

pat—one senses something turbulent, violent, agitating underneath—and it is why this funniest writer since Oscar Wilde (though one with an immensely superior intellectual equipment) is so serious. One hears something tearing as the satin sentences elaborate, the cry of one who wants to judge society from the standpoint of good and evil when these categories have been reduced to mental health and psychosomatic disorder. De Vries's anguish is to find the drama of sin fallen away to the chart of a syndrome. The appeal of De Vries is that of one whose most thin-lipped smile is orchestrated with a belly-laugh and whose loudest guffaw has in it qualities of pain and delicacy. One sees in De Vries emotional attachment to religious attitudes intellectually discarded. The dogma has gone; the sympathy, the taste, the point of view remain.

In the same way, De Vries articulates a highly civilised liberal mind which is only too conscious of its present hollowness. His career has been from Jesus to Janus, like that of his most convincing figure, Tom Waltz in *Let Me Count the Ways*, who switches within hours from piety to blasphemy, according as he is revolting against his father, the militant atheist, or his mother, the aggressive Christian. "There are two sides to any question of importance, and the only thing for an honest man to do is to take both of them." This is by no means an untenable attitude when you think like Tom's father Stan, another guarded pessimist. "If you want my final opinion on the mystery of life, I can give it to you in a nut shell. The universe is like a safe to which there is a combination. But the combination is locked up in the safe."

## Love, Madness, & other Anxieties

By Roger Scruton

PASMORE, the hero of David Storey's first novel in nine years,<sup>1</sup> is the victim of nameless anxieties that alienate him from all he has previously valued. He leaves his wife and children, and goes to live in a small flat, which at first he embellishes with a mistress in the vain hope that this will provide the motive for an action that is as incomprehensible to himself as it is to those who suffer from it. When the mistress leaves, Pasmore is helpless and empty, possessed by cruel fantasies of the life he has betrayed and preyed on by the desire to consummate his own unhappiness. He tells his family of what has happened, and so adds his father's hatred to the list of self-inflicted sufferings. Finally Pasmore begins to crave the understanding and affection that he has sacrificed. He takes to lingering wraith-like outside his former home. And then, by an unexpected reversal, he returns at last, repentant and absolved.

It is a weakness of much of Mr Storey's writing, even at its most successful (as in the recent plays), that the motives of his characters tend to remain obscure. What we are supposed to take as the unreality of Pasmore's experience is in fact no more than the unreality of Mr Storey's description of it. It is not that we are not told why Pasmore leaves his wife and children: it is rather that

what we are told is strangely opaque, as though Mr Storey did not regard it as part of the narrative:

How meaningful was his existence if he could not transpose himself into the world of individuals whose experience, patently, all around him, was lacking in those self-validating certainties which made up all he knew of himself as an individual?

He was reluctant—driven to the other extreme—to measure out his world in deficiencies: deficiencies prejudicial, that is, to his moral well-being. . . .

This jumble of abstract thoughts, from which little can be extracted that throws any light on the hero's motivation, soon gives way to a more concrete evocation of Pasmore's state of mind. But in becoming concrete the prose becomes trivial: we are at once in danger of losing sight of anything distinctive in Pasmore's experience:

Yet plainly something was wrong. On certain mornings he would waken beside her to be immediately aware of a tension, like waking to a room on fire, to flames and smoke. The whole place was alive with the vibrancy of the figure beside him. His body ached. If he had given in and touched her he was sure he would have cried out, in rage, in grief, in some peculiar and wholly unimaginable torment. He couldn't understand it. He was oppressed.

This sort of writing, with its short sentences and futile imagery, conveys a sense of precision that

<sup>1</sup> *Pasmore*. By DAVID STOREY. Longman, £2.

is in fact illusory. The prose remains entirely static. "Flames and smoke", for example, says no more than "fire": it does not explain the metaphor. If the room is "alive", then this is only a shift in the figure of speech that itself requires an explanation—alive with what? To add "with a vibrancy" is merely to repeat the idea. All we know is that the tension proceeds in some way from the figure at Pasmore's side. But if that is so why does Pasmore's body ache? Clearly he does not want to touch his wife; but why? Because if he does so he will cry out with rage. Or rather, not rage, but grief. That is to say, not grief, but a "peculiar and wholly unimaginable torment." The only sentence in this paragraph that is well-written is the next: "He couldn't understand it." For how can Pasmore understand what his creator himself is unable to express?

