man, but his work. Upon the character of the deceased, therefore, his affectations of dress and manner, his inordinate personal vanity, traits which caused a fellow countryman and former friend to refer to him as “the greatest literary fop in history”, I do not intend to dwell. I must only remind you that there is usually a close connection between the personal character of a poet and his work, and that the deceased was no exception.

Again I must draw your attention to the exact nature of the charge. That the deceased had talent is not for a moment in dispute; so much is freely admitted by the prosecution. What the defence are asking you to believe, however, is that he was a *great* poet, the greatest of this century writing in English. That is their case, and it is that which the prosecution feels bound most emphatically to deny.

A great poet. To deserve such an epithet, a poet is commonly required to convince us of three things: firstly a gift of a very high order for memorable language, secondly a profound understanding of the age in which he lives, and thirdly a working knowledge of and sympathetic attitude towards the most progressive thought of his time.

Did the deceased possess these? I am afraid, gentlemen, that the answer is, no.

On the first point I shall be brief. My learned friend, the counsel for the defence, will, I have no doubt, do his best to convince you that I am wrong. And he has a case, gentlemen. O yes, a very fine case. I shall only ask you to apply to the work of the deceased a very simple test. How many of his lines can you remember?

Further, it is not unreasonable to suppose that a poet who has a gift for language will recognize that gift in others. I have here a copy of an anthology edited by the deceased entitled *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. I challenge anyone in this court to deny that it is the most deplorable volume ever issued under the imprint of that highly respected firm which has done so much for the cause of poetry in this country, the Clarendon Press.

But in any case you and I are educated modern men. Our fathers imagined that poetry existed in some private garden of its own, totally unrelated to the workaday world, and to be judged by pure aesthetic standards alone. We know that now to be an illusion. Let me pass then, to my second point. Did the deceased understand his age?

What did he admire? What did he condemn? Well, he extolled the virtues of the peasant. Excellent. But should that peasant learn to read and write, should he save enough money to buy a shop, attempt by honest trading to raise himself above the level of the beasts, and O, what a sorry change is there. Now he is the enemy, the hateful huxter whose blood, according to the unseemly boast of the deceased, never flowed through *his* loins. Had the poet chosen to live in a mud cabin in Galway among swine and superstition, we might think him mistaken, but we should admire his integrity. But did he do this? O dear no. For there was another world which seemed to him not only equally admirable, but a deal more agreeable to live in, the world of noble houses, of large drawing rooms inhabited by the rich and the decorative, most of them of the female sex. We do not have to think very hard or very long, before we shall see a connection between these facts. The deceased had the feudal mentality. He was prepared to admire the poor just as long as they remained poor and deferential, accepting without protest the burden of maintaining a little athenian band of literary landowners, who without their toil could not exist for five minutes.

For the great struggle of our time to create a juster social order, he felt nothing but the hatred which is born of fear. It is true that he played a certain part in the movement for Irish Independence, but I hardly think my learned friend will draw your attention to that. Of all the modes of self-evasion open to the well-to-do, Nationalism is the easiest and most dishonest. It allows to the unjust all the luxury of righteous indignation against injustice. Still, it has often inspired men and women to acts of heroism and self-sacrifice. For the sake of a free Ireland the poet Pearse and the countess Markiewicz gave their all. But if the deceased did give himself to this movement, he did so with singular moderation. After the rebellion of Easter Sunday 1916, he wrote a poem on the subject which has been called a masterpiece. It is. To succeed at such a time in writing a poem which could offend neither the Irish Republican nor the British army was indeed a masterly achievement.

And so we come to our third and last point. The most superficial glance at the last fifty years is enough to tell us that the social struggle towards greater equality has been accompanied by a growing intellectual acceptance of the scientific method and the steady conquest of irrational superstition. What was the attitude of the deceased towards this? Gentlemen, words fail me. What are we to say of a man whose earliest writings attempted to revive a belief in fairies and whose favourite themes were legends of barbaric heroes with unpronounceable names, work which has been aptly and wittily described as Chaff about Bran?

But you may say, he was young; youth is always romantic; its silliness is part of its charm. Perhaps it is. Let us forgive the youth, then, and consider the mature man, from whom we have a right to expect wisdom and common

sense. Gentlemen, it is hard to be charitable when we find that the deceased, far from outgrowing his folly, has plunged even deeper. In 1900 he believed in fairies; that was bad enough; but in 1930 we are confronted with the pitiful, the deplorable spectacle of a grown man occupied with the mumbo-jumbo of magic and the nonsense of India. Whether he seriously believed such stuff to be true, or merely thought it pretty, or imagined it would impress the public, is immaterial. The plain fact remains that he made it the centre of his work. Gentlemen, I need say no more. In the last poem he wrote, the deceased rejects social justice and reason, and prays for war. Am I mistaken in imagining that somewhat similar sentiments are expressed by a certain foreign political movement which every lover of literature and liberty acknowledges to be the enemy of mankind?

THE COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENCE.

Gentlemen of the Jury. I am sure you have listened with as much enjoyment as I to the eloquence of the prosecution. I say enjoyment because the spectacle of anything well-done, whether it be a feat of engineering, a poem, or even an outburst of impassioned oratory, must always give pleasure.

We have been treated to an analysis of the character of the deceased which, for all I know, may be as true as it is destructive. Whether it proves anything about the value of his poetry is another matter. If I may be allowed to quote my learned friend: "We are here to judge, not a man, but his work." We have been told that the deceased was conceited, that he was a snob, that he was a physical coward, that his taste in contemporary poetry was uncertain, that he could not understand physics and chemistry. If this is not an invitation to judge the man, I do not know what is. Does it not bear an extraordinary resemblance to the belief of an earlier age that a great artist must be chaste? Take away the frills, and the argument of the prosecution is reduced to this: "A great poet must give the right answers to the problems which perplex his generation. The deceased gave the wrong answers. Therefore the deceased was not a great poet." Poetry in such a view is the filling up of a social quiz; to pass with honours the poet must score not less than 75%. With all due respect to my learned friend, this is nonsense. We are tempted so to judge contemporary poets because we really do have problems which we really do want solved, so that we are inclined to expect everyone, politicians, scientists, poets, clergymen, to give us the answers, and to blame them indiscriminately when they do not. But who reads the poetry of the past in this way? In an age of rising nationalism, Dante looked back with envy to the Roman Empire. Was this socially progressive? Will only a Catholic admit that Dryden's "The Hind and the Panther" is a good poem? Do we condemn Blake because he rejected Newton's Theory of Light, or rank Wordsworth lower than Baker, because the latter had a deeper appreciation of the steam engine?

