

HELICON



spring '51

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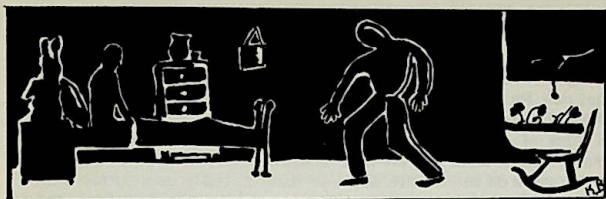
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PA NEVER LIKED ME

by Loretta Childress

I've known for a long time that Pa never liked to look at me. I've seen other fellows' fathers look at them and it was different, somehow. Even when the kids did something bad, their fathers had a sort of that's-my-kid look. Kinda proud and possessive and loving like. Pa used to look at my brother Bill like that. But when Pa looked at me, he'd look away quickly. . .like he didn't like what he saw.

It's always been like that. But it was worse after my brother Bill was killed in Korea. Pa was crazy about Bill. Bill was big and strong like Pa. And I'm little and skinny. I take after Ma's folks. I'm thirteen but I look like eleven. Once I heard Pa say that all the Thompson men were strong as bulls. When he said it, he didn't say, ". . .except Tommy"; but you could hear him thinking the words he held back.

When Bill was alive, Pa didn't pay much attention to me. Once in a while, he was nice to me. . .in the way you'd be nice to someone you felt sorry for. But after Bill was killed there was a sort of bitterness and dislike in his eyes all the time when he looked at me.

I knew Pa hated cowards almost worse than rattlesnakes. . . and that made me afraid to be afraid. And the more afraid I was to be afraid, the more afraid I became. I was afraid of the dark. I've always been afraid of the dark. Mama knew it and kept a light burning in the hall. . .saying she wanted a light in case I had to get up at night and might stumble down the stairs in the dark. But she didn't fool Pa. Pa knew. He didn't say anything but he knew. And hated me for it. You see, Bill never was afraid of anything.

I was even afraid of the farm animals. . .especially the bull and the big pigs. I didn't used to be afraid of them. Country kids grow up with them and get used to them. But it seemed like after Bill was killed and Pa looked at me so bitter all the time, I got afraid of almost everything.

I knew it was silly to be afraid. But the feeling was there just the same.

It . . . the being afraid in the daytime as well as at night. . . started right after we got the telegram from the government about Bill. That day Pa told me to fetch the bull and when I started toward him, I thought to myself, What if I was afraid to fetch the bull? What would Pa think of me? And right away I began to feel kinda dizzy and I was afraid I might faint and the bull would trample on me. Every day the feeling grew on me a little more so that I hated to go near the bull. . . and pretty soon I began to feel that way about the pigs, too. Only it was even worse with the pigs. I've heard of pigs eating babies. If I fainted in the pen, they might eat me.

The only place I wasn't afraid was in school. The teachers always liked me and, even though they might be cross to some of the other kids, they were always nice to me. You see, I always liked reading. Somehow teachers seem to like kids that like reading. But Pa hated to see me with a story book. He thought reading was sissy and that boys should be doing something useful like chores or making something or even raising mischief instead of having "their nose stuck in a cheap dime novel all the time." I tried to explain they weren't cheap dime novels but books by the very best authors, but he never paid no attention.

I guess it was because I was always reading stories and because I was always afraid, that neither Pa nor Ma believed me when I told them about Ed.

Ed was the hired man that helped Pa out once in a while. He was kind of childish and didn't talk very plain but he would give you the shirt off his back. One bitter cold day. . . the temperature was below zero. . . Ed gave his overcoat to an old bum he met in town and then had to buy himself a new one in Martin's store. He didn't have enough money to pay for it but Mr. Martin let him have it because he knew Ed would pay for it when he got the money. Mr. Martin grumbled that Ed was a damn fool for throwing away his money like that but he knew it wouldn't do any good. Ed wouldn't change none. Ed was always doing things like that. Like bringing two big paper bags full of pies and cakes and fruit and chickens to Widow Symonds and her kids whenever he got paid off because he knew they couldn't afford such stuff. Everybody liked Ed. . . even though he wasn't like other men. Old Gramma Perkins. . . she read her Bible every single day. . . used to say Ed wasn't like other men. . . he was a lot better. I guess she was right. . .

But knowing that didn't help me none after I saw him in his bedroom that day.

It was on a Sunday afternoon. I was reading in my room on the third floor and I heard Ed come up and go into his room across the hall from mine. I didn't pay no attention but kept on reading my book, but after a while I heard queer sounds coming from Ed's room as

though he was talking to himself. . . only his voice sounded funny and growly and Ed was always good-natured and jolly. I wasn't trying to be quiet or sneaky but I was barefoot so Ed didn't hear me come to the door. It was standing wide open and I could see into the room and what I saw made my heart stop beating, almost.

Ed was bending over the bureau, staring at himself in the mirror. His lips were pulled back in a snarl like an angry dog's, showing his long yellow teeth. He kept twisting and twisting his face in all kinds of ways. But the worst thing about him was his eyes. They were wild and glaring and empty. . . two balls of bluish shiny stuff without any sense at all in them. I couldn't seem to move or yell or anything. I just stood there, froze to the spot. I remember thinking that a dog's eyes or even a pig's eyes had a lot of sense and knowing compared to those eyes. I knew then that Ed had gone crazy and that craziness was a thousand times worse than I had imagined.

Suddenly Ed seemed to sense that I was there and turned toward me and hissed, "Spy on me, will ya?" He made a grab for me. That seemed to let something loose in me and I could run. I ran screaming down the stairs with Ed after me. But he stopped when he got to the top of the stairs, or I guess he did, because I don't remember hearing his feet on the stairs. But I didn't stop until I got to the living-room.

Pa was lying on the sofa in the living-room and snapped, "What's the matter with you?"

"It's Ed. He's gone crazy. He was making awful faces. And his eyes. . . they're awful. . . He tried to grab me."

Pa looked at me disgusted-like. "Ed wouldn't hurt a flea," he said and turned his back on me.

I went into the kitchen and tried to tell Ma but she said crossly, "You're getting worse and worse. . . Now you're even afraid of poor Ed. . . Don't you know he's always making faces and acting silly just to make people laugh?"

I tried to explain that this was different but she told me to be quiet. The baby was asleep in the corner.

After about a half-hour, Ed came into the kitchen. I sidled over to where Ma keeps the butcher knife just in case, but his eyes were sane looking again though still kinda glittery. He looked at me slyly out of the corners of his eyes as though he wondered if I'd told on him. He remembers, I thought. He knows I know. "Spy on me," he had said. I remembered how crazy people went berserk and murdered everybody around and I felt myself getting cold all over. My room was on the third floor across from Ed's. I was up there alone with Ed every night.

I knew it was no use asking to sleep downstairs. Pa wouldn't let Ma give in to me like that. Besides, they'd say something in front of Ed. . . and that might make him even madder at me.

That night I shoved my old junk chest and a chair against the

door so that I'd hear Ed if he came in. And I slept in the big chair beside the window. I tried to stay awake but I'd doze off and wake with a start.

But he didn't come. Not that night. Nor the next. Or the next. A whole week went by. Then another week.

