

LAST BEFORE AMERICA

A spiral of green hay on the end of a rake:
The moment is sweat and sun-prick—children and old women
Big in a tiny field, midgets against the mountain,
So toy-like yet so purposed you could take
This for the Middle Ages.

At night the accordion melts in the wind from the sea
From the bourne of emigrant uncle and son, a defeated
Music that yearns and abdicates; chimney-smoke and spindrift
Mingle and part as ghosts do. The decree
Of the sea's divorce is final.

Pennsylvania or Boston? It was another name,
A land of a better because an impossible promise
Which split these families; it was to be a journey
Away from death—yet the travellers died the same
As those who stayed in Ireland.

Both myth and seismic history have been long suppressed
Which made and unmade Hy Brasil—now an image
For those who despise charts but find their dream's endorsement
In certain long low islets snouting towards the West
Like cubs that have lost their mother.

THIERRY MAULNIER

TOWARDS A NEW CLASSICISM?

IN considering the question whether the coming years may see the birth of a new classicism in France, I must begin by removing a possible source of confusion. I shall be speaking of a new classicism in the strict meaning of the term; not of what is known as Neoclassicism. The movement which for over a century—ever since the great romantic period, to be exact—has gone under the name of Neoclassicism, and to promote which attempts have periodically been made, is no more than a return to the formal methods of composition introduced and scrupulously followed by our leading writers and artists of the seventeenth century, and also to the special subject-matter (ancient myths, an attitude to life and morality embodied in ‘noble sentiments’) which inspired their work. A return to classical standards is always feasible, and today we have a relatively large number of writers (of the second rank, it must be admitted) who profess to disdain as ‘vulgar errors’ all the literary experiments made since the middle of the seventeenth century, and hold that the sole criterion of artistic perfection was established once for all in that much-favoured age. What these writers are upholding is not so much classicism as what I would call ‘academicism’; they are a decadent posterity of the true classics. Nor should we forget that when, round about 1660, the younger school of writers, destined to become our classics, formulated and made good their æsthetic programme, they were regarded as dangerous innovators, not to say revolutionaries.

So the question which I propose to discuss—Is a new classicism possible?—does not mean ‘Can we revert to classical models and reproduce them in our time?’ but, rather: ‘Have we today conditions favourable to the creation of new classical models and the making of another “classical revolution”?’

I shall therefore leave out of consideration our contemporary authors of five-act tragedies, or aphorisms in the manner of La Rochefoucauld, and of that fiction in a would-be Stendhalian