IN SUSAN HILL's *The Bird of Night*<sup>2</sup> we find a portrayal of madness which, while less dramatic

<sup>2</sup> *The Bird of Night*. By SUSAN HILL. Hamish Hamilton, £1.95.

than Mr Storey's, is far more convincing. The novel concerns a poet—Francis Croft—whose madness and suicide are described by his close friend and companion, Harvey Lawson. Lawson is a studious man, of few passions, who has pursued his researches into Egyptology unhindered by private affection. However, when he is introduced to Francis Croft, Lawson is able to respond to the other's need for a companion, and they begin to live together. Through Francis' suffering and the almost unbearable demands that this makes on Harvey Lawson, the latter is afforded a fulfilment which, in his self-centred solitude, he would never have envisaged. The narrative recounts, through Lawson's eyes, and with frequent glimpses at Francis' letters and diary, the state of the poet's mind as it hovers between childlike elation and despair. The result is a touching picture of this possessed but innocent mentality, written with a strong sense of detail and a fine instinct for illogicalities.

The book has faults, certainly. For one thing it is repetitive. Moreover, the character of the narrator—Harvey Lawson—is ill-defined. It is not clear how he views at the end his relationship

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with Francis Croft. Miss Hill tries to paint him as a testy old man, exhausted by the demands he has had to meet, and impatient of the trivia that now, in Croft's absence, surround him. But her way of describing this attitude is false and declamatory, and the final effect unconvincing. On the other hand one cannot but respect Miss Hill for daring to describe a friendship for which there is no hint of a sexual motive. It is through this brave challenge to modern orthodoxy that the story becomes poignant: the normality of the love between Croft and Lawson lends a serious and disturbing quality to the former's illness which it might otherwise have failed to acquire.

THE THEME of the values of friendship is a familiar part of E. M. Forster's repertoire, and one would not have been surprised to find it developed in *The Life to Come*,<sup>3</sup> a collection of stories most of which have not before been published. This volume contains all the stories that Forster judged either too weak or too "indecent" to be published in his lifetime, and,

<sup>3</sup> *The Life to Come*. By E. M. FORSTER. Edited by OLIVER STALLYBRASS. Edward Arnold, £2.50.

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in the opinion of the present reviewer, it is a great pity that Forster's judgment in these matters was not allowed to prevail. It goes without saying that the stories are far from bad: they are written with imagination and skill, and with the author's characteristic gift for dramatic irony. Their main fault lies in a callow vision of human relationships, which exists here in the absence of the qualities—strong delineation of character and brilliant description—that make the novels so often successful. In his published stories, indeed, Forster frequently allowed his whimsical romanticism to dominate: he presented neither scenes nor characters, but only idylls. But while the previous collections—*The Celestial Omnibus* and *The Eternal Moment*—are charming and inconsequential, at least half of the present stories are distinctly unpleasant, with a grotesque mixture of heavy-handed melodrama and adolescent sensuality that renders them at times almost unreadable. It comes as a surprise to find Forster writing so openly about the physical aspect of homosexual passion, although one can scarcely claim to be shocked by a treatment that is, by present standards, so mildly phrased. But set against the background of unreal and futile relationships that Forster creates in these stories, the homosexual scenes have an "indecent" and unpleasant quality beyond anything in *Le Journal du Voleur*, or in *Notre Dame des Fleurs*. Suddenly, in the middle of a laboured evocation of middle-class sociability, we find an ageing businessman hurrying into the bushes with a milkman whom he has greeted on his morning round. Not only is the milkman young, handsome, genial, good-natured and consumed with generous passion for a middle-aged stranger in a dressing-gown—he is also self-sacrificing to the point of attempting to refuse a gift of money and, later, denying to the police all knowledge of his lover's identity. This characterisation of rustic motives is only absurd because of the attempted realism; as an erotic idyll the scene would be at least acceptable, if slight. A powerful tension exists between the unreality of motive and an insistent earthiness of description, and this lends a tone of wish-fulfilment to the story.

This sentimentalising of physical passion is certainly the most obnoxious feature of the present stories. It leads to no genuine exploitation of sexuality for dramatic ends; on the contrary the sexual encounter becomes a meaningless and vapid endpoint (identified in one story with death itself) in which the very attempt at individual existence comes to rest. One might point here to the contrast with Genet—and it is to be expected that a writer of Forster's sophistication would have accepted the possibility of a Genetesque treatment of homosexual feeling. For Genet,

the sexual encounter serves not as the conclusion of a romantic episode, but rather as a premise from which to begin the exploration of unusual feelings and inverted states of mind. By being explicit Genet merely sets the tone for his particular kind of realism: the motives of his characters, seen through a sophisticated introspection that is not their own, are tested against the banality of the sexual encounter and so given distinction. It is part of Genet's excellence that he avoids all sense that it is in homosexuality that his characters find their *raison d'être*. It merely provides the soil in which more complex passions can achieve fruition. In this way the suggestion of "indecent" is after all avoided. Set beside Genet's achievement, one can see at once that Forster's stories fail for just the reason that persuaded him they should not be published.

