

A French Controversy

By HENRY B. FULLER

THE "biographie romancée"—that compromise between history and fiction, or blend of both—is having the time of its life in France and England; and its principal practitioner in our day, M. André Maurois, has become a centre of controversy, with plenty of attackers and plenty of defenders, on both sides of the Channel. This is largely, of course, because he writes in French on English subjects; and it is his very popular "Life of Disraeli" which has given the affair most of its intensity. For the past few months the *Mercure de France* has been the chief field of a rasping polemic: M. Maurois has been charged with plagiarism on a vast and systematic scale, not only in the case of his "Disraeli" but in the case of most of his other works. He has replied *in extenso*. Parallel columns have supplanted the simple page of ordinary usage, and we have the privilege of reading variants from many sources—M. Maurois on the one hand and almost everybody else on the other.

The controversy, originating in Paris, has spread to London. Frank Harris, who feels that his proprietary interest in Oscar Wilde has been attacked by the comprehensive and prehensile Maurois, is out in a vitriolic letter. On the other hand, the late Sir Edmund Gosse wrote Maurois to offer sympathy and support. He was strong for his friend's "originality."

In France, Maeterlinck and André Provost have entered the fray, on different sides. Provost's contribution, the latest to date, is a most amusing and revealing one. He writes as a former schoolmate of Maurois (or of Émile Herzog, to speak with exactitude), during youthful days at Rouen. Even at that early time, Provost declares, Maurois's school exercises were of the same highly eclectic sort that his later productions have been. He instances a *discours*—in seventeenth century style—which, on examination, turned out to be a mosaic of La Fontaine, Racine, and La Bruyère. Small wonder that this investigator is prompted to dwell on Maurois's elegant employment of scissors and paste-pot, and ends by admiring his dexterity more than his invention.

Maeterlinck, that sage in his villa at Nice, is calmer as he unbosoms himself in *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*. If one is writing the life of a great English statesman, he says, there are sources, and one's first duty is to refer to them. We must not expect a Disraeli to spring full-armed from the head of his biographer. Maurois, by his verdict, has "bien du talent" and has produced a "fort beau livre."

All the same, the question of the "vie romancée" will not down. M. Maeterlinck himself finds it a hybrid *genre* and complains that he never can tell where the history ends and the romance begins. Then, too, the scissors and the paste-pot are always before one as a temptation and an easy cut. If Anatole France and (even more notoriously) Stendhal have not resisted the temptation, who else can? Perhaps only Flaubert, that noble soul who documented himself endlessly and furiously, but whose works may be searched in vain for a single phrase not entirely his own.

Here is just the trouble. To-day's demands are exigent; to-day's rewards are great. The tempo is faster; retirement for thought, for meditation, for assimilation becomes more difficult. If a writer of biography has a vast, expectant audience to satisfy, and a chair in the Académie Française not far ahead, compilation, even if excused by verve, suppleness, and "originality," offers a direct route that can hardly be refused.

M. Maurois's defense, in the matter of Disraeli, Shelley, and the rest, has been prompt and circumstantial; but it has been pierced. And his appropriations (which indicate a wide reading at least, and a cosmopolitan spirit rare among Frenchmen) are found to have been reaped from a wider field than might have been expected. It is likely enough that his best defense is to be found in his work in quite a different field—one which offers little documentation and which gives the writer and observer free play for his own wits. I mean the field known as the United States of America, and I am referring to the recent series of articles by Maurois on our country—or at least its Eastern seaboard—in *Les Annales*, of Paris. Here we seem to get the real man, uncomplicated by appropriations and accusations. No books in libraries; only actual encounters and first-hand observations. Here we get acuteness, and taste, and worldly-wisdom, and (as always) a clear and charming style.

This last point is worth dwelling upon: those who, in the future, may permit them-

selves doubts as to the source of this author's matter, can still read him with pleasure and profit for the sake of his admirable diction. In clarity, in a direct simplicity (or what seems such), he appears to be the direct successor of Anatole France himself. Perhaps this is a concern in which (paradoxically) the foreign reader is the best judge. Just as a man whose eyes are not exactly strong is best able to gauge the intensity of light, so the man who still reads some sorts of French with a little difficulty can take a fairly good measure of a French writer's degree of clarity and directness. He knows strain—or the absence of it. There is no strain in reading Maurois.