Can such a viewpoint explain why

Mock Emmet, Mock Parnell
All the renown that fell

is good; and bad, such a line as

Somehow I think that you are rather like a tree.

In pointing out that this is absurd, I am not trying to suggest that art exists independently of society. The relation between the two is just as intimate and important as the prosecution asserts.

Every individual is from time to time excited emotionally and intellectually by his social and material environment. In certain individuals this excitement produces verbal structures which we call poems; if such a verbal structure creates an excitement in the reader, we call it a good poem; poetic talent, in fact, is the power to make personal excitement socially available. Poets, i.e. persons with poetic talent, stop writing good poetry when they stop reacting to the world they live in. The nature of that reaction, whether it be positive or negative, morally admirable or morally disgraceful, matters very little; what is essential is that the reaction should genuinely exist. The later Wordsworth is not inferior to the earlier because the poet had altered his political opinions, but because he had ceased to feel and think so strongly, a change which happens, alas, to most of us as we grow older. Now, when we turn to the deceased, we are confronted by the amazing spectacle of a man of great poetic talent, whose capacity for excitement not only remained with him to the end, but actually increased. In two hundred years when our children have made a different and, I hope, better social order, and when our science has developed out of all recognition, who but a historian will care a button whether the deceased was right about the Irish Question or wrong about the transmigration of souls? But because the excitement out of which his poems arose was genuine, they will still, unless I am very much mistaken, be capable of exciting others, different though their circumstances and beliefs may be from his.

However since we are not living two hundred years hence, let us play the schoolteacher a moment, and examine the poetry of the deceased with reference to the history of our time.

The most obvious social fact of the last forty years is the failure of liberal capitalist democracy, based on the premises that every individual is born free and equal, each an absolute entity independent of all others; and that a formal political equality, the right to vote, the right to a fair trial, the right of free speech, is enough to guarantee his freedom of action in his relations with his fellow men. The results are only too familiar to us all. By denying the social nature of personality, and by ignoring the social power of money, it has created the most impersonal, the most mechanical and the most unequal civilisation the world has ever seen, a civilisation in which the only emotion

common to all classes is a feeling of individual isolation from everyone else, a civilisation torn apart by the opposing emotions born of economic injustice, the just envy of the poor and the selfish terror of the rich.

If these latter emotions meant little to the deceased, it was partly because Ireland, compared with the rest of western Europe, was economically backward, and the class struggle was less conscious there. My learned friend has sneered at Irish Nationalism, but he knows as well as I that Nationalism is a necessary stage towards Socialism. He has sneered at the deceased for not taking arms, as if shooting were the only honourable and useful form of social action. Has the Abbey Theatre done nothing for Ireland?

But to return to the poems. From first to last they express a sustained protest against the social atomisation caused by industrialism, and both in their ideas and their language a constant struggle to overcome it. The fairies and heroes of the early work were an attempt to find through folk tradition a binding force for society; and the doctrine of Anima Mundi found in the later poems is the same thing in a more developed form, which has left purely local peculiarities behind, in favour of something that the deceased hoped was universal; in other words, he was looking for a world religion. A purely religious solution may be unworkable, but the search for it is, at least, the result of a true perception of a social evil. Again, the virtues that the deceased praised in the peasantry and aristocracy, and the vices he blamed in the commercial classes, were real virtues and vices. To create a united and just society where the former are fostered and the latter cured is the task of the politician, not the poet.

For art is a product of history, not a cause. Unlike some other products, technical inventions for example, it does not re-enter history as an effective agent, so that the question whether art should or should not be propaganda is unreal. The case for the prosecution rests on the fallacious belief that art ever makes anything happen, whereas the honest truth, gentlemen, is that, if not a poem had been written, not a picture painted, not a bar of music composed, the history of man would be materially unchanged.

But there is one field in which the poet is a man of action, the field of language, and it is precisely in this that the greatness of the deceased is most obviously shown. However false or undemocratic his ideas, his diction shows a continuous evolution towards what one might call the true democratic style. The social virtues of a real democracy are brotherhood and intelligence, and the parallel linguistic virtues are strength and clarity, virtues which appear ever more clearly through successive volumes by the deceased.

The diction of *The Winding Stair* is the diction of a just man, and it is for this reason that just men will always recognize its author as a master.

Partisan Review, Spring 1939

A Great Democrat

The Spirit of Voltaire. Norman L. Torrey.
Columbia University Press. \$3.

Voltaire. Alfred Noyes. Sheed and Ward. \$3.50.

Voltaire was not only one of the greatest Europeans of all time but, though he might be surprised to hear it, one of the greatest fighters for democracy, and one who should be as much a hero to us as Socrates or Jefferson. As Professor Torrey says: "Voltaire has an important message for the present age. His readers in the period preceding the World War were mildly amused or mildly shocked but not deeply moved. . . . Today our hopes are not so sanguine. . . . It is in such periods of increasing fanaticism that generations will turn again to the spirit of Voltaire." Professor Torrey has certainly done his best to insure that they shall. Voltaire has suffered the greatest misfortune that can befall a writer; he has become a legend, which insures that he will not be read until someone destroys the legend. This Professor Torrey has done with scholarship and perfect taste. If these admirable books of Professor Torrey and Mr Noyes are as widely read as they ought to be, it will be an encouraging sign. For democracy is not a political system or party but an attitude of mind. There is no such thing as the perfect Democratic state, good for all time. What political form is most democratic at any given period depends on geography, economic development, educational level, and the like. But in any particular issue it is always possible to say where a democrat should stand, and to recognize one, whatever party label he may bear.

