

The Saturday Review

of LITERATURE

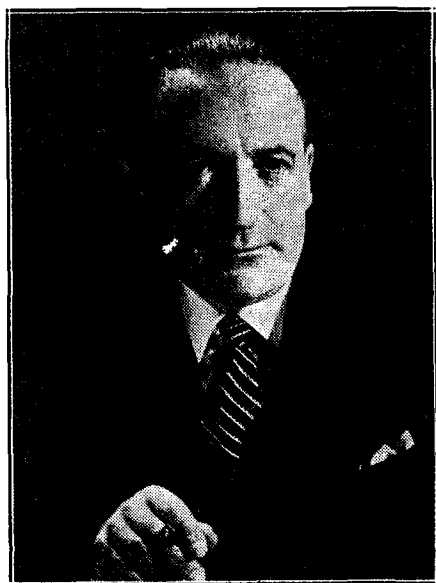
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VOLUME XI

NEW YORK, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1934

NUMBER 14



JULES ROMAINS

Life for Its Own Sake

MEN OF GOOD WILL. VOLUME III: THE PROUD AND THE MEEK. By Jules Romain. Translated from the French by Warre B. Wells. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by GEORGE STEVENS

AMERICAN readers who are exposed to book reviews must by now be aware that Jules Romain is in the process of writing what many qualified critics consider a contemporary masterpiece; that this vast novel, of which the present volume is the third, and of which the end is not in sight, begins in the Paris of 1908 and is expected to cover twenty-five years; that the author has announced the intention of depicting not a group of individuals but a society; and that, whatever the significance of his intention, there is no question that his achievement is great. Certainly those who have read the first two volumes will need no recommendation of the third. As to the others, the problem of the reviewer is only to tell them what they have been missing.

As the volumes of "Men of Good Will" appear in succession, they bring to their readers an excitement in some ways comparable to that which must have been conveyed by the new instalments of a Dickens novel in its first serial publication. Here is nothing ready made and waiting for the presses; it is a complex living organism which is growing under our sight, according to a design which we discover little by little as the details develop. It is too soon, accordingly, to attempt a criticism of "Men of Good Will"; more than one critic abroad, who made this effort, had the pleasure of eating his words with the appearance of further volumes of the novel.

As the author promised at the end of the second volume, "Passion's Pilgrims," the presentation changes: the characters are now followed for longer intervals without interruption; the episodes develop at greater length, and more consecutively. Thus the bulk of the new volume is occupied by three stories, all of them concerning characters previously introduced. The dichotomy of Proud and Meek is borrowed by the author from the Abbé Jeanne, who makes his first appearance in this volume:

On either side of a line uncertainly drawn the crowd of men and women tended to form into two flocks, into two species. On the one side were the Humble and Meek; on the other, those who were Proud in the imagination of their

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The Literature of Horror

The First of a Series of Articles Interpreting Contemporary Novels in the Light of Psychoanalysis

BY LAWRENCE S. KUBIE, M. D.

Introductory Essay

By HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

THIS is an introduction to three essays, the first of which is printed in this issue.

Those who have read even moderately in contemporary fiction, whether it be American, English, or European, must have been puzzled by its frequent obsessions with disease, defeat, suffering, frustration, the erotic, cruelty and brutality, and mental ill health in general. I say puzzled, although they may also have been shocked or outraged, because every period is shocked by its new literature, and there have always been bad books to outrage the cultivated intelligence. This constant neuroticism in current fiction cannot, however, be dismissed by saying that it is good or bad; it is a fact with which we have to reckon; the books which display it are some of them vulgar to the point of disgust or indecent to obscenity, and some of them as serious and as well-intentioned as "Pilgrim's Progress" or Pope's "Essay on Man." And, moral, amoral, and immoral, they are being read by thousands all over the Western world. It is clear that before we attempt to judge this literature of what the authors feel to be a neurotic age, we must understand these books better than do the puzzled readers who, if they are conservative, damn them for their unblushing frankness, and if they are radical, praise them for their supposed release from Victorian inhibitions.

