

DISCUSSION

Portrait of the "Artist" as an Angry Young Gentleman

"And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death."

I FIND it irresistible to respond to ENCOUNTER's generous invitation to comment on the pieces contributed to its October number by the Angry Young Gentlemen. Living in the country, and largely in the past, I have not seen their plays or read their books; but I judge from what I have heard that both of them are highly successful young gentlemen. And on reading the excerpts from their essays given in ENCOUNTER, I wonder what they are angry about. Mr. Tynan writes good, cogent English (his style strikes me as a good deal more taut than Osborne's, and I would judge his intellect to be superior); and the inartistic society against which they are both protesting is apparently affording them a very good living. I can only conclude that what they really need is not several columns of the valuable space of ENCOUNTER, but several hours on a psychiatrist's couch. I have never read two articles so instinct with self-advertised inferiority. The Germans have a saying that "the trees do not grow up to the sky"; but no one in his sane mind could postulate any ceiling to the prodigiously burgeoning chips on the shoulders of these two young gentlemen.

Mr. Christopher Hollis, in an admirable article entitled "Keeping Up With the Rices" (*The Spectator*, 18 October, 1957), has already made a savoury dish of kedgerce out of Mr. Osborne, and by implication out of Mr. Tynan. A few additional remarks are perhaps worth making about the former young gentleman.

Mr. Osborne, at the beginning of his piece in ENCOUNTER, disclaims any serious process of ratiocination. He is not, he proclaims, an intellectual, but an "artist"; his real job is making people feel. In that case, it would seem that the essay form is one unsuited, *ex hypothesi*, to his talents. It is really rather insolent to grab an intelligent reader by the lapel and then preface one's remarks by an admission that one has, after all, nothing intelligible to say:

"I have dreaded writing this piece. If I were ever capable of doing it, I am not capable of doing it now. Months ago some kind of weakness or vanity made me agree to contribute to this book. But I

have procrastinated to the point of downright bad manners until I am now the only writer in this symposium who has not delivered his copy. They are all—apparently—waiting for me. I do not relish having to address myself to what is almost certain to be a self-conscious literary mob, people who write sneering, parochial stuff in the week-end reviews. I can't solve anybody else's problems, least of all these creatures', collecting their literary cocoa tin lids every week."

Let us briefly consider some of the thoughts which have dripped from Mr. Osborne's pen:

"My objection to the royal symbol is that it is dead; it is the gold filling in a mouthful of decay."

This, of course, is not an attack on the royal symbol, but on the human beings among whom Mr. Osborne has the personal misfortune to reside. It prompts the question, Is it better to be dead or decadent? Much could be argued about this dichotomy. Is not gold better than pyorrhœa?

Then again:

"...the state visits to countries like France and Portugal which successfully fulfil the monarchy function of disguising important political issues—such as the barbarity of the French Government's policy in Algeria, and the openly anti-democratic constitution of Portugal—in a sludge of generalised patriotic feelings."

Both France and Portugal are republics. Mr. Osborne seems unaware of these simple facts. For he writes:

"A socialist party that is not republican is not crediting its potential followers with reason or intelligence."

But it seems from the previous quotation from Mr. Osborne that even when the republic has been achieved, the "barbarity," and an "anti-democratic constitution" may still be prevalent in sludge.

If it is so terrible for the Queen, on the advice of her Ministers, to visit Portugal (our oldest ally), why does it go unremarked by Mr. Osborne when a much more savage dictator than Dr. Salazar, Khrushchev (who rules over a country with which

we have no alliance), has tea with the Queen at Windsor?

"As for the ship launchings, the visits to 'establishments,' the polo games, the night-clubs with well-bred nobodies,"...

[would it be better if the Royal Family were coerced into accepting escorts who were ill-bred somebodies?]

... "the T.V. appearances, the endless concentration at the racecourse, the Christmas Day set-cant: are these the crowning interests of a rich, healthy culture?"

As the psalmist twanged: "They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy.

There is none that doeth good, no, not one."