It is a pity that the most widely known of Voltaire's works should be *Candide*, for the facile optimism of Leibnitz, which it attacks, the view that "everything that is, is right," is a side issue. Such a view bears only a superficial resemblance to the profound intuitions of Spinoza or to Rilke's "*dennoch preisen*," which are the basis for all reverence for life and belief in the future. It is too patently contradicted by daily experience to be held for long, even by the rich.

Democracy has three great enemies: the mystic pessimism of the unhappy, who believe that man has no free will, the mystic optimism of the romantic, who believes that the individual has absolute free will, and the mystic certainty of the perfectionist, who believes that an individual or a group can know the final truth and the absolutely good. For Voltaire these beliefs were embodied, the first in Pascal, the second in Rousseau, and the last in the Catholic Church.

Pascal's extreme view about Original Sin, by denying to fallen man any free will, makes the intellect useless, all human relations a hindrance, and all social forms meaningless. We feel, he says, that we must have absolute certainty;

therefore absolute certainty must exist. Only the Catholic religion professes to offer certainty. Therefore we should accept it. Rousseau, starting from the other extreme of asserting the absolute free will of the natural individual, came to similar conclusions. Man is good and corrupted by society; therefore all social forms are bad. If every individual will were allowed to operate freely, there would emerge a general social will. Like Pascal he felt that certainty should exist, and since the intellect could not give it, one should trust to feeling. In the end, since it was impossible for him to become a savage, and no absolute political creed had been invented, he accepted Pascal's wager and died a Catholic.

Voltaire's reply to them both was, in essence, very simple. Examine all the evidence and don't try to go beyond it.

Pascal says that all men are wicked and unhappy. They are, but not all the time. People are often happy and do good acts. Pascal says that the human passions are the cause of all evil. They are, but also they are the cause of all good. They are an integral part of the creation.

The miseries of life no more prove the fall of man than the misery of a hackney coach-horse proves that, once upon a time, all horses were fat and sleek, and were never beaten, and that since one of them ate forbidden hay all its descendants have been condemned to draw hackney coaches.

Rousseau says that civilization is horrible. Much of it is, but not all. We neither can nor want to become savages or babies again.

Never has anyone employed so much wit in trying to make us witless; the reading of your book makes us want to creep on all fours. However, since it is now more than sixty years since I lost that habit, I feel unfortunately that it is impossible for me to take it up again, and I leave that natural attitude to those who are more worthy of it than you or I.

Neither can I embark to go and live with the savages of Canada. . . . The ailments with which I am afflicted retain me by the side of the greatest doctor of Europe, and I could not find the same attentions among the Missouri Indians.

Voltaire saw that those who say that they cannot live without absolute certainty end by accepting some person or institution that offers it. In his day there was only one such offer, that of the Catholic Church.

Mr Noyes disposes once for all of the popular conception of Voltaire as a shallow cynic who felt and believed in nothing. The man was not lacking in reverence who wrote:

I was meditating last night, I was absorbed in the contemplation of nature; I admired the immensity, the course, the harmony of those infinite

globes. . . . One must be blind not to be dazzled by this spectacle, one must be stupid not to recognize the author of it; one must be mad not to worship him.

When he wrote, "*Ecrasez l'infame*," he had in mind the assumption, under whatever disguise, religious, philosophical, political, that the final absolute truth has been revealed.

Allow that assumption, and tyranny and cruelty are not only inevitable but just and necessary. For if I know the Good, then it is my moral duty to persecute all who disagree with me. That is why the Catholic Church can never compromise with liberalism or democracy, and why it must prefer even Fascism to socialism. Fascism may persecute Catholicism, but as a competitor; it is based on the same premise of being in possession of the final truth, and if it persecutes, in the end it can only strengthen its persecuted rivals. The first principle of democracy, on the other hand, is that no one knows the final truth about anything, and that the most one can say is: "At this particular moment, and in this particular instance, the nearest approximation we can get to the truth seems to be this. We do not know what absolute goodness is, but this man seems to be better than that man." In such an atmosphere Catholicism withers. There are many liberal Catholics, like Noyes and Maritain, some of them the salt of the earth, but they will always see their hopes defeated. They will deplore the politics of their church without realising their necessity, for a revealed religion must be centralised and authoritarian, and must oppose any political system which encourages the freedom of the individual conscience.

At the time when Voltaire wrote, social change seemed impossible, and supernatural security was the only refuge for the unhappy; Catholicism, as in any backward country today, had no rival. But as soon as misery is seen to have natural causes which might be removed by political action, absolutist political creeds appear.

Pascal and Rousseau illustrate like parables how people come to prefer certainty to freedom. Both were sick men, and sickness is one cause of unhappiness. Poverty and feelings of social inferiority or insecurity are others. Like Rousseau, liberal capitalism began in the belief that all individuals are equally free to will, and just as Rousseau died a Catholic, so the masses, disillusioned, are beginning to welcome the barrack life of Fascism, which at least offers security and certainty.

Voltaire was no social revolutionary, but within the economic and social conditions of his time he attempted on his estate at Ferney to create a community of which the members would feel happy enough to allow the spirit of democracy to flower. For one of the symptoms of happiness is a lively curiosity that finds others as interesting and worth knowing as oneself, and it is only by removing the obvious causes of misery, poverty and social injustice, that a

democracy like the United States can protect itself against the specious appeals of the enemies of freedom.

The Nation, 25 March 1939

Whitman and Arnold

Matthew Arnold. Lionel Trilling. W. W. Norton. \$3.50.

America has good reason to be proud of her literary criticism. The essays of T. S. Eliot and Edmund Wilson, Professor Van Doren's book on Dryden, and now Mr Trilling's *Matthew Arnold* have set a standard of seriousness and taste, higher, perhaps, than that of any English critics since W. P. Ker.

Mr Trilling has, I think, said the full and final word on Arnold for our generation; there is no aspect of his life or poetry or thought which is not considered or illuminated, so that a reviewer is left with little to say.

What emerges most strongly from this book is the continuity of the Victorian Age with our own. The problems that worried Arnold are the same as those that worry us, for they are the problems of an industrial society in which there has been no radical break, only an increase in tension.