That earlier literatures dealt with what the psychologists call a neurosis is of course obvious. Greek tragedy, whatever else it was and did, certainly had as one of its major themes the upsetting of mental health by the struggles between desire and inhibitions or by the consequences of an abnormal childhood. But the Greeks made these conflicts and disasters magnificent because the protagonists, whatever their maladjustments, were magnificent, extraordinarily different from the killers, the paranoiacs, the sadists, the drunkards, the mania ridden fanatics, the frightened and boastful neurotics of, let us say, Hemingway and Faulkner. It was

not the neurosis but the victim of the neurosis that held the center of the stage. Unquestionably, the attempt to shift the blame to external, malevolent influence detracted from realism. But in the characters chosen by our modern writers of fiction there is a defeatism, a passionate debasement, a ruthless realism of behavior, that has few parallels in earlier times. That there are important revelations as to character, motives, and the sources of emotional life, is also not to be denied. Yet the writers of these novels seem to present case histories, about which they usually (Lawrence is an exception) have no convictions except that they are true to fact, and may be significant.

Critics, and I among them, have been acutely aware of the puzzling nature of this literature of neuroticism,* and have offered many explanations, all of which may have their share of truth. And it is certain that we must judge this literature. Since it is prevalent and has its roots in the psychology of our times, we must for our minds' health as much as for the sake of culture, determine its relation to morals and its value for art. We must learn not only whether it is good for us and when, but whether it is good in itself, and particularly when and why and how. We must have some criterion by which we can distinguish mere vulgarities escaping control from the expression of modern minds seeking release, and detect the difference between malign exhibitionism and the efforts of the imagination to uncover areas of the human spirit hitherto in darkness or obscurity.

If instincts largely evaded in the literature of the nineteenth century are becoming the chief subjects of fiction and drama, we must have some means of deciding how far all this represents an inevitable and necessary readjustment of our estimates of man. Granting the vividness of a Hemingway, the poignancy of a Faulkner, the intuitions of a Caldwell, the crusading fervor of a Lawrence, are we getting merely troubled and passionate outcries from agonized spirits not yet attained to self-knowledge or even to a philosophy of acceptance, resistance, or despair, or a new literature with a new and true content?

Now it must be clear even to the most hasty reviewers of the erotic, neurotic books which come daily to their desks, that before judgment begins there are some aspects of this literature that need explaining. For in all these books, but especially in the best, there are obvious reflections of mental states not clear to the reader, nor clear to the author. As with the stories of Poe, or "Moby Dick," or "The Ancient Mariner," no critic can speak with absolute confidence until some bedside physician has given him, when available, the history of the patient. This history is not the most significant factor. That the Oedipus complex may exist in Greek tragedy is not the most important, may be the least important, element in the judging of that tragedy, but until we understand the life behind the phantasy our

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* See an essay called "The School of Cruelty" in *The Saturday Review* of March 21, 1931.



WILLIAM SAROYAN

A Daring Young Man

THE DARING YOUNG MAN ON THE FLYING TRAPEZE AND OTHER STORIES. By William Saroyan. New York: Random House. 1934. \$2.50.

Reviewed by WILLIAM ROSE BENÉT

All this rambling may seem pointless and a waste of time, but it is not. There is absolutely no haste—I can walk the hundred yard dash in a full day—and anyone who prefers may toss this story aside and take up something in the *Cosmopolitan*. I am not asking anyone to stand by. I am not promising golden apples to all who are patient. I am sitting in my room, living my life, tapping my typewriter.

So speaks young Mr. Saroyan, himself, upon the earth, an Armenian of twenty-six years of age, who was born in the Fresno vineyard district of California, whose father was a writer and teacher, who comes of a line of tellers of tales, who first electrified the editors of *Story* by sending in a study of a destitute young writer called "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze," and then deluged them with stories thereafter in every mail. Mr. Saroyan does ramble in his tale-telling, but he has the ability usually to make his rambling interesting and not boring. He is intensely conscious of himself, but it is a self of some subtlety. Writers for the magazines could give him many pointers on construction,

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This Week

THE VALLEYS OF THE ASSASSINS

By FREYA STARK

Reviewed by Frederick G. Clapp

MENDELSSOHN: A SECOND ELIJAH

By SCHIMA KAUFMAN

Reviewed by Carl Engel

WHEN THE LOOMS ARE SILENT

By MAXENCE VAN DER MEERSCH

Reviewed by Robert Cantwell

CITY EDITOR

By STANLEY WALKER

Reviewed by Charles McD. Puckette

THE FOOLSCAP ROSE

By JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

Reviewed by Theodore Purdy, Jr.

