

THE MEANING OF CONTEMPORARY REALISM

Monmaysers as a novel. But its structure suffered from a characteristically modernist schizophrenia: it was supposed to be written by the man who was also the hero of the novel. And, in practice, Gide was forced to admit that no novel, no work of literature could be constructed in that way. We have here a practical demonstration that—as Benjamin showed in another context—modernism means not the enrichment, but the negation of art.

Luhaas

Franz Kafka or Thomas Mann?

TO DEFINE the conditions in which bourgeois 'literary' literature can flourish today, we analysed the ideological basis and the main stylistic tendencies of the modern bourgeois anti-realistic movement. We might have widened our examination to include 'non-literary' literature, if only to reveal its social basis. Certain of the phenomena we have discussed are to be found most strikingly in this latter literature. Take the cult of the abnormal, of the perverse: horror comics show that this cult is drawn directly from life. Or take the detective story. With Conan Doyle the genre was firmly grounded in a philosophy of security; it glorified the omniscience of those who watched over the stability of bourgeois life. Now the basic ingredients are fear and insecurity: at any moment terror may break through; only luck can avert it. In some works of a middle-brow kind (for example in Hayes' *On a day like any other*) this kind of 'luck' provides—by way of apology for the society it portrays—the book's happy ending. Indeed, a main distinction between high-brow literature and the literature of entertainment is just this rejection of a compromise—though there is a modern variety of the thriller which deliberately exploits horror for its own purposes.

But we must return to our proper subject: to modernism, or rather to those modernist techniques so influential on the contemporary literary scene. We avoided the use of purely formal criteria in distinguishing between modernist and realist literature. Yet ideological criteria, though they underlie and mould literary expression, also represent no more than general tendencies. These may co-exist in one author, even in one work of art, with varying degrees of emphasis and self-consciousness.

Indeed, if we refuse to follow those modernist critics who tell us that theirs is the only possible future literature, and trace the realist tendencies still existing within the anti-realistic movement, the literature of our time begins to resemble an extended battlefield. It is a battlefield where the champions of modern anti-realism, and the champions of what we have called 'the revolt of humanism', noisily contend. What we are examining is not simply two typical literary movements of our time. We are examining a conflict between two basic tendencies, a conflict fought out, not only in one and the same writer, but often in one and the same poem, play, or novel.

The dividing line is often blurred, if only because all writing must contain a certain degree of realism. Indeed, there is a fundamental truth at stake here: realism is not one style among others, it is the basis of literature; all styles (even those seemingly most opposed to realism) originate in it or are significantly related to it. Schopenhauer's remark that a consistent solipsist could only be found in a lunatic asylum is applicable to consistent anti-realism. The inevitability of realism is most obvious, of course, where descriptive detail is concerned. We have only to think of Kafka, where the most improbable, fantastic statements appear real through force of descriptive detail. Without this realism in detail Kafka's evocation of the spectral nature of human existence would be no more than a sermon, not the inexorable nightmare it is. Realistic detail is a precondition for the communication of a sense of absurdity. We get, in fact, not straightforward anti-realism, but a dialectical process in which realism of detail negates the reality described; everything is determined by it—the presentation, the structure, the coherence of the writing. Similar processes are at work elsewhere in other modernist literature. But the tension Kafka achieves by pushing his two poles to their extremes, and by the shock of his transitions, is lacking. In Musil, too, we find this tension, but it owes less to intensity of detail and is spread out over the whole extent of his novel. We encounter dialectical leaps from 'documentary' (with regard to some of the characters the novel is a *roman à*

clé) to intimations of timelessness—attempts to achieve that 'ahistoric', 'paradigmatic' ambience which Musil claimed for the work.

Of still greater importance is the fact that many—and not the least extreme—components of modernist literature (for instance, the problem of time) are not as far removed from contemporary life as it might seem. On the contrary, they reflect very well certain aspects of reality, certain contemporary characteristics and peculiarities (of a certain social class, at least). Even with the most abstruse anti-realistic writers, stylistic experiment is not the wilful twisting of reality according to subjective whim: it is a consequence of conditions prevailing in the modern world. Modernist forms, like other literary forms, reflect social and historical realities—though in a distorted, and distorting, fashion.

