

and in what part of the country he is to be found. As a matter of fact (since we are admittedly on personal ground) we had rather been given to understand that he had lately taken a long journey . . . far away from home. But can this be so? There is certainly no trace here of any pilgrimage having been taken since the production of his last work.

JULIA STRACHEY

Les Amitiés Particulières. By Roger Peyrefitte. Jean Vigneau. 200frs.

THE subject of *Les Amitiés Particulières* is so absorbing that it is difficult to assess the workmanship that went to make it. Like adventure stories for children 'what happened' remains the vivid impression and one is only confusedly aware that the vehicle was adequate to its burden. This long novel describes the first year at a Catholic school of a boy of fourteen, and it almost shocks by the clearness with which the experiences of that age are evoked: most so-called adults, although they are often merely hammering away at problems which would never have arisen if their education had been different, seem to drop an iron curtain on their school life. Otherwise the 'toughs' and the 'successes' who extol their educational system would long ago have been outlawed by the memory of the pathetic creature who first learned to be tough as an over-compensation and the lonely little schemer who always had to be on the alert to retain his superiority. But probably the most important thing to which parents blind themselves is the fact that children expelled into boarding-school enter a world in which their homes are no longer a reality, a world with its own laws and for which only two qualities are any real help: beauty and intelligence. From this world their parents are excluded, partly through defence mechanism and partly because here the young and the old are clearly ranged—as antagonists. Overtures to the opposite camp are made less in a spirit of candour than as a move in a guerrilla war, and quislings are ruthlessly condemned by their own side and despised by their opponents. If only the distressed parents who find their child 'changed'—'he doesn't confide in me any more'—would peep through the curtain at their own youth they would perhaps remember the area of their hearts that was turned to stone for ever in the twilight of the first night at school when they lay in bed calculating their new future, and it would never be forgotten that although the child is sent away to learn to be independent and deal with the 'world', the world is apt to be 'dealt with' in the pattern of school life, or else, present so startlingly different an appearance that the lessons learnt on the playing fields become a boomerang in the hands of society. Through laziness it is not admitted that all upper-class education is now simply 'the formation of character', a training for endurance. But in this huge workshop there is a minority section, whose products—at first sight indistinguishable from those of all the other schools—bear, on closer inspection, a different trade mark, for Catholic education has the additional and specific aim of training its pupils to remain Catholics and where possible, i.e. where it is expedient, to proselytize their fellows. Since in most countries Catholics are in the minority and liable to be assailed by intellectual arguments which have certainly gained in momentum during the last two centuries, this preparation has all the thoroughness that characterizes the activities of minorities. What can be roughly termed the

'Jesuitical' education is perhaps the most perfect weapon devised for entrapping the child, for it respects the intellect and recognizes that emotion is many-edged and deliberately sets out to use these two manifestations for its own ends; no area of the human personality is safe from the priests' probing cauterization, and it is this process that is so well described in *Les Amitiés Particulières*.

Georges de Sarre, aristocratic, rich, and good-looking, is sent at the age of fourteen to the College of Saint-Claude because 'son père avait voulu lui faire compléter, par l'internat, ce qu'il appelait sa formation morale'. But in addition to beauty, Georges has the other great quality: he is clever; and with the sharp-wittedness of all children whose family life has not already dealt them a stunning blow, he regards his new world as a battlefield, measures his chances of success—he can probably be first in French composition—and looks around for an ally, or for what as an only child he most wants—a friend. Mutual attraction is a sharper magnet among children than among adults, for it is not dulled by association with past wounds, it is more generous because no specific objective forms an image behind the impulse, it is more romantic because children do not know that love comes to an end. The most singular difference between Catholic and other education is one of colour; in the Catholic school all the senses are attacked, everything shines, candles and lamps, scarlet wounds twinkle out of the pictures of martyrs, incense creeps through the cracks and half-open doors, the organ booms accompaniment, and ritual, with its atavistic tom-tom calls, begins and rounds off every day. Against this background Georges finds his first friend, Lucien, who has already spent a year at school. They sit beside each other in chapel during the retreat with which the new term begins, and a boy singing:

Viens, Esprit d'amour,
Descends aujourd'hui dans mon âme,
Viens, Esprit d'amour,
Viens; elle est à toi sans retour,

is followed by another reciting ' . . . Travaillez à détacher votre coeur de l'amour des choses visibles; car ceux qui suivent l'attrait de leurs sens souillent leur âme et perdent la grâce de Dieu'.

