

self-important National Saviours at its head is really only a danger to itself and to the "causes" it quacks over. Thus is the Lawrence legend debased a second time.

Now England's most successful, and perhaps most skilful, playwright presents T. E. Lawrence to this new generation. What will they make of him and his legend? Mr. Rattigan has done his best to show, within the limits of his medium, the extreme complexity of Lawrence's accidie of spirit. It is to be hoped that his audience will not interpret this as a study of an angry young man soured by success who found a negative solace in cynicism after a traumatic

experience in a Turkish guardroom. But that is probably too uninteresting an image to grow into a myth, too uninteresting and above all too old-fashioned. On the other hand there is another *Hero of Our Time* whose lineaments seem to be vaguely outlined in Terence Rattigan's character, a *purely* negative figure, the man whose claim to our attention is not what he does, not what he is, but what he doesn't and isn't, the anti-hero. It would indeed be paradoxical if Lawrence of Arabia should appeal to a new generation as a military, social, and sexual failure pure and simple, a sort of Colonel Beckett-Godot. But why not?

Constantine FitzGibbon

## British Culture & Co.

### *The "T.L.S." Submits a Company Report*

THE British Imagination is a subject worthy of consideration, if only because it merges at some line which is indefinable with the British Lack of Imagination. E. M. Forster (whose photograph does not appear in the recent 76-page illustrated number of *The Times Literary Supplement*) wrote several novels early in this century which are concerned with precisely this lack. The strength of his attack on "the uneducated heart" lay in his invocation of the Romantic imagination of Blake, Shelley, and Keats. To-day, however, it is possible to wonder whether Mr. Forster was not too hard on the unpoetic empire builders, businessmen and officials. At any rate a saving grace of some of the British is that they have proved ready to admit that they are unimaginative, to reconsider the case for the imagination, to go back to the sources of England which are really so very poetic—the rivers of Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Blake, Tennyson, Constable, Turner, and Palmer, flowing through a landscape whose greenness is made poignant by the contrast with the "dark Satanic mills."

Perhaps a good many readers turned to this number of the *T.L.S.* with thoughts stimulated by Blake and Shelley and the Lake poets, and behind them a question raised by Coleridge, "What is Imagination?"

There is debate between the Romantic and the Johnsonian imagination or perhaps it would be better to say between the 18th century and the rest, given that the 18th century has staunch 20th-century supporters, while the Romantics have 16th- and 17th-century pre-

cursors. The 18th-century idea is imagination educated by tradition and aided by science operating upon a world of facts, and making pictures of it justifiable at once to God and to Reason.

What strikes me as being peculiarly British (English, perhaps, rather) is the Romantic idea that it is possible to invent a world of "poesy" by a purely unimaginative act. Surely no poets and prose-writers have believed this so fervently as the English. I mean the English rather than the Celtic because although the Celts notoriously bleed with the ardour of fantasy, their kings and maidens and fairies are supposedly conjured from a Cornish or Irish past, whereas the spirits of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seem to come out of Shakespeare's invention and nothing else—as do the same troupe from Milton in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*.

Do the English still invent with their imagination? Is anyone taking notice of Shelley's "We must imagine that which we know?" Is C. P. Snow's *The Two Cultures* somewhere in line with Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*?

These are the kind of questions I hoped would be raised and answered when I opened the special number of *The Times Literary Supplement* on "The British Imagination."

There is no reason why the editor should have anticipated—still less answered—my questions; but I still think there might have been serious consideration of what is meant by the imagination. The number contains a great deal about a lot of other things, but it is hard to describe it except as a company report on

the Present State of British Cultural Life. It contains articles about everything, more or less relevant or irrelevant—Literature, Cinema, Radio, TV, Theatre, Music, Ballet, Snobbery, Art, Museums, Women, Philosophy, the Universities, Psychology, Science, and Advertising. (The last-mentioned reminds me that it contains about twice as many advertisements as anything else.)

