

have become major tensions. And least importantly, but most interestingly, it has brought to the City of Conversation new, diverse, colorful and brilliant figures to be talked about.

EDWARD G. LOWRY.

## The Genius of the Novel

THE republic of letters is often mentioned, but the implied equality among literary forms does not exist. Literature constitutes a hierarchy, with the drama and the lyric at the top, the essay taking a good second place, and the novel belonging nowhere in particular. There is nothing rare about the novel. It is prolific. It exists in a kind of vulgar abundance, notoriously lacking form, using a hundred methods but seldom attaining perfection through any of them, spreading over into the essay, occasionally lifting to the lyrical, at best perhaps accomplishing a moment of drama.

To call a novel dramatic is to applaud, and also to name a quality. But the novel never becomes a touchstone for judgment of the drama or for any other form. It scarcely can. It tells a story, but so does the play, and the fact that it sometimes uses subtle materials which the drama could not conveniently handle affords it no particular distinction. It appears on the whole as a kind of modified play, adapted to the easy chair, arranged for consumption at all hours, a second-rate form, a makeshift, something of a hybrid. It is beloved, but it is also slightly scorned. Dickens is periodically mourned as a lost playwright who mistakenly followed the fashion of his age and used the inferior vehicle. Critics have been known to wonder why Conrad has not tried his hand at plays, with the implication that thus he might have risen to greater heights.

Yet surely there is some deep-cleaving difference in creative intention between the novel and the play. Few writers have used both forms or have used them equally well, and the amphibious talent has usually been the minor talent. In English writing there has been a long sweep first in one direction and then in the other. The great articulate form of the Middle Ages was the narrative, that of the Renaissance and the Restoration was the drama. With the abrupt decline of the play at the end of the seventeenth century the narrative again came forward, to hold the field until the present.

Now these broad choices cannot be due to accident. As the substance of each form is examined in these alternating periods, a curious fact of relationship is disclosed. In the changing areas of human experience the narrative has been a path-finder, with a talent for organization, a passion for ex-

tension; and the drama has been heavily in debt for its pioneering efforts. The Mysteries rose out of the Biblical narratives, the Miracle plays out of the pious tales and the lives of the saints; the Moralities were created at least in part from the allegorical tales which made a staple for twelfth and thirteenth century sermons. Elizabethan drama rifled a huge rich harvest of narrative: mediaeval, contemporary, English, continental, classic: folk-tales, ballads, novelle, romances, the tales of the jest-books, the sober outlines of the chronicles. Restoration tragedy leaned heavily upon the heroic romances. Its comedy drew plots from foreign sources, but its stress upon manners followed upon the long-winded elaborations woven about the theme of mariners in the Elizabethan novel.

Surely it is not too much to say that without the narrative the greater English drama could not have existed; and this is by no means to consider the splendid sixteenth century plays or even the facile product of the Restoration as mere super-structures carpentered out of second-hand stuff. The greater drama has never been lacking in invention, and it has often fused old tales with a white hot flame which the narrative itself never created and perhaps never can create. One can grant that the play is the superior form. The play is poetry—or may be. It is life intensified, focussed, boldly significant.

But give the adventurous narrative its due. A highly developed form like the play, severely limited by conventions of time and space, can hardly come into being without selection, organization, reflection; and these processes the narrative has roughly carried through. If the word plot had not become so stiff and specialized this might be used to cover its effort. In the technical sense the narrative has produced an abundance of plots which the drama has freely taken over. In terms of experience it has charted multifarious ways through the mazes of human conduct, often partially, often crudely, but still decisively. It has constantly broken new ground; it has steadily been attracted by the unassimilated, the untried, the unexploited; it has provided strong initial momentum of interest, and the drama has been lifted on the tide of its energy.