In the daytime, I'd be awful tired and shadows formed under my eyes. Sometimes I would tell Ma I had a headache or a stomach ache and would try to catch a little sleep on the living-room sofa where Ma could see me if Ed came near me while I slept. It was summer and there wasn't any school, so after I finished the chores, I didn't have nothing to do.

All the time, I could feel Ed watching me.

It's just awful to know something important and have nobody believe you. I knew Ed was crazy, but I couldn't get a soul to believe me. Knowing it felt like a stone inside me. . . a stone that was getting bigger and bigger. It was filling my insides and I couldn't think or do anything else. I felt tired and scared all the time. It felt like there was an iron band around my head.

Things are a lot easier for grown-ups. Everybody pays attention to grown-ups. Everybody listens to what they have to say. If I was a man I'd just take the pick-up truck into town and tell the sheriff. But nobody pays much attention to boys. Especially ones with "more imagination than common sense," the way Pa used to say about me.

I tried to stay awake nights listening in case Ed got up and came in my room or went down-stairs to Pa's and Ma's room. If I dozed, I dreamed all about Pa and Ma and the baby all cut up and bleeding, or I'd dream of Ed's face with the terrible eyes closing in on me. I'd wake up in a sweat and I'd be lying stiff and straight and I'd lie there for a long time not daring to move. . . not quite knowing whether it was true or a dream; and my heart would be pounding like everything. I was afraid to go back to sleep for fear I'd go back to dreaming the same dream.

One morning when I went into the barn, I saw Ed sharpening the kitchen knives on the whetstone. There was something funny about the way he was feeling the blades so I stole away without making a sound. . . my heart kind of standing still like. I just didn't have the nerve to wait until he turned around. I was afraid to see his eyes.

That noon, I guess I looked worse than usual because Pa said, "You'd better take the boy to the doctor, Peg. He looks terrible. You can stay in town with your sister. I'll look after the baby. Ed can help me. If Tom wants he can stay there for a few weeks. The change might do him good. He'd have other boys to play with."

Tummy, how I wanted to get away! Anyplace where I could sleep and maybe find someone to believe me. Maybe if I told the doctor, he would believe me. Doctors understand about such things.

Maybe the doctor could examine Ed and tell about him that way. . .

But I remembered Ed and the knives. Maybe he was planning something for tonight and Pa and the baby being alone would make things easier for him.

So I said, "Please don't make me go, Pa. Please, Pa. I'd rather stay here. I. . . I don't like it there. It's. . . it's hot."

I wanted to tell them about Ed. . . about Ed and the knives and the crazy eyes but I didn't dare. Ed was there and besides, Pa'd never believe me. He'd think I was the one that was crazy.

"Tommy, I don't want any more nonsense from you. You've got to see a doctor. Tomorrow. I don't know what ails the boy," he said, turning to Ma. "'Pears to be me like he might have one of them brain tumors or something. He certainly don't act right. . . But then he always was a little different. . . ."

I knew then I had to do something that night. But what? Make Ed angry. So he would do something to show Pa how crazy he was. But what could I do? Ed never minded what people said to him. He was used to people saying things to him. . . teasing him and razzing him. Then I remembered that he was looking in the mirror when he looked so crazy. Maybe mirrors set him off. Downstairs he seemed to be all right. Maybe a mirror. . . or mirrors. . . or lots of them. . . maybe if I collected all the mirrors I could and put them in the living-room where we all went after supper. . . maybe. . . if he saw his face shining back at him from all the mirrors. . . that would set him off. And Ma would be in the kitchen clearing up the dishes so he couldn't hurt her. Maybe Pa and me could handle him. I'd have something ready. . . some stick or maybe Pa's gun.

I had to try it. Otherwise he might do something to Pa when we went to town tomorrow. With crazy people, you never know when it would break out. Like that man that killed nine people in New York.

That afternoon I got four mirrors from the bedroom. And three from the attic. I even took one off an old bureau in the attic. When no one was around, I hid them in back of the settee in the living-room. If nothing happened, Pa would be awful mad at me for doing this crazy thing. I didn't know whether I was more afraid of Ed's going crazy that night or of his not going crazy. Maybe Pa would try to put me away. . . Suddenly I felt so tired I just wanted to go away to Aunt Lucy's and forget the whole thing for just a little while. I wanted to hear kids laugh and play. But then I remembered Ed's awful eyes and knew I couldn't leave Pa and the baby there. . . them not knowing or suspecting anything about Ed.

Just before supper, I took down all the pictures and put the mirrors up in their place.

I couldn't eat any supper because I kept thinking of going into the living-room with the mirrors strung up all over the place. It sure looked crazy, but if Ed just looked at the mirrors and laughed

in his usual way and I had to sleep upstairs with him tonight, I thought my heart would stop. I just had to make him angry. I just had to.

After supper, Pa and Ed got up from the table and I followed them into the living-room. My heart was making hard thumping sounds inside me.

When Pa got inside he looked up and saw the mirrors and yelled, "What the devil. . ."

I said quickly and loud, "Ed put them up, didn't you, Ed? Ed likes to see the faces in the mirrors. Look Ed. See yourself in all of them." I could hardly breathe. . . but I squeaked, "Look Ed, look at that crazy face staring at you."

Pa looked at me scared as though he thought I'd lost my mind and started to say something, but I pointed to Ed. Ed was moving slowly over to one of the mirrors. . . silently. . . like a cat stalking something moving in the grass. Then his face began changing and he was making the same crazy faces I'd seen him making in the bedroom. Pa gasped sort of and Ed turned around sharply and started for Pa. And the wild, terribly empty look was in his eyes. Pa couldn't move. Just like me the first time I saw Ed. But I was ready this time. I darted over to the corner where I'd left the rifle. If Ed started for me before I could aim it, maybe Pa could get him. But Ed didn't look at me. His hands stretched out for Pa's neck and Pa was leaning back on the sofa pulling away from him but not doing one thing to save himself. Pa's scared, I thought. More scared even than I am. I felt strong all of a sudden. And I pulled the trigger. Ed crumpled up on the floor. Ma came in from the kitchen running and saw me with the gun and Ed on the floor.

"My God," she said. Just that and started toward me.

"It's all right Ma," I said. "Ed was going to kill Pa." Ma looked at Pa who sat huddled over on the couch with his hands in front of his face.

"Ed went crazy. He. . . He. . . it was awful." And he covered his face with his hands. I could see him shiver.

"Tom, put down that gun before you hurt someone else." Ma said. Then she went over to Ed and knelt down and turned him over saying, "He's dead. Did you have to kill him? Couldn't you have shot him in the leg or something? Ed would never hurt nobody. . . not in his right mind, that is."

"Let the boy alone." Pa said. That was the first time I remember Pa sticking up for me to Ma. Usually it was the other way round.

"We've got to call the police," Ma said and went over to the telephone.

The police found all sorts of queer writing among Ed's things. Papers with God Ed and King Ed scribbled all over them so they

knew Ed was crazy like we said. Otherwise, I guess I might have been arrested. Instead they acted almost like I was a hero.

That's a laugh. I was even afraid to go near Ed's body. But nobody seemed to notice. And after awhile I wasn't so scared anymore. Somehow remembering how scared Pa was helped a lot.