The situation is immensely complicated; it is natural that in the private statements and public manifestoes of leading modernist writers the issues are often blurred. It is not enough to point to the protests against the suppression of 'degenerate art' under Hitler. These protests proclaimed general freedom of literary expression, but they defended more specifically the writer's duty to describe reality as his artistic conscience dictates. Since truth was the enemy of Hitlerism, a protest against its persecution of 'degenerate art' was at the same time a defence of realism.

The motives of the modernists' opposition to Stalinist dogmatism's rejection of 'formalism' are likewise mixed. Defence of extreme modernism (including genuinely 'formalistic' literature) goes hand in hand with a—justified—rejection of the dogmatists' over-simplifications about the subject-matter and style of realism, and of their tendency to suppress the contradictions existing in socialist society, their reduction of 'socialist perspective' to childish 'happy endings'.

Attacks of this kind may cause the pendulum to swing to the other extreme. Seeing that dogmatism paralyzes originality, the modernist critic is tempted to contrast—an understandable, though objectively incorrect reaction—the 'interesting' colourfulness of decadent art with the 'greyness' of schematic social-

realist pseudo-literature. In the process he is likely to dismiss the theory of socialist realism as an obstacle to artistic freedom. The significant aesthetic antagonism between realism and anti-realism is no longer considered worth discussing; the merits of socialist (and critical) realism are disregarded; and the deeply problematical nature of modernism itself is ignored. In this context, it is worth pointing out the schematism of so many of the most highly praised creations of modernism. Formal novelty, and an affected originality, often conceal a subjectivist dogmatism. Ernst Jünger and Gottfried Benn, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett are not, properly speaking, a whit less schematic than many social-realist writers.

More significant than such polemics—where often enough the adversary, rather than the object to be defended, seems to determine the course of the argument—are the utterances of those critical realists who had an interest in, and concern for, the formal experimentation of modernism, and expressed the conviction that they had many basic attitudes in common. The reason is not far to seek. Many of these experiments are, in effect, reflections of contemporary reality. If realistic writers sympathize with these experiments, and are stimulated thereby to widen the scope of realism, it is because they wish to find new means to deal with contemporary subject-matter. We have only to think of Thomas Mann's published opinions of Kafka, Joyce, or Gide.

However blurred in a particular work of art, these distinctions exist; and can often be traced in individual cases with some precision. They are, indeed, more than bare distinctions; they are often mutually exclusive contradictions. We have already pointed to examples of polarization of content and, as a consequence, of form in cases that appear superficially similar—the handling of the stream-of-consciousness technique in Joyce and Thomas Mann, and the apparently similar, though in fact diametrically opposed, treatment of time. And there is a reason for this outward convergence in spite of extreme inner divergence. While the modernist writer is uncritical towards many aspects of the modern world, his contemporary, the realist writer, can step

back from these things and treat them with the necessary critical detachment. To take the problem of time: Thomas Mann's critical detachment is such that he is not in doubt about the subjective character of the modern experience of time. Yet he knows that this experience is typical only of a certain social class, which can best be portrayed by making use of this experience. The uncritical approach of modernist writers—and of some modern philosophers—reveals itself in their conviction that this subjective experience constitutes reality as such. That is why this treatment of time can be used by the realistic writer to characterize certain figures in his novels, although in a modernist work it may be used to describe reality itself. Again and again Thomas Mann places characters with a time-experience of this subjectivist kind in relation to characters whose experience of time is normal and objective. In *The Magic Mountain* Hans Castorp represents the former type; Joachim Ziemssen and Hofrat Behrens the latter. Ziemssen is aware that this experience of time may be a result of living in a sanatorium, hermetically sealed off from everyday life. We arrive, therefore, at an important distinction: the modernist writer identifies what is necessarily a subjective experience with reality as such, thus giving a distorted picture of reality as a whole (Virginia Woolf is an extreme example of this). The realist, with his critical detachment, places what is a significant, specifically modern experience in a wider context, giving it only the emphasis it deserves as part of a greater, objective whole.

