

but not just that: spirited, but not spiritual. A bit worn but quite ageless: one does not think of him being eighty, though he referred several times to his age.

His manner was that of a most courteous and considerate millionaire of learning. With Goethe not only in front but also in volumes behind him, talking, he scaled the commanding heights. The peaks amongst which he moves easily are—it will be seen—Dante, Goethe, Tolstoy, Proust, Mann. I left with that feeling of elation one has after being with someone of superior intelligence which he does not (as English intellectuals often do) hide.

I TOOK NO NOTES, partly because I hate taking out a notebook, partly because I had no intention of writing up our conversation until I was on the point of leaving. Then I mentioned that I might do so, and said I was sorry I had not noted things down. He said it was better to create impressions of a conversation than report it exactly. "Otherwise you might just as well have brought a tape recorder, which would have made it no conversation at all." The tape-recorder kills interviewing because it puts it on the same level as a dictated letter signed in one's absence.

We recalled that we had met in Geneva at the first of the series of *Rencontres de Genève* in 1946. Karl Jaspers and Merleau-Ponty had been there, and we talked of the recent death of Merleau-Ponty. Lukács said that at the time of the *Rencontres* he had admired the liveliness and openness of Merleau's intelligence, and had formed the impression that his was a mind capable of greater development than Sartre's. But subsequently Merleau-Ponty had become a bit academic, "too much of the University professor," where it was immensely to the credit of Sartre that he had continued to develop. His most recent works—whether or not one agreed with them—were his most interesting.

Lukács said he had given up lecturing, attending conferences, etcetera. It was time that he sat down and tried to sum up a lifetime spent in thinking. His case was the exact opposite of that of Bertrand Russell who had written his philosophical works at a fairly early age and was now free to make pronouncements and to participate in the world of action.

He had completed the first part of his book on "Marxist Aesthetics" and was now writing about the relation of human personality to society in the Marxist system. It was a complex subject because neither was the idea that the person was completely conditioned by society—a social unit—true, nor that he was completely separate from it. For instance, in one's family one was not isolated: one was influenced by

one's relations and they in turn were influenced by oneself. One was made by society and one made it.

He asked me what I was writing; I said that his remarks particularly interested me because I was devoting several years to writing a poem exploring experience in the history of one's time as symbolised by personal pronouns—I, thou, he, she, we, they, etc. One was first conscious of oneself as "I," then of others as being also "I." There was also a phase (particularly in adolescence) of losing oneself in the excitement of being "we." "We" the young against "them" the old, "we" the comrades against "them" the capitalists. "They" are not only people to whom "we" are opposed, but they are potentially absorbed into things they possess, abstractions they represent. Any class which appears as "they" to the "we" of another class is thought of by the "I's" who are members of the "we" as a bit dehumanised.

"All the same," Lukács objected, "everything human has a subjective ground." It was an illusion to suppose that a governing class was not subjective. "But people do tend to think of themselves as living in an impersonal history, amid historic forces, the heirs of a depersonalised past," I answered. To think oneself into the history of our time in a way which would penetrate and uncover its subjectivity even when one was discussing "theys" as formidable as Stalin and Hitler, was my idea.

He asked whether I thought of a sequence of scenes each of them in a different form, or whether there would be a sustained narrative in the same form. I said it would have to be written as a sequence of related parts. Lukács did not think it would be possible to write a long modern poem in a single continuous metre. I said that to-day anything like Goethean hexameters or Wordsworthian blank verse would be boring. But the great exemplar for modern poets was Dante, not because of his *terza rima*, but because of the absolutely literal basis of his imagistic chimeras. However fantastic his inventions might seem, they remained concrete, could be seen in other ways than in the words that enclosed them, could be drawn or made into sculpture. There was always in the Dantean scheme a blueprint, in the imagery, models. Even in Shakespeare this was not so, and the imagery tended to become dissolved into the hyperbolic language.

He agreed that *The Divine Comedy* was really a sequence of scenes, not a continuous developing narration and theme like *Paradise Lost*. He thought the *Inferno* the best of *The Divine Comedy*. One visualised it as a vast underground system of chambers. One passed from one room to another, from a scene containing Paolo and

Francesca, to one with Ugolino, for example. There could not be a modern poem corresponding to *The Divine Comedy*, because Dante wrote in an age when men believed that the fundamental conditions of living did not alter. The characters in the *Inferno* were not those of people conditioned by their environment, not even by Hell. They were, so to speak, statues frozen into gestures projected by their human moral qualities within a history in which the fundamentals of human nature did not change. When Dante speaks with Paolo and Francesca they answer him in the roles which they enacted in their lives, not as people transformed by their circumstances.