SEXUAL RELATIONS are also the main pre-occupation of Strindberg's stories, published under the title *Getting Married*, and now translated in their entirety by Mary Sandbach.<sup>4</sup> The turgid moralism of this work is lightened by so many touches of genius that one can readily forgive the translator for not making the substantial excisions one would like to have made oneself. Strindberg wrote with neither elegance nor wit and with absolutely no thought for literature as an art. On the other hand he had a power of observation and a sense of detail, and it is these two qualities that enable him, in the best of these stories, to present his vision of marriage in a manner that is both realistic and affecting.

He persuaded her to write a book about "Juvenile Criminals". It was severely criticized. She was furious, and swore that she would never write anything again. He took the liberty of asking her if she wrote to be praised, if she was ambitious? She replied by asking why he wrote? This led to a bit of an argument, but it was only refreshing to hear views other than his own, once in a while. His own? What did he mean by that? Hadn't she views of her own too? After this her pride always required her to demonstrate that she had her own views, and, in order to prevent any misunderstanding, these must not be the same as her husband's. But when this happened he told her she might think what she pleased as long as she loved him. Loved? What was he talking about? He was an animal like all men. . . .

It is remarkable that such realism should flourish in the sterile wastes of Strindberg's pedantry. Not content with a long preface about the state

of marriage, Strindberg goes on to repeat himself endlessly in the words of his protagonists, and in heavy-handed commentary whenever a favourite point is proved. It goes without saying that this is an artistic failing; it is the more annoying, however, in that the views which Strindberg is prepared to force on the reader are manifestly absurd. He is under the delusion that the true purpose of marriage is to further "natural selection" and thus breed a more perfect race of human beings. This fatuous piece of popular science accompanies an obsession with feminism, which Strindberg is unable to treat with proper objectivity. Feminism and the bourgeois marriage are seen as complementary forces, conspiring to undermine the relations between men and women and so to produce a race of debilitated and unmanly wretches in whom the light of progress will be finally extinct. It is only by a narrow margin that Strindberg's complex powers of observation win against the crass simplifications of his thought.

IT IS PAINFUL nonetheless to turn from these expressions of enthusiastic bigotry to a modern work which, while equally moralistic, has none of

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<sup>4</sup> *Getting Married*. By AUGUST STRINDBERG. Gollancz, £3.

Strindberg's honesty of purpose. John Berger's *G.* is a novel of remarkable ambitiousness, in which a complicated plot, a great amount of contemporary history, and some of the theories of Marx and Gramsci are all made to coalesce in the melting-pot of a morbid subjectivity.<sup>5</sup> The resulting mixture is both unpleasant and indigestible. "G." is the illegitimate son of a Leghorn merchant and his Anglo-American mistress. He is brought up in England, away from his parents, and, after being seduced at an early age by his aunt, embarks on a life of sexual adventure. His particular combination of aimlessness, ruthlessness and excruciating sentimentality adequately equip him for the role of Don Juan: all he lacks (although this is everything) is a sense of humour. G.'s first meeting with his father, in Milan, at the age of eleven, occurs during the period of martial law imposed in 1898: G. watches the construction of the barricades and the shooting of the rioters. We are supposed to believe that this encounter with political reality somehow infects G.'s destiny, and from now on every episode in his life is paralleled and—if we could but see it—explained by some corresponding public or political event. This

<sup>5</sup> *G.* By JOHN BERGER. Weidenfeld & Nicolson, £2.50.

profoundly metaphysical assumption gives Mr Berger the opportunity to turn his attention to massive crowd scenes, and so distract the reader from the problem of *G.*—the question who this man is, and why we should be following him through these aimless and derivative episodes, is entirely avoided. Indeed it is clear from the start that it is not G. who is the main hero of the book but rather Mr Berger himself; the novel is essentially about Mr Berger's inability to write about G. It is characteristic of Mr Berger's arrogance that as soon as a scene is properly under way he will pause to moralise about the impossibility of saying what he is about to say. In this way he constantly diverts the reader's attention to himself, but without having anything of substance to communicate other than the fact that he, Berger, is incontestably the intellectual superior of his reader.

