

As an ancient recusant family, the Crouchbacks represent the Old Faith, a view of life and an ethic that does not admit quantitative judgments. Guy's father is the main exemplar. His idea of human unity, the Mystical Body, is contrasted with the cynical dismemberment of the world that the Teheran Conference represents; his gentleness and charities with the grasping vulgarity of his world. The low-keyed lyricism in which he is presented makes him a convincingly fine human being, perhaps even the saint that the author intends. Old Crouchback's insistence that "quantitative judgments don't apply" is given a finely rendered application in Guy's relationship with his former wife, Virginia. She, after divorcing Guy, has gone through a series of marriages and affairs, the last of the affairs with Trimmer, a hairdresser in peacetime, but now as the result of a phony propaganda campaign, a hero in the Commandos. When Trimmer gets her with child and leaves her, Virginia asks Guy to remarry her. Aware that she is carrying Trimmer's child, Guy ignores the reigning worldly ethic and marries her. Mr. Waugh manages this episode very well, and the effect is a fine human vindication of Guy's action against the grasping code of the Kilbannocks, who have managed to make even the war pay off for them. In its religious dimension, Mr. Waugh's trilogy is a good deal like Ford Madox Ford's great *Parade's End*. Unhappily, when it is put over against Ford's work, it does not stand up very well, for Ford was a novelist of much greater power than Mr. Waugh.

Mr. Waugh's prose remains an admirably lucid and economical thing, a thoroughly civilized product. It is a more flexible and, I should say, a more human product in these volumes than was the chromium in which the early satires sometimes seemed to be written. There are occasional falterings into the trite and, once, into the fake-portentous ("And the sanctuary lamp was burn-

ing at Broome"). These would probably not have got into the early books. But it is equally true that these books could not have been got into the early prose.

Mr. Waugh has written a frequently delightful comedy and a social history, possibly definitive, of England in the war years. If the trilogy lacks the tight perfection of the youthful satires, it has greater range and greater humanity. The characters are drawn more nearly "round," and they are drawn in a comic profusion almost Dickensian: Aphorpe, Jumbo Trotter, Peregrine Crouchback, the Laird of Mugg, and the daft fascist Miss Carmichael. Nobody else writing today could have managed them. As evidence that age has not withered Mr. Waugh's formidable satiric powers, there are, "pinned and wriggling on the wall" Ian Kilbannock, Arthur Box-Bender, Trimmer, Ludovic, Penfield, and Brompton. In addition to the wide range in type and station of the characters, there is a witty survey of social institutions; notable among them are a London club, the wartime literary Establishment, the Air Force. Critics will probably continue to prefer the early satires and to wish the author had remained perpetually a brilliant young man or a perennially bright undergraduate like Mr. Aldous Huxley. The common reader will plump, I think, for the more human, if clearly less perfect, comedy of middle-Waugh.

—Warren Coffey

*The Marquise of O and Other Stories.* By Heinrich von Kleist. New York: Criterion Books. 318 pp. \$5.00.

An enterprising publisher, Criterion Books, has gathered together, for the first time in English, the whole of Kleist's fiction, and has issued it as a sturdy omnibus volume prefaced by one of Thomas Mann's more charming essays. Kleist, as this collection clearly demonstrates, is one of the most significant fiction-

ists in German; a maker of *novelle* unexampled for morbid power; a forerunner of Isak Dinesen, of Mann himself, and of the once-fashionable Kafka. Several of Kleist's eight stories—*The Marquise of O*, *Michael Kohlhaas*, *The Foundling*, *The Earthquake in Chile*—are among the masterpieces of fiction in any language; and the others, even something so brief as *The Beggarwoman of Locarno*, have such touches of pathos, power, or eerie penetration, that almost any real writer would have been delighted to have created them. Kleist's principal fame, of course, is as a dramatist, the greatest in German; and Mann, evaluating Kleist's plays against those of Goethe and Schiller, states categorically that "Kleist's plays alone . . . give us the archaic shudder of myth the way Sophocles and Aeschylus do." An "archaic shudder" runs through the great dramas—*Penthesilea*, *The Prince of Homburg*, the extant fragment of *Robert Guiskard*—but through them, also, and even more manifestly through the tales, runs a *nouveau frisson* of phosphorescent Romanticism.

Bernd Heinrich Wilhelm von Kleist was born in Brandenburg on 18 October 1777 into a Prussian noble family long distinguished for its professional military service to the Kingdom of Brandenburg; one ancestor, the popular soldier-poet Ewald von Kleist (a kind of 18th Century Prussian Rupert Brooke), had died gloriously on the battlefield, and various majors and generals von Kleist had devoted themselves with stiff-necked fanaticism to the greater glory of War. Major von Kleist, Heinrich's father, died when Heinrich was eleven; he was governed thereafter by women, by his mother (only sixteen years older than Heinrich), and by his half-sister, Ulrike, until, at the age of fifteen, he was forced to enter a fashionable Prussian regiment as an ensign. Seven harrowing, hallucinated years followed — years of *angst*, *noia*, *ennui* in the campaigns against Napoleon, and the worse

years of languishment at Potsdam in the barracks where all the worst qualities of Prussianism proliferated—until the sensitive poet, a dreamer steeped in the intoxicating ambience of Rousseau, requested of Frederick William III, King of Prussia, his release from military service that he might devote himself to philosophical and scholarly pursuits. The release was granted. But the appalled Kleist family thereafter regarded Heinrich as a “failure” who had “disgraced” the family tradition; after Heinrich’s suicide, the family destroyed all “compromising” papers and manuscripts, including, so Kleistian scholars conjecture, the draft of a full-length novel. The tales, and most of the dramas, had already been published, and thereby escaped destruction.

