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# POETRY

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## The Words of the World

*On Wallace Stevens — By FRANK KERMODE*

Two main difficulties seem to be responsible for our English reluctance to accept Wallace Stevens as a major poet. The first and more intractable is his notorious "gaudiness," the fancy and flare of his language; he is devotedly euphuistic, in the sense given to that word by his master, Santayana. "I have never been able to see why what is called Anglo-Saxon should have the right to higgles and haggles all over the page, contesting the right of other words. If a poem seems to require a hierophantic phrase, the phrase should pass," he said in a late lecture. Someone has said that Stevens wrote English as if it were French, and he himself thought it inappropriate that the language of American poetry should be English. It is evidently no good arguing with Englishmen who insist on thinking his use of their language unidiomatic or irresponsible.

The second difficulty is the common assumption that Stevens is a very narrow poet, having poetry, and almost nothing else, as his subject. To overcome this it is first necessary to read Stevens; and the English critic can best help by providing unambitious reading aids. We are not yet ripe for the subtler criticism Americans are producing on the basis of a forty-year acquaintance with the poems—for R. P. Blackmur's essays, to give an example. Elementary introductions and plodding commentaries are needed, and they should be forgotten after reading. This is an attempt at an introduction to *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, perhaps the central poem. I have written the commentary but this is obviously not the place for it.

The short answer to the charge of narrowness is that poetry, to Stevens, meant roughly, everything that has reality; poetry and the *materia poetica*, he said, were one and the same thing. The poet "speaks the words of the world that are the life of the world." This is not merely fine talk; he genuinely makes such claims for poetry, and one can see how vast they are by comparing them with the claims of other poets,

for instance, Mr. T. S. Eliot, who thinks art has frontiers, and that one goes on from it to other and possibly more important matters. Stevens' poet is the discoverer of an order which cannot now, and indeed never could be, discovered by anybody else; religion, myth, were forms of poetic activity which are merely no longer relevant. Consequently, the poet in Stevens is a vast, heroic figure, the "major man" who creates the supreme fiction which is modern reality. He is an "impossible possible philosopher's man," an abstraction of a special kind, but still a man and not a god, except in so far as the creator of a world may be called a god. When he creates reality, first by the feat of seeing things as they are and then by re-imagining them, clothing them in the fictions which give them human relevance, he commits the final act of imagination and invokes "the necessary angel" in whose sight we "see the earth again," cleansed of dead myth and false philosophy. He has the right to say, "Thou art not August unless I make thee so"; and his function is "to help people live their lives" and mitigate the irremediable poverty of humanity.

Stevens, though he discriminated patiently between various romanticisms good and bad, freely acknowledged—for how could he deny?—his romantic heritage. For him imagination is "*the one reality/In this imagined world*," the instrument by which the poet finds "what will suffice" to refresh an earth whose gods are dead. It creates evil as well as good, but chiefly it creates all, and not simply poetic, value. Since it does all these things, poetry is our sun of the mind, our spiritual planet; the bringer of health, of savour, and of consolation; the slayer of the dragon of abstract philosophy; the destroyer of our poverty—"purging . . . the world's poverty and change and evil and death." It is what makes life bearable, and more:

*Natives of poverty, children of malheur,  
The gaiety of language is our seigneur.*

Since it is the most important fact of our lives, it cannot sensibly be called a narrow subject for a poet to dwell upon.

What makes the poet the potent figure that he is, or was, or ought to be, is that he creates the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it and that he gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive it.

