A HISTORY OF STORY-TELLING



Arthur Ransome

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A HISTORY OF STORY-TELLING

EDITED BY ARTHUR RANSOME

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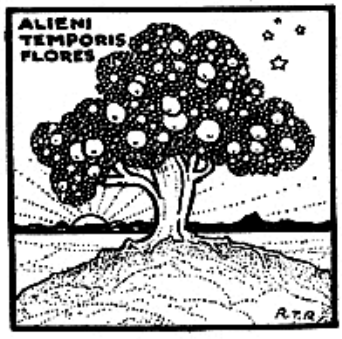
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STUDIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NARRATIVE

BY

ARTHUR RANSOME

Editor of 'The World's Story-Tellers'



WITH 27 PORTRAITS BY J. GAVIN

LONDON: T. C. & E. C. JACK
16 HENRIETTA STREET, W.C.
1909

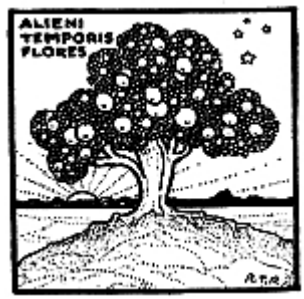
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TO MY WIFE

PREFACE

THIS is a spring day, and I am writing in a flood of sunlight in front of a brown French inn. Above my head there is the dusty branch of a tree stuck out of a window, the ancient sign that gave point to the proverb, 'Good wine needs no bush.' Good books, I suppose, need no prefaces. But honest authors realise that their books are never as good as they had planned them. A preface, put on last and worn in front, to show what they would have liked their books to be, is the pleasantest of their privileges. And I am not inclined to do without it.

A book that calls itself a history of a subject with as many byeways and blind alleys as exist in the history of story-telling, is precisely the kind of book that one would wish one's enemy to have written. Everybody who reads it grumbles because something or other is left out that, if they had had the writing of it, would have been put in. And yet in the case of this particular book (how many authors have thought the same!) criticism of omissions is like quarrelling with a guinea-pig because it has not got a tail. It is not the guinea-pig's business to have a tail, and it is not the business of this book to be a chronicle, full of facts, and admirable for reference. That place is already filled by Dunlop's *History of Fiction*, and, in a very delightful manner, by Professor Raleigh's *English Novel*. The word history can be used in a different sense. The French say that such an one makes a history of a thing when he makes a great deal of talk about it. That is what I set out to do. My business was not to be noting down dates and facts—this book was published in such a year and this in the year preceding. I was to write with a livelier imp astride

my pen. The schoolmaster was to be sent to steal apples in the orchard. I was to write of story-telling as a man might write of painting or jewellery or any other art he loved. I was to take here a book and there a book, and notice the development of technique, the conquests of new material, the gradual perfecting of form. I would talk of old masters and modern ones, and string my chapters like beads, a space between each, along the history of the art.

Well, I have *fait une histoire*, suggested mainly by the masterpieces that I love, and without too much regard for those that happen to be loved by other people. And now that it is done, I think of it sadly enough. It should have been so beautiful. When I see an old church, like the priory church at Cartmel, standing grey and solemn in the mist above the houses, or hear an old song, like 'Summer is icumen in,' or see a browned old picture, like Poussin's 'Bergers d'Arcadie,' I feel that these things have meant more to man than battles. These are his dreams and his ideals, resting from age to age, long after the din of fighting has died and been forgotten, recorded each in its own way, in stone, in melody, in colour, and in the tales also that, changing continually, have 'held children from play and old men from the chimney-corner,' the dreams lie hid. What a tapestry they should have made. For the story of this art, or indeed of any art, is the story of man. Looking back through the years, as I sit here and close my eyes against the sunlight, I see the hard men and fierce women of the Sagas living out their lives in the cold and vigorous north—Pippin, the grandfather of Charlemagne, sticking his sword indifferently through the devil, Beaumains and his scornful lady riding through the green wood. In the

dungeon of the tower sits Aucassin sorrowing for Nicolete his so sweet friend. Among the orange-trees on the Italian slope the gold-haired Fiammetta watches for her lover. With battered armour and ascetic face Don Quixote, upright in his saddle, rides on the bare roads of Spain, dreaming of Dulcinea del Toboso. Gil Blas swindles his way through life and comes out top as an honest rascal will. Clarissa sits in her chamber blotting with tears her interminable correspondence. Tom Jones draws blood from many meaner noses. My Uncle Toby looks, not in the white, for the mote in the Widow Wadman's eye. Mrs. Bennet begs her husband, to 'come and make Lizzy marry Mr. Collins.' Old Goriot pawns his plate and moves to cheaper and yet cheaper rooms to keep his daughters in their luxury. Raphael, nearing death, watches the relentless shrinking of the morsel of shagreen. There falls the House of Usher. There floats the white face of Marie Roget down the waters of the Seine. Quasimodo leers through the rosace; Mateo Falcone feels the earth with the butt of his gun and finds it not too hard for the digging of a child's grave; Clarimonde throws her passionate regard across the cathedral to the young novice about to take his vows; and, with a clatter of hoofs, the musketeers ride off for the reputation of the Queen of France.

A tapestry indeed.

I turn over my chapters, torn rags of colour loosely patched together, and then look back to my dream, that gorgeous thing that for these five years past has glittered and swung before me. I look from one to the other and back again, and am almost ready to tear up the book in order to regain the delightful possession of the dream. It was a task to be taken up

reverently and with love; and indeed these are the only qualifications I can honestly claim. But it needed far more. Now that I have done my best, I look at the result and am afraid. I hate, like I hate the tourists in Notre Dame, impertinent little books on splendid subjects. With my heart in my mouth I ask myself if I have made one.

Impertinent or no, my book is very vulnerable, and since it is my own I must defend it, so far as that is possible, by defining my intentions. The chapters are, as I meant them be, threaded like beads along the history of the art, and it is very easy to quarrel not only with the beads, but also with the spaces between them. There is no one who reads the book who will not find somewhere a space where he would have had a gleaming bead, a bead, where he would have had a contemptuous space. I could not put everything in; but have left material for many complementary volumes. It would perhaps be possible, writing only of authors I have not considered, to produce a history of story-telling no more incomplete than this. But it will be found, and the fact is perhaps my justification, that few of my omissions have been made by accident. In order to have the satisfaction of coming to an end at all, I had to seek the closest limits, and those limits, once chosen, barred, to my own surprise, more than one great story-teller from any detailed discussion.

My object not being an expanded bibliography of story-telling, but rather a series of chapters that would trace the development of the art, many admirable writers, who were content with the

moulds that were ready made to their hands, fell outside my range, however noble, however human was the material they poured into the ancient matrices. Dickens and Thackeray, for example, pouring their energy and feeling and wit and humour into the moulds designed by the eighteenth century, had, economically, to be passed over, since across the channel and in America men were writing stories, not necessarily greater, nor of wider appeal to mankind, but of more vital interest to their fellow artists. Throughout the book we hunt, my readers and I, with the hare. Always we discuss the art in those examples that seem the most advanced of their time. Just as with the Romantic movement I pass over from England to France, though the book contains no survey of French fiction, so when Cervantes is the leading story-teller, the artist nearest our own time, I shall be in Spain, though Spanish literature does not make a continuous thread in the history. I shall think more of the art than of my own country, or indeed of any country, and shall neglect all literatures in turn when they are producing nothing that is memorable in the progress of the technique of story-telling, however freely they may be contributing great or brilliant tales to the world's resources of amusement.

Then too, it will be noticed that I neglect my opportunities. What a semblance of erudition I might have made by discussing, among the origins of story-telling, the Greek and Latin specimens of narrative. But it seemed desirable, since it was possible, to trace the development of the art entirely in the literatures of our own civilisation. French and English, the two greatest European literatures, contain, grafted on their national stocks, every flower of the art that was cultivated by Greece or

Rome. I have used for discussion only the books known and made by our own ancestors, and when, at the Renaissance, they lifted forms out of Antiquity and filled them with imitations of classical matter, I have considered the imitations rather than the originals, if only because any further influence they may have had on the development of the art was exerted not by the classical writers but by the Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards, and Italians who made their manners and materials their own.

The book represents many years of reading, and two of writing where it should have taken ten. It has travelled about with me piecemeal, and, if I dated my chapters from the places where I wrote them, they would trace a very various itinerary. In France, in England, and in Scotland it has shared my adventures, and indeed it is a wilful, rambling thing, more than a little reminiscent of its infancy. Do not expect it to be too consistent. There is, I fear, no need for me to ask you not to read it all at once.

ARTHUR RANSOME.

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PART I

ORIGINS

ORIGINS

Story-telling outside books.

STORY-TELLING has nowadays only a shamefaced existence outside books. We leave the art to the artist, perhaps because he has brought it to such perfection that we do not care to expose our amateur bunglings. If a man has a story to tell after dinner he carefully puts it into slang, or tells it with jerk and gesture in as few words as possible; it is as if he were to hold up a little placard deprecating the idea that he is telling a story at all. The only tales in which we allow ourselves much detail of colouring and background are those in which public opinion has prohibited professional competition. We tell improper stories as competently as ever. But, for the other tales, we set them out concisely, almost curtly, refusing any attempt to imitate the fuller, richer treatment of literature. Our tales are mere plots. We allow ourselves scarcely two sentences of dialogue to clinch them at the finish. We give them no framework. We are shy, except perhaps before a single intimate friend, of trying in a spoken story to reproduce the effect of moonlight in the trees, the flickering firelight on the faces in a tavern, or whatever else of delicacy and embroidery we should be glad to use in writing.

But in the beginning story-telling was not an affair of pen and ink. It began with the Warning Examples naturally told by a mother to her children, and with the Embroidered Exploits told by a boaster to his wife or friends. The early woman would persuade her child from the fire with a tale of how just such another as he had touched the yellow dancer, and had had his hair burned and his eyelashes singed so that he could not look in the face of the sun. Enjoying the narrative, she would give it realistic

and credible touches, and so make something more of it than the dull lie of utility. The early man, fresh from an encounter with some beast of the woods, would not be so little of an artist as to tell the actual facts; how he heard a noise, the creaking of boughs and crackling in the undergrowth, and ran. No; he would describe the monster, sketch his panic moments, the short, fierce struggle, his stratagem, and his escape. In these two primitive tales, and their combination in varying proportions, are the germs of all the others. There is no story written to-day which cannot trace its pedigree to those two primitive types of narrative, generated by the vanity of man and the exigencies of his life.

The professional story-teller.

At first there would be no professional story-tellers. But it would not be long before, by the camp fire, in the desert tents, and in the huts at night, wherever simple men were together relating the experiences of vigorous days, there would be found some one whose adventures were always the pleasantest to hear, whose deeds were the most marvellous, whose realistic details the most varied. Probably it would also be found that this same man could also give the neatest point to the tales of wisdom that were the children of the Warning Example. Men would begin to quote his stories, and gradually the discrepancy between his life and the life that he lived as he recounted it to his nightly audiences would grow too great to be ignored. His adventures would become too tremendous for himself, and, to save his modesty and preserve his credit, he would father them upon some dead chief, a strong man who had done things that others had not, and, being dead, was unable to contradict with his stone axe his too enthusiastic

biographer. Such a man, like many a modern story-teller, would likely use his hold over the imagination of his fellows to become the medicine man of his tribe, the depositary of their traditions, their sage as well as their entertainer. He would create gods besides rebuilding men, and while his people were sheltering in the huts and listening atremble to the dying rolls of the thunder, would describe how his hero, the dead chief of long ago, was even now wrestling with the Thunder God and getting his knee upon that mighty throat. In the beginning man was a very little thing in the face of a stupendous Universe. Story-telling raised him higher and higher until at last heaven and earth were hidden by the gigantic figure of a man. In the Arthur legend, in the legend of Charlemagne, in the Sagas, we can watch men becoming heroes, and heroes supernatural. Then story-telling, having done so much, was to set to work in the opposite direction, and we shall see the figures of men gradually shrinking into their true proportions through each successive phase of the art, until, now that we have examples of all stages permanently before us, we manufacture gods, heroes, men, and creatures less than men, with almost equal profusion.

In early story-telling heroes are more than life size.

But in the beginning of written story-telling, when life was a huge battle in which it was the proper thing to die, when the heroes of stories were not finished off with marriage but by the more definite means of a battle-axe, when life was a thing of such swiftness, fierceness, and force, it was clear to his biographer that the creature who conquered it was surely more than man. His were the attributes of the gods, with whom he was not frightened to struggle

or to be allied. Sigurd's pedigree is carried back to Odin. Pippin struck a sword through the devil who met him as he went to bath, and found that 'the shape was so far material that it defiled all those waters with blood and gore and horrid slime. Even this did not upset the unconquerable Pippin. He said to his chamberlain: "Do not mind this little affair. Let the defiled water run for a while; and then, when it flows clear again, I will take my bath without delay."' Beowulf fought with dragons and died boasting gloriously. Theirs are the figures of men a thousand times man's height, very man-like, but gigantic, like the watchers shadowed on the mountain mist.

Silk and homespun stories.

Each nation showed its peculiar spirit in huge cycles of narrative. The solid force of the Vikings and their sword-bright imagery survives in the Sagas; the French chivalry in the legends of Charlemagne and Arthur; the Celtic feeling for the veiled things in the spells and dreams of the *Mabinogion*. These were the great stories of their peoples. But side by side with them were others. The thralls of the Vikings heard of Brunhild and Gudrun, the serfs of France heard of Roland and Bertha with the Large Feet; but they had also tales of their own. The tales of silk have been preserved for us in writing, but what of the tales of homespun yarn that no old clerk thought worthy of a manuscript with gold leaves, and sweet faces, and blue and scarlet flowers entwined around its borders?

Very few of these homespun stories were written down. *Reynard the Fox* had few brethren except in spoken story-telling. Perhaps just because they never were written down, we can guess from the folk-lore

that has survived among us to our own day, and from the tales we hear from savages, what were those tales of Jean and Jaques, that were perhaps nearer modern story-telling than the great books that were known by their masters. In folk-tale, as in *Reynard the Fox*, we find very different virtues from those of the knights, heroes, kings, and gods. In the silken tales the virtues are those of Don Quixote; in the homespun stories they are those of Sancho Panza. Chivalry would seem an old conceit; bravery, foolhardiness. Sagacity, cunning, and mischief are their motives. In the silken tales there is no scorn shown save of cowards, in the folk-tales none save of fools. Perhaps the proverbs illustrate them best. 'Do not close the stable door after the horse has gone.' 'A stitch in time saves nine.' 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.' These are all short stories summed in a sentence, and any one of them might serve as the motive of a modern novel.

The swineherd and the king's daughter.

From the time that stories began to be written down, we can watch them coming nearer and nearer to this level, nearer and nearer the ordinary man. The history of story-telling henceforth is that of the abasement of the grand and the uplifting of the lowly, and of the mingling of the two. The folk-tale of the swineherd who married the king's daughter is the history alike of the progress of humanity and of the materials of story-telling.

Reduction in the size of the heroes.

But before the heroes of written story-telling could begin to be humble, they had to leave off being gods. It is possible to observe the transformation by

comparing a set of early stories composed at practically the same time, but in different countries, in different stages of civilisation, and so, for the purpose of our argument, in sequence. The *Volsunga Saga*, the *Mabinogion* and *Aucassin and Nicolete* were all composed about the same time, but there are centuries of development between them. The heroes of the sagas are 'too largely thewed for life'; Aucassin is a boy. Love in the sagas is a fierce passion, the mainspring of terrific deeds; Aucassin's love is a tender obsession that keeps him from his arms, and lets him ride, careless and dreaming, into the midst of his enemies. In the *Morte Darthur*, as we have it in Malory's version of the much older tales, we can see the two spirits pulling at cross purposes in the same book. Beneath there is the rugged brutality of the old fighting tales, overlaid now with the softer texture of chivalry and gentleness. The one shows through the other like the grey rock through the green turf of our north country fields.

Technique of the Sagas.

The technique of the old tales varies most precisely with the humanity and loss of super-humanity of their heroes. In the sagas it is very simple. The effect is got by sheer weight and mass of magnificent human material. The details are those of personal appearance and armour; there are no settings. The men ride out gorgeous and bright in battle array, with gold about their helms, and painted shields, on great white horses against a sombre sky. There is no other background to the tales than heaven and the watchful gods. It was not until a later stage in their development that story-tellers painted their full canvas, and put in woodland and castle and all those other accessories that force their human figures to a

human height. At first, like the early painters, they were content with the outlines of men doing things; their audiences, with unspoilt imaginations, filled in the rest themselves. Then, too, they told their tales in a short sing-song form of verse that served well to keep them in mind, but prevented any great variation in emphasis. A lament for the dead warrior, a pæan for his victory, and an account of his wife's beauty, a genealogical tree, were all forced to jog to the same tune, and the atmosphere and scent of their telling could only be altered by the intonations of the singer. They still depended for their effect on the men who recited them, and had not achieved the completeness of expression that would give them independence.

Of the *Mabinogion*.

The *Mabinogion*, that took literary form at about the same time, were made by a Celtic nation, far further advanced as artists than the Scandinavians. The men are not so great in their biographers' eyes as to hide all else. Picture after picture is made and left as the tale goes on. For example:—

> 'And at the mouth of the river he beheld a castle, the fairest that man ever saw, and the gate of the castle was open, and he went into the castle. And in the castle he saw a fair hall, of which the roof seemed to be all gold; the walls of the hall seemed to be entirely of glittering precious gems; the doors all seemed to be of gold. Golden seats he saw in the hall, and silver tables. And on a seat opposite to him he beheld two

> auburn-haired youths playing at chess. He saw a silver board for the chess, and golden pieces thereon. The garments of the youths were of jet black satin, and chaplets of ruddy gold bound their hair, whereon were sparkling jewels of great price, rubies, and gems, alternately with imperial stones. Buskins of new Cordovan leather on their feet, fastened by slides of red gold.
>
> 'And beside a pillar in the hall he saw a hoary-headed man, in a chair of ivory, with the figures of two eagles of ruddy gold thereon. Bracelets of gold were upon his arms, and many rings were on his hands, and a golden torque about his neck; and his hair was bound with a golden diadem. He was of powerful aspect. A chessboard of gold was before him and a rod of gold, and a steel file in his hand. And he was carving out chessmen.'[1]

These two paragraphs are almost perfect in their kind. See only how the details are presented in a perfectly natural order, each one as it would strike a man advancing into the hall, who would see everything before discovering exactly what the old man was about with his chessboard, his gold, and his steel file. The Welsh bards were trained more rigorously than the skalds, and were more delicate in their craftsmanship. And yet it is interesting to see how these two paragraphs are the work of a man writing for people in whose eyes gold and ivory and

precious stones have still the glory of the new. The feeling of that little piece of story is the same we know ourselves when we have a little child before us, and are telling it wonderful things to make it open its eyes. The opening of eyes was one of the effects at which the early artists aimed.

Of *Aucassin and Nicolete*.

And then when we come to *Aucassin and Nicolete*, also written at the same time, but in a country still less barbaric, we find an even more delicate artistry, and a material far nearer that of later story-telling. Not only have the heroes become men, but the wondrous background has become that of real life. There are no castles in *Aucassin and Nicolete* whose walls are built 'of precious gems, whose doors are all of gold.' Nicolete 'went through the streets of Beaucaire keeping to the shadow, for the moon shone very bright; and she went on till she came to the tower where her friend was. The tower had cracks in it here and there, and she crouched against one of the piers, and wrapped herself in her mantle, and thrust her head into a chink in the tower, which was old and ancient, and heard Aucassin within weeping, and making very great sorrow, and lamenting for his sweet friend whom he loved so much.' Now that is a real tower, as we see again when presently Nicolete has to go along its wall, and let herself down into the ditch, hurting her feet sorely before climbing out on the other side. And is not that an admirable sense for reality that suggested the keeping to the shadow as she crept through the town? As for the humanity of the tale; we have been smitten to awe and worship by the heroes of the sagas, interested in the heroes of the magic-laden Mabinogion, and now we are made to be sorry for

Aucassin. Like the swing of a pendulum, the character of heroes has swung from that of God-like ruffians, through that of men, almost to womanhood. We have had terrible tales, and wondrous tales, and now

'There is none in such ill case,
Sad with sorrow, waste with care,
Sick with sadness, if he hear,
But shall in the hearing be
Whole again and glad with glee,
So *sweet* the story.'

Loveliness and delicacy are here for their own sakes. We have already passed the early stages of narrative. We are in the time of sweetly patterned art; in the monastery over in England a monk is writing the air of 'Summer is icumen in,' the first known piece of finished, ordered music; everywhere clerks and holy men, aloof a little from the turmoil of life, are making gardens in the margins of missals, and on the roads throughout the world the vagabond students, as separate from the turmoil as the monks, are singing the Latin songs that promised the Renaissance.

'THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE'

'THE ROMANCE OF THE ROSE'

The thirteenth century.

THINKING of the Renaissance now, we are apt to see only the flowers of its spring, the work of men like Boccaccio and Chaucer, who were strong enough and aloof enough to lift their heads above the flood of classical learning that refreshed them, and to write as blithely as if there had been never a book in the world before them. It is easy to forget those dull years after Chaucer that showed how exceptional he had been in being at once a student and an artist. It is still easier to forget the winter years of ploughing and sowing and premature birth that were before him, the years when no one thought that poetry could be more esteemed than knowledge, those greedy years of rough and ready erudition between the making of the students' songs and the building of the *Decameron*. Many versions of old legends come to us from that time like the *Life of Robert the Devil*, whose son fought with Charlemagne. Many of the legends of the kind that the son of Mr. Bickerstaff's friend was such a proficient in, and many collections of miracles and small romances of chivalry less beautiful than that of Aucassin, were at least written down in these years. The monasteries held most of the learned men, and became more important than the minstrels in the history of story-telling. They produced the books of miracles, and also several armouries of warning examples, many of them taken from the classics, for the vanquishing of scrupulous

sinners and the edification of all. Books like the *Gesta Romanorum*, volumes of tales more or less irrelevantly tagged with morals, were the forerunners of collections of less instructive stories, like those of Boccaccio's country-house party, or those of Chaucer's pilgrims riding to Canterbury. These books, with their frequent reference to antiquity, showed signs of the new spirit that was spreading over Europe; the miracle-tales and the exaggerated wondering biographies held the essence of the old. Rome in the former was the city built by Romulus and Remus; Rome in the latter was the place that had been rescued by Charlemagne, the place that was ruled by the Pope.

But in that thirteenth century, when so many new things were struggling to birth, one book stands out above all others as the most perfect illustration of its spirit. The very fact that it is so much less of a story than the anecdotes of the *Gesta Romanorum* had almost made me pass it over in a more detailed criticism of them, but this same fact perfects it as an example of an artist's attitude in the time of the revival of classical learning. It was almost an accident that let me see these years of novel study and eager wisdom so clearly expressed in the long rhyming narrative of the *Romance of the Rose*, that was known above all other books for a hundred years, that was read by Ronsard, modernised by Marot, and partly translated by Chaucer. The accident was such that I think there is no irrelevance in describing it.

Meung-sur-Loire.

Walking through France with the manuscript of my history on my back, I came at evening of an April

day into the little grey French town of Meung, set on the side of a hill above the Loire. Small cobbled streets twisted this way and that, up and down, between the old houses, and walking under the gateway, the Porte d'Amont, with its low arch and narrow windows overhead, I felt I was stepping suddenly from the broad, practical France, whose roadside crucifixes are made of iron a hundred at a time, into a forgotten corner of that older France whose spirit clings about the new, like the breath of lavender in a room where it has once been kept. In the inn where I left my knapsack there was a miller who drank a bottle of wine with me, and talked of old Jean Clopinel, who was born here in Meung those centuries ago. 'And it was a big book he had the writing of too, and a wise book, so they tell me, and good poetry; but it's written in the old French that's not our language any longer; I could not read it if I tried, and why should I? They know all about it in the town.'

Indeed the town seemed a piece of the old French itself, with its partly ruined church, and the little château crowned with conical cap-like towers, the broad Loire flowing below. I thought of *The Romance of the Rose*, Jean Clopinel's book, the book that meant so much to the Middle Ages, the book that, unwieldy as it is, is still deliciously alive. I thought of Jean Clopinel and his description of himself, put as a prophecy into the mouth of the God of Love:—

'Then shall appear Jean Clopinel,
Joyous of heart, of body well
And fairly built: at Meun shall he
Be born where Loire flows peacefully.'[2]

I made up my mind to look at the old book again

when I should have left the road, and be within reach of a larger library than my own manuscript and a single volume of Defoe.

Jean de Meung.

Jean de Meung, joyous of heart, belongs absolutely to the mediæval revival of learning. He was less of a poet than a scholar, more pleased with a display of knowledge than of beauty, and yet so far undamped by his learning as to be always ready to put plainly out such observations upon life as keep a reader smiling to-day at their shrewdness and applicability. His share of *The Romance of the Rose* is a strange and suggestive contrast with the beginning that was written by Guillaume de Lorris. The first part, earlier by forty years than the second, and about a fifth of the length, is a delicious allegory on love, with the sweetness and purity of *Aucassin and Nicolete*; the second opens solidly with a good round speech by Reason, filling something like two thousand lines, and ransacking antiquity to fit her wise saws with ancient instances according to the new fashion of the time.

Taine finds this garrulous Jean 'the most tedious of doctors'; but it is difficult not to throw yourself into his own delight in his new-won knowledge, hard not to enjoy his continual little revelations of character, as when you read:—

'Let one demand of some wise clerk
Well versed in that most noble work
"Of Consolation" foretime writ
By great Boethius, for in it
Are stored and hidden most profound
And learned lessons: 'twould redound

Greatly to that man's praise who should
Translate that book with masterhood,'

and know that he made the translation himself.

The world at school.

The very popularity of the book proves that the whole world was at school then, and eager to be taught. Lorris, poet though he is, reminds his readers that his embroidered tale hides something really valuable, that it is 'fair wit with wisdom closely wed,' knowing well that he could find no better bait to keep them with him to the end. And Jean, when it comes to his turn, admirably expresses the contemporary point of view. He has no doubts at all between the comparative worths of manner and matter. He justifies the classics by saying:—

'For oft their quip and crank and fable
Is wondrous good and profitable.'

One of the schoolmasters.

The permanent value of knowledge is always before him, and having learnt a great deal himself, what wonder that he should empty it all out, only now and again giving the tale a perfunctory prod forward before continuing his discourse? Knowledge comes always before culture, and knowledge taken with such abandon is almost inspiriting. I cannot be bored by a scholar who in the thirteenth century is so independent and so frank. Eager quarry work such as his had to precede the refined statuary of the Renaissance, and in *The Romance of the Rose* the pedagogue is far too human to be dismissed as a dealer in books alone. Wisdom and observation were

not disunited in him, and there are in that rambling, various repository of learning promises enough of realistic story-telling and of the criticism of life, sufficiently valuable to excuse its atrocious narrative, even were that not justified by the classical allusion with which it is so abundantly loaded. It gives me pleasure to hear Jean Clopinel defend plain speaking, and, protesting against calling spades anything but spades, prepare the way for Rabelais. What matter if the romance suffer a little, and the Rose lie pressed beneath a weight of scholarship? Jean himself moves on unhampered. He talked of women's table-manners so well that Chaucer himself could do no better than borrow from him. He attacked womenkind in general so mercilessly (with the authority of the classics behind him) that he won a stern rebuke from Christine de Pisan, that popular authoress of a century later, just as Schopenhauer might be censured by Miss Corelli. He looks at kings, and, turning away, remarks that it is best, if a man wishes to feel respectful towards them, that he should not see them too close. Nor does he forget to let us know his views on astronomy, on immortality, or his preference of nature over art in sculpture and painting. This last opinion of his is an illustration of that good and honest Philistinism that he needed for his work. All these things and a thousand others he puts, without a shudder, into the continuation of a story on the art of loving, that begins with a spring morning account of a dreamer's vision of a rose and a garden, and Mirth and Idleness, Youth and Courtesy, dancing together as if in a picture by Botticelli.

In Meung six hundred years ago.

I went down that night just after sunset and crossed

the river in the dusk. Resting in the middle of the bridge and looking over the dim reflections to the far-distant bank, with its grove of huge trees, and the tower of the church with the outline of the gateway on the hill behind just showing against the sky, I dreamed that I was back in the old days, when the minstrel was giving place to the scholar, and that up there on the hill, in the little town of Meung, was Jean, Doctor of Divinity, poring at his books. I remembered the bust by Desvergnes, that beautiful scholar's face, and thought how strong a personality his must have been, to leave after six hundred years and more the memory of himself and the feeling of his time so vividly impressed upon the town. For even now, though they do not read his book in Meung, they know all about it, and talk of him with that reverence in speaking that children use when they talk of a master whom they do not often see. I could not help feeling that their attitude was traditional. It has been the same for all these years, and perhaps long ago the townsfolk, passing in the narrow streets, hushed themselves before one door, and whispered, 'Yes; he is in there writing a book; there are not many who can do that,' while old Jean Clopinel inside nursed his lame leg and dipped from folio to folio, as he took gem and pebble from the dead tongue and put his vivid thought and gleeful knowledge in black letter on the parchment, in black-lettered French, the speech of his own people, that all might see how fine a thing it was to look into antiquity and to be wise.

CHAUCER AND BOCCACCIO

CHAUCER AND BOCCACCIO

The Romancers before Chaucer.

THE Franklin of Chaucer's pilgrims introduces his own story by remarking that,

'Thise olde gentil Britons in hir dayes
Of diverse aventures maden layes,
Rymeyed in hir firste Briton tonge;
Which layes with hir instruments they songe,
Or elles redden hem for hir pleasaunce;
And oon of hem have I in remembraunce
Which I shal seyn with good wil as I can.'

Chaucer had many of them 'in remembraunce,' and though he shared the knowledge of Jean de Meung, and was not, like the Franklin, a man who

'sleep never on the mount of Parnaso,
Ne lerned Marcus Tullius Cithero,'

these tales, whether made by the 'olde gentil Britons' or the French, must not be forgotten in considering him.

The romancers who preceded him, and, clad in

bright colours, chanted their stories before the ladies and knights in the rush-carpeted halls, turning somersaults between their chapters, as many a modern novelist might for the enlivenment of his narrative, were not scholars, but had great store of legendary matter from which they made their tales. Their material continued to be used, more and more elaborately, until the time of Cervantes, and in such books as the *Morte Darthur* we can see what manner of material it was. They were not in the least afraid of the supernatural, and they knew the undying attraction of hard blows. Their tales were compiled without reference to the classics, and contain all the characteristics of primitive story-telling noted in the chapter on Origins. They represented, fairly accurately, the Embroidered Exploit. They were tales of heroes, knights, and kings, half elfin stuff, half history, elaborate genealogical narratives in which the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children, and the grandsons' misfortunes are connected with their parents' revenge on the previous generation. There were great dragon-slayers before the Lord, and many who, like Charlemagne, were mighty killers of Saracens in the cause of Christendom. And then there were such tales as that of Melusine, whose father, King Helymas, married a fairy, and out of love for her broke his promise not to inquire how she was when she lay in childbed. Melusine suffers accordingly, spending every Saturday bathing herself, with her delicate white limbs hidden beneath a serpent's scaly skin. There comes to her a young knight called Raymondin whom she saves by her wisdom, enriches by her magic, weds with great pomp, and presents in successive years with ten sons, each curiously deformed by reason of the fairy blood. Raymondin, in espousing her, promises to make no

inquiries about her doings on Saturdays. He breaks his promise, like his father-in-law before him, and when, in anger at the ill-deeds of one of his sons, he reproaches her with what she is, she sadly takes leave of him, and flies off through the window, 'transfigured lyke a serpent grete and long in fifteen foote of lengthe.' There were tales too of more charming fancy, like that of the queen who bore seven children at a birth, six boys and a girl, with silver chains about their necks. The midwife, in her devilish way, showed her seven puppies with silver collars instead of her litter of babes, privately sending the children to be killed. The children, however, left in the forest, were nurtured by a nanny-goat and cared for by a hermit, until the midwife discovered that they were not dead, when she sent men to see that they were properly scotched. But the men were so softened by the accident of meeting a crowd busied with the burning of a woman who had killed her child, that they had only heart to take the chains from off the babies' necks, whereupon they flew away as white swans. That is the beginning of the tale.

The *Gesta Romanorum.*

There were tales like these representing the Embroidered Exploit, and there were others illustrating in a curious manner the growth of the Warning Example. These latter were the forerunners of the tales of Boccaccio, who, like Chaucer, stands as it were with a Janus-head, looking both ways, modern and primitive at once. The *Gesta Romanorum* is a perfectly delightful book, whose purpose was, however, not pleasure but edification. It is a collection of stories containing amusement and religion, diversion and instruction—a primrose path

from the everlasting bonfire. The anecdotes are from a thousand sources. Many of them are taken from the classics, but the references are so inaccurate as to make it pretty certain that the monkish writer had not read them, but had gleaned them from the conversation of other monks he knew. And some of them cannot have come to him within the monastery. I can imagine the old man, with his hood well thrown back, lolling on a bench, behind a tankard of good wine and a dish of fruit, laughing gleefully at the tale of the rich patroness or pious knight who wished to entertain themselves and him. For almost the only things monkish about the stories are the applications or morals, some of which are so far fetched as to make it clear that the monk compiler has included a tale for the pleasure he has himself won from it, and, after writing it down, been hard put to it to find a moral that should justify its place in a book intended as an armoury for preachers. Here is an example:—

'OF THE AVARICIOUS PURSUIT OF RICHES, WHICH LEADS TO HELL.'

'A certain carpenter, residing in a city near the sea, very covetous and very wicked, collected a large sum of money, and placed it in the trunk of a tree, which he stationed by his fireside, and which he never lost sight of. A place like this, he thought, no one could suspect; but it happened, that while all his household slept, the sea overflowed its boundaries, broke down that side of the building where the log was

situated, and carried it away. It floated many miles from its original destination, and reached at length a city in which there lived a person who kept open house. Arising early in the morning, he perceived the trunk of a tree in the water, and thinking it would be of service to him, he brought it to his own home. He was a liberal, kind-hearted man, and a great benefactor to the poor. It one day chanced that he entertained some pilgrims in his house; and the weather being extremely cold, he cut up the log for firewood. When he had struck two or three blows with the axe, he heard a rattling sound; and cleaving it in twain, the gold pieces rolled out in every direction. Greatly rejoiced at the discovery, he reposited them in a secure place, until he should ascertain who was the owner.

'Now the carpenter, bitterly lamenting the loss of his money, travelled from place to place in pursuit of it. He came, by accident, to the house of the hospitable man who had found the trunk. He failed not to mention the object of his search; and the host, understanding that the money was his, reflected whether his title to it were good. "I will prove," said he to himself, "if God will that the money should be returned to him." Accordingly he

made three cakes, the first of which he filled with earth, the second with the bones of dead men, and in the third he put a quantity of the gold which he had discovered in the trunk. "Friend," said he, addressing the carpenter, "we will eat three cakes, composed of the best meat in my house. Chuse which you will have." The carpenter did as he was directed, he took the cakes and weighed them in his hand, one after another, and finding that the earth weighed heaviest, he chose it. "And if I want more, my worthy host," added he, "I will have that"—laying his hand upon the cake containing the bones. "You may keep the third cake yourself." "I see clearly," murmured the host, "I see very clearly that God does not will the money to be returned to this wretched man." Calling, therefore, the poor and infirm, the blind and the lame, and opening the cake of gold in the presence of the carpenter, to whom he spoke, "Thou miserable varlet, this is thine own gold. But thou preferredst the cake of earth and dead men's bones. I am persuaded, therefore, that God wills not that I return thee thy money." Without delay, he distributed the whole among the paupers, and drove the carpenter away in great tribulation.'

So much for the story, which is indeed rather long to be quoted in so small a book. But listen now to the application:—

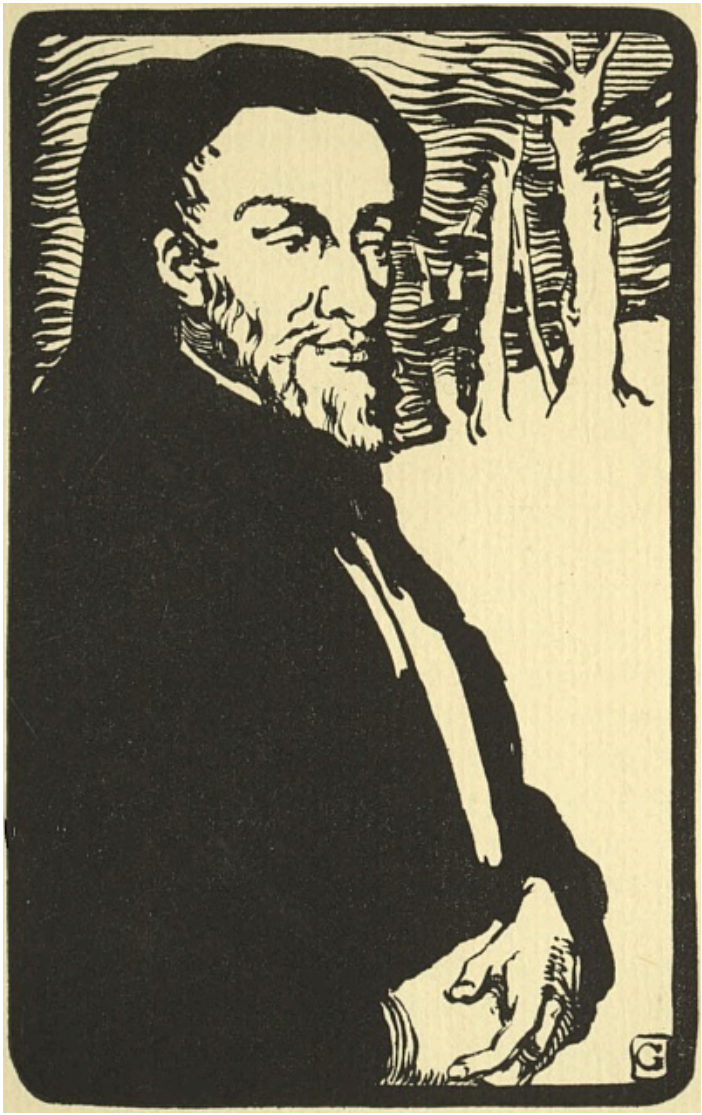
> 'My beloved, the carpenter is any worldly-minded man; the trunk of the tree denotes the human heart, filled with the riches of this life. The host is a wise confessor. The cake of earth is the world; that of the bones of dead men is the flesh; and that of gold is the kingdom of heaven.'