The number has the air of being directed at readers overseas. It is an extended Survey Course, and as such it no doubt contains much valuable information. The articles respond best to the Survey method when they stick to it and do not attempt to establish a thesis. Thus the two articles on painting are valuably informative and they have the advantage that inevitably they discuss imaginative painters—the neo-Romantics of the war years and after.

WHERE THE METHOD PAYS OFF WORST is, unfortunately, in the articles from which one would surely expect most, those on literature. In order, I suppose, to make the report on British Culture more palatable when it came to the indigestible matter of books, each writer of an article was, it appears, asked to discuss a Theme, fitting in as many books as possible which could be made relevant to it. The themes, one need scarcely say, are entirely obvious, the clichés of literary journalistic opinion snatched from the air. They are as follows: autobiographers are very reticent—novelists are too genteel and do not deal with “ordinary” life—poetry is too correct—British writers are reticent about religion—“it is, and has been for a long time, the most prized of our national possessions: a sense of humour”—Americans are better than us at everything and write more about it—nevertheless, the future is bright, and it lies, in the Novel, with Graham Greene and Angus Wilson, and, in poetry, with the long-playing gramophone record. But let the reader chew for himself over the following specimen of stealing-through-the-names-and-weaving-in-the-themes:

It is the extraordinary variety of English social comedy, covering as it does this slow-motion technique of Anthony Powell's and the more obvious cinematic glitter of Graham Greene, the acidity of Angus Wilson and the elegance of Evelyn Waugh, the exaggerative comedy of Wyndham Lewis and the self-involved irony of Aldous Huxley, the roughneck knockabout of Kingsley Amis and John Wain, that gives one confidence in the future use of comedy as a principal medium for expressing the British moral and social imagination.

One can only sympathise with the writer straining for the epithets to fit everyone in.

He does manage, it is true, to introduce at the very end, the word “imagination.” But an index of “British moral and social imagination” which includes Waugh, Huxley, Lewis, Greene, Amis, and Wain, is too extended to work in any way except to make the reader admire the kind of ingenuity which is usually reserved for tourist guides.

HERE is an editorial passage introduced to explain the use of the word Imagination:

As soon as one turns to an impure science, psychology say, where the question of human temperament is paramount, the national contribution may be clearly discerned stemming vigorously from the exotic subsoil.

It is there, if we are to generalise about the British imagination, that we find its most consistent procedure; a subtle exposure to exotic influence, casting each foreign body into the alembic of a mind which transforms it out of all recognition so that it emerges as spontaneously British—and this may be as true of jazz as it is of philosophy.

This seems to be a highfalutin way of saying that what British writers get from abroad (Freud, for example) they get from abroad, but distort into some British shape. This cuts both ways, and is perhaps less an example of imagination than of the lack of it, the twisted ingenuity which produces, say, Cockney rhyming slang—perhaps the least imaginative of all folk idioms. Psychology, anyway, seems an ill-chosen example, since with Locke and Hume there was a peculiarly British and unexotic psychology. Of course, in this century all other schools were swept away by “subtle exposure to the exotic influence”—of the Viennese! But are the British peculiar in turning foreign sows' ears into their own national brand of supposedly silk purses? The French are, surely, far better (or worse) at this. Consider the transformation of Heidegger and Jaspers into the completely French world of J. P. Sartre.

I nag away at the imagination because the matter having been raised it nags away at me. The imagination is that centre of understanding which transforms the artist's outward experience into the malleable material of his inner life, thus enabling him to attain possession of his own inner world which includes his experience of the transformed (but not distorted or unrecognisable) outer world of events. Imagination enables the individual writer or reader to relate moral forces which he has apprehended, with the refractory, centrifugal, chaotic forces which manifest themselves to-day as power politics and materialist progress.