Georges looks round the mysterious chapel 'le supérieur l'employa à lire et expliquer un texte de Bossuet sur l'amour divin. Il ne s'agissait que de l'amour à Saint-Claude'. Under Lucien's tutelage Georges is introduced to the regime of the school. The priests in their vigil over these young souls use the daily communion as the measure of their success. Approaching the sacraments in a spirit of sacrilege appears horrifying to the adult mind, which is trained to think of the consequences of any action; to children, who are single-minded, it is easy to commit sacrilege to gain a greater advantage—that of being left alone. The great Jesuitical fallacy that ends and means are different things and that the one does justify the other, is effortlessly absorbed: 'Au goûter, Lucien était venu auprès de Georges. Il était gentil à voir en mangeant sa grenade. Il en donna un quartier à Georges, qui lui offrit son nougat.

—J'appellerais cela, dit celui-ci, cultiver l'esprit de sacrifice.

—C'est plutôt, répondit Lucien, cultiver l'esprit du college. Ici, tout l'art est de savoir présenter les choses.'

Georges soon discovers that Lucien already has a friend, André, and that André writes poems to Lucien which the latter keeps in his *cahier de retraite*. In the muddled frenzy of a first jealousy Georges asks to see the Superior and goes clutching one of the poems which he has stolen. In the ante-room he feels frightened—after all he is one of the boys, and so against authority—and with the superstition that is common to all children and savages, he hides the poem, leaving its discovery to fate. It is found, André is expelled, but unfortunately, Lucien, under this direct attack from the hand of God, ‘becomes converted’. ‘Lucien réfléchissait; . . . “Tu viens, lui dit-il, de me confirmer ce que je pensais: je n’ai été préservé du malheur d’André que par miracle. C’est Dieu qui est là-dessous.” Il chercha à voir l’heure à sa montre-bracelet . . . “Voilà! dit-il. A partir de maintenant 10h. 35, aujourd’hui 6 octobre, je suis converti.”’

So Georges is left with a guilty conscience and a pedagogic little saint in the next bed, instead of an *ami particulier*. M. Peyrefitte lets himself go on the incredible antics that a young *dévot* will perform; he has remembered it all, medals, scapulars, indulgences, holy thoughts written down in little note-books, and he explains with one nice touch how such a transformation can occur:

‘La gravure la plus chère au cœur de Lucien semblait être celle de Sainte Thérèse de l’Enfant Jésus et de la Sainte Face, qui était accompagnée de cette inscription autographe: “J’ai soif d’amour”, et portant un “bout d’étoffe ayant touché à la servante de Dieu”. C’était sa relique. Après l’avoir laissée longtemps au-dessus des autres dans la boîte, il finit par la mettre à l’intérieur de son calepin; il pouvait ainsi la contempler plus souvent, et il la baisait quand il croyait que Georges ne le regardait pas.’

Georges remains affectionate towards Lucien but his first feeling evaporates under this cold douche of holy water, and it is only towards the end of the term that he sees on the other side of the chapel a younger boy whose beauty makes him remarkable. Beauty—Saint-Claude is a hymn in its praise, like the moral stories the children are told: ‘L’anecdote d’aujourd’hui était en l’honneur de Saint Edmond: Ecolier se promenant avec des camarades, il venait de les quitter pour ne pas entendre leurs discours pervers, lorsqu’un enfant d’une parfaite beauté se présenta devant lui, et lui dit avec grâce: “Je te salue, mon bienaimé”. Edmond demeurant tout interdit, l’enfant ajouta: “Ne me reconnais-tu donc pas?—Tu dois te tromper, lui répondit Edmond.—Comment! c’est moi qui suis toujours à tes côtés quand tu es à l’école, et qui t’accompagne partout où tu vas. Mon nom est Jésus”’.

‘Quelles curieuses histoires, celles du prédicateur! Toujours, il y était question de la beauté, ainsi que dans l’histoire grecque.’