Chaucer and Boccaccio.

The modern novel could have no beginning in a literature so far removed from ordinary life as the romances, so brief in narration, so pious in ideal as the Gesta. Something more of flesh and blood, something of coarser grain than dreams, on the one hand, and on the other something fuller fleshed than the skeletonic anecdote (however marrowy its bones) was needed to produce it. It needed men and women, and it needed a more delicate narrative form, portraiture, and the fine art of story-telling, Chaucer, and Boccaccio. Chaucer, for all that he wrote in verse, was not a *trouveur* when he was at his best. Boccaccio was not a collector of anecdotes. The new classical learning had given them humaner outlooks. The attitude of the *Canterbury Tales* is not that of the *Song of Roland*, or the *Morte Darthur*; the attitude of the *Decameron* is not that of the Gesta. Chaucer and Boccaccio, sometimes at least, were plain men, pleasantly conscious of their humanity, telling stories to amuse their friends.

Chaucer was a middle-class Englishman, Boccaccio

a middle-class Italian. They both wrote in languages that were scarcely older than themselves, in languages that were rather popular than learned. They were both in a sense mediators between the classical culture and their own people. There the resemblance ends, and their personal characters begin to seal the impressions they made on their respective literatures. They represent two quite distinct advances in the art of story-telling, the one in material, the other in technique. In both of them there is a personal honesty of workmanship that makes their work their own. The names of the *trouveurs* are lost, or, at least, not connected with what they did. They were workers on a general theme, and counted no more in the production of the whole than the thousand men who chiselled out each his piece of carving round the arches of Notre Dame. They were the tools of their nations. Chaucer and Boccaccio were men whose workmanship had its special marks, its private personality. They were artists in their own right and not artisans.



GEOFFREY CHAUCER

Chaucer.

Chaucer's was a fairly simple nature. He seems to have taken to Renaissance fashions just as he took to Renaissance learning, without in the least disturbing the solid Englishness of his foundation. He married a Damsell Philippa without letting his marriage interfere with an ideal and unrequited passion like that of Petrarch for Laura. He had Jean de Meung's own reverence for the classics. 'Go litel book, go litel my tragedie,' he says in '*Troilus and Criseyd*,

'And kiss the steppes, wher-as thou seest pace
Virgil, Ovyde, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.'

And yet few men have about them less of a classical savour. He may well have liked 'at his beddes heed

'Twenty bokes clad in blak or reed,
Of Aristotle and his philosophye,'

but he was a man of the true 'Merry England,' when oxen were roasted whole on feast-days, and pigs ran in the London streets. He followed the Court, but he knew the populace. His father was a vintner in Thames Street, and in the Cheapside taverns Chaucer found some of the material that his travels and learning taught him how to use. On St. George's day 1374 he was granted a pitcher of wine daily for life by his Majesty Edward the Third. It is probable that he met Petrarch at Padua. These two facts seem to me to present no very hollow portrait of the man.

Portraiture.

He brought into the art of story-telling a new clearness of sight in looking at other people and at the manners of the time. The romances had not represented contemporary life, but rather

contemporary ideals. No one can pretend to find in Lancelot, in Roland, in Isoud of the White Hands, character-sketch or portrait. Lancelot is the perfect knight, Roland the perfect warrior, Isoud the beautiful woman. They were not a knight, a warrior, a woman. Those who heard the tales used the names as servant-girls use names in modern novels of plot, as pegs on which to hang their own emotions and their own ambitions. The lady who listened with her chin upon her hands as the *trouveurs* chanted before her, took herself the part of Isoud, and gave her lover or the lover for whom she hoped the attributes of Tristram. The jack-squire listening near the foot of the table himself felt Roland's steed between his legs. These names of romance were qualities not people. The Wife of Bath is a very different matter.

'In al the parisshe wyf ne was ther noon
That to th' offering bifore hir sholde goon;
And if ther dide, certeyn, so wrooth was she,
That she was out of alle charitee.
Hir coverchiefs ful fyne were of ground;
I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound
That on a Sonday were upon hir heed.
Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,
Ful streite y-teyd, and shoos ful moiste and newe.
Bold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.
She was a worthy womman al hir lyve,
Housbondes at chirche-dore she hadde fyve,
Withouten other companye in youthe;
But therof nedeth nat to speke as nouthe.
And thryes hadde she been at Jerusalem;
She hadde passed many a straunge streem;
At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne,
In Galice at seint Jame, and at Coloigne.
She coude much of wandring by the weye;

Gat-tothed was she, soothly for to seye.
Upon an amblere esily she sat,
Y-wimpled wel, and on hir heed an hat
As brood as is a bokeler or a targe;
A foot-mantel aboute hir hipes large,
And on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe.
In felawschip wel coude she laughe and carpe.
Of remedyes of love she knew perchaunce,
For she coude of that art the olde daunce.'

She is there, solid, garrulous, herself. She does not get husbands because she is a worshipped goddess, but because she is a practical woman. Bold indeed would be the lady who in imagination played her part. The Wife is no empty fancy dress in which we move and live; she is well filled out with her own flesh, and we watch her from outside as we would watch a neighbour. Hers is no veil of dreams, but a good and costly one, bought at Bristol Fair by one or other of her five husbands whom she has badgered into getting it.

Story-tellers before Chaucer seemed scarcely to have realised that men were more than good or bad, brave or coward. You hated a man, or you loved him, laughed at, or admired him; it never occurred to you to observe him. Every man was man, every woman woman. It was not until the Renaissance that modern story-telling found one of its motives, which is, that there are as many kinds of man and woman as there are men and women in the world. Then, at last, character and individuality became suddenly important. Passion, reverence, charm had existed before in story-telling. To these was now added another possibility of the art in portrait painting. So was the modern world differentiated from the dark ages; blinking in the unaccustomed light, men began

to look at one another. In painting, almost simultaneously with literature, the new power found expression. The Van Eycks were alive before Chaucer was dead, and in the careful, serene painting of 'John Arnolfini and his Wife,' is the observant spirit of the *Canterbury Tales*. That woman standing there in her miraculously real green robe, her linen neat upon her head, her hand laid in her husband's, and her eyes regarding his pious, solemn gesture as if she had consented in her own mind to see him painted as he wished, and not betray her sense of humour, the man, the pattens on the floor, the little dog, and the detailed chandelier, are all painted as if in Chaucer's verse. The identity of them is the amazing thing; their difference from all the other men and women of the town, the difference of their room from all other rooms, and their little dog from all other little dogs. To compare that married couple with any knight and lady carved in stone, hands folded over breasts, on a tomb in an old church, is to compare the modern with the mediæval, and the Wife of Bath with Guenevere or the Wife of Sir Segwarides.

Prose and verse.

After Chaucer, narrative scarcely developed except in prose. Scott, indeed, nearly five centuries later, wrote his first tales in verse, but the rhyming story-teller disappeared in the greater author of the Waverley Novels.[3] Chaucer himself is interesting for marking the transition. He had many attributes of later narrative, in his round English humour, in his concern with actual life, although in this essay I have only needed him to illustrate the beginnings of the portrait-making that has since become so important a byway of the art. But while his verse in the *Canterbury Tales* has the effect of good prose, his

prose, excellent elsewhere, is here unwieldy and beyond his governance. He expressed the new attitude in the old way; but when he was only nine years old, there had been written in Italy prose tales that have hardly been excelled as examples of the two forms of the short story. Chaucer was born in 1340. In 1349 Boccaccio finished the *Decameron*.

Boccaccio.

Boccaccio had a more intricate mind than Chaucer's, and a more elaborate life. He is said to have been an illegitimate son of a Florentine merchant and a Frenchwoman, and the two nations certainly seem to have contributed to his character. He spent six years of his youth apprenticed to a merchant in Paris, forsook business, and was sent to learn law, and only in the end persuaded his father to let him devote himself to books. He had a knowledge of the world uncommon even in his day, and a knowledge of letters that was rare. He was something of a scholar, something of a courtier, and, particularly, something of a poet. Sentence after sentence in the *Decameron* glides by like a splash of sunlight on a stream with floating blossoms. I must quote one of his poems in Rossetti's most beautiful translation:—

'By a clear well, within a little field
Full of green grass and flowers of every hue,
Sat three young girls, relating (as I knew)
Their loves. And each had twined a bough to shield
Her lovely face; and the green leaves did yield
The golden hair their shadow; while the two
Sweet colours mingled, both blown lightly through
With a soft wind for ever stirred and still'd.
After a little while one of them said

(I heard her), 'Think! If, ere the next hour struck,
Each of our lovers should come here to-day,
Think you that we should fly or feel afraid?'
To whom the others answered, 'From such luck
A girl would be a fool to run away.'

He could write a poem like that; he could write the *Decameron*; he could write books of greater impropriety; and at the end of his life could beg his friends to leave such books alone, devoting himself to the compilation of ponderous works of classical learning. There is a legend of a deathbed vision of Judgment where Boccaccio figured, which, being reported to him, nearly gave the wit, the scholar, and the gallant the additional mask of the Carthusian religious.



GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

But the Boccaccio of the *Decameron* was the mature young man, of personal beauty, and nimble tongue, a

Dioneo, who had his own way with the company in which he found himself, and was licensed, like a professional jester, to say the most scandalous things. He knew the rich colour, classical learning, and jollity of morals of the Court of Naples. Here he heard the travelling story-tellers, and perhaps learnt from them a little of the art of narrative. He knew the *Gesta Romanorum*, and began to collect tales himself with the idea of making some similar collection. Noting story after story that he heard told (for it would be ridiculous to reason from the widespread origin of his tales that he had a stupendous knowledge of the world's books), he wrote them with a perfect feeling for value and proportion. In him the story-teller ceased to be an improviser. In his tales the longwindedness of the *trouveurs* was gone, gone also the nakedness of the anecdote. He refused to excuse them with the moral tags of the Gesta. These new forms were not things of utility that needed justification; they were things of independent beauty.

His story-telling.

Boccaccio was intent simply on the art of telling tales. He knew enough of classical literature to feel the possible dignity and permanence of prose, and he told his stories as they were told to him in a supple, pleasant vernacular that obeyed him absolutely and never led him off by its own strangeness into byways foreign to the tales and to himself. He found his material in anecdotes of current gossip, like Cecco Angiolieri's misadventure with his money, his palfrey, and his clothes, and in popular tales like that of the overpatient Griselda. He took it in the rough and shaped it marvellously, creating two forms, the short story proper, the skilful development of a

single episode, and the little novel, the French *nouvelle*, a tale whose incidents are many and whose plot may be elaborate. From his day to our own these two forms have scarcely altered, and in the use of both of them he showed that invaluable art, so strenuously attained by later story-tellers, of compelling us to read with him to the end, even if we know it, for the mere joy of narrative, the delight of his narrating presence. We are so well content with Chaucer's gorgeous improvisations that we never ask whether this piece or that is relevant to the general theme. But in Boccaccio there are no irrelevancies, praise that can be given to few story-tellers before the time of the self-conscious construction of men like Poe, and the austere selection of men like Mérimée and Flaubert.

Importance of framework in books of short tales.

Even without their setting his tales would have been something memorable, something that lifted the art to a new level and made less loving workmanship an obvious backsliding. But stories put together do not make good books. The *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* are very short and make a collection of anecdotes. The *Exemplary Novels* of Cervantes are very long and stand and fall each one alone. But the *Canterbury Tales* are the better for that merry company on pilgrimage. And when Queen Joan of Naples, profligate, murderess, and bluestocking, asked Boccaccio to put his stories in a book, it was well that he should have the plague of 1348 to set as purple velvet underneath his gems—the morality inseparable from the tales was so simple and so careless. Boccaccio's attitude was that of his age. Man has wants: if he can satisfy them, good: if not, why then it may ease his sorrow to hear it

professionally expressed:—'Help me,' as Chaucer says:—

'Help me that am the sorwful instrument
That helpeth lovers, as I can, to pleyne!'

As for good fortune, it is taken as naïvely as by the topers in the song:—

'Maults gone down, maults gone down
From an old angel to a French crown.
And every drunkard in this town
Is very glad that maults gone down.'

When Troilus is happy with Cressida, Chaucer smiles aside:—'With worse hap God let us never mete.' And Boccaccio, after describing a scene that in England at the present day would be the prelude to a case at law, and columns of loathsomely prurient newspaper reports, ejaculates with simple piety:—'God grant us the like.' The *Decameron* owes much of its dignity and permanence to its double frame, to the Court of Story-telling in the garden on the hill, and to the deeper irony that places it, sweet, peaceful, and insouciant, in the black year of pestilence and death.

THE ROGUE NOVEL

THE ROGUE NOVEL

Democracy in literature.

FEW characters in literature have had so large or so honourable a progeny as the gutter-snipe. If the Kings' daughters of High Romance, charming, delicate creatures, had only wedded with Kings' sons, as delicately fashioned as themselves, we should never have known the sterling dynasty of the Tom Joneses and the Humphry Clinkers, with their honest hearts and coarse hides warranted to wear. All those Kings of men, whose thrones were beer-barrels, whose sceptres, oaken cudgels, whose perennial counsellor was Jollity, whose enemy, Introspection, would never have come to their own, and indeed would never have been born, if it had not been for the sixteenth century entry of the rascal into the Palace gardens, for the escapades of such shaggy-headed, smutfaced, barefooted urchins as Lazarillo de Tormes.

To such rogues as he must be attributed much of our present humanity; for until we could laugh at those of low estate, we held them of little account. There is small mention made of serving-men in the *Morte Darthur* or the *Mabinogion*, and when, in the *Heptameron* of Margaret of Navarre, we hear of the drowning of a number of them in trying to render easy the passage of their masters through the floods, the comment is extremely short: 'One must not despair for the loss of servants, for they are easy to replace.' On a similar occasion 'all the company were filled with a joy inestimable, praising the Creator, who, contenting himself with serving-men, had saved the masters and mistresses,' an index alike to the ferocity they still attributed to God and the rather

exclusive humanity of themselves. Do you not think with sudden awe of the revolution to come? Do you not hear a long way off the trampling of a million serving-men, prepared to satisfy God with other lives? It is a fine contrast to turn from these queenly sentences to this little book, the autobiography of a beggar, who thinks himself sufficiently important to set down the whole truth about his birth, lest people should make any mistake. 'My father, God be kind to him, had for fifteen years a mill on the river of Tormes.... I was scarcely eight when he was accused of having, with evil intent, made leakage in his check sacks.... Letting himself be surprised, he confessed all, and suffered patiently the chastisement of justice, which makes me hope that he is, according to the Gospel, of the number of those happy in the Glory of God.' No very reputable parentage this, in a day when it was the fashion to derive heroes from Charlemagne or Amadis.

Lazarillo de Tormes.

It is a short step from the ironic to the sincere. The author of the book is laughing at his hero, and makes a huge joke of his pretensions. But to recognise, even in jest, that a vagabond rogue could have pretensions, or indeed any personal character at all beyond that of a tool in the hand of whoever was kind enough to use him, was to look upon him with a humaner eye and, presently, to recognise him in earnest as a fellow creature. It seems to me significant that the first rogues in our literature should come from Spain, a country that has never quite forgotten its Moorish occupation. In the Spanish student, who, so tradition says, wrote *Lazarillo* while in the University of Salamanca, there

must have been something of the spirit of the race that lets the hunchback tell his story to the Caliph, and is glad when the son of the barber marries the daughter of the Grand Vizier. For, joke as it is, the book is the story of a beggar, told as a peculiarly fearless and brazen beggar would tell it, without suggesting or demanding either condescension or pity.

The morality of the underworld.

There is genius in the little book. Its author perhaps did better than he meant, for he brings on every page the moral atmosphere of the underworld, the old folk-morality, the same in sixteenth-century Spain as in the oldest tales of sagacity and cunning. Lazarillo's shameless mother apprentices him to a blind beggar who promises to treat him like a son and begins his education at once. He takes the boy to a big stone on the outskirts of the town, and bids him listen to the noise within it. The boy puts his head close to the stone to hear the better, and the old rascal gives him a thundering blow, which, the stone being an admirable anvil, nearly cracks his skull. That is his first lesson ... never to be unsuspicious ... and it is as characteristic of the others as of *Reynard the Fox*.

There never was so excellent a beggar as Lazarillo's master; no trick of the trade was unknown to him. As a fortune-teller, he could prophesy what his victims wished to hear. As a doctor he had his remedies for toothache, and for fainting-fits; not an illness could be mentioned but he had a physic ready to his hands. Then too, 'he knew by heart more prayers than all the blind men of Spain. He recited them very distinctly, in a low tone, grave and clear, calling the attention of the whole church; he accompanied them

with a posture humble and devout, without gesticulations or grimaces of mouth, after the manner of those blind men who have not been properly brought up.' Indeed his only fault was avarice. 'He was not content with making me die of hunger,' says his pupil; 'he was doing the same himself.'

Under such a master Lazarillo's wits sharpen quickly. 'A fool would have been dead a hundred times; but by my subtlety and my good tricks, I always, or mostly (in spite of all his care), succeeded in getting hold of the biggest and best portion.' Lazarillo becomes as astute a rascal as his teacher, and, living fairly and squarely in the conditions of the underworld, his villainy does not damp his spirits, or disturb his peace of nights. I was reminded of him by a young tramp with whom I walked in the north country, a rogue with as merry a heart as he, and a similar well-fitting morality. With me, from whom he knew there was nothing to gain but good fellowship, he was a good fellow, walked with a merry stride, whistled as he went, sang me songs in the Gaelic of his childhood, and told me of the jolly tricks he had played with a monkey he had brought from over sea. We walked like men in the sunshine. But when, beyond a turn in the road, he saw some person coming a little better dressed, why then his face flashed into a winking melancholy, his stride degenerated as if by magic into a slouch, and it was odd if his mean figure and despairing hand did not attract a copper, for which he would call down a blessing. Then, as soon as we were out of sight of his benefactor, he would resume his natural walk and burst again into whistling and merriment. Lazarillo is as frank as he. He recognises his needs (Hunger is not an easy fellow to ignore), and would be much

surprised if you denied his right to satisfy them. Nor is he disappointed in you. Every honest man must love a rogue, and you are as consciencelessly glad as himself when Lazarillo, by kneeling before him and sucking the liquor through a straw, diddles the blind man who greedily guards the wine bowl between his ragged knees. You feel that he has but his due when he happens upon a wife and a living and (if you read the continuation of his history[4]) find nothing blameworthy in the fact that he spends his last years in the clothes and reputation of a dead hermit, subsisting on the charity of the religious.

The form of the rogue novel.

I have talked at some length about the contents of this little book in order to illustrate the new material then brought into story-telling. Let me now consider the new form that came with it. *Lazarillo de Tormes* was a very simple development from the plain anecdote or merry quip of folklore or gossip, which was, as we have seen in the last chapter, one of the popular early forms of narrative. Boccaccio raised the anecdote to a higher level of art by giving it a fuller technique and expanding it into the short story. The inventors of the rogue novels achieved a similar result by stringing a number of anecdotes together about a particular hero, making as it were cycles of anecdotes comparable in their humbler way with the grand cycles of romance. Lazarillo himself is not an elaborate conception, but simply a fit rogue to play the main part in a score or so of roguish exploits, idly following one another as they occurred to the mind of the narrator. His life is a jest-book turned into a biography, a collection of anecdotes metamorphosed into a novel.

Its satirical material.

The new form gave story-telling a wider scope. In writing a collection of anecdotes it was difficult to realise the hero who was no more than a name that happened to be common to them all. It was impossible to make much of the minor characters who walk on or off the tiny stage of each adventure. But in stringing them along a biography, in producing instead of a number of embroidered exploits a single embroidered life, there need be no limit to the choice and elaboration of the embroidery. Though the hero was no more than a quality, a puppet guaranteed to jump on the pull of a string, the setting of his life turned easily into a satirical picture of contemporary existence, and satire became eventually one of the principal aims with which such novels were written.

The low estate of the rogue novel's hero made satire from his lips not only easy but palatable. In writing the opinions of a rogue you can politely assume that his standpoint is not that of his readers. For that reason they can applaud the rascal's wit playing over other people, or, if it touches them too closely, regard it with compassion as lions might listen to the criticism of jackals. *Lazarillo* contains plenty of good-humoured, bantering portraits: the seller of forged indulgences, the miserly priest, and particularly the out-at-elbows gentleman who walks abroad each day to lunch with a rich friend, and is unable on his return from his hungry promenade to keep from eyeing, and at last from sharing, the rough bread that his servant has begged or stolen for himself. Lazarillo's merit is that he writes of himself *à propos* of other people, and never barrenly of himself for his own sake. Smollett in writing *Roderick Random* is

true to his traditions in getting his own back from schoolmasters and the Navy Office. And the arms of Dickens, who reformed the workhouses in telling the story of Oliver Twist, must have had quartered upon them the rampant begging bowl of the little Spanish rogue.

Now the characteristic language of satire is as pointed as the blade of a rapier, and for this we owe some gratitude to these rascally autobiographies whose plainness of style was nearer talk than that of any earlier form of narrative. The prose of the picaresque novel has been in every age remarkably free from the literary tricks most fashionable at the time. When your hero dresses in rags you cannot do better than clothe his opinions in simplicity. The writing of *Lazarillo*, of *Tom Jones*, of *Captain Singleton*, of *Lavengro*, is clear, virile, not at all ornate, the exact opposite to that of the Pastorals. Such heroes deliver their sentences, like Long Melford, straight from the shoulder, and would consider fine writing as so much aimless trifling in the air.

Picaresque autobiographies.

Mention of *Lavengro* suggests a paragraph on one of the most curious developments to be noticed in the history of the art. All that we have examined so far have been from truth to fiction; this is a movement from fiction to truth. Stories of the deeds of a man have become romances of the deeds of a hero. A biography has changed as we watched it into a tale of miracle. Here is a quite different phenomenon. An imaginary autobiography that pretends to be real, of a rascally hero, makes it possible for rogues to write real autobiographies that pretend to be imaginary.

Lavengro and the *Romany Rye* are two parts of a rogue novel constructed like the oldest of the kind. They contain a hero somehow put on a different plane from that of respectable society, and the books are made up of the people he meets and the things they say and do to him, or make him do and say. 'Why,' says Borrow, whose attitude towards life is as confident as Lazarillo's, 'there is not a chapter in the present book which is not full of adventures, with the exception of the present one, and this is not yet terminated.'

The development of the rogue novel.

But Borrow and other makers of confessions are not of the direct line, in spite of the roguish and adventurous air that clings about them as they rest upon our shelves. *Lazarillo* had many sincerer and more immediate flatterers—Thomas Nash, for example, whose *Jacke Wilton, or the Unfortunate Traveller*, holds in itself, as one of the earliest pieces of realism in English literature, more than enough of interest for an essay. He had also many younger brothers at home, and an enormous progeny, and it has so happened that the influence of the rogue novel on our own fiction was exerted through them, and not through his early imitations in France and England. Cervantes used its form for the adventures of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, and, combining the picaresque spirit with that of the tales of chivalry, produced the first realistic romance. Many lesser writers were content to follow Lazarillo's lead without such independent ingenuity. They brought up their literary children to be heroes after Lazarillo's fashion and were proud to have him as a godfather. In their hands the rogue novel retained its form and gained only a multiplicity of incident, a hundred

writers earnestly devising new swindles and more exciting adventures for the hero, whose personality under all their buffetings remained constant to its original characteristics. No nation has shown more fertility in fancy than the Spanish. We owe to Spain half the trap-door excitements, half the eavesdropping discoveries, half the ingenious plots and counter-plots of the theatre. And when we remember that for a hundred and fifty years the rogue novel had been one of the most popular forms of Spanish literature, we need not wonder that Le Sage, in turning over volume after volume of the lives of Spanish rascals, should find that the Spanish language was an Open Sesame to an Ali Baba's cave of opulent invention. Just as a hundred forgotten trouveurs chanted the tales of the *Morte Darthur*, before Malory made from their songs the epic that we know, so the rogue novel had seeded and repeated itself again and again, before it met its great man who seized the vitality of a hundred bantlings to make a breeched book.



ALAIN RENÉ LE SAGE

Its culmination in Le Sage.

Just as Malory was not a Frenchman but an Englishman, so Le Sage was not a Spaniard but a

Frenchman, and a Frenchman in a very different age from that which produced his models. The

'Stately Spanish galleons
Sailing from the Isthmus,
Dipping through the tropics by the palm green
shores,
With cargoes of diamonds,
Emeralds, amethysts,
Topazes and cinnamon and gold moidores,'[5]

no longer brought the wealth of the Incas to Cadiz and Barcelona, but had been burnt as firewood in the cabins on the Irish coast. The Elizabethan age had come and gone. Cervantes had been dead a hundred years. Molière had brought comedy to the French stage. Watteau was painting, and Boileau was formulating the eighteenth-century code of letters, when in a little garden summer-house behind a Paris street, Le Sage sat at his desk, dipped through Spanish books, and wrote with a light heart of the people that he knew, disguised in foreign clothes, and moving in places he had never seen. He made his travels by his own fireside, and the contrast between Cervantes' active life and his peaceable *Galatea* is no greater than that between the adventurous Gil Blas and Le Sage's sedentary industry. His lack of personal experience left him very free in the handling of his material, and made him just the man to recast the old adventures of a century before, to translate them, spilling none of their vitality, to a later time, to fill them out with a more delicate fancy, to finish them with a more fastidious pen, and to build from them a new and delicious French book, Spanish in colouring, but wholly Parisian in appeal.

Gil Blas is a Frenchman in a Spanish cloak, Le Sage, as he imagined himself under the tattered mantle of Lazarillo. His disguise left him doubly licensed for the criticism of contemporary France. He was of low estate, so that he could see things from below, upside down, and comment upon them. His circumstances were Spanish, so that he could observe French things, call them by Spanish names, and laugh at them without being inexcusably impertinent. He had also a very excellent technique. Le Sage had read La Bruyère and La Bruyère's translation of Theophrastus, and was the better able to allow his hero to take the hint from Lazarillo, and use his autobiography as an outlet for his social satire. Everything that Lazarillo had done, Gil Blas did in a larger and more skilful fashion. The book summed up the rogue novels in itself, and in its own right brought their influence to bear on English narrative. Smollett translated it, and it shares with *Don Quixote* the parentage of the masculine novel.

THE ELIZABETHANS

THE ELIZABETHANS

The new conditions of professional story-telling.

PROFESSIONAL story-tellers before the sixteenth century seem very far removed from the novelists of our circulating libraries. Theirs was a simpler patronage; they had but to please one rich man, and they could live. The invention of printing made them leap suddenly into the conditions of modernity. It changed the audience of the castle hall into the audience of the world, and patrons into the public. A man told his stories in his own room. He was not sure of a single listener; he might have ten thousand without raising his voice or pressing harder with his pen. Poets might write for their friends or the Court; but Elizabethan story-tellers were already able to exist by writing for the booksellers. Middlemen were between their audience and themselves. They had no chance of excusing the defects of their wares by charm of voice or charm of personality, unless they could get that charm on paper. The characteristics of modern story-telling were rapidly appearing; already, as in the case of *Euphues*, a single book might set the fashion for a thousand; already the novelist felt his audience through his sales. Men like Greene, swift 'yarkers up' of pamphlets, had to write what the Elizabethan public wanted—with the result that there is very little purely English story-telling of the period. The Elizabethans wanted silks and gold from overseas. They fell in love with what was new and strange. They were hungry for all countries but their own, and for all times but those in which they lived. There never were such thieves. They stole from Spain, from France, from Italy, from Portugal, and, curiously mixing impudence and awe, copied crudely

and continually from a newly discovered antiquity.

Elizabethan borrowings.

There was *Paynter's Pallace*, peopled with characters from the love-tales of France and Italy, in whose adventures Elizabethan playwrights found a score of plots. And then there was *Pettie's Pallace*, with its delightful title, *A petite Pallace of Pettie his pleasure*, that shows how late our language lost its French. Pettie steals his tales from the classics, with a most engaging air of right of way. Wherever the Elizabethans went they carried their heads high and were not abashed. They were ready to nod to Cæsar, call Endymion a Johnny-head-in-air, and clink a glass in honour of Ulysses. All the world was so new that Antiquity seemed only yesterday. Classical allusion was used with the most lavish hand. Progne, inveighing against her husband, explains his iniquity as follows:—

> 'He sheweth his cursed cruel kind, he plainly proves himself to proceed of the progeny of that traitor Aeneas, who wrought the confusion of Queen Dido, who succoured him in his distress. It is evident he is engendered of Jason's race, who disloyally forsook Medea that made him win the golden fleece! He is descended of the stock of Demophoon, who through his faithless dealing forced Phyllis to hang herself! He seems of the seed of Theseus, who left Ariadne in the deserts to be devoured, through whose help he subdued the monster

> Minotaur, and escaped out of the intricate labyrinth! He cometh of Nero his cruel kind, who carnally abused his own mother Agrippina, and then caused her to be slain and ripped open, that he might see the place wherein he lay being an infant in her belly! So that what but filthiness is to be gathered of such grafts? What boughs but beastliness grow out of such stems?'

And yet, quite undismayed by such family connections, so intimate was he with antiquity, the story-teller sums up the deeds of his characters as though he were a prosecuting counsel, and they even now cowering in the dock before him.

> 'It were hard here, Gentlewoman, for you to give sentence, who more offended of the husband or the wife, seeing the doings of both the one and the other near in the highest degree of devilishness—such unbridled lust and beastly cruelty in him, such monstrous mischief and murder in her; in him such treason, in her such treachery; in him such falseness, in her such furiousness; in him such devilish desire, in her such revengeful ire; in him such devilish heat, in her such haggish hate, that I think them both worthy to be condemned to the most bottomless pit in hell.'

Lyly writes for women.

There is something in the style of this, as well as in the address to a female reader, that suggests the *Euphues* of John Lyly, published two years later. Lyly, alchemist of Spanish magniloquence into English euphuism, who settled the style of the Elizabethan romance, and brought into it many elements still characteristic of English story-telling, wrote as well as his letter to 'Gentlemen Readers,' and to his 'verrie good friends, the Gentlemen Schollers of Oxford,' Epistles dedicatory to women—'To the Ladies and Gentlewoemen of England, John Lyly wisheth what they would.' They were grateful to him, and since he said that he would rather 'lye shut in a Ladye's Casket, then open in a Scholler's studie,' there was scarce a gentlewoman in London but knew much of him by heart, addressed her husband or lover in terms his Lucia might have used, and woke nearly as eager to read in him as in her looking-glass. His was a very modern success. Then, too, the end of all his tales was high morality. He winds up each with a reflection, and like most English story-telling, they contain more of the Warning Example than of the Embroidered Exploit. He reminds the 'Gentlewoemen of England' that he has 'diligently observed that there shall be nothing found that may offend the chaste mind with unseemly tearmes or uncleanly talke.' And yet he wrote of love a hundred years before the eighteenth century, and throughout those hundred years, and for some fifty afterwards, the chaste mind was to be almost disregarded. Mrs. Aphra Behn was to pour forth what Swinburne called her 'weltering sewerage,' and Fielding and Smollett were to write, before the chaste mind was to exert any very lasting influence on literature. Fielding and Smollett wrote for men, while, like an earlier Richardson, 'could Euphues take the measure of a woman's minde, as

the Tailour doth of hir bodie, he would go as neere to fit them for a fancie as the other doth for a fashion.' Elizabethan women must have been less squeamish than their descendants on the subject of themselves. For in this book planned to fit them, Lyly writes like an Elizabethan Schopenhauer:—'Take from them their periwigges, their paintings, their Jewells, their rowles, their boulstrings, and thou shalt soone perceive that a woman is the least part of hir selfe.' That is the gentle art of being rude, in which so much of early wit consisted. But, as it was designed as a 'Cooling Carde for Philautus and all fond lovers,' whose affections were misplaced or unrequited, the women, accepting not without pride responsibility for the disease, must have found it easy to forgive him and to smile at so impotent a cure.

Euphuism.

The style of Euphues had a much wider influence than his matter. Like Pettie's, it is precious, but with a preciousness at the same time so elaborate and infectious that I am finding it difficult even now, in thinking about it, to keep from imitating it. Its principle is a battledore-and-shuttlecock motion, in which the sense, sometimes a little bruised, is kept up between similar sounds or words that are not quite puns but nearly so. An idea that could be expressed in a single very short sentence is expanded as long as the breath lasts, or longer, by the insertion of separate contrasts, like those used in the intermediate lines of one of the forms of Japanese poetry. There was something of this in Pettie's peroration that was quoted three paragraphs ago; and here is an example from Lyly:—'Alas, Euphues, by how much the more I love the high clymbing of

thy capacitie, by so much the more I feare thy fall.' (There is the idea; all that follows is its embroidery.) 'The fine Christall is sooner erased then the hard Marble; the greenest Beech burneth faster then the dryest Oke; the fairest silke is soonest soyled; and the sweetest wine tourneth to the sharpest Vinegar. The Pestilence doth most infect the clearest complection, and the Caterpiller cleaveth into the ripest fruite: the most delycate witte is allured with small enticement unto vice, and most subject to yeelde unto vanitie.'

'Cruditie and indigestion.'

Such a style could not but attract a newly educated people, still able to marvel at knowledge. Its lavishness of information is comparable to that generosity of gold and precious gems that has been noticed as characteristic of the writers of the *Mabinogion*. The Briton wondered at wealth, the Elizabethan at learning. It is not surprising that in this state of civilisation a fact-laden style should be brought to perfection. 'It is a sign of cruditie and indigestion,' says Montaigne, 'for a man to yeelde up his meat even as he swallowed the same: the stomach hath not wrought his full operation unlesse it have changed forme and altered fashion of that which was given him to boyle and concoct.' In Elizabethan England, when knowledge was so new and so delightful that men did not scruple to invent it, it is easy to imagine John Lyly writing with a huge Bestiary open to the left of him, and a classical dictionary open to the right, from which he might dig out metaphors learned and ingenious, and present them immediately to his readers without putting any undue strain on his own intellectual digestion.

Lyly's followers.

His imitators were no less numerous than his readers. If they could not write they talked his peculiar language. If they were novelists they wrote in something like his manner, and with cheerful consciences used his name as a trade-mark to attract his popularity to themselves. Lodge's *Rosalynde* is introduced as *Euphues' Golden Legacie*, and many other stories were connected by some ingenious silken thread to Lyly's garlanded triumphal car. It is too easy to laugh at euphuism. It was the first prophecy of the ordered poetic prose in which such delicate work has been done in our own time. In the hands of Lodge and Greene, who tempered it with homelier periods, it showed at once its possibilities of beauty. Nor with Lyly was it continued pedantry. A golden smile appears sometimes beneath the mask. Euphues, crossing to England, tells the story of Callimachus to Philautus and the sailors, and when he says, 'You must imagine (because it were too long to tell all his journey) that he was Sea-sick (as thou beginnest to be, Philautus),' we perceive that Lyly is not always to be hidden behind his sentences. The stories he introduces, the tale of Callimachus and Cassander, or the pretty history of old Fidus and his Issida, are as pleasant as the tales of Lodge and Greene.

How near he was to being a story-teller may be seen from the work of these two men. They tried to imitate him in everything; but Greene wrote in a hurry for the press, and you could not expect Lodge, writing on the high seas, to be as consistently euphuistical as an Oxford gentleman, holding an appointment from Lord Burleigh, and having nothing else to do. Euphuism fell away from both journalist

and sailor, leaving a pleasant glow over their style. They were more intent than Lyly on the plain forwarding of the narrative. For the long rhetorical harangues they substituted shorter, simpler speeches to express the feelings of their characters. The harangue was a step from the bald statement that so-and-so 'made great dole,' and these shorter speeches were a further step from the by no means bald declamations on the subject of the dole, towards the working up of emotion by a closer copy of the action and dialogue in which emotion expresses itself. Dialogue was yet to be introduced from the theatre. In Lyly it meant argument, but in the best of his imitators it had become already a tool imperfectly understood but sometimes used for the actual progress of the tale.

Greene and Lodge illustrate very well the characteristics of Elizabethan story-telling. *Pandosto*, *Rosalynde*, and some of Greene's confessions let us know pretty clearly what it was that the public of the day found interesting. Greene was a Bohemian, 'with a jolley red peaked beard' who could 'yark up a pamphlet in a single night,' and do it so well that the booksellers were glad to pay 'for the very dregs of his wit.' Lodge was an undergraduate at Oxford, a pirate, and later a very successful physician. Both were, like their audiences, exceedingly alive.

Romance and confession.

In Greene's *Pandosto* we find reminiscences of old romance, classical nomenclature, the influence of the Italian *novelle*, and plenty of the wild improbability that still had power over his audience. *Pandosto* is a love pamphlet, and after a euphuistic dedication and a little preface on jealousy, 'from which oft ensueth

bloody revenge as this ensuing history manifestly proveth,' Greene leads off with, 'In the country of Bohemia there reigned a king called Pandosto.' Bohemia is an island—no matter. Pandosto, in a most obliging manner, 'to close up the comedy with a tragical stratagem,' slays himself at the finish—no matter again. We must remember that for the Elizabethans, fortunate people who believed in the Lamia and the Boas, probability and improbability had no existence as relative terms. Everything was credible, and one of the joys of romance reading was the exercise of an athletic faith. Another was the gathering of knowledge, and Greene met this demand with books whose breathings of realism illustrate, like Nash's *Jacke Wilton*, the rogue novel in England, and give his name a double importance. These other books were more personal to their writer, and depend more closely on his own life and character. Greene was a wild liver with a conscience. He enjoyed debauch and the company of rogues better than virtue and the society of sober citizens. But his conscience oscillated between hibernation and wakefulness with a periodicity that corresponded to the fulness and emptiness of his purse, and in times of poverty and righteousness he wrote confessions of his own misdoing, and books on the methods of rapscallions with whom he consorted, that brought him the money to continue on his riotous career, and satisfied the curiosity of his public as well as his romances had delighted their imaginations.

Lodge, although his work was also various, appealed mainly to the latter.