Thus if to-day one were deeply concerned with the British Imagination, one would have to consider the Aldermaston Marchers as—quite apart from the question, which I do not agree with, of their politics—a striking and quite traditional manifestation of British imagination stimulated by conscience into action. Shelley would almost certainly have been an Aldermaston Marcher, and Blake might well have written one of his allegorical epic fragments about the March.

CONSIDERING HOW MUCH seems irrelevant in this number, it seems odd how much that might be relevant is left out. Is it carping to suggest that politics is quite peculiarly an area in which the British imagination, perfunctorily and intermittently for the most part, but sometimes courageously and most generously, operates? Was not the freeing of India an action which called on the imaginative faculties of the British, and is there not a connection here, which has not been explored, between the imaginative vision of E. M. Forster (who goes undiscussed in this number) and British action?

The present crisis in the Labour Party is in some respects a crisis of the puritan, nonconformist, Christian-pacifist, innocent socialist imagination. There are descendants of William Morris, John Ruskin, and G. D. H. Cole, unwilling to give up their vision of building Jerusalem on "England's green and pleasant land" through the stern application of principles of comradely love. They do not want to see all the causes and all the principles washed away in the corrosive prosperity of an affluent society which makes universal selfishness possible.

Even conservatism has its pipe-line of the imagination zig-zagging back to Merrie England. And it is possible to argue that the vision of England in the Shakespeare of the historic dramas was operative during the Battle of Britain.

Indeed, the Labour Party crisis is really perhaps part of a much larger crisis in England, a realisation that we are less free than before to shape this country after our dreams. What is repulsive to the generous young, and to the old survivors of radicalism, is the very wide acceptance of a materialism which seems a world-wide almost automatic development of progress: a machinery which needs a few engineers for maintenance of the economic works, and a few experts, but no one who thinks and, still more, no one who imagines.

THE special number of *The Times Literary Supplement* is all too typical of the current trend in which imagination is the name for the

advertising. Nothing is more revealing of this than the two articles devoted to the Novel.

The characteristic of these two articles is that although their survey extends as far back as H. G. Wells, they contain almost no discussion of those novelists who would seem to be distinguished by the qualities of the imagination. Perhaps there was good reason for ignoring the poetic novel; but we must guess the reason, for it is not mentioned. Probably it simply is that the novelists discussed were chosen to illustrate the themes, and anyone like Mr. William Golding, who does not fit, is conveniently introduced as the exception to prove the rule. The theme of the first of the articles is sufficiently indicated by the title—*The Workaday World that the Novelist Never Enters*. This is based solidly on the current anti-cliché cliché of critical non-think that (this is the main idea running through nearly all the literary articles) American writing to-day is *more real* than English because American writers work harder—what's more, if they're novelists, the characters in their novels work harder too—and move in a workaday world of ordinary people. The novels of Amis, Wain, and Sillitoe, which might challenge this view, are not dealt with because they are going to come in later under the heading: *The Uses of Comic Vision: A Concealed Social Point in Playing for Laughs*. The novelists faulted for not dealing with "ordinary lives" (the writer does not answer the question: why should they more than they already do?) are C. P. Snow, Angus Wilson, Anthony Powell, and Graham Greene. As the exception, and perhaps as a token gesture towards imagination, William Golding is introduced; and then let drop with that maddening inconsistency which is characteristic of theme-weaving. "Mr. Golding is a writer truly obsessed by moral problems, one of the very few contemporary novelists who seem capable of producing a work of greatness rather than of talent." However, later we are told that the "guides to the future" are Mr. Greene and Mr. Wilson, so presumably the potentiality for real greatness is no guide.