The same distinction is valid with regard to descriptive detail. In isolation, descriptive detail may be a genuine enough reflection of reality—that is, if the writer in question has talent. But whether or not the sequence and organization make for an adequate image of objective reality will depend on the writer's attitude towards reality as a whole. For this attitude determines the function which the individual detail is accorded in the context of the whole. If it is handled uncritically, the result may be an arbitrary naturalism, since the writer will not be able to distinguish between significant and irrelevant detail. Joyce, I

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think, is a case in point. Once again, the essentially naturalistic character of modernism comes to the fore.

The matter becomes more complex with Kafka. Kafka is one of the very few modernist writers whose attitude to detail is selective, not naturalistic. Formally, his treatment of detail is not dissimilar to that of a realist. The difference becomes apparent only when we examine his basic commitment, the principles determining the selection and sequence of detail. With Kafka these principles are his belief in a transcendental force (Nothingness); in his nihilistic allegories, therefore, the artistic unity is broken.

But the problem cannot be approached formalistically. There are great realistic writers in whose work immediate social and historical reality is transcended, where realism in detail is based on a belief in a supernatural world. Take E. T. A. Hoffmann, for example. In Hoffmann, realism in detail goes hand in hand with a belief in the spectral nature of reality. On closer inspection, though, the difference between his artistic aims and those of modernism is apparent. Hoffmann's world is—for all its fairy-tale, ghostly ambience—an accurate enough reflection of conditions in the Germany of his time, a country moving from a distorted feudal absolutism to a capitalism not less distorted. With Hoffmann the supernatural was a means of presenting the German situation in its totality, at a time when social conditions did not as yet allow a direct realistic description or, indeed, as yet reveal a typical pattern. The working out of a typology was much easier in more highly developed France—though even Balzac at times used methods developed by Hoffmann (*Melmoth Reconcilié*).

Kafka is more secular than Hoffmann. His ghosts belong to everyday bourgeois life; and, since this life itself is unreal, there is no need of supernatural ghosts à la Hoffmann. But the unity of the world is broken up, since an essentially subjective vision is identified with reality itself. The terror generated by the world of imperialist capitalism (anticipatory of its later fascist progeny), where human beings are degraded to mere objects—this fear, originally a subjective experience, becomes an objective entity.

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The reflection of a distortion becomes a distorted reflection. And though Kafka's artistic method differs from that of other modernist writers, the principle of presentation is the same: the world is an allegory of transcendent Nothingness. With Kafka's followers the differences grow smaller or disappear altogether. With Beckett, for example, who mixes Kafkaesque and Joycean motifs, a fully standardized nihilistic modernism is the end-product.

In rejecting a rigid distinction, and acknowledging that in many cases the distinction is blurred, I must not be taken to imply that no real opposition exists. On the contrary, only by this method can the conflict of tendencies be accurately assessed.

To sum up our enquiry so far: similarity of technique does not imply similarity of ideology; nor is the approval or rejection of certain techniques a pointer to a writer's basic aim.

But what is this basic aim? So far, we have dealt with the main components of modernism, tracing the central ideological position common to its various schools. In order to establish our distinction we must return to the question of perspective. First, we must show how perspective acts as a principle of selection, as the criterion by which a writer selects his detail and avoids the pitfalls of naturalism. Clearly, this problem faces every talented writer: literary talent implies an affection for the richness and diversity of life. How the individual writer imposes some kind of order on the profusion of sensuous impression is chiefly a biographical question. These two dialectically opposed, yet dialectically complementary, activities are basic to the formation of an individual style. And here the importance of perspective as the selective principle must be evident. Max Liebermann, the Berlin Impressionist, used to say: 'To draw is to subtract.' We might extend that aphorism: art is the selection of the essential and subtraction of the inessential.