HE THOUGHT that in our age, unlike Dante's, we couldn't view human character as fixed, static, separate from the ideas and interests of the society in which people lived. Marxism pictured people as influenced by certain tendencies, directions of society, not crystallising into "characters" who could be taken out of history and examined like separate objects. No one was in himself completely bad or good, right or wrong. Rather one moved in a bad or wrong direction, a good or right one. He did not mean by this that people were conditioned predictably by circumstances so that they could be analysed mechanically. After the 1917 Revolution there had been in Russia a famous discussion between Lenin and Bukharin in which Bukharin had argued that given at some future time complete sociological information and complete control by political science over the development of history, then individual human behaviour would become completely predictable. Lenin replied that this was nonsense because the unpredictable was an essential quality of human nature. Marx had said not that history ends with Communism, but that it begins with it. After the final victory of Communism, everything previous to it will be pre-history.

Tolstoy was just as much a realist in his attitude to history as Marx, though he wasn't, of course, in the least concerned with Marxism. But in *War and Peace*, Prince Andrey becomes, as a result of the events in which he moves, almost a different person. The first time he is wounded, on the field of Austerlitz, he is dominated by the ambition to become another Napoleon. But the second time—after Borodino—when he is lying at the dressing-station among the other wounded, he is simply one man among others who has fought for his fatherland. And between the two events there is the relationship with Natasha Rostova. Hence, there is at Austerlitz the collapse of Prince Andrey's dreams of ambition; at Borodino a deeper moral crisis, resulting in that spirit of

forgiveness and compassion shown when he sees his hated rival, Anatole, brought into the dressing-station on a stretcher, and he feels nothing but pity for him.

"THEN DO YOU think that Marxism might provide a schema for poetry in the way that Aquinas did for Dante?" "I think not, because we have no fixed concept of moral character as black and white, good or bad, but only of direction within the dialectic of the historic process; and history does not stop at some achieved final goal." I asked him which works being written to-day he thought were good examples of Marxist writing. He greatly admired Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. The important thing about this novel was that the writer doesn't just describe the horror of the concentration camps, but portrays the way in which different sorts of human beings react to such a situation, whether they affirm their humanity or whether they betray it. "I believe that the fundamental task for writers to-day in the socialist countries is the poetically imaginative interpretation of the Stalinist period, since for everyone the good and the bad in him belong to that past which has made him what he is. So a new step forward in social realism begins with this story."

But, I suggested, to say that Tolstoy was a Marxist without knowing it amounted to saying that any good writer was bound to be a Marxist whether or not he knew that he was. His being Marxist consisted simply in his revealing in his work a correct relationship between the individual and the historic time and place. So perhaps *Ulysses* was an unconsciously Marxist novel. Lukács would not agree to this. He found *Ulysses* boring and tedious. He had read it only out of a sense of obligation because people had told him it was "important." He thought that Joyce achieved little except to explore the mechanism by which the subjective consciousness of a particular character functioned, in associating impressions, memories, ideas. Joyce was naturalistic in his description of the associative processes, but this did not make him a socialist realist. Lukács himself was not interested in the mechanisms of his own mind, but in thinking and arriving at conclusions.

Did I know who it was who first invented the phrase "interior monologue"? I said I thought it was some little-known 19th-century French novelist—I had forgotten his name. Not at all. The Russian critic Tschernischewski had first noted that what distinguished the youthful writings of Tolstoy in the mid-1850s was his use of interior monologue. And of course there

are many examples of it in Tolstoy's later work (Prince Andrey's thoughts after Austerlitz), and in Dostoevsky. The contribution of Joyce was to convey naturalistically the actual mechanics of interior monologue.

"What about Proust then?" "Oh, the case of Proust is very different from that of Joyce. In *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* there is a real picture of the world, not a naturalistic—and pretentious and grotesque—photomontage of associations. The world of Proust may appear to be fragmentary and problematical. In many ways it fulfils the situation of the last chapter of *L'Éducation Sentimentale*, in which Frédéric Moreau returns home after the crushing of the Revolution of 1848: he has no longer any experience of reality, only a yearning for his lost past. The fact that this situation provides exclusively the content in Proust's work is the reason for its fragmentariness and problematic nature. Nevertheless, it is a portrayal of a true situation carried out with art.