'Roome for a souldier and a sailer
that gives you the fruits of his labors

> that he wrote, in the ocean, when everie line was wet with a surge, and every humorous passion countercheckt with a storme. If you like it, so; and yet I will be yours in duetie, if you be mine in favour. But if Momus, or any squinteied asse, that hath mighty eares to conceive with Midas, and yet little reason to judge, if he come abord our barke to find fault with the tackling, when hee knowes not the shrowds, Ile down into the hold, and fetch out a rustie pollax, that sawe no sunne this seaven yeare, and either well bebast him, or heave the cockescombe over boord to feed cods. But curteous gentlemen, that favour most, backbite none, and pardon what is overslipt, let such come and welcome; Ile into the stewards roome, and fetch them a kanne of our best bevradge.'

As You Like It.

That is the way in which Thomas Lodge, newly returned to England from piracies on the western seas, introduces his *Rosalynde*. With such a preface, you would expect a ruffianly tale, full of hard knocks and coarse words, certainly not the dainty little pastoral, romantic fairy story, found in Euphues' cell, and holding lessons of much profit for the guidance of his friend's children. The very contrast between its buccaneering author and its own fragility is the same as that between the pastoral writers and their books, between, for example, Cervantes of Lepanto and the

author of the *Galatea*, between the Sidney who died at Zutphen and the author of *Arcadia*. It is the tale of *As You Like It*, and Shakespeare, in turning it into a play, chose the right title for it, since it contains every one of the surest baits with which to hook an Elizabethan audience. It was brought from overseas, and in that time when ships were sailing up to London Bridge with all the new-found riches of the world, the hint of travel was a sufficient promise of delight. It begins with a dying knight who leaves a legacy between his sons, and its audience had not yet tired of Sir Bevis and Sir Isumbras. It has the fairy-tale notion of the youngest born, and was not England youngest son of all the world? There are beautiful women in it, and one of them dresses like a man—a delicious, romantic thing to dream upon. And finally, is it not left by Euphues himself, and therefore full of profit as of pleasure, of wit as of wisdom, and written in something not too far from that embroidered manner, as dear to the Elizabethans as their new won luxuries, their newly imported frivolities.

THE PASTORAL

THE PASTORAL

The discovery and exploitation of Arcadia.

THE Pastoral, whose influence touches even the Elizabethan novels not professedly Arcadian, had been fished up from sunken antiquity by the early scholars of the Renaissance. They were fascinated by the serene country pieces of Virgil, and the leafy embroideries of Theocritus, and were, of course, too newly learned, too eager for the name of learning, to be able to apply the old form to their own material. Instead, they did their best to write not only in a classical manner, but also of a classical country. They used Greek names, Latin names, any but homespun names of their own times. It was not on purpose that Arcadia was set by them in the Golden Age; they had aimed at a century more prosaic. The best time of all the world had a date for them, and they did their best to live up to its particular antiquity. But in using conventions so different from real life, in a time of hurry and stress, it was natural that they should be led into daydreams of a greater simplicity than their own elaborate existence. It was natural, too, that by refining character, tempering the wind, and keeping the year at its sweetest season, they should end in the making of books that were beyond all measure artificial. From the time of Boccaccio to the time of Cervantes these books had multiplied, and become more and more like arrangements of marionettes in landscapes dotted with Noah's Ark trees, until, when the curate in Don Quixote's library defends them to the niece and calls them 'ingenious books that can do nobody any prejudice,' the niece hurriedly replies, 'Oh! good sir, burn them with the rest I beseech you;

for should my uncle get cured of his knight-errant frenzy, and betake himself to the reading of these books, we should have him turn shepherd, and so wander through the woods and fields; nay, and what would be worse yet, turn poet, which they say is a catching and incurable disease.'

Shepherds' plaints.

The niece was right, for when shepherds love sweet shepherdesses, it seems that for the benefit of a Renaissance public they must pour their sorrows out in verse, as elegant and classical as may be. No sooner does one shepherd begin his song than another joins him and another, until there is a chorus of complaining lovers; the infection is so virulent that it leaps from man to man, and if a shepherd-boy breathe a poem to his lass, it is great odds that she will cap it with another, and then they will keep it up between them like a shuttlecock. The disease is so strong indeed that if poor Corydon has no one to cross Muses with, it forces Echo herself to answer him in rhyme:—

'In what state was I then, when I took this deadly disease?
Ease.
And what manner of mind which had to that humour a vain?
Vain.
Hath not reason enough vehemence to desire to reprove?
Prove.
Oft prove I but what salve when reason seeks to begone?
One.
Oh! what is it? what is it that may be a salve to my

love?

Love.

What do lovers seek for long seeking for to enjoy?

Joy.

What be the joys for which to enjoy they went to the pains?

Pains.

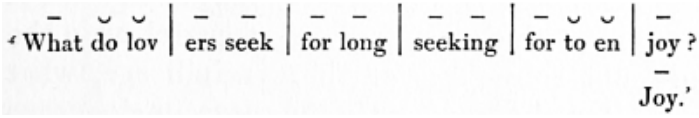
Then to an earnest love what doth best victory end?

End.'

These lines are from Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, which, of course, was not in the Knight's library. We are told in advance that they are hexameters. How delightfully they scan:—

'Wh at d o l oy | er s se ek | f or l ong | se ekin g | f or t o e n | j oy?

J oy.'



On the next page a shepherdess 'threw down the burden of her mind in Anacreon's kind of verses.' And 'Basilius, when she had fully ended her song, fell prostrate upon the ground and thanked the gods they had preserved his life so long as to hear the very music they themselves had used in an earthly body.' Presently follows a copy of 'Phaleuciaks,' and then Dorus 'had long he thought kept silence from saying something which might tend to the glory of her, in whom all glory to his seeming was included, but now he broke it, singing those verses called Asclepiadiks.' And they thought the night had passed quickly.



SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

An apology to Sidney.

This is no insult to Sir Philip Sidney, but only to the rather exorbitant demands of the form he had chosen. His own sonnets vindicate him as a poet, and some of them, even Hazlitt owned, who did not like him, 'are sweet even to a sense of faintness, luscious as the woodbine, and graceful and luxurious like it.' Sidney lets us see his own attitude in that splendid sentence which begins, 'Certainly I must confesse my own barbarousnes, I neuer heard the olde song of *Percy* and *Duglas* that I found not my heart mooued more then with a Trumpet; and yet is it sung but by some blinde Crouder, with no rougher voyce then rude stile'; I should be almost sorry that he finished it by saying 'which, being so euill apparrelled in the dust and cobwebbes of that vnciuill age, what would it worke trymmed in the gorgeous eloquence of *Pindar*?' but that it rings with the sincerity of his classicism. Taste has changed, and now we find his 'barbarousnes' in the question rather than in the confession. But the sentence illustrating at once his sensitiveness to simplicity and his predilection for the classics, shows how genuine was the expression that the busy, chivalric diplomatist found for himself in the confines of Arcadia. The classic metres brought as near as might be our Tudor English to 'the language of the Gods.'

The slow progress of Arcadian narrative.

The continual downpour of poetry, the Arcadian substitute for rain, was not the only drag on the narrative of the pastoral story-tellers. Serenity was considered essential, and so, while the story was being everlastingly shunted, so that the lovesick shepherds might plain, it had also for every step it

took forward to take another back in order to catch again the chosen atmosphere of lovesick repose. The result was 'a note of linked sweetness long drawn out,' a series of agitated standstills, and a narrative impossible to end. Cervantes' *Galatea* was never finished; the last books of *Arcadia* were written by another hand; d'Urfé died before putting an end to *l'Astrée*; and Montemor abandoned his *Diana*.

In the history of story-telling it is not the form of the pastoral that is important, but the motive that gave it its popularity. We begin to understand the motive when we notice that it became the fashion to hide real people under the names of Corydon and Phyllis, and to put ribboned crooks and silver horns into the hands of enemies and friends. At first it was the genuine feeling that made Boccaccio enshrine his Fiammetta; at the end it degenerated into mere privy gossip and books uninteresting without their keys; but in general it was simply a desire of flattering elaborate people into thinking themselves of simple heart. The motive of the Pastoral. The pastorals were like the paintings of Watteau and Lancret, where we find the ladies of a lively court playing innocent games under the trees, while, if we searched in the brushwood, we should find in the soft earth under the brambles the hoofmarks of the sporting satyrs. The feelings of author and subjects were those of the Vicar of Wakefield's family when they sat before the portrait painter:—'Olivia would be drawn as an Amazon, sitting upon a bank of flowers, dressed in a green Joseph richly laced with gold, and a whip in her hand. Sophia was to be a shepherdess, with as many sheep as the painter could put in for nothing.' Elizabethan ladies liked to think of themselves sitting on banks garlanding flowers, troubled only by the sweet difficulties of love, and with innumerable

sheep, since the writer was able to put them in so very inexpensively.

Poussin's *Les Bergers d'Arcadie*.

There is another artist who, living before Cervantes and Sidney were dead, gives in his pictures, cleaner and sweeter than Watteau, an idea of the pastoral spirit. You can imagine one of Watteau's shepherdesses using paint. It would be impossible to suspect the same of one of Sidney's, or of one of Nicolas Poussin's, that solemn, sweet-minded man who was shocked as if by sacrilege at Scarron's irreverent treatment of Virgil. There is in the Louvre (how many times have I been to see it) a picture called 'Les Bergers d'Arcadie.' Hazlitt mentions it, most inaccurately as to facts, but most precisely as to feeling, in his essay on the painter:[6]—'But above all, who shall celebrate in terms of fit praise, his picture of the shepherds in the Vale of Tempe going out on a fine morning in the spring, and coming to a tomb with this inscription: *Et Ego in Arcadia vixi!* The eager curiosity of some, the expression of others who start back with fear and surprise, the clear breeze playing with the branches of the shadowing trees, "the valleys low where the mild zephyrs use," the distant, uninterrupted, sunny prospects speak (and for ever will speak on) of ages past to ages yet to come!'

In those sentences Hazlitt, who found the written pastoral dull, shows us the very secret of its life. In trying to copy the classic country writing, it came to be an attempt to reconstruct the time that has always been past since the beginning of the world. Real shepherds never do and never did show fear and surprise and eager curiosity on their weather-beaten faces; but then in Arcadia is no rain. Sweet, sunny

days, soft, peaceful nights, green grass, white sheep, and smooth-cheeked shepherds Grecian limbed; the whole is the convention of a dream. It was the dream of busy men in close touch with a life whose end was apt to come short and sharp between the lifting of a flagon and putting the lips to it. And in Sidney's dream especially, there is something of the true Renaissance worship of the ancient gods. Sidney's dream was of a pastoral life; yes, but to him other things in it were more important than its rusticity. For him, at least, it must be a life where the goatfoot god still moved in the green undergrowth, where Diana hunted the white fawns, while Silenus tippled in the valley, and Apollo looked serenely from the wooded hill.

Conventional and realistic art.

This was the same art as that of Malory, though not that of the chansons or the sagas. It is the art in which life is simplified into a convention, and human figures worked into a tapestry. The pastoral romances are duller than those of chivalry, partly, no doubt, because their conventions are not home-made but taken as strictly as possible from another civilisation, and partly because they are too long for their motives—the pattern is repeated too often. But they do not represent a dead or a dying art, but rather a stage in the infancy of an art that has blossomed in our own day, in some of the work of Théophile Gautier, for example; in Mr. Nevinson's *Plea of Pan*, in some of the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley. Sidney's *Arcadia* is terribly unwieldy, but passage after passage in it breathes a fragrance different from anything in the literature of realism.

Indeed it is well to mark thus early the distinction

between these two arts, the one that seeks to show us our own souls, the other that shows us life, that one that, using symbols disentangled from ordinary existence, can legitimately fill books with things beautiful in themselves, and the other that reconciles us to ugliness by showing us some vital interest, some hidden loveliness, some makeshift beauty in things as they generally are. The spirit of the one set statues of lovely forms in the bedchambers of the Grecian women, the spirit of the other praises ugly babies to their mothers. Both spirits have shown their right to be by the works of art whose inspiration they have been. We must only be careful not to criticise the art of the one by the canons that rule the art of the other. There are two worlds, the actual and the ideal. If Tom Jones were to open a door by saying 'Open Sesame' to it, we should have a right to laugh, just as we should be legitimately disappointed if Ali Baba were to turn a key and enter the robber's treasury in the ordinary way. We cannot blame the Arcadian shepherds because they are not like the shepherds we meet about the hills, any more than we can blame that little kitchen slut called Cinderella for riding to a king's ball in a gold chariot made of a pumpkin. Truth to an ideal is all we may ask of dreams. And the pastorals, in spite of their borrowed conventions, do hold an ideal, suffocated though it sometimes is under an impossible technique, and the weight of ornament which is so tempting to those who have but newly learned the secrets of its manufacture.

Poetic prose.

Our later Arcadians have not so hampered themselves. They have made short stories instead of labyrinthine narratives, and they have been able, as

Sidney tried to do, to disclaim any competition with utilitarian homespun literature by the use of a poetic prose. In the prose of Sidney's *Arcadia*, imitated from that of Lyly, but a little less noisily eccentric, falling perhaps too often between poetry and prose, we can see the promise of that new prose of ornament perfected by the artists of the nineteenth century, a prose firm, unshaken by the recurrent rhythms of verse, but richer in colour and melody than the prose of use.

CERVANTES

CERVANTES

Prologue.

IT is curious how many odds and ends may be heaped together and woven into a patchwork of thought, by a mind concentrating itself upon one idea, and, as if in spite of itself, making excursions after each chance butterfly and puff of wind, each

half promise of real or phantom value it perceives. The mind returns continually to where it stood, bringing with it always something new, like a starling adding to its nest, until at last the original idea is so covered over with half visualised images, half clarified obscurities, dimly comprehended notions, that it is itself no longer to be seen but by a reverse process of picking away and throwing aside, one by one, the accretions that have been brought to it by the adventuring mind. For the last hour I have been sitting in my easy-chair, a cup of tea at my elbow, a pipe in my mouth, a good fire at my feet, trying not to let myself stray too far from the consideration of Cervantes and his place in the history of story-telling. All that hour, without effort, almost against my will, my mind has been playing about the subject, and bringing straw and scraps of coloured cloth, until now the plain notion of Cervantes is dotted over and burdened with a dozen other things—a comparison between an active life and a bookish one, the relation between parody and progress, the mingling of rogue novel and romance, Sir Walter Scott, and the remembrance of a band of Spanish village musicians. Perhaps if I disentangle this superstructure piece by piece Cervantes himself will become as visible as he intends to allow me to present him.

An active life and a bookish one.

Cervantes was one of the men who write books in two languages; in literature and in life. Indeed, his contribution to his country's history is scarcely less vivid than his share in the history of story-telling.

Cervantes the soldier, losing the use of his hand in the naval battle of Lepanto, in which he took so glorious a part that the grandiloquent Spanish tradition attributed to him, a mere private soldier, more than half the merit of the victory, is quite as attractive as Cervantes the impecunious author, writing plays for the theatre and poems for the nobility, collecting taxes for the king, pleasing himself with his *Galatea*, and laying literature under an international debt to him for his *Exemplary Novels* and his *Don Quixote*. Like Sir Philip Sidney, he won admiration from his contemporaries as much for his personal worth as for his intellect. The maimed hand meant to them and him as much as any printed books. His own life was as romantic as his romance. Wherever he had found himself, boarding a Turkish galley, plotting for freedom in the prisons of Algiers, he had played the game as stirringly as d'Artagnan. Don Quixote's patriotism was no more obstinate and glamorous than his, and Sancho Panza's wisdom was gained in no school of harder knocks.

It is not without significance that his first book should be a specimen of pastoral romance. The *Galatea* bears no closer relation to workaday life than Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*. This old soldier began his career as a man of letters by trying to settle upon an estate in Arcady, the very country whose cardboard foliage he was afterwards to ridicule, and the last book he wrote, in spite of the humaner work that had preceded it, was a romance not dissimilar from his first. Partly this must have been due to the fashion of the time; but it is not extravagant to find in it an illustration of the wistful manner in which men write about their opposites. Men like Stevenson, caged in sick rooms, may love to be buccaneers on paper. The real adventurers set the balance even by

imagining themselves tending sheep on a smooth grassy slope.

Don Quixote no parody.

Cervantes' *Galatea* is not a great work. Its shepherds weep more than Sir Philip Sidney's, and sing considerably worse. But it had its success, and Cervantes was never anything but proud of it, a fact that should not be forgotten in remembering his *Don Quixote*. *Don Quixote* has often been described as a parody of the heroic and pastoral romances, which indeed had become a little foolish. But Cervantes was not the man to jeer at what he loved. Instead, he fills the old skins that had held the wine of dreams with the new wine of experience. He did not parody the old romances, but re-wrote them in a different way. Parody laughs and writes a full stop; the art of Cervantes, Fielding, and Rabelais ends always in a hyphen, a sign that allows all manner of developments.



MIGUEL DE CERVANTES SAAVEDRA

The picaresque form.

Cervantes, like Shakespeare, used all the resources

of his time, and did not disdain to profit by other men's experiments. *Don Quixote* owed a triple debt to the common-sensible humorous rogue novel invented seventy years before, as well as to the more serious tales of knights and pastoral life that made his existence possible. Thieves and shepherds and paragons of chivalry assisted at his birth. The thieves in particular were responsible for the design, or lack of design, in the construction of the book. The rogue novels were made by stringing a series of disconnected 'merry quips' along the autobiography or biography of a disreputable hero. They were like Punch and Judy shows. The character of Punch is as stable as his red nose or his hump back. His deeds do not change him, and, so long as he is always well in the front of his stage we ask for no other connecting thread in the entertainment than his habit of punctuating his conversation with a well-directed log of wood. Let him continue his villainous career, let his squeaking inhuman voice continue to exult, and we are perfectly contented. It was so with the rogues, and it is so with *Don Quixote*. As the Bachelor says, 'many of those that love mirth better than melancholy, cry out, give us more Quixoteries: let but Don Quixote lay on, and Sancho talk, be it what it will, we are satisfied.'

Rogue novel and romance.

Three hundred years after the Bachelor, we too are satisfied with Sancho's chatter, and his master's Quixoteries, because they are both pretty closely connected with humanity. If Don Quixote is among the clouds, Sancho Panza sits firm upon his donkey, and between the two of them the book itself moves spaciously upon a mellowed earth. There is a perpetual interplay between dignity and impudence,

the ridiculous and the sublime, and the partners, as if at tennis, lend vigour and give opportunity to each other. Sancho is not a mere village bellyful of common sense, whose business is to make the Knight of the Doleful Countenance appear ridiculous. He, too, has his delusions; he, too, prefers sometimes those two birds twittering distantly in the bush; Romance, smilingly enough, has touched his puzzled forehead also. And Don Quixote, with ideals no less noble than those of Amadis of Gaul or Don Belianis of Greece, with notions of life no less exaggerated than those in the interminable pastorals, is yet a man of blood and bone. His ideals and notions are properly fleshed, and are in the book as a soul in a body. *Don Quixote* is a book of dreams set upon earth, and earthly shrewdness reaching vainly after dreams. The rogue novels and the romances were, either of them, the one without the other.

The ideal not spoilt by the reality.

We see Don Quixote's adventures with the realist's eye of disillusion, and find that external perfection does not matter to our dreams. "Tis not the deed but the intent.' The gorgeous charger of the knight of chivalry is become a poor old starveling hack that should have been horsemeat these dozen years. Mambrino's helmet is but a barber's bason after all. Lancelot's Guinevere is Dulcinea of the Mill. Her feet are large and her shoulders one higher than the other. The castle is a wayside inn, the routed army a flock of luckless sheep. The goatherds do not talk after the fashion of the Court, like those in *Galatea*; but, 'with some coarse compliment, after the country way, they desired Don Quixote to sit down upon a trough with the bottom upwards.' Gone are the rose-flecked cloudy pinnacles of dawn; we know them

now for drenching rain. And yet—the play's the thing, and is not judged by its trappings, but by its beating heart. Not one scene in the Romances, not one glimpse of the Happy Valley in the Pastorals, has ever moved us like this book, which is so near life that when we close it we seem not to have flown on an enchanted carpet from a thousand leagues away, but to have stepped merely from one room to another of our own existence.

The *Exemplary Novels*.

The *Exemplary Novels* were begun before *Don Quixote*, and published afterwards. They are examples rather of a form in story-telling than of any particular piety. Cervantes was, he tells us, 'the first to essay novels in the Castilian tongue, for the many novels which go about in print in Spanish are all translated from foreign languages, while these are my own, neither imitated nor stolen.' He took the form of the Italian short story, not the episode but the *nouvelle*, the little novel that had inspired the Elizabethans. He took this form and filled it with his own material, told in his own manner. In thinking of that manner I am reminded of the band of Spanish village musicians who seemed at first to have no obvious connection with my subject. There were perhaps a dozen of them grouped on the stage of a London music hall, and they played small windy tunes, occasionally blaring out with trumpets, using a musical scale entirely different from our own. I remembered a Japanese I had heard playing on a bamboo flute, and then the semitones of a little henna-stained flageolet from Kairouan. For theirs was Eastern music, and I wondered if these Spaniards still owed their scale to the old rulers of Granada. They set me thinking whether the peculiar

movement of Cervantes' narrative had not also an Eastern origin. The facts favour the supposition. Up to the battle of Lepanto the Turks were so far a ruling nation as to be the supreme sea-power; until even later the most likely of incidents for the use of the story-teller was that which happened to Cervantes himself—capture by a Moslem pirate and imprisonment in Algiers. Only a hundred years had passed since the Moors had been driven from Granada. It would indeed be surprising if in Cervantes' work we found no sign of Eastern influence. 'I tell it you,' quoth Sancho of his tale, 'as all stories are told in my country, and I cannot for the blood of me tell it in any other way, nor is it fit I should alter the custom.' Many characteristics of Cervantes' narrative remind us that he was writing in a country only recently freed from the Moors, and in a time when it took the united forces of Venice, Spain, and the Papacy to beat the Turks at sea.

Oriental story-telling.

Cervantes is not ignorant, for example, of the literary trick of letting his heroes quote from the poets, after the engaging, erudite manner of the heroes of the *Arabian Nights*. Sancho Panza's conversation is an anthology of those short wisdom-laden maxims that had been the staple of Hebrew and Arabic literature. 'Set a hen upon an egg'; 'While a man gets he never can lose'; 'Where there is no hook, to be sure there can hang no bacon'; shrewd Ali and careful Hakim exchange such sentences to-day in the market-places of the East. But these are small things and beside the main point. I want to suggest that Cervantes had caught, whether in his Algerine prison, or in his Morocco-Spanish Spain, the yarning, leisurely, humanity-laden, unflinching

atmosphere of Oriental story-telling. The form of the *nouvelle*, Eastern in origin, had been passed on from Naples to Paris and to London, without noticeable improvement, but it seems to me that now in Spain it met the East again, and was accordingly recreated. It is just the element of Eastern narrative, accidental in the genius of Cervantes, that makes his examples of that form so infinitely more important than those of the English Elizabethans. Scott told Lockhart that the reading of the *Exemplary Novels* first turned his mind to the writing of fiction, and in Scott there is precisely the mood of uninterruptible story-telling that Cervantes shares with the Princess Scherazada.

The novels are delightful specimens of ambling, elaborate narrative, full of the easiest, most confident knowledge of humanity, illustrating with serene clarity a point of view that is to-day as refreshing as it is surprising. The happy endings, when the seducer falls in love at sight on meeting the seduced of years before, and satisfies all her scruples, and turns her sorrow to unblemished joy by marrying her, show an ethic of respectability no less assured than Richardson's. They are enriched by passages whose observation is as minute as Fielding's. They are never tales about nothing. There is always meat on their bones. They are among the few stories that can be read on a summer afternoon under an apple-tree, for they will bear contact with nature, and are never in a hurry. Even if Cervantes had not written *Don Quixote*, the *Exemplary Novels* would have assured him a place in the history of his art. There is no cleverness in them, any more than in the greater book. The whole body of Cervantes' work is an illustration of the impregnable advantage that plain humanity possesses over intellect.

The portrait of Cervantes.

And now, after these various questions for the schoolmen, questions to more than one of which the cautious man must answer with Sir Roger, that 'much might be said on both sides,' let us return to the old story-teller himself, who will survive by innumerable generations our little praises and discussions as he has lived benevolent and secure through the centuries that have already passed over his grave. The only authentic portrait of Cervantes is in his own words. A hundred artists have tried to supplement these words with paint, and their pictures have at least a family likeness. The portrait made by Miss Gavin after a careful comparison parison of many others represents very fairly the traditional Cervantes type, and does not materially belie the lineaments that he describes:—'He whom you here behold, with aquiline visage, with chestnut hair, smooth and unruffled brow, with sparkling eyes, and a nose arched though well proportioned, a silver beard, although not twenty years ago it was golden, large moustache, small mouth, teeth not important, for he has but six of them, and those in ill condition and worse placed because they do not correspond the one with the other, the body between two extremes, neither large nor small, the complexion bright, rather white than brown, somewhat heavy-shouldered, and not very nimble on his feet; this, I say, is the portrait of the author of the *Galatea* and of *Don Quixote de la Mancha*.' That is the sort of statement of himself that an honest humorous man might make to a friend. Part of the satisfaction given by his books is due to the comfortable knowledge that there is a man behind them, a man who knew the world and had not frozen in it. Cervantes, for all his intimacy with life, never became worldly enough to believe in

hatred. He assumed that all his readers were his friends, and made them so by the assumption.

Epilogue.

No: Cervantes is too simple a man to do anything but suffer in discussion. There are men whom you know well, who seem to elude you like the final mystery of metaphysics when you try to talk about them. My history and not Cervantes is the clearer for the rags and tatters of observation I have picked off him one by one. I had put them there myself. It was necessary, for the purposes of my book, to notice the Eastern character of his story-telling and his position between rogue novel and romance, but, now that it is done, I am glad to go back to him without pre-occupations. There is yet hot water in the kettle, and tea in the pot, and four hours to spend with *Don Quixote* before I go to bed. Cervantes, at least, will bear me no malice, but tell me his story as simply as before I had tried to bring it into argument.

THE ESSAYISTS' CONTRIBUTION TO STORY-TELLING

THE ESSAYISTS' CONTRIBUTION TO STORY-TELLING

The Character.

THE detailed, silver-point portrait studies of Fanny Burney, the miniatures of Jane Austen, and the stronger etchings of Fielding and Smollett, owed their existence to something outside the art of story-telling, something other than the grave, humorous pictures of Chaucer, or the hiding of real people under the homespun of lovesick shepherds, or the gay autobiographies of swindling rogues. They owed it to an art which in its beginnings seemed far enough away from any sort of narrative. In those happy, thievish times when plagiary was a virtue to be cried upon the housetops, this art, or rather this artistic form, had been, like much else, stolen from antiquity.

When literature was for the first time become a fashionable toy, and when, even at Court, a gallant or a soldier was far outmatched by a wit, the little book of *Theophrastus his Characters* suggested a pastime that offered no less opportunity than poetry for the display of nimbleness and sparkling fancy. Life had become very diverse and elaborate, and how delightful to take one of its flowerings, one man, one woman, of a particular species, and exhibit it in a small space, in a select number of points and quips, each one barbed and sticking in the chosen target. Sir Thomas Overbury, trying to define the art he

used so skilfully, said, in his clear way:—'To square out a character by our English levell, it is a picture (reall or personall) quaintly drawne, in various colours, all of them heightned by one shadowing. It is a quicke and soft touch of many strings, all shutting up in one musicall close: it is wit's descant on any plaine song.' The thing had to be witty; it had to be short. A busy courtier could compose one in a morning while his barber was arranging his coiffure, and show it round in the afternoon for the delectation of his friends and the increase of his vanity. He could take a subject like 'A Woman,' and with quick sentences pin her to the paper like a butterfly on cork. Then he could take another title, like 'A Very Woman,' and repeat his triumph with another variety of the species. Sir Thomas Overbury.

Sir Thomas Overbury, that charming, insolent, honest man, the friend of Somerset, venomously done to death by his Countess for having given too good advice to her husband, is perhaps the most notable of the early practitioners. He is not to be despised for his sage poem on the choice of a wife, but he is at his best in the making of these little portraits, like that of the 'Faire and happy Milk-mayd,' wherein, in accordance with his definition, he could polish each detail without jarring his musical close, and without nullifying the single shadowing designed to heighten the whole. The form was fitted to the times like their fashions in clothes. The Character belonged to that age, like the novel to the nineteenth century. Sir Thomas, as his title-page tells us, was assisted by 'other much learned gentlemen'; he was presently followed by a man as different from himself as gentle John Earle, Doctor of Divinity, and just such a student as an Inns of Court man like Sir Thomas would naturally despise. So general was the

inclination of the age to portraiture.

John Earle.

With Earle we are nearer the drawing of individuals, and so to a tenderer touch on idiosyncrasies. He relies less on quaint conceits (though he has plenty of them and charming ones at command; witness the child whose 'father hath writ him as his owne little story, wherein hee reads those dayes of his life that hee cannot remember') and trusts more often to fragments of real observation. His Characters are not so consistently wit's descant on a plain song. He is often content to give us a plain descant on a plain song—less concerned with his cleverness than with his subjects. With Earle we are already some way from the age of Elizabeth, and indeed Overbury, though he was able to quarrel with Ben Jonson, and in spite of his Renaissance death, seems to have a part in a less youthful century. In his wisdom, in his wise advice unwisely given to his friend, there is something already of the flavour of Addison; an essence ever so slight of the sound morality of the periodical essayists whose work owed more than a little to his own.

La Bruyère.

The same impulse that suggested the pleasure and profit of collecting Londoners as Theophrastus had collected his Athenians, suggested also the noting of contemporary manners. Manners and Characters, especially since Characters meant peculiarities, belonged to each other. Overbury's 'Pyrate' is a picture of the times quite as much as of that sterling fellow they produced, to whom if you gave 'sea roome in never so small a vessell, like a witch in a

sieve, you would think he were going to make merry with the devill.' And the portrait of 'The Faire and happy Milk-mayd' betrays in its painting more than a little of the artist and of the age in which she sat for him. This is true of the plain Character, unexpanded and unframed; it is still more true of the Character in the form it very speedily took. The Character became a paragraph in a discursive essay, and La Bruyère, who copied directly from Theophrastus, does not make series of separate portraits, but notices in his original less his picturing of types than his suggestion of their circumstances, dividing his own work into large sections, 'de la ville,' 'de la Cour,' 'des Biens de Fortune,' 'de la Société et de la Conversation,' where he seems to stroll slowly through a garden-walk of philosophy, pointing his remarks with his stick, and using such portraits as he cares to make to illustrate his general observations. His Characters are almost anecdotes. He is like the more advanced naturalist who, no longer content with his butterflies on cork and his stuffed birds stiff on perches, attempts to place them in the setting of their ordinary existence, where they may illustrate at once that existence and their own natures by some characteristic pose. How near is this to the desire of seeing them alive and in continuous action, which, if he had had it, would perhaps have made him combine his notes and sketches in a novel.

The periodical essayists.

The periodical essayists had La Bruyère, and Earle's *Microcosmography: A Piece of the World discovered in Essays and Characters*, and Sir Thomas Overbury with his much learned gentlemen, and Theophrastus, the father of them all, well in their memory. They too were collectors of Characters and observers of public

morals and censurers of private follies. La Bruyère's aims with something more were theirs. Hazlitt's is so excellent a description of their work that I shall quote it instead of writing a stupid one. '*Quicquid agunt homines nostri farrago libelli*, is the general motto of this department of literature.... It makes familiar with the world of men and women, assigns their motives, exhibits their whims, characterises their pursuits in all their singular and endless variety, ridicules their absurdities, exposes their inconsistencies, "holds the mirror up to nature, and shows the very age and body of the time its form and pressure"; takes minutes of our dress, air, looks, words, thoughts, and actions; shows us what we are, and what we are not; plays the whole game of human life over before us, and by making us enlightened spectators of its many coloured scenes, enables us (if possible) to become tolerably reasonable agents in the one in which we have to perform a part.' We might be listening to a description of the eighteenth century novel of manners. Fanny Burney would have recognised these pretensions for her secret own, though she might have blushed to see them so emblazoned.

Minuteness of observation.

The Tatler, *The Spectator*, *The Guardian*, and the rest of them, are like a long series of skirmishes in a determined campaign on the part of the essayists to cross the borderland of narrative. Their traditions, the Character, Montaigne, and Bacon, were very different from those of the story-tellers. The canvases prescribed for them were not huge things almost shutting out the sky, but a very small stock size, two or three pages only, to lie two days on coffee-house tables, and be used for wrapping butter on the third.

The essayists were like men compelled to examine an elephant with a pocket microscope. Each subject, small as it was, hid all others for the moment, so that their observation made mountain peaks and ranges out of pimples and creases. These very limitations sharpened the weapons of their struggle, the weapons that were at last to be taken over by the novelists. The small canvas made carelessness impossible, and this compulsory attention to detail gave a new dignity to the trivialities that the novelists had so far overlooked.

Mr. Bickerstaff.

The very conception of these papers contained an accidental discovery of a possibility in fiction. *The Tatler* was not written by Steele, or Swift, or Addison, or indeed by any one of its contributors, but by a Mr. Isaac Bickerstaff, an oldish gentleman, a bachelor, a lover of children and discreet good fellowship, of an austere but kindly life, possessed by a pleasant, old-gentlemanly desire to better the manners of the town. This is personal, yes, but ... and the *but* has the dignity of the sentence ... the personality is imaginary. It is a Character so far alive as to be able to conduct a magazine. It was a utilitarian conception. Steele was, or pretended to be, vastly annoyed when the authorship was found out and his own jolly person discovered under the sober clothes of Mr. Bickerstaff. 'The work,' he says, 'has indeed for some time been disagreeable to me, and the purpose of it wholly lost by my being so long understood as its author.... The general purpose of the whole has been to recommend truth, innocence, honour, and virtue as the chief ornaments of life; but I considered that severity of manners was absolutely necessary to him who would censure others, and for that reason,

and that only, chose to talk in a mask. I shall not carry my humility so far as to call myself a vicious man, but at the same time must confess, my life is at best but pardonable. And, with no greater character than this, a man would make but an indifferent progress in attacking prevailing and fashionable vices, which Mr. Bickerstaff has done with a freedom of spirit, that would have lost both its beauty and efficacy, had it been pretended to by Mr. Steele.' It is as if we were to hear Defoe apologising for dressing up as Robinson Crusoe, assuring us that his book is but an allegory, and telling us with due solemnity that he has lived with his wife these many years, and hardly above once set foot on shipboard, and then only between London Bridge and Greenwich. Steele was quite unaware that *The Tatler* was an embryo novel. And yet, what is it, but an imaginary character, sometimes meeting other imaginary characters, and experiencing subjects instead of undergoing adventures?



RICHARD STEELE AND JOSEPH ADDISON

The Character and the short story.

Mr. Bickerstaff was in himself a contribution to character-study in fiction; the daily talks that were put into his mouth by Steele and his friends, supplied others no less valuable. The Character, the neat driven team of short sentences, became in his hands something like a story. It became an anecdote with no other point than to bring alive the person described. And the portraits became less general. Types turned into individuals. Ned Softly, for example, is not called 'a very Poet,' and hit off with, 'He will ever into Company with a Copy of Verses in his Pocket; and these will be read to all that suffer him. Every Opinion he taketh for Praise, and Ridicule in his Ears soundeth like Flattery.' He is given the name by which he is known in private life. We see him walk into the room, hear his preliminaries, watch his battery unmasked as he opens his pocket, listen to his verses, hear them again, line by ridiculous line, observe him batten on the opinions he extracts, and see him hide his darlings at the approach of sterner-featured critics. The Character is become a little scene. The moth has no pin through his middle, but flaps his way where we may see him best. Here is the very art that Fanny Burney, that charming show-woman, was to use for the exhibition of Madame Duval; here the alchemy that was to turn puppets into people. It is the same that gave Pygmalion his mistress. The essayists owed much to their own hearts, or to the heart they set in 'our' Mr. Bickerstaff, for if you love a man as well as you laugh at him, it is great odds that he will come alive.

Mr. Bickerstaff's letter-box.

Steele probably got a few letters from unknown correspondents, dull and stupid as such things are.

Perhaps in laughingly parodying them at the coffee-house tables he caught the idea of inventing better ones for Mr. Bickerstaff's assistance. Perhaps, when hard pressed for time, thrown to the last minute for his work by some merry expedition with the Kit Kats to talk and drink wine under the mulberry-tree on Hampstead Heath, he found he could get quicker into a subject through the letter of a servant girl than through Mr. Bickerstaff's first-personal lucubrations. However that may be, much of the best reading in both *Tatler* and *Spectator* is held in the letters supposed to be written to the man who was supposed to write the whole. These letters are not mere statements of fact, to serve instead of Latin quotations as texts for essays. They are imitations, 'liker than life itself,' of the letters of reality. Each one of them is written by some individual person whose impress on its writing is so clear that the letter makes a portrait of himself. Even the cock in Clare Market has a personality quite his own when he sends Mr. Bickerstaff a petition. And as for the Quaker; remember how he would have been described in the old manner, and read this:—

> 'TO THE MAN CALLED THE SPECTATOR
>
> 'FRIEND,—Forasmuch as at the Birth of thy Labour, thou didst promise upon thy Word, that letting alone the Vanities that do abound, thou wouldest only endeavour to strengthen the crooked Morals of this our *Babylon*, I gave Credit to thy fair Speeches, and admitted one of thy Papers every Day, save *Sunday*, into my House; for the Edification of

> my Daughter *Tabitha*, and to the End that *Susanna*, the Wife of my Bosom, might profit thereby. But alas! my Friend, I find that thou art a Liar, and that the Truth is not in thee; else why didst thou in a Paper which thou didst lately put forth, make Mention of those vain Coverings for the Heads of our Females, which thou lovest to liken unto Tulips, and which are lately sprung up among us? Nay, why didst thou make Mention of them in such a Seeming, as if thou didst approve the Invention, insomuch that my Daughter *Tabitha* beginneth to wax wanton, and to lust after these foolish Vanities? Surely thou dost see with the Eyes of the Flesh. Verily, therefore, unless thou dost speedily amend and leave off following thine own Imagination, I will leave off thee.—*Thy Friend as hereafter thou dost demean Thyself*,
>
> 'HEZEKIAH BROADBRIM.'

Could anything of the kind be better? It needed only a series of such letters, consistent to a few characters, and dealing with a succession of events, to produce a 'Humphry Clinker.' The letters of Matthew Bramble and his sister, and Lyddy, 'who had a languishing eye and read romances,' are built no more cunningly than this of Hezekiah.

Sir Roger de Coverley—a novel.

