

Stephen Spender

## Inside the Cage

### Notes on the Poetic Imagination Today

**I**DEALLY, the artist should transform the environment into his own world. But since we live in bodies, which are dressed in clothes, which inhabit buildings, which are parts of cities, which are placed in countries, the most we can expect to see art realise in our surroundings is a struggle between utility and an enhancing uselessness.

The reason why "poets adore ruins" and why—to almost everyone—ruin can make a hideous modern building seem beautiful, may be that destruction celebrates the triumph of the useless over the useful. The useful (in a building, for example) belongs to the living—to the inhabitant—but the useless is that aspect of architecture which is like a mirror where the eyes of the dead have seen their delight reflected. A city should belong at the same time to the inhabitants, who *use* it, the dead who still exist in forms which give pleasure to the eye, and the unborn in whom the dead will live. In towns where the dead and the unborn are omitted, there are simply buildings and thoroughfares used by contemporaries. Utility seems inhuman even to the users, perhaps as the result of a human defect which makes us ungrateful—incognisant almost—of that which we use. The inhabitants of modern industrial cities have a look of complete expressionlessness, of disregard for their surroundings, when they walk through streets or go on buses and trains. This is the "utility" look (just like "utility" clothes or furniture), the look of those who know that they are in a

particular place simply for a particular purpose, and not in a sacred relation with its past and future.

Architecture, and most other "applied" arts, express the tension of the æsthetic against the useful. At the other extreme, music is a completely unutilitarian art, which starts off at the point where the victory of the spirit over musical instruments is complete, and there is an endless reign of imagined peace. But art made with words is inevitably debatable ground. Language enters our ears and eyes like a river flowing out of our surroundings; yet those who have a command of words can shape them into patterns that, while remaining contemporary, resist the mere flow of things. Every poem, however "pure," because it resists surrounding life, could be, and in totalitarian societies often is, suspected of being a manifesto. In poems, the contemporary meets pasts and futures within one individual mind.

#### *The Romantic Polarities*

**P**ERHAPS we can build a statue on the skyline which, pointing to the clouds with a magnificent gesture, draws in our grimy slums through its feet, and, on a finger, uplifts them to the clouds, where they change into light; or perhaps we can only achieve our own transformation, inside ourselves, but with the possibility of communicating the secret to a happy few.

These two poles of outward and inward transformation are the Romantic extremes:

Shelley's claim that the poets are unacknowledged legislators, Keats's cry, "oh for a life of pure sensation." Keats saw that Shelley's wish to vivify the language of noble reason, so that it would persuade men to make a just world, could lead only to the surrender of private poetic gardens to public political planners; Keats wrote poems like *arbour*s, in which readers were invited to spend a life-time eating imaginary nectarines from imaginary dishes.

Although Keats attacked Shelley, their positions had this in common: both sought a centre of their own poetic creating where the imagination is unconditioned. In making his wild claim about poetic legislators, Shelley is really anticipating Thomas Mann's remark in the early 1930's, "Karl Marx must read Friedrich Hölderlin." Shelley realised that unless poetry could be at the centre of politics it might be reduced to illustrating a politician's thesis. Keats chose the alternative to changing society through poetry: that of separating poetry from public matters altogether. Keats offered an entrancing void filled with imaginings, where Shelley offered a transformed everything; but the difference between them was one of strategy. Keats thought that poetry should go into the world as a rich beggar, Shelley as a paupered, democratised king.

### *Progress and Tradition*

UNTIL the late 18th century, the idea of transformation had a central place in life. The art which transformed buildings, ceremonies, tragic or comic experience, drew inspiration from the belief that all humanity was involved in a struggle to attain divine or ideal forms. Although there are vast differences between religions, so long as there is the idea of transformation through the spirit, the signs which divide nations and creeds in history can reunite them again in art, in symbols of rebirth, metamorphosis. Given this acceptance of the idea of transformation, the famous "suspension of disbelief," which enables a reader to enter into the spirit of a belief not his own, is not difficult.