Before Arnold, literary critics had been primarily concerned either, like Dryden with technical questions, or, like Coleridge, with psychological ones. Arnold was the first English critic to see that the personal fate of the artist and the nature of his work is intimately bound up with the fate and nature of society as a whole, and however much we may disagree with some of his conclusions, we must acknowledge him as a great pioneer. Most of what is valuable in modern criticism is derived from him and the questions which he was the first to ask.

He saw clearly that there was something about modern communities which made modern poetry unbalanced, short-winded, gloomy and immature, and this perception itself stifled him as a poet. Lacking it, Tennyson could remain in the ivory tower of technique and private grief, Browning exploit his eccentric personality, but Arnold disapproved of the only kind of poetry which it was possible for him as an upper class Victorian Englishman to write. His natural poetic taste was for the romantic, mysteriously evocative poetry which is the product of precisely that anarchical industrial society which he condemned, as against the poetry of order: Pope and Racine.

Perhaps, unconsciously, he realised that the latter was the poetry of a class within the state. He wanted the poetry of a united state. Hence his admiration of the Greeks.

But no one can escape his age. A poet in an industrialised class-divided

society can only write either the poetry of isolation like Rilke, or the poetry of a class like Kipling. Arnold attempted the impossible task of writing as if Victorian London were Fifth Century Athens, and in consequence his inspiration ran dry.

The same fallacy appears in his critical writing whenever he speaks of the State. In common with Burke, Hegel, and that great but bad man his father, he thought of the state as a real entity, an organic growth, embracing and consummating all the individuals within it, a conception that may describe fairly well a tribal community with an undifferentiated economy, is less than half true of a feudal social system based on agriculture, and in a centralised and industrial society has no meaning whatever. Arnold did not mean to support reaction—like many other liberals, he supported revolutionary movements in other countries, even the Paris Commune—but his idealist theory of the State led him inevitably into a reactionary position, for it assumed a unity of feeling and interest in the community which no longer existed in fact. Indeed, today, even the picture of the State as a strata of ruled and ruling classes is ceasing to be altogether adequate; it is becoming more and more, the united individual professional politicians and bureaucrats versus the disunited rest.

It is not surprising that Walt Whitman and Arnold detested each other, for they represent approaches to life which are eternally hostile, but both necessary, the way of the particularising senses as against the way of the generalising intellect. Whitman, with his endless lists and formless originality, stood up for the particular physical fact against Arnold's disciplined and fastidious abstractions. If Whitman was the greater poet, it does not necessarily mean that he had a greater natural talent, nor does it mean that particular poetry is superior to abstract poetry. It means that Whitman was the more at home in his country and his age. Arnold's poems are literary in a bad sense, because the abstractions with which they were concerned no longer corresponded to the facts; they were derived from the experiences of an earlier and more primitive form of society than that in which Arnold was living. What he said of the Romantics, "They did not know enough," was no less true of himself. But this lack of knowledge was not, as he imagined, lack of classical and scientific book-learning, it was social isolation from "the dirt." "Everything comes out of the dirt, everything—everything comes from the people, the everyday people," wrote Whitman, and he was right. But so was Arnold when he attacked Whitman's lack of discrimination. Flowers grow out of dunghills, certainly, but the flower and the dunghill are not the same thing. Whitman was so busy accepting everything, that he forgot to notice that one thing differs from another. A doctor and a disease, a gangster and a gasman, are all brute facts that have to be accepted as facts, but they differ in significance, and it is the business of the generalising intellect to fit them into an intelligible order. If the professor is not the greatest kind of artist, neither is the reporter. The affectation of being a-theoretical and practical, the homespun

wit of Whitman or Will Rogers, and the fastidious highbrow aloofness of Arnold or Woodrow Wilson, are both forms of conceit, which is another word for cowardice.

If today we feel more sympathetic towards the former than the latter, it is only because at the moment the generalisers in art and in politics are the more powerful and the more dangerous. Yet the nations are listening to their siren voices precisely because the anarchist-capitalist liberal democracy of which Whitman was the spokesman, which accepted everyone and everything as perfectly free and perfectly equal and perfectly good, failed to realise concretely the abstract virtues of Truth, Freedom and Justice. The dirt is getting tired of being just dirt.

Matthew Arnold may have been a prig, but he knew that there is a difference between right and wrong, and if democracy is not to be overwhelmed by an authoritarianism under which poetry will be impossible, it must listen not only to Whitman's congratulations but also to Arnold's cold accusing voice.

Common Sense, April 1939

Christian on the Left

The Clue to History. By John MacMurray. Harper. \$2.50.

Professor MacMurray is one of the most able and most extreme of the left-wing Christians. He believes in God, in the Fall, in history as the gradual realisation of God's will, in the teaching of Jesus as the essential clue to the understanding of that history, and in the Apocalypse, that is, the material coming of the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. And there his orthodoxy ends. He does not believe in theology, he does not believe in the Churches, he accepts nearly the whole of Marx, and he regards Science and Communism as being the fullest manifestations of Christianity that have so far appeared.

Starting from the fact that Jesus was a Jew, he contrasts the Jewish consciousness with that of Greece and of Rome. While the Greek was contemplative and the Roman pragmatic, the Jew was religious, which Professor MacMurray defines as monist, that is, he preserved the unity of theory and practice. The Greek could think but not act, so that he was politically defeated by the Roman who could act but not think, so that he had to go on acting blindly till the Empire which was the result broke down under its own weight.

Primitive Christianity was corrupted by both. The Greek influence made it other-worldly and spiritual; the Roman influence made it ethical, ascetic,

and sad. Rome ruled this world; Greece imagined the next. The apocalyptic teaching of the Gospels was glossed over until restated by Marx. Only the consciousness which can overcome the Greek and Roman dualism, and see thought and action, mind and matter, as one, can enable man to understand the universe and himself and to achieve that freedom which is defined by Dante as "In his will is our peace," and by Engels, as "Consciousness of Necessity." Real Christianity, the Jewish religious attitude fully developed by Jesus, is the leaven in history which has been the cause of all progress.