Stevens, in a manner quite proper to a poet of his generation, was deeply though not quite avowedly indebted to Henri Bergson, and one among many Bergsonian concepts that meant much to him was that of the *fonction fabulatrice*, nature's defence against domination by intellect. He was clear, however, that the fables which result can and do become obsolete. Poets invented the gods, they invented the myths, they invented heaven and hell; but all these are irrelevant to modern reality,

*since now both heaven and hell  
Are one and here, O terra infidel.*

The necessary poem is now of the earth; this is a theme meditated repeatedly in Stevens' essays, and endlessly in poems which seek to be true not only to the defensive fable but to the chaos gleaming behind it; to fortuity and freshness as well as to order. The minute and unpredictable particular has to be in them—

*Could you have said that the blue jay suddenly  
Would swoop to earth? It is the wheel, the rays  
Around the sun. The wheel survives the myths.*

And the myths have to be there, too, fresh, new-made, ready to be obsolete when reality and the observer alter their mutual stance. The *fonction fabulatrice* in Stevens produces a fantastic array of ephemeral myths and heroes, and they are all casualties in the war between the mind and sky, between reality pressing in upon a man and the defensive imagination countering that pressure. This essential biological function can be performed only by poetry; it is not, as Bergson thought, a possible job for metaphysics. Stevens collared Bergson for poetry, and he never ceased to consider the poetry-philosophy relationship; it turns up again in his last lectures.\*

It seems essential, since I have brought in Bergson, to mention also George Santayana, who was even more important to Stevens. *Interpretation of Poetry and Religion* (1900) is a key book,

though Stevens knew Santayana in considerable detail, and altered what he borrowed rather less than in the cases of other creditors (Whitman, Valéry, Eliot; also, less profoundly, Jean Wahl and Focillon). Santayana thought of religion as "poetry intervening in life" and hoped to see poetry emerge into reality from a "half-mythical world."

A rational poet's vision would have the same moral functions that myth was asked to fulfil, and fulfilled so treacherously; it would employ accurately the same ideal faculties which myth used confusedly. More detail would have been added, and more variety in interpretation. . . . (*Reason in Art*).

Above all, perhaps, Stevens was a persistent anti-Platonist of the Santayana kind, regarding beauty as pleasure objectified; the "revelation of reality" produced by poetry is a *physical* revelation, a fact of the human body which the mind cannot tackle or apprehend "on its own terms." "*The greatest poverty is not to live/In a physical world*," said Stevens again and again. George Boas wrote of Santayana that the "objectification of pleasure became for him in his poetic moments the one thing that redeems the barrenness of life"; and that this strikes one as an expression Stevens might have used is testimony of his affiliation to the philosopher whom late in life he honoured in a wonderful poem, "To an Old Philosopher in Rome."

This may make Stevens' philosophic interests sound something out-of-date; and though he seems to have read later philosophers, there is no doubt that he was most affected, naturally enough, by these older ones. Bergson and Santayana provide strong philosophical links with a Romantic-Symbolist tradition in which, in any case, he found himself as a poet; and he made them all of a piece with his other meditations. And, anyway, all this matters only as a beginning. Stevens is the poet of "the single subject thoroughly matured"; he explored it first in poetry, "the discoverer of reality," and later in prose, "the discoverer of poetry." But the explorations are enormously varied, however pervaded by that "presiding personality" Stevens always sought in other men's art, and whoever follows them will be drawn into a rhetorical environment—a *mundo*, as Stevens calls it, to distinguish it from the "real" world—of incredible variety and beauty. The "thought" matters only because a knowledge of its drift can be a help in the reading of the poems. So I will say no more about it, but move on to *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction* which, being understood, makes most of the others easy. I need hardly add that "understanding" here means "being possessed by," in a way Stevens once described: "Anyone who has read a long poem day after

\* These are printed in *Opus Postumus*, published in this country late in 1959 (Faber, 36s.). The same publisher has recently brought out Stevens' principal prose work, *The Necessary Angel*, first published by Alfred Knopf in 1951.

day . . . knows how the poem comes to possess the reader and how it naturalises him in its own imagination and liberates him there."

NOTES TOWARD A SUPREME FICTION has a dream-like philosophical theme as it were immanent in its world; but it expressly doesn't philosophise, spreading no grid of categories. It "brings down from nowhere nothing's waxlike blooms." In it, "the feeling of one man is communicated to another in words of exquisite appositeness that takes away all their verbliness." Any kind of comment, however delicate—and I make no pretence of delicacy—tends to put the verbliness back in, and it is worth recalling a saying of Stevens which, with extreme accuracy, expresses the problem of both poet and critic: "Poetry must resist the intelligence almost successfully." He is with Eliot and Yeats and Valéry in holding that "the poem reveals itself only to the ignorant man." The clearer the explanations, the falser they are likely to be. Sometimes what is being explained isn't even fully there; Stevens is always fantastic, and when he creates a nature, as he does in *Notes*, it is shown as if in continuous creation, changing and incomplete, so that an image or an idea may be seen like Milton's lion, pawing to get free his hinder parts.