With the Industrial Revolution, the idea of Progress challenged, and undermined, the belief

in transformation of outer appearances through inner life. But Progress offered the possibility of another kind of change: that of decreasing pain and increasing happiness. We have grown used to Progress being sneered at by the poets and critics: but whenever I read such a taunt, by Baudelaire for instance, I cannot help reflecting that Progress stands for curing the disease which rendered his life miserable. And if one says that this disease perhaps was the stimulus to his genius, then one is still confronted by further choices between those things which transform, and those which improve, the environment.

The idea of Progress makes everything unnecessary a battleground between use and beauty. It is inevitably attached to the greatest happiness of the greatest number—to battalions of the underfed who will become the well-fed. It would certainly be un-Progressive to build a Venice if, with the same expenditure of energy, you could build twelve dormitory green-belt suburbs.

Yet Progress alienates men from the idea that they should shape their environment into a significance beyond the uses of bodily living. Until the basic needs of everyone have been met, transformation seems fanciful, selfish, wasteful, unnecessary. At best, people who have such aims are told that the most useful city would also be the most beautiful, and that art is perfection of function. This is to say, it is based upon the same kind of external calculations and statistics as those which are made for welfare. Functionalism is the philistinism of people who talk about a work of art as a "well-done-job" like any other piece of plumbing.

There have been various attempts to create a cold, external and abstract art which treats the eye as an organ needing measured quantities of light, colour, space, curved and straight lines, as the lungs need air. But on the whole, the artists, and especially the poets, have rejected the Progressive idea. They have looked with malicious pleasure on its failures (wars, revolutions, etc.) and have concentrated on trying to express the tragedy which has overtaken their inherited past, in the apocalyptic imagery of modern catastrophe.

*The Conditioned and the Conditionless*

THE view that the artist not only interpreted the religious and worldly symbols of Church and state, but in doing so put his imagination at the centre of them—added something uniquely his own to them—was superseded. At the beginning of the 19th century the poet finds himself imprisoned inside his own sensibility as in a cage. He tries—like Keats—to make the cage “a rosy sanctuary”; or—like Shelley—the centre of a revolution of the world through poetry married to political philosophy.

What has happened is that the idea of something purely creative, conditionless as God or as life itself, which is the shaping force at the centre of the individual imagination, has disappeared. Instead, the centre of the modern consciousness is utilitarian.

It is as a result of this change that “strategy” has become the key word in modern literary criticism. Can past values—immensely enhancing the significance of life and yet ruthless in their uselessness—come to terms with 19th century utilitarianism, reaffirmed in the 20th century by the modern crusade for social justice, ruthless in its disregard for the past and individual values?

We see the attempts of the poets, in the cage, to find—even within the cage—an unconditioned centre. Matthew Arnold’s idea that poetry could become a substitute for religion is really a variant of Shelley’s attempt to put poetry at the centre of legislation. The wings which are “no longer wings to fly / But merely vans to beat the air / The air which is now thoroughly small and dry” are also—one may suggest—the wings of the ineffectual angel who was Shelley.

Finally, today we are faced with the consequences of the surrender of the “unconditioned poetic imagination,” which had been asserted by the Romantics and had been inherited by them from a society which in its religious and social institutions enjoyed a *lingua franca* of lived poetic symbolism. After the collapse of the attempts to put poetry back into the symbolism of creeds or politics, and even to make it an alternative religion or way of life, we now find poets accepting the idea that the

imagination has no autonomy, is completely conditioned by circumstances. Writing and criticism have become closed systems, and it is considered bad taste to relate the work that is written back to the view of life from which the writer’s attitude derives. Yet unless the questions and answers on which the present attitude is based are reopened, poetry will not find a way out of its cage.

*Inside the Cage of Neutralised Nature*

THE unconditioned centre is where the imagination sings orphic songs from the centre of existence, which can change the appearance of things for those who hear them. The possibility of such a “penetralium of mystery” by poetry is reaffirmed by the institutions of belief. But since institutions, rituals, ceremonies, dogma which confirm inward life are themselves outward forms, the idea of changing sensibility for ever recreating life through song is the heart of the mystery.

