

Foreign Literature

What Is the Soul?

PSYCHE. By ERWIN ROHDE. Translated from the eighth German edition by W. B. Hillis. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1925.

Reviewed by ERNEST SUTHERLAND BATES

AN English version of this, one of the great treasures of nineteenth century scholarship, has long been overdue. Erwin Rohde, contemporary and early friend of Nietzsche—though like others estranged from that irascible genius in later years—belonged to the German historical tradition which combined philosophy, philology, and history of culture. He reacted, however, against the uncritical and exaggerated praise of all things Greek which had characterized the earlier part of the century, and by his work pointed the way toward a more realistic estimate of classical civilization. "Psyche" was the foundation for all that later study of Greek religion in terms of actual cult practices instead of merely through literature which in the hands of Frazer, Cook, Farnell, and Jane Harrison has yielded such a wealth of new material. Supplemented and modified but not superseded by theirs, his work has been substantiated in its main contention, and, being a masterpiece of prose style, as well as a masterpiece of scholarship, is not likely to be superseded in the future.

The beauty of Rohde's writing could hardly be retained in another language—readable and accurate as Mr. Hillis's rendering is—but the beauty of his far-flung yet closely knit imagination, thrown like a golden net over a thousand years of Greek culture, penetrates the translation and makes the work thrilling as a poem—which essentially it is. Ultimately the most thrilling question for any man is what does he conceive himself to be—what is his notion, rich or poor, positive or negative, of his own self, his soul, his psyche. This is the

glittering thread which Rohde follows through the whole net-work of Greek civilization, and which binds his long work into perfect unity.

Primitive cultures seem, like historical, to have had their great waves of enthusiasm, their ebb and flow of faith and doubt, their stagnant periods of accepted, formalized belief. At the outset of Rohde's volume we catch dim glimpses of such a period in the pre-Homeric or Mycenaean age—now far better known to us—in which there was a highly developed cult of souls, a worship of mingled love and terror directed toward the spirits of the dead supposed to be surviving in or near the tomb, possessed of strange powers, often malignant, always dangerous, to be placated with food and offerings and ritual. The monition to speak no evil of the dead—interpreted today as a tribute of chivalry toward one no longer present to defend himself—originally arose, as an advice of caution, from the directly opposite conception that the dead man was all-powerful to avenge himself. The cult of souls was at its worst dark and superstitious, and even at its best formal and superficial. In the clear rationalism of the Homeric period it all but disappeared. Ghosts had become impotent, tenuous beings, banished at death to a far-distant Hades, leaving the living to pursue untroubled their worldly occupations of war or love or adventure. The Homeric poems, however, with their threefold separated realms of celestial deities, terrestrial mortals, and subterranean shades were as high above the permanent popular level in philosophy as in poetry. Local cave spirits, underworld demons and monsters lingered on for centuries, unextirpated by the bright Olympian gods, and it was these lower divinities who monopolized the actual worship of the Greek populace. The cult of souls revived, was supported by the Delphic Oracle, and was sanctioned at Athens by the most enlightened of the Greek states. A privileged

condition of blessed immortality, contrasted with the next to nothingness of the Homeric shades, was first extended to the special class of heroes, and then to the whole mass of Athenians who were officially initiated in the Eleusinian Mysteries. Yet even here immortality was regarded as a kind of magic gift, unrelated to man's conduct or character, and the belief was in consequence without great influence on human life.

through this inner voice alone that the most dramatic moment in that magnificent book is detailed: It is the moment when Clyde has accidentally tilted the boat, and Roberta has been plunged into the water, and it occurs to him not to save her.

Perhaps the greatest mystery in the art of the novelist inheres in tempo. Tempo, long a living reality to music, emerged in drama much later, and was isolated and christened and recognized later still. In fiction it has hardly yet been recognized. The novelist has been content with the immature device of chapters to indicate a lapse of time no less than a change of subject; or he has used spacings, and even stars. The bald ticking of time—"three years later," "two hours afterwards,"—he has used as a matter of course; and such expressions as "presently," "shortly," "in a few minutes" he has employed as unblushingly as the writer of motion-picture captions has set down his bald descriptive lines. The orchestra knows a better way; drama knows that there must be crests, and shallows in action—that two crests cannot come too closely together, and that too deep a shallow will pull down a perfect crest.