Any attempt at an exhaustive description of what she was experiencing is bound to be absurd. . . . To express her experience it would be necessary for us to reconstruct around ourselves her unique language. And this is impossible. Armed with the entire language of literature we are still denied access to her experience. There is only one possible way of, briefly, entering that experience: to make love to her. Then why do I want to describe her experience exhaustively, definitively, when I fully recognize the impossibility of doing so?

In this way Mr Berger is constantly falling back on the banal idea that words do not begin to capture the deep truths he is attempting to convey. At times he has recourse to graffiti: "Through these drawings," he writes, "what I have called the quality of firstness in sexual experience is perhaps a little easier to recall." The humourless way in which he explores his own professed inability to say what is troubling him would be comic were it not for the implication that what he is attempting to say is in fact inexpressible. Clearly Mr Berger's eminent predecessors—George Eliot, Gustave Flaubert and Thomas Mann, to name but three—were entirely mistaken in thinking that their gifts were adequate to the task of describing human feeling. From his position of superior knowledge Mr Berger is able to see that no experience can be grasped except in its entire historical context, and that the writer can at best trace a few outlines that may or may not suggest what he will undoubtedly fail to define. It is in this way, no doubt, that Mr Berger would justify the tedious complexities of plot and the digressions into seemingly irrelevant events. It is not true to say that the writing is always bad. Humourless and pretentious it certainly is. But when he forgets himself, Mr Berger is capable of a certain descriptive eloquence: if he were able to forget himself further, then he might even discover some human character to describe.

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YUKIO MISHIMA'S *Spring Snow*<sup>6</sup>—the first of the tetralogy "The Sea of Fertility"—is everything that Mr Berger's novel is not, that is to say, lucid, poignant and dramatic. It also has the kind of originality that only a writer who has renounced the desire for mere originality can achieve. Perhaps the most remarkable quality in all Mishima's major works is the calm objectivity with which he is able to describe experience that is far from commonplace and yet capture its "uniqueness." It is through the exploration of the peripheries of human experience that Mishima presents his vision of what is normal. Kiyooki Matsugae, the young hero of *Spring Snow*, is distressed at his susceptibility to a beautiful girl. But in ruthlessly demanding submission, and thus destroying both himself and her, he reflects through his self-consciousness the normal and—in many ways—humane imperatives of traditional Japan. We see the values of the Imperial society reflected in his act of sacrilege, and it is as though the details of Kiyooki's experience only become vivid for us through the light which they borrow from this source.

Mishima's work is remarkable not only for its objectivity, but also for its reflective quality; he is able to surround his characters with a web of complex thought that is poetic without being rhetorical. Even in the simplest of dramas, the motives are never banal. The action of *Spring Snow* takes place shortly after the Russo-Japanese war. Kiyooki, the eighteen-year-old son of the Marquis Matsugae, has been educated in the household of Count Ayakura, in order to acquire the culture, veneer and status that the Matsugaes—a recently ennobled Samurai family—as yet lack. Count Ayakura's daughter Satoko loves Kiyooki, and as a result refuses all offers of marriage. But because she is his senior by a few years, Kiyooki is unable to accept her love at face-value. He is proud, with a self-centred decadence acquired through imitation of customs alien to his full-blooded race. As a result he is unable to perceive the directness and simplicity of Satoko's passion: he takes her attempts to reveal it as expressions of superiority, as cruel exploitations of the vulnerability which their common childhood has created in his feelings. He hardens himself against her, and when the news is announced of her engagement to a Prince of the Imperial household, he is strangely satisfied at his own indifference. And yet, such is the child-like egoism of his nature, the picture of his own indifference weighs strongly in Satoko's favour: he imagines that he risks nothing of himself in

embarking on what is in fact a dangerous liaison. The risks, such as they are, remain external: circumstantial excitements to a passion that leaves his deeper self unharmed.

He wanted her this way and no other. And she herself, on the other hand, had always wanted to keep him off balance by playing games. How things had changed now! She could have chosen this beautiful, sacred, inviolable position at any time, but she had always preferred the false role of elder sister, cherishing him with that affectionate condescension he so hated. . . .

The elegance he had absorbed from his infancy under Count Ayakura's tutelage now became a silken cord in his hands, a noose for his innocence and for Satoko's sanctity. Now at last he had found a valid use for the shining rope whose purpose had puzzled him for so long.

Satoko yields to him and their tragedy begins. The climax of the book is handled with simplicity and skill, and it is extraordinary that Mishima includes so much beside the suffering of his main protagonists. The novel unwinds like a finely painted scroll, to reveal scenes and portraits with a distinctive poignancy of their own. And strangely, as the action becomes more violent, the prose becomes more calm and static; the characters are suddenly viewed at a distance, seeming to fulfil a necessity beyond their author's control. In this way the novel begins to take in more and more of Kiyooki's surroundings, until the picture of his experience is finally complete.