The conditioned centre is imagination banished into a solitude of its own. It reacts and adjusts to a material world whose reasons are based on calculations according to needs, policy, dangers, and the like. These walls have no ears for the music of Orpheus. Belief has been undermined, so that its institutions seem empty shells from which the spirit has fled.

It is this situation of belief confronted by unbelief which I. A. Richards pressed to the logical conclusions of unbelieving in his famous essay *Science and Poetry*, first published in 1926. As criticism, this essay misfires in its attacks on D. H. Lawrence and W. B. Yeats for escapism, its praise of *The Waste Land* for “effecting a complete severance between his poetry and all beliefs.” However, its still great interest lies in its anticipation of a world where the life of the imagination is completely divorced from the material of fact.

The modern poet—as Richards sees him—inhabits a world of neutralised Nature. All statements of a factual kind belong to the province of science and have nothing to do with poetry. The Magical View of “belief in a world of Spirits and Powers which control events, and which can be evoked and, to some extent, controlled themselves by human

powers," has disappeared, together with "belief in inspiration and the beliefs underlying Ritual."

So the poet must accept this picture of a universe totally indifferent to man and his fate, and he must cut himself off from all beliefs. He must refuse to hunger even after a basis of belief. However, if he effects this severance from belief and realises that poetry has no connection with verifiable truths, then myths and "all the attitudes to other human beings and to the world in all its aspects, which have been serviceable to humanity, remain as they were, as valuable as ever. . . . The justification, or the reverse, of any attitude lies, not in the object, but in itself, in its serviceableness to the whole personality."

So imagination is reconciled to the world of materialism and utility, by being proved to be useful.

The severance from belief means breaking the connection of statements of the inner life of the imagination with any kind of corresponding outward reality. That in the past there has been such a connection of intuitions with ultimately verifiable existent facts has been a claim of poetry. And that which authenticated the truth of poetic statement (corresponding to proof in science) was belief. Thus if belief is banished there can be no question of there being true poetic statements—unless they also happen to be scientific ones. All we are left with is projections of the effects of experience on the poet's personality into a language of symbols and myths. To use psychological terms: poems are projected complexes.

Richards calls an unverifiable statement divorced from beliefs a "pseudo-statement," which "is justified entirely by its effect in releasing and organising our impulses and attitudes (due regard being had for the better or worse organisations of these *inter se*)."

Now there is no question but that scientific statements differ from poetic ones. Moreover, a great many poetic ones are conscious make-believe of the kind that Richards labels "pseudo-statements" (or of the kind that all statements in poetry would become if poets accepted this classification). Yet there are certainly statements of quite a different order

in Dante, in Shakespeare, in Wordsworth and Blake—to name a few—which are not scientific and which yet the poet believed to be true and, indeed, ultimately verifiable, though not by scientific methods. Now if we turn these statements into "pseudo-statements," the fact that the poet himself believed in them, turns them into psychologically useful self-delusions. Putting this in another way, it means that the poet instead of having been, as he thought, at the centre of his world, with glimpses of a reality beyond, becomes sensibility acted upon and reacting, more or less valuably, to his environment.

The Romantics, on the verge of the materialist 19th century, were aware of the crisis of belief. Hence Coleridge's preoccupation with the "willing suspension of disbelief," Keats's idea of "negative capability," Shelley's atheism, Blake's illuminist mysticism. But doubt for the Romantics was a strategic device for recovering faith by putting their own poetry at the centre of life. Side by side with their negations go their affirmations—Shelley on the poet as legislator, Keats identifying beauty with truth, Coleridge: "An undevout poet is mad; in the strict sense of the word, an undevout poet is an impossibility . . ." and "It has pleased Providence, that the divine truths of religion should have been revealed to us in the form of poetry."

When the poet abandons the belief which connects visible with invisible worlds, he is left with nothing but a problem of adjustment through poetry to the situation of man in the surroundings of alien nature. He is in a cage with bars that are mirrors reflecting only himself, and there is no possibility of entering through the imagination into the factual realities outside.

