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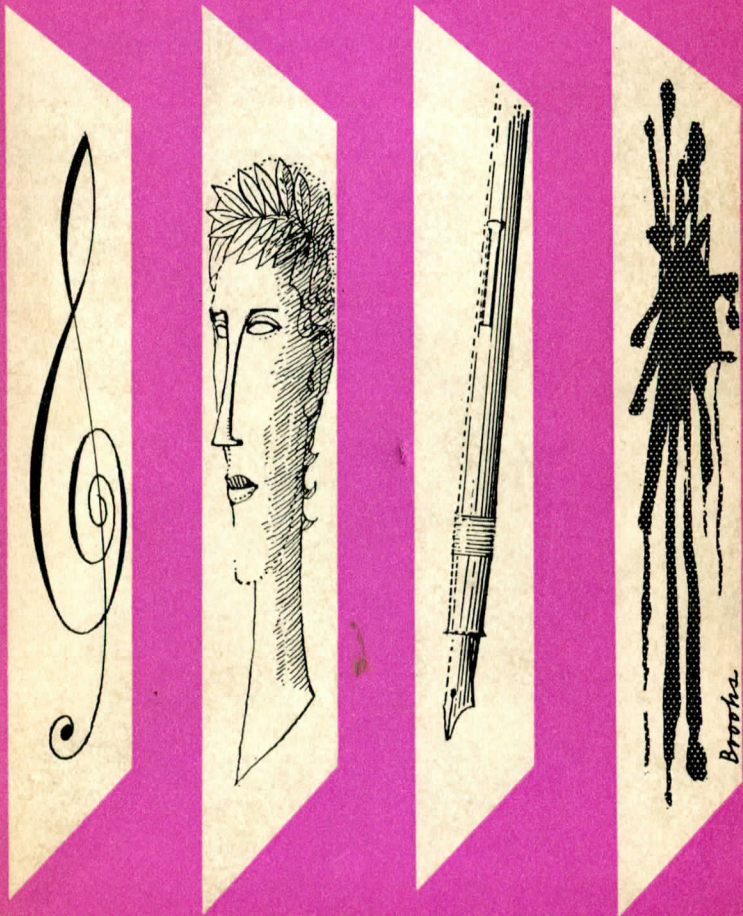
THE FREEDOM OF ART

Honor Arundel



THE FREEDOM OF ART

by

Honor Arundel

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I

The Labour Movement's Responsibility

"It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers." *JAMES THURBER*

For the first time in history it has become possible for the practice and appreciation of the arts to involve not just a privileged class but the whole of society.

In the last fifty years not only maps have changed. Fourteen countries are in the process of building socialism and, in Africa and Asia, country after country is winning its independence. The dark ages of history are nearly over and true civilisation can begin.

We now know that political and economic questions are capable of solution and that increased technical and scientific discoveries make leisure a possibility, if not yet a fact, for everyone.

This means that the arts will assume an ever greater importance in our lives, involving not the leisured, educated, cultivated few but the leisured, educated, cultivated many.

Today the so-called advanced countries in the west are no longer in the lead of historical development, but, hamstrung by an outmoded class structure of society, are lagging behind in scientific advance, industrial techniques, educational facilities and most of all in the general cultural level of their people.

Socialist countries, with all their shortcomings, have shown

themselves capable of planning economic, political and cultural life for the benefit of whole peoples.

Britain boasts of being an affluent society and yet the real fruits of civilisation, of which the arts are an important part, are still only enjoyed by a small section. Many people go through their whole lives without ever visiting a theatre, an art gallery, a concert hall or an opera house. The brave dreams of arts centres envisaged by the first post-war Labour Government have largely remained dreams. Very few local authorities spend anything like the 6*d.* rate ($4\frac{4}{5}$*d.* in Scotland) on the provision of art and entertainment permitted them in the 1948 Act.

In our geared-to-war economy arms expenditure is at the top of the list and the arts are at the bottom. Britain has reached the absurd position of coming eleventh on the list where national spending on the arts is concerned, one point above Finland, and one point below Bulgaria.

The very civilisation we are supposed to be prepared to fight to preserve is being threatened.

Private enterprise has shown itself utterly inadequate, as always, to consider anything except profit. If Bingo is more profitable than ballet, then theatres are turned over to Bingo. If an office block is more profitable than a concert hall then an office block is built. And since private patronage and private enterprise are prepared to allow us to sink into a cultural swamp, the Labour and trade union movement has a special responsibility to act in the defence of the arts. Even if, in the long run, socialism is the only sensible way of organising the material and artistic wealth for the benefit of all, we must still fight now for the preservation and extension of cultural amenities of all kinds and to educate ourselves so that we are capable of enjoying them.

We shall not wake up one morning and find that we are all university graduates with a knowledge of Bach and Shostakovitch, with an appreciation for da Vinci and Picasso, or even the desire to spend our leisure sensibly and creatively. We

shall not suddenly find civic theatres and opera houses in provincial industrial towns.

There have been many hopeful signs in the past few years that the Labour movement is prepared to accept this responsibility. Towns like Coventry and Nottingham have built and equipped splendid new theatres and many more are in the process of doing so. Glasgow is planning the most ambitious arts centre in the country. The T.U.C. passed the famous Resolution 42 which resulted in several splendid festivals, and trades councils up and down the country sponsor cultural events and take a keen interest in artistic and cultural affairs.

The Communist Party, as part, and usually the most lively part, of the Labour movement is actively participating in this cultural awakening. And in doing so it has not only had to fight politically against reactionary authorities both central and local, but against the prejudices and sectarian attitudes which exist in the movement itself.

There has been a tendency to equate opera with dinner jackets and drawled upper-class accents; to mistrust the esoteric jargon with which music and art are often discussed in the "posh" papers and to conclude that the arts are the property of a select few; to dismiss the unfamiliar or the difficult. (Some of these prejudices are founded on genuine reasons and are fostered by the many trends in the arts today which aim at deliberate mystification, inner-circle scholarship and non-communication.)

But it has now been generally realised that the arts should belong to everyone; that the whole business of art is to enrich human life; that the appreciation of art makes us more human human-beings; and that the heritage of the past can enrich the present and make future civilisation possible; that art, therefore, is a good thing in itself and that socialists must be concerned not only with bread and butter questions but with the many-faceted interests of human beings.

The enormous increase in travel to socialist countries in the last ten years has helped to break down old prejudices. People

can see with their own eyes that industrial workers do visit—and enjoy—both opera and ballet; that poetry readings are crowded and popular; and that the vast majority of young people are keenly interested in the arts.

But it would be dishonest to praise the achievements of socialism in the artistic field and do nothing to lay the foundations for similar achievements in our own country.

We have enormous difficulties to overcome; neglect by the government; niggardly grants by the Arts Council; an unbalanced concentration in and around London with a consequent neglect of the provincial cities, Wales and Scotland; commercial television which finds it more profitable to sell advertising space for soap and soup or to regurgitate old American films rather than sponsor true regional talent (nowhere is this more true than in Scotland where S.T.V. in eight years has only been able to "afford" to put on a mere dozen plays).

Within this context it becomes more and more important that we in the Labour movement should work out a coherent and progressive attitude. Should art be propaganda? Is mass popular art always good and minority, difficult art bad? Where should censorship begin and end? What do words like "proletarian" or "bourgeois" mean when applied to the arts? What is decadence? Why do working-class people flock to the Edinburgh military tattoo or "*The King and I*" and stay away from Brecht, Arden and O'Casey? Why do people who are left-wing politically often share opinions on art with Tory backwoodsmen? What is a Marxist attitude? Can it really help in the appreciation of works of art? Can it help artists to create new and meaningful work? Is there such a thing as freedom for the artist and what does it mean and is it a good thing?

These are the sort of questions we are asking, discussing and arguing about. Perhaps there are no definitive answers but through discussion and controversy we may be able to achieve clarity. And that will be a useful beginning.

2

The Origins and Development of the Arts

"The poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society." *WILLIAM WORDSWORTH*

An immense amount of research has been done on the origins of art which has disproved the once popular notion that primitive people only sang, danced or drew pictures once their creature comforts had been attended to and they had sufficient surplus energy. We know now that there has never yet been a society so hungry, so backward, illiterate or oppressed that it hasn't produced some sort of art.

Art was part of the very fabric of life itself, closely bound up with magic, science, work and religion. It helped men to gain knowledge of the world they lived in, to understand themselves and their fellows, to gain power over reality. It could propitiate an angry god, demand rain or sun for the harvest, whip up energy for hunting and fighting; it was a necessary part of initiation and fertility rites. Nor should we forget its simple entertainment value, the decoration of pottery and weapons, the cave drawings, the fantastic bodily adornments.

With the development of society into classes and men's increasing mastery over the natural world, the arts too became differentiated. Out of the primitive dance-cum-song-cum-mime, music, drama, poetry, painting and sculpture assumed separate identities and had separate functions. The arts began

to take on a life of their own. Now the actual production of the necessities of life was done by slaves, serfs and eventually by the modern industrial working class, and a leisured class developed who had the time and the education to cultivate their appreciation of more sophisticated forms of art and the wealth to act as patrons. Slave society, in fact, made possible the tremendous flowering of the arts in ancient Greece. Class society at the same time created the arts as we know them today and destroyed their old function of being the expression of a whole community.

Divisions in society led to a division in the arts, for the working classes, whether slave, serf, peasant or wage-worker, kept their own subterranean folk culture, their dances, songs, embroidery, elaborate national costumes and music.

Of course it would be a mistake to see these two streams of culture in class society as separate entities. The art produced by aristocratic or bourgeois classes can and often does contain popular elements which make it appeal to people in general, and the artist, more often than not, allies himself with the revolutionary class or classes which are on the side of progress.

This unselfconscious subterranean stream of folk culture has largely disappeared in Britain except in the remoter areas of Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Folk dances, national dress and the thousand local traditional customs rooted in village life are being eroded by industrialisation, improved transport and mass communication.

What is more, we now have to contend with an entertainment industry which, in the pursuit of profit, has exploited people's normal needs for relaxation by providing them with a pseudo-culture of the fashionable, the banal and the trivial. There is a disastrous gap between art for the few and entertainment for the many which is for the benefit of neither. As William Morris said:

"They have fallen apart from one another; and I hold that when they are so parted, it is ill for the Arts altogether. The lesser ones become trivial, mechanical, unintelligent, incapable

of resisting the changes pressed upon them by fashion or dishonesty; while the greater, however they may be practised for a while by men of great minds and wonder-working hands, unhelped by the lesser, unhelped by each other, are sure to lose their dignity of popular arts, and become nothing but dull adjuncts to unmeaning pomp, or ingenious toys for a few rich idle men."

In Central Europe and other parts of the world folk culture does still flourish and it will be interesting to see if it will endure under socialism. It tends to be traditional, static and unselfconscious, the expression of a community rather than an individual. The Slovak peasant still paints behind his oven his fascinating mural of birds, flowers and geometric designs in the same way as his ancestors did. Will he soon prefer to buy a nice piece of Fablon? In the twentieth century what young peasant girl wants to wear seventeen petticoats or a yard-wide head-dress made of starched linen or lace? Ways of life are altering at headlong speed and who can say what elements in popular folk culture will be able to keep pace with them, which will endure and flourish and which will die a natural death?

The question of folk song is slightly different, as it has shown a marked resilience in adapting itself to changing social conditions.

It is true that in Britain the bothy ballads, the miners' songs and all the different strands of folk song that grew up in settled communities—miners, farmworkers, etc.—are not sung to anything like the same extent as they were even fifty years ago and the younger generation tends to go for pop rather than the songs their fathers sing.

It is also true that the old songs are far from dead and that there is a large and lively section of the community intent upon reviving and adapting them.

Nevertheless I think that people who hope to retain the "purity" of the tradition, who complain bitterly if, for instance, an Aberdeenshire song is sung with a Glasgow accent, are mis-

taken, as are those who think that all folk songs are necessarily and intrinsically "good" because they originated among the labouring classes. Like any other human activity they vary in quality; there are the clumsy and the trivial as well as the charming and the profound.

But in the best of them, as in all forms of art, there is an enduring quality that, whatever its social origins, has a value beyond the interests of any particular class. While we rightly stress the ever-changing nature of human beings we should not forget that there is also a constant element, and it is by its appeal to this constant element that art endures while the immediately topical quickly loses its significance. As the founder of the Italian Communist Party, Antonio Gramsci said: "In the accumulation of ideas transmitted to us by a millennium of work and thought, there are elements which have eternal value, which cannot and must not perish."

Although social behaviour has altered from age to age, human beings still feel hunger and cold, still love and hate, still pursue happiness or fame, still seek to understand the world with unflagging curiosity. It is still possible, with a little imagination, to identify ourselves with the heroes of Greek legends and plays, to wander with Ulysses, to suffer with Oedipus (the Greeks in fact discovered so many basic truths about the nature of man that their terms are still used as a sort of international shorthand to describe ever-recurring human characteristics and situations). It is still possible to feel the romance of Robin Hood, to sail the gurly sea with Sir Patrick Spens and to feel the undying love between Clerk Saunders and May Margaret.

Human beings, like every other phenomenon, are composed of contradictions, of conflicting opposites; the ego against social responsibility, the desire for change against the desire for stability, the fascination of the strange against the love of the familiar, the desire to participate against the desire to stand aloof, the physical against the spiritual, the imagination against reason, the emotions against the intellect.

While minor art or entertainment satisfies one desire at a time, great art satisfies all at once.

In *King Lear*, for instance, we meet the familiar fairy-tale situation of the King and his three daughters in a strange setting; we sympathise with the King's desire for the feudal rights and feudal virtues and with the impatience of his daughters for more rational behaviour; we realise that the attitudes of the King are at variance with the social needs of the time; we identify ourselves with his plight at the same time as we stand aloof to criticise the results of his egotism and folly. All our contradictions reach a momentary equilibrium while the play is in process.

This simultaneous appeal to the emotions and to the intellect is characteristic of great art. "Our feelings impel us towards the maximum effort of reasoning and our reasoning purifies our feelings," says Brecht. Today it is taken for granted that feeling and reason must always be in opposition. One either enjoys a work of art because through it one escapes from the intolerable world of reason, or, disdaining misleading emotion, one enjoys it coldly through the intellect. Both these attitudes are limiting.

This is at the back of Brecht's theory of alienation. He does not want his audience to be swept away on a mushy tide of self-indulgent feeling, he wants them to understand what they are feeling and to know why.

The average corny American film is one extreme. By cunningly playing on certain basic emotions, mother or romantic love, sympathy for underdogs or virile heroes or fugitives, one is expressly expected to leave one's headpiece in the foyer, to have a good cry and stagger out of the jeyes-scented darkness, having learnt nothing.

The other extremes are the mathematical composers and abstract artists whose work is entirely an intellectual exercise. This limited appeal is the real shortcoming of works like, for instance, an abstract by Ben Nicholson. One looks at four squares, superimposed on different levels, intersected by some

pale blue triangle—it is all rather decorative and pleases some desire we have for pure form unmessed by untidy humanity. The emotions are quite uninvolved.

The first attitude is the more dangerous. We all know the mesmeric effect that Hitler had as he repeated words like Fatherland, Folk, the German Soul and the Truth of the Blood. No wonder Brecht, who lived in and escaped from Nazi Germany, stressed the opposite—that feelings unguided by reason are ultimate destroyers of humanity.

It is more confusing when one's emotional reactions to words are in a good cause. As Oscar Wilde says "Every bad poem is the result of genuine feeling". or Mayskovsky: "It's easy enough to write poetry that does not irritate anybody. 'March, march again, you working men. The Red Flag waves higher likes the flame of a fire.' It will be liked very much and forgotten next day."

The clichés of revolutionary fervour, however heady they may sound at the time, if they have no intellectual core soon mercifully wither away.

True art demands absolute concentration of both heart and intellect so that neither betrays the other, as in *King Lear* or in Bach's Double Violin Concerto, where the structure is as precise as a mathematical formula to delight the reason, and the grace and beauty of the pure sound to exalt the heart.

As long as man is a human being he will respond to Homer, Shakespeare, Beethoven and Rembrandt, because as well as being true to their own time they were able to add to our knowledge of universal truth for which we are always insatiably searching.

To return to Wordsworth: "The poet" (meaning all artists) "is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. . . . The poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth and over all time."

3

The Basis for a Marxist Approach

> "The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness." *KARL MARX*

Marxism has played and continues to play a valuable part in helping us to understand and appreciate art.

Works by Caudwell and Fox, Arnold Kettle's fine *Introduction to the English novel*, Professor George Thomson's profound *Aeschylus and Athens*, the essays on Picasso and Léger by John Berger and many many others have helped us to penetrate the true meaning and beauty of individual works. Even a critic like Edmond Wilson, who is not a professed Marxist, uses the Marxist method in his subtle and brilliant essays on Pushkin and Bernard Shaw.

This critical method has been worked out on the not many references to art in the works of Marx and Engels who state, roughly, that the art, ideology, philosophy and religion of any given period are ultimately determined by the sort of society out of which they spring.