The teaching of Jesus may be summed up as follows: "I come to redeem man, that is to say, to lead him out of the determined life that, so far, he has shared with the rest of creation (The Old Adam) into the freedom which is consistent with his real nature. Freedom is only realised through right action. Right action is only made possible by correct knowledge. Fear prevents knowledge, for man can only know what he can love. But love can cast out fear, because it is the nature of man to love, not in the limited instinctive way of the animals, but intentionally. He can love all men, irrespective of race or class or character, not because he ought to but because he really wants to. In limiting his love he frustrates himself and produces the opposite effect to what he intended. Whoso saveth his life loseth it."

The second half of *The Clue to History* is a brilliant summary of the last two thousand years in Europe, in illustration of this last text. For instance, the Christian Church was corrupted by the secular Roman will to world-power, and the result was the Reformation, the destruction of its own unity and the triumph of the secular national capitalist state. This, in its turn, creates against its will international finance and socialism. An intellectual social democracy which professes freedom and equality but has lost the emotional power to achieve them by action goes down before a blind Fascism which can act but rejects freedom. The Jews who crucified Jesus for being a pacifist international are now persecuted by Hitler for polluting the Aryan race.

Stimulating and illuminating as he is, I cannot help feeling that his determination to believe in the existence of God leads Professor MacMurray into a kind of Hegelian attitude of "Whatever is, is right." His history seems so determined to work out in the long run for the best, and everybody's individual intention is so consistently frustrated, that there seems little reason for doing anything in particular. After all, all study of history is being wise after the event, and I am not convinced that either Jesus or Marx or Professor MacMurray can predict the future with scientific certainty. Progress is probable but not certain. The probability can be increased, but only by conscious human action. Furthermore, belief in God as a conscious agent outside man seems contradictory to the rest of Professor MacMurray's position. He rejects theology as a product of dualist thinking; but so too, surely, is the conception of God.

For me personally his argument would gain in consistency and sacrifice

nothing if he said: "Man is aware that his actions do not express his real nature. God is a term for what he imagines that nature to be. Thus man is always making God in his own image. In so far as Jesus was the first person to make the image correspond to the fact, he revealed God to man. 'My Father worketh and I work,' refers to man and to man only. Neither the universe nor the animals work. 'My Father' is the real nature of man; 'I,' his conscious awareness of that nature. Again, in so far as, in Jesus, this awareness was complete, 'I and my Father are one. None cometh to the Father, save through me.'"

Written March 1939; *The Nation*, 9 September 1939

Effective Democracy

It is two years since I was in Spain, and I must leave it to other and more capable and better-informed speakers than I to tell you about the terrible plight of the Spanish refugees.

But I am going to speak to you all the same. I am going to speak to you because I am a writer whose cultural background is Western Europe, of which Spain is a part, because I am an Englishman, speaking a dialect form of your language, and subscribing to the same political creed, and because the recent history of Spain brings home a moral which writers and democrats must learn, too, or perish.

Before 1931 Spain was a backward country under a military dictatorship, with a feudal agricultural system, little education and no freedom of speech. This had become too much for all classes, and Primo de Rivera and Alfonso were kicked out with hardly a struggle. A liberal government was formed consisting largely of university professors, pledged to a program of social reform. Yet within three years it was defeated at the elections, and reactionaries with Lerroux and Gil Robles came back, and once more, mark you, with no effective resistance. There is a parallel to these two events. In 1918, the German Kaiser was deposed fairly easily in favor of a liberal-socialist government, and in 1933 that government disappeared overnight. Why?

In each case we have a government set up in a democratic parliamentary form and professing the abstract principles of democracy, justice, equality, brotherhood, freedom, that failed to take the actions which could make these principles a social reality. In Germany, for example, the East Prussian Junkers were untouched; in Spain, no steps were taken to prevent sabotage by the landowners. Oh, you may say, but it wasn't their fault. It was the fault of foreign powers; of international finance; of the world economic situation. Well, perhaps it wasn't their fault, but they failed and they went.

In 1936 a government came into power that not only pledged reforms but started to carry them out, with the result that when in July the army officers, landowners, big employers, seeing it meant business, began their revolt, that government had the support of the people, and there is not the slightest doubt that, had it not been for Italian and German intervention, and the shameful behavior of France and England, that government would have quickly defeated them.

Why, why did the governments of Italy and Germany intervene? Why did the governments of France and England behave as they did?

Because they were afraid of the consequences within their own countries of a victory by the Spanish government.

We must distinguish between Spanish and German Fascism. The first is openly reactionary, the second professedly socialist. The National Socialist movement was not made up simply of the Reichswehr, the Junkers, the Bishops and Big Business. Hitler asked for mass support and got it precisely because he promised to do all that the Weimar Republic had failed to do. Franco promised nothing but a return to the good old times, and that, as Lerroux discovered, is something it is far more difficult to put across, and I think that we shall find that even though it be defeated, the resistance of the Spanish government will not have been totally in vain. Franco will have to put through more reforms than he intended to at the beginning.

Real Fascism is not afraid of a political democracy like England, which is not really a democracy at all. A German worker sent off to the Rhine to build fortifications had, after all, not much cause to envy his English brother unemployed in the valleys of South Wales. Indeed, such jealousy is more likely to exist among German business men who, were they English, would not only be freer but probably richer.

But Fascism *is* terrified of any democracy which threatens not only to find its people work, but to guarantee their liberty as well. For when that happens Fascism is shown up as not only unpleasant but inefficient. That was what the Spanish government threatened to do, and why, small country though Spain was, Fascism was determined to crush it. The foreign policy of a Fascist power *must* aim at keeping other countries in a condition as bad as its own or worse.

The English Conservative government on the other hand is afraid of two things. The triumph in Europe of either Fascism or a progressive democracy must stimulate feelings at home and in the Empire that threaten its position. The best it can hope for is a stalemate.