I. A. Richards draws comfort in this situation by pointing out that the spectator does not have to believe anything in order to enter into the mood of Tragedy. Specifically, he cites *King Lear* as an example of unbelieving Tragedy. "We need no beliefs, and indeed we must have none, if we are to read *King Lear*." True, we do not have to believe in the gods Lear invokes in the storm to understand the play, but I cannot see that a refusal to

believe in the sacredness of the office of king, would do anything but hinder our understanding. It is not that we have positively to believe in any dogma to understand the intersection of visible with invisible worlds in *Lear*, but that we have to approach the play with a mind receptive to mysteries. To take another example, I think one can demonstrate that a refusal or complete incapacity to believe that the ghost of Hamlet's father is anything more than an expression of Hamlet's psychology—an image thrown by his neurosis on to a wall—would rob the Tragedy of a dimension, and convert the King and Queen into the gaolers of a lunatic.

Hamlet, in the middle of the ferocious scene with his mother after the play within the play, suddenly is visited by his father's ghost. The Queen asks him: "Whereon do you look?" and pointing to the ghost, Hamlet replies: "On him, on him: look you how pale he glares." After which, the Queen expostulates:

"This is the very coynage of your Brain,  
This bodilisse Creation extasie is very  
cunning in."

How would we feel if the Queen said something to the effect of: "O Hamlet, thou hast coyned a pseudo-statement!" The point here is that we do not have to believe in the world inhabited by the ghost, but we do have to believe in the possibility of such a world. Suspension of disbelief is, in fact, believing, whereas refusal to believe is the substitution of a rational explanation for the irrational. It puts us inside the cage.

And in this essay Richards has stated excellently the situation of the poet inside the cage. We do not have to agree with his conclusions (I doubt whether he now agrees with them himself) to see that he has thrown a harsh, clear light on the effects of those doubts already searingly felt. He says "accept the cage and sing inside it of your complex attitudes, the value of experience in itself." But the answer of the poets has, in fact, been to seek more desperately than ever, ways out. That is the real significance of Lawrence's dark gods and life forces, Yeats's spirit séances, and the more recent returns to what Sir Herbert Read calls

"a medieval thearchy." Insistence on belief may seem desperate, but insistent unbelief makes subject become object, the active the acted upon, and sensibility report a prison.

### *The Literary Myth of Life Outside*

THE contemporary poet inhabits a world which is very like I. A. Richards' world of statements and pseudo-statements. On the one hand there are a great many people who think that reality consists of statements certified by scientists; on the other, there are the poets "clinging to their crosses" or "hungering after a basis of beliefs." Cyril Connolly, in a review of Yeats's *Collected Letters*, has recently put this well:

Most people do not believe in anything very much and our greatest poetry is given us by those who do. The well-meaning, moderate, reasonable, sceptical, cultured humanist is the audience, the fanatic is the conjuror. Critics who do not believe must comment on creators who do. . . .

In the past, poets were often lackeys, but all the same their poems, when they were sent out into the world, were like magnets with fields of power. You wrote "king" or "cross" in your poetry, and there were real kings and real crosses in people's lives, so without having to have the sacred nature of these symbols impressed on them, people responded.

Today it is still possible to play on a few worn emotions: one can send out a love-signal, so long as it is accompanied by a purgative to free it of associations with the movies. More detached symbols have to be loaded with references, in order to establish their significance, which still has some prestige value.

All this may or may not be true. But that is how it looks, from inside the cage. As they distrust all statistics, all tests, all questionnaires, because they smell of scientific inquiry, those inside really have no means of discovering whether or not their assumptions are just. Nevertheless, inside the cage very definite assumptions are made about the life outside, and upon this myth the greater part of literary activity is based.