Now that he has found a creature worthy of his affections, Georges adopts all the possible tactics to make acquaintance. He manages to alter his place in the file for communion so as to be next to Alexandre; now it is he who writes, or rather plagiarizes, poems for the young boy, and finally they meet in secret and discover their feelings are mutual. Georges’ life is now taken up by his first love—probably the only one that is ever whole-hearted—and here he comes up against the full weight of the college. The question of sex is hardly important; love to Georges and Alexandre is the vague romantic absorption in another person, the exchanging of trifling gifts, etc., but the Jesuit discipline

is less interested in sex than in the danger which a private emotion threatens to their system. Two children who love each other create a world they cannot enter and their whole object is to control, utterly, every thought and feeling. Friendship must be healthy, i.e. boring, or it must be stamped out, but priests, like all totalitarians, forget that their methods can be adopted by the enemy. The intelligence they are training for one war can be used for another. As Alexandre says: '... Et pourquoi céderions-nous sans cesse? Parce que nous sommes des enfants, aurions-nous toujours tort? Les enfants ne sont-ils pas des êtres vivants? Seraient-ils les seuls a n'avoir pas le droit d'aimer? ...'

Georges and Alexandre meet secretly and Lucien, whose conversion evaporated mysteriously on receipt of a letter from André, drops his scapulars and becomes an accomplice. If danger threatens, the remedy is simple: a mass presentation at communion, a false confession. Everything has its cover. In the holidays Georges finds a postcard of a Grecian statue which reminds him of Alexandre. The statue is in the Vatican and when the superior discovers the reproduction in Georges' wallet, his suspicions are forcibly calmed by the sanctity of the place where the original resides—the new Rome casts a protecting cloak over Athens. This is the clue to the real spirit of Catholic education, the double vision which is not hypocrisy, as is so often supposed, but simply a mental twist which grows out of a life where reality and appearance are seldom the same: 'Georges passa devant son ancien lycée. Il se demanda s'il lui aurait mieux valu ne jamais aller à Saint-Claude, mais écarta cette pensée qu'une seule image suffisait à rendre sacrilège. Indépendamment d'Alexandre, cette année d'internat religieux l'avait enrichi plus que ses nombreuses années d'externat au lycée. Ce n'était pas comme le supérieur l'aurait dit, à cause de la communion quotidienne. C'était à cause de ce mélange perpétuel du sacré et du profane, qui donnait aux moindres choses un reflet particulier; c'était à cause de cette lutte entre les élèves et les prêtres, digne de celle du chrétien dans le monde. La "vie spirituelle intense" qu'on menait publiquement labas, alimentait une autre vie, d'autant plus intense qu'elle devait se cacher.'

But ultimately children are powerless against authority; a rendezvous between Georges and Alexandre is discovered by their confessor, who, being on the whole nicer and simpler than most priests, understands the full deception practised by these models of purity. He decides to deal with the situation himself, in the confessional, which gives Georges the opportunity of rectifying the situation. Georges confesses his love, simulates repentance, declares his intention of abnegating all future relations with Alexandre, and is able to convince the priest that their relations were always 'innocent'—which is true. The priest agrees not to report the matter if Georges will send him all Alexandre's letters so that he can give them to the younger boy in the holidays as a proof of the sincerity of Georges' repentance. Since the discovery Georges has been unable to talk to Alexandre, but he agrees to this course as the only means of preventing expulsion. He assumes that the younger child has reached his own stage of duplicity and will understand his move. On the first day home Georges posts to the priest all the letters, the lock of hair and other relics he has received from Alexandre and plans to visit the child's home in secret to reassure him. But if Georges has learnt too well the lessons of the college, Alexandre, perhaps as the younger member, has preserved some

candour, and the day after the letter arrives Georges reads in the Catholic newspaper in the *Faits Divers*

'Un Enfant s'empoisonne Accidentellement.