CULEBRA

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

Next Week or Later

WHAT THE PROLETARIAT READS

By LOUIS ADAMIC

The Literature of Horror

(Continued from preceding page)

judgments are unsure. So and much more so with these current stories where neurotic states reveal themselves confusedly on every page.

This history is available now at least for much of the neurotic literature under discussion; if not for the authors, certainly for the books. They are written obviously about precisely the kind of people and kind of problems that for a generation have been the concern of scientific investigators in psychology, and particularly in psychiatry and the half science, half art of psycho-analysis. That there is a wide divergence in interpretation and in methods among these scientists is irrelevant except as leaving the right to differ from a particular conclusion. For these books deal not with rare but with common disorders, as to whose nature there is now general agreement among specialists in nervous complaints. And whether the Freudian emphasis upon sex as a dominant in all mental maladjustments is right or wrong, it is certain that in these books the authors have concentrated upon the problems of sex and so asked for sexual interpretations. The youth with a psychological maladjustment sits in every psychiatrist's office; the novel about an obviously psychological maladjustment is on every serious reader's table. It is not the psychiatrist's business to say whether the book is good or bad art, it is not his business to judge of its value to normal humanity, but emphatically we must go to him to ask what light he can throw upon the case history there exposed in confusing phantasy, upon the sex obsessions obscurely and often crudely described, upon the unprecedented alternations of beauty and vileness, so obviously pathological, which make these books unique in literature.

Hence *The Saturday Review* believes that the articles which follow are of the greatest importance. An attempt to do something of this kind has been made several times before, but always by amateurs, or by scientists who confused literary with scientific judgments. Such attempted and usually futile criticism has aroused little respect. It seems necessary, therefore, to carry out a psychological analysis of specific books under competent control and with scientific detachment. These essays are not literary criticism. But even though delicate, difficult, and in some of their conclusions presumably controversial, they are the indispensable preliminaries of a literary criticism of neurotic literature.

The results are not always or often pleasant, and those who dislike to know too much about what they are reading are advised to go no further. But logically they should then give up neurotic literature good and bad. To the wiser, who will understand that without neuroticism there would have been no "Hamlet," no "Ode to the Nightingale," no "Troilus and Cressida," these probings into the phantasies out of which this current and still highly experimental and unjudged literature is made, will be intensely interesting. It is our own time speaking, whether we like it or not. And such probings had to be made. No reputable literary journal can publish a review of this literature of neuroticism which does not take into account the available explanations of the ultimate sources of its phantasies, without inviting a charge of superficiality.

The particular books in which the editors have been interested, are not necessarily the best of their kind, but certainly among the most widely read. Faulkner's "Sanctuary" has already been translated and discussed abroad as well as much read here. The stories of Hemingway have been read and imitated in every Western country, and Caldwell's "God's Little Acre" was recently the cause of a lawsuit in which the court refused to suppress the novel. They have asked Dr. Lawrence S. Kubie, a highly trained psychiatrist, experienced in psychoanalysis, to dissect these books in order to discover, if possible, the nature of the phantasies there contained. After the *Review* has published Dr. Kubie's studies it will be possible to pass on from these explanatory remarks to a more specific and discriminating attempt to pass judgment upon the new literature of neuroticism.

William Faulkner's "Sanctuary"

An Analysis by LAWRENCE S. KUBIE, M.D.