In itself, this is too abstract a definition. If it is to be of practical use, we must enquire more deeply into the subjective principle guiding artistic selection, and investigate the convergence (or divergence) between the data selected by an individual writer and 'artistic objectivity'. The latter is clearly not a direct con-

sequence of the former; the degree of sincerity, intensity and insight guiding artistic selection is no guarantee, let alone a criterion, of objectivity. Yet it would be wrong to see the two principles as ineluctably opposed. Certainly, there is a divergence between subjective aim and objective achievement. But it is not something abrupt and irrational, a distinction between two meta-physical entities. Rather, it is part of the dialectical process by which a creative subjectivity develops, and is expressive of that subjectivity's encounter with the world of its time (or, possibly, of its failure to come to terms with that world).

A writer's pattern of choice is a function of his personality. But personality is not in fact timeless and absolute, however it may appear to the individual consciousness. Talent and character may be innate; but the manner in which they develop, or fail to develop, depends on the writer's interaction with his environment, on his relationships with other human beings. His life is part of the life of his time; no matter whether he is conscious of this, approves of it or disapproves. He is part of a larger social and historical whole.

His own life is thus never constant or static; it is a process, a running battle between past, present and future. It is something which cannot be measured or understood until its stages have been experienced as a movement from and towards a certain goal. These stages and their dynamic interrelations are not purely subjective elements, to be accepted or rejected by the writer at his discretion. Life itself, the categories determining its nature and development, would be distorted if such factors were to be arbitrarily eliminated.

Up to this point, and within the framework of this rather abstract philosophical analysis, I may have the reader's approval. But a historical phenomenon is historical not only in this general sense; it is also a concrete element in a specific historical process, in a concrete present linking a concrete past and future. It follows that everything in a writer's life, every individual experience, thought and emotion he undergoes, however subjective, partakes of a historical character. Every element in his life as a

human being and as a writer is part of, and determined by, the movement from and towards some goal. Any authentic reflection of reality in literature must point to this movement. The method adopted will vary, of course, with the period and personality. But the selection and subtraction he undertakes in response to the teleological pattern of his own life constitutes the most intimate link between a writer's subjectivity and the outside world. We observe here a dialectical leap from the profound inwardness of subjectivity to the objectivity of social and historical reality.

In all this, perspective plays a decisive role. To understand its importance we must go into the distinction between objective reality and its artistic reflection rather more fully. It is a truism that the roots of the present are in the past, and the roots of the future in the present. Objectively, perspective points to the main movements in a given historical process. Subjectively—and not only in the field of artistic activity—it represents the capacity to grasp the existence and mode of action of these movements. If literature is to render an image of life that is adequate, formally convincing and consistent, the sequence must be reversed. Whereas in life 'whither?' is a consequence of 'whence?', in literature 'whither?' determines the content, selection and proportion of the various elements. The finished work may resemble life in observing a causal sequence; but it would be no more than an arbitrary chronicle if there were not this reversal of direction. It is the perspective, the *terminus ad quem*, that determines the significance of each element in a work of art.

The creative role of perspective goes even further than this and touches on the creative act itself. It is not enough, however, to demonstrate the general connection between perspective and literary creativity. The concreteness of a writer's perspective, of course, is a decisive influence on the vitality and suggestive power of his art. It is decisive in as much as there is a connection—not direct, but complex and devious—between the structure of individual character and the degree to which perspective, in a work of art, can be realized. An *aesthetic* explanation of this

connection has never been attempted; nor, I think, has the question ever been posed. In this place, we can do no more than enquire into one or two extreme examples. And this only in relation to our specific problem—to discover what perspective is favourable to the development of critical realism at the present day.

The following points seem to me worth making. First, there exists a somewhat abstract perspective, which makes use of the general features of an historical period, and can be employed in satire to work out typical characters and situations (Swift, Saltykov-Shchedrin). Clearly, typical situations will be technically easier to realize than characters which are individual and typical at the same time. Secondly, at the opposite extreme, there is the kind of perspective mainly concerned with day-to-day depiction of events, and which encourages the naturalistic description of individual or superficially typical features. The dialectic of historical development is labyrinthine; and, especially in regard to individual particularities, is not open to detached contemporary prediction. Only 'prophetic' vision, or subsequent study of a completed period, can grasp the unity underlying sharp contradictions. One would be misunderstanding the role of perspective in literature, though, if one were to identify 'prophetic' understanding with correct political foresight. If such foresight were the criterion, there would have been no successful typology in nineteenth-century literature. For it was precisely the greatest writers of that age—Balzac and Stendhal, Dickens and Tolstoy—who erred most in their view of what the future would be like. Yet it was not accident that made possible the creation of typical, universal characters in their work.