"You see, what I ask of a novel is not whether it portrays naturalistically my inner mechanisms—Mr. Bloom sitting on the w.c. and thinking his thoughts—but whether it adds to the sum of my experience of life. Proust does that for me, Joyce doesn't." An example of what he admired was the scene in Thomas Mann's *Lotte in Weimar* with Goethe waking up in the morning to those images still hovering over him from dreams, gods and goddesses, and nymphs—"a genuinely human and organic reality."

Lukács likened himself to the street urchin in the Hans Andersen story, who sees that the Emperor has no clothes. All the critics praised Joyce. Lukács looked and saw that the Emperor rode naked. Lukács looked and saw that there was nothing to Samuel Beckett, nothing to the *Alexandria Quartet* of Lawrence Durrell, nothing to the so-called semanticist school of criticism. "But, of course, I may be saying these things because I'm a very old man, just on eighty."

He smiled at me. And when I asked about modern painting he said that perhaps just because he was a very old man what he noticed was the recent tendency for a painter to invent a technique which no one had used before—or which no other contemporary painter happened to be using. As a consequence of this, he became for a time the painter most under discussion, but after six months the novelty wore off, and then it became clear that apart from the device the painting had no content. Instead of looking for content the critics and the public looked to a painter for a new set of tricks. But it was wrong to think that Cézanne and Van Gogh, to whom the development of painting after them was often traced, were void

of content. Their work had a great deal of content. But after them, there has been increasingly a tendency in art for the technique of the medium to separate from the content and become an end in itself.

BUT PERHAPS after all the art of the time through which he had lived, and which we labelled "modern art," which had provided the standards of taste from 1914 to the late 1950s, was the reflection of a period when for a great many people the problem of living had been reduced to terms of mere survival from terrible disasters, wars, upheavals. He thought that to-day—despite appearances—we were moving out of forty years of darkness into comparative light. "I think that's true of all parts of Europe, of the East as well as the West. I hope you won't mind my saying that I must reproach ENCOUNTER for not taking note of this change. You are conservative in this respect and you go on writing about the People's Democracies as though we were still living in the Stalinist era and your mission was to promote views held by Koestler and Orwell a generation ago."

Looking back on his life Lukács was glad it had coincided with eighty years of great historic change. He had been a schoolboy when *Buddenbrooks* was published. He had lived through the pre-1914 years which now seemed an almost unimaginable epoch. The period from 1914-1956 now began to take its place as the history of wars, revolutions, unemployment, hunger, fascism, concentration camps, and then—after the second World War—Stalinism, the Cold War, and the fear of the destruction of all our cultural history by the atom bomb. He thought that one of the symptoms of this new period was a revival of interest in Marxism.

"We are standing at the beginning of a new period of this kind, but the majority of people notice nothing of this," he wrote in a letter, returning to me my draft of our conversation. In another letter he protests that he had not thought of our conversation as being for publication, and that he annotated my draft only out of a sense of *Solidarität der Schriftsteller*—the solidarity of fellow-writers. He thinks that only answers to important questions about matters of great public interest are worth publishing. Ours was merely a lively discussion between writers. He leaves it to me, however, to decide whether to publish this. I have decided to do so, partly because I think that some of the things said throw light on Lukács' way of talking, partly because I hope it will be an example of the kind of dialogue "between colleagues" from the East and the West, that ENCOUNTER should now inaugurate. To publish such a con-

versation is perhaps the best answers to Lukács' reproach that we print "only hostile reports." Perhaps I may also add in our own mild defence that the very people who post-datedly approve of "anti-Stalinism" between 1945 and 1956 are often those who were attacking us for those very attitudes then. We all agree though that events

and attitudes in Europe have changed, and because of this a new atmosphere and relationship is possible. Writers behind the Iron Curtain are the colleagues of writers here; we have regard for their sensibilities, and respect for their views when (as is usually now the case) they do not reflect official instructions and attitudes.