That, in the most general terms, is the significance of Spain; and unless we learn its very disagreeable lesson soon, ladies and gentlemen, it may be too late. Slogans of Anti-Fascism and Save Democracy are in themselves virtually ineffective. No one ever succeeded in this world by simply being *against* something. Democracy isn't like a favorite old hat of grandpa's which we must save from going to the cleaner's, because grandpa liked it that way. There is

no political structure which is the perfect democratic model, good for all time. In the words of your President, government is not a structure but a process. Equality before the law, the right to vote, freedom of speech, are fine things; but we shall be judged, and rightly, by the use we make of them. So long as we in our country have two million unemployed and you in yours have ten; so long as conditions in many parts of the British Empire remain what they are; so long as we have, both of us, the most blatant inequality of wealth and opportunity, slums, malnutrition, snobbery, race prejudice, lack of social feeling; so long, in fact, as we are all so damn conceited, selfish and lazy, neither England, France, the United States, nor any other country that calls itself a democracy can hold its head up.

We in this room, ladies and gentlemen, have all, I fancy, received an excellent education. So had the leaders of the Weimar Republic and the first liberal government in Spain. We all believe in freedom and equality. So did they. We all mean well. So did they. In a general sense, we are all intellectuals. So were they. But they failed. And they failed because, as a whole, they lacked the kind of character which alone makes a democratic form of government possible to run.

I know this sounds old-fashioned and priggish but it's true. No true political system makes such demands on character. To be an effective democrat before everything else, we must really take ordinary men and women, not as objects of reform nor as voters but as human beings and hear them, not as an intellectual idea, nor through a sentimental alcoholic haze but at close quarters in all their crudeness, and their copious religious and political beliefs. (I do not know what "ordinary" means in your country; in mine it means to have left school at 14 and to be earning less than \$20 a week.) Some people find this easy. Intellectuals, I think, find it difficult, but it is essential. Nothing else, no ideals, no intellectual brilliance, no personal courage, can take its place.

And we must look tonight, not as intellectuals are apt to do, at something it is exciting to contemplate in a study, but because only correct knowledge can produce correct action. Political realism means knowing that in the end, the liar is always found out. The lie of Fascism nearly came out in Spain. Sooner or later it will; but as the world is at present, if we tell lies, we will be found out first, and only prolong its life. We need tell the truth, however unpopular, and admit disagreeable facts, however damaging to our pet theories. We shall only do this if we like people.

And if we take an active part in politics, we must avoid the intellectual's temptation to be dogmatic. Knowing that the world is always changing, that the truth of today becomes the falsehood of tomorrow and that the finest constitution we can devise may, in a hundred years, become an engine of tyranny, we must regard all political structures, theories and parties as provisional. But at the same time, we must not turn this into an excuse for doing nothing. We may not know very much, but we do know *something*, and while

we must always be prepared to change our minds, we must act as best we can in the light of what we do know. Again, we shall only do this if we like people.

All of us here want to save democracy. Then we must make it more worth saving; and to do that, we must first see to it that we personally behave like democrats in our own private, as public, lives; and when I look at my own, I wish I had a clearer conscience.

England and the United States are rich, are powerful nations, and the United States, at least, cannot be crushed by foreign intervention, like Spain. If we *can* make a decent society in our two countries, we have nothing to fear from the Fascists; on the contrary, they have everything to fear from us. And it is still just possible that we can. We still have a slight chance.

But if we interpret brotherhood as meaning we must do nothing to hurt anybody's feelings, if we use our liberty of speech not to find out how best to do things, but to air our learning and show off our personalities, and so to prevent anything definite getting done, if we shout "up with democracy" only because we think it will make us popular or "down with Fascism" only to divert attention from our failings, then it will not be long before we suffer a worse fate than that of Spain, worse because it will not be tragic. For it will not be Germany, it will not be Italy, but our own people who will say "To hell with talk, to hell with truth, to hell with freedom," will rise up and sweep us away, and by God, ladies and gentlemen, we shall deserve it.

Booksellers Quarterly, May 1939

How Not to Be a Genius

Enemies of Promise. By Cyril Connolly. Little, Brown. \$2.75.

I can imagine no more valuable gift for a nephew with literary ambitions than this book. The great masters he will discover for himself; technique and taste cannot be taught. All that experience can do for youth is to warn and, as far as I know, Mr Connolly is the first person to say what it is like to be a serious writer in the twentieth century, to talk about such writing as a career like banking or plumbing.

Enemies of Promise is divided into three sections. The first is an examination of the relative virtues and vices of recent literary styles, the style of the Dandy (Ronald Firbank), the Mandarin (Lytton Strachey), and the Tough Guy (Ernest Hemingway), and an attempt to relate them to the social conditions of the last thirty years. The second section tries to answer the question "Why do so many young writers of talent today fail to develop? Why are their first books so often their best?" The last is an autobiography of Mr Connolly's childhood and school days.

Such a combination of criticism with autobiography is a feature of our time. André Gide was the first to do it, and his example has been followed by others, notably Mr Isherwood in *Lions and Shadows* and Mr MacNeice in *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay*. There is a close relation between the ideas which men hold and the way in which they live. In a slowly changing society the ideas of an individual are the ideas of his class; that is the meaning of the word Tradition. The development of industrial civilization, by enormously accelerating the speed of historical change, and by splitting up the old dual or three-class structure of society into smaller and smaller units, has already destroyed tradition. The life of each individual is becoming increasingly unique.

Until the nineteenth century, each class had traditional standards which were high enough to give the individual who had acquired them the right to call himself mature, but what passes for tradition in modern society, or any section of it, is so feeble that to accept it is to perish.

The individual who desires maturity must go on alone, hoping that he will be able to reach a reasonable standard before he has committed any irrevocable mistake, or been overtaken by the natural waning of his physical powers. There has never been an age when it was more necessary to look after one's health and keep an honest diary.

There is one great psychological class division in English society, the division between those who have been educated at a public school (*Amer.*, Preparatory School) and those who have not; and it is impossible for a foreigner to realize how profound that division is.