In that region of the unknown, unknown to author as to reader save by effect, there will come, even now is coming, the use of inanimate objects not as setting alone, but as integral and reacting parts of certain moments. But only of certain moments. As Hardy uses the wheel and roll of the night skies, and the flow of the moors, and the crouching shoulders of the Essex hills, so one handling the lesser scenes realizes that his function is largely the pointing of relationship; and that relationships exist between himself and his surroundings hardly less sharp, hardly less violent in impact, than those between man and man. These patient familiar things, scenes, façades, gardens, passages, aspects of closed rooms, impinge upon and affect him; and rushing greetings of fire and sunlight, withdrawals, reproachings, indignations, and tragic reminders are functions of inanimate objects, and of places almost as much as of their bustling and preoccupied inmates and habitués. Sometimes more so. Such things have not been taken into account. They will emerge in fiction late, but already their importance on the stage has been recognized, and lighting, color, spacing, proportion, silence, clutter, and even—with O'Neill—actual expansion and contraction of the walls of the room, take up their vital part in drama, and will be followed by their full-bodied entrance into fiction. "We know not what each other says—these things and I," Francis Thompson mourned. The novelist of tomorrow may know, and expose these interactions between human beings and their silent faithful "inanimate" companions.

For there is possible to perception, and therefore possible to fiction as a record of perception and reaction, something which pictorial artists have known, almost alone of artists. There is possible a certain naked look at the object in itself, unveiled, divorced from habit, custom, expectation—a direct impact upon the senses of the aspect of things, with no separating conventions of what one should see or can see. There is a direct perception of line and mass, just as there is a direct perception of truth; and by such perception may be disclosed not only the form but its equivalents. The moderns, some of them, are by simple means divulging this power of human vision—in the United States, to name one Pamela Bianco has projected moments of the sharpest and most naked vision flat upon the object itself, or oftener with a bold use of atmosphere as dynamic. The great contribution of Arthur Davies is not in his extension of material, nor in his handling of its relationship; but it is precisely in this power to multiply even the ordinary vision of the artist until new planes, and *new planes in motion*, present themselves as simply as old lines and surfaces. Georgia O'Keefe has communicated not the emotion—a simple matter—but the actual ray of an object painted, of a leaf, a stamen. And occasionally this is true in the wood-cuts. These ways are incommunicable. That is their power. They can be employed, but they cannot be talked about. But it is upon some such area of power and energy that the fiction writer, not less than the pictorial artist, is about to enter.

It will be in his area, perhaps, that the "third convention" of Professor Saurat will be formulated for art, and then there may be for fiction, correspondences to the other exactitudes: the spectrum, the octave, the seed.

Meanwhile the confusion is like a magnificent exercise, many instruments being tuned and tried, and new music is heard

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Note to Novel Readers

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habits of fiction and drama—as these might be written. The use of the Greek chorus has always pulled at the sleeve of the dramatist, and sometimes, though very rarely, has emerged in the novel. An example of a new use of the chorus appears in "Carmencita and the Soldier," that stirring reinterpretation of "Carmen," made in this country by Morris Gest. Here the chorus is no longer a volley of bright-skirted and bodiced maids and men, thrust into the action like a shower of sparks from a burning building when the action is, as yet, concerned only with contemplating a possible conflagration; no, this crude chorus is replaced by an assembly which actually represents the thought of the actors: A grave sombre company, emerging at various planes of vision, on irregularly-placed surfaces high in the set, chanting their dreamy reflections on what goes on below, no action among them, no motion any more than the motion of thought, namely, the sudden flutter of innumerable fans, and these as abruptly furled. This is an advance on the chorus of "Coq d'Or," where the chorus sits passive and immobile, static like flesh, not mobile like spirit—a thing of the external, and not of the flame, the mood. And it is the triumph of Theodore Dreiser that, in "An American Tragedy," he has transferred this chorus, similarly, from the external to the internal; has made it not a company of commentators, but the voice within the chief actor himself; and it is