The poem, then, is unlike philosophy, as a philosophical poem ought to be, even if it deals with the interdependence of nature and the human imagination. The poet's element is the fortuitous, he is for ever being "flicked by feeling," by unheralded significances, epiphanies that are perhaps at the same time fables. "Poetry deals in *trouvailles*; hence its disorder." The poet is not organising reality, since reality is reality imaginatively seen; things as they are are things as they seem, says Stevens, so that poetry is "part of the *res* itself and not about it." So the activity of the poet is quite unpredictable, and the final poem is fact not before realised, a contribution to reality. From it ideas of order may be inferred; but the poet has made a nature and not a physics. It is a nature full of the squawk and clatter of birds, of unique flowers, of the excitement of changing seasons, unexplained personalities welling out of the *fonction fabulatrice*, irrational transitions. It gives pleasure because of the way we are, because analogies and resemblances please us, and these are not to be had if there is no irrelevance. "The irrational element in poetry is the transaction between reality and the sensibility of the poet from which poetry springs"; and this is the transaction which effects "the conversion of our *Lumpenwelt*." The important thing is that we are dealing, in poetry, not with myth but with

fact, with fact not realised before; the fiction is the only, ever-changing, truth.

"ONE poem proves another and the whole," we read in *A Primitive like an Orb*; and this is certainly true of Stevens, so that to soak oneself in the *Collected Poems* is the best preparation for any one of them. However, something may be done towards an unimpeded reading of *Notes* by explanations of the sectional titles.

*It Must be Abstract*. "The Ultimate Poem is Abstract" is one of Stevens' more forbidding poem titles. He is using "abstract" in a special sense; it is not the abstract that Blake hated. Stevens describes the wrong sort of abstraction in "Landscape with Boat"; the man who desires this wrong kind of abstraction is gaudily described as a "Nabob of bones":

He never supposed  
That he might be the truth, himself, or part of  
it,  
That the things that he rejected might be part  
And the irregular turquoise, part, the perceptible  
blue  
Grown denser, part, the eye so touched, so played  
Upon by clouds, the ear so magnified  
By thunder, parts, and all these things together,  
Parts, and more things, parts. He never supposed  
divine  
Things might not look divine, nor that if nothing  
Was divine then all things were, the world itself,  
And that if nothing was the truth, then all  
Things were the truth, the world itself was the  
truth.

Blake's "minute particulars" are of the essence of Stevens' abstract. The poet's abstraction is not "a vice except/To the fatuous"; for as Stevens says in his summary of Valéry's dialogue *Eupalinos*, "Man . . . fabricates by abstraction"; it is his way of "living in the world, but outside existing conceptions of it." The particular has to be abstracted from all the dead formulations and images that obscure it, to be looked upon as a reality free of imaginative (or, since they are obsolete, imaginary) accretions; it has to be seen absolutely, "without evasion by a single metaphor" (*Credences of Summer*). In Stevens' pervasive imagery of the seasons, winter represents this abstracted reality, a bare icy outline:

One must have a mind of winter  
To regard the frost and the boughs  
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow . . .  
and not to think  
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,  
In the sound of a few leaves,  
Which is the sound of the land  
Full of the same wind  
That is blowing in the same bare place  
For the listener, who listens in the snow

*And, nothing himself, beholds  
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.*  
(THE SNOW MAN)

After winter, spring: the newly perceived analogies, related particulars, colours, sounds, rush in and vanquish the cold outline. The fully re-imagined reality is expressed as summer (the central poem for this figure is the superb "Credences of Summer"). This season is the only paradise, the full human satisfaction; and "the mind lays by its trouble." But with fall and winter the cycle proceeds.