Saul Bellow's *Augie March* is the stick used to beat the non-workaday-world British novelists with. Perhaps what is required is a mass emigration of British talent to America (and perhaps this is what is happening anyway) because without this it is difficult to see how the British can produce novels about characters who are "newspaper boy, Christmas extra in a toy department, flower-shop assistant," etc. To be these things is part of the experience of many American students, who, in this respect, if they are novelists, have many of the advantages that Dickens had. One can, indeed, envy the American writers this. But it is more the British

educational system than the British writer which needs altering.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE CONDUCTED TOUR never penetrates to the point where it is criticism, so that, moving in the fog of themes being woven, often it reads like denigration disguised as praise, praise disguised as denigration. We read: "The prime importance of the *Strangers and Brothers* series is surely its loving concern with bureaucratic man." Praise or denigration? One would like to hear D. H. Lawrence's raspberry at that! And at this: "It is plain that the whole atmosphere and procedure of jockeying for power holds a fascination for Snow." And, just to fit Snow into the theme of his not being Saul Bellow:

Here, undoubtedly, is an English novelist writing from the inside of men at work, but they are . . . technicians, of science and the law, and they do not really provide exceptions to the rule that our novelists never deal from the inside with ordinary working-class occupations.

There is, of course, no such "rule"—the idea that there is was improvised for the occasion by the writer of the article, and is only sustained shakily by excluding several writers (of whom D. H. Lawrence is one) who would not meet it. Nor to anyone but a theme-weaver would it seem to matter that C. P. Snow doesn't write about characters he doesn't know about. What one should ask is whether he is really discerning about the characters he does invent, the life he does describe. The point at which criticism might begin would be in considering in what respect Snow's novels may or may not be superior to those of John Galsworthy, Francis Brett Young, and other fabricators of fictional time-reporting epics, the "prime importance of whose work" is "its loving concern with bureaucratic man." I have in mind Lawrence's essay on Galsworthy and the Forsytes.

Although the survey of the novel goes back to H. G. Wells, there is no consideration of Joyce, Forster, and Lawrence as *novelists*, nor of the poetic fiction of Virginia Woolf, nor of Christopher Isherwood, nor of Henry Green, nor of Samuel Beckett. Since no principles are even indicated for these exclusions, I am reduced to guessing that perhaps the theory of Mr. William Cooper, put forward in a talk to the Pen Club Congress at Frankfurt fifteen months ago, has got around—that the so-called "experimental" novelists of the early part of the century are significant only as having invented technical devices which have now been absorbed into the novels of what one might call the School of Materialist Bourgeois Realists (my name, not Mr. Cooper's).

THE MOST REMARKABLE—and, indeed, scandalous—omission is of Lawrence Durrell. One would have thought, surely, that Durrell, apart from Golding and Samuel Beckett (mentioned here as a playwright but not as a novelist), was of all British novelists the one most seriously and ambitiously engaged in trying to construct a fictitious world which stands in a moral relation to modern society. At the very least he provides a challenge to the kind of thing which Snow, Powell, and Wilson are doing; to some critics the *Justine* series would seem more significant than the Lewis Eliot series, or than *The Middle Age of Mrs. Eliot*. I cannot take sides in the controversy between the Eliots (Lewis and Mrs.) and Justine, but I should have thought that by implication it is the most important battle of fictional purposes of the decade: unless indeed one were to decide that Lewis Eliot and Justine were both bourgeois and could most fittingly meet in a novel, say, of Angus Wilson (in which Justine seduces Lewis Eliot), and that the significant fiction of our time was in the line of Arnold Bennett (not discussed in the Special Number), Amis, Wain, Braine, and Alan Sillitoe.

I was so amazed by the omission of Lawrence Durrell that I thought perhaps he was not really English, and ran to *Who's Who*. It is true that he seems to have been educated partly in Darjeeling, and was not born anywhere he thinks worth putting on record, but I can scarcely believe these to be disqualifications, especially since he was partly educated at St. Edmund's School, Canterbury. This should at least have got him into the most repellent article of the number, *The Reticent Faith: Speaking up for Life and the Rest is Silence*, which combines the smartly allusive vocabulary of the new criticism with an unctuous religiosity, and puts forward Leopold Bloom as the apostle of the resurrection and the life. The *de rigueur* inferiority complex before America breaks out in a new form here, putting T. S. Eliot forward as "our most English writer."