Photographers swarmed all over the place taking pictures. And asking me questions. I don't remember much what I said.

But I remember Pa. He stood over to one side looking at me. And his eyes had that expression. . . that that's-my-kid look. Pa was proud of me at last.

I began to feel warm and happy inside. I looked out the window. . . to hide the joy in me (the reporters might think I was proud and vain and liked the fuss they were making over me). The leaves were greener. . . the barn looked friendlier. I wanted to run and shout and play again. . . the way I did before Bill was killed and Pa started to look at me that way.

Then a funny thing happened. I heard Pa telling the reporters all about it. . . but he wasn't telling it quite the way it happened. Almost, but not quite. He wasn't letting the men know how scared he'd been. He was ashamed of being frightened, just like us.

Pretty soon, I looked back at Pa. He didn't look so awful big. Next to the reporter, he looked kinda old and shriveled. Funny. Not real old but a little old and shabby. . . like the grey sweater he was wearing. His face was getting wrinkles in it and his hair was getting thin on top.

Pa was getting pretty old to do all that work around the farm. He must be nearly forty-five. I'd have to help more. I had to take Bill's place. Next year I'd be fourteen. . . almost a man. Time I stopped wasting so much time on all them story books and helped Pa more.

Bankrupt Aladdin

Flies in our ointment,
Cinders in our soup;
Aphrodite cackles in the chicken coop.

Still we mark the calendar,
Wonder will it rain
Tomorrow, if tomorrow
Comes again.

Lilting verse you serve us--
Heartless amenities grown cold;
And for illumination lend us
New dialectics for old.

"How many angels in an atom?"
 Troubles not our sleep.
 Yet cloistered years we envy you
 And empty questions thought deep.

Olympus does not interest us--
 The Golden Sheep is shorn;
 We hear him bleating in our dreams--
 In our dream...stillborn.

Diana Fine

Reflection

The warm sweet smell of the night air
 With its fragrant scent of fresh cut grass
 Seeps into the room.
 Nature's perfume tempts one's thoughts
 Through moonlit lanes of fantasy
 And brings contentment softly.
 The silver spired fir tree at the pathway's end
 Stretches up its arms, balancing the moon upon its crest.
 Off beyond the darkened hedgerows,
 Beyond the furthest shades
 Lying silently, like souls at rest,
 The doleful hooting of an owl
 Vibrating softly, dies away and
 Echoes out again.
 Mournful, melancholy prophet
 Reiterating still, as through the centuries,
 His muted warning of impending doom,
 He calls in vain to an unheeding world
 Which, wrapped in a cocoon of false complacency
 Would rather turn away its glance
 And close its ear to truth.

Enchantment fills the smaller hours,
 Some abstract sense
 Expelling those disturbances
 Which crowd and whelm the day.
 One's mind revolves at will
 And turns from this to that with ease.
 A golden moth
 Has seen the small lamp beckoning
 Across the vast expanse of night,
 His eyes are darting little flames

That glitter with desire---greedily.
 His wings beat hopelessly against the screen;
 He seeks but cannot find the aperture,
 The gateway to that false delight,
 Elusive goal which, once gained, means but death
 And worse, his disillusionment.
 But still he struggles on.
 His plight is pitiful to see;
 Attack upon renewed attack he makes,
 A hurtling, fighting urge which drives him
 To destroy himself; he knows and cares not why.
 Such brightly sparkling eyes, and yet, so blind!

I glide above the world of earthly things
 Gazing down upon
 A pageant, filled with change.
 Yet no,
 Each succeeding act is but
 A repetition of the one before.
 No group of actors seems to learn,
 To benefit, from past mistakes
 That their preceding brethren made;
 But all go blindly on
 To the eternal darkness of the wings.

Misguided little moth, give up your futile strife.
 But that, you will not do.
 Before you and your progeny will heed
 The lessons carried down the stream of time,
 Millions of your brothers will have died,
 Frustrated equally by that same task
 At which you work so blindly and so long.
 Your avarice and greed will be your certain death.
 If you penetrate that screen,
 A rapid flight
 Will bring you to that much desired lamp;
 In ecstasy you'll whirl and spin and twist
 Into a circling thread of silvery gold---
 Faster, faster, spinning madly, closer, closer---
 Suddenly--- a puff of smoke---
 And you are down.
 Scorched and wrinkled wings,
 Pressing back into the shaded wood;
 The physical pain unnoticed, amid
 The agony of the enlightenment.
 But now it is too late,
 Your life is finished, you are no more,

You cannot even warn,
Your folly will be unobserved
And death will be as futile as was life.

A cooling breeze
Stirs the topmost branches of the fir;
A sigh so hushed, near imperceptible,
Whispers huskily into the room,
Crushed hopes, despair are mingled in the sound
As if a Universe has lost all hope of life.
Stealthily the silence creeps once more
Into the fingered shadows on the lawn
And clearly comes the weakened flutter of a tiny heart.

The little creature sinks,
One wing begins to fold;
Disbelief, bewilderment will slowly cloud his eyes
And anguish will supplant the zeal that once was there.
Strength exhausted, he will plunge into the loamy Earth's embrace,
A fleeting moonbeam flashes in his eyes,
A glistening pearl rolls in the grass, and then is lost
Among the centuries of tears.
Power could be his to change his fate
And he could wing away to happy hours
And yet he pressed on,
Breaking mind and will upon his self-inflicted rack.

Arthur B. Toft

Hour

0300

The white room is dark,
Over-crowded, and small.
A shaded lamp on the bedside locker
Casts shadows on each wall.
Quiet
ODORS: Merthiolate. Alcohol. Urine.
Blood. Unwashed flesh. Pus.
Talc. Old sheets. Sweat. Bandages.
Foul water. Ointments. Vomit. Soap.

Stinks.
On the soft mattress he lies.
His breathing is slow;
Where he is --- who he is ---
He does not know.
Unconscious
DATA: Tall, thin, S1/c USN (R).
Born twenty years ago.
Grammar school. Three years high school.
One year USN. One week combat.
Tough.

0315

Diagnosis: Abdominal wounds.
(Machine gun bullet). Serious.
Hemorrhage: thirst . . . screaming pain . . .
No water. . . Morphine . . . Delirious . . .
"Please"
LIKES: Ice cream. Babes. Cars. Beer.
Jazz. Money. Comics. Sea Food.
Dislikes: Opera. Teachers. Poetry. Gin.
Celery. Hats. Snow. Rats.
Average
His pale, thin arm sticks out;
The IV drops. Substitute for a meal.
The bloody, pulpy hole in his guts.
(Even after four operations), won't heal.
Sloppy
CARE: Penicillin. IV. Codeine. APC.
Change dressings. Sulfa. Penicillin.
Morphine. IV. Compresses. APC.
Keep him warm. Penicillin.
Routine.

0330

His hair is dry, his lips white,
Cheeks unshaved and drawn.
(Does his body have the strength
To see another dawn?)
Kid
SOUVENIRS: First date. Picnics. Beer.
Letters. First kiss. Hunting. Hooky.
Fishing. Ties. Trips. Photos.
Books. Shows. School. Friends.
When ?
REFRAIN: "Oh, I've been in for long enough,
Don't send me out to sea;

This Navy life is too damn rough,
 Bell-bottoms ain't for me."
 No.
 USN: White hats. Blues. Liberty.
 Restrictions. Stand By! Head.
 Secure. Clean. Sweep. Ladder.
 Bulkhead. Leave. Log. Thirteen buttons.
 Chow.

