

how this is to be done against the intransigent hostility of Moslem nationalists. Again, the whole question of EDC and a French lead to Europe, which he discusses a little portentously (with M. Schuman as hero), has already been so transformed by recent events that the argument is partly irrelevant. And, as he himself admits, the French economic recovery of the last two years has been more rapid than he imagined it could be.

This really leads to a fundamental point. Mr. Luthy is particularly impressive when he shows how Frenchmen of every type have been so dazzled by their ideals that they have become ineffective. Yet, when arguing that to overcome her domestic and foreign crisis France must shake off the past and cease to be against herself, he seems to fall a little into

the same trap. In a way, this demand for a change in outlook could be put to any country in Europe, or even to the United States. But, violent convulsions apart, countries do not change rapidly. Thus, as France grows older, certain faults may become less prominent while others turn out to be irreparable, the North African empire may even be lost, but she will still be France, just as Britain after the loss of her "civilising mission" in India is still Britain. Indeed, the really quite remarkable recent economic progress in France, which has gone together with similar progress everywhere in Western Europe, goes to show that some of the problems Mr. Luthy discusses may not be so specifically French as he suggests. Still, for what is specifically the French concern, read *The State of France*.

T. R. Fyvel

BAD CONSCIENCE

HOMO REUS, Guilty Man, is one of the more conspicuous synonyms of *homo urbanus*, and we suffer under a whole gamut of shames, from the theological one of having had the bad taste to be descended from apple-stealers, down to such minor matters as having kissed that little girl at the dancing-class, or scribbling "Tush!" on a library-book, or picking one's nose in the bath, or not having kissed that other little girl at that other dancing-class, or being unable to read the works of Mr. William Faulkner. This last failing has been peculiarly painful in a month which has seen the publication of two of this author's books, *A Fable** and *Faulkner's County*.†

A Fable is conceived on a grand scale. Ostensibly it is concerned with an event (that never took place) on the Western Front in spring, 1918: a French regiment refuses to go over the top, and the mutiny spreads at once to enemy and ally. The war comes, not to an end, but a stand-still. This is the surface story:

but at the same time the book is largely a re-writing of the events of Passion Week—the mutiny is instigated by a Corporal and his twelve followers, Bible characters appear thinly disguised (as, for example, the sisters Marthe and Marya), the Corporal goes by way of a Gethsemane and Pilate to his own Calvary and eventual resurrection as the Unknown Soldier under the Arc de Triomphe.

This is a theme which in any case only a writer of Mr. Faulkner's stature has the right to tackle. He has not altogether fallen short of the challenge; in conception this is a very good book indeed, perhaps even a great one. What I find infinitely putting-off (and of course I feel guilty about that) is the execution. In the first place the story is told in an innumerable series of flash-backs and flash-forwards and what-have-you, so that, to my mind at least, all time-sense is lacking. This may give a certain universality and stillness, but surely anything that can call itself *A Fable* should begin approximately at the beginning and end approximately at the end?

This is one deterrent to easy reading. Another is that the book presents a very large number and wide variety of characters, and the story deals with them in bewildering

* *A Fable*. By WILLIAM FAULKNER. Chatto and Windus. 15s.

† *Faulkner's County*. By WILLIAM FAULKNER. Chatto and Windus. 15s.

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JONATHAN CAPE

succession. Either of these difficulties alone would be formidable; together they are forbidding indeed—and even yet a determined effort might circumvent them were it not for the third, and far the fiercest, dragon at the gate, the style. *A Fable* is written in a manner that insists that every page, every line, every word is of the immenseness of significance. This is done largely by picking up in each sentence or phrase a word or two from the sentence or phrase before. Thus:

Then the sunrise gun crashed from the old citadel above the city; the three flags broke simultaneously from nowhere and climbed the three staffs. What they broke and climbed and peaked in was still dawn, hanging motionless for a moment. But when they streamed on the first morning breeze, they streamed into sunlight, flinging into sunlight the three mutual colours—the red for courage and pride, the white for purity and constancy, the blue for honour and truth. Then the empty boulevard behind the cavalry filled suddenly with sunlight which flung the tall shadows of the men and the horses outward upon the crowd as though the cavalry was charging it.

Only it was the people advancing on the cavalry. . . .

In itself this is perhaps a beautiful passage. The repetitions (three, broke, climbed, streamed, sunlight, cavalry, fling) tend to substitute sound for sense, so that the reader has to make a special effort to concentrate on the matter; at a key moment of a book, this would not necessarily be a bad thing. Three hundred and ninety-two pages of it, however, are quite a different proposition. If all is invested with super-significance then, in the nature of things, much must be falsely so. Long passages are turgid, turbid, and tumid and I (who am perhaps torpid) began to long for the lucid, pellucid, and limpid.