Herein is some satisfaction—even consolation—for an author whose material is not everywhere accepted fully as his own. There is always manner, there is always method; and to praise these is to give a Gallic artist a full half of the recognition he craves. The thing done is no more important than the way the thing is done. The artist-touch is the essential. This helps explain Lindbergh's reception at Le Bourget. He did it, yes; but *how* he did it! The manner of his accomplishment accounted for half the homage; and even now, in this spring of 1928, our young man is still the theme of prose-poems and *nouvelles* in the best of the Paris magazines. Let us, then, try to appreciate artistic work on an artistic basis, that of Maurois included. See him, if you will, as the free borrower, the adapter, the adjuster—but as the artist through all. We need a brief, easy, and sympathetic "Shelley"; we want a convenient, compendious, intelligible "Disraeli"; and we are willing to welcome facile first aid in the case of various other English characters upon whom an outsider's eye may profitably be cast for us. M. Maurois, with a deft hand, arranges an attractive show in a still more attractive showcase: shall we not buy? The answer is ready; we do.

A New Schnitzler

THERESE: CHRONIK EINES FRAULEN-LEBENS. By ARTHUR SCHNITZLER. Berlin: S. Fischer Verlag. 1928.

Reviewed by A. W. G. RANDALL

IN his latest novel Arthur Schnitzler has returned to his earlier manner of writing fiction—that is, to the Maupassant-like realism which marked such a work as the "Weg ins Freie." The result is not so interesting as the two or three preceding works, such as "Fräulein Else" and the "Traumnovelle," which, as was pointed out in these columns at the time of their appearance, really constituted remarkable experiments in the technique of fiction, an intelligent and unpretentious application of the methods of psycho-analysis to the purposes of literary art.

In "Therese" there is no analysis. As the sub-title proclaims, it is the narrative of a woman's life, and the creator rarely lets his creature fall into reflection, not to speak of self-analysis or introspection. It is a story of drab, exterior circumstance. Therese Fabiani is the daughter of a pensioned Austrian Army officer, living at Salzburg. When she was about sixteen her father goes mad, and her mother, a gossiping, idle, rather feckless creature, never on good terms with her husband, takes to writing cheap novels and inviting friends, men and women, to her house, with so loose an attention to morals that she receives a warning from the police. Incidentally she tries to marry off Therese to an elderly Count, but the girl, in reaction against her mother's intentions, falls in love with the boy, Alfred Nüllheim, and then, more seriously, with the Lieutenant Max. This latter is the first of a long series of amours, related without emphasis. Therese is portrayed as a passive lover, a woman without initiative in passion, merely succumbing, rather wearily, to numerous adventures, none of which result in any permanent attachment.

Escaping from her mother Therese settles in Vienna. The succession of rather dull "affairs" continues. She has a child by a down-at-heel artist named Kopisch. He deserts her, as do almost all her other lovers. Without sentimentality—rarely, since "Moll Flanders," has such a record been given with less emotion—Herr Schnitzler portrays the awakening of the maternal instinct. Therese is then launched on a series of endeavors to earn money to keep her son. As nurse and governess she goes from family to family, often attracting the undue attentions of fathers or elder brothers of her pupils. The procession would be wearisome to watch had not the writer managed so to differentiate the various

milieus into which Therese comes, that we find ourselves, after her various disasters, inquiring anxiously what family she will now engage herself to, and whether she will at length find happiness. Twice permanence of affection and material contentment seem about to come her way. She falls in love with a young officer—but he commits suicide. Then she gains the special affection of one of her pupils, Tilda, and ends by becoming her father's mistress. They are about to be married when he suddenly dies from a heart-attack. In the meantime Therese's son, cursed before he was born, has developed into a moral degenerate, a thief, a blackmailer. Constantly his mother gives him money until there is no more to give him. He returns, however, with threats, blackmails Therese's brother, a very prim Pan-German Deputy, and eventually, on the exhaustion of his mother's patience and her refusal to help him further, he attacks her so violently that she dies from her wounds.

Hardly an ordinary human emotion, a thought above the plane of mere animal existence, lightens this sombre narrative. A Zolaesque gloom pervades it, and yet the reader will find himself following the central character's sordid career with interest. Herr Schnitzler has again shown himself as an excellent exponent of the naturalistic technique.

"Personaggi del Quattrocento Italiano," by Piero Misciatelli (Rome: Provenzano), is a succession of succinct and well-informed notices of personages of importance of the Italian Renaissance—Popes, warriors, humanitarians, artists, and famous women.