An artist is a man of his place and time. It is entirely reasonable to suggest that MacDiarmid couldn't have written the *Odyssey*, that Michelangelo couldn't have painted a Modigliani nude, that Galileo couldn't have invented the theory of relativity or Mozart written in the twelve-tone scale.

But this is not to say that economics are the *only* determining

factor. Both Marx and Engels strenuously insist upon the complexity of the relationship between the economic basis of society and its ideological and cultural ramifications. Engels writes:

"The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure—political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, constitutions established by the victorious class after successful battle etc., forms of law—and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants; political, legal and philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into dogma—also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggle and in many cases determine their form. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase."

This placing of an artist fairly and squarely in his time and place, and judging his works in relation to the society he lived in, is the first step towards any sensible appreciation of his work.

The danger has been in an oversimplified version of Marxist ideas, and I believe that part of the reason for this is a misunderstanding of the word "superstructure". It suggests the scaffolding round a building, easily determinable, easily controlled. It is a static word when the exact opposite is true. The ideological superstructure and the forms it takes are living forces, interacting upon and influencing each other, influenced by and influencing the economic structure of society, with their own dialectical laws of contradiction and movement.

This oversimplification, that is, economic determinism, has led to both political and artistic *culs de sac*. It was responsible for the idea that people only joined the socialist movement for economic reasons, voting with feet or stomach, disregarding the profound effect which ideas can have upon the human mind and heart. Engels himself was a minor capitalist, and Marx a bourgeois intellectual who married a member of the

Prussian aristocracy, while it is lamentably true that at least a third of the British working class must have voted Tory between 1951 and 1964.

It has led to the pseudo-Marxist literary criticism which praised or condemned an artist's work on the basis of whether or not he supported the progressive movements of his day in an explicit political way.

Reading such pseudo criticism one has almost been led to conclude that Byron was a great poet because he died at Missolonghi in the cause of Greek Independence; that Wordsworth could be written off as a renegade because he was disillusioned with the results of the French Revolution and became a respectable Tory in his old age; and that Keats could be ignored because his radicalism, though no less real than Shelley's and Byron's, was less explicitly expressed. As Lenin said: "The essential thing for literary criticism is not what the writer thinks but what he presents."

It may well be true that an artist's revolutionary sympathies influenced his work for the good. It is also true that works inspired by revolutionary enthusiasm can be mediocre, flat and uninspired. The many songs, poems and novels written by Chartists, for instance, while fascinating sociologically have, with a very few exceptions, little artistic merit.

A genuine Marxist attitude is, I firmly believe, the basis for appreciating art, whether Gregorian chants, Georgian architecture, the plays of Shakespeare or Aeschylus, the paintings of Delacroix or Constable, the music of Monteverdi or Britten, the poetry of Chaucer or T. S. Eliot. The first premise for judging works of art must be to understand what the artist is trying to express, within the context of his class, society, nationality and time. His individual talent will always react to these influences in an infinitely varied and unpredictable manner.

A Marxist attitude is much more than a quick linking of art with social conditions and political forces or the taking of snap political judgements. "A problem can only be fully understood

when all its aspects, all its implications, all its determinants have been established and examined"—which means, in short, a detailed search for the truth.

If we take a composer like Bach, for instance, we would start by roughly noting that he was born in Weimar in 1685; that Germany at that time was a collection of petty dukedoms; that the Duke of Weimar employed him and was for a time his private patron; that he was greatly influenced by Lutheran hymns; that he was also employed by the Church as organist and composer and was expected to compose religious works for special occasions; that the society he lived in was a stable one, in which everyone was supposed to have both duties and privileges; that a strong feeling of nationality and nationhood had not been born; that the individual was not yet important as an individual; that there were not yet great virtuoso soloists; that Italy had so far been leading the world musically; that there had been enormous technical advances in the making of musical instruments—stringed instruments gaining in resonance and power—the modern flute taking over from the recorder, and the piano gradually replacing the harpsichord.

We should then have to study the different musical forms, counterpoint and polyphony, the oratorio, the mass and the cantata; the suites with their contrasted dance rhythms—gigues, sarabandes and minuets; preludes and fuges, toccatas and concerti, and find out which were traditional and which innovations. We would have to compare him with his Italian and German contemporaries, Vivaldi and Buxtehude.

Only when these questions—and a great many more—had been studied would we be really in a position to analyse the works.

But I have left out the most important aspect, the beauty of the music itself. This remains undefinable (at any rate by me), but unless we respond to it our analysis will remain abstract and meaningless. Delight must come first, and if inadequate and superficial on its own, the man who has not music in his soul will never be a music critic, Marxist or otherwise.

Beauty is difficult to define though we may be able to define some of its factors. William Empson, the literary critic and poet writes: "The reasons that make a line of verse likely to give pleasure, I believe, are like the reasons for anything else; one can reason about them."

Empson analyses in his fascinating book *Seven Types of Ambiguity* a line from one of Shakespeare's sonnets

"Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang"

and suggests some of the ideas in it which combine to give the line its richness and beauty.

"Because ruined monastery choirs are places in which to sing, because they involve sitting in a row, because they are made of wood, are carved into knots and so forth, because they used to be surrounded by a sheltering building crystallised out of the likeness of a forest, and coloured with stained glass and painting like flowers and leaves, because they are now abandoned by all but the grey walls coloured like the skies of winter, because the cold and Narcissistic charm suggested by choirboys suits well with Shakespeare's feeling for the object of the sonnets, and various sociological and historical reasons (the protestant destruction of monasteries; fear of puritanism) which it would be hard now to trace out in their proportions; these reasons, and many more relating the simile to its place in the Sonnet, must all combine to give the line its beauty, and there is a sort of ambiguity in not knowing which of them to hold most clearly in mind."

"I do believe", Empson writes, "that more goes on in our minds, if we find the line beautiful at all, than we easily recognise and that like most other poetry it is heightened if you think back to its historical setting."

I would underline the words "if we find the line beautiful at all", because unless we feel the impact of delight our historical sociological and literary examination will lead us nowhere in our appreciation of art. It is only after the impact has been felt that we can reason about it.

It is obvious that the "I know what I like but don't know why" attitude to art is as inadequate as "he was on the side of the workers and must be good".

But it is not even enough to relate an artist to his society; for society, at any given time, is not static but perpetually in the process of change, either slowly and quantitatively or in that qualititative leap which we call revolution, and an artist responds to these changes either explicitly or implicitly or both. He is not only affected by the change but may actively help to bring it about.

The two modern revolutions with the widest repercussions have been the French Revolution in 1789 and the Russian Revolution in 1917. There can be no doubt that these two revolutions changed every facet of human life. And in both of them the ideas, whether expressed philosophically, scientifically or artistically, were not only products of the economic struggle but in turn affected it and transformed it.

The French Revolution was not only the seizure of power by the rising middle class in the pursuit of their class interests; not only the curtailing of the power of the feudal nobility; it was an ideological war in which every established value was challenged.

Liberty, equality and fraternity may have been limited political objectives for the middle class, but the poets, musicians and philosophers transformed them and gave them a deeper universal significance.

Mozart made the hero and heroine of *Figaro* two servants, while the lecherous old Count is defeated in his designs for the feudal right of "the first night". Beethoven made the last movement of his Ninth Symphony a hymn to freedom, peace and the brotherhood of man. Proclaiming that the men in hodden grey were the equal of the belted earl Burns wrote "A Man's a Man for a' that". His vision of a world where all men would be brothers was a far more joyous long-term perspective than limited political reform. So was Wordsworth's when he wrote that it was "bliss in that dawn to be alive but to be

young was very heaven" and that it was possible to build a happy world "not in Utopia, subterranean fields, or some forgotten island, heaven knows where, but in the world, this very world where we must find out happiness or not at all". So was Blake's vision of the future; when "the happy earth sing in its course, the mild peaceable nations be open'd to heav'n and men walk with their fathers in bliss". The Nobles of France would put off "the red robe of terror, the crown of oppression, the shoes of contempt and unbuckle the girdle of war from the desolate earth". And "the wild raging millions" would "sing in the village and shout in the harvest, and woo in pleasant gardens their once savage loves" and "the saw and the hammer, the chisel, the pencil, the pen, and the instruments of heavenly song sound in the wilds once forbidden".

These visions have not yet been realised but the poets have kept our hopes intact by appealing to man's perpetual struggle for perfection.

4

The Arts under Capitalism

"A writer's endeavour, for the most part, is to please his readers." *ALEXANDER POPE*

"I have not the slightest feeling of humility towards the public, or to anything in existence but the Eternal Being, the Principle of Beauty, and the Memory of Great Men . . . but a Preface is written to the public—a thing I cannot help looking upon as an enemy, and which I cannot address without feelings of hostility." *JOHN KEATS*

But a new golden age was not ushered in by the French Revolution. Instead man's inhumanity to man continued. Industrial capitalism brought exploitation for the many as well as freedom for the few; poverty for the many as well as riches for the few.

Wordsworth, who had exalted individual man:

> Thus was man
> Ennobled outwardly before mine eyes.
> And thus my heart at first was introduced
> To an unconscious love and reverence
> Of human Nature; hence the human form
> To me was like an index of delight
> Of grace and honour, power and worthiness.

retired to his lakes, writing more and more about less and less.

Hazlitt expressed his disillusion:

"For my part I started in life with the French Revolution and I have lived, alas, to see the end of it. My sun rose with the

first dawn of liberty and I did not think how soon both must set. The new impulse to ardour given to men's minds imparted a congenial warmth and glow to mine; we were strong to run a race together and I little dreamed that long before mine was set, the sun of liberty would turn to blood or set once more in the night of despotism. Since then, I confess, I have no longer felt myself young, for with that my hopes fell."

Moreover, one of the by-products of this new industrial society was a change in the function of art and in the relation of the artist to society.

The artist discovered that he too was a mere producer and seller of commodities in a society which had little use for them.

In feudal society he had glorified his patrons, decorated churches, written plays, poems and music for public occasions. Increased trade brought increased wealth and the newly rich employed artists of all kinds to design and decorate their houses, to provide entertainment for private and public occasions and in the process to bring them prestige. Theatre companies in Shakespeare's day had Court or noble patronage; Haydn was employed by Prince Esterhazy; Pope had various noble patrons; Purcell was commissioned to write works for public occasions; Milton wrote *Comus* for the Earl of Ludlow; Van Dyck painted portraits of royalty and their children.

Of course private or church patronage had had its drawbacks. While it worked satisfactorily for Haydn it had placed Mozart in the humiliating position of being insulted by the Archbishop of Salzburg or kept waiting for hours in chilly drawing rooms in order to curry favour with arrogant duchesses. Nor did it work for Burns, who was forced to take a job as exciseman for £50 a year because his noble patrons were profuse with their flattery but scanty with their cash. Both he and Mozart, driven to early deaths by poverty and overwork, were writing on their death beds letters to friends begging for money to pay off minor debts.

But there had never been any doubt that art was a necessary

part of civilisation and that the artist, if he behaved nicely, was a valuable member of society. It was possible with a little luck, a great deal of tact, and a certain amount of skill in evading censorship, to earn a reasonable living, as poet, musician or painter.

With the growth of capitalism all this changed. Art was looked upon as something suspect or frivolous. Early capitalists believed in thrift (capital had to be accumulated, not wasted on useless display or artistic patronage). As a freelance in a competitive market the freedom of the artist became alarmingly absolute. For the first time he felt apart from society, a rebel, an outsider. And naturally he made a virtue of his isolation and hostility.

With the breakdown of public and private patronage it is interesting to note just how some of the artists of the period did manage to survive. Byron and Shelley and Southey had private incomes; Van Gogh was kept by his devoted brother; Wordsworth received a number of legacies plus a sinecure from the Post Office; Keats struggled along with a tiny private income and poorly paid journalism. Society no longer felt responsible for its artists and the romantic idea of starving in a garret became only too possible.

Wordsworth was one of the last poets to feel and express his social obligations. He saw the poet as "a man speaking to men". He deliberately chose "incidents and situations from common life . . . in a selection of language really used by men".

A generation later John Keats is viewing the public as "a thing I cannot help looking upon as an enemy, and which I cannot address without feelings of hostility". His responsibility is to the ideals of truth and beauty.

This is not to deny his strong feelings of human obligation or the fact that in poems like *Hyperion* he showed a profound understanding of historical change. But he tended to equate the Public with a hostile Establishment who were against truth, beauty and poetry itself. It is perfectly possible, as

Engels said about Schiller, to combine radicalism with escape from the world.

In the work of the English poets of this period we see two conflicting trends—the idea of man's potentiality to change the world and himself for the better—and the withdrawal into a private retreat of beauty away from the public world of pain and horror—of hope and despair.

In the mood of hope Wordsworth had seen London as a sight "touching in its majesty".

> The City now doth, like a garment, wear
> The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
> Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie
> Open unto the fields and to the sky;
> All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

In the mood of despair Blake had written:

> I wander through each charter'd street,
> Near where the charter'd Thames does flow,
> And mark in every face I meet
> Marks of weakness, marks of woe.
>
> In every cry of every Man,
> In every Infant's cry of fear,
> In every voice, in every ban,
> The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.
>
> How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
> Every black'ning Church appalls;
> And the hapless Soldier's sigh
> Runs in blood down Palace walls.
>
> But most through midnight streets I hear
> How the youthful Harlot's curse
> Blasts the newborn Infant's tear,
> And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.

Gradually "reality" and the "real world" became synonymous with degradation and unpleasantness. Shelley could write in *Adonais*:

> He has outsoared the shadow of our night,
> Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
> And that unrest which men miscall delight,
> Can touch him not and torture not again.
> From the contagion of the world's slow stain
> He is secure. . . .

And Keats escaped in the song of the nightingale from:

> The weariness, the fever and the fret,
> Here where men sit and hear each other groan;
> Where palsy shakes a few sad last grey hairs,
> Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies;
> Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
> And leaden-eyed despairs;
> Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
> Or new love pine at them beyond tomorrow.

And since the "real" world was so alien the only solution was to create another world of beauty in the imagination. At first this creation was a positive and rebellious act against the ugliness, both physical and moral, of industrial capitalism. Artists rejoiced that beauty and the creation of art had no cash value and that artists were free from the inhuman relations between man and man brought about by capitalist society.

Art for Art's sake—as opposed to Art for Cash's Sake—was anyhow a protest. But Beauty, set on a pedestal above the hard facts of existence, soon loses its value and the aesthetes of the late Victorian era did art a disservice in the long run by turning it into an exquisite toy for the amusement of the very very select few capable of appreciating it—just as they did woman a disservice by creating a feminine ideal who had never soiled her hands with ugly toil, who swooned at the sight of

blood, who had the vapours at every hint of stress and strain and excelled only in the useless occupations of poker work or netting bags, and who covered the legs of her piano in pantalettes.

W. B. Yeats felt the pull of this enticing and beautiful world of the imagination. In *The Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland* he writes of:

> A dim green well-belov'd isle
> Where people love beside star-laden seas,
> How Time may never mar their faery vows
> Under the woven roots of quicken boughs

and how

> Somewhere to north or west or south
> There dwelt a gay exulting gentle race
> And how beneath those three-times blessed skies
> The Danaan fruitage makes a shower of moons.

Yeats lived long enough and had sufficient personal and poetical integrity to achieve a synthesis between the world of politics and human problems and the world of "faeryland forlorn". In many of his later poems he concentrated his poetic imagination on the workaday world and in the process the commonplace became marvellous and "a terrible beauty was born".

But Yeats was an exception. In general the cult of abstract Beauty for its own sake contained within it the seeds of decadence, sentimentality, pretty-prettiness and nostalgia for the past; a retreat into private language and esoteric terms; a reduction in the impact and force of art by concentration on only one aspect—formal design and colour in painting, "pure sound" in poetry, mathematical formulae in music.

It resulted in the abstract painters of today whose work, however decorative and delightful, only appeals to a small part of human experience.

Or to a so-called *avant garde* poet like Graham Reynolds who can offer a piece like:

Espalier
O era rose
Veil I eve
Remit pale, dunned dust,
Surd, rust, sap,
Gift sap
Spill, as reversal lips
past fog, past surd,
Rust, sudden nude,
lap time.
Reveil I eve
so rare oriel, apse.

Great art has always appealed to the whole of man. Decadent trends belittle the role of art and turn it into a plaything for the few who know the rules or absence of rules of the particular game.

On the positive side there have been the hopeful signs of growth and new integration. The intense human passion and love of beauty in Keats, the tough witty cynicism in Byron, the revolutionary ardour in Shelley, the re-discovery of history in Scott, the social criticism in Dickens and Thackeray, and all the skilful and profound analyses of human relationships and social forces which we find in the works of the great nineteenth-century writers—all these belong to the side of human progress.

Conflicting trends can of course be present in the works of single writers and even in individual works, which is one of the reasons it is so dangerous to write off any work as being "decadent", as a term of abuse. Very very few works can be dismissed in such a way and there is a good argument for denying that those are works of art at all. Even the non-communication plays in the modern theatre are communication by the very fact that they are performed in a theatre to an audience.