0345

It is quiet on the Ward.
 The sick, the wounded lie
 And dream: perhaps of happier days
 Now long gone by.
 Youth.
 LIFE: Short. Dangerous.
 Exciting. Hard. Bitter.
 Happy? Useful? Worthwhile?
 S1/c is dead.
 0400.

Irving Girshick

Voyagers

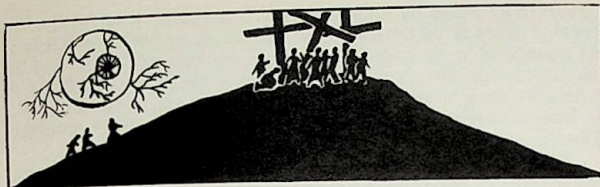
The denuded stump, malignant scion
 Of its haloed coverlet, bridges
 An imposed infirmity, like a chaste dream.
 Its soldered, silvered prongs are the leavings
 of Heaven

(For the kingdoms of Heaven are
 paneled by twinkling christs)

Sappho, now concubine to my soot-lined
 Cavities, left her legacy to a blooded
 Rose blossomed in December, that lies
 Impaled within a concrete cradle.

And from the consecrated dung-heap,
 Arose the heralding bee, flaunting eternity
 With the cadence of a mute conveyor.
 (And received a mute audience with infinity)

Roger Rubin



CALVARY HILL

by Ferdinand Buckhold

With a groaning protest of gears that was becoming increasingly painful to Mr. Bennet, the orange-colored bus dipped its way from the green-painted curb in front of the Rathskeller. The windows rattled as the hard rubber tires bumped over the cobblestoned street that led out of the city and onto the highway to Oberammergau.

Mr. Bennet sighed deeply and settled more comfortably in his seat behind the driver. He always gave a sigh of relief when the passengers, his "charges" he thought with a wry, inward smile, had been safely stowed away along with their leather bags, their walking sticks, their "purchases". The word "purchases", it always seemed to Bennet, had an aura of surreptitiousness. Probably because of the almost apologetic manner his "charges" had when they bought them. "Guilt complex," he thought drowsily. These well-fed Americans had seen too many hollow-eyed children, too many gaunt, grey-faced refugees, not to feel a twinge of uneasiness when they bought warm, bright-colored socks or oversized bottles of Chanel #5. They had purchased their way across a large part of Europe; tweeds and hand-stitched shoes in London, silk nightgowns and perfumes in Paris, lace carpets and silver tea sets in Brussels. When they had crossed the German border it had taken them a whole day to grow accustomed to the sight of hundreds of beggars, the thousands of aimless refugees. But now their bags were crammed with German black market booty. Even Mr. and Mrs. Helner had lost any outward sign of discomfort as they bargained for ancient cuckoo clocks, or sets of silver stamped with imperial eagles.

Mr. Bennet wondered idly what possible use the old couple could have for thirteen tiny wooden horses. Probably had thirteen grandchildren back in Io-way. A horse for each grandchild. But who would use the fine sets of polished Westphalian beer mugs with glazed smoking pipes to match? Or twenty-seven matched gold-handled, ivory-tipped toothpicks? Mr. Bennet sighed more deeply and closed his eyes. The loot of Asia and Europe had been brought to the heart

of the German Reich by its swastikaed supermen. Now twenty-five representatives from the New World would carry back several hundred pounds of it to gather dust on the mantels and shelves of the Republic across the sea. There must be some sort of design in it, Mr. Bennet thought wearily. Just now he was too tired to figure it out. It could wait until they had traveled the seventy-five kilometers to Oberammergau.

With his chin nestled against his leather jacket in order to cushion some of the milder joltings, he tried to doze off to an uneasy sleep. But as soon as his eyes were closed, he saw the few paragraphs for his novel he had written the previous night at the old inn. He had had his two principal characters meet in a pub in England and had tried to have them express some of his feelings about writing. Philip, the damaged philosopher, after sipping meditatively on his warm beer, asked Charles, the dissatisfied newspaperman, "Do you know why modern writers are so much like birds?"

"Because they walk on two legs and some of them are cuckoos?"

"Because they peck their way through life. Peck, Peck. There goes the Greek drama. Peck, peck. There goes Shakespeare, and Baudelaire, and Rimbaud. Peck, peck, peck. And what happens to this frenzied sifting of the golden kernels? It is deposited in weird lumps in old coal clinkers. It is laid with delicate grunts of self-esteem on the wave-washed sand. There it remains for an infinitesimal moment before it is dashed into the sea to fertilize all manner of loathsome creatures at the muck-filled depths who are, in spite of their spiny armor, gobbling each other alive as fast as they are hatched."

"Is it always so?"

"Oh, perhaps a few droppings remain for a time in the sun. But after a few years they become as white and as dry as old cattle bones. They fall apart at the touch and crumble into gritty dust, the kind found swirling about the tombs of lepers and madmen."

Before Charles could reply, Mr. Bennet had fallen asleep. Almost immediately, out of the midnight velvet of his sleep-wakened self, a small, whirling yellow dot appeared. Mr. Bennet stirred uneasily. He knew what would come next. He had had this same dream ever since they left Paris. Swiftly, the yellow dot grew from pin-point size until it filled the screen of his sleeping mind. A pale-faced spider was dressed grotesquely in white taffeta. Instead of arms, long rod-like appendages carried it in a monstrous bobbing hobble. Its legs were completely useless, ending in atrophied stilts from which its tiny, black shoes dangled helplessly. Now its dry-as-dust lips opened as it called his name. "Mr. Bennet, Mr. Bennet!" With a shock he saw that its head was topped by a disheveled mass of dirty, yellow hair. "Mr. Bennet, Mr. Bennet!"

He opened his eyes abruptly and jumping up suddenly cracked his shin against the iron rail separating his seat from the driver's. Cursing under his breath, he limped painfully to the rear of the bus, toward the corner occupied by the two Orcott sisters.

"Were you napping, Mr. Bennet?" asked Grace, the elder, with a grimace that tried to masquerade as a smile.

"No, Miss Orcott, I was just planning our itinerary. May I help you two ladies?"

Grace Orcott simpered. She was always at a disadvantage when confronted by Mr. Bennet's polite urbanity, being more accustomed to the homespun oaths of her red-necked peers back in the nether regions of Oklahoma.

"Oh, dear Mr. Bennet, always thinking of us. I don't know what we would do without you. How do you ever manage to look after twenty-five people all the way through Europe? I know Elizabeth and I can never thank you enough for the kindness you have shown us. I'm sure we will speak to the agency when we get back home and tell them what a wonderful man you are. Won't we, Elizabeth?"

Mr. Bennet turned his head so that his gaze was fixed directly over the younger Miss Orcott's left ear. He had met her too-bright stare early in the voyage and did not intend to repeat the process. He had avoided speaking to her as much as possible and had paid the driver from his own funds to load and unload her and her wheel chair at every stop. As she started to smile eagerly, he swallowed uneasily. He had been aware for some time that Elizabeth Orcott was the spider of his unfinished nightmares.