*After the leaves have fallen, we return  
To a plain sense of things. It is as if  
We had come to an end of the imagination,  
Inanimate in an inert savoir. . . .*

*Yet the absence of the imagination had  
Itself to be imagined. . . .*  
(THE PLAIN SENSE OF THINGS)

For all imaginative activity that has a real relevance to our poverty and need starts from this primary effort of abstraction. It is a recognition of reality imperceptible except in poems; and the measure of a poet's power is his ability

to abstract himself, and to withdraw with him into his abstraction the reality upon which the lovers of truth insist. He must be able to abstract himself and also to abstract reality, which he does by placing it in his imagination.

Thus the cycle runs from abstraction through re-imagining and the loss of power in these evasions of metaphor to a new effort of abstraction, and so on.

*The poem refreshes life, so that we share,  
For a moment, the first idea. . . . It satisfies  
Belief in an immaculate beginning.*

*And sends us, winged by an unconscious will,  
To an immaculate end. We move between these  
points:*

*From that ever-early candour to its late plural*

*And the candour of them is the strong exhilaration*

*Of what we feel from what we think, of thought  
Beating in the heart, as if blood newly came,*

*An elixir, an excitation, a pure power.  
The poem through candour, brings back a power  
again*

*That gives a candid kind to everything.*

The history of art is held to bear out such a view of the poetic process, and this is a leading theme in Stevens' important lecture, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," a work closely associated with *Notes*. Because of change, not even Dante or Verrocchio can avoid that loss of contact with reality which is an essential of all art; change creates the need for new abstraction

so that we may continue to have our pleasure and our peace. So the "ephebe" of *Notes*, the young man in receipt of this obscure advice on how to be a hero or a virile poet, must first cleanse the sun, the prime image, from all mythical accretions. Only thus can he begin the process of turning himself into "the intelligence of his soil, the sovereign ghost." (*The Comedian as the Letter C*.)

*It Must Change*. "The imagination . . . generates as well as abstracts," says Santayana in *The Sense of Beauty*; and, again, "It is . . . possible that changes in the character of the facts . . . should necessitate the continual reconstruction of our world." The poem must change as reality changes: "Invisible change discovers what is changed." Most of the doctrine of change as it affects poetry is in a superb late poem called "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight," and a reading of that makes much explanation unnecessary. This ultimately Bergsonian theme is fundamental to Stevens' view of art.

Why should a poem not change when we realise that there is a fluctuation in the whole of experience? Or why should it not change when we realise that the indifferent experience of life is the unique experience, the item of ecstasy which we have been isolating and reserving for another time and place, loftier and more secluded?

It is this constancy of change that renders obsolete heaven and hell, the myths and the gods whose departure is celebrated in the same essay ("Two or Three Ideas"). It is a late essay, but Stevens had said these things as early as *Harmonium*. Here are a few more revealing prose comments on the fact and the need of change:

It is one of the peculiarities of imagination that it is always at the end of an era. What happens is that it is always attaching itself to a new reality, and adhering to it. It is not that there is a new imagination but that there is a new reality. (*The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words*.)

Just as the nature of truth changes, perhaps for no more significant reason than that philosophers live and die, so the nature of poetry changes, perhaps for no more significant reason than that poets come and go. (*The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet*.)

If we could produce any fixed image of the world, we should want to call it the chief or only image; and no matter how great and inclusive it might be, it could not content the imagination, which is "the irrepressible revolutionist" (*Imagination as Value*). The reality which is truest for us, the modern "conversion of our *Lumpenwelt*," is the product of what Simone Weil called "decreation" as opposed to "destruction."



tion"; we pass from the created not to nothingness—that would be destruction—but to the uncreated. "Modern reality is a reality of de-creation, in which our revelations are not the revelations of belief, but the precious portents of our own powers."