Marxist understanding is not a short-cut in analysing the various trends in art; on the contrary, it is rather a long way round, involving far more than a superficial summing up of "progressive" or "decadent" characteristics.

But it is possible to make a broad historical generalisation and say that, by and large, the artist under capitalism has felt himself to be at odds with society, that he has had an exaggerated idea of his "freedom", which is shared by the public. It is continually boasted in the Western "free" world that the artist is absolutely free to express his ideas and his personality; he is no longer considered as a responsible member of the community but as a wild cat walking in the wild woods on his wild lone. This freedom is largely illusory and is as Lenin said: "a masked or hypocritically concealed dependence on the purse, on bribery, on fees." The box office can be an even greater tyranny than censorship laws.

It is one of the most important tasks of the socialist movement to break down this false conception of the artist versus society and art versus reality, to bring back the artist and art into their true place in our lives and to re-awaken the audience into a critical and creative appreciation and participation.

5

William Morris—Socialist and Artist

"I do not want art for a few, any more than education for a few, or freedom for a few." *WILLIAM MORRIS*

William Morris was the first British artist to become a revolutionary socialist. He was also the first to work out a socialist attitude to the arts and to realise their importance both in the struggle for socialism and in life under socialism.

Morris saw the pursuit of happiness as the goal of human life. "What is the object of Revolution? Surely to make people happy. Revolution having brought its fore-doomed change about, how can you prevent the counter-revolution from setting in except by making people happy?" Happiness could not be attained by either masters or slaves, by the powerful rich or the labouring poor. But he insisted that a change in the economic system alone would not be enough to make people happy.

The basis for human happiness lay in the satisfaction of man's creative impulses in work and leisure. He insisted, just as Ernst Fischer does in *The Necessity of Art*, that these impulses are an inherent part of human nature and can only be satisfied in the production and enjoyment of art.

Morris saw art not just as the production of a few specially gifted people but as something everyone, in a greater or lesser degree, could create, that every workman could be a craftsman and every craftsman have something of the artist in him.

He thought that architecture especially and the applied and visual arts could supply an endless need for art-work, for

the architect, the designer, the sculptor, the carver, the stonemason, the weaver, the joiner and the painter. All the necessities of life had the choice of being either beautiful or ugly, and when once freed from the tyranny of having to make a profit they should and could be beautiful. "Have nothing in your house which you do not know to be useful and believe to be beautiful," he said.

In his vision of the communist future, *News from Nowhere*, he lays particular stress throughout on the beauty of town buildings, the people's clothes, their glass and table ware, and describes the natural joy people felt in decorating buildings, blowing glass, working in wood and metal, creating useful and beautiful things.

Although machines could be used for necessary drudgery, mere machine-minding could never satisfy man's needs. Therefore under socialism dull repetitive work should be shared so that everyone would have the chance of perfecting some special skill. (In *News from Nowhere* the dustman writes books and the weaver is studying mathematics.)

Morris saw that the profit system creates entirely artificial needs, so that people loaded their houses and their persons with the vulgar, the tasteless and the gimcrack. (What would he think of the gadget-loaded status-symbol-filled houses of today?)

It is interesting to note that in his vision of the future, this "second childhood" of the world, there is no evidence of any "great" art being produced, no individual writer or musician struggling to bring order out of chaos or to resolve enormous conflicts. The only writer is:

"A capital fellow, and you can't help liking him. But he has a weakness; he will spend his time in writing reactionary novels, and is very proud of getting the local colour right, as he calls it; and as he thinks you come from some forgotten corner of the earth, where people are unhappy, and consequently interesting to a story teller, he thinks he might get some information out of you."

Morris seems to suggest that a society without conflicts is not likely to produce great individual works of art, but that the function of art will change (or rather return to its original function) and become an intrinsic part of living.

Although we may not agree with all of Morris's ideas, there are certain fundamental ideas which we ignore at our peril. One is that it is absolutely necessary for socialism to make it possible for people to find joy in work for its own sake and not just for the material rewards.

Another is to see the creation of beauty in our everyday lives as an absolute necessity.

It is evidence of Morris's extraordinary foresight that although Victorian London was even more squalid and poverty-stricken than the London of today, Morris still thought in terms of architecture rather than mere housing. It was not enough to put roofs over the workers' heads, they must be beautiful roofs. This has been a slow lesson to learn and we in Britain have only recently begun to realise the importance of town planning (in some cases too late), the preserving of green belts, the designing of pleasant housing estates rather than industrial barracks, and the general improvement in furniture design and interior decoration.

We may doubt whether a socialist society, freed from unnecessary conflict between classes, will ever be quite like the gentle, gay and joyful country described in *News from Nowhere*. Certainly the experiences of socialism in the last forty years have been both stormy and conflict-ful and there seems every justification for thinking that there always will be conflicts between the old and the new in every sphere, between the generations, between temperaments, and that the restless spirit of man will never be content to call a halt to scientific progress. There is no hint that drama, passion and tragedy will disappear from our lives, thus removing the material out which the great individual artist creates his work.

At the same time, as Morris points out in so many of his lectures, the old folk popular art, produced by the unconscious

intelligence, must be replaced by a new popular art produced by the conscious intelligence. Only in this way can the gulf between the artist and the people, between great and popular art be removed.

There are hopeful signs that in the socialist countries precisely this is being done; the many folk ensembles and the traditional art of national minorities are being cherished along with the more complex and profound forms of art—opera, ballet, music, poetry and drama.

But Morris did not only have dreams of the future, he worked actively throughout his life to put his ideas into practice.

In wallpaper, furniture and textile design, printing and book-making, he created art which was "a happiness to the maker and to the user".

His poetry, which is largely neglected today, was part of his general aims. He used legends from Greece, Icelandic sagas and fairy tales in an effort to bring back the old story-teller's art. Whatever their literary merit,* it is quite clear what his intentions were. He was the first socialist poet to translate his socialist ideology into poetry, and it is unfortunate that, narrative verse being so thoroughly out of fashion today, his has been insufficiently studied or appreciated.

The progressive movement in the last forty years has tended to see art as propaganda (and has often made the mistake of thinking that propaganda was necessarily art), but Morris never stresses the propaganda aspect; he sees all genuine art as an unmixed blesssing for mankind and its primary function as giving delight and entertainment.

If we in the left-wing movement had studied Morris more and understood him better, we would have avoided some of the sectarian attitudes that have disfigured our movement in the past.

* See Dr Jessie Kocmanova's brilliant defence of it in her book, *The Poetic Maturing of William Morris.*

6

Socialist Attitudes

"Our literature and art, therefore, must first serve the working class which leads the revolution." *MAO TSE-TUNG*

The Russian Revolution, like the French Revolution, changed not only Russia but the whole world. The future predicted by Marx and Engels became a fact. Communism was no longer a spectre haunting Europe, it was a phenomenon of flesh and blood, with all the ills that the flesh is heir to.

And ideas about art, about its purpose and function, about the duties and responsibilities of artists, also underwent a fundamental change.

The potentialities of art to change human nature and to play a decisive part in the ideological war were immediately recognised. After all, Marx had called the nineteenth-century English realists "the splendid brotherhood of fiction writers in England, whose graphic and eloquent pages have issued to the world more political and social truths than has been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together".

In spite of its appalling economic and political difficulties the young Soviet republic paid great attention to art and, freed from Tsarist censorship, there was a glorious free-for-all in music, literature, drama and the arts generally. Mayakovsky wrote his declamations; Eisenstein made *Storm over Asia* and *The Battleship Potemkin*; Meyerhold mounted his controversial productions; Shostakovich started his meteoric career.

The fundamental policy that emerged from this stormy

period was that art must once again be popular and that it must serve the needs of the revolution. The issues were black and white—either an artist was for or against Soviet power; he either wrote, painted or composed works to advance the cause, or he was a decadent reactionary lackey of the imperialists.

The trouble was that, like many other apparently straightforward slogans, "art must serve the masses" was open to about a thousand interpretations and misinterpretations. Works of art mean different things to different people—a play like Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* will make some members of the audience feel that they have seen the gilded lilies of Mayfair being turned upside and deliciously down, others will murmur about decadence and amorality. Succeeding generations will also bring their subjective reactions to a work—the fascists turned Wagner's Icelandic heroes into racially pure Nordic supermen; the Germans turned an entirely innocent theme from one of Haydn's string quartets into *Deutschland über Alles*.

To serve the masses came to mean to some people the active illustration of the current party line.

Now it is undoubtedly true that capable journalists can popularise and explain the necessary aims of modern child welfare among the peasantry, the fulfilling of norms among factory workers, the principles of Soviet democracy and other current day-to-day necessities. It is even true that artists with an advanced sense of social responsibility will want to employ their talents in these fields; Mayakovsky certainly did. But this can never be the sole task of an artist. However sincere and dedicated he may be, he cannot immediately write a novel or a play to pep up the morale of cement workers or collective farmers—it is not his job. He has a duty to the truth as he sees it, even if it conflicts with the truth as seen by a political party, or a government or even his friends. I am not suggesting that the artist is always right—he is a fallible human being, partial and prejudiced; but unless he adheres to his own particular

vision he has no artistic integrity and is not worthy of being called an artist. It is impossible to see the world through the eyes of a Committee.

Obviously, the first socialist government in the world was bound to make mistakes in its handling of the arts and artists. The astonishing thing is that there have been so many achievements in so short a time. The music of Prokofiev, Shostakovich and Khatchachurian; the novels of Sholokhov; the poetry of Mayakovsky and Pasternak have become part of our world cultural heritage.

Nevertheless it is useful for us in Britain to study some of the calamities that subsequently arose when art was expected to be part of the official propaganda machine.

Alexander Tvardovsky, editor of *Novy Mir*, poet and novelist, made a most revealing speech at the 22nd Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1962. He spoke of the period of "constraint and restriction" now ending and the difficulty of overcoming "habitual concepts, inert psychology".

He criticised Soviet literature for its "insufficient profundity and truth in depicting life".

"The defect of many of our books is primarily the absence of the truth of life, the author's trepidations, his wondering what is permissible and what is not, his lack of confidence in his reader. 'I'm smart,' he thinks, 'I know everything; but suppose the reader does not understand something the way he should and stops fulfilling his work plan?' This is nothing but a concession to the methods and habits belonging to those years of our development which were in general marked by a spirit of mistrust and suspicion that is particularly ruinous to art".

He criticises the writers who use literary media to illustrate the various proposals of the Party and says "he is actually not contributing anything of value—it is almost the same as fulfilling a milk delivery plan with butter purchased in a shop".

He goes on to say: "One of the amazing peculiarities of art is this—if the artist is not deeply moved by the ideas, images and pictures of life with which he fills his production, no miracle

will occur; the reader, viewer or listener will accept the work coldly; he will not be touched to the depths of his soul. To lie or evade or pretend is as difficult in art as it is in matters of love."

These criticisms strike home to anyone who has read a selection of Soviet novels published, say, between 1935 and 1955. A false optimism, contrived happy endings, trivial personal relationships were characteristics of many novels in this period. They portrayed stiff-upper-lipped heroes defeating imperialist spies; if these heroes had emotional problems they dashed off to the Far East to build a pipe line; they never thought of anything except fulfilling the Plan and in the end they received telegrams of congratulation from Stalin.

"Instead of the genuine tension underlying the struggle for socialism, we got the artificial tension of a detective story" wrote the Marxist critic Georg Lukacz. Events which were exceptional were presented as typical, and reality was presented as a happy never-never-land in which all norms are fulfilled and personal tragedy unthinkable and positively reactionary.

"Difficulties in the building of socialism were invariably blamed on the activities of enemy agents. The exposure of these agents served as the dénouement of the plot as well as the solution of the conflict. Both before the agent's arrival and after his exposure, there existed an idyllic state of non-conflict. Naturally there will be spies and counter-revolutionaries as long as two rival social systems exist. But these elements only use for their own criminal purposes existing difficulties, contradictions and mistakes."

Writers were also urged to create "the proletarian hero" who would embody all the virtues of the revolutionary working class and inspire the reader to redouble his efforts to build socialism.

To quote Tvardovsky again: "The hero is usually more or less upright in his action and his thoughts, but although he has all the virtues he is supposed to have, there is one simple but

irreplaceable quality he does not possess—the charm of a human being."

The heroes of literature have not always been wholly admirable characters—Falstaff with his boozing and his cowardliness, Tom Jones with his wenching, the Good Soldier Schweik, Mother Courage. And even the ones who immediately excite our sympathy and admiration, Elizabeth Bennett and Hamlet, Prince Andrew and Chris Tavendale, are conceived as complex human beings, with failings as well as virtues. They all have the charm of human beings.

The politically correct hero, whose every virtue was supposed to inspire the reader with similar virtue, was not a human being and could neither charm nor inspire.

The hero of Dudintsev's *Not by Bread Alone*, who never thinks of anything but his invention from first page to last, is an unmitigated bore. I would almost prefer the self-pitying, hysterical and thoroughly "reactionary" Jimmy Porter of *Look Back in Anger*. At least he is alive.

But not only was subject matter dictated to artists, they also received directives as to style.

The term "socialist realism" was first mentioned by Gorki in 1934 after seventeen years' fierce controversy between people who thought that a new, different proletarian culture ought suddenly to arise and people who believed that the new art should grow out of the traditions of the past, the nineteenth century realists in particular.

I am quite convinced that Gorki never intended it to be used as a straitjacket for succeeding generations or in other countries, but it unfortunately has been.

Now, to a certain extent all great art is realistic in that it teaches us more about the world, about human nature, about the outer conditions of social reality and the inner reality of ourselves. In this sense the Soviet novels were were discussing earlier were thoroughly unrealistic in that they denied the complex, exciting, conflictful business of building socialism.

But an infinite diversity of styles can project this realism—

fable, fairy story, symbolism, allegory—pastoral, historical, poetical, and satirical.

Virginia Woolf's stream of consciousness, James Joyce's invented language, Oscar Wilde's artificial comedies, Brecht's fables, Picasso's cubism, MacDiarmid's esoteric quotations have all contributed something to our knowledge of reality.

Realism, when it is confused with its dowdy relation naturalism, can be particularly frustrating for the visual artist, who was expected to be severely representational, to paint pictures of Lenin (or Stalin) addressing the workers and to embody tractors or pylons in his landscapes.

The *n*th degree of naturalism in literature is shown in the novels of the Frenchman Robbe Grillet who fills up pages and pages with useless factual detail, all true and "realistic" but utterly meaningless and inessential.

"Art must serve the masses" came to mean a narrowing purpose for art; that it must have an immediate, explicit political message, immediately intelligible to all members of the working class. Anything difficult or esoteric became suspect; dissonance, lack of melody in music; the non-representational in art; the experimental in all the arts.

It is easy to realise now how the propaganda function of art predominated during this period to the exclusion of its many other functions. But since the war and since the break up of dogmatic ideology which began at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and is still continuing, the picture of art as a rather grim teacher-cum-warrior, with a ruler in one hand to rap the knuckles of the faithful and a sword in the other to smite the enemies of the revolution, is fading.

Art can and does arouse the most varied feelings, the highest spiritual exaltation and the lightest-hearted amusement, moral indignation and irreverent laughter; it can be soothing or disturbing, kind or cruel, tragic or gay, popular or esoteric, simple or learned. Any attempt to limit its appeal is disastrous and, fortunately, in the long run as impracticable as it is to limit the nature of man himself.

Moreover, art conceived primarily as propaganda usually defeats its own purpose. As Oscar Wilde said about certain academic paintings: "Their meaning is too obvious and their method too clearly defined. One exhausts what they have to say in a very short time and then they become as tedious as one's relations."

Half-truths and glib optimism breed cynicism and apathy. In the last analysis only truth can serve the people.

This sectarian approach to art did not only exist in the Soviet Union. Peter Karvas writing in *World Marxist Review* describes similar experiences in Czechoslovakia after 1948 and no doubt they could be duplicated to a lesser or greater degree in other socialist countries.

Karvas speaks of writers "undertaking commitments very much like the pledges of miners or builders—short-term tasks of an essentially production nature, thematically, and also in point of time linked with the urgent tasks of socialist construction" or writers planning novels "to organise the countryside", thus actually "diminishing the real possibilities art has to influence man, his history, his struggle for happiness".

The social function of art, he says, is not "to intervene in life with the directness and immediacy of technology or mass political work". He too speaks of the "vulgarisation of the principle of topicality and the erroneous approach to the problem of the positive hero.".

The tragic result of this misunderstanding of the function of art was that the newly created audience found literature lagging behind their demands. "They often accepted it because it propounded things they had long known. But such art neither stirred nor delighted them. They remained indifferent because simplified understanding of the requirements and orientation on speedy 'response' robbed art of that which has always been the source of its appeal to man, its ability to enrich him, to strike a responsive chord in his heart—the magic of the inimitable, a disturbing newness, an ineffable individuality, beauty newly discovered. The 'infallible' works which

answered all specifications, which in no way departed from standard, which had had the benefit of countless consultations and were in every respect absolutely correct, had only one fault—they were not art."

We, in Britain and America, and when I say, "we" I mean the Left-Wing movement as a whole, not just the Communist Party, have not been free of sectarianism which has manifested itself in different ways at different periods.