Her voice was very deep, coming as it did from her massive chest and throat, developed by years of swinging herself on crutches.

"Mr. Bennet is indeed a remarkable young man," she answered, gazing up at him from under her hair. As he bowed and smiled in reply, he was aware, in spite of himself, of the way the shiny stuff of her dress stretched across her heroic bosom.

"I wonder," continued Grace, "if you could tell us something of the Passion Play we will see tomorrow. We don't know too much about things of that nature."

"Well," thought Mr. Bennet as he settled himself in front of the two sisters, "at least it's better than reviewing a nightmare."

II

Excitement stirred the babbling, many-tongued crowd that lined the way leading up the little hill. Jesus Christ was mounting the slope to Calvary. The onlookers grew silent as the perspiring figure drew near. Mr. Bennet looked deep into the eyes of Christ. For an instant, the inhuman, wide-eyed stare held him transfixed. Then the white, unlined forehead shone in the warm sunlight as the piercing gaze turned to the other line of spectators. Gradually, Mr.

Bennet became aware of the pain in the palms of his hands. Looking down, he saw that he had clenched his fists so tightly the nails had pierced the flesh of his hands. Turning abruptly, he began running jerkily up the hill. He pushed his way through the packed throng surrounding the two crosses, and once more he gazed toward the approaching bent figure.

Mr. Bennet had long since forgotten everything but the lonely figure on the cross. When the Roman soldier, his breast-plate gleaming, lurched toward the bound man, Mr. Bennet gave a hoarse cry, unnoticed by anyone, so deep was the absorption of the fascinated spectators. The wooden mallet swung down, smashing the nails to the cross. Mr. Bennet and the crucified man writhed together. Agonizingly the god-like face thrust itself on the corded neck turned Heaven. The lips began to move. Mr. Bennet gasped. He felt his heart pound crazily. The parched lips had formed his name. He smothered a wild laugh and strained to listen. There was no mistaking that clear, deep voice. From under the blond hair, covered with the brown dust of Calvary, the pale face had turned toward him. "Mr. Bennet, Mr. Bennet!" The voice thundered in his ear.

Suddenly he understood. The conflicting patterns of his life were suddenly, smoothly, fixed together to form a bright yellow, arrow-like path that pointed to the helpless, white-clad figure. He knew what he had to do. Head held high, arms swinging easily, he walked with the strides of a young boy down the hill to find Elizabeth Orcott.

Silent Tapestry

The flame imagined, mercifully glazes
its source, as the sun-ripened breast
its beady likeness. The thin membrane,
like sheer ice, suffering torment and
taunt from Sun and River, careens madly
toward an impossible bank.

Thumping, gurgling red the voyage, brocaded
black the vessel, and sacred white the port
and a porpoise to note the passage, he hungering
for bread and crown.

Roger Rubin

THE ART of GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

by John Corpaci

The period of decadency in Italian literature, a complex phenomenon, is a difficult thing to explain. It is as difficult to explain as the Romantic movement whence it derives and the spiritualistic and mystical movements from which many times it is inseparable.

In Fogazzaro and Pascoli there was already something present of the morbid, sick, and flat. There was an unsound morality, a voluptuous abandon to a sense of mystery, an abdication of the powers of the intellect in front of the forces and the problems of life, an improper use of the musical qualities of poetry. Nevertheless, in Fogazzaro and in Pascoli the moral reins are not yet broken; in spite of the passiveness of their temperament, they maintain a spiritualistic interpretation of life and hold themselves aloft from the sensualism and perversion of the true representatives of the decadent European period: Baudelaire, Wilde, and D'Annunzio.

The major representative of the Italian decadents was Gabriele D'Annunzio. D'Annunzio has a threefold importance: as a novelist, he is the last embodiment of the decadence of the nineties; as a poet, he is the last great character in the Byronic tradition: romantic, cynical, scandalous, and adventurous. His life was a series of love affairs, debts, extravagances; lastly, he is important as a man of action.

In D'Annunzio we find an indissoluble combination of a decadent of the nineteenth century and a Renaissance cavalier. In poetry, the man of the Renaissance is undermined by aestheticism and decadence, and, notwithstanding the sublime appearances of his art, lacks concrete signification because of a superficial adherence to the philosophy of Nietzsche. But, in life, the hero overcomes the aestheticism and decadence, and if he does not write like a hero, he acts like one.

D'Annunzio springs from what the Italians call their true aristocracy as distinguished from their minor nobility.

He did well as an aviator and as a soldier, but sports, games, and athletic life in general were not cultivated by him when he was a student at the college of Prato in Tuscany and at the great University of Rome. He was educated to worship the arts and to live in his emotions, tendencies to which his undeniable genius would have inclined him anyhow.

A difficulty encountered in the interpretation of D'Annunzio arises from his social code. He was reared in an atmosphere of the arts and of emancipation from all morals. In fact, "He lived in

a society from which he received no penalties for his innumerable escapades."

D'Annunzio's promise was at once recognized in his first volume *PRIMO VERE* (Spring), published when he was only sixteen. However, it is only with *CANTO NUOVO* (New Song) that he displays himself in full possession of his powers, firmly established upon his own feet. The book's appearance caused great excitement in literary circles. "The book struck a new note in Italy." It tells the story of a healthy child of nature on the threshold of manhood revealing in the glory of his youth and strength, and living the simple country life of the author's own wild Abruzzi.

These early lines might serve as a motto not merely for the *CANTO NUOVO* but for the whole of D'Annunzio's later life and work. So close was he living to nature that he hardly could distinguish himself from it.

He was a sensualist, and, being a sensualist, with no inspiring faith or rich inner life to draw upon, he was bound to be largely dependent upon external influences for his inspiration.

Rome was to be his school. D'Annunzio idealized ancient Rome, and "His most lasting achievements probably are those wonderful writings of his prior to 1900, in which he . . . endeavored to revive the bygone splendors of Italy." Artistically and intellectually he lived in that colorful past, because at heart he was an aesthete. Here, at Rome, his extraordinary susceptibility to sensuous beauty of every kind was quickened by close familiarity with the art of the capital. His rich, gorgeous style began to attain maturity. Above all, there was a deepening of the lyric melancholy, of the haunting sense of decay which is so characteristic of his writings. In his works, we notice the careful attention paid to the words he uses. It was through them that he attempted to convey to the reader sensations. He had an excessive preoccupation with sensation, with color and movement. In fact, "All his life he has searched avidly for sensation."

His life was a continuous search for pleasure, and perhaps it was not as happy as he had intended it to be. But, nevertheless, what a life! At seventeen, he was a marvelous boy with a face like a medieval angel and the literary world at his feet; then a social success, a Byronic lady-killer; then a popular author, the lover of Duse, the great actress. Finally, a vital, single force in persuading his country to join the allies, and, in the war that followed, his country's greatest hero.