The period after 1799 was, even for Kleist, excessively *mouvementé*. He entered the University at Frankfurt, became engaged to Wilhelmine von Zenge, the daughter of the Town Commandant, but abandoned his studies shortly thereafter to travel to Berlin, to Switzerland, to Paris, accompanied by friends or by his devoted Ulrike, who gave him of her inheritance as well as of her sisterly devotion. He wrote in these years *Die Familie Schroffenstein*, an absurdly melodramatic vendetta-play redeemed by an astonishing conclusion of commingled sensuality and *tendresse*, and the powerful historical tragedy, *Robert Guiskard*, in which he placed that chevalier among his plague-decimated army at the Gates of Constantinople. All who heard *Robert Guiskard* were overwhelmed by it; the poet Wieland wrote to a friend that “if the shades of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Shakespeare were to combine to write a tragedy, the result would not surpass Kleist’s play”; but Kleist himself, in a fit of neurotic revulsion, burned most of the manuscript, saving only a portion from which he was later able to recast the magnificent opening tableau of 525 lines which we know today as *Robert Guiskard*. Moody, feverish, un-

stable, ambitious one moment to “wrest the laurel” from the great Goethe and the next desiring only annihilation, Kleist, after lecturing his fiancée with drill-master pedanticism in a series of letters on the “holiness” of “Motherhood,” abruptly broke off his engagement to the baffled Wilhelmine. Aside from his beloved Ulrike, the only other passionate attachment in his life was to the actress Henriette Vogel, with whom he entered into a suicide pact on 21 November 1811 on the shores of the Wannsee.

In the intervening years, in the great creative period from 1805 to 1810, Kleist was somehow able to get down, in the comparatively tranquil purlieu of Königsberg and Berlin, virtually the whole of that great work on which his reputation rests: the tales; the tragedies *Penthesilea* and *Prinz Friedrich von Homburg*, the former the most “sensational” of his dramas and the latter the most “assured”; and the four lesser plays, the deliciously sophisticated *Amphytrion*, the farcically popular *Der zerbrochene Krug*, the sentimentally mystical *Das Käthchen von Heilbromm*, and that most arid of Kleist’s productions, *Die Hermannschlacht*, with its savage and interminable tirades. Ludwig Tieck brought out a collected Kleist in 1821, ten years after the poet’s suicide, when his memory was still beclouded with scandal; but the definitive critical edition of the *Werke*, from which Kleist’s real glory dates, did not appear until 1905.

Kleist’s fiction, his *Erzählungen*, had appeared in two volumes in 1810 and 1811. The eight tales (or *novelle*, to be precise, for they resemble the Italian model) which Criterion Books has collected are: *The Marquise of O*, a delightful and romantic account of a woman, who, impregnated by an unknown man, advertises in the newspapers, asking him to appear that she might marry him; *Michael Kohlhaas*, which Mann calls “perhaps the strongest of all German stories,” a masterly short novel of a 16th Century horse dealer

who, seeking justice against the entrenched aristocrats who have defrauded him, eventually becomes an outlaw and incendiary transfigured to heroic proportions by the popular imagination; *The Beggarwoman of Locarno*, a terse account of spectral revenge; *The Engagement in Santo Domingo*, a lurid Haitian romance of miscegenation in the time of the Negro uprisings of 1803; *The Foundling*, an audacious tale of a foundling who impersonates the long-dead lover of his foster mother, and is killed by his foster father, who, condemned to hang, refuses absolution that he might “go down to the lowest pit of hell” to wreak his vengeance once more upon that accursed foundling; *The Earthquake in Chile*, with its celebrated opening sentence, “In Santiago, the capital of the kingdom of Chile, at the very moment of the great earthquake of 1647 in which many thousands of lives were lost, a young Spaniard by the name of Jeronimo Rugera, who had been locked up on a criminal charge, was standing against a prison pillar, about to hang himself”; *Saint Cecilia, or The Power of Music*, a miraculous “legend” imbued with Kleist’s extraordinary and unexpected adoration of Catholicism; and *The Duel*, which investigates “the ways of God” and “the ways of men” under the aspect of a medieval trial by combat.

I have always felt that the best of Thomas Mann’s stories—*Death in Venice*, *Tonio Kröger*, *The Blood of the Walsungs*, *Felix Krull*, *Disorder and Early Sorrow*, *Mario and the Magician*—are the finest stories in German; they are so marvelous that I cannot imagine their equals. But, just below them must be set these stories of Heinrich von Kleist—after a hundred and fifty years finally made available in English in this convenient omnibus which should be in every library, public or private, which pretends to distinction.

—Kuno von Pregnitz

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