

Intellectuals have always been partial to grandiose ideas about themselves, whether of a heroic or a masochistic kind, but surely no one has ever had a more grandiose idea about the destiny of modern intellectuals than the brilliant economist Joseph Schumpeter. Though he desired nothing so much as to be realistic and hard-boiled, Schumpeter had somehow absorbed all those romantic notions about the revolutionary potential and critical independence of the intellectuals which have now and again swept through the radical and bohemian worlds. Marx, said Schumpeter, was wrong in supposing that capitalism would break down from inherent economic contradictions; it would break down, instead, from an inability to claim people through ties of loyalty and value. "Unlike any other type of society, capitalism inevitably . . . creates, educates and subsidizes a vested interest in social unrest." The intellectuals, bristling with neurotic aspirations and deranged by fantasies of utopia made possible by the very society they would destroy, become agents of discontent who infect rich and poor, high and low. In drawing this picture Schumpeter hardly meant to praise the intellectuals, yet until a few years ago many of them would have accepted it as both truth and tribute, though a few of the more realistic ones might have smiled a doubt as to their capacity to do *all that*.

Schumpeter's picture of the intellectuals is not, of course, without historical validity, but at the moment it seems spectacularly, even comically wrong. And wrong for a reason that Schumpeter, with his elaborate sense of irony, would have appreciated: he who had insisted that capitalism is "a form or method of economic change and not only never is but never can be stationary" had failed sufficiently to consider those new developments in our society which have changed the whole position and status of the intellectuals. Far from creating and subsidizing unrest, capitalism in its most recent stage has found an honored place for the intellectuals; and the intellectuals, far from thinking of themselves as a desperate "opposition," have been enjoying a return to the bosom of the nation. Were Archibald MacLeish again tempted to play Cato and chastise the Irresponsibles, he could hardly find a victim. We have all, even the handful who still try to retain a glower of criticism, become responsible and moderate.

In 1932 not many American intellectuals saw any hope for the revival of capitalism. Few of them could support this feeling with any well-grounded theory of society; many held to a highly simplified idea of what capitalism was; and at most all were committed to a vision of the *crisis* of capitalism which was merely a vulgarized model of the class struggle in Europe. Suddenly, with the appearance of the New Deal, the intellectuals saw fresh hope: capitalism was not to be exhausted by the naive specifications they had assigned it, and consequently the "European" policies of the Roosevelt administration might help dissolve their "Europeanized" sense of crisis. So that the more American society became Europeanized, adopting measures that had been common practice on the Continent for decades, the more the American intellectuals began to believe in . . . American uniqueness. Somehow, the major capitalist power in the world would evade the troubles afflicting capitalism as a world economy.

The two central policies of the New Deal, social legislation and state intervention in economic life, were not unrelated, but they were separable as to time; in Europe they had not always appeared together. Here, in America, it was the simultaneous introduction of these two policies that aroused the enthusiasm, as it dulled the criticism, of the intellectuals. Had the drive toward bureaucratic state regulation of a capitalist economy appeared by itself, so that one could see the state becoming a major buyer and hence indirect controller of industry, and industries on the verge of collapse being systematically subsidized by the state, and the whole of economic life being rationalized according to the long-run needs, if not the immediate tastes, of corporate economy—had all this appeared in isolation, the intellectuals would have reacted critically, they would have recognized the trend toward “state capitalism” as the danger it was. But their desire for the genuine social reforms that came with this trend made them blind or indifferent to the danger. Still, one may suppose that their enthusiasm would have mellowed had not the New Deal been gradually transformed into a permanent war economy; for whatever the theoretical attractions of the Keynesian formula for salvaging capitalism, it has thus far “worked” only in times of war or preparation for war. And it was in the war economy, itself closely related to the trend toward statification, that the intellectuals came into their own.

Statification, war economy, the growth of a mass society and mass culture—all these are aspects of the same historical process. The kind of society that has been emerging in the West, a society in which bureaucratic controls are imposed upon (but not fundamentally against) an interplay of private interests, has need for intellectuals in a way the earlier, “traditional” capitalism never did. It is a society in which ideology plays an unprecedented part: as social relations become more abstract and elusive, the human object is bound to the state with ideological slogans and abstractions—and for this chore intellectuals are indispensable; no one else can do the job as well. Because industrialism grants large quantities of leisure time without any creative sense of how to employ it, there springs up a vast new industry that must be staffed by intellectuals and quasi-intellectuals: the industry of mass culture. And because the state subsidizes mass education and our uneasy prosperity allows additional millions to gain a “higher” education, many new jobs suddenly become available in the academy: some fall to intellectuals. Bohemia gradually disappears as a setting for our intellectual life, and what remains of it seems willed or fake. Looking upon the prosperous ruins of Greenwich Village, one sometimes feels that a full-time bohemian career has become as arduous, if not as expensive, as acquiring a Ph.D.