The "Laus Vitae" is by far the longest poem D'Annunzio ever wrote. It is a hymn to life in all its aspects. The poem was written in a burst of inspiration, but it is uneven in several spots. The best of it is to be found in single passages rather than in the organic whole. In the prayer to Zeus he confesses his loathing of the mon-

sters of sensuality that drag him down, and the god's answer explains not a little in the poet's works:

In two of his romances, *IL TRIONFO DELLA MORTE* (The Triumph of Death) and *IL FUOCO* (The Flame), D'Annunzio attempted to relate personal experiences objectively. A great writer said of his work, *IL TRIONFO DELLA MORTE*, ". . . an unsurpassable example of his talent. His accomplishment here reaches its maximum; all his powers fight for him. . ."

Representative of his novels is *PIU CHE L'AMORE* (More Than Love). It is a drama whose material is tragic and whose essence is lyrical. Even from this tragedy one can note several sentences which reveal the firm, proud spirit of D'Annunzio. One of these sentences is: "Vivere non e soltanto soffrire, ma anche far soffrire" (To live is not only to suffer, but also to make suffer).

Nevertheless, a general sense of unity is lacking in these works, and they do not by any means compare to his greater works which he wrote for the theatre. Perhaps the greatest of these works and the most representative of D'Annunzio's theatre are: *LA FIGLIA d'JORIO* (The Daughter of Jorio) and *LA CITTA MORTA* (The Dead City)--the latter inspired by and written for the great Sara Bernhardt.

Before discussing these plays, it would be well to mention something of the D'Annunzian theatre.

The D'Annunzian theatre marks a passing of aestheticism for the few to aestheticism for the many. The spectator has the sensation of assisting at a legend rather than at a tragedy. The characters are presented in an unrealistic light, and rather than studying an individual, one studies a group as a whole. There is present a fairy-tale atmosphere, and the dramas do not represent conflicts between men, but rather a picturesque painting of Abruzzi, where all the superstitions and traditions of his home town, which have so completely fascinated the artist's imagination, find their true and proper place.

D'Annunzio wanted to bring upon the stage the hero of instinct, the superman who did not know any other law but his own, any other destiny than that which pleasure, pride, and ambition pointed out to him. ". . . every man nurses within himself a secret dream which is not goodness, and is not love, but an uncontrollable wish, unrestrained pleasure and egoism."

His characters want to reveal a new world to the public, a new beauty; they want to exhort the mob to glorious feats, but they do not possess the life of art which is so necessary to be a dramatic character. They recite a part written for them by a poet who has adopted words of unusual splendor and beauty, but all spiritual conflicts were absent. He wanted to bring poetry upon the stage, but poetry on the stage signified first humanity and then spiritual conflict, which D'Annunzio overlooked. And it is quite true that ". . . The D'Annunzian

theatre is not a theatre of poetry, but almost always of prophesy, of education, of corruption. . . of political exhortation.

LA FIGLIA d'IORIO is a legend dealing with D'Annunzio's native Abruzzi, a story of superstition and over-powering tragedy, culminating in a distressing scene of popular intolerance. Being a powerful peasant tragedy of his own Abruzzi, it is rooted in the primitive fears, passions, and superstitions of his countrymen. ". . . It has deep roots of human sentiment in religious instinct, in the traditions of race."

D'Annunzio possessed a great power in dealing with words. However, he had other great abilities, and his popularity was not due entirely to the susceptibility of the Italian people to rhetoric and poetry. Deeds of valor had the force of conclusive arguments with them.

From the moment Italy declared war (W. W. I), D'Annunzio's career became one of the most romantic of modern times; for the man who had hitherto been regarded merely as a sensuous aesthete and decadent, whose only claim to distinction had been his exquisite sense of beauty and his mastery of the language, now proved himself to be a man of action and a politician who for many months defied powerful governments. His exploits in the air were of the most fantastic nature, and during one of them he lost an eye.

However, his courage has been criticised as being nothing other than another of his weird manifestations for excitement and adventure. One critic stated that: "Whether it was misguided patriotism that moved him or inflated selfishness, it is certain that he won the approval of the best element of the nation."

The CANZONI DELLA GESTA DELL'OLTRE MARE (Songs From Beyond the Sea), songs of a patriotic nature and inspired by the Tripoli campaign, gave him his place in the hearts of his countrymen. It was during this period that "Gabriele D'Annunzio combined the dissevered arts of literature and war."

These "canzoni," however, have been severely criticized as lacking in sincerity. But to understand the rhetorical tone wherein they abound it is necessary to understand that D'Annunzio's love for Italy was not of the purest kind. It was tainted with the individualism of the renaissance adventurer. Indeed, it was not always easy to draw the line between D'Annunzio's patriotism and his thirst for personal glory. Italian public opinion hesitated between two explanations of his bravery: "Was it due to an outburst of genuine patriotism, or was it merely an exhibition of hare-brained ambition?"

He gave a certain mysticism to war which has been duly labelled as false by many Italian critics. In death he saw the great leveller. The individual killed in battle was mingled with the spirit of the race. In this sense, and in this sense only, he recognized the humblest soldier as his brother.

The story of the spiritual formation of D'Annunzio is all found

in the one hundred and fifty pages of IL CAMPAGNO DAGLI OCCHI SENZA CIGLI (The Friend With the Lashless Eyes.) It is through this work that the poet presents the hallucinations of a heroic world in which a young boy, who has left behind him the enclosing, prison-like walls of college, breathes, alone and triumphant, the air of a new life beneath a free sky.

It represents the best of his works in prose and will probably outlive him in its entirety. It also represents the most comprehensive image of the artist, both as a man and as a poet; and, therefore, the key to his psychology and art.

It is significant that in this work, D'Annunzio continuously harps upon the theme of greatness, of pride, of superb and dominating solitude; no less significant is the fact that in this work the truth grows and becomes deformed, it is weighed down with double meanings, illusions, presentiments, and is clouded over by ineffable sadness.

In the work there is present a dualism never surpassed between heroism and decadence, impetus and sadness. The true poetry of D'Annunzio belongs to an Ultra-romantic zone, shady and secluded. However, D'Annunzio ended by abusing this subtle atmosphere, but it has been, in the perfect moment of his activity, the most profound expression of his art.

When he re-entered in himself and dissipated the delirium of his senses, and listened to the true voice of his "ego," which he had for so long ignored, he wrote the most durable and worthy of his works. In fact, his art, which is so opulent and carnal in many pages, evaporates in music in his lovelier works.

D'Annunzio was undoubtedly a consummate master of Italian prose, perhaps, the greatest in modern times (if we overlook Fogazzaro), and his works, which are so closely united to the musical quality of the words, are almost untranslatable.

"To read D'Annunzio in French or English is to miss the beauty, the music, the exuberant verbal ingenuity which are his sole literary 'raison d'etre'."

He revelled in expressing the emotions of lust and love, and his works display a characteristic sensuous quality.

"Always his pages conveyed love's sensory aspects rather than its spiritual expression, because that was Gabriele's own approach to love. . . by nature an extremist, he constructed his tales along melodramatic lines, employing lurid plots and a tragic outcome, preferably suicide.

(Bertita Harding)

However, other emotions besides love and lust were celebrated by

the author. Nobody has better expressed the doom that lies over man, the dim sadness and weariness, which is at the bottom of all human happiness, the boredom, the shame of man. When we read his prose we are hurled from admiration to boredom and then back to admiration.