*The casual is not  
Enough. The freshness of transformation is*

*The freshness of a world. It is our own,  
It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves.*

Change is essential to the precious physical reality Stevens sets up against Platonism; it provides those "revelations of reality" which are of the physical world, and not from on high:

*The light  
Of it is not a light apart, up-hill.  
(A PRIMITIVE LIKE AN ORB)*

The last words of "A Primitive like an Orb" speak of the central poem as "the giant ever changing, living in change." Change is, then, the constant topic and activity of the imagination. The poles of change are, in the language of *Notes*, the "ever-early candour" of the abstracted first idea, and its "late plural," the inconceivably various and fluctuant union of the imagined and the real. Imagination exhausts part of reality, and each new imaginative act is performed on a different matter. It is

*As if the air, the mid-day air, was swarming  
With the metaphysical changes that occur,  
Merely in living as and where we live.*

The second section of the poem consists of parables and illustrations of this theme, and of course relates it to the other two. The statue of General Du Puy, for instance, is an example of the obsolescent noble rider; he does not change, but belongs "among our more vestigial states of mind," and becomes "rubbish in the end." The fourth section is one of Stevens' most ravishing explanations:

*Two things of opposite natures seem to depend  
On one another, as a man depends  
On a woman, day on night, the imagined*

*On the real. This is the origin of change.  
Winter and spring, cold copulars, embrace  
And forth the particulars of rapture come.*

*Music falls on the silence like a sense,  
A passion that we feel, not understand.  
Morning and afternoon are clasped together*

*And North and South are an intrinsic couple  
And sun and rain a plural, like two lovers  
That walk away as one in the greenest body.*

We are made so as to desire "the exhilarations of change"; from it proceed "the particulars of

rapture." Consequently the supreme fiction "must give pleasure."

*It Must Give Pleasure.* "The purpose of poetry is to contribute to man's happiness": this is one of Stevens' *Adagia*. He is here, and elsewhere, at one with Wordsworth and Coleridge, and indeed with the whole Romantic tradition, though closest, perhaps, to the subtle hedonism of Santayana.

If the pleasure fails the very substance and protoplasm of beauty is wanting. . . . Not until I confound the impressions and suffuse the symbols themselves with the emotions they arouse, and find joy and sweetness in the very words I hear, will the expressiveness constitute beauty; as when they sing, *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. (*The Sense of Beauty*.)

In holding this view, and its corollary that the poet is a man with a capacity for sensuous delight greater than that of other men, Stevens consciously identifies himself with one of the most enduring aspects of Romantic thought.

It is, however, essential to extend the sense of "pleasure" to include other meanings, such as "health" ("Poetry is a health"); consolation; whatever mitigates the poverty of the children of malheur. For "pleasure" is the mode of operation of the one comforter, the gaiety of language. The poet's part is

to help people live their lives. He has had immensely to do with giving life whatever savour it possesses. He has had to do with whatever the imagination and the senses have made of the world. He has, in fact, had to do with life except as the intellect has had to do with it . . . he is an *amoureux perpétuel* of the world that he contemplates and thereby enriches.

The poet's pleasure is sometimes called a "liberation," or a "justification," meaning "a kind of justice of which we had not known and on which we had not counted," a "purification"; and in the state of elevation he provides "we feel perfectly adapted to the idea that moves and *l'oiseau qui chante*." Even the poet who created God uttered "hymns of joy" to celebrate his creation. The virile poet lives

in a kind of radiant and productive atmosphere . . . the pleasure that the poet has there is a pleasure of agreement with the radiant and productive world in which he lives. It is an agreement that Mallarmé found in the sound of

*Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui.*

He is the only giver of true pleasure, since he alone provides, not the obsolete joys of a heaven, but those revelations of reality which proceed from the "more than rational" apprehension of the physical world freshly and fully imagined. The difference between old customary joy and

that which springs from the fiction is the subject of the first poem in the section:

*To sing jubilas at exact, accustomed times,  
To be crested and wear the mane of a multitude  
And so, as part, to exalt with its great throat,*

*To speak of joy and to sing of it, borne on  
The shoulders of joyous men. . . .*

*This is a facile exercise. Jerome  
Begot the tubas and the fire-wind strings,  
The golden fingers picking dark-blue air:*