Some six percent of the population, from the age of eight to the age of twenty-one, spend three-quarters of each year away from home in small communities made up exclusively of members of their own class and sex. In the best of these communities, they receive an excellent academic education, perhaps the best in the world. The letters and diaries, for example, quoted on pages 255–260, 267–271, are an indirect tribute to the way in which their writers have been *taught*. But academic training is neither the whole nor the chief aim of these schools. The beliefs they inculcate are summed up by Mr Connolly thus:

- (1) Character is more important than Intellect.
- (2) Intellect is usually found without Character (Oscar Wilde).
- (3) Best of all is Character plus Prettiness. Prettiness alone is suspect, like Intellect alone, but Prettiness that is good at games is safe.

From the six percent who undergo this education, come most of England's rulers and writers. It is impossible to understand modern English literature until one realizes that most English writers are rebels against the way they were educated, and it is impossible to understand the strength of the English ruling class until one realizes where it comes from. For the English are right; character and personal charm *are* politically more important than intellect.

The Public School boy comes away with a first-class political training, but one which he can only use in the interests of six percent of the nation, for that is all the nation he knows. Democrats, who rightly condemn the English system for its one-class nature, can learn a good deal from it.

Further, so can writers. Many faults in the work of English writers are due to their blind reaction: realizing that what their teachers meant by Character was something morally despicable, they are tempted to reject character altogether, and in this they are mistaken, for, though their teachers were wrong in supposing the only desirable character to be that of a tea-planter, they were still right in saying that character is more important than intellect, even for the artist.

In fact, the second section of *Enemies of Promise* is an account of the dreadful things that happen to intelligent young writers who lack character. The enemies are listed as lack of money, politics, day-dreams and conversation, drink, journalism, sex, and success and failure. I cannot do better than quote Mr Connolly:

What ruins young writers is overproduction; the need for money is what causes overproduction.

An outside job is harmful to a writer in proportion as it approximates to his vocation.

For sensitive writers, canvassing, making speeches and pamphleteering are not the best medium. . . . To command a listening senate, however, is the secret ambition of many. . . . Among the hardest workers in political parties will be found, like Rimbaud at Harar, those whom the god has deserted.

Drunkenness is a substitute for art; it is in itself a low form of creation.

If, as Dr Johnson said, a man who is not married is only half a man, so a man who is very much married is only half an artist.

The best thing that can happen to a writer is to be taken up either very late or very early, either when old enough to take its measure, or young enough to be dropped by society with his life before him.

The health of a writer should not be *too* good.

A writer works best at an interval from an unhappy love affair, or after his happiness has been secured by one more fortunate.

A writer suffering from financial difficulties is only good for short-term work, anything long will remain unfinished. And if he has too much money—unless he has had it all his life—he will spend it, and that is also a substitute for creation.

The world is full of charming failures, and unless a writer is quite ruthless with these amiable footlers, they will drag him down with them. . . . It is by a blend of lively curiosity and intelligent selfishness that the artists, who wish to mature late, reach a fruitful senescence. They cannot afford

to associate with those who are burning themselves up, or preparing for a tragedy, or whom melancholy has marked for her own.

In pointing out the temptations that beset every writer, Mr Connolly indicates by implication what kind of character a writer needs. Perhaps, after all, he is a truer son of St Wulfric's than either he or the unpleasant authorities of that unpleasant establishment would care to admit.

The New Republic, 26 April 1939

Young British Writers—On the Way Up

BY W. H. AUDEN AND
CHRISTOPHER ISHERWOOD

Times of crisis, like our own, are unfavourable to the art of the novelist.

The realistic novelist, trying to write about Europe to-day, is like a portrait-painter whose model refuses to sit still. He may hope to catch certain impressions, jot down a few suggestive notes—but the big, maturely considered masterpiece must wait for better times. Most of what passes for fiction is, of necessity, only a kind of high-grade news-reporting. The writer is far too close to his violently moving, dangerous subject.

Among the younger novelists in England, we have three such reporters—all men of great honesty and considerable talent: George Orwell, Ralph Bates, and Arthur Calder-Marshall. Orwell's career has been extraordinary. Educated at Eton, he has become a voluntary exile from his own class, preferring to inhabit the bitter and sordid world of the unemployed. A period of service with the Burmese police produced *Burmese Days*, a brilliant attack on British imperialism in the East. *Burmese Days* is the only novel which can bear comparison with Forster's *Passage to India*. Orwell lacks Forster's humanity. His irony is coarser, and his satire less delicate. But *Burmese Days* is, nevertheless, a thrilling and moving story of one man's failure in his struggle with the official machine. Returning to Europe, Orwell wandered about, acquiring the terrible experiences which are recorded in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, *The Clergyman's Daughter*, and *Down and Out in London and Paris*. Not since Jack London's *People of the Abyss* has anybody written so frankly about the Lower Depths of English life and its inhabitants, the miserable, huddled figures in their bundles of rags whom you can see any evening, trying to snatch a few moments of police-disturbed sleep on the benches of the Embankment and Trafalgar Square.

When the Spanish civil war broke out, Orwell went to fight on the Loyalist side. While operating a machine-gun, he was severely wounded in the throat,

and, for some time, almost lost the use of his voice. Another book, in some ways his best, has been the result.

Bates, like Orwell, took part in the Spanish civil war. Indeed, he has become almost as much of a Spaniard as an Englishman. Several years before the war, he was already working as an engineer in Barcelona, and his sympathies were naturally involved with the fate of the People's Government. He is of working-class origin. His novel, *The Olive Field*, which tells the story of the unsuccessful 1934 revolt in the Asturias, shows a very different kind of talent from Orwell's. Bates's study of the Spanish peasants is warmer, more human, more lyrical (if, also, less subtle) than anything Orwell could achieve. It is possible to compare him, in this respect, with John Steinbeck. Orwell, whose strength and weakness lies in his morbidly acute class-consciousness, seems always to be apologizing for his upper-class background, his Etonian education. Bates is able to write more freely and naturally about the working-class to which he, by right of birth, belongs.

Calder-Marshall, also of upper-class origin, has attempted no similar feat of social denaturalization. Once himself a schoolmaster, he wrote one of the best English public-school novels, *Dead Centre*. *Dead Centre* has no plot: it is in the form of a collection of statements, made in the first person singular, by masters, school servants, and boys. Taken together, these statements build up a convincing, accurate and un sentimental picture of English public-school life. Calder-Marshall has also written the story of a murder-trial, *About Levy*; a big, sociological novel, *Pie in the Sky*; and a number of short stories. For some time, he lived in the East End of London, in one of the few houses which still stand directly on the river-bank, with the Thames actually splashing against the walls—the perfect setting for an Edgar Wallace mystery-story.