We cannot, however, help becoming aware of fatal deficiencies in his works. They are marred by fragments which result in a lack of general unity. He was a lyrical poet, and, therefore, expressed himself far better in verse than he did in prose.

Another fault was his interpretation of humanity. "In trying to look at humanity from above and from outside, he falls below, for the great art is the expression of the fully human."

Industrious, he wrote until the very last moment of his life, and the story of how the poet's body was found is indicative of his zealous qualities. "...when the first of them reached his study D'Annunzio was already dead, slumped over his desk, with the quill pen that he always used still between the fingers of his right hand ..."

Years before his death, he had written his own epitaph on the dedication page of one of his books in perfect Latin--he summed up his character and his mission: "I am Gabriel D'Annunzio, standing before God, one-eyed among my winged brothers, a disciple of unconventionality, minister of divine secrets, advocate of human folly, descended from on high, prince and herald."

D'Annunzio was recognized as the greatest force in modern Italian literature. "After D'Annunzio all which was decadent in our literature came from his examples."

He was the perfect type of aesthete, his was the religion of beauty. He may not have been so great an author as he thought he was, and we may utterly condemn his philosophy of life, but no one can deny the sharp surge of his enthusiasm and the fervour of his passions.

For his influence on Italian literature and for his political ideas, the works of Gabriele D'Annunzio, less rich in poetic value than those of his contemporaries, nevertheless, have a historical importance far greater.



Across the Counter

"Cotton and crepe
at \$1.98 -
Aprons and pinafores
for workaday chores -"
Effective as prayers in guarding from taint
Impervious to soup (and tears) and paint;
"Color-fast" (baptized and anointed) -
"Money back, if disappointed."

The Song of Songs was sung in Spring;
No refund in July
When pavements form the roof of Hell,
When flowers rot and bluebirds die.
No anarchy in apple tree,
Patterned bough on bough,
As in the tangle of these streets
Uncombed by God or plow.

The spider's seine is spread for prey;
What prey seek I by mine?
Or is there such a garment as -
Desire - sans - design?

Ask the crayfish searching for pearls
At the bargain counter -
"The People, Yes" - the people pay the price -
Ask the crayfish why they stab each other,
Ask the hungry lion to be "nice."

Diana Fine

Maturation

Heave boulder on boulder;
Fill the crevices with sand;
We shall smile when we are older -
When the storm has left the land.

We shall build a wall from sorrow,
Though hurled from it in dreams -
Though our bruised laughter on the morrow,
More like weeping seems.

Diana Fine

A Last Drink With Hennessy

Oh, Hennessy, for the last time
 Brave man's reason and life's rhyme
 Unhinge your coffin
 Swing the door
 Lurch to the bar
 And drink one more.

Raise the glass to your stilled lips
 Force it down in tooth-clenched sips
 Let it trickle,
 Stain the floor
 Drench your carnation
 And drink one more.

For what reason do you leer?
 Why is your face a twisted sneer?
 Forget the wreath
 That cloaks the door
 Come let me pour
 And drink one more.

Eugene Silver

Earth Bound

Can't you hear in the rush of the wind through the day
 The wild shouts of the imps as they leap in their play.
 First they rise to the sky with a shout of mad glee.
 Then they swoop in their dance on the foam of the sea.
 Comes the eve they lie down on the cool of the night
 And they bathe, as they lie in the moon's gentle light.
 In the morn they arise with the dew in their hair
 And they leap to the sky, race wildly through the air.
 How I wish I were free like the winds of the sea
 And could leap and play with the imps through the day.

Michael E. Somers

STAY HOME TONIGHT

by Kevan Broadman

Bernie tapped the garbage can to hear the noise. As he walked up the rotted steps to his apartment, he wiped his fingers on his pants. He set the empty can under the kitchen sink and then he squashed a roach which was scurrying across the floor. When his mother came into the kitchen, he was eating a sardine sandwich. Her bathrobe was thin and loose, and it was drawn in the places where it was sewn together.

"Hello Ma." The olive oil was leaking through the bread and it was soggy.

"Empty the can?" Her voice was tired. Her voice was always tired.

"Yeh"

"His mother eased herself into a chair and stared at the cracked oil cloth on the table.

"Gotta get some beer. You know how your father likes beer." Her voice was monotonous and very tired.

"Yeh," Bernie said.

Some of the sardines fell on his pants. He picked them up and put them in his mouth.

"Where's my old man?" He really didn't care.

"With Joe, I think," and then she said, "He's always with Joe."

"Him and that old bastard are one and the same." The sardines stuck in his teeth and he picked them with the knife.

"You shouldn't say things like that. Joe is your father's friend."

"Joe can go to hell."



She sighed and her slight shoulders moved underneath the robe.

"Okay Ma," he said.

"You going to be here for supper?"

"Don't know."

"We got nice chopped liver."

He got out of the chair and threw the bread crust into the can.

"I got a date."

His mother didn't move.

"How's your headaches?" Bernie was putting on his lumber jacket.

"Why don't you stay home tonight, son? You don't stay home with me anymore, like you used to."

"I got a date," he said.

"You're still my baby."

"Cut it out, Ma." Bernie pulled up the zipper.

"When I die. . ."

"Stop talking like that, Ma. You ain't going to die. You know what the Doc said. It's in your mind."

Bernie wiped his shoes with the sleeve of his jacket. He spit on them and wiped them again. He was all mixed up about his mother. She always said crazy things like that. It made his stomach feel funny.

"I'll get the beer for him," and Bernie opened the door. Some of the dirty plaster from the door sash trickled to the floor.

"I'll get it. I need some air." She got up slowly. Bernie went out and closed the door.

When Bernie's old man came in, the beer was on the table. He pushed the door shut with his foot and then loosened his belt.

"That you, Edward?" Bernie's mother was lying down.

Edward sat at the table. He opened up his shirt in the front so that the hair on his chest showed. He poured a glass of beer.

"Yeh, it's me."

He could hear the rustling of the sheets as she got up. Her slippers dragged against the floor when she put them on.

"What we got to eat tonight?"

Bernie's mother came into the kitchen and went to the ice box.

"We got nice chopped liver."

"Where's Bernie?"

She put some rye bread on the table and the paper cup with the chopped liver.

"He's got a date."

"He's always got a date for supper. We're not good enough to eat supper with? . . . Who's he got a date with?"

"I don't know," she said.

"You should know. You're his mother."

Bernie's old man took a large piece of chopped liver and stuffed it into his mouth. He swallowed a glass of beer to wash it down.

"I'm going out tonight. . .with Joe, on business."

She put some chopped liver on the bread, but she did not eat it. She just stared at it.

"Well, say something. Just don't sit there," he said.

"And what should I say?" She was very tired.

Bernie's old man went to the sink and wiped his hands on the wrinkled dish towel.

"How do you feel today?" He kept on wiping his hands.

"All right," she said very slowly.

"I gotta go tonight. Joe and I got a deal on. I gotta go."

"Edward, I'm your wife. Edward, I tell you, stay home tonight. . .just tonight."

Edward hung the towel back in place. What did she want from his life? She was just sick. . .that's all. He tried to be a good husband. She was just sick.

"I gotta go with Joe tonight," he said.

He buttoned his shirt and pulled his belt together.