Stephen Spender

A Song for Innocence

for Olivia

O desolate spring in the middle of the desert,
 We have walked down the green margins of the hills
 And come across the sand in the short
 Cool hours when the heart fills
 With love, hoping to find your clear
 Waters under the fruit of the oasis
 Which the cowboy sang about, the geographer
 Drew, the churchman preached. A promise
 Led us over the burning dunes
 Hour after hour, year after year until
 We forgot our thirst: our minds fill
 Like our high boots with stones.
 At last we are lost and drink
 Dry air with a few curses. There is nothing to think;
 Our eyes grow blind, our feet no longer
 Remember where they were going or why
 We began: only, inside us, each carries gratefully the cry
 Of the others like food from a stranger
 Whose ignorance is our home, whose body
 Lying in the desert is our body.

David Posner

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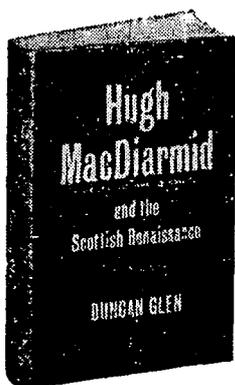
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BOOKS & WRITERS

Who is India?

On V. S. Naipaul's Journey into "Darkness" — By D. J. ENRIGHT

FEW PEOPLE these days, it seems, and very few Indians, regard *A Passage to India* as conveying an accurate picture of Indian life and character. "Good style," the Indian will admit appreciatively, "but not India..." And yet no one—and I rashly include Indians here—seems able to produce a picture of India which is either superior in its cogency or even notably different in essentials from Forster's. Forster covered himself by acknowledging—indeed it was a large part of the point—the impossibility of "picturing" India: the book is a "passage," and a (generally) gentle study in misconceptions. Aziz's account of the provenance of the water in the tank near Fielding's house assumes the power of the Mogul emperors to make water flow uphill. Miss Quested—the well-intentioned tourist makes the guide the test—accepts everything Aziz says as literally true. "In her ignorance, she regarded him as 'India,' and never surmised that his outlook was limited and his method inaccurate, and that no one is India." So it seems curiously wrong-headed in the critics to complain that Aziz is "unrepresentative," or (since he doesn't try to explain it) that Forster didn't understand Hinduism. Forster was writing a novel. In *An Area of Darkness* V. S. Naipaul, perhaps unhappily, is not.¹

The incident of the uphill-flowing water was brought to mind by Mr. Naipaul's Kashmiri engineer. "That?" he says, waving his hand at Akbar's late-16th-century fort, "that is five thousand years old." Mr. Naipaul's stories are bound to remind other travellers of similar experiences of their own. Himself a Trinidad Indian who has spent much of his time in England, he remarks that the Indian army officer "even manages to look English; his gait and bearing are English; his mannerisms, his tastes in drink are English; his slang is English." Yes indeed.

Several years ago I found myself in a small British party who were being conducted round Fort William in Calcutta. This treat had kindly (and perhaps not inappropriately) been arranged by the British agency sponsoring our intellectual tour, though my own feeling was that I hadn't come to India to be marched round an army camp, and only the intimation that we should eventually be offered a chota peg or so in the officers' mess dissuaded me from a sick headache. The brisk Indian major pointed out with professional pride how splendidly the fort was placed for shooting down rioters on the main streets. Endeavouring to repel the suspicion that he had actually said "shooting down the natives," I lagged behind, and hoped to catch sight of something specifically Indian, or at least something less specifically military. The major had taken note of my insubordinate attitude, and as I caught up with the party, "But *you* can't be British," he told me sternly, "I would say that you are French." No drink was offered. I seem to recall, though, that we were shown the regimental silver.

Perhaps the writer can get nearer to the spirit of a country, or its spirits, in the medium of fiction or poetry, with the help of a free ranging imagination, than through the head-on collision of an orthodox travel book. Possibly fiction can be truer than non-fiction in spheres where "the truth" is so enormously hard to come by; paradoxically, a greater objectivity is achieved through poetry or fiction. To write a travel book, which means sticking to the facts in a case where the facts are so many and so diverse, leaves the author dependent on the confrontation of his personality with the small minority of facts which happen to come his way; with the beaten-track or hit-and-run traveller the facts will be merely touristic, and even with the more enterprising or more privileged, they will still be a small minority and inevitably limited in kind by the fact that he *is* a traveller. A travel book by an author of little personality is

¹*An Area of Darkness*. By V. S. NAIPAUL. Deutsch, 25s.