

In short, the domination of leftism in postwar literature is broken, although the agony and the burial took an inordinately long time. The media are still ruled by the Marxist epigones, the recycled liberal-democrats, the conformist little bureaucrats ready to cash in on any regime's handouts. With an admirably executed about-face, they now turn not to Moscow but to Washington, from where invitations and checks are expected. From Kremlin to White House, Gorbachev-style. But talent can only be found on the right. I speak here of literature, not of essays, pamphlets, scholarship, historiography, sociopolitical analysis—fields today, at long last, unclassifiable as to ideological commitment. From war's end to the mid-70's—the date of Solzhenitsyn's still well-remembered Parisian visit and television debate—the period was leftist/bourgeois, utopian, and unoriginal. Since then, France has witnessed a reactionary renaissance, and books hidden under the veil of hypocrisy have found the channels of public acclaim. Ideology slowly yielded to life—at whose description Céline, Anouilh, Rebattet, and Aymé were masters. Modernity came finally to mean not communist Aragon's and feminist Beauvoir's mind-killing volumes, or the *nouveau roman*, empty of characters and peopled by geometrical descriptions, or ideological elucubrations, but immersion in life and, above all, in a style, a language. The message was clear to those able to read: the way of writing, of approaching things, must convey the way of living. The latter was no longer to be confined to alcoves, protest marches, and the signing of pro-Mao manifestos. "Reaction" became an act of living. As Bernanos once wrote: "Of course I am a reactionary! Only a corpse does not react—but then it is covered with worms!"

The word "reactionary," less familiar to the reader, at least in its literary use, than "modern," should acquire meaning when put in the context of time. The great schools of romanticism, realism, and naturalism raised the novel to its highest achievement, but in the last half-century the genre has declined and has been in search of a philosophical base in which it could make sense once again, in which the term *story* can be appreciated. But we have been living in an overly analytical age, with dozens of theories and labyrinthine detours—Freudian, semiotic, structuralist, deconstructionist—

all flying around us like airplanes out of control. As in modernist exhibits of art, we no longer know "what is what"; titles, contents, and shapes offer no clues; words abolish each other.

Let us call it an absence of meaning, perhaps a deliberate one. It is, at any rate, a cult of the subjective, an exclusivist cerebration, a series of game theories. The "reactionary" act in literature (and art) is then the *restoration of meaning*, hence of objects, images, people, and of their relationships, passions, fears, and hopes. Reactionary literature is not today not something simplistic, rudimentary, fearful of verbal risks; it is a turn to the "story" of the literary text, the rooting of characters in the world common to the reader and writer. "Reactionary" literature was the novels of Thackeray and Balzac, Hamsun and Tolstoy and Chekhov, the plays of Ibsen and Shaw, although they did not bear this label, since there was no vast, victorious, and dominant counter-novel, counter-drama. And it is untrue that their public was as puzzled by their novelties as today's public is: it merely had to adjust, as publics before them, to a new style, plot, and characters. There was no need for professors of semantics to explain what it was all about, while their academic rivals prepared a counter-explanation that was just as farfetched.

Why were Flaubert and Dostoyevsky reactionaries? Because they worked with the assumption that literary creation is not a mere system of signs, that people understand other people, and that the modern reader knows what Homer or Sophocles were also writing about: human beings. Solzhenitsyn, too, is a reactionary: sabotaging the ukase to write about idealized tractor drivers, he fashioned flesh-and-blood Ivan Denisovitches. What would we readers gain by knowing (gratuitously guessing) Ivan's dreams, Oliver Twist's castration complex, Aliosha's sublimated envy of Ivan or vice versa?

Modern reaction in literature is thus the talent and the courage to write again on the human level, a return from piled-up theories and layers of the sub-, un-, and proto-conscious. Only the mediocre writer allows language and grammar to dictate his text. The reactionary novelist is aware that after a never-ending apprenticeship he is master of the word, that he and his characters forever mingle in inspiration.

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His 'Life'

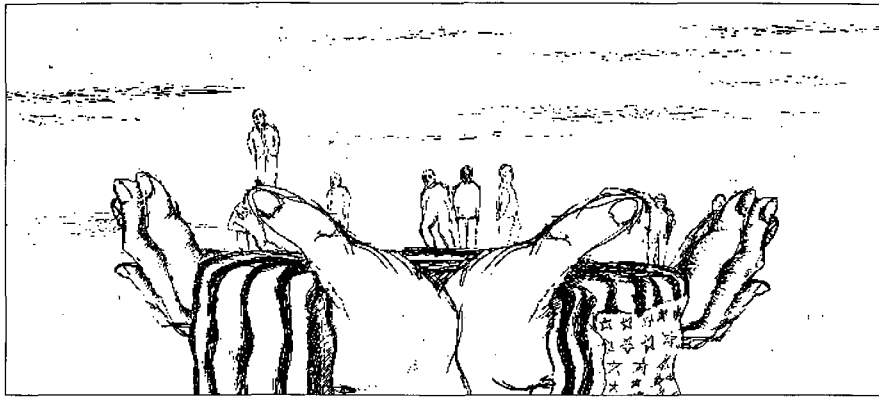
by Richard Moore

Quip upon quip
in "smarty ass" one-upmanship
until our clown
experienced death's clever put-down.