THE one quite serious article in the literary section, *Evaluation in Practice: What Does 'Moral' Mean?* raises the question of moral and religious authority pressingly. In his survey of various critics, the writer points up the question behind modern moralistic criticism. For those concerned with extracting values from the line of the great tradition, what is the authority behind the values which they find in the works they admire? Literature is not and cannot be its own authority.

The decisive fact is this: if our deepest conviction about the greatest literature is that it is an original force, a great vitaliser of life oper-

ating at the profoundest level, we must in the end recognise a fundamental inadequacy in the whole current diction of question and answer, analysis and discrimination, statement and meaning. No thinking in such categories, however qualified, however intensified, will bring thought to a point where it embodies the truth that demands embodiment first.

The writer of this article does press a penetrating and serious question and relate to it the several critics under discussion. It is exactly this urgency and this relatedness which is lacking in the other essays on literary subjects. And the lack in this Special Number, as far as literature is concerned, is indicated by the fact that the only article in which there is serious criticism is the one devoted to criticism. The rest is things strung together, and the critical attitude is only introduced for the purpose of setting up relationships where there are none.

To be critical is, for example, to take a text by a writer, to consider it as distinct from another text by another writer. This is what is almost entirely lacking in theme-weaving articles of the kind that are here. Here is an example of the method of which I complain; it is from the article on autobiographies:

Such books as *Good-bye to All That* and *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* may seem less

frank to-day than they did thirty years ago, but at least they put forward no *persona*: they set down a personal vision in exact terms of remembered reality.

This discusses two books as though they were the same kind of book, two writers—Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon—as though they were the same kind of writer. Actually it would be difficult to find two books more different (apart from the fact that they both came out of the Great War and that both are by courageous officer-poets) than *Good-bye to All That* and *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*. Nothing is gained by considering them as alike except flimsy support for the flimsy thesis that autobiographies are too reticent. (The word *reticent* seems to occur about six million times in the Special Number.) Graves' book does look extremely frank, even to-day. Sassoon's book is not frank, and never was, though it is poetically truthful. Graves is a very special poet in having no *persona*, being opposed to the Trade Union rules of poets having masks, writing symbolic poems, etc. Graves is frank and direct as Catullus is frank and direct. Who could say this of Sassoon?

Oddly enough Sassoon did write one poem revealing very much the Graves kind of frankness, which Graves, without asking Sassoon's permission, published in the first edition of *Good-bye to All That*, subsequently withdrawn. I used to have a copy containing this poem which Graves declared to be Sassoon's best. But the Fox-Hunting Sassoon is a *persona* if ever there was one—in the same way as the Yeats of the *Autobiographies* wears a mask. The beauty of Sassoon's book is precisely that the author sees the young Sassoon in a poetic vision.

WHY do the objections I am raising seem to me important and necessary? Because I think that treating novels and poems—and writers—as though they were commodities, made to fit into categories and to illustrate generalisations hastily arrived at for the purpose of stringing as many names of works together as possible within the context of a theme, is depressing to literature.

The greatest discouragement for writers today is the literary life, with its predetermined attitudes, its labelling of every work and every writer according to generation, class, movement, or some other category to illustrate a theory about "the present state of writing."

A writer is a unique sensibility, writing out of a unique experience, situated in a unique time and place. The value of his work lies in this uniqueness, and it is precisely what we are quick to appreciate when we read a new work

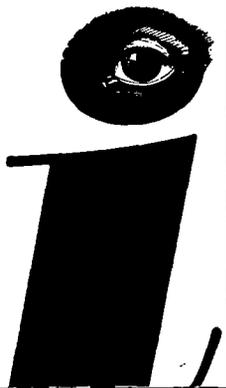
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by a young writer, a *Lucky Jim* or *Hurry On Down*. But the moment we have absorbed each of these works, it seems there is something in us wants to treat them as the same work, Mr. Amis and Mr. Wain as the same person. Their books begin by being an experience: within a few weeks they are included in a hole of a rack of modern literature with "Vintage 1954, Château Redbrique" attached to it. And Messrs. Amis and Wain may well be afraid of becoming, even to themselves, not individuals with an experience different from any that has been written about before, but just "writers," with a sickness at the heart which is that they know that ever after this they will to some degree be writing about being writers.