An article in *New Masses* in 1933, for instance, laid down exact specifications for the ideal Marxist work of literature whose primary function was "to lead the proletarian reader to recognise his role in the class struggle" and the writer was told that he must express the view of "the vanguard of the proletariat" and that he "should be, or should try to make himself a member of the proletariat".

Something of this view must have affected me, because I remember as a student walking around in a dirty macintosh with unkempt hair lest the ghastly secret of my middle-class origins be too immediately apparent. In those days the term "intellectual" was a dirty word, usually prefixed by the abjective "bloody", and we who came from middle-class homes instead of calmly accepting our limitations and advantages, crawled about in a constant state of inferiority and apology.

I remember, too, working in Unity Theatre's Play Department, being dogged by demands to find a play we referred to as "the English Lefty" which was to be an exact replica of Clifford Odets' brilliant piece of dramatic journalism *Waiting for Lefty*. Play after play was criticised or turned down, not on the basis of its own merits or de-merits but because it did not follow the master recipe.

This may sound like lunatic fringe stuff and I am not suggesting that such views were held by responsible Marxists, but it was real enough for the then editor of *Challenge* (1941) Ted Willis, now Lord Willis of Chislehurst—or is it Dock Green?—to tell me that I had no business on a paper like *Challenge* (the organ of the Young Communist League) because

my unfortunate background would preclude me from ever "serving the workers' cause".

The thirties was a tremendously creative period for all writers and artists connected with the left. The appalling poverty at home and the growing menace of fascism abroad aroused the most passionate and partisan feelings in all but the most ivory-tower-enclosed artists. Various books have recently been written which attempt to belittle achievements and sneer at the hopeful heady atmosphere in which we believed that the Revolution would begin next Tuesday at the latest, in which we thought we had all the answers to all the questions, in which the newest poem or play was a harbinger of that glorious popular meaningful art envisaged by William Morris.

Cultural organisations were formed, the Left Theatre, Unity Theatre in London and Glasgow, the Workers Music Association, Co-operative and left-wing choirs, magazines like *Left Review* and *Poetry and the People*, all providing a forum for a wide group of new writers and musicians dedicated to the cause of socialism.

These are solid achievements which cannot be dismissed; Steinbeck's moving novel *The Grapes of Wrath*; Clifford Odets' plays; Alan Bush's working-class songs with their inspiring rhythms and bare harmonics; plays by Montagu Slater; the poetry of a numerous group of poets, Randall Swingler, Edgell Rickword, Maurice Carpenter, John Cornford as well as the more famous Auden, Isherwood and Spender; criticism by Ralph Fox and Christopher Caudwell; novels of Welsh mining life by Lewis Jones and Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*; brilliant satire like Unity Theatre's famous pantomine *Babes in the Wood.*

The ballad form was re-discovered, so (even then) was folk song, the mass declamation, the living newspaper, all geared to the absolutely necessary task of defeating capitalism at home and fascism abroad.

But none of the writers and artists I have mentioned, many of whom were Communists, were conforming to any particular

pattern—they were pioneers, expressing new ideas in new forms; they were truly revolutionary. And they created an artistic renaissance which has had, as yet, no parallel.

But in the Labour movement certain attitudes persisted which, particularly in the post-war years, weakened its intellectual and cultural wing and estranged many artists and writers who were basically sympathetic to the cause of socialism. Such attitudes were less apparent during periods like the thirties when there was a big popular movement demanding social change, and during the Second World War when the whole nation was involved in defeating fascism and it was quite clear that people needed and enjoyed the inspiration and solace of the deepest and most profound art.

Since the Labour movement today is taking increased responsibility in our present battle for the arts it is important to enumerate some of these attitudes. Some of them arose out of the general political climate (the Cold War, for instance) others out of a misunderstanding of the function of art.

Everyone's experience is partial and individual, but these are some on which I have personally barked my shins in a variety of organisations, writing and lecturing and doing common or garden political work.

First, the idea that all art should have an explicit political message and be, so to speak, a "weapon" in the hands of the working class to help them win socialism, and that past and present work that does not fulfil this function should be, labelled "bourgeois", "escapist" or at best a frivolity. Then that art should have immediate impact and intelligibility even to culturally unsophisticated audiences. What was overlooked was the contradictory nature of these two views—for the explicitly political is just as likely not to appeal to a popular audience since, by ignoring the function of art to delight and entertain, it would only be meaningful to a politically educated minority.

There was also a confusion between long-range and short-range art, for while mass declamations and revolutionary songs

are valuable and inspiring, so also are reflective poetry and string quartets.

Another common attitude was that the arts were icing on the cake, something that need only be our concern after economic and political questions had been solved. This led to the neglect of the actual cultural amenities that do exist.

With the tremendous re-thinking that has been going on since 1956 in which all aspects of Communist policy have been re-examined and are still being re-examined, with the most fruitful results, these sectarian attitudes are being eliminated.

For example, in Scotland, not only has the Labour movement changed its attitude to the Edinburgh Festival, which used to be sneered at as a sort of upper-class circus "dripping its cosmopolitan insipidness", but has, in the process, helped to change the character of the Festival itself. A similar change has occurred in relation to Glasgow's Citizens Theatre where new audiences have helped to influence choice of plays.

7

Picasso and Brecht—Communist Artists

"Every poem is a voyage into the unknown."
MAYAKOVSKY

While some of the artistic theories and directives thrown up by socialism may have had a cramping effect on art, nevertheless the ideas of Communism and the theory of scientific socialism have been and are a great revivifying influence. Every major artist has been influenced one way or another by the ideas of the Russian Revolution just as two centuries earlier they were influenced by the French Revolution.

And so it is no accident that the most profound and controversial figures of this century have been or are Communists. For the understanding of the social and historical process which only Marxism gives is able to add another dimension to art.

Painters like Picasso and Léger, musicians like Prokofiev and Shostakovich and Alan Bush, playwrights like Brecht and O'Casey, poets like MacDiarmid and Neruda and Hikmet have won international renown which rests on solid achievement and not on the whim or fashion of the moment.

Even critics with a bias against Communism have not been able to deny this achievement, though they are always struggling to prove that the Communism of these artists is a mere accident at best or an unfortunate aberration at worst.

Their solutions of how to integrate art and Communism

have been widely different, so different that it becomes more and more apparent how impossible it is to legislate exactly what sort of art a Communist artist should produce. No wonder the dogmatists have been bewildered, for the nice safe rules have been triumphantly broken and the nice safe labels torn to shreds.

It is impossible to fit a painter like Picasso into any category. Astonishingly versatile and prolific, he has given us not one kind of art but several different kinds and single-handed caused an artistic revolution. His work includes the poignant savage symbolism of *Guernica* and the gentle simplicity of the dove of peace. He has broken down the human figure into geometrical designs and then recreated it sometimes into bizarre distortions, sometimes into shapes of fluid grace. And he has, with his lithographs and pottery, followed the example of William Morris in bringing work of use and beauty into people's houses.

No one is better than Picasso at explaining his artistic philosophy, and in the recent book *My Life with Picasso* Françoise Gilot quotes him extensively.

About the modern artist he says: "Each one of us must recreate an entire language from A to Z. No criterion can be applied to us *a priori* since we don't believe in rigid standards any longer."

About his own paintings he says:

"When I paint, I try to give an image people are not expecting, and, beyond that, one they reject. That's what interests me. I always try to be subversive. That is, I give a man an image of himself whose elements are collected from among the usual way of seeing things in traditional painting and then reassembled in a fashion that is unexpected and disturbing enough to make it impossible for him to escape the question it raises.

"I've never believed in doing painting for the 'happy few'. I've always felt that painting must awaken something even in the man who doesn't ordinarily look at pictures, just as in

Molière there is always something to make the very intelligent person laugh and also the person who understands nothing. In Shakespeare too. And in my work, just as in Shakespeare, there are often burlesque things and relatively vulgar things. In that way I reach everybody. It's not that I want to prostrate myself in front of the public, but I want to provide something for every level of thinking.

"The majority of people have no spirit of creation or invention. So how do you go about teaching them something new? By mixing what they know with what they don't know.

"The objects that go into my paintings are common objects from anywhere: a pitcher, a mug of beer, a pipe, a packet of tobacco, a bowl, a kitchen chair with cane seat, a plain common table.

"For me, a casserole, any old casserole, is a vessel in the metaphorical sense, just like Christ's use of parables. He had an idea: he formulated it in parables so that it would be acceptable to the greatest number. That's the way I use objects."

Of course people do not like looking at themselves, at their fellow human beings, or the common objects in their daily life in "a new way"—they are disturbed, alarmed, even frightened.

No one wants to see his ambition ending the way Macbeth's did, his clinging to old traditions ending in a tragedy like King Lear's; the incidents of his daily life demanding a revolutionary form of conduct, as Christ's parables did.

But that is true revolutionary art—not the presenting of the old, the safe, the comfortable, the accepted, but the new, the unaccepted, the dangerous, the subversive.

Picasso's life work has been a continuous development, a continuous experimentation and exploration, a true "voyage into the unknown".

This does not mean that we have to applaud every phase, every picture. Probably Picasso himself would be the first to admit that some of his experiments failed, that some of his explorations were more fruitful than others. An art critic (which

I am not) would need careful study and analysis to arrive at any just evaluation. But even non-art critics must feel the passion, the vitality, the integrity of his work and be disturbed into a new awareness.

Bertolt Brecht is another artistic giant of our century.

Starting off as an *enfant terrible* and, like Gorki, attracted to all the tramps, thugs and misfits of society (which formed the material for his famous *Dreigroschenoper*) he developed into one of the most profound of dramatists, exploring by the dialectic method man's relation to society with increasing wisdom and maturity.

After spending many years in exile, a period in which his plays could not be produced, he returned to his native Germany after the war and to the astonishment of the "free" West, was given in East Berlin the most advantageous working conditions it is possible to imagine: his own theatre, his own company, unlimited rehearsal time, and a substantial government subsidy to remove financial insecurity and box-office neurosis.

His plays are, like Picasso's paintings, impossible to categorise. He used fable, folk tale and fairy story; music, dance and mime; the most slangy down-to-earth everyday speech and his own special brand of poetry which is at the same time utterly bare of all poetical frills and yet capable of the deepest emotional intensity.

Brecht is obsessed by moral problems; how good intentions can lead to evil and vice versa. His *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* is motivated entirely by goodness and generosity and yet she breaks a strike and brings ruin to the people she wanted to save.

(When this play was produced in London the critics made great play of the fact that it had dated, that capitalism wasn't like that any more, as if Mauler and his colleagues were not exactly the same, in essence, as Roy Thomson and Hugh Fraser outbidding each other for press monopoly.)

The theme is similar in *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, where

the gentle charming heroine is prepared to share her last penny with her friends and relations, as a result of which her shop would fail and she and her lover and her baby would starve. She has to invent a twin brother who can act with the necessary hard-heartedness to survive.

Capitalism, says Brecht in effect, is not a state of society where goodness and generosity will bring anything but misery and ruin. And yet, in the telling words of another tough simple-hearted heroine, the servant girl in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, "how terrible is the temptation to do good".

In *Mother Courage* Brecht shows that the desire for survival, in a bitter war-torn world, is terribly at odds with the decent human feelings of friendliness and love.

In *Galileo* he explores the more complex ethics of a man's duty to society in conflict with not only his desire to serve the truth but his desire to work and live.

All these are pricky uncomfortable questions which still need to be solved in a socialist society. Conflicts between loyalties towards the Party, friends and families, between human and political obligations, still exist under socialism. The difference is that the unreal and unnecessary conflicts between classes have ended. Under socialism we will have the chance to get to grips with our real human and artistic problems.

But if you try and type Brecht by calling him a socialist realist, or a revolutionary romantic, or a bourgeois anarchist, it will be hard to tie him down, nor will it be very rewarding to try.

He deals fairly and squarely with moral-political problems; his themes are intensely real, concrete and rooted in actuality both social and personal, but the form of his plays is far from being what we generally mean when we say realist. He has imaginary gods coming down to earth and going up to heaven again in *The Good Woman*, a Greek chorus chanting in *St Joan*; characters address the audience whenever they feel like it; imaginary countries, wars and revolutions are described; the sets are a mixture of impressionism and fantasy.

I remember reading of a Soviet theatre which boasted that it had "real" moss growing on the stage and a "real" waterfall. But when I visited the Schiffbaudamm theatre in Berlin during a dress rehearsal of *The Chalk Circle* there was only a small panel of white silk with a leafless tree scrawled on it to indicate winter, a forest and a snowstorm. And the two soldiers tramped across the bare boards of the revolving stage.

I am not suggesting that Brecht did not have any political difficulties in East Germany. With the cunning of the seasoned revolutionary he clung on to his Austrian passport. But I do suggest that he had as free a hand to present his work as any playwright has ever had.

But what is most important is that his understanding of dialectics and his Communist beliefs helped to make him the most controversial and exciting playwright of our time.

8

MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance

"That I for poor auld Scotland's sake
Some useful plan or book could make
Or sing a sang at least."

ROBERT BURNS

I am putting Hugh MacDiarmid into a chapter by himself because in order to understand his importance it is necessary to provide a little historical background.

Robert Burns, as David Daiches has pointed out, was writing at the end of a tradition, the tradition of popular vernacular poetry. His fame and success lay in the fact that he was voicing popular sentiments in forms already familiar to a wide section of the population, new words for old songs, and in established verse forms. His genius enabled him to rise above the merely local and parochial and to express the developing ideals of human brotherhood and equality, of national independence, freedom and sharp class loyalty, as well as the enduring human emotions of love and hate, joy and despair, pleasure in hard work and gay conviviality.

But after Burns, Scottish poetry dwindled to a mere trickle. With the breakup of rural life, increased industrialisation and the forcible anglicisation of all Scottish traditions, this particular kind of poetry was doomed to wither away.

This fact has not stopped a vast number of minor rhymsters from continuing to write pseudo-Burns, although, as in all

imitations, the real qualities that made Burns a great poet have been omitted. Instead we have a cloying sentimentality, a sickening nostalgia, a false "pawky" humour, parish-pump politics. Burns wrote "Whisky and freedom gang thegither"—his imitators have forgotten about the freedom.

The influence of Burns is a very lively force even in Scotland today, and lifts working-class cultural life far higher than its English counterpart. Even in small villages you will find the majority of the population knowing a dozen or so of his songs and half a dozen of his poems, apart from one or two local "experts" who know the Bard's work inside out. Where else but in Scotland would you meet, as I did recently, a merry character who boarded an Edinburgh bus at closing time and entertained the company by reciting the whole of *Tam O'Shanter*?

But on the literary scene the influence of Burns has been the dead hand of tradition.

> Mair nonsense has been uttered in his name
> Than in ony's barrin' Liberty and Christ

as MacDiarmid says.

Every up and coming poet was (until recently) judged not by contemporary standards but by how like Burns he was, and if not, why not.

MacDiarmid started his poetical career by trying to re-create, singlehanded, a Scottish poetry of national and international importance, dealing with the problems of the modern world of science and politics.

First he had to create a language, using not only the rich expressions of spoken speech from all over Scotland, but drawing on the pre-Burns literary vocabulary of Henryson and Dunbar. He unwisely called this "synthetic" Scots, thus giving the impression that the Scots he uses is unnatural and phony, and that he had "brought dictionary's methods" into his verse instead of "like Nature's child, warbling his native wood-notes wild". A dictionary is the natural quarry for any poet in which to dig for his new mateial, and any poet who

warbled his native wood notes spontaneously would remain, where he deserved to be, in the wood.

But like Burns, who had been criticised for writing "in a virtually unknown dialect", MacDiarmid received blasts of angry contempt.

Now it is quite true that at first sight, and even more at first sound, MacDiarmid's Scottish lyrics and his long poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* do present certain linguistic difficulties, but none that cannot be overcome by a little application and a good memory. And one needs, after all, more than a little application to understand a sonnet by Shakespeare.

What was new and splendid about these poems was their breadth of experience. In *A Drunk Man* every aspect of the human predicament is touched upon, from man's relation to the universe to sex, from Burns suppers to the General Strike.

And in the short lyrics, instead of braw laddies loving bonny lassies, we had a whole realm of human complex feelings revealed, from the ironic tenderness of

> Wheesht, wheesht my fulish hert,
> For weel ye ken
> I wadna hae ye stert
> Auld ploys again.
>
> It's guid to see her lie
> Sae snod an' cool,
> A' lust o' lovin' by—
> Wheesht, wheesht, ye fule!

to the harsh humour of the men of Crowdieknowe who are woken from their graves when "the last trumpet blaws" to sneer at God and his angels, "they trashy bleezin' French-like folk" who had forced them to move; from the compassion of:

> I met ayont the cairney
> A lass wi' touzie hair
> Singin' til a bairnie
> That was nae langer there.

to the enigmatic *Water Gaw*, the charming *Bonny Broukit Bairn* and the elegiac:

> Twa een like milk wort and bog-cotton hair
> I love thee, earth, in this mood best of all.

There were discerning critics who immediately recognised the highly individual talent and power of these poems, but in general MacDiarmid was abused, neglected and vilified—even more so when his nationalism matured into Communism.