Ferdinando Paolieri, playwright, novelist, and poet, died recently in Florence. He was a popular writer and at his death was shown much honor by his countrymen. His poem, "L'Olio," a description of peasant life, has won high plaudits.



To a man who has never seen a deer...

A CAGED *odocoileus virginianus* in Central Park is not a deer. Until you have seen a willowy doe or an antlered patriarch of the forest, aquiver with life, a deer among deer, you have missed one of the unforgettable glories of all living things.

Not to know such incomparable grace is to be cheated of a glamorous experience. It is like spending a lifetime without ever observing the surge of the ocean, the upcoming of the sun, the peak of a mountain, or a blade of grass. . . .

If you cannot *today* leave for the wilds of the Adirondacks or the woodlawn that frames the Blue Danube, to see your first deer, you can *tonight* read *Bambi, A Life In The Woods*, by FELIX SALTEN.

Read it not simply because John Galsworthy hails it as a new masterpiece, or because The New York Times says the deer, *Bambi*, is "far more exciting to read about than hundreds of human beings who crowd the pages of our novels;" or because The Book-of-the-Month Club has selected it as its current book; or because *Bambi* is leaping a deer-like leap to the fore-front of the best seller list.

These are all good contributing reasons, but read *Bambi* rather because it is supremely beautiful prose, because it is an enchanting and unisistent allegory of the life of man; and lastly because it will assuage the desolation of going through life as a man who has never seen a deer. . . .

Bambi, by FELIX SALTEN with a foreword by JOHN GALSWORTHY translated by WHITTAKER CHAMBERS illustrated by KURT WIESE published by SIMON & SCHUSTER, N. Y. \$2.50 at all booksellers

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Points of View

Gossip from London

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

I have to report, for the benefit of the Bowling Green's customers, that the Black Dog Pub, in Shoe Lane, is an agreeable place either to start or to break a journey.

But to yourself I must bewail the fact that only the perversity of animate objects prevented this report from being of far greater interest. For by a melancholy chance your investigator missed being conducted to the Black Dog by no less a guide than the Tomlinson, himself.

It befell thus: Upon arrival in London I established contact with Mr. Frank V. Morley, the admirable brother of the conductor of the Bowling Green, to whom I was directed by a friend. I confessed to him an interest in the Black Dog. Frank not only offered to show that pub, but went on to say that if I would come to lunch on the next day (a Tuesday, I think) he would exhibit Tomlinson in person and that afterward we would shanghai Tommy, take him to the Black Dog and cause him to point out the spot where it all started, as they still say in Dayton, Tenn. And that would have made a story for your customers.

On the appointed day I showed up for lunch, as also did another Tomlinson admirer named Vignolles, a young man just returned from Singapore. You will agree that a man could not possibly have a better name in which to be just returned from Singapore than Vignolles. And so to the Rainbow. But, as one versed in the ways of men and mice might have known, that was just the day chosen by the Tomlinson to stay away.

We had, however, a pleasant company, with whom you must be familiar. The only names I remember were Harold Laski and Cobden-Sanderson. But there were many pleasant souls. My next-chair neighbor had been born in Indianapolis and had lived there until he had reached two and one-half years. So you see we got matey almost immediately. Naturally he had some standing as an authority on America. He told the chap across from us all about American salesmen—their pep, their purposefulness, and their diligence in studying Psychology, by which (he said) they were able to sell anyone anything, any time or where. "You may not believe it," he assured his friends, "but they could sell you anything, absolutely anything, whether you wanted to buy it or not. Isn't that so?" He addressed the last to me. A nice question. I am sorry to say I failed my native land in this pinch, and told the truth. Another gentleman argued for individual liberty of speech and action, on the thesis: "A man should be allowed to make a nuisance of himself as much as he pleases, provided only he doesn't make a *damned* nuisance of himself." It

was delightful. After lunch an expedition of six or so was organized to visit the Black Dog and survey the authentic scene.

Crossing Fleet street, we set and made good an easterly course of some two hundred yards, sighting no obstacles to navigation save an excavation containing a half dozen navvies. Arrived at the corner of Shoe Lane, we turned sharp left and proceeded north up that thoroughfare.