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 LEONARD BACON

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 AMY LOVEMAN

The AMEN CORNER

ONE hundred years ago the diary of Samuel Pepys was first published. When Pepys died his immense library went to an English university. The spirit of the man walks with his readers in 1926 more than ever it did in 1668. In that year Pepys records that "Edward, First Earl of Clarendon, Lord Chancellor—did love and esteem of me as well as he did of any man in England that he hath had no more acquaintance with, and once in the Council Chamber, on passing me by, stroked me on the head." Clarendon's History laid the foundation for the learned books of the Oxford University Press. . . . Here is a page out of the present diary of Samuel Pepys, patriot, and lover of good books, well known to the founder of the Clarendon Press of Oxford.

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The 8th. UP AND to my office about my business, then to Fifth Avenue and it being too soon to go to dinner I walked up and down and looked in on the new quarters of Oxford University Press. I did purchase some of their very fine volumes recently brought out having to do with the Eighteenth Century and a somewhat earlier time, and I did recall to them there that in *Amen House* where is the home of the Press in London there is in the basement of that House an authentic piece of the London Wall of Roman Britain—very noteworthy about this great Press. So to my Club, and by and by in came sundry friends, booklovers, and I did tell them of my morning jaunt. Whereupon W. Peris, Esq. talked learnedly on *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*¹ by one, *Curry*, which he bought of them latterly, which considers celestial physiognomy, geomancy, alchemy, and dreams, as interpreting anew the Canterbury Tales in very pleasant manner. He did remind us that *Salzman's English Life in the Middle Ages*,² and *The Legacy of the Middle Ages*³ by *Crump & Jacob*, now out, doth give a marvellous background for any literary or other work of that time. These, he concluded, be beautiful books for making gifts: the amusing illustrations in the first and the perfect full-page half-tones in the other make them suitable for art-lover, student, minister, or man or woman of fashion. I resolved to buy these forthwith. Thus, after an hour with them, I took bus and went after my wife to her inn. Thence home, where I was troubled to see her forced to sit in the back of the bus, though pleased that her company was none but women and one parson. Elizabeth told me anon this man was engrossed in reading *John Woodforde's Diary of a Country Parson*⁴ which, she said, was c. the years 1758 to 1787, and she did envy his chuckling over it—she did recently borrow and read the work with great pleasure for it comes nearest my own diary of anything she hath yet read and enjoyed. So to supper, then to my musique papers, to prayers and bed.

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 10th Up, and to my desk in my chamber where all morning making a catalogue of my books which did find me work but with great pleasure. Did examine my 18th century purchases. Whereupon my wife began reading aloud from *English Women in Life & Letters*⁵ (by *Phillips & Tomkinson*), a very fine volume with hundreds of pictures, mainly about the last two centuries but also full of earlier stories and with many pages about my wife, our serving-wench Jane, and no little about my personal habits. My women, very eager, did read aloud foolishly, only reading here and there a bit and of themselves everything, whereas they ought to do it all, every word, for this be a very fine picture of ours and later times in England. . . . Had fritters for dinner. This day Mr. Roehrich sent my wife a pair of silver candle sticks. . . . Later finished reading *English Men and Manners in the 18th Century*,⁶ by one *A. S. Turberville*, a most interesting book which discourses pleasantly on yesterday's troubles, customs, and scandals, with accounts of the blue stockings, the watering places, and men of the highway and the sea (which last especially interested me), of Whigs and Tories in Queen Anne's day, of artists, soldiers, admirals, divines, drama, and Grub Street. The book hath hundreds of rare illustrations. . . . In the evening went to the new playhouse where I saw a comedy by *Arthur Murphy* called *The Way to Keep Him*.⁷ This was a good play, smacking of French models which are like this same author's farces. 'Twas well acted. So home, and to bed.

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