It is ironic that when MacDiarmid, having explored this particular vein as far as he could—for the Scottish Renaissance on which he had set his hopes could only have been entirely successful if it had been followed by the necessary social and political changes—started to write long complicated poems in English, the critics were even more annoyed and derisory.

For once again this was entirely new poetry, packed with esoteric quotations from a dozen different languages, encyclopaedic references, profound philosophic observations mingled with pedestrian statements of fact or political policy, a poetry to bewitch and bewilder friends and enemies alike.

And yet, by the sheer force of his genius, MacDiarmid has won through. He received a Civil List Pension in 1948 (a rare honour for a poet) for services to Scottish Literature, and in 1956 was given an honorary doctorate by Edinburgh University. By his seventieth birthday he had won world-wide recognition as one of the greatest contemporary poets.

But in what way is his Communism an intrinsic part of his poetry? In an overt political way he has taken a progressive stand, both in his poetry and in public life, on all the major questions of the day. He sees Communism as a liberating force for mankind so that, now that economic problems are capable of solution, people can concentrate on the real business of civilisation, art, philosophy, science and mathematics. He believes profoundly in man's potential to change the world and himself and to hold within the nutshell of his own brain the achievements of civilisation. At the same time he sees that at

the present day this potential is utterly unrealised and the thoughts and lives of the majority of men are nasty, brutish and short. He deplores particularly, that craftsmen who use their skill in weaving and engineering yet run their lives in a slipshod, shabby way. As he says in *The Seamless Garment*

> Are ye equal to life as to the loom
> Turnin' oot shoddy or what?

and

> Border claith's famous
> Shall things o' mair consequence shame us?

MacDiarmid has no slavish adoration for the "people" any more than he has for the gentry of the Establishment. He has annoyed a lot of people by his full-blooded vituperation of "lord high muckymucks" or by saying in one of his Hymns to Lenin that "politics was bairns' play beside poetry" and that "ae gowden lyric" was worth a social problem solved.

It is very doubtful if MacDiarmid's poetry will ever be popular in the sense that Burns's is, or that his songs and poems will be recited at pub sing-songs (although it is worth noting that a number have been performed on such occasions without any resentment and confusion on the part of the audience).

His worth, in spite of wilful obscurity and occasional indigestibility, lies in the fact that he has never compromised in his high ideals for poetry, in spite of the fact that ·0001 per cent of the population in this country read or take an interest in poetry, MacDiarmid has always addressed an audience of millions about the most important issues of yesterday, today and tomorrow, saying in effect "if you don't understand me, you bloody well ought to", which may be arrogant but is never patronising. He has the pride of an artist and the humility of a human being.

The Scottish literary scene has never recovered from the bomb of *A Drunk Man* in 1926, and there has been enough serious work written in Scots since then to have made his individual rebellion well worth while. Without him there

would have been no Scottish Renaissance, for he inspired and encouraged playwrights like Alexander Reid and Robert McLellan, poets like William Soutar and Sydney Goodsir Smith, and the great novelist, Lewis Grassic Gibbon. Whether it is still possible to weld Scotland into a nation and the Scots tongue into a literary language is not for me to answer.

But in both Scots and English MacDiarmid has enormously increased the range of poetry, and nobody could insult it by regarding it as a plaything.

Like Brecht and Picasso he has been attacked by the Left as well as the Right, although by now a number of the socialist countries have made translations of his work, which have had especial success in Hungary.

He has made an individual voyage into the unknown, discovering new continents of thought and idea, presenting his discoveries in new forms; hampered by the cultural and political backwardness of modern Scotland, attempting, perhaps, the impossible, but arousing everyone who reads his work to look forward to a future when every human being will realise his fullest potentialities.

As he says in his poem *Reflections in a Slum*:

> Man does not cease to interest me
> When he ceases to be miserable.
> Quite the contrary!
> That it is important to aid him
> In the beginning goes without saying.
> Like a plant it is essential
> To water at first,
> But this is in order to get it to flower
> And I am concerned with the blossom.

All socialists must be and are concerned with the blossom.

9

Art and Nationality

"We are not only natives within our own frontiers but inheritors of the earth." *BERNARD SHAW*

The question of art and nationality is a thorny and controversial one. Writers and artists have been at different times condemned for narrow nationalism and for cosmopolitanism; praised for using as raw material the popular and folk traditions of their countries; sent abroad to study to broaden their outlooks and criticised for writing "in virtually unknown dialects".

Obviously the strength of national sentiments and consciousness varies from country to country and from epoch to epoch. And since national feelings are rooted in the emotions they can at times be as unreasonable and illogical as all other feelings. What at one moment are natural and laudable desires for national independence can become, with the swing of the pendulum, the unnatural and unlaudable desires to enslave other countries. *Rule Britannia* and *Deutschland Deutschland über Alles* should bring a blush to the cheek of the most patriotic Englishman or German. Patriotism, hovering uneasily between rampant jingosim on the one hand and mawkish sentimentality on the other, is the most easily exploited and distorted of all the sentiments.

Therefore statements like "all art must have nationality" must be looked at very coldly and calmly. Is it true just for today, or for all time? Was it true yesterday?

Undoubtedly it was not true yesterday. The early com-

munities had no feeling of nationality. Sparta could make war on Athens and Venice on Genoa, each city felt itself a separate entity. In John Arden's play *Armstrong's Last Goodnight* the bold border reiver says "I dinna care who's king in Edinburgh as long as I'm king o' the Borders".

Feudalism stressed international ties, and national traits in music, sculpture, painting and literature were not easily visible and certainly did not predominate. The Catholic Church, then the patron of so much artistic activity, was an international organisation, Latin the international language of scholarship.

Since countries developed unevenly the ideas of nationhood arose at different times, even for instance in such close neighbours as England and Scotland. Take two famous documents written within 100 years of each other, the Magna Carta in 1215 and the Arbroath Declaration in 1314. Magna Carta demands uniformity of weights and measures, the freedom of merchants to travel—it is basically about feudal restrictions on trade. And for several hundred years English kings saw nothing unreasonable in demanding that huge hunks of France be administered by the English crown.

The Arbroath declaration, on the other hand, is about national independence. Addressed by the Scottish Nation to the Pope it swears allegiance to "our King and Prince" but with the important proviso:

"But after all, if this Prince shall leave these principles he hath so nobly pursued, and consent that we or our Kingdom be subjected to the King or People of England, we will immediately endeavour to expel him as our enemy and as the subverter both of his own and our rights, and will make another King, who will defend our Liberties; for so long as there shall but one hundred of us remain alive we will never subject ourselves to the dominion of the English.

"For it is not glory, it is not riches, neither is it honour, but it is Liberty alone that we fight and contend for, which no honest man will lose but with his life."

This early crystallisation of the ideas of national sovereignty explains the national emphasis in Scots literature, from Barbour's heroic epic *The Bruce*, to Burns, to Scott and thence to MacDiarmid. It also explains the dearth of imaginative literature between the Union in 1707 and the Scottish Renaissance in the 1920's. In that period Scotland excelled in philosophic and scientific works but, the deepest thoughts and emotions being intimately connected with a national language, the works of imagination have been few and far between.

The gap between the spoken word (Scots) and the written word (English) became wider and wider to the detriment of literature. Scots, instead of developing into a national language degenerated into a dialect with no standard pronunciation or spelling, while standard English became associated with the ruling class, the "they" of the Establishment. Even today standard English is regarded as "talking pan-loaf" by the average Scottish worker; it is a status symbol.

A playwright friend of mine who writes very good plays in Scots and rather bad ones in English says he can think in English but only feel in Scots.

David Daiches in his book *The Paradox of Scottish Culture* points out the danger to literature when the language of the heart and that of the head become separated, the first becoming self-indulgent and sentimental, the second intellectual and arid.

Yet it is astonishing how minority languages stubbornly continue to survive. Even Gaelic, forbidden after the abortive rebellion of 1745, despite government neglect and rural depopulation as well as the more subtle influences of education and propaganda, continues to be a spoken and written language of great beauty and precision.

Whether socialism, which has in China and the Soviet Union already done so much to salvage, establish and encourage minority languages, will be won in Britain in time to save Gaelic, Braid Scots, and Welsh from extinction remains to be seen. Up till now, the Scots and the Welsh, despite their latent national consciousness, have not succeeded in taking the

necessary political actions to make their aspirations practical. Successive British governments have had a Dr Beeching attitude to national cultures—if not enough people are involved, cut it out. We may be able to reopen railway lines, but to resuscitate minority cultures is more than an administrative problem.

The art of small countries, oppressed by larger countries—Wales, Scotland and Ireland in the United Kingdom, and the smaller central European countries gobbled up by the Austro-Hungarian empire and only gaining their independence after World Wars 1 or 2, is bound to be deeply imbued with national sentiments and colour. Such countries are bound to feel pride in their national traditions in all forms of art, and to determine not to be swamped by influences of the more developed countries.

We can understand the reasons for the national school of music, Dvorak, Smetana, Moussorgsky and Glinka; the tremendous flowering in Russia during the nineteenth century as old backward divided Russia discovered its national character and aspirations and staggered into the modern world; the great poets who voiced the sentiments of independence and Liberty in Rumania, Bulgaria, Poland and Hungary; the rediscovery of folk song, folk tales and national traditions.

We can understand how the Jews, after centuries of pogroms and persecutions, culminating in the horrifying mass deportations and slaughter during the Second World War, insisted upon having at last an ethnic and political home, Israel. And how even many un-nationally-conscious Jews, who had been happily assimilated into German, British, or American communities, rediscovered their nationality, the languages of Yiddish and Hebrew, the old songs and the old customs.

Since they first arose, national aspirations have been the inspiration of all kinds of art. But a country which is independent tends to be much less self-conscious. And for a major colonial and imperialist power the problems are somewhat different again.

England had been "conquered" by the Romans, and overrun from time to time by a variety of different tribes from Europe. But Boadicia was not a "national" heroine, since England had not yet been welded into a nation. King Alfred, who made such valiant efforts to establish Anglo-Saxon as the language of literature and scholarship as well as the speech of the people, was not the ruler of a single country. England remained a country of warring tribes and dissident barons until red rose and white rose were united under the Tudors. The English language as we know it today evolved slowly via Langland and Chaucer and Spenser until Shakespeare, since when it has altered very little to the present day. Chaucer, as well as being the father of the English language, described characters and scenes that could only belong to England. Shakespeare explored the ideas of independence and kingship in his historical plays, re-examining history in the light of his own times. The slogan "God for Harry, England, and Saint George" may have been apposite to a people on the brink of invasion by Spain but hardly for the English army at Agincourt with their aim of subjugating France.

With the establishment of nationhood, what a glorious treasury of artistic achievement resulted! Shakespeare, Spenser and a host of minor poets; Byrd, Dowland, Orlando Gibbons and a host of minor composers. It was a golden age of art, and the art, whatever its foreign influences, was basically and unmistakably English.

In the period of imperialism and colonialism English national feelings were exploited and distorted by the ruling class. Britannia was to rule the waves, God who made her mightier was to make her mightier yet. Britain had a God-given task to shoulder the white man's burden and, Bible in one hand and gun in the other, to make possible the superprofits of imperialism.

No wonder the early socialist movement and the artists allied with it entirely dissociated themselves from this revolting exhibition of so-called patriotism; no wonder "the worker has

no fatherland" and "workers of all lands unite" were slogans with such deep appeal. Patriotism had become a decoy for leading the working class into bloody colonial or imperialist wars.

Poems like Rupert Brooke's:

> If I should die, think only this of me,
> That there's some corner of a foreign field
> That is for ever England

were rejected as sentimental and unreal.

The relationship between the artist and his nationality has not only varied from epoch to epoch but within the different arts.

A writer deals with words, the words of his national language. Novels and plays give living speech to their characters and, however stylised that dialogue may be, it is still rooted in actual speech. Whatever the foreign influences on English literature they have been translated and transmogrified. The Petrarchan sonnet became more flexible and less formal in the hands of Shakespeare and Sydney; Aristotle's dramatic rules were completely unrecognisable when handled by Jonson and Congreve; Shaw could live in London, James Joyce in Paris, but they remain unmistakably Irish. In fact writers, whether they are highly conscious of it like MacDiarmid, or largely unconscious of it like Keats, cannot evade their nationalities.

In relation to music the question is more subtle. Music has always been the supreme international language, the rules of composition and harmony and the various musical forms have been fairly generally accepted in Europe for many hundreds of years (and entirely different ones accepted in China and the east).

Mozart did not feel specifically Austrian but was happy to work in Paris or Prague as well as Vienna, or he would have been happy if he had found the ready cash. He composed operas to German, Italian or French texts with equal facility and verve. Moreover his themes were international themes

inspired by the break-up of feudalism and the hoped-for future brotherhood of man. National traits are of course there but they are muted, entirely different from the aggressively national operas of Moussorgsky, Smetana and Borodin, which not only took themes from national history or folk tales, but used to great extent the folk melodies and rhythms of their respective countries.

English musicians have been in a different position. The Elizabethan and seventeenth-century composers, Dowland and Purcell, were trying to assert their Englishness against the then dominance of Italian music (some of the minor composers actually translated their names into Italian as a prestige gimmick). And in the nineteenth century they were again trying to re-create an English tradition free from the domination of Germany. So the national element in English music has always been strong, from Purcell to Elgar, Edward German and Vaughan Williams.

Vaughan Williams, particularly, without jingoism, chauvinism or ideas of national superiority (from which Elgar and German were not always free) set himself the rewarding task of rediscovering a national idiom, using as his raw material the long-neglected treasures of English folk song. His *Variations on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* welded the Elizabethan tonality and the enchanting melody of *Greensleeves* into something that was both old and new and English. (The fact that we now hear it tinkled on a xylophone to advertise itinerant ice cream is beside the point!)

But it was not until the Second World War that patriotism became once more respectable for the British Labour movement, for this war was not only against international fascism, it was also for national independence.

Alan Bush, who started as a pupil of the German Hans Eisler and was for many years influenced by his bare stark harmonies and sombre melodies, turned to English subjects; he used traditional tunes as well as historical themes in his operas, *Men of Dorset*, *Watt Tyler* and the *Byron Symphony*.

The Labour movement and the artists who allied themselves with it began to realise that there was an English tradition, rooted in the praiseworthy past, Cromwell and the Levellers, the revolutionary and romantic poets, the trade union and Chartist heroes, a tradition far more enduring than imperialist slogans and My Country Right or Wrong sentiments.

It is probably far more difficult for the English with an irrevocably damaged folk tradition and all the aftermath of having been (and still being to a large extent) an imperialist power, to have unselfconscious national feelings.

Bernard Shaw says that a healthy nation is as unconscious of its nationality as a healthy man of his bones.

But where national independence still has to be won, the national element in art will be dominant and art with national traits be highly valued and sometimes over-valued.

Only when international rivalry has been abolished; when no one country oppresses another; when the rights of minority cultures are given free expression, will we be able thoughtfully and calmly to sort out what our national characteristics are, what is worthy of being developed and what should be discarded.

There must always be a difference between one country's art and another's, and when I hear of films being made with an American film star, an Italian director, a Yugoslav script writer and set in Greece, I can only say "Vive la différence!"

An artist is, whether he likes it or not, a man not only of his time but of his nation, which will consciously or unconsciously influence his choice of subject and style. But he is also a citizen of the world and should not have to apologise for drawing inspiration from Greek mythology, Indian philosophy, Chinese theatre, Mexican pottery or Icelandic sagas—in fact the whole heritage of world culture.

When the world is composed of free and equal states, artists too will be able to be as unconscious of their nationality as of their bones.

10

Form and Content—the Unity of Opposites

" 'T'aint what you say, it's the way that you say it."
POPULAR SONG

But as well as dealing in general with the relation of art and the artist to society, a Marxist should also study the inner dialectics of art, the relation between the component parts, the conflict between form and content.

There is often confusion about the nature of these component parts, between theme and plot, style and form.

In *Hamlet* for instance the plot is about the Prince of Denmark's efforts to revenge the murder of his father; the style is blank verse alternated with prose; the form is a five-act tragedy; the theme (if I dare to rush in where scholars fear to tread) is the tragedy of the individual, who, finding the times out of joint, strives to put them right single-handed.

It is possible to discuss and evaluate all these elements separately as long as we realise that of course they cannot exist separately, they all add up to *Hamlet*.

The confusion is exemplified by the short-cut labels which people attach to works of art. They talk about a "working-class novel" without indicating if they mean a novel about the working class, one written by a member of the working class, or one with a socialist message. Similarly with the label "bourgeois". Do people mean a work written by a bourgeois writer, which might include William Morris, Tennyson and

Karl Marx? a work produced during the period of capitalism? about members of the middle classes? or with a theme praising the virtues of profit, private enterprise and colonial exploitation?

Such labels proceed from a confusion of thought and lead to even more confusion, especially if moral judgements are implicitly contained in them.

There have recently appeared a whole group of new English writers who have written about the working class and have enormously increased the scope of the contemporary novel and play.