Though simple and poetic, the style is capable of bearing a considerable stress of thought. Often the descriptive and explanatory passages are elaborated to a degree of complexity rarely encountered in Western literature outside the works of Proust or Balzac. It is remarkable that, for all the elaboration, Mishima never repeats himself, and never gives the sense of departing from the central plot. His ruminative style is a natural consequence of the attempt to treat human motivation in its full complexity. In this book, even more than in *Forbidden Colours*, Mishima is almost entirely successful.

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<sup>6</sup> *Spring Snow*. By YUKIO MISHIMA. Translated by Michael Gallagher. Secker & Warburg, £2.75.

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## AUTHORS & CRITICS

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### Anderson's "Unemployment"

Patrick Hutber

MR ANDERSON has crammed his shot-gun full of ammunition and fired it off in the general direction of unemployment. As a result he has peppered his target, and while this makes for lively reading it does not make for particularly easy discussion.

With some of the things he says it is possible to agree. Quoting the phrase "There is no labour-saving device half as useful as a housemaid" he draws attention to the astonishing shortage of labour in the old-fashioned service trades—nurses, domestic help, handymen, etc. He rightly points out that many of these are terribly underpaid, and that this is an economic nonsense. In my part of the world it is impossible to get anyone at all to help in the garden, unless you can cozen an old-age pensioner into coming round, largely I suspect for the pleasure of conversation, a cup of tea, and the feel of a fork in his hand again. And yet 30p-an-hour is what people would expect to pay a jobbing gardener. Greatly daring I offer 40p, thus threatening to corner the market, and yet it should surely be more than this. Is there scope for an agency to do for jobbing gardeners what Norland does for nannies—raise the status and the pay? More generally, one reason why an Incomes Policy is essential is that left to themselves the forces of the market will never succeed in procuring an adequate wage for some of the most vital members of the community—the social workers, probation officers *et al.* who are unlikely ever to be strongly unionised in the way that teachers are.

Mr Anderson's main thesis however can, if I understand him aright, be summed up in the words "Unemployment has increased, is increasing, and ought to be increased." He believes that we are inevitably faced with a monstrous amount of unemployment, present or prospective, and the answer to this is change our social

attitudes (and, of course, financial arrangements), treating freedom from work as a blessing, and encouraging early retirement, etc.

To my mind, there are three major flaws in this argument. The first I have to indicate by asserting that two years from now we are much more likely to be facing a shortage of labour, and all the problems that brings to the economy, than massive structural unemployment. Of course, the total is much too high at present; but to see why it is, we must analyse the nature of this unemployment in more detail. Apart from short-term unemployment—people who are genuinely going to get a job within a few weeks—and that hard core, perhaps 150,000 strong, of the mentally disturbed, inadequate personalities, non-English speaking immigrants or the frankly work-shy, who make up the unemployables, there are three main sorts of unemployment at the present time.

There is regional unemployment associated with inconvenient areas and declining industries. There is what one might call "redeployment" unemployment (if Mr Harold Wilson will forgive the term) arising from a change of attitude in British industry, an end to a lot of overmanning and feather-bedding, and a once-for-all move to more efficient levels of manning. And there is recessionary unemployment caused by the failure of the British economy to grow over the past five years at any acceptable rate.

Unemployment, though high, is already patchy—there is a shortage of labour in Central London; and in my area of North Bucks the unemployment rate is nil. After two years of 5% growth, to which the Government is totally committed and on which it is staking everything, the only serious unemployment will be regional. Elsewhere, and above all in the south-east, *labour shortage* will be the problem.

Ah, Mr Anderson will reply, but the whole trend of machines is to displace men. Quite so. But technological advance displaces them into the service industries—a growth in leisure trades (such as garages, restaurants, yacht marinas) and a growth in government services. One shipyard may close down, throwing 30,000 men out of work; but one new airport, such as Foulness, will need 150,000 or more. Already in the United States a far higher percentage of the labour force is in services than is the case here in Britain, and the trend will continue in both countries. It is a highly welcome trend, since as Mr Anderson rightly points out services improve the quality of life. Moreover, economy in manufacturing manpower can mean an end to noisy, dirty, repetitive and degrading jobs in factories; already Volvo in Sweden is beginning to reorganise its car production in terms of groups of people rather than of a continuous production line.

PATRICK HUTBER is City Editor of the "Sunday Telegraph." J. R. L. ANDERSON's article was published in the November ENCOUNTER.