Faulkner's County, subtitled *Tales of Yoknapatawpha County*, is the author's own selection of his tales about the Deep South and consists of one short novel, four long stories, and a number of shorter ones. Most of these date from earlier days before the tail of style started to wag him: far less ambitious than *A Fable*, these tales are more successful; powerful, brilliantly constructed, full of suspense, and radical in treatment. Occasionally they tread dangerously close to the confines of Hot Discomfort Farm, but they avoid quite stepping over them. The Faulkner of *Faulkner's County* is perhaps a

lesser man, but he seems to me a better writer than the Faulkner of today.

MR. KINGSLEY AMIS, author of *Lucky Jim*, presents no such difficulties. His new book, *That Uncertain Feeling*,* is eminently readable. Readers of *Lucky Jim* will remember that it was farcical, more or less picaresque, fast-moving, hard-hitting, pro-"life" anti-literature, pro-money anti-culture, and so on. *That Uncertain Feeling* is in the same genre but it is no pale shadow, or inflated repetition, of its predecessor. Mr. Amis has avoided the "second novel" pitfalls. Indeed, I think that this new book is, in its rather different way, even better than his first one. In this tale of a Welsh assistant librarian, Mr. Amis plays down the farce (the only slapstick passage in the book is also the only weak one in it); so that, while there are perhaps fewer horse-laughs than in *Lucky Jim*, *That Uncertain Feeling* is an altogether more solid and satisfactory affair. The author has also abandoned the picaresque, and the whole book shows a remarkable advance in consistency and balance.

Perhaps Mr. Amis's forte is his rational analysis of character, his linguistic explorations into the hinterlands of vanity and motive:

Feeling a tremendous rakehell, and not liking myself much for it, and feeling rather a good chap for not liking myself much for it, and not liking myself at all for feeling rather a good chap, I got indoors, vigorously rubbing lipstick off my mouth with my handkerchief.

This sort of thing can only be done by an artist with extreme respect for language, and accuracy in the use of it. Indeed much of Mr. Amis's concern is with the exact *intonation* of common-place phrases:

Why did I like women's breasts so much? I was clear on why I liked them, thanks, but why did I like them *so much*?

The writing is, in fact, uniformly brisk and crisp: the pernickety might object to too lavish use of what the Fowlers stigmatise as "pedantic humour," using long words for a laugh (as when, a large brown dog running up to the narrator, he "recommends his immediate departure"); but even this is usually

* *That Uncertain Feeling*. By KINGSLEY AMIS. Gollancz. 12s. 6d.

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so brightly done as to amuse rather than offend.

Mr. Amis satirises a number of deserving to observe the Welsh gaff being blown once objects *en route*, and it is particularly pleasant and for all. This is done partly by parody (as in the delightful snatch of pseudo-Thomas beginning

*When in time's double morning, meaning
death,
Denial's four-eyed bird, that Petrine cock
Crew junction down the sleepers of the
breath),*

but principally by close attention to, and observation of, real Welsh talk and manners, as opposed to the bogus Bloody Valley, Lust among the Pit-props, Taffy the Naafi stuff churned out by the professional Celts. Indeed this intruder Saxon writes almost the only accurate transcription of genuine Welsh tone and idiom that I can remember.

Within its limits (the rational and mechanistic) *That Uncertain Feeling* is a tour-de-force; and having said that, I feel freer to turn to the one element in it that I find objectionable. Mr. Amis and his narrator (I do not feel it possible to altogether separate them, especially since *Lucky Jim* presented a narrator of precisely the same type) are conscientiously and unfeelingly anti-art, anti-knowledge, anti-tradition, anti-manners—opposed, in fact, on principle, to “the best that is known or thought” or enjoyed or done. This attitude is entirely negative, and seems to be founded principally on sturdy obtuseness. Hooray for the Philistine values! How screamingly funny to think of anyone enjoying a book about Dr. Johnson! The hero is (as I have said) a librarian, but on the first page we are told

My gaze, slightly filmed by afternoon drowsiness, swam round the square, high room, fixing idly on the etching, or daguerrotype, or whatever it was, of Lord Beaconsfield's face which hung over the Hobbies and Handicrafts Section:

and I should have thought the inverted intellectual snobbery of (of all persons) a librarian, who cannot distinguish (of all things) an etching from a daguerrotype, excessive. The hero surveys his bookshelf:

A few Penguins, an Everyman Jane Austen (a College set-book, I should explain). . . .