Of course, every writer who publishes a first book which meets with recognition, experiences with the cup of success, also the Fall, the loss of innocence. He will never again be the marvel that he was to his friends at college when he first showed around his unpublished poems or stories, and they will never be as wonderful to him. Redemption is necessary. And redemption—as Mr. Wain pointed out when he complained bitterly once that he had the right to claim serious criticism—may lie partly in criticism, because criticism makes distinctions, and to make distinctions is to treat the unique as unique.

But criticism of contemporary work is, nevertheless, negative; the judgment made by precedent upon the unprecedented. Mr. Wain wrote as though it were possible to live on this bitter justice, but in fact purges are not nourishing. What a writer can live on is faith in his own being as a person and not as a public figure, and in the transforming power of the imagination. He has to remain at all costs a writer who writes without being "a writer." The task of imagining the nature of our world is an objective one, the task of the angels who stand almost like electrical transformers above the landscape of modern life in Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, changing the undigested material of the modern experience into the significant symbols that can be grasped by inner individual lives. Theme-weavers can take away your belief in yourself as anything but a name in a list which illustrates their particular theme, but the objective task outside and beyond "the writer" and the "present state of literature" remains to be done. This is what Rilke knew when he imagined his angels. It is what Shelley meant when he indicated a task of poetry, beyond the poets and the life of literature—to "imagine that which we know."

Stephen Spender

## More and the Dead Men

IT IS Mr. Nigel Dennis' contention ["*Down Among the Dead Men*," ENCOUNTER, October] that in *A Man For All Seasons* I missed, or deliberately turned away from, an opportunity for the exercise of heroic style, so that in my hands Sir Thomas More becomes not a 16th-century Saint of heroic virtue but a decent 1960 chap; not a person but a people, Mr. Dennis amusingly puts it.

Elsewhere, on the same evidence, I have been charged with writing straight hagiography; you can't please everyone. But it would be nice to please someone.

Mr. Dennis offers two examples of this popularising and reducing process in my play. Here is the first:

Aubrey tells an amusing story of Sir William Roper coming to More's house in search of a bride and being led upstairs to a bedroom where More's two daughters were asleep in one bed; More whipped off the covers; the naked girls whipped over on to their stomachs, and Roper, remarking that he had now seen both sides of them, chose Margaret as his bride by tapping her on the behind. There was no suggestion of this in Mr. Bolt's play [continues Mr. Dennis] presumably because the work is addressed to 1960, when courtship of the Lord Chancellor's daughter is so much nicer.

On the contrary, the story pleases my own 1960 taste as well as it does Mr. Dennis', and without doubt would have gone over like a house on fire with a 1960 audience. Unhappily it is almost certainly untrue.\* But I don't suppose Mr.

\*In the generations following his death the figure of More was surrounded by a small mythology of such stories, some crediting him with a Bernardine saintliness and the gift of prophecy, most with a Falstaffian gift for bawdy. A century later some of them were committed to paper by John Aubrey and others. When, as in the present instance, there is no earlier evidence for the story and it runs counter to such facts as we have (in this case the pattern of his known behaviour towards Margaret) then it is wise to treat it, as they say, with circumspection. These stories tell us not about More but about the Jacobean attitude to More's memory. The Jacobean attitude is always interesting, but dramatists and their critics particularly must beware the national tendency to regard all pre-Restoration history as more or less the property of Shakespeare and its persons, or people, as properly treated only in Shakespearean style.

Our drama critic discussed Mr. Robert Bolt's Thomas More play, "*A Man for All Seasons*," recently in these pages, and we have invited the playwright to comment.