The persistent curiosity and exploratory energy have never shown themselves with greater strength and resilience than in the golden era of the modern novel. One by one succeeding tales have opened up unilluminated areas: portions of rural Ireland in Maria Edgeworth, the Scotch village in Susan Ferrier, the English village in Mary Mitford and Mrs. Gaskell, sections of London in Pierce Egan and Dickens, the Yorkshire moors in Emily Brontë; continuing into new field after new field, in George

Eliot, Hardy, Cooper, Bret Harte, Mark Twain; becoming more and more intensive and specialized, entering mills, mill-towns, mines, ghettos, fishermen's settlements, lumber-camps, sweat-shops, prairie farms, often returning over its ground but usually accumulating fresh materials. Its pressure upon the new and changing aspects, the stirring immediacies of contemporary life, has been quick and constant. It has studied single sections of society minutely, with documentation. Such novels as *Hard Times*, *The Way of All Flesh*, *One of Our Conquerors*, *The American*, *The New Machiavelli*, *The Odd Women*, *The Rise of David Levinsky*, *The Portrait of the Artist as Young Man* indicate in a rough sequence the thoroughness and the avidity with which the novel has seized upon situations in moments of flux. The single development of the so-called psychological novel is proof of its restless, burrowing, but often exquisitely precise aptitude for investigation.

The novel has moved on with something of the effect of a natural force, a rising wave, cupping and cresting, lifting to intelligibility and notice aspects of the mixed chaos of modern life; and if the past is a guide it has been making for some sort of larger culmination in the drama. As everyone knows, the drama has been in a poor way for the last two hundred years or more. Critics have lamented its decline volubly. They have cast about in all directions to find causes, and they have unearthed a quantity of detail on the introduction of scenery, the digressions of opera and pantomime, the abuses of licensing. Perhaps all these had their stultifying effects. But the history of the drama is not the history of an incubated form. Given a powerful dramatic impulse, this could hardly have been smothered by external and accidental causes. Whenever drama has genuinely asserted itself it has shown an irresistible and sweeping vigor which has transcended difficulties.

It would seem that the poverty of the drama in this long period has come from the simple fact that materials which it could use have been lacking. Restoration drama had wrung the older matter dry. The modern drama has been unable to clutch the substance of contemporary life with security and force because that substance was new and unsifted; it has been in slow and partial process of definition—by the novel. And, the precipitate expansions of life being what they are, it takes rather a long time to organize a rich new groundwork of knowledge about human experience. The most that the play has been able to do has been to continue certain formal traditions of the stage, to create revivals, and to attempt feverishly to catch up with the novel by taking over some of its easiest suc-

cesses—like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, and *Little Women*.

Whether the play is now at last burgeoning after its long fallow period it may be too soon to say; but there are signs of its new birth. These hardly need iteration, for one and all have been eagerly seized upon by the waiting critical high priests. The significant fact is that the best production of this new era, if new era it is, has grown straight and sound from a rich narrative tradition. Synge turned to accumulated narrative sources much as Marlowe turned, and so did others of the Irish group. Their drama, even though it spread out beyond the use of traditional narrative, unquestionably derived from this not only much of its matter but its courage and a basic inspiration, and when it apparently turned away it still held close to the tales of a living folk. In England the Manchester playwrights have advanced as if by pre-arrangement into just those areas of stodgy, commercial, lower and middle class life which Dickens, Charles Reade, Gissing, and others had been mapping out for half or three-quarters of a century; and there are other more single indications that the drama has been rising out of the novel. Shaw, with all his individual temperament and inventiveness, flung out into the polemics of his combined feminism and anti-sentimentalism after George Meredith had blazed the difficult way. In Nan, Masfield owes nothing to Hardy's *Tess* for plot, and the relationships between the two are by no means direct, but it is still true that a figure of great and commanding tragic beauty, taken from a rich local life, was shown first at full length in the novel and then in the drama; and we are so accustomed to take for granted the advances of the novel that we overlook the force of such an innovation.

The state of the novel too now suggests a change in creative focus. It is not only that critics complain that behind the massed ranks of the "new" novelists, Bennett, Wells, Lawrence, Beresford, James Joyce, Dorothy Richardson, there is an empty space. The novel has lost much of that keenness which could boldly catch the larger movements and outlines of event and personality. It seems not to be occupied with the most elementary narrative aim—to mirror or to collect a given section of experience. Half or more of the younger novelists are using biography or autobiography almost undisguised, the loose, immediate record.