If I were asked which was the first English novel of character-study, as I am asking myself now, I should reply, as I reply now, those essays in the *Spectator* that are concerned with Sir Roger de Coverley. Set that little series of pictures in a book by themselves, as has been done with appropriate and delightful illustrations by Mr. Hugh Thomson, and in reading them you will find it hard to remember that you are not enjoying a more than usually leisurely kind of narrative. The knight is shown to us in different scenes; we watch him at the assizes, leaning over to the judge to congratulate him on the good weather his lordship enjoys; we see him smile in greeting of Will Wimble; we watch him fidget in his seat with impatience of the misdeeds of the villain in the play; we hear of his death with a tear in our eye that is a testimony to the completeness and humanity of the portraiture. If only his love-story were thinly spread throughout the book and not begun and ended in a chapter, *Sir Roger de Coverley* would be a novel indeed. As it is, in that delicate picture of a country gentleman and country life—for Sir Roger does not stand against a black curtain for his portraiture, but before his tenants and his friends—we have the promise of *The Vicar of Wakefield* and of *Cranford*, and of all that chaste and tender kind of story-telling that is almost peculiar to our literature.

Johnson and Goldsmith.

Johnson and Goldsmith followed the tradition. Even the ponderous Doctor could step lightly at times, and never so lightly as when he obeyed the instinct that turns discussion into fiction and essays into sketches. He too can write his letters, and that from Mrs. Deborah Ginger, the unfortunate wife of a city wit, is a story in itself. And as for Goldsmith, he can hardly

hold his pen for half a paragraph before it breaks away from the hard road of ideas and goes merrily along the bridle-path of mere humanity. His letters from Lien Chi Altangi, that serious Chinese busied in exposing the follies of the Occident, turn continually to story-telling. A wise remark will usher in an Eastern tale, and, not even in the papers of Steele or Addison are the subjects of characters, like the little beau, who would have been a 'mere indigent gallant,' magicked so deliciously to life. Finally, he did with 'The Man in Black' what Addison and Steele could so well have done with Sir Roger. Fielding and Smollett had written before him, and he saw that he could follow their art without resigning any of the graces of the essayist.

The later essayists.

The eighteenth century saw the absorption of the periodical essayists into avowed story-telling. Miss Burney left them nothing to do but to write sketches for chapters that might have appeared in her books. The essayists who came later could only make beautiful examples of a form that was already a little old-fashioned, though, following other suggestions, they experimented in a new direction and found another art to teach to story-tellers. Leigh Hunt's pair of early nineteenth-century portraits, 'The Old Gentleman,' and 'The Old Lady,' betray the family likeness of the character as it was known to Overbury. Lamb's portrait of Mrs. Battle is nearer modern story-telling. He does not let us into more than one of Sarah Battle's secrets, but in telling us of her attitude towards the game of whist he shows us how she looked upon the game of life. We would know her if we met her, even if she were not seated at the card-table, the candles unsnuffed, the fire

merry on the hearth, and in the faces of her and her partner and foes the frosty joy of 'the rigour of the game.' Hazlitt, though he stuck close to his Montaigne, and cared less to illustrate himself by other people than by his own opinions, gives us characters too—that noble one of his father!—and his account of Jack Cavanagh the fives player, and his description of his going down to see the fight, are splendid passages of biography and narrative. But the gift of the later essayists to story-telling was the new art of reverie, and of the description of an event so soaked in the describer's personality as to be at once an essay and a story. The art of reverie. Few forms are richer in opportunity either for essayist or story-teller, than that which made possible Lamb's 'Dream Children,' and in which the child De Quincey, who had been in Hell, could show us the calamity of three generations of beautiful children, and ask at last whether death or life were the more terrible, the more to be feared. It is sufficient to mention the names of Walter Pater and Mr. Cunninghame Graham to show that some of the finest work of modern times has been done in this kind of story-telling, and is being so done to-day. And this art, this most delicate art of suggested narrative, is it not also —to return, perhaps a little fancifully, to the tragic old knight's definition—is it not also 'a picture in various colours, all of them heightned by one shadowing'? Is it not also 'a quicke and soft touch of many strings, all shutting up in one musicall close'?

TRANSITION: BUNYAN AND DEFOE

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The old world of fairy tale.

THE hundred years between the Elizabethan romancers and the English novelists was not a period of great story-telling like the fifty that were to follow it, or the first half of the nineteenth century. It is of interest here mainly because it witnessed a complete change of audience, the gradual transition of all the arts from a light-hearted and credulous old world to a careful and common-sense new one. The change is made very clear by a comparison of the stories popular before and after.

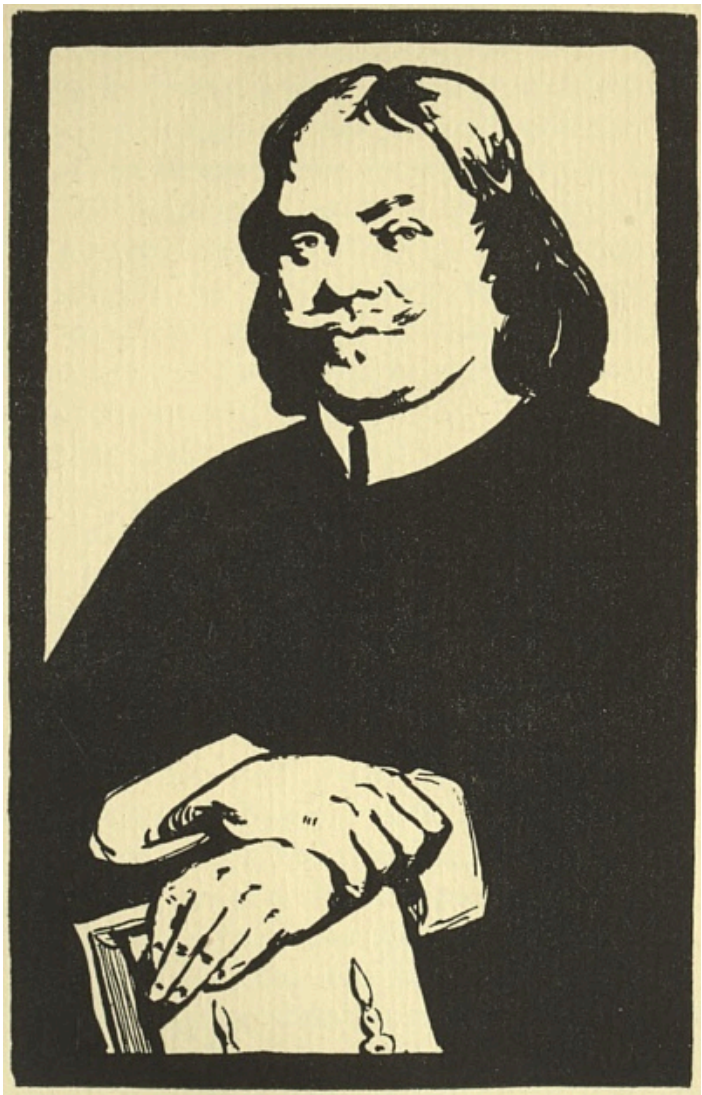
Robert Burton gives us a fairly accurate notion of the story-telling of the first quarter of the century, in a paragraph of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. He is referring to spoken tales, but his description applies quite as well to tales in print. 'The ordinary recreations which we have in winter, and in the most solitarie times busie our minds with, are cards, tables and dice ... merry tales of errant knights, queens, lovers, lords, ladies, giants, dwarfs, theeves, cheaters, witches, fayries, goblins, friers, etc., such as the old woman told Psyche in Apuleius, Bocace novels, and

the rest, *quarum auditione pueri delectantur, senes narratione*, which some delight to hear, some to tell, all are well pleased with.' In short, the material of Shakespeare's plays, of Spenser's *Faërie Queene*, of the early rogue books, and of the tales imitated from Italy and antiquity by Greene and Lodge and Pettie.

A more sober spirit.

By 1640 things had already changed a little. James Mabbe, the quaint flavour of whose Tudor style, endearing as the moss on an old house, reminds us that he published his translation of six of the *Exemplary Novels* before Cervantes had been dead for a quarter of a century, felt that he had to apologise for them to the more sober spirit of the time. 'Your wisest and learnedst Men,' he writes, 'both in Church and Common-weale, will sometimes leave off their more serious discourses, and entertain themselves with matters of harmelesse Merriment and Disports. Such are these stories I present unto your view. I will not promise any great profit you shall reape by reading them, but I promise they will be pleasing and delightful, the Sceane is so often varied, the Passages are so pretty, the Accidents so strange, and in the end wrought to so happy a Conclusion.' That marks very neatly the mid-seventeenth-century attitude towards the art. It was not impossible that the simple unascetic humanity of Cervantes would be taken amiss by these people who were stirred by the forces that were producing a Cromwell and a Bunyan, a Commonwealth and a *Pilgrim's Progress*. Only, in contradiction to this, the translator could make a confident appeal to a Pepysian delight in pretty passages, strange accidents, and happy conclusions—a delight only different from that of the Elizabethans in its anxiety to be able to write

'harmelesse' when it had enjoyed them.



JOHN BUNYAN

Bunyan's world.

Before the *Pilgrim's Progress* was written there had come to be two parties in the audience: one with an epicurean delight in loose living, and one whose care was for a stern decency that postponed all flamboyance to a future life. The men of the first party flung their roses the more joyously for their antagonism to the sober black of the others, and were all the merrier for the thought that most of the community held them damned, although, when Bunyan wrote, theirs was the outward victory. Consciences were violently stirred, and so were either hardened absolutely, or else unmistakably alive. If you were good you were very very good, and if you were bad you were horrid, like the little girl in the rhyme. There had been revolutions and counter-revolutions; and likes and dislikes were pretty strongly marked, because men had had to fight for them.

Bunyan's business was the description of a pilgrim's progress through a world thus vividly good and bad. His choice of allegory as a method allowed him to illustrate at the same time the earnestness of his times and their extraordinary clarity of sensation. It was a form ready to his hand. The authorised version of the Bible, published in 1611, its English retaining the savour of a style then out of date, formed at once his writing and his method, as it constituted his education. 'My Bible and Concordance are my only library in my writings.' And, himself a minor prophet, he could quote from Hosea: 'I have used similitudes.'

The justification of allegory.

Bunyan's use of them was very different from Spenser's. Hazlitt said of *The Faërie Queene* that, if you left the allegory alone, it would leave you; and his advice may be safely followed. It is not so with Bunyan, and his allegory must be defended in another manner. It needs defence, for although it is one of the oldest and pleasantest ways of producing wisdom-laden stories, it is so easy to use badly that people have become a little out of patience with it. We remember the far-fetched explanations tagged on to the *Gesta Romanorum*, and refuse any longer to be fobbed off with puzzles that are easy to make and hard to solve. We demand that a book shall have cost its author at least as much as it costs us. Allegory is like fantasy, either worthless, or not to be bought with rubies and precious stones; with anything, in fact, but blood. When Bunyan writes:

'It came from my own heart, so to my head,
And thence into my fingers trickled;
Then to my pen, from whence immediately
On paper I did dribble it daintily,'

he sets up the one plea that is an absolute justification of his method; that it is 'dribbled daintily,' and came from the depths of him. The old monks wrote their stories, and searched their heads for a meaning. But Bunyan thought for himself, and could not think without seeing. His heart's talk was in passionate imagery.

Bunyan and the early painters.

He was the son of a tinker, and a tinker himself, and saw his visions as clearly as he saw his tin pans. His book is never opalescent with the shifting colours of a vague mysticism. It is painted in tints as sharp and

bright and simple as Anglo-Saxon words. Bunyan had to throw himself into no trance in order to watch the pilgrim's arrival at the New Jerusalem. The Celestial City was as real to him as London, and there seemed to him no need to describe it in a whisper. His eyes were as childlike as those of the early painters, who clothed the builders of the Tower of Babel in fifteenth-century Italian costume, put a little bonnet on the head and a flying cloak about the shoulders of Tobias, and set soft leather boots on the feet of the angel. The whole of the *Pilgrim's Progress* is contemporary with Mr. Pepys. 'Now Christiana, if need was, could play upon the viol, and her daughter Mercy upon the lute; so, since they were so merry disposed, she played them a lesson, and Ready-to-halt would dance. So he took Despondency's daughter, named Much-afraid, by the hand, and to dancing they went in the road. True, he could not dance without one crutch in his hand; but, I promise you, he footed it well. Also the girl was to be commended, for she answered the music handsomely.' It might be Mr. Pepys himself describing the frolic of some friends. And yet it was the most natural, righteous thing in the world, since Great Heart had killed Giant Despair, and Despondency and Much-afraid had just been freed from the dungeons of Doubting Castle.

The Fear of Life.

It is characteristic of the English spirit that the greatest national classic of piety should be written by a man whose relish for life was in no way blunted by his thoughts of immortality. Bunyan had a fear of life no less real than his fear of God, and loved both God and life the better for fearing them. Men set capital letters to the Fear of God, and there is a Fear of Life

no less different from cowardice. Bunyan, a brave man, imprisoned again and again for his beliefs, and more than once in imminent danger of hanging, shows in a passage of his *Grace Abounding* this Fear of Life in a very glare of light. Bunyan had loved bell-ringing, and, after he had come to consider it not the occupation of a man whose profession was so perilous and serious as a Christian's, he could not help going to the belfry to watch those whose scruples still allowed them his favourite pastime.

> 'But quickly after, I began to think, "How if one of the bells should fall?" Then I chose to stand under a main beam, that lay athwart the steeple from side to side, thinking here I might stand sure; but then I thought again, should the bell fall with a swing, it might first hit the wall, and then rebounding upon me, might kill me for all this beam. This made me stand in the steeple door; and now thought I, I am safe enough, for if a bell should then fall, I can slip out behind these thick walls, and so be preserved notwithstanding. So after this I would yet go to see them ring, but would not go any further than the steeple door; but then it came into my head, 'How if the steeple itself should fall?' And the thought (it may, for aught I know, when I stood and looked on) did continually so shake my mind, that I durst not stand at the steeple-door any longer, but was forced to flee, for fear the

steeple should fall upon my head.'

A man who felt as vividly as that, and was as stout as Bunyan, taking existence as he would take a nettle, took it with a grip as firm as that of love, and loved and feared his life as he loved and feared his God. He knew that brightness and clarity of sensation desired by Stendhal when he wrote, 'The perfection of civilisation would be to combine all the delicate pleasures of the nineteenth century with the more frequent presence of danger.' Life was very actual to him, and so, in this account of a pious dream, we find the clearest prophecy of that sense for reality that distinguishes the novels of the eighteenth century. The *Pilgrim's Progress* was the first great story of that series of books that was to paint the English character in the eyes of the world.

Facts.

A fact is something very like an Englishman. It is a thing complete in itself, and satisfactory on that account. There is no vanity about a fact, and, as a people, we hate showing off. I can think of no other nation as hungry for fact as ours, none with a book that corresponds to the *Newgate Calendar* and has been so popular, none with a book of spiritual adventure so actual as the *Pilgrims Progress*, none with a book of bodily adventure comparable with *Robinson Crusoe*. Defoe and Bunyan stand for the plain facts of religion and existence, in both of which they found so English a delight.

The instinct for verisimilitude.

Bunyan's book is an account of a dream. It is not a frank fairy tale demanding a certain licence of nature

to make possible its supernatural events. Like the *Romance of the Rose*, unlike the *Faërie Queene*, it takes its licence in its first sentence—'As I slept, I dreamed'—and is able thenceforth to be as miraculous as it pleases without much loss of credibility, since miracle, if not consistency and continuity, is of the very element of a dream. It was an instinct for reality that made Bunyan give his story such a setting. Giants and dwarfs could no longer be jostled with thieves and cheaters as when Burton wrote. And Defoe, writing another forty years later, shows this same instinct for reality very much more conscientiously developed.



DANIEL DEFOE

With an imagination scarcely less opulent than Bunyan's, Defoe, if he had described a dream, would have managed somehow to make it as short-winded and inconsequent as a real one. He was in love with

verisimilitude, and delighted in facts for their own sakes. 'To read Defoe,' wrote Charles Lamb, 'is like hearing evidence in a Court of Justice.' No compliment could have pleased him better.

Lamb and Defoe.

The letter in which Lamb paid it him was written at the East India House, immediately after the labour of entering the accounts of a tea sale. Careless as it is, it contains a criticism of Defoe's books that goes to the root of his method. Here is its kernel. 'The author,' writes Lamb, 'never appears in these self-narratives (for so they ought to be called, or rather, autobiographies), but the *narrator* chains us down to an implicit belief in everything he says.' (It is interesting to notice that Defoe, a very early realist, obeyed the spirit of Flaubert's maxim, that a writer should be everywhere invisible in his work, and that his books should, so to speak, tell themselves.) 'There is all the minute detail of a log-book in it. Dates are painfully impressed upon the memory. Facts are repeated over and over in varying phases, till you cannot choose but believe them.' Then follows the sentence already quoted. Lamb goes on: 'So anxious the story-teller seems that the truth should be clearly comprehended, that when he has told us a matter of fact or a motive in a line or two farther down he repeats it, with his favourite figure of speech, 'I say,' so and so, though he had made it abundantly plain before. This is an imitation of the common people's way of speaking, or rather of the way in which they are addressed by a master or mistress, who wishes to impress something on their memories, and has a wonderful effect upon matter-of-fact readers.'

The new world of matter-of-fact.

There is little to add to that, though Lamb 'had not looked into them latterly,' or he would have noticed in Defoe's books, with his quick eye for such things, Defoe's wary way with anything that seems to him at all incredible. In *The Journal of the Plague Year*, for example, none of the more dramatic anecdotes are vouched for by the writer. He heard them from some one else, did not see them with his own eyes, finds them hard to believe, and so rivets the belief of his readers. We shall observe in discussing Hawthorne the more advanced possibilities of this ingenious trick. The best books of Defoe's are rogue novels, and in none of them was he content with a merely literary reality. His heroes are as solid as ordinary men, or more so. The figure of Selkirk shrinks away like a faint shadow behind that of Crusoe, whose imaginary adventures his own had suggested, and there can be no doubt in anybody's mind as to which of the two is the more credible. And then there is that style of his, homelier even than Bunyan's, though less markedly so, since he is describing homelier things. There is no Euphuism here; Defoe was not the man to deal in gossamers. The essayist's delicacy of line had not yet been given to the story-tellers, and Defoe was not the man to deal with silver point. His style is as simple and effective as a bricklayer's hod. He carries facts in it, and builds with them alone. The resulting books are like solid Queen Anne houses. There is no affectation about them; they are not decorated with carving; but they are very good for 'matter-of-fact readers' to live in. Matter-of-fact readers made Defoe's audience, and the hundred years since Burton wrote had made a matter-of-fact English nation out of the credulous Elizabethans. The eighteenth century opens with this note. The tales the old woman told Psyche have been

blown away like dead leaves into heaps for the children to play in, and grown-up people, serious now, have done with fairy tale and are ready for the English novel.

RICHARDSON AND THE FEMININE NOVEL

RICHARDSON AND THE FEMININE NOVEL

For women by women.

EUPHUES had addressed a dedication to the 'Ladies and Gentlewomen of England,' and had said openly that he would rather lie shut in a tiring closet than open in a study; but, writing for women as he did, he never tried to write as if he were himself a woman. On the contrary, Lyly's attitude was that of the gallant. The Elizabethan romancers who followed him were read by women but content to be men. Mrs. Behn, whose 'weltering sewerage' we have not had space to discuss, wrote for women, but certainly

not less coarsely than if she had been writing for her own heroes. It was not until the eighteenth century that there was fairly launched a new story-telling, characteristically English in origin, without the fine careless heroism and improbability of romance, that it held was 'calculated for amusement only,' and different also from the mischievous realism of the picaresque. These ships, with their gallant scarlet and gold pennons, and their merry skull and cross-bones, had been long afloat before there came to join them a white barge with a lily at the prow and on her decks girls in white dresses, with their heads close together telling stories to each other. The author of a tale had hitherto been either a man, a god, or a rascal; he had never been content to be a girl. And the first of the new craftswomen was a fat and solid little printer and alderman of the City of London, called Samuel Richardson.

Samuel Richardson.

Richardson was an author of a kind quite new to English letters—neither a great gentleman like Sidney, nor a roisterer like Greene, nor a fanatic preacher like Bunyan, nor a journalist like Defoe; just a quiet, conscientious, little business man, who, after a duteous apprenticeship, had married his master's daughter like a proper Whittington, and, when she died, had married again, with admirable judgment in each case. It is not every one who can marry two wives and be unhappy with neither. As a boy, he had written love-letters for young women who were shy of their abilities. Girlish in his youth, he had preferred the tea-table to the tavern. Surrounded by women in his manhood, he was a grotesque little figure of a man, as inquisitive as an old maid, as serious over detail as a village gossip; walking in the

Park, and looking at the feet of the women he met, and, as they passed him, quickly scanning their faces, and saying to himself, 'that kind of person,' or 'this kind of person,' and then going on to observe and summarise the next. He was accustomed, like a Japanese draughtsman, or a woman in a theatre, to complete and instantaneous observation. His was just the mind to show women what they could do; and this, with their constant applause and help, he did.



SAMUEL RICHARDSON

He had a lifetime of feminine society behind him when he was asked to write a series of letters on 'the useful concerns in common life' for the guidance of servant-girls, and, setting himself to the task, produced *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*, and then, stepping on from his success, *Clarissa Harlowe*, and

finally the monstrous *Grandison*. The books were written in a close atmosphere of femininity. 'My worthy-hearted wife and the young lady who is with us, when I had read them some part of the story, which I had begun without their knowing it, used to come into my little closet every night, with—"Have you any more of Pamela, Mr. R.? We are come to hear a little more of Pamela."' Every letter of Clarissa's was canvassed by the tea-parties that wept and trembled for her fate, and worshipped her proud little creator. And all his friends contributed their ideas of the perfect man to the making of Sir Charles Grandison. No author had ever written so before.

The novel by post.

I believe that the femininity of the resulting books was due to his choice of the epistolary method as well as to his own temperament, and his enviable opportunities of studying the character of the audience at which he aimed. If he had not happened upon it, if he had tried to tell his stories in the manner fashionable at the time, they would but have been exaggerations and amplifications of tales that Steele would have put most comfortably into a single number of *The Tatler* or *Spectator*. If he had used the autobiographical form he would have been prohibited from much of his detail, and all the effect of lighting his subject from several points of view. But letters were so new in story-telling that they helped him to be new himself, just as a new and unusual fashion of coat helps a man to be militantly original, within as well as without. And then letters, always describing events that have scarcely happened, excuse the most unlimited detail, the most elaborately particularised gossip or confession. Letters were the perfect medium for the expression of

the feminine mind.

I do not deny that there are disadvantages in the novel by post, that concerns many characters in elaborate play. Richardson has, for example, to keep his corresponding couples, naughty Lovelace and uneasy Belford, Clarissa and the giddy Miss Howe, dodging apart again and again for the purpose of exchanging letters. We are tortured by Pamela's efforts for the good of her story, her letters sandwiched between tiles and buried in earth, the incredible agility of her postman John, and the forethought and luck that enables her to provide herself with ink and paper in the most impossible circumstances. And when Mr. Belford writes of Clarissa, 'there never was a woman so young who wrote so much and with such celerity,' we look at the huge volumes and find it easy to believe him. When we hear that 'Her thoughts keeping pace with her pen she hardly ever stopped or hesitated, and very seldom blotted out or altered,' we reflect that she certainly had not the time. And when later we are told that 'Last night, for the first time since Monday last, she got to her pen and ink; but she pursues her writing with such eagerness and hurry as show her discomposure,' we cannot help smiling to think how very advantageous such discomposure must be to Mr. Richardson, who is to edit the correspondence. There is this difficulty of credibility, and also occasional even more obvious awkwardnesses, as when the characters, always very obliging to their creator, have to enclose copies of letters that would not otherwise have got into print.

Richardson does not attempt illusion.

On the other hand, we cannot count these as serious

blemishes on a form of art so far removed from any attempt at illusion. There is in Richardson's novels no sort of visualised presentment of life. We see his principal characters through little panes of glass over their hearts, and in no other way. I cannot for the life of me imagine what Clarissa really looked like, but I know well enough what she thought. Spasmodic reminders of Pamela's abstract prettiness produce little but an impatient desire to see a portrait. I remember but one glimpse of her, and that is in the first volume, when she has dressed herself up in her new homespun clothes, dangles a straw hat by its two blue strings, and looks at herself in the looking-glass. There comes an expression a little later, 'a pretty neat damsel,' and again, 'a tight prim lass,' and I think that the ghost of a little girl shows in the looking-glass, but only for a moment, like the reflection of a bird flying over a pool of water. Richardson's characters are decreasingly real from their hearts outwards. They have no feet. But their hearts are so beautifully exhibited that we cannot ask for anything else. To quarrel over them with Richardson is like quarrelling with the delightful Euclid because no one has ever been able to draw a straight line that should really be length without breadth. Such a line does not exist outside his books, yet Euclid is all in the right when he talks of geometry. Pamela and Clarissa do not exist outside their propositions, yet Johnson, talking fairly honestly, was able to say that there was more knowledge of the human heart in a letter of Richardson's than in all *Tom Jones*.

The passion for respectability.

It is knowledge of the human heart from the girl's point of view—the unromantic girl, for Richardson

could never bring himself to believe in great passions. He would never have used as the text of a novel that sentence from the New Testament that has inspired so many later story-tellers: 'Her sins are forgiven her because she loved much.' Richardson's only passion is one not usually so called, and that is a passion for respectability. The desire for respectability, for her children's sake if not for her own, is part of every woman's armour in the battle of this world. In Richardson's two best novels it is something far more than this, an obsession that love cannot conquer nor goodness override. In Clarissa it is so Quixotic, so forlorn a hope as to be noble; but Pamela's respectability is a little disgusting. What, after all, is Pamela's story but the tale of a servant-girl who declaims continually about her honesty, writes foolish verse about it, lets her head fall on her master's shoulder, and refuses to be his except as his wife? She is quite right, of course, and most estimable. But her affronted virtue does not seem much more than a practical commercial asset, when she successfully marries the man who by every means in his power has sought to destroy it. Clarissa, on the other hand, has nothing to gain, nothing even to retain, except her self-respect. The respect of Howes, Belfords, and Harlowes could weigh but little with a being lifted from ordinary Philistine life into a conflict as unworldly as hers. She has the ivory dignity of some flowers, and the curious power of the book that traces her misfortunes is due to the spectacle of so flowerlike and fragile a being engaged in a struggle so terribly unequal. The struggle itself could hardly have been imagined by a wholly masculine writer. It is a kind of elaborate proposition, not a picture of life. It is like a chess problem in which we know that white mates in two

moves, and are interested only in seeing how he does it. In Richardson, as in Euclid, we know always what is coming. Our artistic pleasure is in the logic and sequence of the intervening steps. If you expect a theorem to turn into a problem or *vice versâ*, the inevitability of Richardson annoys you; but if you read him in the right spirit that quality is your chief delight.

It is interesting to notice that Richardson, inventing girls' theorems, is unable to draw a hero in whom a man can believe. Lovelace, for example, is touched in in a way that makes women fall in love with him, but men feel for cobwebs in the air. Pamela's master is frankly incredible. And it is no bad illustration of Richardson's femininity that Charles Grandison, planned as the perfect man, has been found unbearable in the smoking-room, insipid at the tea-table, and has probably had no conquests but a few Georgian ladies'-maids. But the women, abstractions, algebraical formulæ, as they are, let us into secrets of the machinery of a woman's mind that no earlier novelist had been able to examine.

Richardson's influence.

Richardson's precise, intimate, feminine knowledge of women and feminine method of writing had a wider influence than that we are tracing in this chapter. He showed story-tellers a new world to conquer and quite unexplored possibilities in the telling of a tale. It was for this that he was translated by the Abbé Prévost, the Jesuit, soldier, priest and novelist, who wrote in *Manon Lescaut* of a passion greater and more self-sacrificing than any that had come in the way of the little printer of Salisbury Court. And when St. Preux and Julie exchange those

letters that brought a new freedom of sentiment into literature, Rousseau, who taught them how to write, had himself been taught by Richardson.



FANNY BURNEY

Fanny Burney.

I do not intend any detailed portraiture of the later writers of the feminine novel, but only in a brief

mention of two of them to suggest the course they took in the development of their art, until in the nineteenth century it combined with and became indistinguishable from the masculine novel that held it at first in a not lightly to be reconciled hostility. Let us look along the bookshelf for a volume called *Evelina, or the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*. Thirty years had passed between the publication of *Clarissa* and that of Fanny Burney's best book, and in those years Fielding and Smollett had written, and *Humphry Clinker* had shown that it was possible to describe in letters other things than a series of attacks on the armour of respectability. Fanny Burney took more material with a lighter hand, stealing away the business of *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, *The Citizen of the World*, and trying not only to 'draw characters from nature' but also to 'mark the manners of the time.' She had learnt from a diligent perusal of Richardson, avoided a too elaborate postal system, and made her butterfly task the easier by writing of herself, whereas he had to invent the Clarissas and Pamelas of his more bee-like labours.

Young lady's 'manners.'

Fanny Burney was the daughter of a popular music-master, whose house was always full of all sorts of people, so that she had the best of opportunities for observing that surface of life which she was able so incomparably to reproduce. She was able to see manners in contrast. Now 'manners' described by a man in a coffee-house—by Steele, for example, or Goldsmith, mean the habits and foibles of contemporary society. 'Manners' 'marked' at a young lady's rosewood desk mean vulgarity and its opposite, and the various shades between the two. In

the essayist's eyes, manners were simply manners, to be described each one for its own sake. The feminine novelist found manners either good or bad, and was concerned with the tracing of a gossamer thread of distinction. The story of Evelina is not so much that of her love-affair with Lord Orville, but of the suffering or satisfaction of a sensitive person exposed alternately to atmospheres of bad manners or good. Evelina threads her way shyly along the border-line, and illustrates both sides by their effects upon her happiness. We are sorrier for her when she hears Miss Branghton cry out joyfully, 'Miss is going to marry a Lord,' than when she is in more serious trouble over her acknowledgment by her father. All the minor characters for whom the story makes a frame are set there as types less of character than of behaviour. There is Mrs. Selwyn with her habit of 'setting down' young men, and her characteristic praise of Lord Orville, 'there must have been some mistake about the birth of that young man; he was, undoubtedly, designed for the last age; for he is really polite.' There is Captain Mirvan, representing good birth and brutality of manners; Madame Duval, low birth seeking to veil itself in lofty affectation; the Branghtons, frank vulgarity; Mr. Smith, the tinsel gentility of the Holborn beau. Each character is in the book in order to inflict its peculiar type of manners on the heroine, so that we may watch the result. Evelina herself, delicious as she is, is given to us as a touchstone between good breeding and vulgarity.

Feminine standards of delicacy.

Miss Burney marks very clearly the introduction of the feminine standards of delicacy that were to rule the English novel of the nineteenth century. Evelina's

criticism of *Love for Love*, written less than a hundred years before she saw it, distinguishes honestly between her own point of view and that of the best of men. 'Though it (the play) was fraught with wit and entertainment, I hope I shall never see it represented again; for it is so extremely indelicate—to use the softest word I can—that Miss Mirvan and I were perpetually out of countenance, and could neither make any observations ourselves, nor venture to listen to those of others. This was the more provoking, as Lord Orville was in excellent spirits, and exceedingly entertaining.'



JANE AUSTEN

Jane Austen.

Twenty years after *Evelina*, the novel of femininity took a further step in technique and breadth of design. Miss Austen, who in the last decade of the

eighteenth century was writing the novels that were not to be published till after the first decade of the nineteenth, learnt from both her precursors. She was a proper follower of Richardson, but dispensed altogether with the artifice of letters, although the whole of her work is so intimate and particular in expression that it would almost seem to be written in a letter to the reader.[7] Like Miss Burney she had read the masculine novels of an ordinary life, whose strings were not so finely stretched as those of life in the books of the sentimental little printer; she had read Fielding and Smollett and the Essayists, and Miss Burney herself, but she carried the satire she had learnt from them deeper than Miss Burney's criticism of well or ill-bred manners. She deals more directly with existence. Miss Burney with lovable skill made her puppets play her game. Miss Austen's puppets played a game of their own. She remarked before writing *Emma*, 'I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like,' exactly as if she were a little girl rather capriciously choosing a new plaything. But Emma, once chosen, illustrates no special theorem, and is compelled to tread no tight-rope over the abyss of vulgarity. Miss Austen's world has the vitality of independent life, and is yet close under observation, like society in a doll's house. Her people are alive and real, and yet so small that she found it easy to see round them and be amused. Indeed, she grew so accustomed to laughing at them that she came to include the reader in her play. I am not sure if it would not be wise for any one who found a page of hers a little dull or incomprehensible, to consider very carefully and seriously if she is not being mischievous enough and insolent enough to win her silvery laugh from his own self. To read her is like being in the room with

an unscrupulously witty woman; it is delightful, but more than a trifle dangerous.

The analysis of the heart.

But Miss Austen's satire is not so important as the clear, keen sight that made it possible. The feminine novel finds its justification and characteristic in the quick light gossiping knowledge of Miss Burney, in Miss Austen's bric-à-brac of observation, in Richardson's topographical accuracy among the hidden alleys and byways of the heart. Its tenderness of detail is its most valuable contribution to story-telling, associated though it is with feminine standards of decency, and the sharp point of feminine raillery. The first of these concomitants is a gift of doubtful, and certainly not universal, virtue. The second is no more than a variation, a different-tinted, other-textured version of the satire of men. But the gift to which they were attached has made possible some of the finest work of later artists, in those stories whose absorbing interest is the unravelling of tangled skeins of intricate psychology. Theirs is a minuteness in the dissection of the heart quite different from, and indeed hostile to, the free-and-easy way of men like Fielding and Smollett, and wherever we meet with this fine and delicate surgery practice we can trace its ancestry with some assurance to the feminine novel of the eighteenth century.

FIELDING, SMOLLETT, AND THE MASCULINE NOVEL

FIELDING, SMOLLETT, AND THE MASCULINE NOVEL

The English Renaissance.

I HAVE always felt that the English Renaissance was considerably later than that of France or Italy, and happened in the eighteenth century. When we speak of the Italian or the French Renaissance we mean the times in the histories of Italy or France when the peculiar genius of each of these countries showed the most energetic and satisfying efflorescence. In Italy and in France this time was that of the revival of classical learning, when Boccaccio lectured on Dante at Florence and Ronsard gardened and rhymed. In England, although from the time of Chaucer to the time of Shakespeare we were picking continental flowers, and flowering ourselves individually and gorgeously, yet we had no general efflorescence in our national right, no sudden and complete self-portraiture in several arts at once. And this in the eighteenth century was what we had. All our national characteristics were unashamedly on view. Our solidity, our care for matter of fact, our love of oversea adventure, were exhibited in Defoe. Our

sturdy spirituality had only recently found expression in Bunyan. Richardson discovered the young person who, rustling her petticoats, sits with so demure an air of permanence on Victorian literature, and represents indeed so real a part of our national character that we shall never be able to forget her blushes altogether. Our serious turn for morality showed itself at once in the aims all our authors professed, and in the pictures of Hogarth who, with courage unknown elsewhere, dared to paint ugliness as ugly. This is the century that represents us in the eyes of the world. If we would think of the Italian spirit we remember the *Decameron*; if of the French, we remember Ronsard's 'Mignonne, allons voir si la rose,' or Marot's 'Mignonne, je vous donne le bon jour.' But if a Frenchman tries to describe an Englishman his model is not a Chaucer but a Jean Bull, and the only adequate portraits of Jean Bull are to be found in the novels of Fielding and Smollett.



HENRY FIELDING

Two points of view.

Out of this general efflorescence were to spring two branches of story-telling different and hostile from

the start. The novel was given sex. Richardson had scarcely invented the feminine novel before Fielding and Smollett were at work producing books of a masculinity correspondingly pronounced. Fielding was the first to mark the difference, and Richardson to the end of his life hated him for writing *Joseph Andrews*. It often happens that one philosopher hates another whose system though less elaborate is obviously founded on a broader basis than his own. Fielding could afford to laugh at Richardson, but Richardson could never laugh at Fielding. He could only enjoy the lesser satisfaction of holding his rival accursed. Their upbringings had been as different as the resulting books. Eton, law studies at Leyden and the Middle Temple, were a different training for the art of story-telling than the Dick Whittington youth of the little business man. Richardson saw the game of life from the outside. Harry Fielding knew the rough and tumble. Richardson was all for virtue; so was Fielding, but, as he would have put it himself, for virtue that is virtue. Virtue at the expense of nature he could no more understand than Benvenuto Cellini, who, if the facts in the case of Pamela had been set before him, would have thought her a devilish artful young woman, and, if he had met her, congratulated her upon her capture. Fielding had a short, rough and ready creed, and that was that a good heart goes farther than a capful of piety towards keeping the world a habitable place.

Pamela and *Joseph Andrews*.

Pamela made him laugh. He wanted to make money by writing, so he sat down to put the laugh on paper, with the ultimate notion of filling his pocket by publishing a squib. He set out to parody Pamela in the person of her brother Mr. Joseph Andrews. He

had not gone very far in the performance before Parson Adams came into the story, and became so prodigiously delightful that it occurred to Fielding that he had here as admirable a couple for adventure as Cervantes himself could have wished, with the result that Mr. Andrews' correspondence does not compare at all favourably with his sister's, while his biography is infinitely more entertaining. When the book was done, its creator printed on the title-page: 'Written in imitation of the Manner of Cervantes, Author of Don Quixote,' made no very particular reference to his original purpose, and described his book as 'A Comic Epic in Prose.' The masculine novel was on its way. Like *Don Quixote* or *Le Roman Comique* it represented a smiling move towards reality, or the criticism of reality, in Fielding's hands through the high and difficult art of ridicule, in the hands of Smollett, whose first book was published six years later, through the easier art of caricature.

These two men between them made the masculine novel of the eighteenth century. Its scope and character are best mapped out by a study of their respective lives, which were sufficiently unlike to make their books almost as different from each other's as they were from Richardson's.

Fielding and Smollett.