Stan Barstow's *A Kind of Loving*, Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, John Braine's *Room at the Top*, Keith Waterhouse's *Billy Liar*, Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* all explore with realism and compassion the incidents and emotions, the joys and tragedies in the lives of working-class characters who are far more representative of the British people as a whole than the introspective sensitive characters of, say, Elizabeth Bowen and Virginia Woolf.

But these works are far from having what we generally mean by a "progressive" theme. In fact thematically they are very timid indeed and it is difficult to pin them down to more than a statement of "life is like that".

In our fragmented and alienated society whole sections of the population have only the vaguest idea of how other sections live. The industrial worker is ignorant about his rural colleagues; the executives in the commuter belt are ignorant about industrial workers; the huntin' shootin' fishin' tribe pursue their activities far from the public gaze; busmen don't know about debs and miners don't know about ad-men. Novels and plays are turning into suppliers of information; they turn a searchlight or a microscope on to the lives of a particular group, and we read about cycle workers in Nottingham or railwaymen in Fife as if we were reading about the habits of strange forgotten tribes.

How limited compared to the great nineteenth-century

novelists who always attempted to show society as a whole! George Eliot shows us industrial workers, agricultural labourers, small and big farmers, the squires, doctors and clergymen who made up nineteenth-century England. What is more she shows us society in development, institutions that are crumbling into decay and new movements that are increasing in strength.

In contrast Stan Barstow shows us the life of one person almost abstracted from the life of society as a whole, from social and political movements. It is true as a news photograph is true; it catches a moment in time in a particular place for a particular person; but it is static as a photograph is necessarily static.

For it is perfectly possible for a work *about* members of the working class to express themes contrary to their progressive historical interests. Such works can be as sentimental, as nostalgic, as glammed up, as works usually described as "bourgeois".

The plays of Harold Pinter, for instance, using the medium of the weary cliché-ridden speech of the rootless misfits of society, disclose a world of motiveless violence and chaos. His "realistic" style is used to tell us that human beings are less than human; that they cannot communicate or enter into relationships with each other; that life is meaningless; that violence and crime are inescapable. Yet I suppose, if you really wanted to, that you could describe *The Birthday Party* as a "working-class" play.

It is both what you say and how you say it that determines the content.

Analogies always have fatal flaws, but if you think of content as liquid—wine, tea, coffee or beer—and form as the vat, cask, bottle glass, mug, teapot, you will see that though one can discuss content in separation, it only exists socially in some given form.

Form is socially accepted experience. At a certain moment of history it is generally recognised that a jug is the best form for

presenting wine. Someone discovers tea and it is necessary to find a more suitable form (a receptacle which separates the leaves from the liquid) so the teapot is invented. As long as tea continues to be drunk teapots are used and have varied very little in shape since they were first invented.

And to continue our rather sordid analogy—if tea bags become generally used, the teapot will be no longer necessary and will be discarded in favour of something more socially acceptable.

The forms of art have been equally slow to change. Symphonic form has been used by every great composer from Mozart to Shostakovich; sonnets from Petrarch and Shakespeare to W. H. Auden; the conventional novel still forms the backbone to any publisher's list; and the three-act play is only just beginning to be challenged in the average rep theatre.

Content is the revolutionary force which changes form. In art, war continues ceaselessly between content and form, momentarily reaching equilibrium until new content demands new forms.

Wordsworth's poetical autobiography was the first poem of its kind, its content fitted into none of the established poetic forms. The novel arose in the eighteenth century because writers could no longer express what they wanted in poetry or drama; the concerto, with its opportunities for individual virtuosity, was necessary to express the new individualism.

When content changes form, it is, so to speak, an artistic revolution, and is greeted by the conservative elements in society with as much anguish and fury as political revolutions.

"It's not what I mean by a novel—any child could paint better—that nasty clatter-bang modern music—women don't have green hair and two eyes on one side of their faces—I like a good tune—what does it mean?"

When I say the conservative elements in society I do not mean the politically conservative. Time and time again the extreme Right and extreme Left meet in unfortunate unanim-

ity to condemn the revolutionary and new in art. General Eisenhower and Mr. Krushchev agree in their dislike of "modern" paintings and music. Some of the criticisms voiced by conservative Communists I have heard all my life from my very conservative Conservative relations.

The truth is that stable society sees the expression of its stability in recognised and socially recognised art forms and any innovator is immediately accused of "undermining the whole fabric of society".

Gulley Jimson in *The Horse's Mouth* by Joyce Carey puts the matter satirically in a nutshell:

"Charles Dickens wrote that the pre-Raphaelites were worse than the bubonic plague. . . . All art is bad, but modern art is the worst. Just like the influenza. The newer it is, the more dangerous. And modern art is not only a public danger—it's insidious. You never know what may happen when it's got loose. Dickens and all the other noble and wise men who backed him up, parsons and magistrates and judges, were quite right. So were the brave lads who fought against the Impressionists in 1870 and the Post-Impressionists in 1910, and that rat Jimson in 1920. They were all quite right. They knew what modern art can do. Creeping about everywhere, undermining the Church and the State and the Academy and the Law and marriage and the Government—smashing up civilisation, degenerating the Empire."

The pre-Raphaelites, Epstein's sculpture, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Picasso's cubism, were all received with fury, fear and vituperation by conservative elements (both Left and Right), and with rapture by progressive elements (both Left and Right).

Being revolutionary politically is no guarantee of being revolutionary artistically (and *vice versa*). Picasso and Brecht have been very charily accepted in the Soviet Union, while more adventurous Poland and Hungary are intoxicated with artistic experiments of all kinds.

It would be tragic indeed if, under socialism, all the tremendous possibilities of art for exploring new depths of reality

should be restricted to the old traditional forms—the realistic novel, the three-act well-made play, the representational picture. Every form should be available for our use and new forms should be adopted and developed as the revolutionary content changes.

There is in every work of art the most delicate balance between the various elements, and when any element is out of true one is immediately conscious of a flaw.

Such a flaw is obvious to me in a work like William Morris's long narrative poem *Pilgrims of Hope*. He has chosen, in order to express his ideas on the conflict between revolutionary principles and personal loyalties, a metre which is quite unsuitable for his mood of thoughtful sincerity.

> I look and behold the days of the years that are passed away
> And my soul is full of their wealth, for oft they were blythe and gay
> As the hours of bird and of beast; they have made me calm and strong
> To wade the stream of confusion, the river of grief and wrong.

Looking at a stanza like that one is aware of a failure of harmony; the metre, with its abrupt caesura in the middle of the line, does not suit narrative verse, and it gives too many opportunities for the monotonous coupling of similar words. Why "look" and "behold"? Why "blythe" and "gay"? What is the precise difference between "river" and "stream"?

There is a similar failure in Longfellow's

> Tell me not in mournful numbers
> Life is but an empty dream

where the trochees—ti *tum* ti *tum*—insist upon sounding positively jolly and make it impossible to take the poem seriously.

I felt a similar flaw in Smetana's opera *Dalibor*—a tragical-heroical opera in which the gay folky melodies detract from

the grim heroism of the theme. It is a life and death story of great dramatic intensity but the music, however colourful and tuneful, is not life and death music.

A different sort of disharmony is apparent in Hardy's tragic novels like *Tess* and *Jude* where his conscious theme is at variance with what the novels are really about. *Tess* is described as "the history of a pure woman", and in the novel Hardy tries to express his ideas about determinism, fate and the Immanent Will. In order to illustrate his philosophic ideas he seriously strains our beliefs both in the characters and in the events; the mechanics of the plot creak; the dialogue is often stilted.

The fate of the Wessex peasantry could have grown organically out of the characters, but as it is one feels that the dice were loaded before the story began; that people as sensitive and intelligent as Jude and Tess simply could not be so stupid. This lack of inner unity does not prevent both *Tess* and *Jude* from being wonderful and moving novels but there remains a grain of dissatisfaction in our appreciation, they lack that sense of organic inevitability that gives tragedy its own satisfaction.

As an example of perfect artistic unity I would take Keats' sonnet "Bright Star". This poem of romantic yearning after impossibility is prevented from being sloppy or nostalgic by the economy of the style and by the severe classicism of the sonnet form, which is in itself a perfect dialectical unity.

In the first eight lines:

> Bright star, were I as steadfast as thou art,
> Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
> And watching with eternal lids apart
> Like Nature's patient, sleepless eremite,
> The moving waters at their priestlike task
> Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
> Or gazing at the new soft-fallen mask
> Of snow upon the mountains and the moors.

we get the images of cold, purity and distance.

In the sestet we get, as a glorious shock and contrast, the warm, sensuous "pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breasts". There is not a single word that does not take its rightful place in this unity of opposites.

It is on this lack of unity that criticism is based. The idea that you can have a good story badly told, a good idea inadequately presented, as if technique and style could be separated, leaves out the important fact that an "idea" does not become art until it is presented in the appropriate form.

Proust first started his magnificent introspective autobiography as a conventional third-person novel and it was not until late middle age that he discovered the right form for it in *Remembrance of Things Past.*

If you read Van Gogh's letters you are aware of his unremitting and painful struggle to find the right form and style for his individual vision of the world, while conventional painters and critics sneered at his technique as if it were a separate entity and not an integral part of his art.

"My great longing is to learn to make those very incorrectnesses, those deviations, re-modellings, changes of reality, so that they become, yes, untruth if you like—but more true than the literal truth," wrote Van Gogh.

The style was the man.

II

Artistic Truth

"I must lay aside the pleasant patter I have built up for years and seek the brutality, the ill-breeding, the barbarism of truth." *W. B. YEATS*

Art is the search for an expression of the truth. Failures in art arise when the individual artist has been inadequate to this search and expression and presents superficial, lop-sided, tendentious works.

There are thousands of different truths about any given subject and out of them the artist has to select the salient truth for his particular purpose.

One could write a book on the subject of an ordinary table—its measurements, the kind of wood, how it has been made and by whom and in what circumstances, its cost to produce, the social history of tables in general, the personal history of this particular table, its present users and uses—one would need the knowledge of a mathematician, a geographer, a social historian, a political economist to express the many-faceted truth about the table.

But the artist's truth would be different from all these. Picasso might use the table to express one of his parables; Dickens might use it as a groaning board for the huge dinner in *A Christmas Carol*; the salient truth about this particular table at the moment is that I am trying to write a book on it.

But an artist should know all the different truths before he makes his selection.

"A writer should know everything or at least as much as

possible," writes Gorki. "He should be able to pick out of the chaos of impressions, out of the variegated tangle of emotions, the things that are of universal significance and typical; he must be able to discard the narrow, personal, subjective, impermanent things that are in constant flux and soon disappear without leaving a trace. If he can accomplish the first, his work will be artistic and socially significant; but if he cannot accomplish the second, he will write anecdotes devoid of all social and educational substance."

Gorki describes how in order to create a single character, Foma Gordeyev, "I had to observe many a dozen merchants' sons who were dissatisfied with their fathers' lives and professions." Only out of this abundant material would a writer be able to select the vital characteristics which make a character "true".

There are millions of truths about capitalist society which would fill a dozen encyclopaedias. Marx discovered the most vital and important truth of all, the class struggle as its source of energy. Only on the basis of this discovery could he build up his true picture of capitalist society.

The greater the artist the more profound his vision. Shakespeare and Tolstoy reveal far more to us than a contemporary writer saying "Life is like this but I don't understand why".

That the great writer's devotion to truth has sometimes been opposed to his overt intentions has often been remarked on: Balzac, whose novels prove the despicableness of the very people he set out to admire; Hardy, whose requiem for the Wessex peasantry won against his philosophic theories; Tolstoy whose beliefs in passive resistance bring *Resurrection* to a clanging anticlimax.

The conscious beliefs of the artist are often at variance with his artistic integrity. It is therefore unwise to lay too much store by them and to condemn Tolstoy because he was a Christian pacifist or praise Shelley because he was a political radical. Their work is what we judge them by, and we may well find more to praise in Tolstoy than in Shelley because,

whatever his intentions, he reveals such a depth of understanding about human society and the human heart.

The nature of art does not change though its forms and functions do. There is no fundamental difference between Beethoven and Shostakovich, Dickens and Gorki.

The great arts, as Georg Lukacz says, depict "man as a whole in the whole of society". The converse is equally true, that minor works of art only show part of man in part of society.

When we say realism we usually mean truthfulness. In literature life-like dialogue, social observation, credible plots, accurate descriptions of material facts are methods of achieving this truthfulness, though they are not the only ones.

Fairy stories with their dragons, witches, giants and fairies have a truth of their own. The story of *Romeo and Juliet* is wildly improbable, but this does not invalidate it as a work of realism—it tells the truth about the tragedy of lovers in a divided world. A satire like *Gulliver's Travels*, an allegory like *Pilgrim's Progress*, fantasy and symbolism, can all be methods of exploring reality. Realism is not only achieved by a realistic style.

So terms like "realism" and "humanism" must have a very wide interpretation indeed. Homer and Sholokhov, Praxitiles and Picasso, Bach and Britten are in their very nature humanists, i.e. in favour of life and the development of human beings, and realist, i.e. exploring and revealing aspects of the reality of the world, society, human realationships and the character of human beings.

The principles of Marxism, the dialectic method with its theory of opposites perpetually in conflict, synthesising and then creating new conflicts, is used not only to study human society but science, nature and indeed every other phenomenon and human activity.

An artist who is also a Marxist ought, therefore, to have a head start. I do not think it is accidental that Soviet scientists were first in the sputnik race, or that Picasso, MacDiarmid and

Brecht stand head and shoulders above their contemporaries.

But great artists are few and far between. What we are usually more concerned with is the number of lesser artists who make up a country's body of work, who have genuine if limited talents, who, because of class or sex limitations, political or philosophical prejudices, look out at life through only a small window, who never stir us to the depths of our emotions or stretch our imaginations to the *n*th degree. Those whom Louis MacNeice describes in his *Elegy for Minor Poets*:

> Who were too carefree or careful, who were too many
> Though always few and alone, who went the pace
> But ran in circles, who were lamed by fashion,
> Who lived in the wrong time or the wrong place,
> Who might have caught fire had only a spark occurred,
> Who knew all the words but failed to achieve the Word.

Geniuses erupt unpredictably into a surprised world. Who could tell that an illiterate, half-blind slum-dweller in Dublin, would become Sean O'Casey, author of *Juno and the Paycock*? Who could predict that a wealthy and aristocratic landowner would write *War and Peace*?

But the great body of minor artists are formed by society and are only able in a minor way to act upon it. In a healthy society they are vigorous, honest and forward-looking. In a sick and dying society they are tired, evasive, sentimental or disgusting.

We in Britain live in a sick society. Capitalism has distorted human beings, stressing the acquisitive, competitive, selfish sides of their natures; the idealists become cynical; the sensitive become brutal. In every aspect of our life spurious values are encouraged and rewarded, from our competitive educational system to the jungle of high finance where Clore and Cotton, Courtaulds and I.C.I., Hugh Fraser and Roy Thomson, after having devoured their small competitors, snap their huge jaws at each other.

The dominant ideology of a society is the ideology of its

ruling class; and although in the Labour movement the qualities of self-sacrifice, solidarity and courage predominate, even it has been to a certain extent corrupted by the degrading values of capitalism, Labour leaders abandon socialist principles for £5,000 a year and a peerage.

The bulk of artistic work produced in such a society reflects these values rather than creating new ones. And the truthful artists become more and more limited in the amount of truth they reveal. There is what Arthur Miller calls "a narrowing field of vision".

Man, as Aristotle said, is a social creature; he has to live with his fellows and depend upon them. His happiness depends upon the balance he achieves between his individual and his social obligations. This is an inescapable fact. But most present, day writers are wilfully blind to it. Instead they are trying to detach man's ego from the world he lives and must live in. Human beings in such works are shown as solitary, a-social, a-moral, unable to enter into living relationships with other human beings; they are enclosed within their own subjective experience; they cannot communicate.

In Albert Camus's *The Outsider*, the central character goes through his entire life as if it were happening to someone else. Becket's characters are imprisoned in dustbins, buried up to the neck in sand, utterly powerless even to participate in their own lives.

We see man driven unwillingly by a futile and perverse passion as in Nabukov's *Lolita*.

Jean Genet, in *The Balcony*, pictures the world as a gigantic brothel where people enact their fantasies and obsessions, and in which external reality is made utterly meaningless by the revolutionary leader and the fascist chief of police swapping roles.

Graham Greene shows us the futility of anyone trying to do good to anyone, the more innocent the intentions, the more guilty the result. Scobie, the police commissioner in *The Heart of the Matter*, with his well-meaning pity brings ruin, murder

and suicide in his wake. The girl in *The End of the Affair*'s sudden embarrassing passion for Christ appears to absolve her from all other human responsibilities.

There is an endless list of minor works, obsessed with sex (rather than love) perversion, drug addiction, violence and crime, with the disintegration of the personality and the breakdown of human relationships—isolated, pitiful man adrift in chaos.

It can be argued that sex, perversion, violence and crime have always provided subject matter for art—the Bible, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Dostoievsky—just as they have formed part of life.