This is not to decry their work. It is immensely tangible. It has what the novel at best always seeks—novelty. It uncovers something. But in as long a view as one can succeed in getting, its en-

circlement of the unsorted substance of experience represents a kind of climax. The modern novel has persistently sought after life. Now it has apparently come somewhere near to salting its tail. It may now retire into a triumphant quiescence.

But the novel has always had a marked capacity for sudden turns and pregnant surprises. In England it may very well in some hidden underground way be preparing for a further and different achievement, developing in the direction of fantasy, for example; and over here its period may not be ended but beginning. Critics have been crying up the drama, and the drama is probably coming, though not because of their industrious efforts; but there seems no danger that the novel will become extinct. It may slip into a relative passivity for a time, as it has done before, but it will scarcely perish, for it is the product of an undying impulse, the desire to find out what life is, not necessarily what it means or may become, but its mere character.

George Moore says that the English novel is not serious, and he refers more particularly to its lack of form. He is right: it is not serious. It is loose, scrambling—and irrepressible. It is much closer to life than to art. The clay of experience is likely to cling to it, even grotesquely. Its easiest failure is the failure of detachment. To speak of the "art-novel" is almost a contradiction in terms, for only a few times in its long history has the English novel achieved anything like purity of outline. Form is hardly to be expected of it in any strict sense; its real gift is for energizing discovery. If any single quality has appeared uppermost in its development it has been that of humor, not merely a sense of fun or even of comedy, though it has not lacked these, but a kind of quick intemperate responsiveness which has kept it moving through the thick and often viscous masses of experience with an air of lively research.

CONSTANCE MAYFIELD ROURKE.

### The Happy Man

Who bears in mind misfortunes gone,  
Must live in fear of more;  
The Happy Man, whose heart is light,  
Gives no such shadows power:  
He bears in mind no haunting past  
To start his week on Monday;  
No graves are written on his mind  
To visit on a Sunday:  
He lives his life by days, not years,  
Each day's a life complete,  
Which every morning finds renewed  
With temper calm and sweet.

W. H. DAVIES.

## A "Ninety-Eight Percent American" in Porto Rico

SOME time ago the governor of Porto Rico, Mr. E. Mont Reily, arrived at the port of New York in a burning ship. The fire had started the day following the ship's departure from San Juan with its precious cargo, and the rumor is abroad that the calamity was not a mere accident, but had been caused by an infernal machine of some sort secreted in the bowels of the vessel by a fervent Porto Rican patriot with the intention of sending Mr. Reily to the bottom of the sea. The governor is said to have been the recipient of numerous anonymous threats, and that is the only thing that lends a certain appearance of solidity to the story.

To one familiar with the history of Porto Rican popular temperament this infernal machine plot does not sound real. Mr. Reily is by no means the most autocratic governing executive that has lorded it over the island, and yet history does not record a single instance in which a serious attempt was made against the person of a non-Porto Rican official. Threatening letters are quite another thing. But rumors express desires when they do not express facts or fears. What, then, is the basis of this desire on the part of the majority of the natives to eliminate Mr. Reily if not from the world at least from their island? That is the question that such Americans as give a hang about these little colonial affairs are asking themselves.

Recent political history in Porto Rico shows the governor in an interesting and somewhat disconcerting light. Four months ago he reached San Juan and assumed charge of his post. He found the following political situation: the Unionist party, made up of most of the wealthiest and "best" citizens and dragging behind its banner a substantial majority of the masses, occupied all of the seats in the Lower Chamber but thirteen, and all of the seats in the Senate but four; the Republican party, the traditional opposition party for the last sixteen years, controlled nine seats in the Lower and three in the Upper Chamber; and the Socialist party (the local branch of the A. F. of L., gone into politics) had four men in the House and one in the Senate. The Unionists had polled the previous November 120,000 votes, the Republicans 61,000 votes, and the Socialists 59,000 votes. Both Unionists and Socialists had made heavy gains since the previous election—the Socialists almost trebling their vote—at the expense of the Republicans. The platforms on which popular opinion had thus divided itself were: Unionist,—autonomy for the present with independence as an ultimate aspiration; Republican,—Americanism, statehood; Socialist,—