"I'll be home as early as I can. Get some rest."

"Bernie won't be back till late," she said.

"I know. . .you told me before."

"I'm always left alone at night."

"You'll be all right." She was imagining things. She'd be all right.

From the bedroom she could hear the water from the kitchen faucet. . .dripping against the dirty white tile of the sink. She got up from the bed and went into the kitchen. She tried to shut the faucet off, but still it dripped. . .steady and loud. The stove was next to the sink. She stared at the small knobs of the stove which would stop the dripping.

Passionale

Desire became an obsession,

Many thoughts, many places, and many images,

Recalled to mind favorite haunts and whispered confessions.

The sun's rays pierced a lane

Directly into his room and innermost brain.

It was there that she became a reality,

A tangible object who appeared and as quickly was lost.

Lust and desire within become distilled,

Unrequited love must be fulfilled.

Robert Pugh

(Reprinted from AMERICA SINGS)

Contrast

BLACK is the night,
 BLACK is the cape that
 shrouds the executioner.
 BLACK is the soul of
 the murderer,
 And BLACK is the soil
 in which we are buried.

DEATH itself is a
 black aspect.
 DEATH is darkness ---
 of sight --- of mind.
 DEATH is the finish,
 the end of life,
 And DEATH comes quickly
 and swiftly unannounced.

LIFE ends with breath
 expired.
 LIFE taken away --- that is
 death --- required.
 LIFE is expressed by happiness
 and joy,
 And LIFE is extinguished by
 sorrow and grief.

WHITE clouds and bridal gowns.
 WHITE is cleanliness
 and virginity.
 WHITE is bright and devoid of sin.
 And WHITE is the casket which
 they placed my child in.

Robert V. Pugh

MODERN FICTION, REALITY ?

by Arthur B. Toft

Much has been said for and against modern fiction. Contemporary readers tend to condone the words of futility, sordidness, corruption and negation that have been showered, too often haphazardly, into the lap of mankind. Champions of the old 'school' desire entertainment only, or at any rate, easily discernible allegories emphasizing the virtues of tried, trusted and outworn moral codes. Both groups leap at each other's bared throats across the prostrate form of art. The 'condoners' argue that modern literature in searching for reality has hurled off the encumbrances of a false 'Victorian' modesty, and in the process of cutting life open to the bone revealed the sordidness and negation of man's existence, while offering a thrusting challenge to his moral and spiritual values. Man is not sure that the exponent of modern writing has the answer to the world's physical and mental corruption, but he is sure that the complacent antagonist hasn't.

It is easy to acknowledge the fact that as the fiction of the past century deals increasingly with the little understood realm of mental processes and psychological motivation of man in his communal intercourse with his fellow, it must necessarily have an immense influence upon the future of humanity, a humanity whose rapidly dwindling hope for salvation lies in finding a means of living at peace for more than twenty-five years at a time. Where then, does this put the author of today?

The contemporary writer is necessarily a commentator upon the way in which man conducts himself and his affairs. But he is more than that! So many who have brayed loudly in defense of the modern author seem thoroughly contented with the fact that eminent writers like Huxley, Gide and Mann have given us brilliant and lucid pictures of the degeneracy and decadence which man has achieved. They see nothing wrong with the fact that none of these authors even attempt to offer ideas in remedy of the revolting conditions which, they maintain, exist. These champions will hotly deny that such is the case, and indignantly insist that the sordidness, negation and futility of modern and contemporary fiction is a flaming challenge to the spiritual and moral responsibility of a scientific age. To be sure it is!

But other deeper, profounder considerations and appreciations are involved now, considerations not so easily definable as those

with which Charles Dickens was faced in 19th Century England. He was presenting tangible, easily recognizable problems which could be corrected by an act of government and concerned only certain strata of society. Modern novels and the problems which they pose concern all of mankind, regardless of artificial, socially constructed distinctions. At this our modern reader smiles complacently and explains that his heroes fully realize this fact and the consequent need for presenting contemporary problems in a new form, in a language which will portray all the abstract reaches of the human mind. He will expound at length upon the new techniques, symbolism, the different levels of meaning and the constant endeavor of the artist to discover some medium of expression which will convey to his audience the intangible concepts, the abstract, aesthetic qualities which are the motivating forces behind life.

Granted all this. But too many of these revolutionary media fall into the category of private, personal language, which only the author himself can definitely understand! The average reader is left thoroughly confused and bewildered with the work he is reading and completely reliant upon the more imaginative conjecturing of the Sunday newspaper critics. He is reluctant to admit that he doesn't like a book and afraid to say that he can't understand just what the author wants to put across. Even though the reader manages to delve into the very core of the modern novel with the aid of these competent critics, he finds, regardless of the hackneyed and convenient arguments, that optimism and truth are reflected back at him from pessimism and negation, after reaching the final sentence he still has not stumbled on one shred of an idea that may be held up as a feasible solution to the futility of man's unfortunate lot. Certainly it cannot be said that Point Counter Point is bubbling with optimism and enthusiasm for a brave new world; the sickening corruption which pervades Mann's Magic Mountain horrifies him, but does the average reader discern any note of hope within this intense novel? And likewise, the disintegration of moral values in The Counterfeiters leaves him with nowhere to turn, not even within himself.

War novels such as Mailer's The Naked and the Dead and Dos Passos' Three Soldiers show war as a miserable sickness. They are sympathizers only. They offer no remedy or encouragement. Man has a disease. The war novelists inform him of this well established fact.

It is well to be concerned with the workings of the mind and attempt to fathom its innermost intricacies, even in fiction - such a subject is fiction anyway - but let us not distort these questions until we lose sight completely of what was once known as common sense. The alarming number of young disciples and followers of the prominent writers, who think of themselves as aspiring Mann's and Gide's, merely because they assume an air of morbid futility and

expand their respective vocabularies by avidly learning all the negative words in the dictionary, support the accusation that the modern artist is not facing reality in the way in which he presents his comments to the world.

It is a reflection upon our age that people readily accept the obvious, negative side of modern literature. But they do not have the perception to see any deeper than this. Unfortunately, all of the revolutionary techniques in the world won't open their eyes to the true, underlying meanings of this literature, if these techniques are the intensely personalized communicants between the author's hand and brain. Obscurantism is a poor substitute for material complacency if all that it conveys is futility and frustration.

These are the immediate problems which the contemporary author has to face. He has to realize that the average man is insufficiently advanced mentally to grasp those abstract concepts of life revealed to the artist. And the artist should realize that man must be spoken to in a language which he, as a young and not very bright child, can understand. The writer who fails to grasp the measure of undesirable influence which an incorrect interpretation of his art may and often does produce is materially assisting those forces of disintegration which he himself wishes to combat.

Spring Song

Dripping silence, the sun washes
with fiery ripples, the diamond dancing sea.
Brilliant pebbles, pirouetting blindly,
ignite the slow incense of spring,
defy the stunning orb and shower the rich
mould with stinging red rhythms.

Dawn scars the perfect melancholy
of becalmed, topless frigates,
and tarnishes the new-ribbed hull.
Unwelcomed, unopposed, but for withered eyes.
I lap, famished, the light and sigh
Surely the hot tipped steel
Seeks my bursting flesh

Roger Rubin

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