They both looked on man as man, a simple creature seldom wholly bad. They were not the fellows to tolerate humbug about platonic love, or the soul, or religion. Religion meant the Established Church, and a parson was a man, good or bad, a representative of the State perhaps, but not a representative of God. Love was no opal passion between Endymion and the moon. It meant desire between man and woman, as

tender as you liked, but still desire. It was as simple a thing as valour, which meant ability to use the fists and stand fire. Fielding and Smollett knew a fairly brutal world. But their positions in it had been different. Fielding had always had his head above water. He is continually thinking of fair play, and feels, as we do, a thrill at the heart when he sees Tom Jones and an innkeeper shake hands after bleeding each other's noses. Smollett had had a harder time. He had known what it was to be denied the privileges of a gentleman. He had been in a subordinate position in the navy when that was an organisation of licensed brutality. He was as accustomed to seeing men's bodies cross-questioned, as Fielding to reading law-cases and examining men's minds. He writes always on a more animal level than Fielding. After every fight he lines up his characters for medical treatment:—

> ""n' well," says he, "'n' how
> Are yer arms, 'n' legs, 'n' liver, 'n' lungs, 'n' bones a-
> feelin' now?'"

Fielding only inquires after their hearts. Put their portraits side by side, and the difference is clear. Fielding's is the face of the fortunate man who has had his bad times and come smiling through; Smollett's that of the man not bruised but permanently scarred by the experiences he has suffered. An old sailor once said to me that you can judge of the roughness of a man's employment by the coarseness of his language; those whose work is roughest, using the coarsest words. Fielding is seldom disgusting. His heroes are constantly putting their feet into it; but not into unnecessary filth. It is impossible to say the same of Smollett.

Smollett and Le Sage.

Their choice of models was characteristic; *Joseph Andrews* being written in imitation of the gentle banter of Cervantes, while *Roderick Random* copied the more acid satire of Le Sage. Indeed, Le Sage was not serious enough. 'The disgraces of Gil Blas,' says Smollett in his preface, 'are for the most part such as rather excite mirth than compassion; he himself laughs at them; and his transitions from distress to happiness, or at least ease, are so sudden, that neither the reader has time to pity him, nor himself to be acquainted with affliction. This conduct, in my opinion, not only deviates from probability, but prevents that generous indignation, which ought to animate the reader against the sordid and vicious disposition of the world.' That is a moving and very remarkable paragraph. Between those lines is the memory of more than enough 'acquaintance with affliction,' and there is something terrible in the assumption, made with such absolute conviction, that good luck 'deviates from probability.' Smollett had not known much happiness, and found so light-hearted an aim as Le Sage's impossible. His own was almost vengeful. 'I have attempted to represent modest merit struggling with every difficulty to which a friendless orphan is exposed, from his own want of experience, as well as from the selfishness, envy, malice, and base indifference of mankind.' Roderick Random is a rogue and a skunk, but we cannot blame Tobias Smollett if he did not know it. Random's more objectionable qualities are those that pull him through his difficulties. A nicer man would have gone under. The difficulties are at fault for making not Random but Smollett what he was.

The technique of the English novel.

The technique of the English novel was more elaborate than that of its models. Just as *Joseph Andrews* is more orderly than *Don Quixote*, so *Roderick Random* is a step between the pure rogue novel, the string of adventures only connected by the person of the adventurer, and the modern novel of definite plot. *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas* could be cut off anywhere. Their creators had only to kill them. But the curtain could not be rung down on the adventures of Random or Andrew before quite a number of different threads had been properly gathered and explained. There were a few pretty wild coincidences to be discovered. Rory, Joseph, and Fanny all find their true parents; perhaps but rough and ready means to give rotundity to a story, but still pleasant mysteries, to be kept like sweetmeats and dessert as lures for flagging appetites. The novel had assumed some of the elaborate interest of the *nouvelle*, as practised by Cervantes and the Elizabethans, and the influence of the stage perhaps partly accounts for the construction of the English imitations, more consistent than that of their Spanish and Franco-Spanish models. The art of play-writing had reached its period of most scrupulous technique so recently that these two men who had failed in the theatre were not likely to forget its methods when experimenting with the more plastic art of narrative.

Fielding the better artist.

Of the two, Fielding is always the better artist. He is more interested in his art, more single-minded. He never forgets his duties as a novelist, and continually turns to the reader, just as if he were a sculptor executing a difficult piece of work in the presence of an audience whose admiration he expects. He was

ready to laugh at himself for it too: 'We assure the reader we would rather have suffered half mankind to be hanged than have saved one contrary to the strictest laws of unity and probability.' He did not always keep up this admirable conscientiousness; but he did so more consistently than Smollett.

The delicacy of their craftsmanship is best compared not in their greatest books but in those two novels in which they essayed the same task, the portraiture of a rogue, and a rogue not after the merry sympathetic fashion of Lazarillo, but one whom the authors themselves accounted a villain and expected their readers to detest.

Jonathan Wild.

The ironic biographer of Jonathan Wild realised the difficulties of the undertaking. He saw that unless he adopted an attitude which would make it proper for him always to express approval of his hero, his readers would begin to cast this way and that, not knowing whether to sympathise or hate, as the genius of the author or the villainy of the hero were alternately prominent in their eyes. Accordingly, choosing the name of a real and famous gallows-bird who had been hung some twenty years before, Fielding took his tone from those little penny biographies that used to be hawked among the crowd who waited at Tyburn to see their hero swing. He ironically takes this tone; and sustains it without a false note for a couple of hundred pages. How admirably he uses it:—

> 'The hero, though he loved the chaste Laetitia with excessive tenderness, was not of that low

> snivelling breed of mortals who, as is generally expressed, *tie themselves to a woman's apron-strings*; in a word, who are afflicted with that mean, base, low vice or virtue, as it is called, of constancy.'

And again in the passage that sums up the book:—

> 'He laid down several maxims, as the certain means of attaining greatness, to which, in his own pursuit of it, he constantly adhered.
>
> As—
>
> 1. Never to do more mischief than was necessary to the effecting of his purpose; for that mischief was too precious a thing to be thrown away.
>
> 2. To know no distinction of men from affection; but to sacrifice all with equal readiness to his interest.
>
> 3. Never to communicate more of an affair than was necessary to the person who was to execute it.
>
> 4. Not to trust him who hath deceived you, nor who knows he has been deceived by you.
>
> 5. To forgive no enemy; but to be cautious and often dilatory in revenge.
>
> 6. To shun poverty and distress, and to ally himself as close as possible to power and riches.

7. To maintain a constant gravity in his countenance and behaviour, and to affect wisdom on all occasions.

8. To foment eternal jealousies in his gang, one of another.

9. Never to reward any one equal to his merit; but always to insinuate that the reward was above it.

10. That all men were knaves or fools, and much the greater number a composition of both.

11. That a good name, like money, must be parted with or at least greatly risked, in order to bring the owner any advantage.

12. That virtues, like precious stones, were easily counterfeited; that the counterfeits in both cases adorned the wearer equally; and that very few had knowledge or discernment sufficient to distinguish the counterfeit jewels from the real.

13. That many men were undone by not going deep enough in roguery; as in gaming any man may be a loser who doth not play the whole game.

14. That men proclaim their own virtues, as shopkeepers expose their goods, in order to profit by them.

15. That the heart was the proper seat of hatred, and the countenance of affection and friendship.'

The whole scheme is worked out with a scrupulous attention to the main idea, and a consistency of mood that would not have been unworthy one of the self-conscious artists of a hundred years later. Poe himself could have built no more skilfully, and, lacking Fielding's knowledge of rascaldom, the straw for his bricks would not have been so good.

Ferdinand, Count Fathom.

Smollett had the knowledge; but, a less perspicuous artist, did not realise the difficulties of using it. His villain is never frank in his villainy. Smollett intended from the beginning to disobey Fielding's principle, meant to save his rogue from the gallows, meant to do it all along, and was consequently handicapped in making him respectably wicked. Ferdinand, Count Fathom, does damnable deeds, but his author's purpose is completely nullified by his promise of eventual conversion. The book is not true to itself, but fails because Smollett was not sufficient of an artist to be able to send his hero to hell.

It is interesting to notice in one of the dullest scenes of this unsatisfactory book, that Smollett touched for the first time, in a fumbling, hesitant manner, the note of quasi-supernatural horror that was soon to be sounded with clarity and almost too facile skill. In the hero's device for the undoing of Celinda there is the first warning of the Radcliffes and Lewises and their kind, with their groans upon the battlements, their figures in white, and their unearthly music in the wind. Smollett did not wait long enough to find out what could be done with this new sensation. He jangled the note, and, in his inartistic way, passed on to paint and to reform the wickedness of the Count.



TOBIAS SMOLLETT

Smollett the more versatile.

I am a little ungracious to Smollett in saying so loud that he was an artist inferior to Fielding. Inferior he was, but when I set their best books side by side, I

remember that there is little to choose between the pleasures they have given me, and am compelled to admit that the less scrupulous Smollett had the wider range. I read *Tom Jones* in one sitting of twenty-four hours, and should like to write an essay on it, but can find no excuse for discussing here that epic of good-heartedness, since its characteristics are not different from those already noticed in *Joseph Andrews*. But *Humphry Clinker* would have held me for as long if it had had as many pages, and in the history of the art, has, as an example of the novel in letters, an interest wholly separate from that of *Roderick Random*, which is a specimen of the picaresque. When Smollett came to write that book he was fifty years old and just about to die. He seems to have forgotten his old feud with life, and to look at things with a kindlier eye as one just ready to depart. His late-won detachment helped him to a scheme as clear as one of Fielding's, although even in this he is sometimes submerged in human nature. His notion was to describe the same scenes and events simultaneously from several points of view, in letters from different persons, so as to keep a story moving gently forward, with half a dozen personalities revolving round it, able to realise themselves or be realised in their own letters or those of their friends. In none of his other books are the characters so rounded and complete. There is Matthew Bramble, the old knight, outwardly morose and secretly generous; his sister, an old maid determined not to remain one, for ever grumbling at her brother's generosities; Lyddy, their romantic niece, and Jerry, their young blood of a nephew; and, as persons of the counterplot, Mistress Winifred Jenkins and Mary Jones; not to speak of the ubiquitous Clinker. The letters tell the whole story, and yet, written long

after Richardson's, they have an older manner. Richardson's letters, with all their passionate reiteration of detail, do not concern themselves with foibles. They do not make you smile at their writers, and if you had laughed, as Fielding did, he would have been prodigiously annoyed. Smollett's letters have the same aim as the letters of the *Spectator* or the *Tatler*. They are different only in less brilliant polish, and in their grouping round a story. The Humphry Clinker correspondence is as important as the letters of Clarissa in forming the most delicate and humorous epistolary style employed by Miss Evelina Anville.

The motives of the masculine novel.

The extreme difficulty I have experienced throughout this chapter in thinking of the technique of these novelists, instead of their material, is a tribute to their power. It is the same with Hogarth. It is impossible to get at the artist for thinking of the life upon his canvases. It is almost impossible to consider Fielding or Smollett as technicians (I have had to do it in their least human books), for thinking of the England that they represented. And now that I am looking about for a concluding paragraph on the work of these two men, when I should be summing up the general characteristics of their craftsmanship, I look at the pile of their books on the table before me, and feel a full and comfortable stomach, and cannot get out of my nose the smell of beer and beef and cheese associated as closely with their pages as lavender with the pages of *Cranford*. What an England it was in their day. Mr. Staytape carried Rory 'into an alehouse, where he called for some beer and bread and cheese, on which we *breakfasted*.' 'Our landlord and we sat down at a board, and dined

upon a shin of beef most deliciously; our reckoning amounting to twopence halfpenny each, bread and small beer included.' The bright glances of Mistress Waters 'hit only a vast piece of beef which he was carrying into his plate, and harmless spent their force.' Her sighs were drowned 'by the coarse bubbling of some bottled ale.' Square meals are the best antidotes for sentiment, and in every scene of these novelists there is always some one who has fed too recently to allow any hairsplitting delicacy in the room with him. No confessional disentangling of emotions, but beer, beef, cheese, a good heart, a sound skin, and the lack of these things, are the motives of the masculine novel.

A NOTE ON STERNE

STERNE hardly comes within the scope of this book, since his was the art, not of telling stories, but of withholding them, not of keeping things on the move, but of keeping them on the point of moving. It is not without much difficulty and two or three chapters that a character of Sterne's crosses the room. The nine books of *Tristram Shandy* bring him through the midwife's hands, and a little further. I believe we hear breeches talked of for him. Another nine books would perhaps let him put one leg into them. *Tristram Shandy* is a continuous denial of the forms that Fielding and Smollett were doing their best to fix. But it is read by many who find them

superficial, because Sterne writes of universal, whereas they write of a limited and particular humanity. They write of a Mr. Jones or a Mr. Random, while the hero of Sterne's book is man. He begins, as he puts it himself, *ab ovo*. He saw that the whole of humanity is a constellation revolving round the birth of a child, and contrived to introduce into his book every imaginable incident connected with that event. If Tristram Shandy does not grow up quick enough to take to himself a wife, My Uncle Toby is taken as a husband by the Widow Wadman. If he does not die, Yorick does. If My Uncle Toby's affairs do not go far enough to produce a baby, Tristram is born. In this book, where nothing seems to happen, everything does. It is the Life and Opinions, not of Tristram Shandy, but of Humanity, illustrated, not in a single character over a long period, but in half a dozen over a short one. For the story of the three generations of the giants, Rabelais needed land and sea, Paris and Touraine. For the adventures of his strolling players, Scarron needed a dozen little towns along the Loire, with inns and châteaux and what not. But for the adventures of Humanity, Sterne, who learnt from both of them, needed only a bowling-green, a

study, a bedroom, and a parlour. There is really little else of background to the story. And it is all there; birth, love, death, and all the sad comedy of man misunderstood, and fortunate when, like Uncle Toby, he does not try to understand, the beginning in triviality, and the end in 'Alas, poor Yorick!'

PART II
ROMANTICISM

CHATEAUBRIAND AND ROMANTICISM

CHATEAUBRIAND AND ROMANTICISM

Chateaubriand and the French Revolution.

THERE are some men who seem epitomes of their periods, of all the weaknesses, strengths, ideals and follies and wisdoms of their times. All the tangled skeins of different movements seem embroidered into the pattern of a face; and that face is theirs. We seek in them the years in which they lived, and are never disappointed. Sir Philip Sidney means the age of Elizabeth, Dr. Johnson the common-sense English eighteenth century, Rousseau the stirring of revolutionary France, Goethe the awakening of Germany. Of these men was Chateaubriand. He was born before the storm and died after it. He gathered up the best of the things that were before the revolution, and handed them on to the men who, when the revolution had left a new France, were to make that new country the centre of European literature. Rousseau and the Romantics meet in him. He wrote when France, her eyes still bright and wide after the sight of blood, was seeking in religion for one thing, at least, that might be covered by the tossing waves of revolution and yet survive. Christianity in his finest story is the rock on which his lovers break themselves. And Christianity was the first earthwork attacked before the revolution, and the first reoccupied afterwards.

Chateaubriand stands curiously in the midst of the opposing elements. Like Byron he was a patrician and a fighter. He too would have died for freedom. But whereas Byron fought, contemptuously sometimes, for revolutionaries, Chateaubriand fought against them.

When some of the ragged ones marched joyously down his street carrying the heads of two of their enemies bleeding on the ends of pikes, he cried at them, 'Brigands! Is this what you mean by Liberty?' and declared that if he had had a gun he would have shot them down like wolves. And if Chateaubriand had not been an aristocrat, he could never so well have represented his times. He would have fought and written as a revolutionist, instead of caring passionately for one party, and pinning to it the ideals of the other, so claiming both for his own. Everything that could make him one with his period and country was his. After a childhood of severe repression, he had seen the fall of the Bastille, and then sought liberty and the North-West Passage, coming back from America to find the revolution successful against himself. Could any man's life be so perfect an analogy of the meteor-like progress of France? France also sought liberty and a North-West Passage, quicker than all others; France also was to return and find the ground aquiver beneath her feet.



JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

After that she was to be mistress of Europe. The

three stages of Romanticism correspond with these three stages of France; the last that of Hugo and Gautier and Dumas, the Romanticism of 1830, promised by that of Chateaubriand, itself made possible by the unrestful writing of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. It is impossible to understand any one of the three without referring to the others. Rousseau was the son of a watchmaker, in a day when superiority of intellect in a man of low birth won him either neglect or the most insufferable patronage. His mother died in bearing him, and his father, although he made a second marriage, never mentioned her without tears. He seems to have been a very simple-hearted man, and found such pleasure in romances that he would sit up all night reading them to his little son, going ashamedly to bed in the morning when the swallows began to call in the eaves. These two traits in his father are characteristic of the work of Rousseau himself. His life was spent in emphasising the compatibility of low birth with lofty animation, and so in preparing that democratisation of literature that generously attributes humanity to men who are not gentlemen. Richardson gave him a suitable narrative form for what he had to say, and *La Nouvelle Héloïse* is a novel in letters whose hero is a poor tutor in love with his pupil. The book is full of an emotional oratory so fresh and sincere that it seems as if the ice of fifty years of passionless reasoning has suddenly broken over the springs of the human heart. There is in it too an Ossianic sharing of feelings with Nature, as if man had realised with the tears in his eyes that he had not always lived in towns.

The world of the Revolution.

Chateaubriand had not Rousseau's birthright of

handicap. He could not feel the righteous energy of the watchmaker's son against a people who did not know their own language and were yet in a position to employ him as a footman. He was outside that quarrel. He left Rousseau's social reform behind him on the threshold of his world, but had learnt from him to carry his heart upon his sleeve, and to cry, like *Ossian*, 'The murmur of thy streams, O Lara! brings back the memory of the past. The sound of thy woods, Garmallar, is lovely in mine ear.' He took with him Rousseau's twin worships of passion and nature into the melancholy turmoil that was waiting for him, sad with an unrest not of classes but of a nation. He knew, like France, what it was to question everything while standing firm upon nothing. In that maelstrom nothing seemed fixed; there was nothing a man might grasp for a moment to keep his head above the waters of infinite doubt. Everything seemed possible, and much of the Romantic melancholy is a despairing cry for a little impossibility from which at least there could be no escape. It is one thing to question religion by the light of atheism, or atheism by the light of religion; it is another thing, and far more terrible, to question both while sure of neither, and to see not one word in all the universe, not God, nor Man, nor State, nor Church, without a question mark at its side, a ghastly reminder of uncertainty, like, in some old engravings, the waiting figure of Death muffled in each man's shadow.

Atala.

That was the world of the Revolution, a world whose permanent instability had been suddenly made manifest by a violent removal of the apparently stable crust. With the overturning of one

mountain every other shuddered in its bed, and seemed ready at any moment to shake with crash and groan into the valleys. This was the world for whose expression the face of Chateaubriand, nervous, passionate, the fire of vision in his eye, the wind of chaos in his tempestuous hair, seems so marvellously made. This was the world in which, like the spirit of his age, he wrote the books the times expected because they were their own. *Atala* and *René*, but particularly *Atala*, seemed to be the old, vague promises of Rousseau and *Ossian*, reaffirmed with the clarity of a silver trumpet. Chactas and Atala, those savage lovers, who 'took their way towards the star that never moves, guiding their steps by the moss on the tree stems,' walked like young deities of light before these people who had known the half-mummied courtesies of an eighteenth century civilisation. 'She made him a cloak of the inner bark of the ash, and mocassins of the musk rat's skin, and he set on her head a wreath of blue mallows, and on her neck red berries of the azalea, smiling as he did so to see how fair she was.' The world is young again, and man has won his way back into Eden, conscious of sorrow, conscious of evil, but alive and unafraid to be himself.

Nature and emotion.

Chateaubriand carried further than Rousseau the transfiguration of nature by emotion, although in *Atala* nature is still a stage effect, subjected to its uses as illustration of the feelings of the humans in the tale. Chateaubriand tunes up the elements with crash of thunder, bright forked lightning, and fall of mighty tree, to the moment when, in the supreme crisis the hand of Atala's God intervenes between the lovers, and the bell of the forest hermitage sounds in

the appropriate silence. But in those vivid, fiery descriptions there is already something besides the theatrical, a new generosity of sentiment that was to let Barye make lions and tigers instead of what would once have been rather impersonal decorations, and to allow Corot to give landscapes their own personality without always seeking to impose on them the irrelevant interest of human figures. Nature is never excluded from the story, and when the action is less urgent the setting is given a greater freedom. The lovers never meet on a studio background, but are always seen with trees and rivers, and forest dawn and forest night, more real than any that had been painted before. Chateaubriand is never content to call a tree a tree or a bird a bird, but gives them the dignity of their own names. Aurora no longer rises from her rosy bed in the approved convention for the dawn, but a bar of gold shapes itself in the east, the sparrow-hawks call from the rocks, and the martens retire to the hollows of the elms.



FRANÇOIS RENÉ DE CHATEAUBRIAND

Particularity in setting.

It was through caring for his setting in this way that

Chateaubriand came as if by accident to the discovery of local colour. He wanted his savages to love in the wilderness, and happening to have seen a wilderness, reproduced it, and made his savages not merely savages but Muskogees, fashioned their talk to fit their race, and made it quite clear that this tale, at any rate, could not be imagined as passing on the Mountains of the Moon. When the older story-tellers named a locality they did little more than the Elizabethan stage managers, who placed a label on the stage and expected it to be sufficient to conjure up a forest or a battlefield. Chateaubriand, in making his writing more completely pictorial, visualised his scenes in detail, and so showed the Romantics the way to that close distinction between country and country, age and age, race and race, that made the artists of the nineteenth century richer than any who were before them in variety of subject, and in the material of self-expression.

Christianity.

The Christianity of *Atala* was the religion that Chateaubriand offered to his country in *Le Génie du Christianisme*. I can never be quite sure that it was his own, but in that amazing book, divided and subdivided like an ancient treatise on some occult science, he showed with passionate use of reasoning and erudition that Christianity was not the ugly thing that it had been pictured by the eighteenth century philosophers, and, more, that it at least was older than France, and permanent in a world where kings, emperors, and republics swung hither and thither like dead leaves in the wind. The teaching came to Paris like a gospel. These people, anchorless as they were, were not difficult converts, because they were eager to be converted, and to be able, if only for a

moment in their lives, to whisper, 'I believe' in something other than uncertainty. All society became Christian for a time, and when that time passed, the effects of the book did not all pass with it. The artists of a younger generation had learned that Christianity was the belief that had brought most loveliness into the world, and that the Gods of Antiquity were not the only deities who were favourable to beautiful things. The false taste of the end of the eighteenth century had been pierced by Gothic spires, and through the dull cloud of correct and half-hearted imitation showed again the pinnacles and gargoyles and flying buttresses of the naïve and trustful mediæval art. Atala joins hands with Nicolete, and links Victor Hugo with the builders of Notre Dame.

The art of Chateaubriand survives the battle in which it was used.

There is little wonder that a writer who answered so fully the needs of his own generation, and did so much to cut a way for the generation to come, became instantly famous, immediately execrated. Chateaubriand wrote: 'La polémique est mon allure naturelle.... Il me faut toujours un adversaire, n'importe où.' In 1800 he had no difficulty in finding them. But it takes two to make a quarrel. It would not have been surprising if books that belonged so absolutely to the battles of their times should have struck their blows, and been then forgotten for want of opposition. Manifestations of the time spirit, and particularly fighting manifestations, not infrequently manifest it only to the time, and are worthless to future generations. *Atala*, after setting in an uproar the Paris of 1802 is for us but a beautiful piece of colour whose pattern has faded away. Unless we can feel with the men of the dawn that we are tossing on

mad waves, clutching at religion as at a rock beneath the shifting waters, and breathlessly thankful for any proof of its steadfastness and power: unless we can remember with them the old love of drawing-rooms and bent knees and kisses on gloved hands, and feel with them a passionate novelty in the love of wild things in the open air; unless we can remember the tamed, docile nature of the pastorals, and open our eyes upon a first view of any sort of real country; unless, in a word, we can dream back a hundred years, the beauty of *Atala* is like that of an old battle-cry:—

'So he cried, as the fight grew thick at the noon,
Two red roses across the moon!'

The cry no longer calls to battle. The combatants are dead. The bugle sounds to armies of white bones, and we who overhear it think only of the skill of the trumpeter. And Chateaubriand had something in him that was independent of his doctrines, independent of his enemies. Flaubert, looking back to him over the years, saw in his books, when the dust of their battles settled about them, early examples of a most scrupulous technique. Chateaubriand the fighter, the man of his time, was forgotten in the old master of a new prose. These books shaped in the din of battle were models for men writing in a fat, quiet day of peace. Then it was possible, the clangour no longer sounding in the ears, to notice the mastery of form, the elaboration, carried so far and no further, of the main idea into the significant detail that was to make the idea alive; then became clear the economy that makes of every fact a vivid illustration of some trait in the people of the story, a heightening of the lights or a deepening of the shadows of the tale.

SCOTT AND ROMANTICISM

SCOTT AND ROMANTICISM

Scott's place in the romantic movement.

THE genius of a man like Scott does not leap into the world a complete and novel creation, like Minerva from the skull of Jupiter, ready for battle, and accoutred in the armour that it never afterwards forsakes. Nor does it with the strength of its own hand turn one world into another, or the audience of Fielding and Smollett into that of the Waverley Novels. The world is prepared for it; it finds its weapons lying round its cradle, and works its miracle with the world's co-operation.

Romanticism, although, in our indolence, we like to think of it as the work of a single man, as a stream gushing from the hard rock at the stroke of a Moses, was no conjuring trick, nor sudden invention, but a force as old as story-telling. The rock had been built gradually over it, and was as gradually taken away. It suits our convenience and the pictorial inclination of our minds to imagine it as the work of one man or

two; but there is hardly need to remind ourselves of facts we have so wilfully forgotten, and that, if we choose, we can trace without difficulty a more diffuse as well as a more ancient origin of the spring.

Romanticism was a movement too large and too various to be defined in a paragraph, or to allow an essay on any single man to describe, even in the art of story-telling, its several sources, and the innumerable streams that flowed from them to fertilise the nineteenth century. It carried with it liberty and toleration, liberty of expression and toleration of all kinds of spiritual and physical vitality. It was comparable with and related to the French Revolution. It allowed men to see each other in their relations with the universe as well as with each other, and made existence a thing about which it was possible to be infinitely curious. Old desires for terror and fantasy and magnificence arose in the most civilised of minds. Glamour was thrown over the forest and the palace, and the modern and ancient worlds came suddenly together, so that all the ages seemed to be contemporary and all conditions of human life simultaneous and full of promise.

Scott was a part of this revivified world, and his importance in it is not that of its inventor, but of the man who brought so many of its qualities into the art of story-telling that his novels became a secondary inspiration, and moved men as different as Hugo, Balzac, and Dumas, to express themselves in narrative.



SIR WALTER SCOTT

Romanticism before the Waverley Novels.

Before the writing of the Waverley Novels, Romanticism in English narrative had shown itself but a stuttering and one-legged abortion, remarkable only for its extravagances. It had not, except in poetry, been humane enough to be literature. It had made only violent gesticulations like a man shut up in a sack.

Horace Walpole, protesting, I suppose, against Fielding and Smollett, had said that the 'great resources of fancy had been dammed up by a strict adherence to common life,' while the older romances were 'all imagination and improbability.' He had tried to combine the two in *The Castle of Otranto*, a book in which portraits sigh and step down from their canvases, dead hermits reappear as skeletons in sackcloth, and gigantic ghosts in armour rise to heaven in a clap of thunder. These eccentricities were efforts after the strangeness of all true romance, and their instant popularity showed how ready people were for mystery and ancient tale. Before Scott succeeded in doing what Walpole had attempted, in writing a tale that should be strange but sane, ancient but real, a crowd of novels, whose most attractive quality was their 'horridness,' had turned the heads of the young women who read them. Miss Thorpe, in *Northanger Abbey*, says:

> 'My dearest Catherine, what have you been doing with yourself all this morning? Have you gone on with *Udolpho*?'
>
> 'Yes, I have been reading it ever

since I woke; and I am got to the black veil.'

'Are you indeed? How delightful! Oh! I would not tell you what is behind the black veil for the world! Are not you wild to know?'

'Oh! yes, quite; what can it be? But do not tell me: I would not be told upon any account. I know it must be a skeleton; I am sure it is Laurentina's skeleton. Oh! I am delighted with the book! I should like to spend my whole life in reading it, I assure you; if it had not been to meet you, I would not have come away from it for all the world.'

'Dear creature, how much I am obliged to you; and when you have finished *Udolpho*, we will read the Italian together; and I have made out a list of ten or twelve more of the same kind for you.'

'Have you indeed! How glad I am! What are they all?'

'I will read you their names directly; here they are in my pocket-book. *Castle of Wolfenbach*, *Clermont*, *Mysterious Warnings*, *Necromancer of the Black Forest*, *Midnight Bell*, *Orphan of the Rhine*, and *Horrid Mysteries*. These will last us some time.'

'Yes; pretty well; but are they all horrid? Are you sure they are all

horrid?'

'Yes, quite sure, for a particular friend of mine, a Miss Andrews, a sweet girl, one of the sweetest creatures in the world, has read every one of them. I wish you knew Miss Andrews, you would be delighted with her. She is netting herself the sweetest cloak you can imagine.'

Percy, *Ossian*, and Chatterton.

These things were but the clothes of romantic story-telling, walking bodiless about the world, while a poetry old enough to be astonishingly new was nurturing the body that was to stretch them for itself. Chatterton's ballads, imitations as they were, showed a sudden and novel feeling for mediæval colouring. *Ossian*, that book of majestic moments, carried imagination out again to stand between the wind and the hill. Scott disliked its vagueness, but it helped in preparing his world. Percy's *Reliques*, excused by their compiler on the frivolous ground of antiquarian interest, brought the rough voice and rude style of Sir Philip Sidney's blind beggar ringing across the centuries, and in those old tales, whose rhymes clash like sword on targe, Scott found the inspiration that Macpherson's disorderly, splendid flood swept down on other men.

Scott's life.

Scott's life was no patchwork but woven on a single loom. He did not turn suddenly in manhood to discover the colour of his life. It had been his in babyhood. An old clergyman, a friend of his aunt,

protested that 'one may as well speak in the mouth of a cannon as where that child is,' while Walter Scott, aged three or four, shouted the ballad of Hardyknute: —

'And he has ridden o'er muir and moss,
O'er hills and mony a glen,
When he came to a wounded knight
Making a heavy mane.
Here maun I lye, here maun I dye,
By treacherie's false guiles;
Witless I was that e'er gave faith
To wicked woman's smiles.'

As he grew older, he was able, like Froissart, to 'inquire of the truth of the deeds of war and adventures' that were to be the background of much of his work. He knew old Lowland gentlemen who had paid blackmail to Rob Roy, was told of the '15 and the '45 by veterans who had used their swords on those occasions, and heard of the executions after Culloden from one who had seen at Carlisle the rebels' heads above the Scottish Gate. The warlike knowledge of his childhood was ripened and mellowed for story-telling by the enthusiasms of his youth. Riding through the Lowland valleys collecting the border minstrelsy, his good nature and pleasant way let him learn in a broad acquaintanceship fashion the character of his countrymen. He had not Balzac's deep-cutting analytic knowledge of men, but knew them as a warm-hearted fellow of themselves. He knew them as one man knows another, and not with the passionately speculative knowledge belonging to a mind that contemplates them from another world. He did not analyse them, but wrote of their doings with an unconscious externality that very much simplified their motives and made them

fit participators in the sportsman-like life of his books.

Scott and reality.

Ballads and sagas and the historical reading to which they had given their savour; a free open air life, and a broad, humorous understanding of men; these were the things that Scott had behind him when Cervantes moved him to write narrative, and when the gold that shines through the dress of education in the stories of Maria Edgeworth made him fall in love with local as well as historical colour, anxious to draw his nation as she had drawn hers, and to paint Scottish character in prose as Burns had painted it in verse. The historical character of his work should not disguise from us its more vital qualities. Hazlitt, whose keen eye was not to be put out by the gold and pomp of trappings and armour, notices that Scott represents a return to the real. He is noticing the most invigorating quality of Romanticism. Scott's importance is not his because he wrote historical novels, but because his historical novels were humane. He had found out, as Hazlitt says, that 'there is no romance like the romance of real life.'

His technique.

'As for his technique, there is no need to praise him, who had so many other virtues, for that of delicate craftsmanship, which he had not. He was not a clever performer, but an honest one whose methods were no more elaborate than himself. Dumas describes them in that chapter of the *Histoire de mes Bêtes* in which he discusses his own:—

> 'His plan was to be tedious, mortally tedious, often for half a volume, sometimes for a volume.
>
> 'But during this volume he posed his characters; during this volume he made so minute a description of their physiques, characters, and habits; you learnt so well how they dressed, how they walked, how they talked, that when, at the beginning of the second volume, one of these characters found himself in some danger, you exclaimed to yourself:
>
> '"What, that poor gentleman in an applegreen coat, who limped as he walked, and lisped as he talked, how is he going to get out of that?"
>
> 'And you were very much astonished, after being bored for half a volume, a volume, sometimes indeed for a volume and a half; you were astonished to find that you were enormously concerned for the gentleman who lisped in talking, limped in walking, and had an applegreen coat.'

The sensation of reading a Waverley Novel is that of leaning on the parapet of a bridge on a summer day, watching the sunlight on a twig that lies motionless in a backwater. The day is so calm and the sunlight so pleasant that we continue watching the twig for a time quite disproportionate to the interest we feel in it, until, when it is at last carried into the main current, we follow its swirling progress down the

stream, and are no more able to take our eyes from it than if we were watching the drowning of ourselves.

Improvisation.

Scott knew very well the disadvantages of improvisation, of piling up his interest and our own together. But he could work in no other manner. He said: 'There is one way to give novelty, to depend for success on the interest of a well contrived story. But, wo's me! that requires thought, consideration—the writing out of a regular plan or plot—above all, the adhering to one, which I can never do, for the ideas rise as I write, and bear such a disproportioned extent to that which each occupied at the first concoction, that (cocksnowns!) I shall never be able to take the trouble.' His was a mind entirely different from Poe's, or Mérimée's, or Flaubert's, those scrupulous technicians with whom was the future of Romanticism, and it was an artistic virtue in him to realise the fact, to proceed on his own course, leaving as he went large, rough, incomparable things, as impressive as the boulder stones of which the country people say that a giant threw them as he passed.

His character and work.

His swift, confused writing gets its effect because he never asked too much from it. He never tried to do anything with it beyond the description of his characters and the telling of their story. He had no need to catch an atmosphere by subtleties of language. His conception of the beings and life of another age did not make them different except in externals, from our own. He did not, like Gautier or Flaubert, regard the past as a miraculous time in

which it was possible to be oneself, or in which true feeling was not veiled in inexactitudes. Very simple himself, he did not feel in the present those laxities of sensation or inexactitudes of expression that made the past a place of refuge. He was not dissatisfied with life as he found it, and was not disposed to alter it when he dressed it for a masquerade. Nor was that difficult for him. His mind was full of the stage properties of the past, and, as he walked about, he lived in any time he chose and was the same in all of them. He lived with humanity rather than in any particular half-century, and did not feel, like Peacock, the need of dainty, careful movement in order not to break the fabric he was building. *Maid Marian* is the same story as *Ivanhoe*. Scott seems to have stepped straight out of his story to write it, Peacock to be looking a long way back, and building very skilfully the replica of something he had never seen but in a peculiarly happy vision. Scott is quite at home in his tale, and can treat it as rudely as he likes. Peacock seems to be playing very warily on the fragile keys of a spinet.

Sir Walter's fingers would have broken a spinet. His was no elaborately patterned music threaded with the light delicacies of melody. He struck big chords and used the loud pedal. His was the art of a Wagner rather than that of a Scarlatti. 'The Big Bow-wow strain,' he wrote, comparing himself with Jane Austen, 'I can do like any now going; but the exquisite touch, which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me.' 'One man can do but one thing. Universal pretensions end in nothing.' Scott knew that jewellery-work was not for him, and never tried his eyes by peering through the watchmaker's glass.

He saw life, as a short-sighted man sees a landscape, in its essentials. He could spread over it what dress of detail he preferred, and chose that which came readiest to his hand, flinging over humanity the cloak of his boyish dreams. Humanity was not hampered by it, but moves through his pages like a stout wind over a northern moor.

THE ROMANTICISM OF 1830

THE ROMANTICISM OF 1830

The mingling of the arts.

DUMAS in *La Femme au Collier de Velours* thus describes Hoffmann's room: 'It was the room of a genius at once capricious and picturesque, for it had the air of a studio, a music-shop, and a study, all together. There was a palette, brushes, and an easel, and on the easel the beginnings of a sketch. There was a guitar, a violin, and a piano, and on the piano an open sonata. There was pen, ink, and paper, and

on the paper the first scrawled lines of a ballad. Along the walls were bows, arrows, and arbalests of the fifteenth century, sixteenth-century drawings, seventeenth-century musical instruments, chests of all times, tankards of all shapes, jugs of all kinds, and, lastly, glass necklaces, feather fans, stuffed lizards, dried flowers, a whole world of things, but a whole world not worth twenty-five silver thalers.'

That account, whether from hearsay, conjecture, or knowledge, I do not know, is not only an admirable portrait of the room and brain of an arch-romantic, but might serve as a parable of the Romanticism of 1830. In that year Hugo's *Hernani* was produced at the Comédie Française, and the young men who battled with the Philistines for its success were drawn from the studios as well as from the libraries, and had their David in Théophile Gautier. Never before had the arts been so inextricably entangled, had antiquarianism been so lively and humane, had gems and worthless baubles been so confounded together. Chateaubriand had reaffirmed the pictorial rights of literature. Delacroix was painting pictures from Byron and from Dante, in bold, predominant colours, very different from the lassitudinous livery of the schools. There was a new generosity of sentiment responsible for Corot's landscapes and Barye's beasts. The sudden widening of knowledge and sympathy was expressed in the new broadness and courage of technique, and the same forces that covered the palette with vivid reds and blues, and compelled the sculptor to a virile handling of his chisel, found outlet in words also. Writers, like painters, seized the human, coloured, passionate elements in foreign literatures, looking everywhere for the liberty and brilliance they desired. The open-throated, sinewy, gladiatorial muse of Byron found

here devoted worshippers, and the spacious movements of Shakespeare, his people alive and free, independent of the dramas in which for a few hours in the Globe Theatre they had had a part to play, delighted men with an outlook very different from, and hostile to, that of Voltaire, although he had done his share in making their outlook possible.