You know the London lanes. Shoe Lane is on the large side (as the pipe merchants say) and pretty straight. Its first reach, from Fleet street to its confluence with St. Bride's street, is a matter of some two hundred yards. Up this the party proceeded. At approximately the middle of the stretch the party encountered a large lorry, laden with rolls of virgin newsprint. Forced to pass in single file, the various members of the party were observed each to lay a gentle palm upon the end of a cylinder of paper. The gesture would be a furtive caress which changed its mind and decided too late to be a slap. Whether this is a rite of some sort, practiced by gentlemen of the press, I do not know. I report it for what it is worth.

The party was now arrived at the open space or square where Shoe Lane and St. Bride's Street stop to parley with their lesser neighbors, Little New Street and Stonecutter Street. Here, on the northwest corner (i. e. the corner of Shoe Lane and Little New Street) stands the Black Dog.

It is a building of some three or four stories, rather undistinguished in architecture. Upon its face it bears its name and, further, the sign of its proprietors, the amiable Messrs. Mann, Crossman, and Paulin, who are, as you know, a sort of Frank G. Shattuck Co. of the Pub business. There is some further sign intimating that the liquids to be had within are excellent, but by this time we were about to enter.

There are three doors for the convenience of the Black Dog's patrons: One diagonally on the corner and two in Little New Street. By the nearer of these two we entered, and found ourselves in a small, rectangular barroom, evidently one of several. Your correspondent, agitated lest the thirst of the party might have led it past the True Room, made anxious inquiries. "Oh," said the others, who know their pubs, "this was the room, all right, for at that time of day Tommy and the Skipper couldn't possibly have gotten into the others." Saying which a round of port was ordered and found to be unimpeachable in quantity and quality.

Your correspondent, now equipped for observation, gazed about and reports as follows:

The room, which runs along the Little New Street side of the building, is some twenty feet long by ten wide, and is rather high than low. Along the inboard side ranges the bar, a comfortable affair of some dark wood—walnut perhaps—well weath-

ered and smooth. At the moment it bore, beside the glasses of the assembled company (with encircling fists), a glass-imprisoned cake of the layer variety, at which the brass handles of the beer pumps peered in some resentment. In the narrow runway behind the bar, the cupbearer was nimble, in a leisurely fashion, in the practise of his art. On the rear wall are the usual mirrors, and in front of them shelves with appropriate furnishings of bottles, chiefly whiskey and port, ranged like the pieces on a chessboard behind pawnlike piles of cigarette packets. There were, too, the usual small signs commending beverages to the attention of the Black Dog's clients, and one which warned against gambling.

Behind us, as we faced the bar—that is to say, along the outer wall—runs a sort of bench or settee—a subway-seat affair, waiting to receive the leisurely inclined. It is upholstered in a hard, black oilcloth which may or may not have received the posteriors of Tommy and the Skipper—I am not archeologist enough to say—as they sat in that momentous discussion. Above this—high enough to be out of the way, even of a City Hat—is a shelf for discarded glasses, and behind that the windows—two large plateglass ones.

I will not detain you with a description of our Proceedings, which were of the approved type. They continued until the barman, mindful of the behests of the much-hated Dora, eased us out with gently insistent bleats of "Now, then, gentlemen."

For the rest I have to report that the other two rooms, in succession toward the Shoe Lane front are, first a small ladies' bar not more than ten by ten, and second a much plainer and dingier public bar hardly larger, at the corner.

When Tommy and the Skipper had had their liquids they emerged (I am told) and proceeded down St. Bride's Street to the Ludgate Circus end. It was there that the Skipper played his Dirty Trick on Tommy, for which he deserves the gratitude of every decent man.

ROBERT K. LEAVITT.

Life and "Lives"

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

I appreciate Dr. Watson's complaint, "I am sick of 'psychology'." Certainly, many contemporary novelists have been concerned too much with new psychological theories, too little with observation of life. But I am a bit suspicious of any essay on art under the title "Feed Me on Facts"; and this suspicion is verified by the article itself. It is the province of Dr. Watson, as a scientist, to feed us on facts; but he can scarcely demand the same thing of the artists. "Facts"—in the sense in which Dr. Watson sometimes uses the word—are hardly their final concern; nor scientific theories; but a vision of life, an imaginative interpretation of a myriad facts.

Dr. Watson's demand that art turn science is illustrated by his reference to biography. "I don't see how anyone except a very naive person could write up his own life." Why? First, because no one would have the will, second, because no one would have the technique, to be entirely honest. But what is one's life, and what, therefore, its story? Says Dr. Watson again: "No wife could possibly read the autobiography of her husband. No husband could read the true life on his wife." Not the "Watsonian life" certainly; not the sum total of all deeds and ideas. But is such a sum total, life? Not in art. If I tell the story of my life so as to produce the definite impression of that life on others, I do so by relating a certain number of facts, objective and subjective, all of which, severally and together, represent the meaning of my life. This autobiography lives in proportion, first, as I am alive, second, as I understand the essence of my life and the technique for making that essence apparent in the written word.