Typology and perspective are thus related in a special way. The great realist writer is alone able to grasp and portray trends and phenomena truthfully in their historical development—'trends' not so much in the social and political field, as in that area where human behaviour is moulded and evaluated, where existing types are developed further and new types emerge. Men are changed by forces in their environment. But it is not only the character of individual human beings that changes. Greater em-

phasis is given at certain times to certain specific problems: some are pushed into the foreground, others eliminated; certain characteristics acquire a tragic aura, others, tragic in the past, are now reduced to comic dimensions. Such shifts of emphasis go on perpetually throughout history. Yet only the greatest realists are equipped to understand and portray their complexity.

A writer may grasp the authentic human problem (and thus the authentic social problem) of a particular phase in the historical process without consciously anticipating subsequent political and social developments. Here again, the question of perspective is relevant. For a typology can only be of lasting significance if the writer has depicted the central or peripheral significance, the comic or tragic characteristics of his types, in such a way that subsequent developments confirm his portrait of the age. (Balzac and Tolstoy have this kind of lasting significance; Ibsen, by way of contrast, has dated in many respects). We see now that perspective is not to be confused with the capacity to predict historical events. Yet we also see why a perspective that sticks too closely to day-to-day events is rarely successful: concrete and determinate in matters which are of small interest to literature, it fails to produce adequate aesthetic solutions in more important matters. Lasting typologies, based on a perspective of this sort, owe their effectiveness not to the artist's understanding of day-to-day events, but to his unconscious possession of a perspective independent of, and reaching beyond, his understanding of the contemporary scene.

Perspective, in this concrete form, is central to our problem. For there is an intimate connection between a writer's ability to create lasting human types (the real criterion of literary achievement) and his allegiance to an ideology which allows of a belief in social development. Any attempt to substitute a static immobilism for the dynamic movement of history must reduce the significance, the universality, of the typology in question. Even in the Naturalist period the difficulty of creating living characters had increased so much that a writer of Zola's stature could not create one really memorable character. The

state of affairs in modernist literature is still more striking. It takes, of course, a different form with each individual writer. But we are less interested in the particular form the reduction takes—whether the reduction of character to shadowy blur, or a surrender to mission to a rigid and superficial stylization, or a surrender to mystical irrationalism. Equally, there will be modernist theoreticians who refuse to admit that this reduction is anything negative. They will claim for Beckett's characters the dignity of a new typology, or reject the whole business of type-creation as a hangover from the nineteenth century.

It may be useful here to listen to the views of certain writers whose approach is not ideological and philosophical, but who are guided rather by practical experience of their craft. In a different context, some years ago, I quoted a remark of Sinclair Lewis' about John Dos Passos. Lewis praised Dos Passos' 'natural'—i.e. modernist—compositional methods as an enormous advance on older narrative conventions. Yet, speaking of the creation of character, he was forced to conclude: 'It is undeniable that Dos Passos has failed so far to produce characters as memorable as Pickwick, Micawber, Oliver Twist or David Copperfield or Nicholas Nickleby . . . and he will probably never do so.'

No less interesting is a confession of Camus's in his preface to the writings of Roger Martin du Gard. Martin du Gard's characters, Camus remarks, display a density, a three-dimensionality, very unusual in contemporary literature. The significant literature of our time, he continues, goes back to Dostoevsky rather than to Tolstoy. Its heroes are passionate, gesticulating shadows meditating upon human fate. Camus brilliantly contrasts Dostoevsky's young women in *The Possessed* with Tolstoy's Natasha Rostova: 'The distinction is like that between a film and stage character: the presence is spiritual, incorporeal.' I have no space here to comment on Camus's illuminating discussion of Dostoevsky and Kafka. The contrast between the two artistic modes is worked out with remarkable impartiality. Camus does not omit to point out that Dostoevsky's art is infinitely richer than that of his followers, who often inherit

little more than the shadowiness to which he reduces human personality.