Bohemia, said Flaubert, was “the fatherland of my breed.” If so, his breed, at least in America, is becoming extinct. The most exciting periods of American intellectual life tend to coincide with the rise of bohemia, with the tragic yet liberating rhythm of the break from the small town into the literary roominess of the city, or from the provincial immigrant family into the centers of intellectual experiment. Given the nature of contemporary life, bohemia flourishes in the city—but that has not always been so. Concord too was a kind of bohemia, sedate, subversive, and transcendental all at once. Today, however, the idea of bohemia, which was a strategy for bringing artists and writers together in their struggle with and for the world—this idea has become disreputable, being rather nastily associated with kinds of exhibitionism that have only an incidental relationship to bohemia. Nonetheless, it is the disintegration of bohemia that is a major cause for the way intellectuals feel, as distinct from and far more important than what they say or think. Those feelings of loneliness one finds among so many American intellectuals, feelings of damp dispirited isolation which undercut the ideology of liberal optimism, are partly due to the breakup of bohemia. Where young writers would once face the world together, they now sink into suburbs, country homes, and college towns. And the price they pay for this rise in social status is to be measured in more than an increase in rent.

It is not my purpose to berate anyone, for the pressures of conformism are at work upon all of us, to say nothing of the need to earn one's bread; and all of us bend under the terrible weight of our time—though some take pleasure in learning to enjoy it. Nor do I wish to indulge in the sort of good-natured condescension with which Malcolm Cowley recently described the younger writers as lugubrious and timid longhairs huddling in chill academies and poring over the gnostic texts of Henry James—by contrast, no doubt, to Cowley's own career of risk-taking. Some intellectuals, to be sure, have "sold out" and we can all point to examples, probably the same examples. But far more prevalent and far more insidious is that slow attrition which destroys one's ability to stand firm and alone: the temptations of an improved standard of living combined with guilt over the historical tragedy that has made possible our prosperity; one's sense of being swamped by the rubbish of a reactionary period together with the loss of those earlier certainties that had the advantage, at least, of making resistance easy. Nor, in saying these things, do I look forward to any sort of material or intellectual asceticism. Our world is to be neither flatly accepted nor rejected: it must be engaged, resisted, and—who knows, perhaps still—transformed.

All of life, my older friends often tell me, is a conspiracy against that ideal of independence with which a young intellectual begins; but if so, wisdom consists not in premature surrender but in learning when to evade, when to stave off, and when to oppose head-on. Conformity, as Arthur Koestler said some years ago, "is often a form of betrayal which can be carried out with a clear conscience." Gradually we make our peace with the world, and not by anything as exciting as a secret pact; nowadays Lucifer is a very patient and reasonable fellow with a gift for indulging one's most legitimate desires; and we learn, if we learn any thing at all, that betrayal may consist in a chain of small compromises, even while we also learn that in this age one cannot survive without compromise. What is most alarming is not that a number of intellectuals have abandoned the posture of iconoclasm: let the zeitgeist give them a jog and they will again be radical, all too radical. What is most alarming is that the whole idea of the intellectual vocation—the idea of a life dedicated to values that cannot possibly be realized by a commercial civilization—has gradually lost its allure. And it is this, rather than the abandonment of a particular program, which constitutes our rout.

In a recent number of *Perspectives* Lionel Trilling addressed himself to some of these problems; his perspective is sharply different from mine. Trilling believes that "there is an unmistakable improvement in the American cultural situation of today over that of, say, thirty years ago," while to me it seems that any comparison between the buoyant free-spirited cultural life of 1923 with the dreariness of 1953, or between their literary achievements, must lead to the conclusion that Trilling is indulging in a pleasant fantasy. More important, however, is his analysis of how this "improvement" has occurred:

In many civilizations there comes a point at which wealth shows a tendency to submit itself, in some degree, to the rule of mind and imagination, to apologize for its existence by a show of taste and sensitivity. In America the signs of this submission have for some time been visible. . . . Intellect has associated itself with power, perhaps as never before in history, and is now conceded to be in itself a kind of power.

Such stately terms as "wealth" and "intellect" hardly make for sharp distinctions, yet the drift of Trilling's remarks is clear enough—and, I think, disastrous.