I should say that many contemporary biographies and autobiographies are weak primarily not because their authors are unacquainted with the latest theories of psychology, but because they are unacquainted with the methods of art and with life itself. Herein lies the weakness of the so-called psychological, or "stream-of-consciousness," novel and biography. These are bad because the essence of life is not in the stream of consciousness, but in actions—and in words, gestures, and grimaces, all of which are actions. It is through these means that we realize the life within our fellows; it is through these means that we *know* them to be alive. And the story that plays up ideas and images at the expense of spoken words and actions fails to produce in the

reader that tremendous sense of life that great art—and life itself at times—produces. Take, for instance, a beautifully written novel like "Mrs. Dalloway," by Virginia Woolf. There is everywhere throughout this book the stirring of life, but life itself is not proved sufficiently by words and deeds. Mrs. Dalloway does not finally live.

Any more, I think, than I live even to myself except in words and deeds. We like to flatter ourselves that *our* story can never be told; that we have an inner life—vague desires, floating images—that the objective biography could never catch. Therefore, we welcome the psychological biography and autobiography. But I wonder: when we think over our lives, what are the memorable, the impressive, moments? For me, at least, the moments that found expression in word or deed. The rest? Very beautiful, sometimes, in a vague, appealing way; but never certain, definite, stamped with meaning—never memorable. The beginnings of life were there—faint, beautiful stirrings. I may regret that these beginnings never found complete sanction in word or deed. I do not know why they missed it, but they did; and when I think of my life they are but a faint and intangible background for remembered words and actions.

In other words, persons who live, in the actual world or in art, express themselves. Life, like Croce's poetry, is expression. And I doubt if it makes much difference about psychology, subconscious or otherwise, except as this eventuates in recognizably characteristic words and deeds. In this sense, I too am weary of psychology. But this isn't what Dr. Watson meant.

JAMES MCB. DABBS.

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A Reviewer Replies

To the Editor of *The Saturday Review*:
SIR:

In your issue of June 23, Mr. Dan F. Waugh of Tokyo, with a courtesy of phrase not always used by correspondents, severely dispraises a review of "Lotus and Chrysanthemum" which I wrote for your issue of March 3.

In reply to the questions he asks, I think it sufficient to say that a reviewer has open to him many different ways of handling a book, each way perfectly valid for its particular purpose. He may analyze the technical faults of the book, or point out the errors of judgment it displays, or lament that it is not some totally different kind of book, or damn it in general with good old Johnsonian gusto. Had I done any one of these things, Mr. Waugh would doubtless have been better pleased. But a reviewer does not always say all that he thinks about a given book; he has not space for that. In a given case, it may seem to him wiser to pass over even very serious faults, in the interest of trying to give his readers a clear and imaginative account of certain real pleasures which the book holds in store. The reviewer is not necessarily limited to the rôle of a schoolmaster assigning grades to class papers; often it is his privilege and his duty to enact the part of a returned traveler, pointing out to his stay-at-home friends the beauties that are to be found in a distant country.

It will interest Mr. Waugh to know that I agree with all his objections to the book, and that I could point out several more which he does not raise. But I deliberately omitted these matters from my review, for the reason that I was primarily concerned in calling to my readers' attention the kind of literary refreshment which the best portions of the book offered. I must admit that I have no patience with a review that displays merely the reviewer's clever awareness that the book could have been done better.

I am highly complimented by Mr. Waugh's final accusation against me. He says—"We ask him for a stone, and he gives us bread." No more gratifying words have ever been addressed to me; no finer tribute was ever paid to a reviewer; and surely no stranger confession was ever made by a disapproving reader.

ARTHUR DAVISON FICKE
Austerlitz, N. Y.

Two noted French writers have recently brought out new books. Paul Bourget in "Le Tapin" (Paris: Plon) has included what he terms "two studies," the one entitled "L'Enfant de la Mort" and the other "Une Fille-Mère." Roland Dorgelès's volume, "Montmartre Mon Pays" (Paris: Lesage), presents the reminiscences of a sojourner in Montmartre.

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