Robert Frost

Social and Political Conservative

by Peter J. Stanlis



Anna Mycek-Wodcicki

Between 1913 and 1962 Robert Frost published 11 books of poetry, won four Pulitzer Prizes, established himself as the unofficial poet laureate of the United States, and acquired a national and international literary reputation. Despite his fame as a poet and public speaker, and because of his friendship with such liberal Democrats as Vice-President Henry Wallace and President John F. Kennedy, few Americans are aware that in his social and political philosophy Frost was a highly original conservative thinker. His thought was wholly unsystematic, and lacked the coherence and unity of the abstract systems of speculative philosophers, but it was wholly consistent in adhering to basic social and political conservative principles.

Frost distrusted abstract labels and categories, because he knew that such terms as “revolutionary,” “radical,” “liberal,” “rebel,” and “conservative” often provided the basis for ideological theories and rational systems created by the imagination and then identified with “reality.” Like Edmund Burke, the poet considered ideology a fictional product of the creative imagination, often utilized as a substitute for revealed religion and historical experience, and the chief source of the delusions that led men to dream that they could establish a Utopian social order. The ideologies of such writers as Rousseau and Marx had no place in Frost’s social and political philosophy. In avoiding abstract categories, Frost never referred to himself as a conservative, because he feared that other people’s false conceptions of this term would be attributed to him. Two lines summed up his viewpoint on such abstract categories:

I never dared be radical when young
For fear it would make me conservative when old.

These lines express Frost’s characteristic prudent temperament and moderation between political extremes; he avoided intellectual disillusionments by refusing initially to commit himself to ideological illusions.

Frost’s social and political conservatism was part of his total dualistic philosophy, which assumed that “reality” consisted of two basic elements—matter and spirit, each complex in it-

self, but made doubly so by their constant and unresolved interactions. He stated that the universe consists of “endless . . . things in pairs ordained to everlasting opposition,” and that “the philosopher values himself on the inconsistencies he can contain by main force. They are two ends of a strut that keeps his mind from collapsing.” In resolving the dualistic conflict between the one and the many in matter and spirit, Frost believed that all human endeavors sought to reconcile and unify the complexities, paradoxes, ambiguities, and contradictions in man’s experience through greater knowledge, understanding, revealed insight, and wisdom. Frost’s philosophical dualism drew heavily on the thought of Aristotle and Kant, and was further indebted in many of its complexities and elaborations to the metaphorical language of Emerson, and the work of William James, Henri Bergson, and Alfred North Whitehead, among others.

Frost rejected as too simple and optimistic the spiritual monism of Ralph Waldo Emerson, which explained the problem of evil as merely the absence of good as the sole reality. He also rejected the materialistic monism of Karl Marx, which treated spirit as an illusion and ended in doctrinaire atheism. To Frost human nature itself was a dualistic compound of matter and spirit, or body and soul. He viewed religion, philosophy, science, art, education, politics, and the unfolding history of mankind in organized society as different forms of revelation, perceived by the human mind as metaphors that illuminated what is true, good, and beautiful in life.

Although Frost did not belong to any church, he identified himself as “an Old Testament Christian,” in the tradition of St. Augustine. He once stated that he was “less churchy” than T. S. Eliot, but “more religious.” He despised religiosity, but he stated that he had “no religious doubts, not about God’s existence.” His whole object in his poetry, he said, was “to say spirit in terms of matter or matter in terms of spirit,” so that his major poems are emotionally charged with a profound piety. He believed certain mysteries always remain, and therefore “something has to be left to God.” Contrary to the claims of Joseph Warren Beach, Lawrance Thompson, George W. Nitchie, Marion Montgomery, and Yvor Winters, Frost was not a spiritually alienated man, an indecisive agnostic or “spiritual drifter.” These critics fail to understand the dividing line between being noncommittal and uncommitted.

Peter J. Stanlis’s most recent book is Edmund Burke: The Enlightenment and Revolution, published by Transaction.