Here are a few of these assumptions: modern men are less "living" than people were in the past, tradition has died out of life and become



a secret cult practised in literature, especially by (Cambridge Eng. and Mass.) critics, there is a widespread collapse of values, moral and æsthetic; no one outside the cage believes anything any longer. Adding all this up, those inside the cage discover that there is an unexplained inconsistency in the fact that they go on writing—an activity which they have proved to be almost impossible. Several of the older poets inside the cage have only produced their major work on condition that it is understood by everyone else that it is the last great work possible in the modern predicament. There is general agreement that if the work that goes on inside the cage has any failings, these are entirely attributable to what goes on outside. Inside the cage, perhaps the best we can hope for now is a few hard, crystalline images unconnected with anything that goes on outside. As Sir Herbert Read put it recently (ENCOUNTER, January 1955):

We have the poetry we deserve, just as we have the painting we deserve, the music we deserve; and if it is fragmented, personal, spasmodic, we have only to look around us to see the satanic chaos through which nevertheless a few voices have penetrated. The voices are pitched high and may sound discordant; but sometimes they convey an image that has a crystalline brightness and hardness, and cannot be shrouded.

From inside the cage, it has nevertheless been necessary to write for those who are outside. Since there is (supposedly) no basis of belief to work on—this having been dispelled by “proper” statements—what spiritual realities outside the cage can the poet appeal to? The answer is—negative ones. You can show people that they are bored, that what they have in this civilisation is not life but a kind of death-in-life. Baudelaire says: reader, you are bored. Lawrence: you have denied and frustrated your instinctive life. Eliot: you are dead.

This negative view of modern life is complemented by a very positive conception of the past. Here there is the greatest unanimity among writers who disagree in most other respects. Despite the tremendous reaction against the writing of the end of the last century, actually the idea found in Walter Pater and in *The Yellow Book* that pagan times were much

more vivid than our own is carried on by D. H. Lawrence until 1930, and, still more recently, by Henry Miller. Although veiled by irony, a nostalgia for a pagan and an early Christian past, and for primitive societies, is strong in *The Waste Land* and *Sweeney Agonistes*—even in the *Four Quartets*.

Nearly all the poets agree that their contemporaries of the industrial age are corpses and phantoms, while men and women in the past were more living. At the same time, in D. H. Lawrence and Henry Miller, there is an idea of saving the present through a resurrection of the past in the physical, sexual body. These writers oscillate between violent assertions of the physical body and instincts now, and the idea that the “living” inhabit irrecoverable pasts or primitive societies.

Thus, Henry Miller in *The Colossus of Maroussi*:

I say the whole world, fanning out in every direction from this spot, was once alive in a way that no man has ever dreamed of. I say there were gods who roamed everywhere, men like us in form and substance, but free, electrically free.

D. H. Lawrence in the introduction to his paintings:

We, dear reader, you and I, we were born corpses and we are corpses.

But when Lawrence looks back to a Grecian past (in Sicily) corresponding to that which Henry Miller felt at Mycenae:

So now they come back! Hark!

Hark! The low and shattering laughter of bearded men with the slim waists of warriors and the long feet of moonlit dancers.

Contrast this, though, with the idea of the transcendence of such a past in a resurrection through sex, of Lady Chatterley:

The life of the body, he [Sir Clifford] said, is just the life of the animals.

And that's better than the life of professorial corpses. But it's not true! The human body is only just coming to real life. With the Greeks it gave a lovely flicker, then Plato and Aristotle killed it, and Jesus finished it off. But now the body is coming really to life, it is really rising from the tomb. And it will be a lovely, lovely life in the lovely universe, the life of the human body.

Certainly, Lawrence at times gets out of the

cage. For the way to get out is to get back to some universal, positive and loving principle which unites imagination and nature instead of splitting them in two. It is this unifying force of passion which is symbolised by sex in Lawrence.

*Credit Based on Bankruptcy*

ALL the same, the idea of negation predominates. And for some time the most impressive affirmations can be constructed within the heart of negation. To declare bankruptcy is better than to live upon empty conventions. Castles of the imagination can be built more firmly on air than on false foundations. Everything—as Yeats well knew—can become its opposite. Thus in an age of reduced values, to assert that there are no values is an affirmation of values. The void with which a civilisation ends can be filled with a vision which is a sum of all the phases of that civilisation.