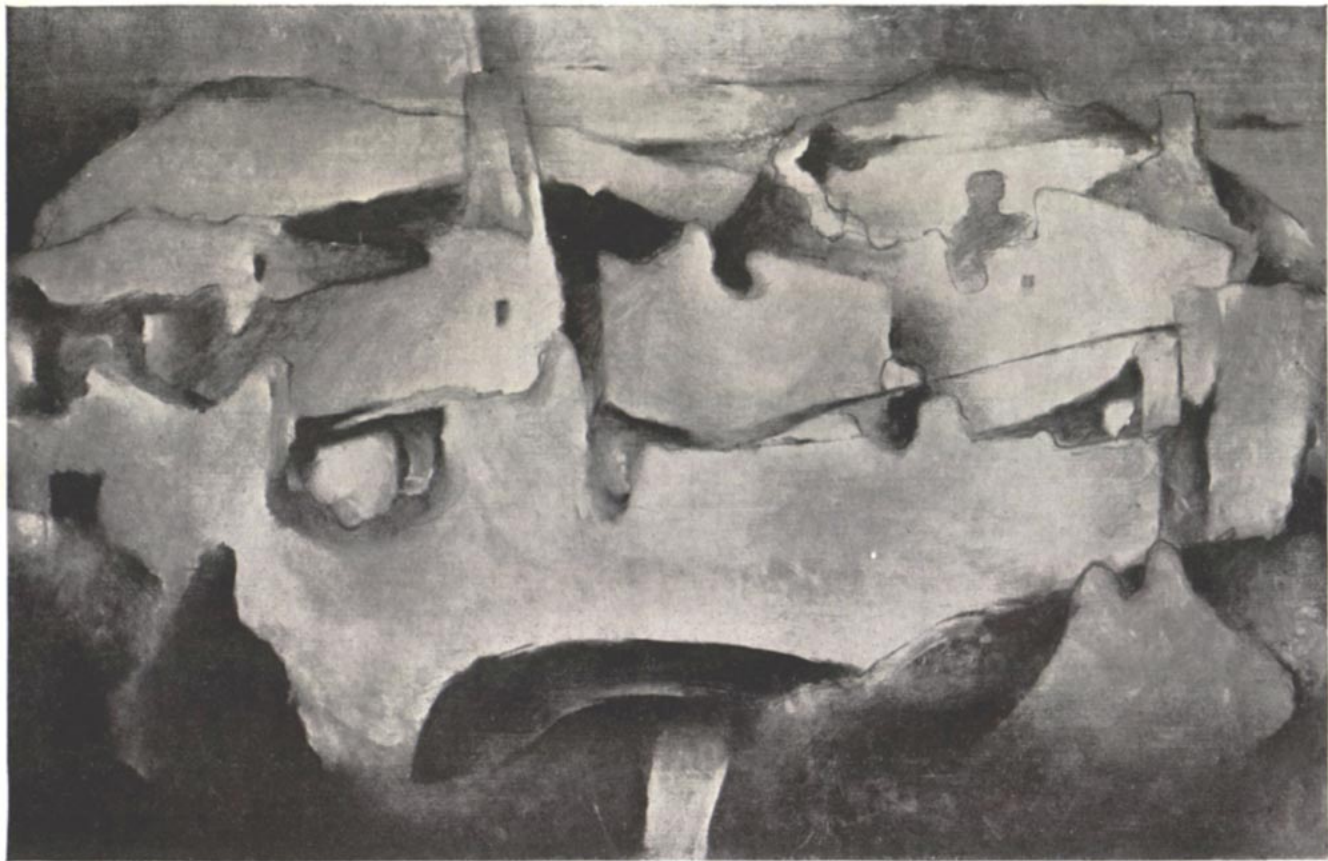
S. . . . , 14 juillet.

'Hier après-midi, le jeune Alexandre Motier, âgé de douze ans et demi, a absorbé un toxique violent qu'il avait pris pour un remède. Le malheureux enfant, victime de son erreur fatale, n'a pu être rappelé à la vie.' Alexandre is the victim of his failure to learn his school's real lesson, and Georges has completed his 'formation morale'.