VICTOR HUGO

The studio and the study were very close together. Gautier, Hugo, and Mérimée were all painters in their own right, and there is a difference between the

writers who have only seen life from a library, and those who have seen it from behind an easel. The writer who has once felt them can never forget the eye-delighting pleasures of the palette, but composes in colour-schemes, and feels for the tints of words as well as for their melody. The work of the Romantics was visualised and coloured in a manner then new. It was almost shocking to men who had been accustomed, as it were, to write in the severest monotone, and to refuse, if indeed they had ever thought of it, such luxury of realisation.

Local colour.

There is no need, except for the sake of the argument, to state the fact that pictures are called up in a reader's mind by a careful selection of details presented in a proper order. It is well known that a few details correctly chosen have a more compelling power on the imagination than a complete and catalogued description. These men, writing pictorially, gave a new responsibility to single touches. It became clear that visualisation was impossible unless observation preceded it, and details accordingly took upon themselves the exigent dignity of local colour. Local colour, from distinguishing between places, was brought to mark the difference between times. Archæology became suddenly of absorbing interest; its materials were more than its materials; they were made the symbols of lives as real and as red in the veins as those of the archæologists themselves. Notre Dame was no longer to be expressed in a learned antiquarian paper, but in a passionate book. And Victor Hugo visualising with the accuracy of a poet, found that just as archæology meant little without life, so the life was vapid without the archæology. Quasimodo shoves his

hideous face through a hole in order to be elected king of fools, but Hugo does not allow that marvellous grimace to fill the picture. The hole must be there as well, and so 'une vitre brisée à la jolie rosace audessus de la porte laissa libre un cercle de pierre par lequel il fut convenu que les concurrents passeraient la tête.' The setting is as important as the head; humanity and its trappings are worthless by themselves, and valuable only together. Here is the source of Realism, within Romanticism itself. Indeed almost the whole development of the art in the nineteenth century is due to this new care for the frame, and to this new honesty in dealing with the man within it.

The youth of the Romantics.

An energetic simplicity of nature was needed for the fullest enjoyment of these new conditions, and the greatest of the French Romantics were almost like big interested children in their attitude towards life and themselves. As soon as we find a Romantic like Mérimée, reserved, subtle, a tender-hearted Machiavellian, we find a man who is to dissociate himself from them sooner or later, and to produce something different a little from the purely Romantic ideals. There is something beautiful and inspiriting in the youth of the Romantics. I like to think of Gautier, the olive-skinned boy from the studio in the rue St. Louis, overcome with nervousness at the idea of touching the hand of Hugo, himself only twenty-seven, sitting down and trembling like a girl on the stairs before the master's door. And then the splendid prank of Dumas, who, on the eve of revolution, went down into the country like one of his own heroes, held up a town, and with a very few friends obtained the submission of the governor, and captured an

arsenal for his party. They were boys, and some hostility was needed for their uttermost delight. In England the battles of art are more like squabbles, but in the Paris of 1830 it seemed as if the town were divided into camps for the defence of classicism and the support of the new ideas. It was as if each point of vantage had to be taken by storm, and the great night of *Hernani*, when Hugo's supporters had red tickets and a password—the Spanish word *hierro*, which means 'steel'—was the noblest memory in the life of at least one of Hugo's enthusiastic lieutenants.

Such a joyous and vigorous thing was the Romanticism of 1830. It touched story-telling through Balzac, Hugo, Dumas, Gautier, and Mérimée, of whom the first three, in turning from the theatre to the art of narrative, found inspiration in Sir Walter Scott. Scott's influence has been one of bulk rather than of quality on English story-telling. But in France, instead of tracing his progeny in insipid copies, we follow it through the bold variations of these three powerful and original minds. Through them it returned to England again. Balzac, as the most important of the three, in view of the later developments of the novel, I have discussed in a separate chapter. Gautier's Oriental and Antique inspiration, and Mérimée's combination of ascetic narrative with vivid subject, are also themes for separate and particular consideration. But Hugo and Dumas are so generally representative of the Romantic movement in story-telling, that in writing of them in this chapter I feel I am but filling in the background already sketched for the others.

The Preface to *Cromwell*.

The theatre was, in 1830, the scene of the most

decisive battle between Romanticism and Classicism. The fight of the painters, of the poets, of the story-tellers, seemed concentrated in the more obvious combat of the dramatists, whose armies could see their enemies, and even come to blows with them. And in Hugo's preface to *Cromwell*, that preface which is now so much more interesting than the play that follows it, he claims several things for the dramatist that by act if not by argument he was later to claim for the artist in narrative. He demands that the sublime and ridiculous should be together in literature and, as in life, win their force from each other. The drama, and so the novel, which also attempts in some sort a reproduction of human existence, is not to be written on a single note. It is not to be wholly sublime or wholly ridiculous, but both at once. The general in his triumphal car is to be genuinely afraid of toppling over. And so, in *Les Misérables*, the student's frolic is whole-heartedly described, without in any way binding the author to make light of the sorrow of Fantine when she finds that her own desertion is the merry surprise at the end of it. The sublime will not be the less sublime for being mingled with the grotesque, and so, in *Notre Dame de Paris*, the deepest passion in the book is felt by a hideous and deformed dwarf, and by this same dwarf rather than by any more obvious impersonation of justice, the lascivious priest is flung from the tower. Looking up in his agony, as he clings to the bending cornice his desperate hands have clutched, he does not meet the eyes of some person of a grandeur matching the moment, but sees the grotesque face of Quasimodo, utterly indifferent to him, looking, like one of the gargoyles, over Paris, with tears on his distorted cheeks.

In this same preface, too, Hugo justifies innovations

in language, very necessary for an art whose new won freedom was to let it explore so much that was unknown. When the body changes, he asks, would you keep the coat the same? Triumphantly appealing to history, he points out that 'the language of Montaigne is no longer that of Rabelais, the language of Pascal is no longer that of Montaigne, and the language of Montesquieu is no longer that of Pascal.' He is justifying there the coloured prose of Chateaubriand, the opulent vocabulary of Gautier, and his own infinitely various effects in prose and verse.

Victor Hugo on Scott.

He was, until Sainte-Beuve took the work from his hands, at once the leader and the defender of Romanticism. And, critic and artist, severally and in the combination that we have grown accustomed to expect in fulfilment of both these functions, his was too sovereign a mind to adopt or borrow anything from another writer without knowing very clearly what he intended to do with it. Writing of *Quentin Durward*, he said: 'Après le roman pittoresque mais prosaïque de Walter Scott il restera un autre roman à créer, plus beau et plus complet encore selon nous. C'est le roman, à la fois drame et épopée, pittoresque mais poètique, réel mais idéal, vrai mais grand, qui enchâssera Walter Scott dans Homère.' That romance is Victor Hugo's own. His tremendous books are conceived in the manner of an epic poet rather than of a novelist or a romancer. The relations of his characters are not solely concerned with themselves but with some large principle that animates the book in which they live. If he is without Norns or Fates, if he sets his characters against a background other than that of Destiny, he substitutes the power of the

law or the power of the sea, and illumines with a story not only the actors who take part in it, but also the spirit of the Gothic or the spirit of revolution.

The Waverley Novels and Hugo's romances.

To turn from the Waverley Novels to the romances of Hugo, is like stepping from the open air into a vast amphitheatre whose enclosed immensity is more overwhelming than the clear sky. Scott writes, on a plain human level, tales that we can readily believe, chronicles that are like private documents, or memoirs such as might have been written by the ancestors of our own families. Hugo does not tell his tale from the point of view of its actors, but puts them before us in a setting far larger than the one they saw. Their petty adventures are but threads chosen arbitrarily from a far more intricate design, and they themselves but illustrations of some greater motion than any to which in their own right they could aspire. There are hundreds of them, and with our narrow powers of interest and attention we fasten on one or two, like children choosing colours on a race-course, and follow them to the end, while Hugo, with his godlike eye, sees them all as threads in his pattern, poor, small lives, twisted in accordance with a design beyond their comprehension. In Scott's open air we can live and breathe and be content, and stand firmly with our feet upon the ground. In Hugo's amphitheatre we see an ordered spectacle of life and death, and are, as it were, present at the shapings of the ends of man.



ALEXANDRE DUMAS

Dumas on Scott.

There is a much less terrible pleasure to be had from the works of Dumas. Behind all Hugo's books is the solemnity, behind Dumas' the joy of living, the *joie de vivre*—the French phrase, although identical,

seems better to express it. To compare Hugo's with Dumas' criticism of the Scott novel is to see very clearly the difference in weight and depth between the two men. Hugo sees in Scott the promise of another and a greater kind of romance. Dumas sees only that it is possible to improve on Scott's technique. He notices that Scott spends half a volume or so in describing his characters before setting them in action, and in his gay way justifies him by saying: 'Il n'y a pas de feu sans fumée, il n'y a pas de soleil sans ombre. L'ennui, c'est l'ombre; l'ennui c'est la fumée.' Sacrifice fifty pages of *ennui* to the gods, and then away with your story. Dumas decides to improve on this, to set his characters moving, and to pour his libations of *ennui* on the way. 'Commencer par l'intérêt, au lieu de commencer par l'ennui; commencer par l'action, au lieu de commencer par la préparation; parler des personnages après les avoir fait paraître, au lieu de les faire paraître après avoir parlé d'eux.' This is not very sublime, after the suggestion that Hugo won from the same subject; but it produced '*Les Trois Mousquetaires*.' D'Artagnan is in a hubbub on the first page, and the *ennui* of description is given us so sparsely that, watching for it chapter by chapter, we almost consider ourselves swindled when we reach the last and are still without it. 'The purpose of this tale is not to describe interiors,' Dumas petulantly ejaculates when tired of talking about Cornelius' room in *La Tulipe Noire*. No; certainly not; neither of rooms nor of men. Damn psychology, and hey for full-blooded adventure. Dumas took a free stage for his duels and headlong rides and gallant adventures and ingenious stratagems. His men moved too fast not to feel themselves encumbered in a furnished room; there was little point in describing a landscape for them,

since, before it was done, they were several leagues off in another; too intricate furniture in their own heads would have cost them hesitancies, unguarded stabs, and possible falls from a galloping horse.

Les Trois Mousquetaires.

Dumas' novels are novels of the theatre. His first piece of work was an attempt to make a melodrama out of *Ivanhoe*, and his best books exhibit the art of Walter Scott modified by the rules of the stage. The curtain rises on people moving about. It falls on a climax. The action of all its scenes is in crescendo. Alter Scott to fit these rules, and you have something like the form that Dumas for more than half a century has imposed on non-psychological fiction. How admirably he filled it himself. Those splendid fellows of his, whose cavalier way fairly takes us off our feet, are not dead puppets made to wield toy swords at the pulling of a string. There is something exuberant and infectious even in the restraint of Athos. They are all alive, not with an independent, almost hostile existence like that of the characters of Balzac, but with a vitality they owe to their creator and to us, the free coursing blood of boyish dreams. They are the things that at one time or another we have set our hearts on being, the things that Dumas actually was. Where they ride a jolly spirit goes with them, and we know that Dumas had only to settle in a quiet village to turn it into a place of gay and prosperous festivity. 'Madeleine,' says D'Artagnan at the end of *Vingt Ans Après*, 'give me the room on the first floor. I must keep up my dignity now that I am captain of the musketeers. But always keep my room on the fifth floor; one never knows what may happen.' Is not that just the attitude of Dumas, who remarked upon his deathbed, 'I took twenty francs

with me to Paris. Well, I have kept them. There they are,' and pointed to his last louis on the mantelpiece. In the flamboyant youthfulness of Dumas, who died a boy at sixty-seven, and called Mazarin 'still young, for he was only fifty-six,' is perhaps that characteristic that made Romanticism in France so complete and satisfactory a Renaissance. When such men as he were writing books the world had won its youth again.

BALZAC

BALZAC

His vitality.

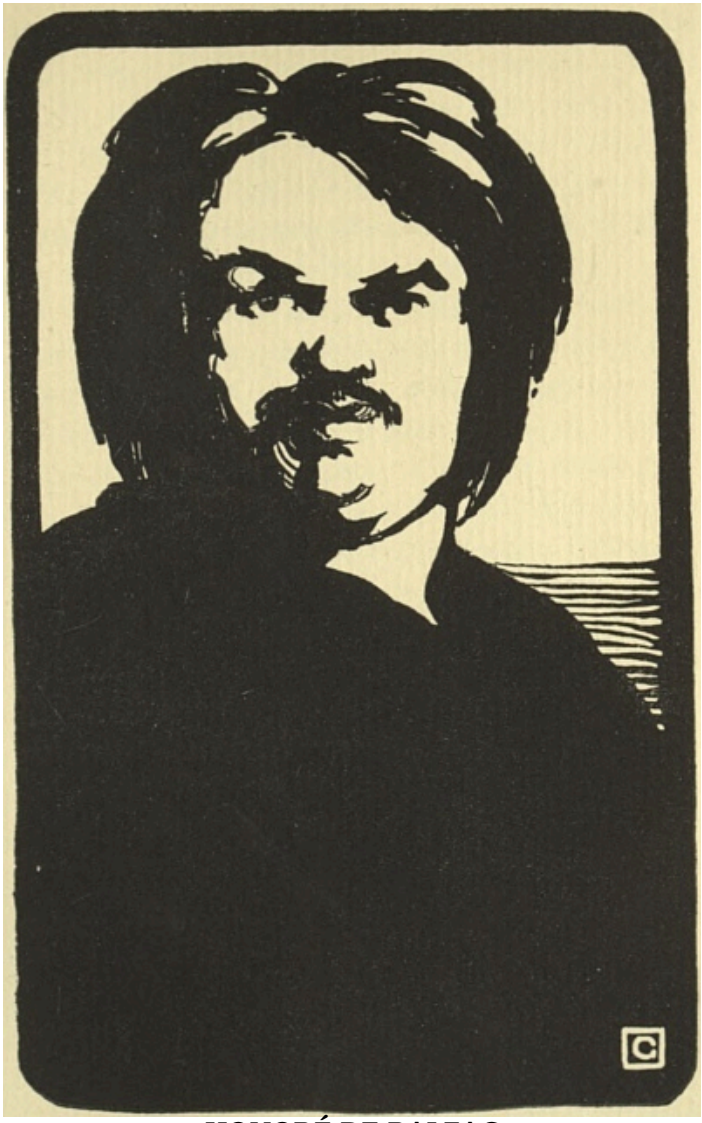
BALZAC used to tell a story of his father, who, when asked to carve a partridge, not knowing how to set about it, rolled up his sleeves, gripped his knife and fork, and cut it in four with such energy as to cleave the plate at the same time and embed the knife in the table. That was the manner of setting about

things natural to Balzac himself. He was a 'joyous wild boar' of a man, with the build and strength of a navvy. He was never ill. Gautier tells us that the habitual expression of that powerful face was a kind of Rabelaisian glee. Now a man who could write the *Comédie Humaine* and look aside from it with a Rabelaisian glee was perhaps the only kind of man who could have attempted such a task without being turned, willy nilly, into a pedant.

The conception of the *Comédie Humaine*.

There was a logic, a completeness, in the groundwork of the scheme, that would have sterilised the imagination of a man with less exuberant vitality. Compare for a moment the *Comédie Humaine* with the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Scott meant to Balzac what Maria Edgeworth had meant to himself. He had seen in her an attempt to paint Irish country and character, and had decided to do the same for Scotland. Balzac after those ten years of bad mediæval stories, those ten years of labour for the Rachel of his own soul, saw in him an attempt to paint Scottish country and character, and decided to do the same for France. But, whereas Scott had been brought up on the *Reliques of English Poetry*, and in the country of purple heather, grey rock, and leaping stream, Balzac was nourished on philosophy and science, and spent his youth in a Paris lodging. Scott saw men rather than kinds of man. Bailie Nicol Jarvie is more Nicol Jarvie than Bailie. Balzac comes at life in a much more scientific spirit. 'Does not Society make of man,' he asks, as Chaucer has unconsciously asked before him, 'as many different men as there are varieties in zoology? The differences between a soldier, a labourer, an administrator, an idler, a savant, a statesman, a

merchant, a sailor, a poet, a pauper, a priest, are, though more difficult to seize, as considerable as those that distinguish the wolf, the lion, the ass, the crow, the shark, the sea-calf, the goat, etc.' Balzac made up his mind to collect specimens of the social species, not pressed and dried, like the old 'Characters' of the seventeenth century, but exhibited alive and in their natural surroundings. He was to make a world with the colour of contemporary France, an 'august lie, true in its details,' a world complete in itself, a world in which all the characters were to show the impress of that state of life to which it should please Balzac to call them. That was the idea that turned the Waverley Novels into the *Comédie Humaine*, that the idea whose exposition by a less full-blooded professor would have been so readily precise, so readily dull in its precision.



HONORÉ DE BALZAC

Physical energy and the task of writing.

Now there are few harder tasks for a man of overflowing physical energy than this, of covering innumerable sheets of paper with wriggling unnatural lines traced with the end of a pen. It is likely to become a torment; the feet cross and uncross, the fingers itch, the inkpot flies across the room, and the energy defeats itself. There is the legend of Scott's hand, covering sheet after sheet so swiftly and with such regularity that it was painful to watch it; but Scott's was not the bomb-like brute energy of Balzac. Balzac, to give life to his scientific ideas, needed a more fiery vitality than Scott's, who began and ended with merely human notions. The actual writing of his books was proportionately more difficult for him. There was no mere eccentricity in his habit of getting the sketches for his books set up in type, and enlarging them from proofs in the middle of large sheets of paper, covering the vast margins with the additions that were to make the books themselves. It was a wise attempt to give himself the same physical outlet as that enjoyed by the painter or sculptor, to give himself something to pull about, something actual, something that could be attacked, anything rather than the terrible silkworm spinning of a single endless fibre. His energy would have been wasted in a hundred ways unless, so far as was possible, he had fitted his work to himself and himself to his work. Giant of concentration as he was, he added cubits to his stature by taking thought. He made his writing hours different from every one else's, wore a white frock something like a monk's habit, and found in the drinking of enormous quantities of coffee a stimulant as much theatrical as medicinal. These things meant much to him, and his use of them was an action similar to that of Poe's schoolboy, who, when

guessing odd or even the marbles in his playmate's hand, would imitate the expression of his adversary's face and see what thoughts arose in his mind. The paraphernalia of work were likely to induce the proper spirit. When all his fellow Parisians were in bed, Balzac, gathering the voluminous white folds about his sturdy person, and glancing at the coffee stewing on the fire, sat down to his writing-table with the conviction of an alderman sitting down to a city dinner. There could never be a doubt in his mind as to the purpose for which he was there.

Balzac's prose.

This navvy-work of production had its influence on the character of his writing. But it was never in Balzac's nature to have understood Gautier's craftsman's delight in the polishing and chasing of diminutive things. Balzac, the working machine, was simply enormous energy so coaxed and trained as to produce an enormous output. The raw material of his rich humanity passed through violent processes. It had but small chance of any very delicate finish. Balzac thought in books and in cycles of books, never in pages, paragraphs, or sentences. Although he was much preoccupied with 'style,' envying the men whose writing would be charming to the ear even if it meant nothing to the mind, the best of his own prose is unbeautiful, rugged, fiercely energetic, peculiarly his own, and therefore not to be grumbled at. He would have liked to write finely, just as he would have liked *la vie splendide*. But his mind, delivering pickaxe blows, or furiously wrestling with great masses of material, could not clothe itself in stately periods. Always, out of any splendour that he made for it, shows a brown, brawny arm, and the splendour becomes an impertinence. He had ideas on

art, as he had ideas on science, but his was too large a humanity to allow itself to be subordinate to either. He was too full-blooded a man to be withered by a theory. He was too eager to say what he had in his mouth to be patient in the modulation of his voice. He was almost too much of a man to be an artist. To think of that man fashioning small, perfect poems, who avowed that he wrote his *Contes Drôlatiques* because he happened to notice the fall in the French birth rate, is to think of a Colossus tinkering at the mechanism of a watch.

His proximity to life.

Then, too, he had been too close to life to think of art for art's sake. During the years that followed his setting up author in a garret, he had watched the existence of those who are so near starvation that they seem to make a living by sweeping the doorstep of Death. And, at the same time that, walking out in the evenings, and following a workman and his wife on their way home, he had been able to feel their rags upon his back, and to walk with their broken shoes upon his feet, he had also had his glimpses of *la vie splendide*, the more vivid, no doubt, for their contrast with the sober realities he knew. To this man, however great a writer he might become, life would always mean more than books. It always did. He could cut short other people's lamentations by saying, 'Well, but let us talk of real things; let us talk of Eugénie Grandet,' but Eugénie Grandet, the miser's daughter, interested him much more than the mere novel of that name. His people never existed for the sake of his books, but always his books for the sake of his people. He makes a story one-legged or humpbacked without scruple, so long as by doing so he can make his reader see a man and his

circumstances exactly as they appeared to himself. He was not like a pure artist, an instrument on which life played, producing beautiful things. His concern with life was always positive. His world was not a world of dream and patterned imagery, but, according to his mood, was an elaborate piece of mechanism and he an impassioned mechanician, or a zoological garden and he an impassioned zoologist. It is almost matter for wonder that such a man should choose to express himself in narrative.

His conception of the novel.

And yet the novel, as he conceived it, gave him the best of opportunities for putting his results before the world. If we allow ourselves to set all our attention on politics and finance and social theory, we lose in life all but the smell of blue-books, and the grey colour of Stock Exchange returns. If Balzac had written science, and not stories, we should have only had the ideas of his novels without that passionate presentment of concrete things that gives those ideas their vitality. Indeed, the novels are far greater than the ideas, just as the poetic, seeing man in Balzac was greater than the scientist. Weariless in distinguishing man from man, type from type, specimen from specimen, by the slightest indication of the clay, he was able in novels, as he could never have done in works of science, to give the colour of each man's life expressed in his actions, in his talk, in his choice of clothes, in the furniture of his room. The action of all novels, like that of all plays, is performed in the brain of the reader or spectator. The novelist's and dramatist's characters are like pieces on a chessboard, symbols of possibilities not obviously expressed. In older fiction these possibilities were left so vague that the reader could

adopt any part he chose, without in the least interfering with the story, independent as that was of personal character. Never before Balzac made them had the chessmen assumed so much of human detail. In his books they are no longer pegs of wood, depending for their meanings on the reader's generosity, for their adventures on the ingenuity of the author. They make their moves in their own rights. The hero of a Balzac novel is not the reader, in borrowed clothes, undergoing a series of quite arbitrary experiences. He cannot be made to do what the author requires, but fills his own suits, and has a private life. Balzac knows and makes his reader feel that his characters have not leapt ready-made into the world to eat and drink through a couple of hundred pages and vanish whence they came. They have left their mark on things, and things have left their mark on them. They have lived in pages where he has not seen them, and Balzac never drags them to take a part in existences to which they do not belong. I can remember no case where Balzac uses a stock scene, a room, or a garden, or a valley that would do for anything. There was only one room, one valley, one garden, where the characters could have said those words, lost that money, or kissed those kisses, and Balzac's stupendous energy is equal not only to pouring life into his people, but also to forcing the particular scene upon his canvas with such vivid strokes that every cobble seems to have a heart, and every flower in a pot to sway its blossoms with the sun. Even in the short stories, where he often follows gods that are not his own, writing of madness like a Hoffmann, and of intrigue like a Boccaccio, his peculiar genius is apparent in the environments. How carefully, in *La Messe de l'Athée*, he works out the conditions of life that made the

story possible for its actors. And, in the longer novels, there is scarcely a sentence unweighted with evidence that is of real import to him who would truly understand the characters and happenings of the book. How much does not the story of *Eugénie Grandet* owe to that description of the little money-getting, vine-growing town of Saumur, with its cobbled streets, its old houses, its greedy faces watching the weather from the house doors, the only proper setting for the narrow power of Goodman Grandet, and the leaden monotony of his daughter's life?

Balzac's world and that of Realism.

Balzac's fierce determination that his lies should be true in their details has often been remarked in claiming him as the first of the French realists. And, indeed, others of his characteristics, his interest in life as it is, the scientific bias that found its parody in Zola, his fearlessness in choice of subject, his entire freedom from classical ideals, are certainly attributes of realism. Realism is ready, like Balzac, to deal with stock exchanges and bakeries and all the side shops of civilisation; realism finds Greek Greek and not an Elixir of Life; realism tries to see life as it is. But realism (an impossible ideal) needs for its approximate attainment a man of ordinary energy; and this Balzac was not. Balzac used Thor's hammer, not one from the carpenter's shop. He lived like ten men and so do his characters. A crossing-sweeper in a story by Balzac would wear out his broom in half an hour, but the broom of a crossing-sweeper of de Maupassant or Flaubert would be certain of an average life. Balzac's world is not the world of realism, because it goes too fast, like a clock without a pendulum, running at full speed. His world is more

alive than ours, and so are his men. They are demons, men carried to the *n*th power. Fire runs in their veins instead of blood, and we watch them with something like terror, as if we were peeping into hell. They are superhuman like Balzac himself, and have become a kind of lesser divinities. None but he would have dared 'to frame their fearful symmetry.' None but they could so well have illustrated existence as Balzac saw it.

A new motive in fiction.

And life, as this Rabelaisian Frenchman saw it, in the chaotic years of the nineteenth century, was a terrible thing except to the blind and the numbed, and to those who, like himself, possessed 'unconquerable souls.' He found two primary motives in existence. Passion and the production of children was one. He said that this was the only one. But his life and his work made it clear that there was another, and that this other was money. Money, the need of it, the spending of it, fantastic but always acute plans for getting hold of it, like that suggested in *Facino Cane*, filled his own life, and were not banished even from his love-letters. His own obsession by debts and business forced on him as a novelist a new way of looking at life, and, through him, gave another outlook to story-telling. In the older novels, Fielding's for example, rich were rich, and poor were poor, and only to be changed from one to the other by some calamity or fairy godmother of a coincidence. People were static; unless they turned out to be Somebody's illegitimate son or rightful heir, their clothes were not of a finer cut as they grew older, and if they ate off wooden platters in the first chapter, they supped no more daintily in the last. In romantic tales and fairy

stories, a hero might cut his way to fortune through dragons or piratical Turks; in the rogue novels he might swindle a dinner, and after long switchbacking between twopence and nothing, happen by accident upon a competence; he never, before Balzac took him in hand, went grimly at life, closing his heart, concentrating his energies, compelling even love to help him in his steady climb from poverty to opulence. He left that to the villain, and the story-teller took care that the villain eventually got his deserts. The older novelists were vastly interested in the progress of a love-affair; Balzac looks kindly at that, but his real interest is in the progress of a financial superman. The wealth and poverty of Balzac's characters is the quality that makes or breaks them. The mainspring of their actions is the desire of getting on in life. What is the tragedy of Eugénie Grandet, but money? What is the tragedy of Père Goriot, but money? Eliminate wealth and poverty from either of them and they cease to exist. If old Goriot had been rich and indulgent to his daughters he would have been an estimable father; but he is poor; his daughters must be luxurious, and so he is Père Goriot. The story is that of Lear and his kingdom, translated into hundred franc notes and lacking the Cordelia. Love, Wisdom, Gentleness are inconsequent dreamers in a house of Mammon. They talk in window corners and behind curtains, ashamed of their disinterestedness. They are like the old gods banished from the temples, whispering in secret places in the woods, and going abroad quietly in the twilight, while in the glare of noon the clanking brazen giant strides heavily across the world.

'And underneath his feet, all scattered lay

Dead skulls and bones of men, whose life had gone
astray.'

GAUTIER AND THE EAST

GAUTIER AND THE EAST

The East as a means of expression.

THE East is an invention of the nineteenth century. We have only to look at the works of Voltaire or of Goldsmith to see that the Orient did not exist before the time of the Romantic movement. To early writers it meant nothing but polygamy, moguls, elephants, and 'bonzes,' and the eighteenth-century translation of the *Arabian Nights* did little more than supply an entertaining form to an ironical philosopher. Even when it became the fashion to make imaginary Orientals expose the follies of the West, the East had not yet become alive for us. We find scarcely a hint in the hundred and twenty letters of *The Citizen of the World* that it meant more than a dialectical

expression for topsy-turvydom, a place to which you could refer as to Lilliput or to Brobdingnag, useful like the *x* of algebra in illustrating the properties of other things. The first glimmerings of discovery are in Beckford's *Vathek*, an extravagant book, belittled by a schoolboyish humour—as when the Caliph plays football with the rotund figure of the Indian Magician—but written by a man to whom the East did really mean some sort of gorgeous dream.

For the East is not an expression of philosophy, or of geography, but of temperament; it is a dream that has led many to leave their people for its people, their homes for desert tents, in the effort to turn its conventions into realities of life. Men have fallen in love with it, as they have fallen in love with statues or with the beautiful women of pictures. It means more than itself, like a man whom time has lifted into Godhead. It has been given the compelling power of a religion. I believe it was an invention made possible by the discovery of local colour. With the emphasis of local colour came an emphasised difference in places. Minds only mildly preferring one place to another when both were vague, most vigorously preferred one or other place when both were realised in vivid detail, and could be readily compared. Fastidious minds seeking the stage-properties of expression could choose them in the booths of all the world. Men who did not care for the settings of their own lives were able to fill out their dim Arcadias with detail, and vein their phantom goddesses with blood.

The East, when Gautier was growing up in the rich tastes of the Romantic movement, was ready to supply the most delicious conventions. Goethe had shown its possibilities. It was there like a many-

coloured curtain behind which he could build a world less entangled, less unmanageable than his own. Its newness must not be forgotten in considering his use of it, and in thinking of his use of Antiquity we must remember that it was as novel as the East.

The Antique.

Now the Antique was one of the cudgels with which the Classicists tried to beat the heads of the Romanticists in the battles of that time. It did not mean to Gautier what it meant to them. Its metamorphosis was simultaneous with the birth of the East, and had almost the same cause. Insisting on local colour in places, the Romanticists insisted also on local colour in humanity. Cromwell was to be allowed to say that he had the parliament in his bag and the king in his pocket. Cæsar was to be allowed to talk like a man and even to be one. So that for Gautier Antiquity meant not a cold inhumanity that had been beautiful, but a warm, full-blooded life that worshipped simple, energetic gods, and found expression in a thousand ways other than the speech of blank verse and heroic actions that had been so often represented in pictures of an annoying timidity of colouring. The East and the Antique together had been touched as if by magic, and turned from the abstract into the concrete, from the heroic into the human, and so into the very material for personal expression.

The East and Arcadia.

Gautier's attitude towards the East is not unlike that of the Elizabethans towards Arcadia. Sir Philip Sidney, courtier, soldier, and busy statesman, wrote

in terms of shepherds, shepherdesses, and shipwrecked princes, and worked in an ideal atmosphere where no cares were greater than love, or a thorn in a lamb's foot. He, with

'A sweet attractive kinde of grace
A full assurance given by lookes,
Continual comfort in a face,
The lineaments of gospel bookes,'

seemed to belong to that Golden Age which has never been now, but always long ago. And Gautier, busy writer of articles and travel-books, massive and vividly alive, could not persuade himself to be Parisian and contemporary. Nor would it be extravagant to compare him with the pastoral writers of to-day, Celtic and Gaelic, who like him lift their emotions into a simpler, more congenial atmosphere, and like him insist continually on the local colour of their dreams. These writers, sitting in London or in Edinburgh, hear, without moving from their comfortable chairs, the cry of the curlew on the moor, and are transported to a quiet bay, half enclosed by cliffs, 'in two white curves, like the wings of the solander when she hollows them as she breasts the north wind,' and under the spells of an intenser imagined life find their own emotions more vivid and more easily expressed. Gautier, sitting in Paris, sees the swallows fluttering about the roofs and flying south in autumn.

'Je comprends tout ce qu'elles disent,
Car le poète est un oiseau;
Mais captif ses élans se brisent
Contre un invisible réseau!

Des ailes! des ailes! des ailes!

Comme dans le chant de Ruckert,
Pour voler, là-bas avec elles
Au soleil d'or, au printemps vert!'

That cry for wings is the keynote of his most passionately beautiful work. When he is at his best; when he is not projecting young men with a mathematical freedom of morals into a Western society; in those moments when he is most himself, we hear clipped feathers beat against the bars. He sought to escape from Paris to the Enchanted Islands, and from the nineteenth century to the Golden Age. The Enchanted Islands he had identified with the East, and the Golden Age was the time of the Pharaohs or of the making of the Venus. As the Christian fingers his crucifix and is able to kneel upon the footsteps of the throne, so Gautier found talismans to help his dreams to their desires. A mummy's foot, a marble hand took him to the times he loved, or half revealed the perfections that reality refused. A curiosity shop was a postern-gate to heaven, and a merchant of antiquities held St. Peter's keys.

The story-telling of dreams.

His art is that of making his dreams come true. He is not an observer of life, like Richardson, Fielding, or De Maupassant. He does not copy the surface of contemporary existence; but cuts away all but passion, and clothes that in symbols whose strangeness disentangled it and helped him to make it real. Beautiful women step down to him from their tapestries, and, living on drops of his blood, come back to him out of their graves. The Princess Hermonthis claims her little foot that he has bought as a paper-weight, and takes him to the tomb of the

Pharaohs and the pre-adamite kings sitting with their thousand peoples waiting for the final day. The Pompeian harlot is brought alive by the love of a youth for the imprint her perfect breasts have left in molten lava. He is ill at ease in his most famous *Roman de la Momie* until he has finished with the Englishman and the doctor, and is translating the scroll of papyrus buried three thousand years ago with Tahoser in the sarcophagus.



THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

Gautier the man.

But it is too easy to construct a man out of his work.

It is more interesting to compare the man of this world with the man he would have liked to be, and the man he chose to express. Gautier was not pure dreamer. Though the world of his art was as far from the world of Paris, as the world of Mr. Yeats from the world of London or Dublin, he was not a seer, or a poet between whom and reality hung a veil of dreams. He was a solid man, one of whose proudest memories was a blow that registered five hundred and thirty-two pounds on an automatic instrument, the result of daily washing down five pounds of gory mutton with three bottles of red Bordeaux. He was a Porthos, and the Gautier of his stories, that gorgeous barbaric figure, was his boast, cherished as Porthos cherished his dignity. The traits he loved in himself were those that gave colour to his fiction. His olive skin, his strength, his vitality, his scorn of the religion of sacrifice—these were the details he caressed. He was never tired of insisting on everything that helped in this Oriental and Antique projection of himself. His hero in *Mademoiselle de Maupin* exclaims: 'I am a man of the Homeric times; the world where I live does not belong to me, and I do not understand the society about me. Christ has not yet come for me; I am as pagan as Alcibiades and Phidias.... I find the earth as beautiful as heaven, and I think that perfection of form is virtue. I love a statue better than a phantom, and full noon better than twilight. Three things please me: gold, marble and purple, splendour, solidity, colour.' When a reviewer described him as a being, 'fat, jovial, and sanguinary,' he quotes the description with gratitude, and explains gleefully that it refers to his taste for bull-fights. He begins a book: 'People have often caricatured us, dressed like a Turk, cross-legged on cushions.... The caricature is only an exaggeration of

the truth.' That was how he liked to think of himself, and how he would like to be imagined. It is interesting to know that he was a kindly bear of a man, who was always called by his Christian name, and delighted in astonishing his friends with outbursts of genius served up in a joyous obscenity.

He was not a man of wealth as his work suggests; but an extremely industrious journalist. Like Balzac, he was proud of his prodigious activity. He confesses that he wrote about three hundred volumes: but that is the estimate of Porthos; his biographer puts the number at sixty. From his twenty-fifth year he was an artist on a treadmill, and only at every hundredth, or two hundredth, or three hundredth turn of the wheel could he escape for a little and try to satisfy himself. That is why his poems and shorter stories are the most perfect specimens of his later work. He needed things that could be roughed out in a sitting and carried about without risk until the time when he could work on them again. He was able to hurry out of sight his dozen sheets for the *Presse* or the *Figaro*, sit down on his cushions, let his fingers run through the long hair of a Persian cat, and turn over again and again one of the minute Enamels or Cameos of his poetry. In so small a space he could afford to be fastidious. He could take up the little thing a week later, and a month after that, and file and polish it to his content. It was the same with the stories. The story-telling Gautier was a Gautier on holiday.

He was a complete man, and could, in active life, have twisted the present if he had chosen. But he did not choose. As for politics, 'what does it matter whether one is ruled by a sabre, a sprinkler of holy-water, or an umbrella?' He has been censured for

this, but the censure means no more than to say he was a perfect artist unfortunately not interested in local government. One does not ask a shoemaker if his soles and uppers are Socialist or only gentle Liberal. As for his own life, he worked hard, brought up his children, but found his emotions too intricate to please him. He had to separate them, and translate them into terms of another time and place. Modernity rattled past him, like the chariots of the king past the potter, who would not look up from his wheel lest an ugly curve should throw awry the vessel he was shaping. Gautier did his duty by this world and left it, discovering for others what Baudelaire called 'the consolation of the arts,' and finding peace himself in the less encumbered simplicity of his Ancient and Oriental Arcadia.

The flowers of the white narcissus.

His work was the construction of a paradise for himself in which other people are allowed to walk. His stories are a substitute for opium and haschisch, and take us into a world like that of old romance and myth, where we meet our own souls walking in strange clothes. 'Art,' says Santayana, 'so long as it needs to be a dream, will never cease to be a disappointment.' We leave a volume of Gautier as we leave the *Mabinogion*, or the *Morte Darthur*, or the *Volsunga Saga*, or a book of fairy-tales. We have to readjust ourselves before meeting the difficulties of life. But opposite Santayana's sentence we may set one from Mahomet. 'If any man have two loaves, let him sell one, and buy flowers of the white narcissus; for the one is food for the body and the other is food for the soul.' And perhaps this art, where the world is simplified into the conventions of a tapestry, by its intense appeal to primitive emotions, may help us

like a touchstone to distinguish between the things to which more than lip-service is slavery, and the things to which less than life-service is death.