A casual glance at the newspapers corroborates that this is certainly true of life in Britain today. What is more, it has great appeal even to rational civilised people who are horribly fascinated by murder and crime and such revelations as were revealed in the Profumo-Keeler-Ward trial. We all have within us, though mercifully usually held in check, the dark impulses of destruction. "Everyone wants to kill his father!" cries Ivan Karamazov to the spectators at his trial. "Why else are you here?"

But to show violence and crime as a part of life and dark impulses as part of human nature, as the great writers do, is entirely different from showing them in isolation, abstracting them from the mainstream of life and history. They show such a tiny part of the truth that it is only just removed from being a downright lie. To show a part with no relation to the whole is bad Marxism, it is also bad art.

Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *A Scots Quair* is, I consider, one of the few great novels of this century produced in Britain (and I cannot think of the others).

He describes life in a small part of Scotland, in the crofts, the villages, the small towns, yet this part is a microcosm of history in motion. The Mearns are a part of Scotland, Scotland is part of the world, and the world is the world of yesterday and tomorrow as well as the world of today.

Living characters, expressive dialogue, poetry, savage humour, indignation, compassion, vivid forcible language one could, I suppose, find in other modern realistic novels (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, for instance). But without Gibbon's understanding of the nature of society and the movement of history *A Scots Quair* would only be telling us of the lives and loves of Chris Guthrie, about which immediately a super-glossy film would be made.

The miserable claustrophobic egoism presented and extolled in so much contemporary literature is a denial of the truth about human nature. For as John Donne said in his famous sermon: "No man is an Island. Any man's death diminishes me since I am involved in Mankind. . . . So do not ask for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for Thee."

Grassic Gibbon illuminates this truthful and profound statement.

In *Grey Granite*, Ewan Tavendale "the cool boy with the haughty soul and cool hands, apart and alone, self-reliant, self-centred", who has just been instrumental in forming a Young Workers' League, is at the first dance organised by the League.

"It seemed to Ewan in a sudden minute that he would never be himself again, he'd never be aught but a bit of them, the flush on a thin white mill-girl's face, the arm and hand and the downbent face of a keelie from the reek of the Gallowgate, the blood and bones and flesh of them all, their thoughts and their doubts, and their loves were his, all that they thought and lived in were his."

Ewan had discovered that no man is an island, the truth with the most far-reaching implications: "brutal, ill-bred and barbaric" to the sensitive individualist, but rewarding and life-giving to the man who wants to live tomorrow as well as today.

12

Love, Sex and Pornography

"It's love that makes the world go round."
PROVERB

Almost everyone, from the sociologist to the bewildered Church leader and other custodians of our morals, has agreed that ours is a sex-obsessed society (it is worth noting that no one suggests that ours is a love-obsessed society).

Sex is a necessary and delightful part of love, but taken on its own tends to make one a bit dizzy and disorientated. And this is what our contemporary writers are doing.

Under capitalism today a vast proportion of the population do work which, if not utterly degrading and distasteful, is boring and meaningless. Increased mechanisation and automation may have freed us from some useless toil but they have also freed us from much of our pleasure in useful work. What is more, it has meant that an increasing number of people are occupied in selling goods, often to people who neither desire nor need them, and their wilder and wilder flights of fancy offer us "free samples" costing *1s. 3d.*, and leave us in doubt as to whether we are buying a status symbol or a refrigerator, a love potion or a packet of soap powder.

We turn knobs for light, heat and entertainment; we open tins and packets instead of cooking with raw materials; children grow up without ever seeing peas in the pod or fish in the water. Divorced from the physical processes of living we feel with Van Gogh:

"And I was sick of the boredom of civilisation. . . . It is a good thing in winter to be deep in snow, in the autumn deep in the yellow leaves, in summer among the corn, in spring amid grass. It is a good thing to be always with the mowers and the peasant girls in summer with a big sky overhead; in winter by the fireside . . ."

It is a good thing to work with hand and brain, to dig a garden, to play a musical instrument, to repair a machine, to bake a loaf—any activity that directly involves you, demanding lesser or greater skill, but still your own personal skill.

Today there seem to be only three things which people enjoy directly: cooking, driving a car and sex.

There have never been so many cook books, for both sexes, of all nationalities, for all classes. Every magazine is crammed with instructions for this delightful and appetising activity. Hostesses are even advised not to do it in solitary dignity in the kitchen, but to get the guests to participate in the barbecue, to have a table spirit-stove for guests to dip their bits of succulent fillet steak, mushrooms, etc. into the communal frying-pan. Famous figures in public life, equipped with butchers' aprons and modern devices, give recipes, describe how "relaxing" and "creative" it is to cook.

It is the same with driving motor cars—they are described in advertisements not as a means of getting from A to B, but as status symbols, personality symbols, sex symbols. Even where perfectly adequate public transport is available people prefer to jump into their wingless chariots because there they are, often disastrously, in charge of their own destinies.

And it is the same with sex—here is activity which is direct, personal, physical yet involving (sometimes) the whole of the personality. It is an activity which can be enjoyed by all sections of society, rich and poor, stupid and intellectual, the unskilled and the craftsmen, duchesses and dustwomen. It cannot be de-personalised by automation; it is not dependent upon the political climate, the fluctuations of the stock exchange; it escapes the limitations of class, colour, nationality and religion.

There is today an enormous interest in what is called pornography, though it is difficult to think of a category that would include such different works as *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Tropic of Cancer*, the *Kama Sutra* and *Fanny Hill*.

To this subject our national character has always had two conflicting attitudes—the puritan kill-joy and the erotic and uninhibited. These attitudes have cut across classes, political parties and religions—not all political puritans were kill-joys, while there is still a strong Mrs Grundy element in the Labour movement today; the advocacy of frank enjoyment of physical love has been at times the prerogative of the aristocracy, at times of Burns's Jolly Beggars.

The arts have always been suspected by the puritans of all ages as liable to inflame the sexual passions. An early moralist, Philip Stubbes (1582), quoted by Nina Epton in her delightful anthology *Love and the English*, inveighs against dancing as:

"An introduction to whoredom, a preparation to wantonness, a provocation to uncleanness and an introite to all kinds of lewdness. . . . What filthy groping and unclean handling is not practised everywhere in these dancings?"

He describes theatres as: "devourers of maidenly virginity and chastity . . . where such wanton gestures, such bawdy speaking, such laughing, kissing and bussyng, such clippyng and culling, such winking and glauncing of wanton eyes and the like is used as is wonderful to behold."

In almost identical terms the MRA spokesmen today inveigh against the Edinburgh Festival. Basing their accusations of "nakedness, obscenity and filth" on a 30-second "spoof" at a Drama Conference (which involved a naked model and which was later judged in a court of law not to have been obscene) they proceeded to attack Shakespeare's Henry IV (a bawdy play), Joan Littlewood (a godless woman), Lord Harewood, the Festival Director himself, and to suggest "screening" for actors and actresses to prove their moral purity.

In Scotland particularly there has always been a strong

sex = sin = hellfire element. Theatres were forbidden for years; Sir David Lyndsay's works were burned by the common hangman and Allan Ramsay's first lending library was closed because it might corrupt the working population.

It is true that the artistic creative instinct and the sexual one are closely allied and both art and love enable the ordinary man to become air-borne in a somewhat similar way. Art inspires love and love inspires art—Shakespeare's lover "with a sonnet to his mistress' eyebrow" is a surprisingly typical figure.

But the abstraction of sex as a sort of technical exercise divorced from human relations, or as a panacea for all ills, a thing in itself, is surely a modern phenomenon. Even the amorous Fanny Hill tells us that sex is more rewarding with the man she loves.

James Bond and the tough heroes of Raymond Chandler and James Hadley Chase are the technical sexperts. But a thousand other minor writers extol a successful sexual relationship as the absolute cure-all for the personal or social difficulties of their hero or heroine. And another thousand think that by describing sexual activity in realistic detail that they are achieving artistic significance and, of course, box office.

Every lurid paper-back you look at purports to be sultry, scorching, shocking, intimate, revealing, etc., though of course not all live up to the blurb, and a number of honest well-written stories lie overwhelmed by their inflammatory epithets.

Sex is a part of love, love is a part of life and to many people the most important part. But abstracted from the whole rich human personality and the whole rich life of human society it becomes stale, boring and dishonest.

I have just read a book by a Japanese writer, *The Key*, by Tanizaki, described as "a record of passion that contains some of the most intimate revelations in modern fiction". As Harriette Wilson says of her liaison with the Earl of Craven:

"It was all a dead bore." I learnt nothing about the husband and wife in the novel except their (rather peculiar) sex habits, nothing about their work, neighbours, surroundings, conversations, ideas, philosophy of life.

The greatest novel about human passion is still, to my mind, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*. But that is because Anna and Vronsky and Karenin are real living characters belonging to their time and their society, and their agony, bliss and confusion takes place in the real concrete everyday world, a world moreover in which we are quite sure that they are the exceptions and their tragedy arises out of their very exceptionalness. Levin and Kitty represent the normal, and without that contrast the lovers' tragedy would lose its poignancy.

As far as I can judge from the Soviet novels that have come my way (except Sholokhov) sexual love has not been considered a suitable subject for literature, though the same would not be true of the post-war socialist countries.

Men and women, often on the most cursory acquaintance (in some Soviet novels) dash off to register their marriages; if the hero and heroine are both good workers it is taken for granted that marital harmony will follow. Petit-bourgeois ideology, yearnings for decadence and an incorrect attitude to work are usually the causes for domestic strife (of course they are, but not the only ones). One gets the impression of stern steely conscientious builders of socialism occasionally exchanging slogans of revolutionary fervour before he goes off to irrigate the desert and she to study metallurgy in the Far North. I remember one play translated for the B.B.C. radio in which the hero asks: "Darling, where is my history of the C.P.S.U. (B.)?" and she replies "On the table beside the bed."

This is just as limited and partial as our feverish hot-house so-called realistic descriptions of sex.

Since the 20th Congress a number of far more profound studies of human relationships, particularly through the medium of film, have been described, in which tender and passionate love is seen as an important part of life.

These inadequacies in literature both in the East and the West are due to the failure of the writer "to see the whole of man in the whole of society". In the East the tendency is to see people only in relation to their political convictions, their work and their social obligations; in the West to delve ever deeper into individual psychology, to abstract human relationships from society and even single aspects of human relationships at that. Obviously in this, as in other fields, we can learn from each other.

If we believe, as I do, that socialism does provide the fullest possibilities for individual development, then, freed from tiresome and unnecessary censorship and dogmatic applications of Marxism, the writers and artists under socialism will fulfil their aims of a true and profound art.

We in the West have something even more important to do —to change the system of society in which we now languish, in which work is an unpleasant necessity and leisure a feverish craving after sensation and novelty.

13

Censorship

"And art made tongue-tied by authority."
SHAKESPEARE

Since art not only reflects society but can have a revolutionary effect upon it and help to change it, not so much by prescribing specific political remedies as by creating the intellectual and emotional climate in which the change can take place, it follows that there have always been rewards for artists of the Establishment and penalties for those against it.

The Establishment, by which I mean not only the actual government, but all its ramifications in the civil service, the Church and even public opinion, is not in itself a reactionary force. We have become so used in the last 200 years of thinking it in itself an evil that the idea of any tame poet or painter or musician prepared to work for it revolts our freedom-loving artistic souls.

Like everything else, the Establishment has had eras of being progressive and eras of being reactionary.

And the organs of the Establishment have had the same variations. The Catholic Church could at one moment of history commission the most splendid masses or murals; at another condemn musicians for writing intervals of thirds and sixths because they were lascivious and debauching.

Purcell and Handel were happy to compose work for public and court occasions; Milton wrote pamphlets for Cromwell; there have been many progressive governments that it was no dishonour for artists to serve—the Mexican government in the

thirties, the Spanish Popular Front, the present Cuban Government, the many socialist governments throughout the world which commission works of art and heavily subsidise the arts. It is wrong to look at All Government, in a liberal abstract way, as a source of oppression.

But all governments have tried, though not always with long-term success, to censor, hamstring or bribe artists who did not follow an accepted pattern and present accepted ideas. So has the Church, as a brief glance at the Index of forbidden books prepared by the Vatican shows.

There has been straightforward political censorship and oppression, the imprisoning or exiling of artists, booksellers and printers; the confiscation of property, sackings from jobs and actual death for vaguely defined "subversive activity" or even "dangerous thoughts".

The severity of this oppression has varied from age to age, from government to government; it is at its worst when the Establishment is in an insecure and jittery state, or engaged in foreign or civil wars, and it varies with the actual dangerousness of the work concerned.

It is possible that our comparative freedom from this direct form of political oppression in Britain today is enjoyed not only because of the democratic liberties won by the Labour movement, but also because the Establishment feels pretty secure and because art affects such a small section of the population that its dangerousness is extremely limited.

More powerful in our society is the tyranny of the box office, the enormous rewards in money and prestige for the glossy and the meretricious, and the unwritten codes imposed by film producers, publishers, radio and T.V. authorities. These are so subtle and so varied that the unseen censor leaning over your shoulder makes actual censorship unnecessary.

We know that painters like Annigoni are handsomely rewarded for glamourising the Queen, that Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond epics, left an estate of many thousands,

while what some may consider more deserving artists scratch a bare living and die in neglect.

The only really blatant political censorship in this country comes from the radio and T.V. authorities; and this is done not so much by censoring what people say as by simply not inviting people to appear whose opinions are likely to be subversive.

This was most obvious in the refusal to give the Communist Party radio and T.V. time for electoral broadcasts. It is also true that in the many discussion programmes, political, religious or philosophical, the Communist point of view is rarely represented.

Closely linked is the question of moral censorship, although here again it is more implicit than explicit.

Stable societies have established moral codes and standards of behaviour which are accepted by the majority of citizens and often by the artist as well. These standards have varied from age to age, from country to country; what was acceptable in ancient Rome would not be acceptable in modern Spain. Revolutionary changes have ushered in, sometimes slowly, sometimes rapidly, whole new codes of behaviour involving moral beliefs as well as fashions and manners.

The exploitation of one class by another was not considered morally wrong by the majority of nineteenth-century citizens; the middle class might be sorry for the labouring poor, even alleviate their sufferings by charity and good works, but they accepted it as a God-given statute that rich men should gorge in castles while poor men starved at gates. In a settled socialist country, however, the majority of citizens do think it morally wrong, and writers wishing to extol a life of idleness and wealth at other people's expense would simply not get a hearing. Legislation would be unnecessary.

In a similar way the acceptance of female inferiority is no longer prevalent under socialism. The seeds of female emancipation were sown at the time of the French Revolution—after all, if all men were to be equal why not women too? And the

dangerous ideas of sex equality formed a faint discordant undercurrent in the novels of the succeeding centuries, from the Godwins' outspoken convictions to Jane Austen's gentle hints that her heroines might find it necessary to disobey parents or guardians. Moreover their relationships with husbands or suitors were never those of supine obedience.

It is even more marked in the works of the great women Victorian novelists, whose writing itself was a form of protest against the intellectual and social inferiority forced upon them.

It was not always explicitly politically expressed; but who can remain unmoved by the yearnings for an important and socially valuable life voiced by Dorothea in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* or Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* or Jane Eyre's passionate appeal:

"It is vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquillity; they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it. Millions are condemned to a stiller doom than mine, and millions are in silent revolt against their lot. Nobody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth. Women are supposed to be very calm generally; but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrowminded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing the piano and embroidering bags."

It took the socialist revolution to make this equality a practical possibility, and in novels under socialism the "yes, yes, dear" wife is a figure of scorn as much as the domineering husband.

There will be no need under socialism to legislate against literature extolling the obedience of women to fathers and husbands, any more than to legislate against the advocacy of a return to duelling, family feuds, baby-farming, child marri-

ages, the abandoning of girl babies and other examples of social behaviour belonging to dead and gone societies.

Socialist morality is based on the rights of the individual to develop within society as long as his rights do not infringe the rights of others. All moralities develop slowly and unevenly; there are set-backs, retrogressions, pockets of backwoodsmanship; old habits, customs and conventions die hard. Economic and social conditions can be consciously created, the rights of the individual can be legislated for, but the morality that grows out of them will only grow as society matures.

Capitalist morality is based on property-owning and exploitation. To make this unpalatable fact attractive to the unproperty-owning exploited majority, it had to be adorned with a plethora of noble-sounding nonsense.

Religion was called upon to sanctify exploitation—by the promise of posthumous rewards of paradise for the meek, the uncomplaining and the hard-working; by the praise of charity and philanthropy and of accepting your "station in life".

Women, in actuality mere property, either as prostitutes, factory workers or domestic slaves, were described in the minor literature of the period as goddesses on pedestals, decorated with halos and ordered to be meek, mild, decorative and useless.

Parents exploited their children by not sparing the rod and demanding abominable excesses in the name of filial obedience.

Colonial invaders bravely and self-sacrificingly shouldered "the white man's burden".

But since artists are concerned with truth, the best writers exposed the hypocrisy of this travesty of morality; they showed us how the labouring poor really lived, and the tyranny and terror that reigned in the average middle-class home. I still shudder to read Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, where little Ernest is bullied and beaten by his papa because he cannot pronounce the letter "c"; the desperate hunger of Oliver Twist in the workhouse; the sadism of Mr. Murdstone when David Copperfield cannot remember his homework.