As a work of art *Les Amitiés Particulières* cannot compete with *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but its object is also slightly different. Joyce's problem was largely an intellectual and a social one, which are points never tackled by Monsieur Peyrefitte, perhaps because the French are less pre-occupied with the status of things of the mind, and class distinctions are deliberately excluded from Saint-Claude, whose pupils are all drawn from one area of society. But what *Les Amitiés Particulières* explains so well is that additional twist given by the Catholics to the mistakes made in all boarding-school education: the great error of such education is to treat the school years which are so much a part of life as a preparation for life, a kind of Spartan training against some future excursion into Athens; but all that happens is that the world turns out to be a shoddy replica of school, the candid eye is lost for ever, and the child who has lived a whole life-time he was made to understand was unreal, either wearily accepts situations whose importance he finds it hard to believe, or, better warned by some almost atavistic battle-cry, never commits himself at all for fear of tearing open some ancient wound. But the Catholics go one stage further. Their approach is *personal*, each separate child must be controlled, every secret corner of his heart disinterred, and to do this they tear away any belief in the support that one human being can give to another; but nothing is overt, there are no hearty lectures on responsibility, etc., the acid is dropped in little by little until everything is eaten away; when you no longer trust another human being you can get on with the business of trusting God; when you have seen through the world you can never become its victim but can fight it with the only unanswerable weapon—cynical despair; when you have learnt the lesson of the double vision, action and emotion are equally meaningless.

This is the heritage of Catholic education that made it possible for the Church to be a temporal power, for a society to flourish in which divorce was impossible, but where every wife had a lover and every husband a mistress; a society where *volupté* had meaning and *love* had very little. It is an attitude of mind very different from that of the Catholic convert and which always presents a riddle to the Puritan, but it is one which those who went to Catholic schools always recognize in each other, members of a secret society who, when they meet, huddle together, temporarily at truce with the rest of the world, while they cautiously, untrusting, lick each other's wounds.

SONIA BROWNELL.

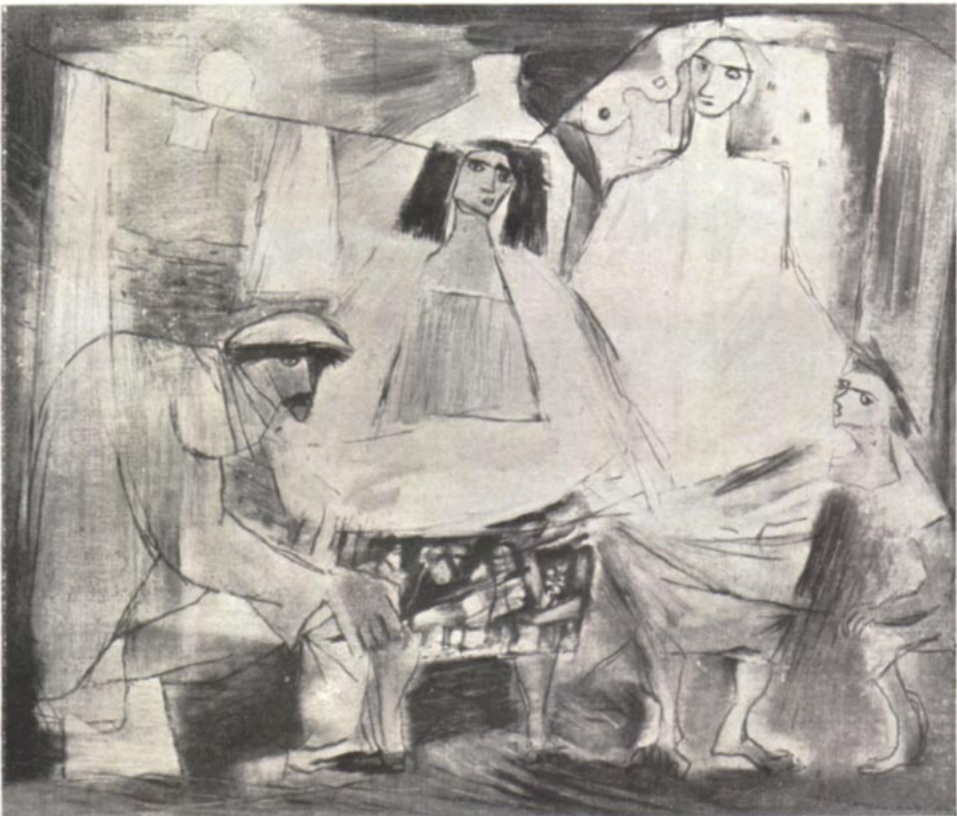


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