Of course, of course, no one could *possibly* read Jane Austen for pleasure! The hero surveys the *nouveau riche* in a pub:

At least this crowd has enough bad taste to drink brandy before “dinner.”

There are (believe it or not, Mr. Amis!) other reasons for not drinking brandy before dinner than the desire to conform to the arbitrary code of an *ancien régime*.

This sort of meaningless cock-snooking (and it pervades the book) seems to me brash, provincial in the bad sense, sometimes puritanical in the bad sense. It is a great pity, because Mr. Amis is also thoroughly provincial and puritanical in comparatively good senses. The hasty diagnosis would be acute cultural inferiority complex: but since the context of his books everywhere else belies the occasion for this, I am left wondering.

Two books to be recommended for pure, imaginative writing, and of particular interest for their unusual periods and settings:

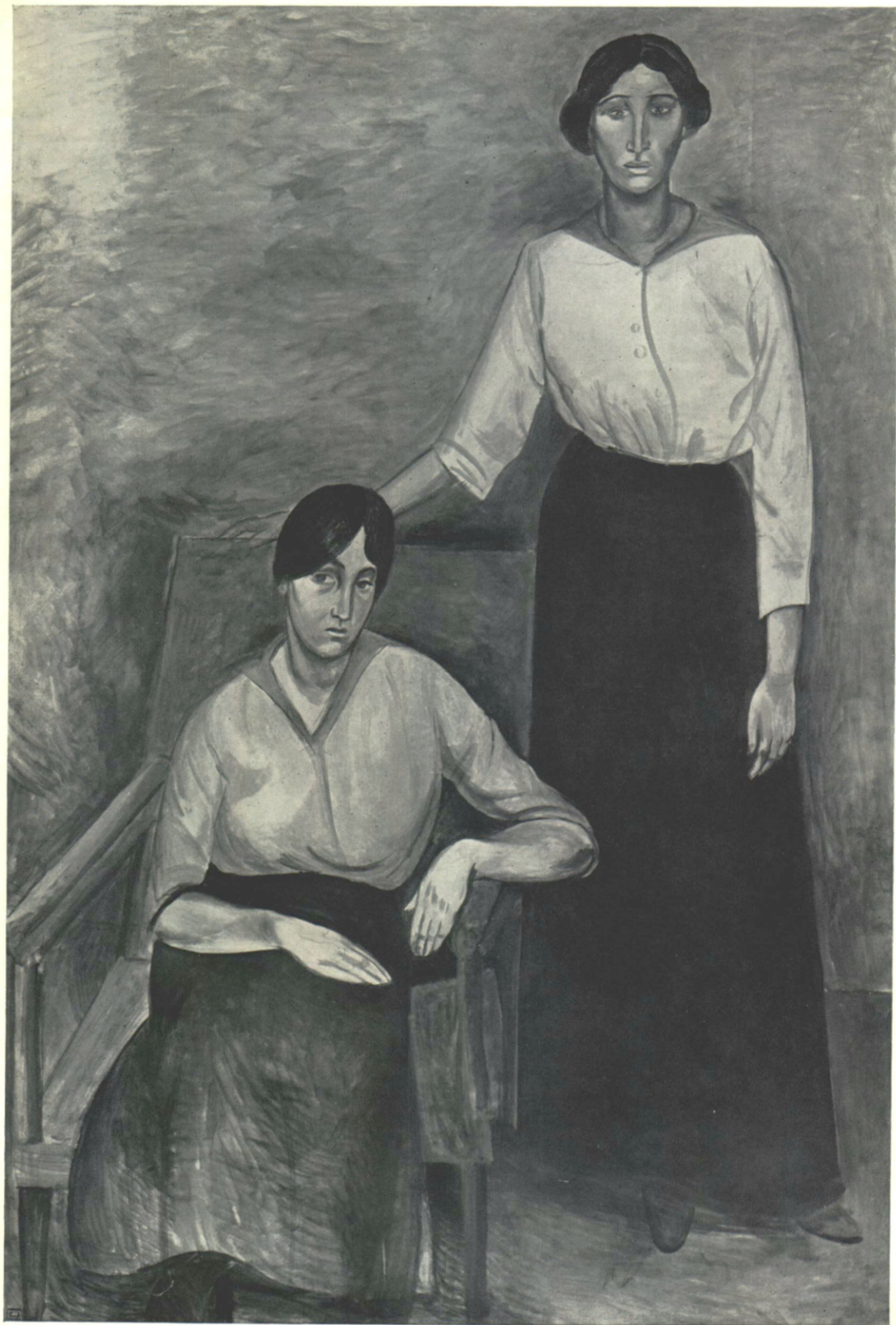
Bryher's *Roman Wall** is set in 3rd century Roman Switzerland: the Alemanni are massing on the border, the Empire rots at the centre, and its periphery is falling apart. This twilight period is conjured up with remarkable felicity, and that overworked word “charm” would not be out of place.