WHY shouldn't people in a free world play polo if they want to, and can afford to? Isn't it rather snobbish to complain that members of the Royal Family sometimes associate with people who are not celebrities? The launching of ships is not, in fact, it may be observed in passing, exclusively confined to members of the Royal Family. I regret my lack of information on this topic, but I am unable to report in what sports, indoor or outdoor, Mr. Osborne himself indulges or excels; but even if they were markedly anti-social, I really don't think I would write to the newspapers to complain about his forms of recreation. I like to think that Mr. Osborne has a happy private life of his own, but whether it be happy or unhappy, it would be presumptuous for strangers like myself to intrude upon it. Not so Mr Osborne. So far he has been good enough to refrain from prescribing what games I ought or ought not to play, what pastimes I myself should be allowed to indulge in, or be discouraged from indulging in. So far his plaint only applies to the Royal Family; but where will this process end? Very good humble men in cloth caps may soon find themselves deprived of their whippets by these Angry Young Gentlemen, and, for all I know, they may join with Prince Jean de Faucigny-Lucinge in barring Lady Docker from the Casino in Monte Carlo, and perhaps have their faces slapped for their pains.

Mr. Osborne suffered, I believe, a good deal of intrusion from the press at the time of his recent marriage. One might have hoped that his own disagreeable experience might have led him to have a chivalrous regard for the Queen's privacy.

Her Majesty is currently under attack for not appearing on television as often as Mr. Muggeridge used to. But, for Mr. Osborne, she has already lost her public in the very brief and fugitive appearances she has so far made.

"It bores me, it distresses me that there should be so many empty minds, so many empty lives in Britain to sustain this fatuous industry [the Royal Family]; that no one should have had the wit to laugh it into extinction, or the honesty to resist it."

Is this a well-written sentence? Is it witty? Does it fill empty minds? Does it laugh anything into

extinction? One could go on till the bears mate with the squirrels asking similar questions about this particular piece of anger.

As far as I am informed, neither the Queen nor the Home Secretary has yet thought it necessary to interfere in any way with Mr. Osborne's private activities. In the free English world in which he seems to find it so disagreeable to live, he has just got married, without anyone attempting to intrude upon his private happiness. Chuck it, Osborne, chuck it. I don't mean your marriage, naturally not. But has it not occurred to you that your busy-bodding activities might interfere with other people who have a right to seek happiness in their own way, without you, and the *Daily Mirror*, the *People*, the *Sunday Pictorial*, Mr. Muggeridge, Lord Altrincham, and Mr. John Gordon pontificating about them?

It is sometimes said as a reproach against the British people that they think that the world "owes them a living." It almost seems as if the Angry Young Gentlemen feel that the world owes them grievances, which in their ineptitude they have not so far been able to discover or postulate for themselves. And that in their psychological disquietude they have picked upon the Queen who, after all, is fair game for Angry Young Gentlemen. She is a sitting bird. How sludgy can you be?

We need not waste so much time on Mr. Tynan, abler though he is than Mr. Osborne.

Consider two extracts from Mr. Tynan's piece:

"... Your attitude towards your native land... should be governed by a gracious old concept, redolent of all that was best in medievalism. Recently refurbished by Mr. Waugh, it is called the concept of precedence. "There is a single line," he has written, "extending from Windsor to Wormwood Scrubs of individuals all justly and precisely graded..."

"... I would recall to your mind a remark made two years ago by Anthony Nutting, when Khrushchev and Bulganin were in India... B. and K., he said, having been turned down at the front door, had gone round to the back. India, that is to say, was the tradesmen's entrance. I am not sure where the Jews stand in the Great Chain of Being; so many of them are so obstinately classless;..."

This is Mr. Tynan's representation of Mr. Nutting's opinions. I wonder why Mr. Tynan dragged the Jews in? So far as I know, Mr. Nutting, of whom I have scarcely more knowledge than I have of Mr. Tynan, has never said anything derogatory about the Jews. But the phrase "Chain of Being" seems to indicate that it is Mr. Waugh and not Mr. Nutting whose words are being distorted in this irrelevant fashion as fuel for Mr. Tynan's ire.

But what has Mr. Waugh ever said against the Jews? We all know that, like many Jews and Gentiles, he is not a Zionist; but I have never previously heard him accused, directly or indirectly, of anti-Semitism. Of course, particularly for intellectuals, it is often a useful trick to accuse your opponents of anti-Semitism without producing any evidence. How angry and dishonest can you be?

Mr. Tynan is a very clever young gentleman. I find it hard to believe that he could have involved himself and his readers in such an intellectual confusion by accident.

In fact, what Mr. Tynan is inviting his readers to believe—if words have any meaning—is that all right-wing opinion in Britain can be summed up in two phrases torn from their contexts (one without attribution) from Mr. Nutting and Mr. Waugh. The first of these two middle-aged gentlemen (both of whom have given up being as angry as they used to be) has retired from politics, while the latter has never intruded himself into the political arena.