This judgment is the more interesting as we find in Camus's own work a comparable reduction of human personality. For, however suggestive as an allegory of the *condition humaine*, and however subtle the moral problems thrown up by Camus's description of the plague, the characters in *La Peste* remain, by Camus's definition, shadows. Yet it is not the spare style, maintained with marvellous consistency, which has brought about this reduction; it is the lack of perspective. The lives of his characters are without direction, without motivation, without development. Camus's plague—the choice of subject-matter is characteristic—is not shown as an accidental disaster, as a horrific interlude in the continuity of human life. The plague is the reality of human existence itself, the terror of which has no beginning and no end. Camus's admiration for Roger Martin du Gard's typology is significant, because it contains a profound, though unstated, criticism of his own work.

These apparent digressions may, I hope, have served to shed some light on the role of perspective in literature. We must now take a further, decisive step in the argument—with the proposition that no writer of the past century, asking himself to what goal history is moving, has been able to ignore socialism.

The writers of the 'humanist revolt', and their contemporaries, had to face this challenge. It was Zola who said that whenever he set out to tackle a new problem he always came up against socialism. Again, it is significant for Gerhart Hauptmann's artistic development—and for the enormous impact of his early Naturalist work—that the problem of socialism, though vaguely articulated, was always present in his mind. Once this vision lost its validity for him, Hauptmann plunged into that prolonged creative crisis which caused his admirers to fear for his future as a writer. There is no lack of other examples: the decisive role played by socialism in the work of Anatole France, of Romain Rolland, of George Bernard Shaw, is sufficiently well-known. And Roger Martin du Gard's criticism of bourgeois

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society, in his cycle of novels, is no less determined by a *terminus ad quem* of this kind—Jacques Thibault's encounter with socialism.

A simple conclusion would appear to be available at this point. Is not the decisive distinction that between the presence of a socialist perspective in socialist realism, and its absence in decadent bourgeois literature?

The conclusion is tempting, but false. For the distinction I have in mind, the ideological and artistic implications of which I am concerned to analyse, is operative within bourgeois literature itself. The true opposition is not between socialist realism and bourgeois modernism, but between bourgeois critical realism and bourgeois modernism. Not everyone who looks for a solution to the social and ideological crisis of bourgeois society—and this is necessarily the subject-matter of contemporary bourgeois literature—will be a professed socialist. It is enough that a writer takes socialism into account and does not reject it out of hand. But if he rejects socialism—and this is the point I want to make—he closes his eyes to the future, gives up any chance of assessing the present correctly, and loses the ability to create other than purely static works of art.

Ideologically, this question has been central to bourgeois literature throughout the past century; indeed, it has become increasingly urgent. Let us look at some of its earlier appearances. A hundred years ago Heine wrote in a preface to the French edition of *Lutezia* that communism, though it was against his interests and his natural inclinations, had an attraction he found hard to resist. One reason for this attraction was communism's emphasis on logic and on justice. The unjust society he lived in stood condemned—even though the new society, as he put it, should use his *Buch der Lieder* as 'wrapping paper for an old lady's coffee'. Another reason was as cogent, if Machiavellian: the communists were the most powerful enemies of his own old enemy, German reaction and German chauvinism. In spite of all this, Heine never became a socialist. But he did take up a position towards socialism which enabled him to look at the bourgeois

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society of his day, and at the future, without illusions.

Let us look at the changing forms perspective has taken for the bourgeois writer over the course of history. Before the French Revolution, realism did not have to face this problem. Perspective went no further than the overthrow of the feudal society of absolutism. The shape of the new bourgeois society was—from the point of view of the artist—of secondary importance. This was to change after the French Revolution. The degree to which the works of Goethe and Balzac, of Stendhal and Tolstoy, are still interlarded with utopian elements is very striking. It expresses their ambiguity towards bourgeois society. On the one hand, we still find a bourgeois-progressive perspective (with Tolstoy, it is still peasant-plebeian) which is rooted in, and does not look beyond, bourgeois society. But on the other hand there is a deeply felt need to go beyond the mere affirmation of existing conditions, to explore values not to be found in present society—values which come to be thought of, necessarily, as hidden in the future. Thus the utopian perspective serves a double function: it enables the artist to portray the present age truthfully without giving way to despair.