POE AND THE NEW TECHNIQUE

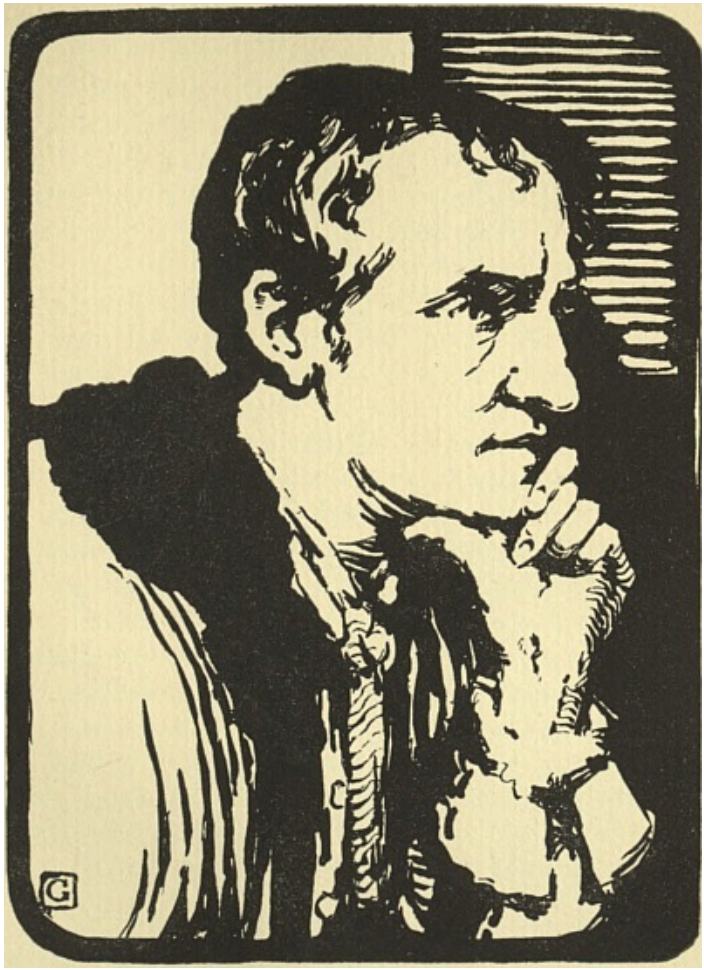
POE AND THE NEW TECHNIQUE

Self-conscious method.

'It is the curse,' says Poe, 'of a certain order of mind that it can never rest satisfied with the consciousness of its ability to do a thing. Not even is it content with doing it. It must both know and show how it was done.' It is all very well to call it a curse; it is the curse that gave us Leonardo's notebooks, Reynolds' Discourses, and Stevenson's few essays on the art of writing; the curse that is among the reasons of Leonardo's excellence, Reynolds' excellence, Stevenson's excellence, and the excellence of Poe himself. It is the curse that is the secret of all real knowledge of technique. The man who is as

interested in the way of doing a thing as in the thing when done, is the man who is likely to put a new tool in the hands of his fellow-craftsmen.

Poe's methods were such a delight to him that his works have an uncanny atmosphere about them, as if he had not written them but had been present, passionately observant and critical, while they were being written by somebody else. More than once he used his pen to make a new thing out of a discussion of an old one, and on these occasions he dissects his own motives in so impersonal a manner that it is difficult for the reader to remember that the author examining is in any way connected with the author undergoing examination. *The Raven*, for example, a profound piece of technique, is scarcely as profound, and certainly not as surprising, as *The Philosophy of Composition*, in which its construction is minutely analysed, and Poe callously explains, as a matter of scientific rather than personal interest, that the whole poem was built on the refrain 'Nevermore,' and that this particular refrain was chosen on account of the sonority and ease of *o* and *r* sounded together. It was inevitable that such a man busying himself with story-telling should bring something new into the art.



WILLIAM GODWIN

William Godwin and *Caleb Williams*.

Another story-teller, who, like Poe, was a philosopher and deeply interested in technique, had existed before, and from him Poe had that strengthening of his ideas that is given by outside

confirmation. He refers often to William Godwin, the author of *An Enquiry concerning Political Justice* and of several novels, among them one now most undeservedly half forgotten, called *Caleb Williams*. It is seldom possible to point to any one book as the sign-post of a literary cross-roads, but there can be no doubt that in *Caleb Williams* we see the beginnings of self-conscious construction in story-telling. Of that book Hazlitt wrote: 'No one ever began *Caleb Williams* that did not read it through: no one that ever read it could possibly forget it, or speak of it after any length of time but with an impression as if the events and feelings had been personal to himself.' And the author not only had done this, but had known how it was done. It is usual to say that Poe himself was the first to choose an effect and then plan a story to produce it. But *Caleb Williams* was published in 1794, and in a preface to one of the later editions Godwin gave his methods away. On him also lay that fruitful curse. He wrote: 'I formed a conception of a book of fictitious adventure that should in some way be distinguished by a very powerful interest. Pursuing this idea, I invented first the third volume of my tale, then the second, and last of all the first.'

Godwin perhaps did not realise how revolutionary was his attitude, and even Hazlitt, delighted as he was by their results, does not seem to have noticed the novelty of his methods. But Poe, finding Godwin's ideas of the very temper of his own, developed them logically as far as they would go, and in two paragraphs that I am going to quote, expressed in a final manner the principles of self-conscious construction.

The architecture of narrative.

The first is taken from an essay on Hawthorne:

> 'A skilful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but, having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be worked out, he then invents such incidents—he then contrives such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of the effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed.' ...

The second is more personal, and from *The Philosophy of Composition*:

> 'I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect*.... Keeping originality always in view, I say to myself, in the first place, "Of the innumerable effects or impressions of which the heart, the intellect, or

> (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion, select?" Having chosen a novel first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought out by incident or tone—whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone—afterwards looking about me (or rather within) for such combination of event and tone as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect.'

The Masque of the Red Death.

Here, of course, he is exaggerating actual fact to make his meaning more clear; but I am sure that even the exaggeration is deliberate. If he did not literally work in that way he certainly worked in that spirit. A writer of Poe's fertility of imagination would be at least biassed in choosing his effect by consideration of material already in his head. But, the effect once chosen, he left nothing to chance. He would never, like the older story-tellers, allow himself to be carried away by a wave of his own emotion. He stands beside de Maupassant and the conscious artists of the latter half of the nineteenth century. His emotional material is never emptied carelessly in front of the reader. Chosen scraps of it are laid before him, one by one, in a chosen order, producing a more powerful effect than the unrestrained discharge of the whole. The first sentences of one of his stories prepare its readers for the atmosphere demanded by its conclusion. In *The Masque of the Red Death*, for example, revolting

horror is the emotion on which he built. So, from the terrible opening lines, 'The Red Death had long devastated the country. No pestilence had ever been so fatal and so hideous. Blood was its Avatar and seal —the redness and the horror of blood. There were sharp pains and sudden dizziness, and then profuse bleeding at the pores, with dissolution ...' to the end, 'And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed hall of their revel, and died, each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all,' we are led on through consciously created disquietude and terror. How menacing is the sentence that immediately follows the prelude: 'But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious.' We feel at once that the shadow of death is at his elbow.

The detective stories.

Perhaps Poe's technique is more easily examined in those of his tales in which the same faculties that planned the construction supplied also the motive. The three great detective stories, *The Purloined Letter*, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, and *The Mystery of Marie Roget*, are made of reasoning and built on curiosity, the very mainspring of analysis. It is a profitable delight to take any one of these stories, and, working backwards from the end to the beginning, to follow the mind of the architect. Each of the tales states a difficulty and secretes an explanation that is gradually to be reached by the reader, who identifies the processes of his own mind

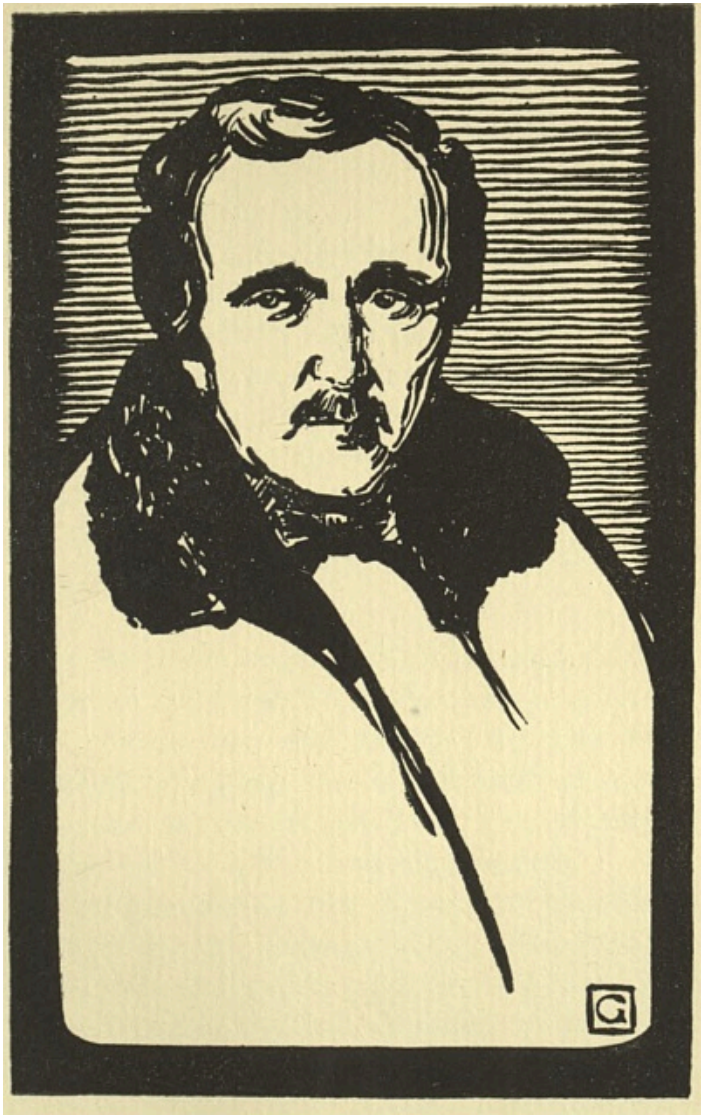
with those of the analytical Dupin. Starting always with the solution, we can watch Poe refusing the slightest irrelevance, and at the same time artfully piling up detail upon detail in exactly that order best calculated to keep the secret, to heighten the curiosity, to disturb the peace of the reader's mind, and to hold him in conjectural suspense until the end.

Poe's mind.

But it is easy, in considering the technique of Poe's stories, his smiling refusal of 'inspiration,' his confident mastery over his material, to let the brilliance of his analytical powers hide from us his intimacy with the beautiful, the richness and vividness of his imagination, and, particularly, the passionate character of his mind. Like Leonardo da Vinci, he was a man whose works were the result of the energetic fusing of an emotional personality into moulds designed by reason. Not all Leonardo's theories and calculations would have sufficed to make a *Mona Lisa*. And if Poe had been merely a skilled technician, like so many of his imitators, we should have had from him only unbeautiful toys no less valueless than theirs. All Poe's work depends, like all Leonardo's, on his power of retaining the poetry, the energy of his material, after submitting it to his constructive science, and then, when the moulds have been made, of pouring it into them red-hot and fluid, as if in the primal vitality of its conception. In those very detective stories, that seem built by and of the coldest-blooded reason, what is it that makes them great but Poe's absorbing passion for the manner of mind of their leading character. Dupin is not a mere detective. He is not an analyst, but analysis. He is the embodiment of the logical

spirit in mankind, just as Nicolete, in the old French tale, is the embodiment of the loving spirit in womankind. It is for this reason that some have accused Dupin and Nicolete of a lack of individuality. They are not individual, but universal.

If we would understand the matter as well as the manner of his stories, we must think of him as two men, and remember that the same sensibility that served the man of anagrams, and ciphers, and detective puzzles, served also the worshipper of beauty, and made him tremble like a lover at the faintest whisper of her name. Delicately balanced, alike as analyst and æsthete, he was moved profoundly by the smallest circumstance. Just as a glass of wine was sufficient to overturn his reason, so the least wind of suggestion stirred his brain in a deep and surprising manner. Nothing that happened to him touched him only on the surface. Everything dropped to the depths of him, and sometimes returned enriched and recreated. Ideas that others would have passed over became for him and for his readers powerful, haunting and inevitable. Ideas of mesmerism, of hypnotism, and of madness, that have been for so many lesser artists only the materials for foolishness, were pregnant for him with wonderful effects and stories that, once read, can never be forgotten. In *William Wilson* he is using less flippantly than Stevenson the idea of dual personality. In *The Oval Portrait*, where a painter transfers the very soul of his lady to his canvas, and, as the portrait seems to breathe alive, turns round to find her dead, he is using the subtle, half-thought things that an earlier writer would scarcely have felt, or, if he had, would have brushed, like cobwebs, secretly aside.



EDGAR ALLAN POE

His failures.

With a mind so sensitive, a coinage so rare, and a technique so thorough, it is curious that he should so frequently have failed. And yet, when we examine his failures they are not difficult to explain. They are due in every case, saving only his attempts to be funny, which are like hangman's jokes, to sudden rents in the veils of his illusions, made by single impossible phrases whose impossibility he seems to have been unable to recognise. I could give a hundred examples, but perhaps none better than the excruciating line in an otherwise beautiful poem, where he tells us that

'The sweet Lenore hath "gone before," with Hope,
that flew beside.'

Lapses like that destroy like lightning flashes the mysterious atmosphere he has been at pains to create. They are the penalty he had to pay for being a citizen in a youthful democracy. Americans are never safe from the pitfalls of a language that is older than their nation.

His isolation.

In the America of that time, Poe was like the little boy in the grocer's shop, who, while the shopmen are busy with paper and string, dreams of green meadows and scribbles verses on the sugar bags. Even in Europe he would have been one of those men 'who live on islands in the sea of souls.' There are some like Scott and Gautier who are always called by their Christian names, and can talk unreservedly with a thousand. There are others more aloof in mind of whom it is difficult even to think with familiarity. It seems fitting enough to hear of Scott as Walter or Wattie, and of Gautier as Théo,

even in old age; but who would have dared to call that man Tommy who heard in tavern song some echo of the music of the spheres? There are men who cannot be habitually good companions, and, when the talk is at its loudest, turn from the crowd, pull aside the curtain, and look up to see the pale moon far above the housetops. Such a man was Poe. He would have been lonely even in the city of Europe where he could perhaps have found three men of his own aloofness from the inessential, his own hatred of the commonplace, his own intense belief in individualism. He was extraordinarily lonely in America. His love of beauty, his elevation of his work above its results in gold, were next to incomprehensible by that people in that chaotic state of their development. Energetic and wholly practical, fiercely busied with material advancement, they could not understand his passionate, impractical, intellectual existence. His biographer, a literary man, remembered not that he was a great artist, but that he died through drink, not that he had made beautiful things but that he had gained little money by doing so. In the Poe who 'reeled across Broadway on the day of the publication of *The Raven*,' in the Poe who died in an hospital, they forgot the reality, and, in their hurry, found it easy to make a melodrama out of a gentle and inoffensive life. Their traditional idea of Poe allows his extravagances to represent him. It is as if we were to describe some hills by saying there was a lightning flash between the peaks. I prefer to think of the little cottage at Fordham, where he lived with his wife and her mother, and their pets, parrots and bobolinks, a peaceful, small citadel held by those three friends against the world. Throughout Poe's harassed existence this note of gentleness and quiet is always

sounding somewhere below the discords of penury and suffering.

His work.

The result of his isolation, his poverty, his sensibility, and his intellectual energy was a great deal of work of no value whatever, some melancholy and beautiful verse, critical articles of a kind then new in America, a philosophical poem, some tales of the same flavour as the most delightful of Euclid's propositions, and some other stories that can only be fully enjoyed by those who come to them with the reverence and careful taste it is proper to bring to a glass of priceless wine. It is by them chiefly that he will be remembered. They are a delicacy, not a staple of food. They are not stories from which we can learn life; but they are the key to strange knowledge of ourselves. They leave us richer, not in facts but in emotions. We find our way with their help into novel corners of sensation. They are like rare coloured goblets or fantastic metal-work, and we find, often with surprise, that we have waited for them. That is their vindication, that the test between the valueless and the invaluable of the fantastic. There are tales of twisted extravagance that stir us with no more emotion than is given by an accidental or capricious decoration never felt or formed in the depths of a man. But these stories, like those patterns, however grotesque, that have once meant the world to a mind sensible to beauty, have a more than momentary import. Like old melody, like elaborate and beautiful dancing, like artificial light, like the sight of poison or any other concentrated power, they are among the significant experiences that are open to humanity.

HAWTHORNE AND MORAL ROMANCE

HAWTHORNE AND MORAL ROMANCE

The essayist in story-telling.

HAWTHORNE is one of the earliest story-tellers whom we remember as much for himself as for his books. He is loved or hated, as an essayist is loved or hated, without reference to the subjects on which he happened to write. He wrote in a community for whom a writer was still so novel as to possess some rags of the old splendours of the sage; an author was something wonderful, and no mere business man. He had not to expect any hostility in his reader, but rather a readiness to admire (of which he seldom took advantage), and an eagerness to enjoy him for his own sake. He could assume, as an essayist assumes when he dances naked before his readers, that they were not there to scoff. He brought a sweet ingenuous spirit into modern story-telling that would perhaps have been impossible had he been writing for a more sophisticated audience. We love him for it. He made books, he said, 'for his known and unknown friends.' As he says it, he brings us all into the circle. When we think of Fielding, Bunyan, or Cervantes, we think of *Tom Jones*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Don Quixote*; when we think of *Elia*, *Table Talk*,

and *The Scarlet Letter*, we think of Lamb, Hazlitt, and Hawthorne.

Hawthorne and Poe.

This engaging, unsuspicious, essayistical attitude of his would have been quite impossible to Poe; but we must remember that Hawthorne and Poe, although contemporary, knew very different Americas. Poe's birth was a kind of accident, and he approached America penniless, so that she was a hostile place to him, a country of skinflint editors and large terrible towns, from which to escape in books, and, as far as possible, in life. He hated the New America, but he belonged to her. Hawthorne belonged to the old. His family connected him with her history; he was never at her mercy; as we learn from his rambling prefaces, that would be intolerable in a less lovable writer, she was endeared to him by a delightful boyhood, and did not refuse him a peaceful youth of devotion to his art. She never treated him otherwise than tenderly, and he did not leave her until as a representative of her people, nor sought escape from her in books, except for those of his shadowy creatures who could move with greater freedom in a less bread-and-buttery fairyland.



NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Hawthorne's life.

His life, as we learn it from those prefaces and from his biographers, was as gentle as the man himself.

We read of quiet days of work in a study from whose windows he could watch the sunlight through the willow boughs; of days on the river with Thoreau in a canoe which that angular reformer had built with his own hands; of meetings with Emerson walking in the woods, 'with that pure intellectual gleam diffused about his person like the garment of a shining one'; of evenings before the red fire in a little room with white moonlight bringing out the patterns on the carpet, weaving the tapestries of dream that were next day to come alive upon the paper. These people, who were to make the intellectual life of America, were not American in the peace of their existence. Hawthorne, in the newest of all countries, wrote 'in a clear, brown, twilight atmosphere.' He was a lover of secondhand things, and so clothed things with his imagination that all he touched was green with ivy. No contemporary or even historical romances have about them such ancient tenderness and legendary dusk as his. It is extraordinary to think that he was born within two years of Poe. He thought 'the world was very weary, and should recline its vast head on the first convenient pillow and take an age-long nap.' America, at least, had a thousand other things to do, but it was not until he had seen Europe that Hawthorne recognised the fact.

His notebooks.

His notebooks reflect at the same time this quiet life and its excitements, the stirring adventures of an artist in search of perfection. He 'had settled down by the wayside of life like a man under an enchantment.' None but the artist can know how happy such enchantment is. He notices the flashing soles of a boy's bare feet running past him in the wood, and 'a whirlwind, whirling the dried leaves

round in a circle, not very violently.' He writes one day, 'The tops of the chestnut trees have a whitish appearance, they being, I suppose, in bloom'; two days later, unsatisfied, he makes another attempt to fit his words to his impression:—'The tops of the chestnut trees are peculiarly rich, as if a more luscious sunshine were falling on them than anywhere else, "Whitish," as above, don't express it.' One of his biographers, himself no mean artist, suggests that Hawthorne's must have been a dull existence, if in it such trifles were worthy of note. But the frequency of such notes, interspersed by innumerable sketches for stories, is not a sign of the poverty of Hawthorne's life but of its opulence. For Hawthorne, busied always with dim things not easily expressed, every walk was a treasure hunt that might supply some phrase, some simile, that would give blood and sinew to the ghost of an idea.

The material of his work.

His friends were as far removed from the ordinary as himself. He was never 'bustled in the world of workaday.' Even his spell of life as surveyor in the Customs was such that his description of it reads not unlike Charles Lamb's recollections of the old clerks in the South-Sea House. The Customs House was a place of sleep and cobwebs, and the people in it, mostly retired sea-captains, 'partook of the genius of the place.' 'Pour connaître l'homme,' says Stendhal, 'il suffit de l'étudier soi-même; pour connaître les hommes, il faut les pratiquer.' Hawthorne had never kept company with men; his nature and his circumstances made him learn man from his own heart. He was never hampered as a romancer by the kind of knowledge that would have made him a novelist. He deals not with manners, for he had little

opportunity of studying them, nor with passions, for they had not greatly troubled him, but with conscience. He plays upon the strings of conscience, and, dusty as the instrument may be, his playing wakes an echo.

Perhaps if he had been less personal, less lovable, we could not have tolerated his tampering with those secret strings whose music is so novel and so poignant. Certainly we would have found him intolerable if he had been less serious. If he had jangled those fibres with a laugh they would have given no response. If he had waked them with a careless discord they would have broken. We can bear it because he is Hawthorne; we listen to him because he is in earnest. All, in such matters, depends upon the attitude of the artist. War, for example, is a terrible thing in Tolstoy, a joyous thing in Dumas, and an ordinary thing, neither terrible nor joyous, in Smollett. We take to ourselves something of an artist's outlook, and sin is nothing to us unless we hear of it from a man to whom it is momentous.

Goya's 'Monk and Witch'.

I remember a little picture by Goya representing a monk and a witch. The woman, with white staring eyeballs, wide nostrils, fallen jaw, shrinks back against the monk in puling terror; and he, crazed utterly, his eyes fixed on nothingness, shrieks with gaping mouth some horrid incantation that drowns the gasping breathing of the witch. Theirs is no physical fear of fire or sword or scourge: they have sinned, and seen the face of God. Before me are a set of reproductions of Holbein's 'Dance of Death.' Death lies before the feet of the burgess in the road, plucks unconcernedly at the robe of the abbot, viciously

sticks a spear through the middle of the knight, and snuffs the altar candles in the nun's cell, where her young lover is playing on a guitar. But the picture of Judgment at the end is no more than a careless grace after meat. It is there with propriety but without conviction. Death is a full stop, not a comma. What is it to me that the burgess may have cheated, the abbot be a hypocrite, the knight a roysterer, and the nun a wanton? Death is close at hand to put a stop to the doings of them all. I do not know what was the sin of the monk or the witch, and yet the mere memory of their spiritual terror moves me more than the pictures before my eyes. Their peril is not of this world.

The background of Hawthorne's tales.

Hawthorne's finest stories are a Dance of Death, in which Death is no mere end of a blind alley, but a dividing of the ways. Those dim people he found in his own soul are important to us by their chances of salvation or damnation. Their feet

'Are in the world as on a tight-rope slung
Over the gape and hunger of Hell.'[8]

The background to their actions is not happiness and misery, questions of this world only, but righteousness and mortal sin. The fortunes of Hawthorne's characters are shaping for Eternity. When Ethan Brand flings himself into the furnace, what one of Hawthorne's readers ever thought he died there?

Even this dignity of grave belief, combined with the charm of the writer, would not excuse unskilful playing. But Hawthorne is as dexterous on his chosen

instrument as Poe on his, and as consciously an artist as Stevenson, who indeed, in *Markheim*, plays, no more skilfully than he, Hawthorne's peculiar tune. In the preface to *The House of the Seven Gables* there is a paragraph that, though long, it is not impertinent to quote. It shows how carefully he had thought out the possibilities, and how scrupulously he had defined the limits, of his chosen art.

Romance and Novel.

> 'When a writer calls his work a Romance it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume had he professed to be writing a Novel. The latter form of composition is presumed to aim at a very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. The former—while, as a work of art, it must subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart—has fairly a right to present that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he thinks fit, also, he may so manage his atmospherical medium as to bring out or mellow the lights, and deepen and enrich the shadows of the picture. He will

> be wise, no doubt, to make a very moderate use of the privileges here stated, and especially to mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavour, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the public. He can hardly be said, however, to commit a literary crime, even if he disregard this caution.'

There is a hint here of the provincial pedant; 'dishes offered to the public' are a little out of date; but the principles are sound. Hawthorne could not give clear outlines to the results of his 'burrowings in our common nature' unless he set them in an atmospherical medium that made such outlines possible for things so vague and so mysterious. Romance left him free to do so. He could make a world to fit them, a patterned world, coloured to suggest New England, Italy, or Nowhere. He was never forced to shock us by introducing them into quite ordinary life. He never loses command over his 'atmospherical medium,' and never weakens the importance of his characters by letting them escape from the dominion of morals. And yet his stories are not 'impaled on texts.' Moral feeling makes them alive, but it is treated like the Marvellous—'mingled as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavour.' No artist had ever such tricky balances to keep. No artist keeps his balance more successfully.

Devices of craftsmanship.

His artistry is as subtle in the details as in the design. It is hard to examine his stories unmoved. But, if we quiet our consciences, and still the

throbbing of our hearts, and force ourselves to read them paragraph by paragraph with scientific calm, we find there are few tales from which we can learn more delicate devices of craftsmanship in making afraid, and in giving reality to intangible and mysterious things. Before such skill the most prosaic reader surrenders his reason and shudders with the rest.

Notice, for example, in *Rappacini's Daughter*, Hawthorne's way of making credible the marvellous. He states the miracle quite simply, and by asking 'Was it really so?' lays, without making his intention obvious, a double emphasis on every point. On every point he throws a doubt, and stamps belief into the mind. When Giovanni wonders if Beatrice is like the flowers in that rich garden of death, in breath and body poisonous, 'to be touched only with a glove, nor to be approached without a mask,' Hawthorne suggests that he had grown morbid. We know at once that he had not. A beautiful insect flutters about her and dies at her feet. 'Now here it could not be but that Giovanni Guasconti's eyes deceived him.' We know that they did not. As Beatrice goes into the house, Giovanni fancies that the flowers he had given her were already withering in her grasp. 'It was an idle thought,' says Hawthorne, 'there could be no possibility of distinguishing a faded flower from a fresh one at so great a distance.' We see the dead petals fall like leaves in autumn as she steps across the threshold.

And then notice, in *The Scarlet Letter*, his use of simple actions made significant by their contexts. When Hester Prynne has thrown aside, as if for ever, the searing symbol of her outlawry, her child refuses to recognise her, until she picks it miserably up, and

pains her bosom once again with the embroidered scarlet character. 'Now thou art my mother, indeed!' cries the child, 'and I am thy little Pearl!' And when Hester tells her that one day the minister will share a fireside with them, and hold her on his knees, and teach her many things, and love her dearly—'And will he always keep his hand over his heart?' the child inquires. It is quite natural in her to notice a peculiar habit, and to cling to a familiar piece of ornament; but her words and actions assume the dignity of portents when we know what they meant to that poor woman and that conscience-stricken man.

The power of details.

The imagination needs straws to make its bricks, and Hawthorne is careful never to set it the impossible task. He knows how to squeeze all the emotion in his material into one small fragment of pictorial suggestion that can be confidently left to produce its effect in concert with the reader's mind. Remember how Goodman Brown, at setting out, looked back and saw 'the head of Faith still peeping after him with a melancholy air in spite of her pink ribbons.' A trifle, apparently, but one that is not to be wasted. After his talk with the devil, he thought he heard his wife's voice above him in the air, as an unseen multitude of saints and sinners were encouraging her to that awful meeting in the forest. "'Faith!" he shouted in a voice of agony and desperation, and the echoes of the forest mocked him, crying "Faith! Faith!" as if bewildered wretches were seeking her all through the wilderness. The cry of grief, rage, and terror was yet piercing the night when the unhappy wretch held his breath for a response. There was a scream, drowned immediately

in a louder murmur of voices, fading into far-off laughter, as the dark cloud swept away, leaving the dear and silent sky above Goodman Brown. But something fluttered lightly down through the air and caught on the branch of a tree. The young man seized it, and beheld a pink ribbon.'—A pink ribbon, a merry little thing that we can see and touch, is made a sudden, awful summary of horror and despair.

He makes nature throb with his own mood, and by imperceptible art weights the simplest words with the emotion of his tale. How are the very tones of madness caught as the young man flourishes the devil's stick and strides along the forest path. "'Ha! ha! ha!" roared Goodman Brown when the wind laughed at him. "Let us hear which will laugh loudest. Think not to frighten me with your deviltry. Come witch, come wizard, come Indian powpow, come devil himself and here comes Goodman Brown. You may as well fear him as he fear you.'" That paragraph is the work of a master.

The character of his work.

And yet, artist as he was, Hawthorne lived too near provincialism to show no signs of its influence in his outlook and his work. He could not enjoy statues without clothes. He was able to commit the enormity of typifying a search for the absolute beautiful by the making of a tiny toy butterfly that flapped its wings just like a real one. Nor did he ever reach that conception of his art, of all art, that sets prettiness in niches round rather than upon the altar of the temple. He valued perhaps too highly the simple flowerlike embroidery that is characteristic of his work. When, while he was in the Custom House, this

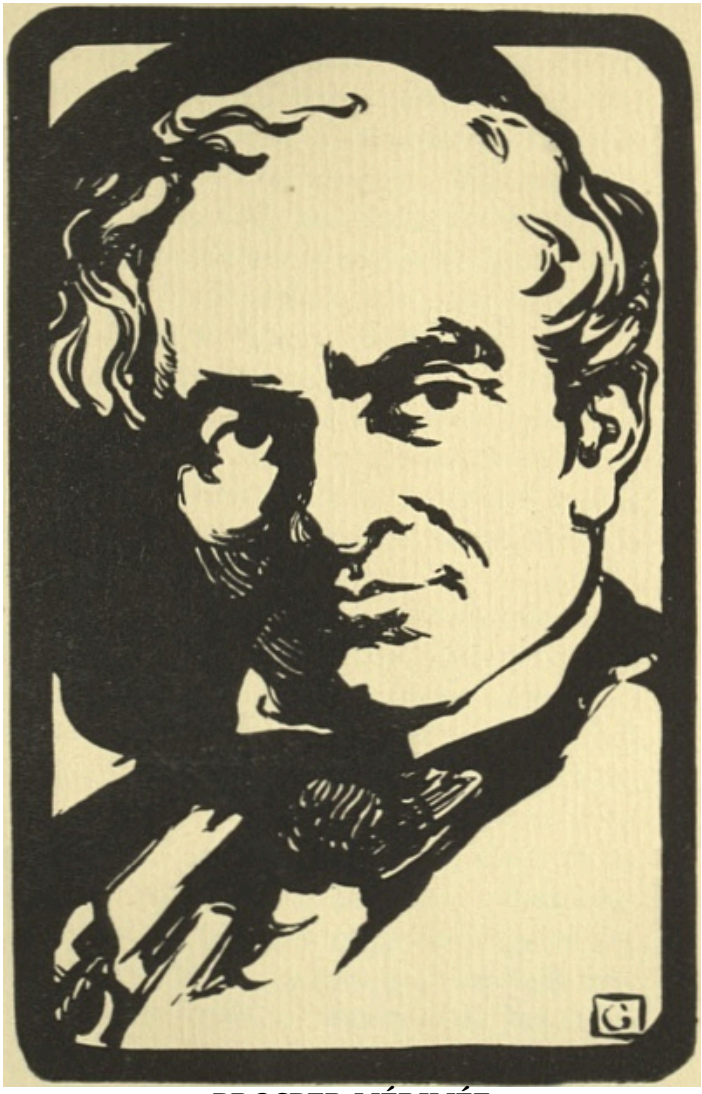
power of facile prettiness deserted him for a season, he produced nothing, and feared that all his power was gone, for it was not in him to conjure without a wand. He thought afterwards that he might have written something with the pedestrian fidelity of the novel; but that was the one thing he could never do. A man who is accustomed to see his pages glimmer with opalescent colour, and to feel the touch of elfin fingers on his brow, is oddly disconcerted in those moments when the little people must be brushed aside like midges, and the glimmering veil be torn by the elbows of a ruder reality. Such men are not so common that we can complain of the *défauts de leurs qualités*. And indeed, in his more solemn stories, instinct with the spiritual terror of Goya's miniature, the grace that never leaves him adds to the effect. A rapier seems never more cruel than in a hand elaborately gloved. What kind of man is that, we ask, who, balancing souls between Heaven and Hell, can never quite forget his friendship with the fairies?

MÉRIMÉE AND CONVERSATIONAL STORY-TELLING

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Mérimée's attitude towards writing.

THERE is a lean athletic air about the tales of Prosper Mérimée. Their author is like a man who throws balls at the cocoa-nuts in the fair—to bring them down, and not for the pleasure of throwing. His writing was something quite outside himself, undertaken for the satisfaction of feeling himself able to do it. He was in the habit of setting himself tasks. 'I will blacken some paper,' he writes, 'in 1829,' and he keeps his word. He was not an author, in the modern professional sense, but a man, one of whose activities was authorship. There is a real difference between writers of these classes, the amateurs existing outside their work, the professionals breathing only through it. Gautier, full-blooded, brutal, splendid creature, is almost invisible but in his books. Mérimée, irreproachably dressed, stands beside his, looking in another direction. I am reminded of the sporting gentlemen of Hazlitt's day who now and again would step into the ring and show that they too had a pretty way with the gloves. Late in his life, when one of his juvenile theatrical pieces was to be played for the first time, Mérimée went to the performance, and heard a hostile noise in the house. 'Is it me they are hissing?' he asked, 'I am going to hiss with the rest.' I think of Congreve asking Voltaire to consider him as a plain gentleman, not as an author.



PROSPER MÉRIMÉE

Writing was only one of the interests of Mérimée's life; only one of the innumerable tasks he set himself. He learnt half a dozen languages without being a

mere linguist. He travelled in half a dozen countries without being a traveller. He was extremely erudite, but never a bookish scholar. He fulfilled with enthusiasm his duties as Inspector of Ancient Monuments without lapsing into a dusty-handed antiquary. He saw much of the fashionable life of Paris without being a man of the world. He was a courtier without being nothing but a courtier, and could accomplish a state mission without turning into a diplomatist. He studied 'la théologie, la tactique, la poliorcétique, l'architecture, l'épigraphie, la numismatique, la magie et la cuisine,' without being solely a theologian, a tactician, a specialist in sieges, an architect, a decipherer of inscriptions, a coin collector, a wizard, or an undiluted cook. No more was he a writer, as Dumas, Hazlitt, Hawthorne, and Keats were writers. On no shore did he burn his boats. His character was as various as his activities. He was sensualist and sentimentalist, dandy and Bohemian. Evenings begun in the salon of Mme. de Boigne or at the Hôtel Castellane were, his biographer tells us, finished behind the scenes at the Opera. He wrote delightful love-letters, but whole series of his letters to his friends are unfitted for print by consistent indecency. He read his tales to his Empress, and told them in the gipsy tongue by the camp-fires of Andalusian muleteers. His experiments in literature were analogous to his experiments in cooking. Both were expressions of an intense curiosity about life and the methods of life, and a thirst for personal practical efficiency in them all. Never had man more facets in which to see the world. It is important in this essay, that considers only one of them, not to forget that there were others.

The imaginary author of his tales.

It is indeed not easy to see more than one facet of a man's personality at once, and difficult not to assume that this one facet is the whole. The *curés* of the old churches in France who saw Mérimée busied in protecting the ancient buildings from ruin and restoration would have been amazed by the witty dandy of the dinners in the Café de la Rotonde, or by the author of *Colomba*. Each one of such a man's expressions suggests a complete portrait, but only the composite picture tells the truth. It is difficult not to reason from his work and build up an imaginary author—a discreet, slightly ironical person, who smiles only with the corners of his mouth, never laughs, never weeps, modestly disclaims any very personal connection with his tales, and is careful to seem as little moved as may be by the terrible or mysterious things he sets before us. This imaginary polite person, who represented Mérimée in conversation as well as in books, is not Mérimée, but, just now, as I see him quietly smiling in the air before me, I know who he is. He is the conventional raconteur, whose manner every Englishman assumes in the telling of anecdote or ghost story.

Printed and spoken stories.

Perhaps each nation has its own. Perhaps each nation adopts an attitude for anecdote peculiar to its own genius. The French at any rate is very different from the English. The Frenchman will gesticulate in his tale, suit the expression of his face to its emotions, and try, ingratiatingly, to win our indulgence for his story, that becomes, as he tells it, part of himself. The Englishman, more tenacious of his dignity, less willing to hazard it for an effect,

throws all responsibility upon the thing itself. In England, the distinction between printed story-telling and story-telling by word of mouth is more marked than elsewhere. The object of both is to interest and move us, but, while the literary artist makes no bones about it, and takes every advantage possible, giving the setting of his tale, its colour scheme, its scent, its atmosphere, the plain Englishman shrinks from all assumption of craftsmanship, sets out his facts bare, rough like uncut stones, and repudiates by a purposely disordered language, perhaps by a few words of slang, any desire of competition with the professional.[9] And we, the audience, allow ourselves to be moved more readily by an amateur than by a man who avows his intention of moving us. The avowed intention provokes a kind of hostility; it is a declaration of war, an open announcement of a plan to usurp the throne of our own mind, and to order the sensations we like to think we can control. We are more lenient with the amateur; we wish to save his face; politeness and good-fellowship are traitors in our citadel, and we conspire with the enemy to compass our own yielding.

Mérimée's adoption of the conventions of anecdote.

Mérimée gives his tales no more background than an Englishman could put without immodesty into an after-dinner conversation. He does not decorate them with words, nor try to suggest atmosphere by rhythm or any other of the subtler uses of language. He does not laugh at his jokes, nor, in moments of pathos, show any mist in his eyes. The only openly personal touches in his stories are those sentences of irony as poignant as those of another great conversationalist, whose *Modest Proposal* for the eating of little children

is scarcely more cruel than *Mateo Falcone*. His style is without felicities. It has none of the Oriental pomp of Gautier's prose, none of the torrential eloquence of Hugo's; but its limitations are its virtues. Pomp is the ruin of a plain fact as of a plain man, and rhetoric rolls facts along too fast to do anything but smooth them. This style, that seems to disclaim any pretension to be a style at all, leaves facts unencumbered, with their corners unpolished. It emphasises Mérimée's continual suggestion that he is not a story-teller, and so helps to betray us into his power. But I cannot understand those critics who find it a style of clear glass that shows us facts through no personality whatever. Always, in reading a Mérimée, I have an impression of listening to a man who has seen the world, and was young once upon a time, who loves Brantôme, and who in another century would have been a friend of Anthony Hamilton, and perhaps have written or had a minor part in memoirs like those of the Count Grammont. And this man is the imaginary mouthpiece of English anecdote, the mask handed from speaker to speaker at an English dinner-table.