One of the most commercially successful of the young English writers of distinction is Graham Greene, the author of *Brighton Rock*, *Stamboul Train*, *It's a Battlefield*, and several other novels. Greene also helped to edit *Night and Day*, a short-lived attempt to produce a London version of *The New Yorker*. He is the son of a schoolmaster, and has travelled widely, in Iceland, Africa, and Mexico. He has also worked a good deal in the English film studios. Greene's training in film-script writing has given to his work an almost American terseness, speed, and punch. He is attracted by themes of violence, crime, and bloodshed; but his stories are more than mere thrillers. They possess a curious, symbolic quality: the tales themselves seem to be fables, full of inner meaning. Greene is a Catholic and deeply preoccupied with the problems of right and wrong, of the nature of sin and the inevitability of its punishment. Thus *Brighton Rock*, ostensibly an exciting book about a race-track gang, is in reality something much deeper, much more ambitious. Its hero, the neurotic boy-gangster, is a sort of amoral touchstone. Himself inhabiting a world which is beyond good and evil, he has the power of exposing whatever is evil or good in the characters of his victims and companions. Perhaps his creator

owes something to Faulkner. One is reminded of the gangster Popeye in *Sanc-tuary*. Greene is far from being a Dostoyefsky (only a writer of genius can balance great hatred with great love), but his work is always interesting, and sometimes very powerful.

Stephen Spender is better known as a poet than as a writer of fiction; but mention should be made of his fine, unjustly neglected volume of stories, *The Burning Cactus*. Spender's book is so good that one can only suppose that it was unsuccessful because it was unfashionable. In these days of super-journalism, the public demands observation, it likes its scenes and situations built by an accumulation of detail; it mistrusts the single, intuitive flash. Spender does not observe the number of tables and chairs in a room, he does not phonographically reproduce the precise accents and mannerisms of a conversation. His stories describe, not character, but the *idea* of characters. In fact, he is an artist.

Two young English writers have attempted what is, perhaps, the most difficult medium of all—the prose fantasy. Rex Warner's two novels, *Wild Goose Chase* and *The Professor*, are direct attempts to describe present-day European conditions in terms of *Alice in Wonderland*. They are brilliant, ingenious, and, often, extremely amusing but they lack poetry, and every great writer of fantasy must be something of a poet.

Far more exciting, though less technically successful, is Edward Upward's *Journey to the Border*, one of the most impressive things of its kind published in England since 1918. It describes a day in the life of a young private tutor who is employed at a country house in the north of England. The tutor is a timid, introverted young man, given to day-dreaming, and to moods of sullen resentment and impotent rage against the complacent stupidity of his employers. What he is searching for is a way to make his job tolerable, to find a technique for living; and so this story becomes, in a most amusing and graphic manner, an analysis of all possible religious and philosophical theories. Upward has written very little so far. But it is impossible not to feel, when we read this book, that we are in the presence of a master of English fiction.

It is interesting to note that the lives of Warner and Upward have much in common. Both are schoolmasters, living quietly and unsensationally in the routine of their jobs. Both are happily married. Neither has done much travelling—though Warner once taught in a school in Alexandria. Neither has had any very dramatic adventures. Both Warner and Upward have approached the Left Wing Movement theoretically, through a study of Marxism. Both are considerable scholars. Perhaps it is this kind of career which best fits a writer to undertake daring mental journeys, and explore regions unknown to the two-fisted, coal-heaver-stevedore-hitch-hiking novelists of the red-blooded school.

Another writer of extraordinary talent and comparatively limited production is Henry Green, author of *Blindness*, *Living*, and the soon-to-be-published

Party Leaving. Green is a difficult novelist, highly fastidious in manner, who has invented his own rules of syntax and punctuation. An Etonian like Orwell, he has remained rooted in, though scarcely loyal to, his class. Green's latest work is one more proof of the truism that a novelist of genuine talent can take any set of characters, any situation, and create from them a picture, a microcosm, of the entire human world.

Perhaps no other author of his generation has the charm and descriptive skill of William Plomer—who, for the present, seems almost entirely to have abandoned creative writing, to devote his time to the exacting duties of a publisher's reader. Plomer has spent much of his youth in South Africa; later, he travelled to Japan, to teach English at a Japanese university. His best novels and stories (he is also an accomplished poet) are all descriptive of life in foreign countries. *Sado* is one of the very few convincing studies of a young Japanese ever written in English. *I Speak of Africa* and *The Child of Queen Victoria* show a deep understanding of the mentality of the African Negro. Plomer has also produced a life of Cecil Rhodes, and a London novel, *The Invaders*, which describes the underworld of our capital city with an almost anthropological detachment. Plomer has, as they say, no axe to grind. He is unpolitical in the narrower sense. For this reason, perhaps, his books are more or less unfashionable to-day. But his character-drawing is full of sympathy and warmth, and he is always on the side of the weak against the strong. His humour lies in that kind of understatement which is peculiarly British. We must hope that, when the louder voices of hate are silent, his persuasively gentle accents will be listened to once more.

James Stern may reasonably claim to be the best of the younger short-story writers. A book of short stories is a bad proposition in publishing to-day, and magazines have printed far more of Stern's work than has yet appeared in book-form. *The Heartless Land*, the first of his two volumes, deals entirely with Africa. *Something Wrong* is a series of stories about adolescents and children. Stern's wealth of subject-matter is astonishing. He can write with equal power about horses, old ladies, poisonous snakes, English drawing-rooms, South Sea islands, fishermen, governesses, little girls. He is equally at home when describing complicated mental processes and scenes of violent physical action. He seems to have no formula, no pattern; each story is a fresh surprise. If the English public could recognize genuine, solid talent, undecorated by the tricks which make for notoriety, Stern's name would be famous in England to-day.

Vogue, 15 August 1939