ANYONE familiar with the phantasies of the insane is continually encountering incidents in daily life which remind him hauntingly of the hospital. Such experiences are at first disturbing. Ultimately, however, they become reassuring; because they prove that there is nothing in the phantastic world of the insane which is completely alien to ordinary human nature, and that insanity and normality merge into each other by imperceptible gradations. The psychiatrist who is also a psychoanalyst is in hourly contact with this borderline between sickness and health, and finds himself therefore in a special position. Frequently in observing the successive stages in the transition from sickness to health, or occasionally from health to sickness, he has an opportunity to study strange patterns of phantasy, perplexing symbolic distortions, and surprising shifts of feeling which are hidden from the casual onlooker. All products of the human spirit become to him objects of study without prejudice, so that he brings to literature a clinical eye, seeking in its pages masked expressions of hope and desire, of frustration, anxiety, and anger, similar to those which appear in his patients.

For this search modern literature offers a fertile field. Because it attempts to portray that which is neurotic and defeated in human nature, it is closer to truth than the old romantic tradition which was content to picture only the aspirations of man. And because it seeks for the causes of these defeats within man's inner nature, it is sounder than that "realism" which explains all distress by the workings of chance and external events. Despite its honesty, however, one finds that there is much in this modern literature that is as confused as the neurosis itself. This literature sometimes repeats itself compulsively, just as the neurosis indulges in endless and compulsive repetitions. Sometimes it is exhibitionistic; and even though the exhibitionism of literature is subjected to the discipline of an artistic technique, it reminds one that the neurosis too is exhibitionistic. Therefore even where the portrayal of problems is accurate, the pseudo-solution which is offered may be confusing and neurotic. This makes it worth while to try to penetrate below the surface of some of these modern writings, if only because of the confusion which their very power can create in the minds of readers. Is it not a fair challenge to art to demand that when it deals with the neurotic components of human nature it should understand its subject?

Of the authors of these books the psychoanalytic critic of literature knows nothing because he has no access to direct information about their lives. He does not even know to what extent they have been conscious or unconscious of the meaning of what they have written. He does not know whether their own lives share in the problems which their books reflect. It would be an impossible and an intolerable presumption for him to draw any conclusion about them as individuals. Nonetheless he is free to discuss the unconscious meaning of the books in which these men have written of matters of which they show, at least, only a dim comprehension. Of these books William Faulkner's "Sanctuary" is a brilliant and most interesting example, and I shall choose it for the first of my studies.

So familiar are tales of horror in literature that we accept them without realizing how strange a phenomenon they are, or how difficult to explain. Furthermore, in recent years changes have appeared in

the literature of horror, comparable in many ways to those which have occurred in the literature of sex. In a general way it may be said that in both categories there has been a gradual drift from a romantic point of view, first to one of ridicule, and then to a frantic and tortured striving after realism.

Some readers resent this horror literature intensely; some exult in it; and still others find in it merely a thrilling exercise in literary craftsmanship. About its artistic significance there is, therefore, much disagreement. It would seem impossible to resolve this disagreement without first understanding in some measure its psychological origins.

This literature is so abundant that to study it in detail would involve the psychoanalytic dissection of a great many books and stories, drawn from many stages of the world's cultural evolution. Within the limits of this study that is impossible; and so one turns instead to a single book which brings together all the converging

streams which have contributed to the development of the current trend. Such a book is William Faulkner's "Sanctuary." It is not the only book, nor even the best one necessarily. But it serves our purpose both because of the turbulent power of its imagery, the

violent eruption of unconscious forces, and also for the practical reason that it has been widely read.

As a further justification for concentrating on one book, one may point to the analogy to what may occur in the psychoanalytic treatment of a patient. There it happens not infrequently that a series of dreams appears, scattered perhaps over many weeks or months, the first ones of which are benign and relatively unemotional, the successive dreams becoming increasingly distressing. The translation of the earlier dreams into terms of fundamental instinctual drives and conflicts is rarely possible on the basis of any material which the patient can produce. As the work goes on, however, even if one ventures upon no specific interpretations of the dreams, the significance of the series becomes clearer. More violent feelings are aroused; the imagery becomes more turbulent; instinctual drives come steadily closer to direct expression. The dream series may be thought of as "ripening"; and gradually the evolution reaches a point at which a dream comes to the surface which can be analyzed fruitfully, throwing light retrospectively upon the mysterious shadows of all its predecessors.