A later phase of critical realism—Flaubert is a good example—rejects such utopianism with a gesture of ascetic defiance. Utopian writing in this period takes the form of an escape into exoticisms whether of time or place. This dual critique—ironic detachment from his own ineradicable romanticism, but also rejection of a bourgeois world condemned by the standards of that romanticism—enabled Flaubert to view his age without hope, but also without fear. In bourgeois realism his is a strange borderline case: Flaubert's portrayal of society hints occasionally at the coming dichotomy, but it preserves much of the richness and truth-to-life of earlier realism. After Flaubert, new problems come to the fore. But, before entering into these, it may be useful to instance the tendencies running counter to realism in the literature of the age.

At the time when Heine was composing his later works—about a decade after the above confession—another writer put

down his views on the subject—Dostoevsky, in his story *From the Darkness of the City*. This story contains perhaps the first authentic description of the isolation of modern bourgeois man—an interesting ideological link between Dostoevsky and modernism. Yet Dostoevsky still sees such isolation in a social context. He does not idealize it; rather, he paints it in a pessimistic hue and shows it to be a blind alley. The social circumstances and consequences of this isolation are clearly seen by Dostoevsky—where modernism would tend to mystify. His hero's sufferings derive from the inhumanity of early capitalism, and particularly from its destructive influence on personal relationships. Dostoevsky loathes capitalism with all his being; but he rejects a socialist solution no less passionately. His protest against the inhumanity of capitalism is transformed into a sophistical, anti-capitalist romanticism, into a critique of socialism and democracy. Thus, fear of socialism completes the isolation of man in capitalist society (though with Dostoevsky this isolation is to some extent concealed by his pan-Slav clerical mysticism).

Dostoevsky represents, of course, a comparatively early stage in this evolution. Nietzsche, who substitutes a critique of bourgeois philistinism for this critique of bourgeois inhumanity, generalizes the attitude towards life described in Dostoevsky's story, *The Cellar*. This is not the place to show how Nietzsche's identification of capitalism and socialism, his raising of the spectre of 'mass culture', his rejection of democracy and progress, helped to prepare the way for Hitler's demagoguery. I attempted this in my book, *The Destruction of Reason*. There, I tried to show how these tendencies had lived on in a modified form after Hitler's defeat. The opposition to socialism gathered momentum and was soon transformed into an ideological crusade which, though nominally concerned with the preservation of democracy, was really nourished by a growing fear of the threat which mass society poses to the ruling elite. If we add to this the dark shadows cast by the nuclear bomb, it will easily be understood how the fear thus engendered could be yoked to acquiescence in, or active support for, Cold War policies.

If I have anticipated a little, it is to point to the final implications of this ideology. I do not suggest that there is a direct connection between modernist literature and political attitudes of this kind. The works of Joyce and Kafka were written long before; and Robert Musil, for example, is known to have been a strong opponent of Nazism. We are not here concerned with directly political attitudes, but rather with the ideology underlying these artists' presentation of reality. The practical political conclusions drawn by the individual writer are of secondary interest. What matters is whether his view of the world, as expressed in his writings, connives at that modern nihilism from which both Fascism and Cold War ideology draw their strength.

There is a close connection between such a view of the world and the rejection of a socialist perspective. We are not concerned with academic discussions about the correctness or otherwise of socialist theory; this need have little bearing on a writer's understanding and portrayal of his age. It is a writer's actual experience of life that interests us. For Heine, on his sickbed, this problem was no less existential than for the hero of Dostoevsky's short story. And it is certainly no less so for the contemporary writer. His, and his heroes', most immediate experience is of their isolation in a world which has become increasingly abstract, uniform, technological. At first these new forces seemed to threaten only his individual culture. Later, they were seen to undermine the foundations of his moral and physical being. Finally, in the nuclear age, the perspective became the destruction of mankind itself.