But declarations of bankruptcy are extremely dangerous, because their credit rests on the losses themselves. One cannot write this civilisation's last great poem more than once. After that, one can only justify it by lesser and inferior works. As Wyndham Lewis noted recently:

We seem to be running down, everywhere in life, to a final end to all good things. Compared to fifty years ago, when the supreme and ultimate rot began, our food—our milk, our cheese, our bread, our concocted foods, everything, in short, is inferior, and there is every reason to suppose it will get more so, decade by decade.

In this situation, it is surely understandable that poets should want to take refuge from the great Negation by discovering that certain positive religious and moral institutions still exist. Thus in many directions we see—often side by side with despairing and destructive ideas—the attempt to find within society, or within the churches or within the academies and universities, some tradition where a *lingua franca* of symbols, dogma, style and learning survives.

After all, in spite of everything, the churches have carried on even while we were being told that the “magical view” of belief in a world of Spirits and Powers had been superseded. Moreover, this view has the advantage that—

superseded or not—it is not really open to the arguments by which it has been talked out of existence.

One cannot argue about the return to theology in literature. If one believes, it will make sense, if one does not one will talk, like Herbert Read, about “the attempt to revive a mediaeval thearchy.” But there can be no genuine discussion between belief and unbelief. What one may note, however, is that in the works of the writers who have gone back to older dogmas, there seems a weakening of their hold on the idiom of contemporary life, corresponding to the increase of their power to express their beliefs. Mr. Eliot and Mr. Auden might well retort that if they seem less concerned with contemporary life, this is because they have enlarged their understanding of a life outside time altogether. Nevertheless, these efforts do not resolve the problem of putting poetry back at the centre of the unconditioned imagination; and the reason is that, although the weakening in daily life of the symbolism of the church is no argument against religious belief, it has deprived religious poetry of its common language. Compared with their early, secular poems, the later Eliot and Auden seem curiously specialised in an age of specialisation.

In his introduction to the fifth volume of the Auden-Pearson anthology, *Poets of the English Language*, Auden anticipates this objection with an objection of his own against the position of the poet without religious dogma living on the moral capital of Christianity. He adroitly puts the boot on the other foot:

They were all of them uneasily aware of the possibility that the liberal creed might only hold for talented and successful people like themselves, for men who might speculate upon the meaning of existence in general but never had to put the personal question “Why do I exist?” because they were enjoying themselves in the exercise of their talents and the glory such exercise brought them. However many adoring disciples might sit at their feet, outside the cosy circle there was a shadow who was by no means friendly, to whom their genius for inspiring speech was a joke, and who spoke himself in a very different vein.

The shadow—Auden suggests—is the hero of

Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, who refuses to consult a doctor—although not doing so will prove fatal to him—out of spite.

The argument—just, in its criticism of the Liberals—suggests a simple alternative in which writers accept spiritual discipline common to all. From Auden's own Anglicanism, one can guess what this alternative would be. Yet if it is true that "they were all haunted men, with a room in the house which was kept locked and from which they had to distract the attention of visitors . . . . The snark, that is, the meaning of existence," it is also true that wandering around the cellar and not locked up there was the ghost of unbelief, of a resignation to the ultimate meaninglessness of existence. And the ghost in the attic and the one in the cellar had no common language in which they could come to terms—or, indeed, even quarrel. Some inside the cage have decided now in favour of the ghost in the attic—who after all has eternity to offer—but it does not make any difference to the fact that the fissure in our society which puts some on the side of the attic and others on the side of the cellar, keeps the poet inside the cage.

#### *Apologia for an Interest in Life*

THE problem is to put the creative imagination back at the centre of life. This cannot be done by the orthodox religious without their achieving something even more difficult than a mass conversion of 20th century man—that is, forcing the "world picture" of science into the frame of theology. On the other hand, acceptance of the division of the world into the truth of science and the pseudo-statements of the imagination is to lock poetry inside the cage.

The following propositions should be considered :

(1) Art has a purpose which is to transform contemporary life.