*For companies of voices moving there,  
To find of sound the bleakest ancestor,  
To find of light a music issuing*

*Whereon it falls in more than sensual mode.  
But the difficultest rigour is forthwith,  
On the image of what we see, to catch from that*

*Irrational moment its unreasoning,  
As when the sun comes rising, when the sea  
Clears deeply, when the moon hangs on the wall*

*Of heaven-haven.*

And the final poem celebrates the *mundo* which is the world so perceived. It is this power that enables the poet to bring to "the solitary and those that live in misery and terror" a message of pleasure and comfort; and "in the service of love and imagination nothing can be too lavish, too sublime, or too festive." To this theme are devoted the complex splendours of the fables which bring the poem to an end. These two hundred lines of verse seem to me to give continuously a higher delight than anything of comparable length written in this century.

The imperative, "it must give pleasure," is examined and obeyed throughout Stevens' poems. There are poems about it, from "Sunday Morning" with its paradise fully of the earth, and Bonnie and Josie "*celebrating the marriage/Of flesh and air*" in his first volume, to the confrontation of pleasure with pain in "Esthétique du Mal" and the solemn certainties of the "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour." But there is also the deep movement of pleasure in the poems, more certain in the late than in the early, and best witnessed by the magnificent and sustained elevation of Section iii of *Notes*, where the theme challenges the poet most closely.

NOTES TOWARD A SUPREME FICTION has in each of the three sections ten poems of seven three-lined stanzas, with a short prelude and a kind of coda. The three sections lie, as it were, beside each other; there is no continuous development in the thought. "Each phrase is conceived," as R. P. Blackmur puts it, "as a version of the other two, that is, with a mutual and inextricable, rather than with a successive, relationship."

Here, as elsewhere, Stevens arrives at a kind of climax (in the thirtieth poem) where he allows himself a cry of "That's it!" But "it" is a rightness of feeling, not a claim to have completed a clear demonstration. We *feel* the obscurity of an order, are content with "*the more than rational distortion/The fiction that results from feeling.*" Reality has been discovered in, not imposed upon, the world, and completed by the "fictive covering" that "weaves always glistening from the heart and mind."

Yet there is, for all that, a genuine beginning and end, an early candour and a late plural, in the poem. A good deal of the doctrine is contained in the opening poems; and in the final section the fables are used to achieve a deliberate intensity of feeling. The complex and majestic Canon Aspirin poems (from v to the opening of ix, where it modulates into the bird noises of II, vi) raise the temperature of the whole work and justify not only the sober ecstasies of the conclusion but the immense and beautiful claims for poetry in the eighth poem:

*What am I to believe? If the angel in his cloud  
Serenely gazing at the violent abyss,  
Plucks on his strings to pluck abysmal glory,*

*Leaps downward through evening's revelations,  
and  
On his spread wings, needs nothing but deep  
space,  
Forgets the gold centre, the golden destiny,*

*Grows warm in the motionless motion of his  
flight,  
Am I that imagine this angel less satisfied?  
Are the wings his, the lapis-haunted air?*

*Is it he or is it I that experience this?  
Is it I then that keep saying there is an hour  
Filled with expressible bliss, in which I have*

*No need, am happy, forget need's golden hand,  
Am satisfied without solacing majesty,  
And if there is an hour, there is a day,*

*There is a month, a year, there is a time  
In which majesty is the mirror of the self:  
I have not but I am and as I am I am.*

I should not expect anybody who cares about poetry to find this other than glorious; and yet it is more so when read as a sequel to the previous poem. Furthermore, it is far from being wholly representative of the tone and quality of the verse in the poem, which extends from potent argumentation to extraordinary ventriloquial bird-poems, from furious springs to the full calm satisfactions of August. Perhaps of the third section only could it be said that each of the ten poems is a great poem; but the whole work exists in a radiant and productive atmosphere, saying the words of the world that are the life of the world.

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## NOTES & TOPICS

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### A Wreath for Lawrence?