In the history of the literature of horror it is possible to recognize stages which are roughly similar to this. From a boy's tales of adventure, with their naive, exultant triumphs over external dangers, to the deep and biological horrors of "Sanctuary" a series could be traced. In this series it would become evident that this constant preoccupation with fear and horror has a direct bodily meaning. The more naive and childlike presentations are all externalized adventure stories with dangerous situations. The more "realistic," adult, and "morbid" stories penetrate below this surface into the instinctual reservoirs out of which terror arises. There is a direct link between the frequent nightmares of childhood and the rarer but equally significant nightmares of adults, and an identical relation between the naive melodrama of a simple frontier civilization and the sophisticated shocker of a "morbid" modern community.

The problem which faces us reaches to the roots of certain complex issues. In the first place it raises the question of the

genesis of anxiety; and in the second place the even more perplexing issue of the paradoxical pleasurable utilization of horror (what is technically known as the "erotization of anxiety"). Indeed it is this paradoxical and perverted utilization of anxiety for "pleasure" purposes, rather than the problem of the genesis of anxiety, which constitutes our immediate concern.

The outstanding feature of this ultra-sophisticated literature of biological horror is its increasingly frank reference to some form of genital injury. It is not necessary for this reason to assume that all anxiety is genital in its derivation. It is enough to recognize that there is an important interplay of all phantasies of mutilation and contamination between one instinctual battlefield and another; but that since in normal life the genital normally assumes a position of dominance among the instincts, all manifestations of anxiety tend to become focussed in this direction. Whatever the source, however, the outcome is that through all of the books in which horror plays so large a role, the ultimate manifestation of the major horror is through some form of genital injury.

One might expect to find that a great deal of this literature had been written by women, because so frequently in these tales the victims are women, and since in real life the chief form of genital injury of which both sexes are consciously fearful is always the fear of rape, and especially of the forcible defloration of a virgin. Surprisingly enough, however, one finds that it is not women who write of defloration and its terrors, but men. Since the state of terror, whatever its apparent nature may be, must have a personal core to start with, this suggests that there must be a basic fear in all men which merely uses the idea of rape as a less distressing substitute. Therefore one examines the men in these tales of rape for evidence of the nature of this basic fear and finds that they tend to an extraordinary degree to be figures who are crippled either in a directly genital sense, or indirectly through some other form of bodily injury. This crippling produces a state of real or psychic impotence.

It is out of just this sense of impotence that there arises one of the most characteristic nightmares of childhood, one in which the child feels helpless in the presence of danger and either runs frantically hither and thither and never escapes, or else is unable to move at all (cf. Temple Drake, in "Sanctuary"). Besides that one may place the not infrequent obsessive phantasy of an adult who finds himself bound helplessly while bandits attack the woman he loves. In such a phantasy the bandits execute for the man that which his own fear of impotence makes impossible; but he is freed from the painful acknowledgment of his fear of impotence by making it appear to be the result of external interference and external agents (that is, the bandits who tie him up) rather than the result of his own internal incapacity. (This, as we shall see, takes place either in fearful anticipation or as a reality not once but repeatedly in "Sanctuary.")

It is for this reason, primarily, that we take it to be no accident that the chief villain in the tale of "Sanctuary" is described as totally impotent. This was not a device chosen by chance out of many alternatives, merely to intensify the horror. It was an inevitable choice; because the whole significance of such horror phantasies is linked to the male's constant subterranean struggle with fears of impotence. We shall see, after the main features of the story have been outlined, how almost every element in it represents one of the many ways in which the male deals with this fear.

It should be clearly stated and clearly understood that we are implying nothing about the psychosexual life of the author of this book. Anxieties about potency exist in masked forms in every living male. But the ability to write such a book gives no indication that such fears have acquired any special or unusual intensity in the personal life of the book's creator. The artist's intuitive perceptions and representations of problems may at times de-

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From the jacket design of "Sanctuary" (Modern Library)