Mérimée's *anglomanie*.

Mérimée himself had something of the appearance of an Englishman; everything except the smile, according to Taine. No Frenchman can write of him without referring to his *anglomanie*. His mother had English relatives, and Hazlitt, Holcroft, and Hazlitt's worshipped Northcote were among his father's friends. He was not baptized in the Catholic religion. He seems to have grown up in an atmosphere not unlike that of many English intellectual families, and very early made friends across the Channel for himself. This Englishness perhaps partly accounts for

the peculiar attitude he took as a story-teller, and also made possible that curious reconciliation between the virtues of rival schools that the attitude demanded; made possible, that is to say, the apparent paradox of a man whose subjects were Romantic, whose style was almost Classical, and whose stories were yet a prophecy of the Realists. It is not a French characteristic to recognise virtues in more than one type at once, and to combine them. 'Le Roi est mort; vive le Roi.' The French invented that saying. They do not recognise compromises, but are exclusive in their judgments, and regulate their opinions by general rules. A Romantic hates all Classicists, a Realist finds his worst term of opprobrium in the word Romantic. An Englishman, on the other hand, does not think of regulating his affections or actions by a theory. If he has principles, he locks them up with his black clothes for use on special occasions. He keeps a sturdy affection for Oliver Cromwell, without letting his love for the Commonwealth abate in the least his loyalty to the King. Mérimée seems extraordinarily English in being able to own Romantic ideals, without using Romantic method.

The contrast between his manner and his material.

The conversational story-telling depends for its success, not on the wit or charm of the talker, but on the plots of his stories. No more exigent test of the intrinsic power of a tale can be applied than this, of telling it badly in conversation. A good story will sometimes gain by the naked recital of its facts; a bad one is immediately betrayed. Bad stories, in this sense, are those that resemble the women of whom Lyly wrote:—'Take from them their periwigges, their paintings, their Jewells, their rowles, their

boulstrings, and thou shalt soone perceive that a woman is the least part of hir selfe.' How many times, in repeating to a friend the story of a book, you have become suddenly aware it was an empty, worthless thing that, in clothes more gorgeous than it had a right to wear, had made you its dupe for a moment. Mérimée was compelled by his method to tell good stories or none. His material, to be sufficiently strong to stand without support, to be built with rigid economy, and to make its effects out of its construction, to be told as if with a desire of making no impression, and to make an impression all the stronger for such telling, could not be of a light or delicate nature. His events had to be striking, visible, conclusive. He had to choose stories in which something happened. There is death in almost every one of his tales. Hence comes the amazing contrast between his work and that of the Romantics. The large gesture, the simple violent passions are his as well as theirs, because he needed them, but, while they matched their subjects in their temperaments, and wrote of hot blood with pulsing veins, everything in Mérimée's stories is vivid and passionate except the author. The atmosphere of his tales is not warm or moist, but extraordinarily rarified. In that clear air his colours seem almost white. If they were not so brilliant we should not perceive them at all. Even his women are chosen for the attitude. The women a man loves are usually reflected in his work. But Mérimée's women are the women of Romance, dying for love or for hate, ready at any moment to throw their emotions into dramatic action, while the women he loved were capricious, whimsical, tender seldom, *outrées* never. The writer needed picturesque women as clear as facts. The man loved women who never betrayed themselves, but

were sufficiently elusive to give him an Epicurean pleasure in pursuing them.

An art of construction.

The art of Mérimée's tales is one of expository construction. He was compelled by his self-denials to be as conscious an artist as Poe. He is like a good chess-player who surrenders many pieces, and is forced to make most wonderful play with the few that remain. His effects are got from the material of his tales, not superimposed on the vital stuff like the front of a Venetian palace on the plain wall. He takes his dramatic material, and sets it before us in his undecorated style, so that no morsel of its vitality is wasted, smothering no wild gesture in elaborate drapery, but cutting it out so nakedly that every quivering sinew can be seen. His art has been compared to drawing, but it is more like sculpture. His stories are so cleanly carved out of existence that they are 'without deception.' We can examine them from above and from below, in a dozen different lights. There is no point of view from which the artist begs us to refrain. Behind a drawing there is a bare sheet. Behind a story of Mérimée's there is the other side.

Pointillism in facts.

His art is more like painting in those few tales of the marvellous that are his ghost stories, as the others are his anecdotes. Mérimée had the archæologist's hatred of the mysterious, and the artist's delight in creating it. He reconciled the two by producing mysterious effects by statements of the utmost clarity, the very clarity of the statements throwing the reader off his guard so that he does not

perceive the purposeful skill with which they are chosen and put together. There is a school of painting in France, whose followers call themselves Pointillists; they get their effects by laying spots of simple colours side by side, each one separate, each one though in the right position with regard to other spots of other colours placed in its neighbourhood. At a sufficient distance they merge luminously into the less simple colours of the picture. Mérimée's treatment of the marvellous was not unlike this. The vague mystery of *La Vénus d'Ille* is not reflected by any vagueness or mystery in the telling of the tale. It is impossible to point to the single sentence, the single paragraph that makes the mystery mysterious. You cannot find them because they do not exist. Instead, there are a hundred morsels of fact. Not one of them is incredible; not one is without a reasonable explanation if an explanation is necessary. And yet all these concrete, simple facts combine imperceptibly in producing the extraordinary supernatural feeling of the tale. Compare this negative manner of treating a miracle with the frank, positive fairy-tale of Gautier's *Arria Marcella*. The effects of both tales are perfectly achieved, but Arria Marcella belongs to written story-telling. We believe in her because Gautier wishes us to believe, and uses every means of colour and rhythm and sensual suggestion to compel his readers to subject their imaginations to his own. The Venus belongs to story-telling by word of mouth. Hers is a ghost story whose shudder we covet, and experience, in spite of ourselves, in spite of the half-incredulous story-teller, by virtue of those simple facts so cunningly put together.

Strength or charm.

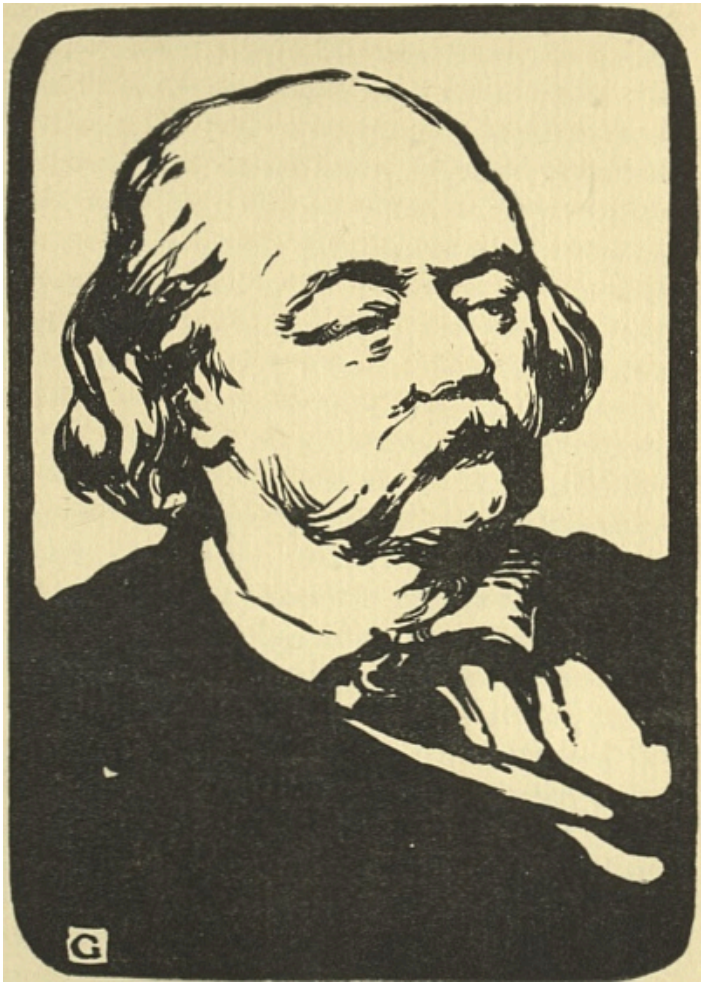
But to write analytically of such stories is to write with compass and rule, dully, awkwardly, technically, badly. It is impossible to express the excellence of a bridge except by showing how perfectly its curves represent the principles of its design, and to talk like an architect of the method of its building. And that is so very inadequate. It is easy to write of warmth, of delicacy, of sweetness; there is nothing harder in the world than to write of the icy strength that is shown not in action but in construction. And although there is a real charm about the shy, active, intellectual man who made them, a charm that is shown in his love-letters, yet there is no charm at all about Mérimée's stories. The difference between them and such tales as Nathaniel Hawthorne's is that between the little Grecian lady in baked clay, who stands upon my mantelpiece, still removing with what grace of curved body and neck and delicate arm the thorn that pricked her tiny foot some thousand years ago, and the copy of an Egyptian god, standing upright, one straight leg advanced, his jackal head set square upon his shoulders, his arms stiff at his sides, his legs like pillars, so strong in the restraint of every line that to look at him is a bracing of the muscles. There is no charm in him, no grace, no delicacy, and he needs neither delicacy, grace, nor charm. Erect in his own economy of strength he has an implacable, strenuous power that any added tenderness would weaken and perhaps destroy.

FLAUBERT

FLAUBERT

'I AM the last of the fathers of the church,' said Flaubert, and on this text his niece remarks that 'with his long chestnut coat, and little black silk skull-cap, he had something the air of one of the Port-Royal solitaries.' The metaphor is accurately chosen. Flaubert lived in an atmosphere of monastic devotion to his art, and the solitaries of Port-Royal were not more constant than he to their intellectual preoccupations. A man of excessive openness to sensation, he fled it and was fascinated by it. He would take ever so little of the world and torture himself with its examination because it hurt him to look at it. Life, and especially that life whose sensitiveness was so slight as, in comparison with his own, to have no existence, brought him continual pain. 'La bêtise entre mes pores.' Stupidity touching him anywhere made him shrink like a snail touched with a feather. He had *recoquillements*, shrinkings up, when with his dearest friends, and it was pain to him to be recalled to ordinary existence. He escaped from modernity in dreams of the Orient, but was continually drawn back by memory of the unhappiness that was waiting for him, to the contemplation of those ordinary people whose

slightest act, as he imagined it, struck such a grating discord with himself. An exuberant life like Gautier's was impossible to such a man. He could not be so gregarious a recluse as Balzac. He had to fashion a peculiar retreat, a room with two windows, from one of which he could see the stars, and from the other watch and listen to the people whom he hated and found so efficient as the instruments of his self torture. He found the seclusion he desired in a most absolute devotion to the art of literature, which was in his hands the art of making beauty out of pain. Pain, self-inflicted, was at the starting-point of all his works, and in most of them went with him step by step throughout.



GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

Flaubert and the bourgeois.

An analysis of the pain that Flaubert suffered in examining Philistines, that white light of suffering which throws up so clearly the bourgeois figures on which he let it play, supplies the key not only to the

matter of much of his work, but to its manner, and particularly to that wonderful prose of his, whose scrupulosity has been and is so frequently misunderstood. Flaubert was not pained by a bourgeois because he felt differently from himself. He was pained by a bourgeois because a bourgeois did not know that he felt differently from himself, because a bourgeois never knew how he felt at all. Whole wolves hate a lame one. It has never been stated with what inveterate hatred a lame one regards whole wolves. And Flaubert was less fitted for life than an ordinary man. He was given to know when he was honest or dishonest to himself. In so far was he, on their own ground, weaker than those others, who never know whether they tell the truth or a lie. He was born as it were with no skin over his heart. He had no need to make guesses at his feelings. What more terrible nightmare could be imagined for such a man than to hear men and women, educated, as the bourgeois are, into a horrible facility of speech, using the language of knowledge and emotion, unchecked by any doubts as to their possible inaccuracy. In all bourgeois life, where language and action have larger scales than are necessary, there is a discrepancy between expression and the thing for which expression is sought. For Flaubert, sensitive to this discrepancy as the ordinary man is not, it was a perpetual pain. And just as a man who has a nerve exposed in one of his teeth, touches it again and again, in spite of himself, for the exquisite twinge that reminds him it is there, so Flaubert in more than one half of his books is occupied in hurting himself by the delicate and infinitely varied search for this particular discord.

Flaubert's prose.

Flaubert's prose is due, like his unhappiness, to his inhuman trueness of feeling. He realised that flexible as language is, there are almost insuperable difficulties in the way of any one who wishes to put an idea accurately into words. He went to the bottom of all writing and announced that literature is founded on the word; and that unless you have the right word you have the wrong literature. He was a little puzzled at the survival of the mighty improvisations of older times, although he loved them; but there was no doubt in his mind that his own way was not 'a primrose path to the everlasting bonfire' of bad books. Whatever he wrote, he would have it in words chosen one by one, scrupulously matched in scent, colour, and atmosphere to the ideas or emotions he wished to express. His whole creed was to tell the truth. What exactly did he feel? These were the letters that were always flaming before him. It is vivid discomfort to a labourer to be cross-questioned, and forced to find words for his unrealised meanings. With increased facility of speech we grow callous, and, compromising with our words, write approximations to the thoughts that, not having accurately described, we can scarcely be said to possess. Flaubert, in disgust at such inexactitudes, forced on his own highly educated brain the discomfort of the cross-questioned labourer. Knowing the truth, he would say it or nothing, and rejected phrase after phrase in his search for precision. It was gain and loss to him; gain in texture, loss in scope. 'What a scope Balzac had,' he cried, and then: 'What a writer he would have been if only he had been able to write.' The work of such men is loosely knit in comparison with his, because built in a less resisting material. 'Oui,' says Gautier—

'Oui, l'œuvre sort plus belle
D'une forme au travail
  Rebelle,
Vers, marbre, onyx, émail.'

Flaubert's attitude made prose a medium as hard, as challenging as these.

It is difficult to believe that the older writers bought their excellence so dearly. Their thoughts cannot have been so biassed, for it is the expression of every bias, of the background, of the smell, of the feel of an idea that makes circumspicuity of writing so difficult. Montaigne, for example, sitting peaceably in his tower, asking himself with lively interest what were his opinions, was not at all like the almost terrible figure of Flaubert, striding to and fro in his chamber, wringing phrases from his nerves, asking passionately, ferociously, what he meant, and almost throttling himself for an accurate answer. Is it harder than it was to produce a masterpiece?

Romanticism and realism.

Flaubert, who held Chateaubriand a master, was the friend of Gautier, and the director in his art of Guy de Maupassant, who wrote with one hand *Madame Bovary* and with the other *Salammbo*, who put in the same book *St. Julien l'Hospitalier* and *Un Cœur Simple*, is, on a far grander scale than Mérimée, an illustration as well as a reason of the development of romanticism into realism. Flaubert's passionate care for the truth, would, if he had lived before the Romantic movement, have confined itself to the elaboration of a very scrupulous prose. But after the discovery of local colour, after the surprising discovery of the variety that exists in things, as great

as the variety that exists in words and in their combinations, it was sure to apply itself not only to the writing but also to those external things that had suggested the ideas the writing was to embody. It would try to make the sentences true to their author; it would also try to make them true to the life they were to represent. It was Flaubert who said to De Maupassant as they passed a cabstand, 'Young man, describe that horse in one sentence so as to distinguish him from every other horse in the world, and I shall begin to believe that you have possibilities as a writer.' This demand for accurate portraiture turned the romantic realism of Balzac's *Comédie Humaine* into the other realism of *Madame Bovary*. *Madame Bovary.* Balzac had his models, yes, as hints in the back of his head, but he made his characters alive with his own energy and his own brain. As I have already pointed out, they are all too alive to be true. But Flaubert, true to himself in his manner, wished to be true to life in his matter. Madame Bovary, that second-rate, ordinary, foolish, weak, little provincial wife, has no atmosphere about her but her own. She has not been inoculated with the blood of Flaubert, as all the veins of all the characters of Balzac have been scorched with fire from those of that 'joyful wild boar.' When Flaubert wrote that everything in the book was outside himself, he was saying no more than the truth. He was as honest towards her and her life as he was towards his own ideas. She talks like herself. Now the older writers, like Fielding and Smollett, are content to let their people talk as men and women should talk to be fit for good literature. Even the characters of men like Balzac or Hugo say what they think, as nearly as their creators are themselves able to express it. Flaubert is infinitely more scrupulous.

The Bovary never says what she thinks. Flaubert knew well enough what she was thinking, but sought out exactly those phrases and sentences beneath which she would have hidden her thought, those horrible bourgeois inaccuracies that it was torture for him to hear.

A life so wholly concerned with intangible things seems too intellectual for humanity. I am glad to turn aside from it for a moment to remember the Flaubert who was loved by those who spent their days with him; the uncle who taught her letters to his little niece, and who would, as she says, have done anything imaginable to enliven her when sad or ill. 'One of his greatest pleasures was the amusement of those about him,' although he never saw a woman without thinking of her skeleton, a child without remembering that it would one day be old, or a cradle without finding in it the promise of a grave. He was one of the men who love their friends the dearer for their dislike of mankind in general. He never shaved without laughing at 'the intrinsic absurdity of human life,' and yet he lived out his own share in it with steadfast purpose, 'yoking himself to his work like an ox to the plough.'

The result of his incessant labour divides itself into four kinds; novels of the bourgeoisie, a novel of the East, three short stories, and two other books that are, as it were, twin keys to the whole.

Salammbo.

Madame Bovary and *L'Éducation Sentimentale* are the novels of the bourgeoisie, novels with an entirely new quality of vision, due to the sustained contrast between his own articulate habit of mind and the unconsciously inarticulate minds of his characters; these are the books commonly described as his contributions to Realism by men too ready to set him on their own level. Opposed to these two books there is *Salammbo*, an Oriental and ancient romance, a reposeful dream for him, in which move characters whose feelings and expressions are no more blurred than his own. All these books offer more delight at each re-reading, although the last, considered as an example of narrative, is almost a failure. The Romantics too often miss the trees for the wood. Flaubert's method makes it rather easy to miss the wood for the trees. But his trees are of such interest and beauty that we are ready to examine them singly. In writing *Madame Bovary*, his subject was close within his reach. Madame was too near to allow him to cover her up with a library of knowledge about his own times. But in *Salammbo* he was so anxious to be true to the life that he did not know, that he read until he knew too much. The book is made of perfect sentences, perfect descriptions, while the story itself is buried beneath a dust-heap of antiquity. Cartloads after cartloads of gorgeous things are emptied on the top of each other, until the whole is a glittering mass with here and there some splendid detail shining so brilliantly among the rest that we would like to remove it for a museum. The mass stirs: there are movements within it; but they are too heavily laden to shake themselves

free and become visible and intelligible.

Trois Contes.

No such criticism can be urged against the three short stories, the *Trois Contes*, in which Flaubert proves himself not only one of the greatest writers of all time, but also one of the greatest story-tellers. This little book is a fit pendant to the novels, since it represents both the Flaubert of *Madame Bovary* and the Flaubert of *Salammbo*. *Un Cœur Simple*, the first of the three, is the story of a servant woman and her parrot, a subject that de Maupassant might have chosen. So completely is it weaned from himself, that no one would suspect that Flaubert wrote it after his mother's death, for the pleasure, in describing the provincial household, of remembering his own childhood. It and the two stories, *St. Julien l'Hospitalier* and *Hérodias*, which are purely romantic in subject and treatment, and more scrupulous in technique than the finest of Gautier, are among the most beautiful tales that the nineteenth century produced. All three answer the supreme test of a dozen readings as admirably as those old improvisations from whose spirit they are so utterly alien.

La Tentation de Saint Antoine and *Bouvard et Pécuchet.*

That is the sum of Flaubert's work in pure narrative. There are beside it two books, one a *Tentation de Saint Antoine*, that he spent his whole life in bringing to perfection, and the other, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, that he left unfinished at his death. They are among the most wonderful philosophic books of the world. In an Oriental dream, a dialogue form with stage directions so explicit and descriptive as to do the

work of narrative, and in a story whose form might have been dictated by Voltaire, whose material was the same as that used in the novels, he expressed man in the presence of Religion, and man in the presence of Knowledge. The legend of St. Anthony is treated by the Flaubert who loved the East, the story of Bouvard and Pécuchet by the Flaubert who tortured himself with observation of the bourgeois. St. Anthony is tempted of love and of all the religions; at last, not triumphing, but shaken and very weary, he kneels again, and Flaubert leaves him. Bouvard and Pécuchet, the two clerks given by the accident of a legacy the aloofness and the opportunity for development that was Anthony's, are tempted of love and of all the knowledges; at last made very miserable they return to their desks; that is where Flaubert would have left them if he had lived. To discuss the settings of these two great expositions is to ask the question that was asked by a disciple at the end of Voltaire's *Dream of Plato*. 'And then, I suppose, you awoke?' It is only permissible after recognising the grandeur of the underlying idea.

The statue of *Le Penseur*.

There have been two men with such a conception of thought. Rodin carved what Flaubert had written. The statue of *Le Penseur*, that stands in front of the Panthéon in Paris, is the statue of a man tormented like St. Anthony, baffled like Bouvard and Pécuchet. This statue does not represent man's dream of the power of thought, of the dominion of thought. That head is no clear mechanism, faultless and frictionless; that attitude is not one of placid contemplation. The head is in torture, the whole body grips itself in the agony of articulation. The

statue is not that of *a* thinker, but of *the* thinker; man before the Universe, man unable to wrest the words out of himself. Flaubert had such a vision as that when he wrote the *Tentation* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. He hated mankind because they could not share it with him. They did not know as he knew, or see as he saw, but knelt or worked, and were happy. This one stupendous conception of the true relation between man and thought is that on which all Flaubert's work is founded. Expressed in these two books, it is implied in all the others (even in *Salammbo*, which is almost an attempt to escape from it). It is not a message; it does not say anything; it is as dumb as Rodin's statue; it simply *is*—like *Paradise Lost* or the *Mona Lisa* or a religion. 'I am the last of the Fathers of the Church.'

A NOTE ON DE MAUPASSANT

DE MAUPASSANT for seven years submitted all he wrote to Flaubert's criticism. If we add to the preceding essay some sentences from Flaubert's correspondence, it will be easy to imagine the lines that criticism must have taken, and interesting to compare them with the resulting craftsman.

'I love above all the nervous phrase, substantial, clear, with strong muscles and browned skin. I love masculine phrases not feminine.

'What dull stupidity it is always to praise the lie, and to say that poetry

lives on illusion: as if disillusion were not a hundred times more poetic.

'Find out what is really your nature, and be in harmony with it. *Sibi constat* said Horace. All is there.

'Work, above all think, condense your thought; you know that beautiful fragments are worthless; unity, unity is everything.

'The author in his work ought to be like God in the Universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere.

'Fine subjects make mediocre works.'

These sentences might well be taken as de Maupassant's inspiration. De Maupassant, a man of powerful mind, with Flaubert's example before him, makes each of his tales a rounded unity, and a thing outside himself, and yet a thing that no one else could have written. He shunned fine subjects. His stories are like sections of life prepared for examination, and in looking at them we are flattered into thinking that we have clearer eyes than usual. He chooses some quite ordinary incident, and by working up selected details of it, turns it into a story as exciting to the curiosity as a detective puzzle. He allows no abstract feminine-phrased discourses

on the psychology of his characters: he does not take advantage of their confessions. Their psychology is manifested in things said and in things done. The works, as in life, are hidden in the fourth dimension, where we cannot see them.

La Rendezvous, a tiny story of seven pages, will illustrate his methods. The chosen incident is that of a woman going to see her lover, meeting some one else on the way, and going off with him instead. That is all. Let us see how de Maupassant works it out. Here is his first paragraph:

'Her hat on her head, her cloak on her back, a black veil across her face, another in her pocket, which she would put on over the first as soon as she was in the guilty cab, she was tapping the point of her boot with the end of her umbrella, and stayed sitting in her room, unable to make up her mind to go out to keep the appointment.'

The whole of her indecision is expressed before it is explained. Then there is a paragraph that lets us know that she had been keeping the appointment regularly for two years, and we sympathise with her a little. A description of her room follows, made by mention of a clock ticking the seconds, a half-read book

on a rosewood desk, and a perfume. The clock strikes and she goes out, lying to the servant. We watch her, loitering on the way, telling herself that the Vicomte awaiting her would be opening the window, listening at the door, sitting down, getting up, and, since she had forbidden him to smoke on the days of her visits, throwing desperate glances at the cigarette-box. De Maupassant's characters think in pictures of physical action. People do so in real life.

The heroine sits in a square watching children, and reflects, always in the concrete, how much the Vicomte is going to bore her, and on the terrible danger of rendezvous, and so on, making pictures all the time. At last, when she is three-quarters of an hour late, she gets up and sets out for his rooms. She has not gone ten steps before she meets a diplomatic baron, of whose character in her eyes de Maupassant has been careful to let us have a hint beforehand. He asks her, after the usual politenesses, to come and see his Japanese collections. He is an adroit person this baron. He does not make love to her. He laughs at her. He ends, after a delightful little dialogue, in half hurrying, half frightening her into a cab. They have scarcely started

when she cries out that she has forgotten that she had promised her husband to invite the Vicomte to dinner. They stop at a post office. The baron goes in and gets her a telegram card. She writes on it in pencil—it would be vandalism to spoil the message by translating it from the French—she writes:

'Mon cher ami, je suis très souffrante; j'ai une névralgie atroce qui me tient au lit. Impossible sortir. Venez diner demain soir pour que je me fasse pardonner.

JEANNE.'

She licks the edge, closes it carefully, writes the Vicomte's address, and then, handing it to the baron, 'Now, will you be so good as to drop this in the box for telegrams.'

There de Maupassant ends, without comment of any kind. His stories have always 'the look of a gentleman,' and know how to move, when to stop, what to put in and what to leave out. They are impersonal, but not more impersonal than Mérimée's. There is a man behind them, and in contradistinction to the school of writers with whom he has been confounded, he does not blink the fact, but obeys Flaubert's maxim, allowing his presence to be felt but keeping himself invisible. De

Maupassant, the pupil of Flaubert, makes even clearer than his master the intimate connection between those apparently hostile things, Romanticism and Realism. Lesser and coarser minds may have needed the stimulus of a revolt when none was; but the great men on the heights knew that the suns of dawn and sunset were the same.

De Maupassant's position in this book is commensurate neither with his genius nor with what I should like to say of him, and hope to write in another place. I had wished my book to end with the Romantic Movement, and so with Flaubert, who seems to me to mark its ultimate development without a change of name. De Maupassant is here only to show how direct is the descent of the least exuberant of modern story-telling from the Romanticism that made possible the work of Chateaubriand, Hugo, or Balzac. His true position is in a book that should begin with Flaubert and end with some great writer of to-morrow, whose work should show by what alchemy the story-telling of to-day will be changed into that of the future.



GUY DE MAUPASSANT

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

My table is covered with a green cloth, and on it, under the lamplight, are two bowls of roses. One is full of the rich garden flowers, whose hundred folded petals hold in their depths the shadows of their colourings—cream, crimson, and the rose and orange of an autumn sunset. In the other are three or four wild roses from the hedge on the far side of the lane. I scarcely know which give me greater pleasure. In comparing them I seem to be setting *Aucassin and Nicolete* by the side of *La Morte Amoureuse*. How many flowers must represent the gradual growth of one into the other. How large a collection would be necessary to illustrate every stage of the transformation of the simple beauty of the wild blossoms into the luxuriant loveliness, majesty, and variety of the roses in the opposite bowl. I have attempted such a task in this book; not the impossible one of collecting every flower in any way different from those that had opened before it, but of bringing together a score or so to make the difference between first and last a little less tantalising and obscure.

Genius a stationary quality.

I had thought I was tracing a progress of the art itself; but I no longer think so. Century after century has laid its gift before the story-teller, its gift of a form, an unworked vein, a point of view. He has learnt to hold us with an episode, and also, evening after evening, to keep us interested in the lives of a dozen different people whose adventures in the pages of a book he makes no less actual than our own. In this last century of the art we have seen men looking back to all the ages before them, and bringing into modern story-telling the finest qualities of the most ancient, recreating it, and winning for it the universal acknowledgment that is given to painting, poetry, or music. Much seems to have been done, and yet, who would dare assign to a modern story-teller, however excellent a craftsman, a place above Boccaccio? Who says that his digressions make old Dan Chaucer out of date? Art does not progress but in consciousness of its technique and in breadth of power. Genius is a stationary quality. Techniques and the conditions of production, qualified the one by the other, and modified by genius, move past it side by side, like an endless procession before a seated king. The works they carry between them are not to be judged by their place in the cavalcade, but by the spirit before whom they pass, who wakes from time to time to give them life and meaning.

None the less, there is a kind of imperfect contemporariness in the art that lets the finest works of all times remain side by side to be imitated or compared. And this power of survival that belongs to works of genius accounts for two phenomena, which give genius itself a spurious air of progress. The one is an ever clearer consciousness of technique, the other an ever wider range of possibilities, both due to the increasing number of works of art that are

ready for comparison or imitation.

The dissociation of forms.

In the latter half of my book, and particularly in the chapters on Poe, Mérimée, Hawthorne, and Flaubert, we have been partly busied in remarking the later stages of self-conscious craftsmanship. There remains to be discussed the dissociation of one form from another that naturally accompanied this more observant technique. I want to distinguish here between the short story, the *nouvelle*, and the novel, which are not short, middle-sized, and lengthy specimens of the same thing, but forms whose beauties are individual and distinct. They demand quite different skills, and few men have excelled in more than one of them. Before proceeding to closer definition, let me name an example of each, to keep in our minds for purposes of reference while considering their several moulds. Balzac's *Père Goriot* is a novel; Gautier's *La Morte Amoureuse* is a *nouvelle*; de Maupassant's *La Petite Ficelle* is a short story.

The novel.

The novel was the first form to be used by men with a clear knowledge of what it allowed them to do, and what it expected of them in return. Smollett's is its simplest definition. 'A novel,' he says, 'is a large diffused picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groups and exhibited in various attitudes, for the purpose of a uniform plan and general occurrence, to which every individual figure is subservient.' It is, as near as may be, a piece of life, and one of its similarities to ordinary existence is perhaps the characteristic that best marks its difference from the *nouvelle*. The novel

contains at least one counterplot, the *nouvelle* none. Life has as many counterplots as it has actors, as many heroes and heroines as play any part in it at all. No man is a hero to his valet, because in that particular plot the valet happens to be a hero to himself. The novelist does not attempt so equable a characterisation, but by telling the adventures of more than one group of people, and by threading their tales in and out through each other, he contrives to give a conventional semblance of the intricate story-telling of life.[10]

The *nouvelle*.

The *nouvelle* is a novel without a counterplot, and on a smaller scale.[11] The latter quality is dependent on the former, since it combats the difficulty of sustained attention, that the novel avoids by continual change from one to another of its parallel stories. The *nouvelle* was with Boccaccio little more than a plot made actual by the more important sentences of dialogue, and by concise sketching of its principal scenes. It has now grown to be a most delicate and delightful form, without breathlessness and without compression, its aim of pure story being implicit in the manner of its telling. It is differentiated from the short story, the advantage of whose brevity it shares in a lesser degree, by the separate importance of its scenes, which are not bound to be subjected so absolutely to its conclusion. For example, the splendid cathedral scene in *La Morte Amoureuse*, where, at the moment of ordination, a young priest is stricken with passion for a courtesan, would be unjustifiable in a short story unless it ended in the climax of the tale. The priest would have to die on the steps of the altar, or the woman to kill herself at his feet as he passed, a

vowed celebate, down the cathedral aisle. The short story must be a single melody ending with itself; the *nouvelle* a piece of music, the motive of whose opening bars, recurring again and again throughout, is finally repeated with the increase in meaning that is given it by the whole performance.

The short story.

The short story proper is in narrative prose what the short lyric is in poetry. It is an episode, an event, a scene, a sentence, whose importance is such that it allows nothing in the story that is not directly concerned with its realisation. This is true of many specimens of the *nouvelle*, but it is the essential rule of the short story. Look at the end of *La Petite Ficelle*, or of any other of the *Contes* of de Maupassant. 'Une 'tite ficelle ... une 'tite ficelle ... t'nez la, voila, m'sieu le Maire.' 'A little bit of string ... a little bit of string ... look, there it is, M. le Maire.' That sentence, repeated by the dying man in his delirium, needs for the full pathos of its effect every word of the story. From the first paragraph about an ordinary market day, the accident of the old man picking up a piece of string in a place where a purse had been lost, the false accusation, and his guilt-seeming protestation of innocence, every detail in the story is worked just so far as to make the reader's mind as ready and sensitive as possible for the final infliction of those few words. Keats once coated the inside of his mouth with cayenne pepper to feel as keenly as he could 'the delicious coolness of claret.' The art of the short story is just such a making ready for such a momentary sensation.

The possibilities of narrative.

Just as Time, with the clearer consciousness of technique, has made the moulds of the art more markedly distinct, so it has given the artist an infinite choice of amalgams with which to fill them. Although some of the most delightful examples of narrative are still produced with the old and worthy object of telling a tale to pass the time, although there are still men who lay their mats upon the ground, squat down on them, and keep their audiences happy by stories that demand no more intellectual attention than the buzz of bees in the magnolia flowers; yet, if we consider only those artists who have been discussed in the preceding chapters, we perceive at once how many are the other possibilities of narrative, and, if we examine the story-telling of our own day, we shall find that most of them are illustrated in contemporary practice.

Story-telling has grown into a means of expression with a gamut as wide as that of poetry, which is as wide as that of humanity. 'It is literature,' says Wilde, 'that shows us the body in its swiftness and the soul in its unrest'; and the same art that helps us to laze away a summer afternoon is a key that lets us into the hearts of men we have never seen, and not infrequently opens our own to us, when, in the bustle of existence, we have gone out and found ourselves unable to return. It is a Gyges' ring with which, upon our finger, we can go about the world and mingle in the business of men to whom we would not bow, or who would not bow to us. It breaks the gold or iron collars of our classes and sets each man free as a man to understand all other men soever. It opens our eyes like Shelley's to see that life—

'like a dome of many-coloured glass,

Stains the white radiance of eternity.'

We become conscious of that radiance when, by this art made free of time, we can dream the dreams of the Pharaohs, pray with the hermits in the Thebaid, and send our hazardous guesses like seeking dogs into the dim forests of futurity. Our eyes may fitly shine, and we become as little children in brief resting-hours out of the grown-up world, when this art makes those tints ours that we never knew, and sends us, divested of our monotones, to choose among all the glittering colours of mankind.

And if we are not listeners only, but have ourselves something to fit with wings and to send out to find those men who will know the whispering sound of its flight and take it to themselves, how much do we not owe to this most manifold art of story-telling?

There is nothing that its pinions will not bear.

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FOOTNOTES:

[1] Translation by Lady Charlotte Guest, 1838.

[2] The quotations in this chapter are from the translation by Mr. F. S. Ellis.

[3] It would be possible to trace an interesting history of narrative in verse from Chaucer to our own day. But although the names of Spenser, Milton, Lafontaine, Gay, Goldsmith, Keats, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Rossetti, which with many others come instantly to mind, show how various and suggestive such an essay might be, yet the purpose of this book would hardly be served by its inclusion. It would be more nearly concerned with the history of poetry than with that of story-telling.

[4] By H. de Luna, 1620. The earliest known edition of *Lazarillo* was published in 1553.

[5] From a poem by John Masefield.

[6] There is another picture of the same name and subject in the Duke of Devonshire's collection.

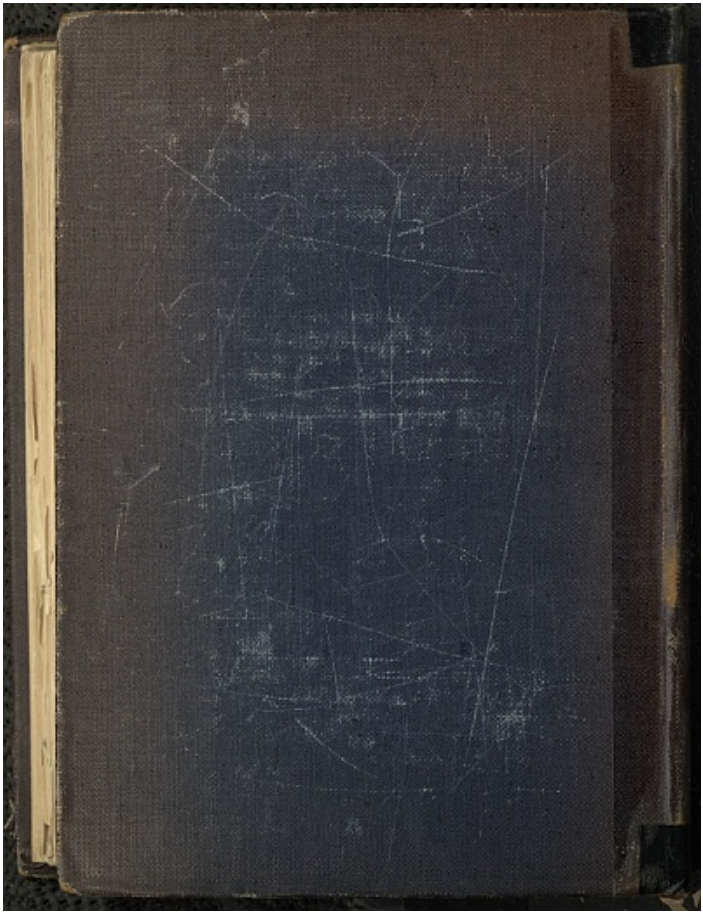
[7] It is worth noticing as an additional proof of the close connection between the story in letters and the feminine novel that *Sense and Sensibility* was built out of an older tale that she actually wrote in epistolary form.

[8] From a poem by Lascelles Abercrombie.

[9] This is repeated with a new purpose from the chapter on Origins.

[10] The distinction between novel and romance made in the chapter on Hawthorne is one of material rather than of form. It is possible to use the material of romance in the form of either novel, *nouvelle*, or short story.

[11] The novelette is not the same as the *nouvelle*, but simply a short novel as its name implies.



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