(2) It may well be necessary for a poet, in order that he have a working structure for the

symbolism of his poetry, to have a rigid, systematic framework of dogma. That, though, is outside the poetry. Within the poetry, the belief, resting on this framework which gives it force and precision, is nevertheless undogmatic and universal. Eliot, who is dogmatic in his orthodoxy when he writes prose, could—if one read his poems alone—easily be thought to be a Buddhist. The very esoteric ideas of Yeats, which are completely baffling—and quite incredible—if one reads *A Vision*—offer no obstruction to an understanding of his poetry. Poets who are completely opposed in their intellectual ideas, can nevertheless—if one read only what they had imagined—be reconciled in their poetry. The really important distinction today is not between different creeds but between believing and not believing. Beliefs put man at the centre of his poetry; materialism makes him an illustrator of a system outside the poetry.

(3) The assumptions of critics and poets about modern life should be challenged at every point and treated not as statements but as open questions.

(4) It is time that instead of saying "We get the art our society deserves" someone said "We get the society our art deserves."

(5) "The task of genius, and man is nothing if not genius, is to keep the miracle alive, to live always in the miracle, to make the miracle more and more miraculous, to swear allegiance to nothing, but live miraculously, think only miraculously, die miraculously." Henry Miller, *The Colossus of Maroussi*.

(6) We live today in a world with two futures—of total annihilation, or of revolution different from any envisaged by politics. It is impossible to think of survival only in terms of material progress. In regard to the future, we are now like Pascal taking his bet on eternity. We take our bet on survival of the physical world, but it can only be through living and working—in Henry Miller's sense—miraculously.



## Funeral Games

"COME ON, hurry," Joseph called to his friend, stamping his foot.

The pale ugly boy on the doorstep lowered his eyes, meekly; but his obedience went no further. He could not hurry. He hobbled down the steps carefully, like a girl.

"Come on," said Joseph, reproachfully this time. "What, are you tired already?"

"No," said the other boy, Fonda. His voice sounded as if he'd been asked something that didn't concern him.

Joseph watched him, his mouth pursed. He picked his nose absent-mindedly—he might have been looking at a picture in a book. Suddenly he shook it all off—hitched up his shorts and cantered away, digging his toes in the dust. "Quick, quick," he tooted at the top of his voice, with the urgency of a railway-engine; and his voice banged like tin against the wintry, moss-covered walls of the empty school-yard. "Quick," he cried, "recess will be over any minute." He enjoyed frightening Fonda, and himself, with this threat.

Fonda plodded round the courtyard behind him with the same meek and steady steps.

Imitating the screech of brakes, Joseph halted before him. He began pounding at Fonda with his clenched fists, quickly, lightly. Round and round his friend he danced, punching delicately into the thick, well-patched coat which sent his fists bouncing back to him like rubber. Fonda wiped his cold nose, whined a little, rather uncertain, and stooped to pick up a button that had fallen off his coat.

"So you won't fight, ha," panted Joseph, working himself up with enormous zeal. Fonda

examined his button mournfully; he threw a slow, dull, circular glance round the courtyard, as if expecting the whole place to be littered with lost buttons.

Joseph gave him a final punch in the chest; a hard, angry one. Then he stopped dancing.

"Why doesn't your mother take you to the doctor?" he cried, exasperated.

"She did," said Fonda, and he went and sat on a stone—like a girl again, gathering an invisible skirt round his blue knees; he blew on his button and polished it.

"Well? Are you really as ill as all that?"

"Yes."

"Why? Why?"

"I have pernicious anæmia, and the consequences may be fatal if proper care is not taken of me immediately," recited Fonda.

There was no pride in his voice. This horrified Joseph; this was the worst disease, the most unnatural; no one had ever caught it before; it did not belong to the kind that made boys pale as archangels, that put a supreme contempt on their thin faces and a light of fever in their eyes like the light of battle.

"Well? And will . . . will proper care be taken of you?" he asked under his breath.

"My mother said to the doctor: I have no money—how can I take proper care of him?" He had an uncanny memory. He always got better marks than Joseph. He simply learnt everything by heart, then sat very still, unravelling his memory.

"And what is it the doctor said would happen if you're not looked after?"

"The consequences may be fatal if . . ."