THE destiny of D. H. Lawrence, both as a person and as a writer, must be acknowledged by anyone acquainted with the facts to be one of the most extraordinary of this century. The saga of young Bert the coal-miner's son, and its continuation as the wanderings and bickerings of Lorenzo and Frieda, are known to us all. But let us not forget what he dared, what he suffered, what he achieved. He was born of an illiterate working-man and a puritanical schoolmarmish sort of woman in a poor cottage of a Midland mining town, inheriting thereby the social disadvantages so lavishly bestowed on his "class" by the snobby, purse-proud, jingo, philistine, and hypocritical society of that epoch. Threatened with consumption from childhood, he qualified as a schoolmaster only to lose his job, without compensation, because of diseased lungs. Earning a most precarious income as a writer, he eloped with the daughter of a Prussian baron, a married woman in Nottingham, mother of three small children.

This elopement was one reason why he was hated by the virtuous. Another was that, as David Garnett most justly says, Lawrence "was the type who provokes the most violent class-hatred in this country: the impotent hatred of the upper classes for the lower." And his flaming, original, unorthodox books were as incomprehensible to them as Shelley's poems had been to their predecessors. *The Rainbow* was prosecuted, and in accordance with all the fine feelings of fair play, condemned, without the author even being informed of what was happening—which for several years reduced him and Frieda to pinching poverty, and exasperated him to the verge of madness. It was an American, Amy Lowell, whose gifts of money mainly tided them over; another American, Mabel Dodge Luhan, whose invitation to Taos gave him the impulse to visit Ceylon, Australia, New Mexico, and Mexico. Then, the illness, and near-death, at Oaxaca, the return to Europe, the confiscation of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the confisca-

tion in the post of fourteen of his *Pansies*, the confiscation of his pictures; death at forty-four, and the chivalrous British obituaries, *The End of Filth*.

But was it "filth"? And it certainly wasn't the "end."

How often in the past forty years I have skimmed through highbrow or lowbrow articles "proving" that Lawrence was a spent force and about to subside into oblivion. I pick up William White's 1950 check-list, and read: "My present check-list of more than 700 items takes up where Edward D. McDonald left off," and elsewhere in the same pamphlet: "Lawrence is translated into all European languages." And also, I may add, into many Asiatic.

America has done most for him posthumously, as it did most for him during his life. Professor Harry T. Moore, who has edited two recently-published books in America,\* has been working for years on the new, enlarged edition of Lawrence's Letters, which Moore tells me will be double the size of the Huxley edition—so many people kept Lawrence's letters from the beginning, believing in his "greatness." England has produced some very good letter-writers—better than France I should say, in spite of Sévigné and Voltaire—but not one so vivid and life-giving as Lawrence. Edward Nehls after years of devoted work—I think it must be quite seven years ago we began corresponding about it—has at last completed his indispensable *Composite Biography* in three volumes. Italy is about to produce a translation of his Complete Poems; Germany plans a big revival; France, parochial as ever, will at least have a new pocket-book about him.

Obviously, some of this contemporary uproar is due to the dirty Yankosachsen obsession with what they call "dirty words" and the legal action about *Lady C*. This, of course, is perfectly true. We are all slaves of the machine, and particularly of the insatiable advertising machine, the newspaper, whose main purpose is government propaganda and the extraction of money from over-paid morons. Books with four-letter words are "news"; authors of four-letter books are "news"; authors who are "news" must be bought and displayed—in "cheaps," of course. All this is true enough, but has not much to do with the continued and world-wide circulation of Lawrence's books. All that is temporary and unimportant, and the fact is that his books would be just as much read and admired if *Lady C* had never existed. Obviously the book, the four-letter words, the brouhaha about the American Courts' decision in its favour, have been a great advertisement. But, as anyone can see, the almost world-wide distribution of Lawrence and his books would have proceeded if this scandal-

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\* *A D. H. Lawrence Miscellany*. Edited by Harry T. Moore. Southern Illinois University Press. *Sex, Literature, and Censorship*. By D. H. LAWRENCE. Edited by Harry T. Moore. New York, The Viking Press.