Every writer has now to face the challenge of this perspective—whether or not he is aware of its social and historical circumstances. Many individual reactions seen at first sight to represent no more than the personal experience of the writers in question. And they are, of course, personal in the sense that all individual experience is unique, that a man cannot jump over his own shadow. But art implies a relation between the artist and the outer world. Indeed, whatever the private opinion of the artist,

a relation of some kind is inevitable. And no less inevitable is the imposition of a certain level of generalization on the subject-matter; whether he will or no, every writer describes the condition of mankind. The present social condition of mankind is at the root of even the most abstract, the most solipsistic vision of the future. And since, in the age of imperialism, of world war and world revolution, no search for a valid perspective can overlook socialism, we are entitled to guess at a rejection of socialism behind the fashionable condition of *angst*.

Put in general terms this may sound paradoxical. But examination of individual cases tends to confirm it. We have already encountered Gottfried Benn's notion of '*doppelleben*', of statism (as against dynamics). In his essay, *Can artists change the world?*, Benn examines this problem without mystification or modernist obscurantism—indeed with a surprisingly old-fashioned lucidity.

I am struck by the thought that it might be more revolutionary and worthier of a vigorous and active man to teach his fellow-men this simple truth: you are what you are and you will never be different; this is, was, and always will be your life. He who has money, lives long; he who has authority, can do no wrong; he who has might, establishes right. Such is history! Ecce historia! Here is the present; take of its body, eat, and die.

The triviality of this, its portentous, affectedly paradoxical tone need not be enlarged on. But it may serve as a key to some of Benn's darker utterances. It may explain the cynicism which led Benn to tolerate the social evils of his time—even collaborating with Hitler—causing him to justify the most dishonourable courses of action as morally permissible, or even desirable. If men and society are basically unchangeable, what other course is there but to collaborate with the powers that be? Seen in this light, Benn's static view of the world is the more easily understandable.

Other modernist pronouncements may be clothed in more mystical language; but they come to the same thing. The German writer Alfred Andersch, for instance, sees—not without justi-

fication—the emergence of abstract art as a 'reaction, instinctive or conscious, against the corruption of idea into ideology'. Its contemporary triumph he explains in this way: 'Since the danger of a relapse into totalitarianism is always present, abstract art retains its topicality.' What is meant by the transformation of idea into ideology? Above all, I think, a rejection of socialism. Socialism has forced a bourgeoisie which long since ceased to be revolutionary to reconsider the social roots and consequences of 'ideas'. Traditional bourgeois culture proceeded on the assumption that ideas were not relevant to social or political problems. The dominant view was that they not only could not, but should not, have such relevance. True, men of prophetic insight like Heine and Dostoevsky saw that the advent of socialism would give ideas a new importance and a new relation to reality—or, rather, that socialism would take up the threads of the tradition of the bourgeoisie itself. For nobody doubted, in the 17th and 18th centuries, that the ideas of Hobbes and Milton, of Diderot and Rousseau, strongly influenced, in conjunction with the social movements of the time, men's decisions and actions. It was only later, when the bourgeoisie had won its battle, and the proletariat was still politically and ideologically weak, that the condition which Andersch idealizes came to rule supreme.

Socially speaking, this corruption of idea into ideology has two faces. First, individual ideas are inextricably linked with the social class whose aspirations they express. Second, the struggle between conflicting ideas is ultimately decided by the outcome of the conflict between social classes. This new state of affairs, the renewed relevance of ideas in practical politics, was not properly understood by the bourgeois intelligentsia until the First World War. When, after 1917, the revolutionary outbreaks suddenly revealed that this relation had already existed for some time, the bourgeoisie were forced to face up to the phenomenon. Since bourgeois ideology, however, had at its disposal no ideas of the same calibre as socialism, it generated the 'ideologies'—in the pejorative sense of the term—of Hitlerism and, later, of nuclear