Although writers had to follow the current code of never mentioning physical functions—babies had to arrive after a miss and a couple of asterisks, and it was made clear that any woman moved by physical passion could hardly be a lady—they revealed many of the harsh truths of capitalist society. And it is due, anyhow in part, to them that the platitudes and hypocrisies were exposed.

In a decadent society moral standards also decay. In our modern jungle we have to rely on the police and the censor to keep some sort of order.

The morality of dog eats dog and "I'm all right, Jack" and "you've never had it so good" is now so blatant and unashamed that its apologists do not even try to cover it up with soothing religious slogans. The profit-motive and self-preservation are admitted to control most people's behaviour and, if they don't, people are quickly labelled as mugs or cranks. The purveyors of pornography, plastic flowers or the fulsome lies of the advertisements are excused by the reflection that "after all a man must live". There are no accepted standards except those of ruthless individualism.

In this moral confusion it is difficult for us in the Labour movement to make clear judgements. We may feel that no serious work should be banned because it uses certain four-letter words or involves unmentionable topics like abortion or V.D. (actually, there are now no unmentionable topics). But we may also feel that these particular four-letter words do not enhance the value of the work and that the concentration on drug-taking, sexual perversion, rape, murder, incest, etc. is not only monotonous but unhealthy.

We are faced with the fact that our censors, who have taken a severe beating in recent years, permit incitement to sadism, violence and sexual exploitation, man by woman, and woman by man, but whip out pious blue pencils to mutilate works of genuine entertainment or serious intention.

Lady Chatterley's Lover is a serious work. You do not have to like or admire it, but you must admit the high seriousness of

intention in analysing a particular relationship. For many years it was banned.

On the other hand, every week in every women's magazine the adverts incite women to bedevil a man into offering mink coats, matrimony or motor cars by the use of provocative perfume or other sex-inciting gear. The censor in this case does not even have a flicker of an urge to intervene.

Society creates moral or immoral standards, and while art may try to change them, entertainment merely reflects them. If we dislike the result it is no good relying on the blue pencil—it is society itself that needs to be changed.

The position is further complicated in that the crazy lust after profit tempts publishers into putting on the market works of no merit at all, especially for the juvenile and teenage market. Before children have had a chance to develop reasonable values they are subjected to a stream of magazines and books ranging from the merely vulgar to the "feelthy postcard" type; from lurid nonsense to wilfully perverted glorification of racial hatred, sadism and violence.

Now in general the tastes of our children are formed by parents, schools and their general environment, and if they are given opportunity to develop reason and judgement they grow quite naturally out of blood and thunder escapism or sentimental never-never-landism. But many children are deprived either by home, school or environment, and they are the ones who are particularly susceptible to the influences of delinquent comics.

While believing that morality—and I naturally include the whole sphere of human behaviour not just sex—can only grow organically out of society, I consider that there are perfectly good reasons for using the censor's power to keep out the most pernicious publications intended for youth.

Such publications are a long way from art, but since the authorities measure them with the same yardstick it is necessary to mention them.

Under socialism the whole relationship of the artist to

society changes. No longer is he an outsider; he is an insider, and he has social as well as artistic obligations. Does he need restraining and if so by whom?

In revolutionary Russia, with a bloody civil war on, not to speak of the international conspiracy, armed and ideological, being waged from outside, it is quite obvious that any literature advocating a return to the bad old days, portraying the Whites as Christian gentlemen and the Reds as sadistic thugs, would have been banned. And if any such book had been written I would shed no democratic tears at its being banned.

It is worth while remembering that such works would not have been truthful works of art anyhow.

In actual fact the novels and films dealing with the Civil War period have been far from being over-simplified half-truths. Grigor, the hero of Sholokhov's Don trilogy, swithers between Red and White, revolution and reaction; Sholokhov never suggests that the Reds were angels and the Whites devils, but far more profoundly analyses the way individuals are caught up and remoulded by the forces of history.

But once socialist power is firmly established one would expect a relaxation of censorship and government direction. In the case of the Soviet Union exactly the reverse happened.

Not only were writers, musicians and painters censored, criticised, banned and victimised for explicit political reasons, but also for implicit, unpolitical and stylistic reasons; for anything not directly representational in art; for jazz, dissonance or lack of melody or even "western influence" in music; for pessimism, individual psychology, introspection or frivolity in literature; for experimentalism in general.

Zoschenko, the delightful humorist, the poet Anna Akhmatova, Shostakovich, Isaac Babel, Pasternak, all at times fell under official disapproval. They have been since rehabilitated but in some cases too late.

Now criticism, both forthright and fumbling, informed and uninformed, is a necessary and sometimes valuable part of every artist's life. But when backed by Party and Government

with absolute power, it can create an intellectual reign of terror. And then art *is* tongue-tied by authority.

It is impossible for an artist to search honestly and painstakingly for the truth in the fear that victimisation will overtake him if he finds it. What is more, the artistic middlemen, the publishers, editors, theatre managers, cultural committees and so on are equally paralysed by this fear, and become as timid as our box-office profit-ridden middlemen in the west towards anything that is new, original and controversial.

The irreverent humour of satirists can easily be suspected, because beyond the gentle fun poked at the foibles and follies of human beings there is the glimpse of steel.

James Thurber puts the duty of the humorist very cogently in his preface to *Lanterns and Lances*:

"Humour in a living culture must not be put away in the attic with the flag, but should be flaunted, like the flag bravely. Every time is a time for comedy in a world of tension that would languish without it.

"Much of what follows is my own attempt in my little corner of the struggle, to throw a few lantern beams here and there. But I also cast a few lances at the people and the ideas that have disturbed me. Some were written in anger, which has become one of the necessary virtues, and if there is a touch of the lugubrious in certain pieces, the perceptive reader will also detect, I like to think, a basic and indestructible thread of hope. Let us not look back in anger, or forward in fear, but around in awareness."

Such an attitude was similar to Zoschenko's. He is frivolous when other people are being serious; he is thinking of bed bugs when other people are thinking up heroic slogans; he is a marvellous corrective to wishful thinking and romanticism.

Although during the Zhdanov-Stalin era he fell into disfavour he has since been handsomely (although, alas, posthumously) rehabilitated with a new edition of his work published in 1960 totalling 300,000 copies.

As for pessimism and nostalgia for the past, they have been present in many forward-looking writers' works.

Genuinely felt pessimism is as unlike glib cynicism as genuine optimism is unlike "everything in the garden's lovely" platitudes. As Thurber says: "Everybody's got to wake up sometime feeling that everything is terrible because it *is*."

Nostalgia for the past is surely felt by everyone over forty. Shakespeare regretted the "constant service of the antique world"; Ruskin hankered after Gothic architecture; Morris yearned for the merriness and creativeness of medieval craftsmen and the bravery of Icelandic heroes. And on a more prosaic and personal level I deplore the age of the motor car, the T.V. and the H-bomb. But they all knew, as I certainly know, that you cannot turn the clock back and inherit the virtues of the past without its shortcomings.

What is more, writers and artists are in a continuous state of development. Morris developed from medieval romanticism to revolutionary socialism; Nabukov, whose *Lolita* I have been so rude about, has just written a splendid translation of Pushkin.

Governments cannot create genius or even talent, but they can cripple or destroy it. They can also create the conditions in which genius and talent are likely to develop and flourish.

14

Freedom and Responsibility

"We must become the champions of liberty of intellectual life, of free artistic creation and of scientific progress."

TOGLIATTI, 1964

Freedom of the individual under capitalism has been a noble slogan never borne out by the facts except for the few, the lucky, the privileged and the rich.

Just as there are limitations in the democratic freedoms won by the working class and other progressive elements during past struggles, so the freedom of the artist is likewise limited, by the press and theatre monopolies, the monolithic structure of the entertainment industry in general, and by box-office standards.

And yet the ideal of the freedom of the artist is a valuable part of our democratic heritage.

It may seem absurd that people who view with equanimity the fact that in 1964 41,000 Scots emigrated because they had no freedom to work in their native land, can get into a lather of indignation because Pasternak's *Dr Zhivago* was turned down for publication in the Soviet Union. Yet their indignation should not be dismissed as entirely frivolous.

It is true that the arts cannot flourish in a society like ours, with its niggardly government spending, its worship of profit and the isolation of the arts from the masses of the people.

But it is also true that they cannot flourish in an atmosphere of fear and censorship, dogmatic directives and the threat of victimisation.

Socialism has made splendid provision for the arts; magnificent theatres, concert halls and art galleries, not only in the main centres of population but even in remote and sparsely populated areas. Even visiting a distant mid-Siberian town like Novosibirsk it is possible to find at the Railwaymen's Institute a lavish production of *Der Fledermaus*. Socialism has provided unparalleled opportunities for young people to study the arts and to learn their craft whether as ballet dancers, musicians, film directors or writers. It has given artists prestige and financial security. (In fact, a Hungarian friend complained to me that their writers were idly lolling in rest homes instead of pounding away on their typewriters.)

Yet added to all this it is necessary to provide an atmosphere for free and forthright controversy, to challenge accepted values and conventions, to experiment with the widest diversity of forms.

It will always be difficult to differentiate between the novel and the new, the fashionable and the revolutionary. Even among Communists, who have a false reputation for unanimity, the most widely divergent and violently felt views exist about the value of individual works, different styles and aesthetic theories. I have met Soviet writers who rushed to my bookcase looking for books by Agatha Christie, or insisted upon reciting Kipling's *If* to me in Georgian. I have met a Czech literature graduate busily employed in translating what appeared to me an utterly valueless poem by Samuel Becket. I have met young people from socialist countries greeting with the wildest enthusiasm the works of Pinter, Ionesco and Becket, whose work appears to me to have strong elements of nihilism and destructiveness. I have met others who consider abstract art as positively wicked if not obscene. Artistic values and theories are "in a terrible state of chassis" and our only hope of arriving at sensible conclusions is to have the freest possible discussion and argument.

We are still only groping to understand the process of artistic creation; why certain sounds, shapes, colours, stories,

ideas thrill us to the marrow while others leave us cold. William Empson may be able to find reasons why a certain line of poetry is beautiful, but there will always be one element beyond reason. There is no recipe to guarantee a masterpiece.

We expect great things from art under socialism. We expect it to depict the birth of tomorrow within today; to understand the complexities and irrationalities of human behaviour without losing the basic historical pattern; we expect it to sharpen our reason, stretch our imagination, deepen our emotions; to be compelling, disturbing, inspiring and critical; to encourage men to develop their fullest potentialities as human beings. We expect the artist to be conscious of his responsibility in the ideological and moral remoulding which every one of us must undergo in order to create a just society.

But how he interprets this must always be the concern of the individual artist himself.

Burke said: "We must re-enthrone the goddess Difficulty. This it has been the glory of the great masters in all the arts to confront and to overcome; and when they had overcome the first difficulty, to turn it into an instrument for new conquests over new difficulties; thus to enable them to extend the empire of their science; and even to push forward beyond the reach of their original thoughts, the landmarks of human understanding itself."

Marxists have never underestimated the difficulty of arriving at the truth in art or science. MacDiarmid speaks of "fusing the discordant qualities of experience, of mixing moods and holding together opposites"; and says of his own poems:

> So I have gathered unto myself
> All the loose ends of Scotland,
> And by naming them and accepting them,
> Loving them and identifying myself with them,
> Attempt to express the whole.

The freedom the artist needs is not the freedom of wilful individualism but the freedom to challenge difficulty.

The founders of Marxist thought, Marx, Engels and Lenin, were most generous, humble and undogmatic in their attitude towards the arts, never abusing their influential position to utter pronouncements on a subject which they considered that they had insufficiently studied.

"Literature," said Lenin, "is the last thing in the world to lend itself to mechanical levelling and uniformity, to the subjection of the minority by the majority. There is no doubt that in this field great freedom must be assured to individual initiative and personal inclinations, great freedom of thought and fantasy, form and content."

At the same time he stresses the necessity for artists to choose sides in the ideological battle, since art is inevitably tangled with it; he points out that conscious choice is always better than unconscious commitment, and that in our time there is no possible choice that is more humanistic than alliance with the people struggling for a communist society.

Similar views are expressed by present-day leading Communists, who attempt to strike this necessary balance between freedom and responsibility.

The Communist Party of Great Britain at its 28th Congress stated that it did not stand for the direction of artists in their artistic work. But this does not mean the issue of ivory towers or hermetically sealed cells, it does not mean freedom from social responsibility (though social responsibility is quite different from having to illustrate the short-term political programme of any government or party).

The Polish Communist leader, Gomulka, in his address to writers, while criticising certain writers for "cutting themselves off from the main stream of national life" and telling them that "there is no serious literature that does not take one or the other side in the key conflicts of our times", said:

"It is not our intention to simplify or to vulgarise the role and duties of writers, the social functions of literature. We do

not want to reduce its task to those of political propaganda. We know that literature of that kind is neither great art nor good propaganda."

The absolute freedom envisaged by the idealists cannot exist for any member of society, artist or not. He is restricted by his time and place, his temperament and his talents, and most of all by his inescapable obligations towards his fellow human beings. These obligations will be even more inescapable when he is once more an integrated member of society, since they grow out of that integration.

Even under capitalism, however much the artist boasts of his isolation, his art, as does all art, remains communication. Many artists will and already do enjoy fulfilling commissions for public occasions; and the necessity for discovering a common language with a potential audience, whether in murals for schools, sculpture for public parks, plays and music for festive occasions, can be a stimulating and rewarding experience.

I should like to see sponsorship of the arts by the most varied organisations, trade unions and trades councils, Co-operative Societies, Municipal Councils, Education Committees and local Arts Committees all over the country. This would at the same time actively involve the artist in the life of the community and prevent the tyranny of over-centralisation.

In such a context the freedom of the artist would be a positive not a negative thing, so long as he was not strait-jacketed in advance by rigid instructions.

In this socialist future one cannot prophesy exactly what sort of art will be produced: whether new artistic giants will grow up with the stature of Shakespeare or Beethoven or whether, as in *News from Nowhere*, we shall settle for everyday beauty and gentle entertainment.

Engels, when writing about the future relations between the sexes, writes:

"The future will be settled after a generation has grown up, a generation of men who never in all their lives have had

occasion to purchase a woman's surrender either with money or with any other means of social power, and of women who have never been obliged to surrender to any man out of any consideration other than that of real love. . . . Once such people appear they will not care a rap about what we today think they should do."

Likewise when a generation of artists and writers appear who have never been tongue-tied by the box office or intimidated by political committees; who have never been threatened with victimisation if they spoke the truth or rewarded with fame and millions for the glossy half-truth; when an audience grows up, educated, informed, critical and enthusiastic—why should such people care a rap about what we today think they should do? They will be doing it. And the theories of today will be safely filed in reference libraries.

Britain today is a political and cultural backwood, a moral jungle. For thirteen years Tory governments have dinged into our heads that all we want is to "have it good" and now a Labour Government is promising that we shall have it even better.

The Communist Party is naturally in favour of a high level of material prosperity for all, not as an end in itself but, as the necessary basis for human happiness and development.

Material prosperity, on its own, without purpose or inspiration, is totally inadequate to satisfy our needs and quickly incites us either to live for kicks or to take part in the rat race for respectability and power.

Socialism is the only answer to the physical and moral squalor in which we live, and the arts will not only be an integral part of the good life of the future but can now provide the spiritual refreshment we all need in our present struggles.

When the working class has achieved power it will still need, in Gramsci's words to "take on the work of reconquest, to restore in full for itself and all humanity the devastated realm of the spirit".

And meanwhile as William Morris said: "If these hours be

dark, as indeed in many ways they are, at least do not let us sit deedless, like fools and fine gentlemen, thinking the common toil not good enough for us, and beaten by the muddle; but rather let us work like good fellows trying by some dim candle-light that tomorrow, when the civilised world, no longer greedy, strife-ful and destructive, shall have a new art, a glorious art, made by the people and for the people, as a happiness to the maker and the user."

Questions about the role and direction of the arts have become issues of keen—and often heated—discussion today; for it has come to be realised that art is part of the very fabric of life itself, not a luxury for the few but a necessity for human beings. This original, lively and provocative book discusses these questions in the context of contemporary experience in both capitalist and socialist countries. Is there a Marxist approach to art and what is it? Does the concept of the artist's social responsibility contradict artistic freedom? Is censorship ever justified? What is happening to the arts under capitalism? Is there a future for socialist art? These and similar themes are treated here with a wealth of illustration, including chapters on the work of three Communist artists—Hugh MacDiarmid, Picasso and Brecht.

Honor Arundel, born in 1919, was at one time film and radio critic for *The Daily Worker.* Now she lives in Edinburgh, is married to Scots actor Alex McCrindle, and is a regular lecturer and propagandist in Scotland. Her poetry, articles and criticism published in *The Daily Worker, Marxism Today, The Scotsman* and various Scottish literary magazines are known to many readers, who will welcome this fuller and more personal statement of her views on cultural problems.

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