Loot and Loyalty,† by Jerzy Pietrkiewicz, deals with matters even more remote to English ears, the Russo-Polish border in the early 17th century. This book is not so much a novel as a pseudo-historical fantasia woven around two historical persons, the Scottish mercenary Captain Tobias Hume (noted for his compositions for viol da gamba), and the peasant pretender to the Russian throne known to historians as “the second false Dmitri.” Mr. Pietrkiewicz has none of Bryher's delicate delineation of character, but his material is so wild (and, yes, woolly), and his “attack,” in the musical sense, so determined, that he has produced a thoroughly interesting book.

* *Roman Wall*. By BRYHER. Collins. 10s. 6d.

† *Loot and Loyalty*. By JERZY PIETRKIEWICZ. Heinemann. 12s. 6d.

Hilary Corke



Les deux sœurs, 1914

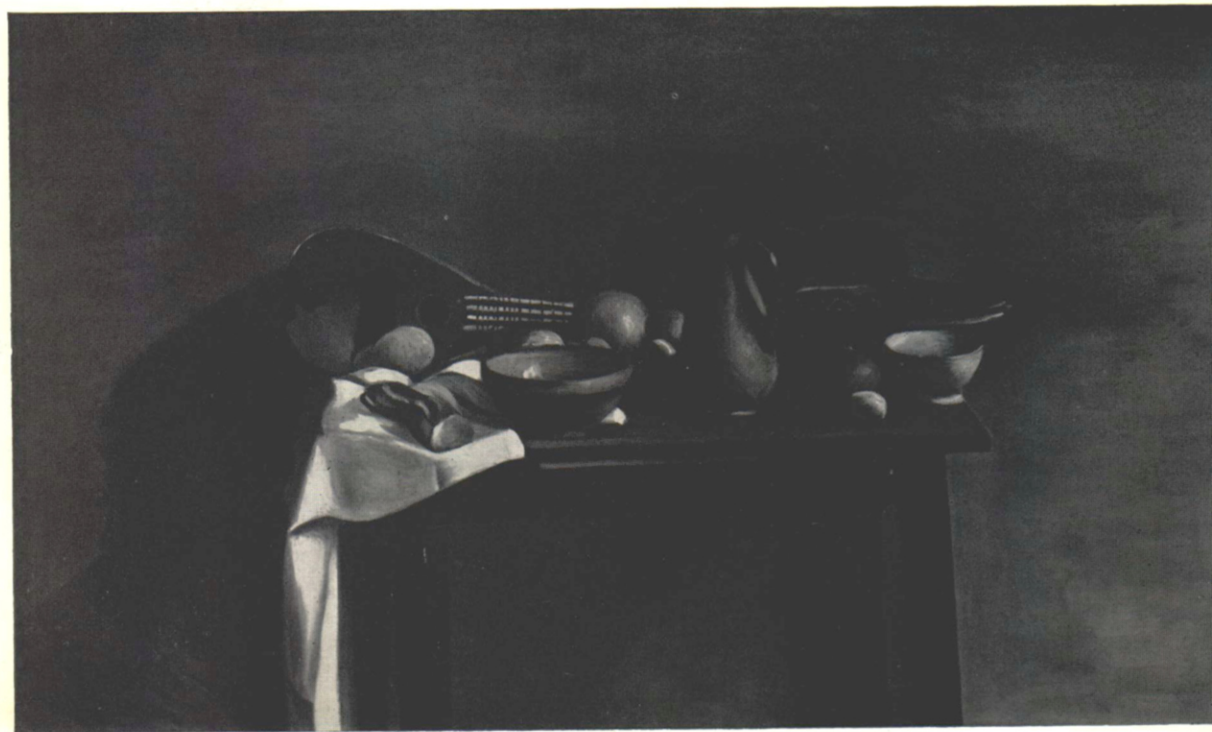
Photo: Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen



Nature Morte, 1904

Photo: Marlborough Fine Art Ltd., London

La table, 1922





Les deux pichets, 1942

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