If these Angry Young Gentlemen had a legitimate grievance against the world by which they have been so lushly suckled, I would have expected them to attack Mr. Macmillan or Mr. Cousins, Mr.

Khrushchev or President Eisenhower, or Mr. Thorneycroft or Mr. Bevan; for these are the men who seek to dominate the world in which they live. Instead, these angry young gentlemen have chosen to attack the people whom Mr. Macmillan would be least likely to send in to bat for the Conservative Party—Mr. Waugh and Mr. Nutting. And they call it cricket.

"Then, said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou has not laboured, neither madest it grow; which come up in a night, and perished in a night:

And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?"

Randolph S. Churchill

Whom have you forgotten?

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LETTERS

Mr. Anderson and Admass

IN YOUR current number—and also in the book Declaration Mr. Lindsay Anderson writes:

“... Artists and intellectuals who despise the people, imagine themselves superior to them, and think it clever to talk about the ‘Ad-Mass’ are both cutting themselves off from necessary experience, and shirking their responsibilities....”

The term *Admass*, now in fairly common use among literary journalists, was first coined by me—see the passage headed *New Names in Journey Down A Rainbow*. It is not a description of any kind of people but a name given to an economic-industrial-social-cultural system that is American in origin but is now taking over most of the Western world. And I for one mistrust and dislike *Admass*, but this has nothing to do with despising people, cutting oneself off from necessary experience, shirking one's responsibilities.

J. B. PRIESTLEY

London, W.1

“Zero and the Impossible”

MAY I make two points in connection with the article by Martin Seymour-Smith in the November ENCOUNTER?

Firstly, to complain that logic and logical analysis are “loveless,” “neutralised,” and “bleak,” is rather like complaining that tennis-courts are hard and flat and hemmed-in by wire-netting.

Secondly, the comments on the work of Ryle and Ayer, at the end of the article, are further depressing evidence of the resentment which is only too often aroused when the irritating force of plain unadorned reasoning clashes with other, more cherished, habits of thought.

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IN HIS article “Zero and the Impossible” (ENCOUNTER, November), Mr. Seymour-Smith sets out to consider four very different writers whose only affinity is, as he himself admits, “this sad coincidence” of their recent death. In order to avoid writing four unrelated pieces, he poses a criterion

for good writing, in the light of which he will consider each of them. This criterion is their ability to devise “a poetic language... in which it is possible to communicate an apprehension of reality.” Yet when the turn of Joyce Cary comes, Mr. Seymour-Smith says that “We should be unwise... to make a serious attempt to assess the degree of his creative intelligence.” His condemnation of Cary does not then rest on Cary's failure to measure up to the set standard, for the measurement is never made. There is no attempt to assess the quality of his prose, to examine his success in communicating an “apprehension of reality.” Rather does Mr. Seymour-Smith concern himself with the question of the validity of Cary's reality. Such a concern is, in fact, more appropriate to the work of a novelist than is a pre-occupation with linguistic analysis. Yet having reached the right path apparently by accident, Mr. Seymour-Smith seems to stumble along it, without seeing where it leads him.

In the first place, he criticises what he terms Cary's “Anti-moralistic” outlook. By this, he seems to mean the failure of Cary's characters to see any conflict between their own actions, and some objective standard of morality which they recognise. Gully Jimson has no other standard of conduct than his need to express himself as an artist, Nimmo no scruples in his power-lust. Each deceives himself in order to justify his own actions. What Mr. Seymour-Smith fails to recognise is that Cary did not deceive himself, nor did he attempt to deceive us. The conflict is there if we wish to see it. He shows us how these people have shirked the conflict. There is no need for us to do so.

More important, he fails to observe Cary's achievement in establishing communication both between us and his characters, and between the characters themselves. Nina's understanding of Nimmo, for instance, is very much greater than she will allow herself to realise. For if she did realise it, her happiness would vanish; such is her superficiality. The same might be said of the dream-world in which Mr. Johnson lives; yet the fact is that these people, far from being uncomplicated, ignore their complexities in order to be able to act. Mr. Seymour-Smith would have us believe that Cary's characters live in an Antinomian world, where nothing matters provided one is saved; where what Cary was in fact doing was trying to resolve, as every novelist does, the dichotomy between freewill and determinism. If his solution appears Antinomian, it is not so much that he comes