It is perfectly true that in the government bureaucracy and institutional staff, in the mass-culture industries and the academy, intellectuals have been welcomed and absorbed as never before. It is true, again, that "wealth" has become far more indulgent in its treatment of intellectuals, and for good reasons: it needs them more than ever, they are tamer than ever,

140 and its own position is more comfortable and expansive than it has been for a long time. But  
if “wealth” has made a mild bow toward “intellect” (sometimes while picking its pocket),  
then “intellect” has engaged in some undignified prostrations before “wealth.” Thirty years  
ago “wealth” was on the defensive, and twenty years ago it was frightened, hesitant,  
145 apologetic. “Intellect” was self-confident, aggressive, secure in its belief or, if you wish,  
delusions. Today the ideology of American capitalism, with its claim to a unique and  
immaculate destiny, is trumpeted through every medium of communication: official  
propaganda, institutional advertising, and the scholarly writings of people who, until a few  
years ago, were its major opponents. Marx baiting, that least risky of occupations, has become  
150 a favorite sport in the academic journals; a whining genteel chauvinism is widespread among  
intellectuals; and the bemoaning of their own fears and timidities a constant theme among  
professors. Is this to be taken as evidence that “wealth” has subordinated itself to “intellect”?  
Or is the evidence to be found in the careers of such writers as Max Eastman and James  
Burnham? To be sure, culture has acquired a more honorific status, as restrained ostentation  
has replaced conspicuous consumption: wealthy people collect more pictures or at least more  
155 modern ones, they endow foundations with large sums—but all this is possible because  
“intellect” no longer pretends to challenge “wealth.”

What has actually been taking place is the absorption of large numbers of intellectuals,  
previously independent, into the world of government bureaucracy and public committees;  
into the constantly growing industries of pseudo culture; into the adult-education business,  
160 which subsists on regulated culture-anxiety. This process of bureaucratic absorption does not  
proceed without check: the Eisenhower administration has recently dismissed a good many  
intellectuals from government posts. Yet it seems likely that such stupidity will prove  
temporary and that one way or another, in one administration or another, the intellectuals will  
drift back into the government: they must, they are indispensable.

165 Some years ago C. Wright Mills wrote an article in which he labeled the intellectuals as  
“powerless people.” He meant, of course, that they felt incapable of translating their ideas into  
action and that their consequent frustration had become a major motif in their behavior. His  
description was accurate enough; yet we might remember that the truly powerless people are  
those intellectuals—the new realists—who attach themselves to the seats of power, where  
170 they surrender their freedom of expression without gaining any significance as political  
figures. For it is crucial to the history of the American intellectuals in the past few decades—  
as well as to the relationship between “wealth” and “intellect”—that whenever they become  
absorbed into the accredited institutions of society they not only lose their traditional  
rebelliousness but to one extent or another *they cease to function as intellectuals*. The  
175 institutional world needs intellectuals *because* they are intellectuals but it does not want them  
*as* intellectuals. It beckons to them because of what they are but it will not allow them, at least  
within its sphere of articulation, to either remain or entirely cease being what they are. It  
needs them for their knowledge, their talent, their inclinations and passions; it insists that they  
retain a measure of these endowments, which it means to employ for its own ends, and  
180 without which the intellectuals would be of no use to it whatever. A simplified but useful  
equation suggests itself: the relation of the institutional world to the intellectuals is like the  
relation of middlebrow culture to serious culture. The one batters on the other, absorbs and  
raids it with increasing frequency and skill, subsidizes and encourages it enough to make  
further raids possible—at times the parasite will support its victim. Surely this relationship  
185 must be one reason for the high incidence of neurosis that is supposed to prevail among  
intellectuals. A total estrangement from the sources of power and prestige, even a blind  
unreasoning rejection of every aspect of our culture, would be far healthier, if only because it  
would permit a free discharge of aggression.

I do not mean to suggest that for intellectuals all institutions are equally dangerous or  
190 disadvantageous. Even during the New Deal, the life of those intellectuals who journeyed to  
Washington was far from happy. The independence possible to a professor of sociology is  
usually greater than that possible to a writer of television scripts, and a professor of English,  
since the world will not take his subject seriously, can generally enjoy more intellectual  
leeway than a professor of sociology. Philip Rieff, a sociologist, has caustically described a  
195 major tendency among his colleagues as a drift from “science” to “policy” in which “loyalty,  
not truth, provides the social condition by which the intellectual discovers his new  
environment.” It is a drift “from the New School to the Rand Corporation.”

There is, to be sure, a qualitative difference between the academy and the government bureau  
or the editorial staff. The university is still committed to the ideology of freedom, and many  
200 professors try hard and honestly to live by it. If the intellectual cannot subsist independently,  
off his work or his relatives, the academy is usually his best bet. But no one who has a live  
sense of what the literary life has been and might still be, in either Europe or this country, can  
accept the notion that the academy is the natural home of intellect. What seems so unfortunate  
is that the whole *idea* of independence is losing its traditional power. Scientists are bound  
205 with chains of official secrecy; sociologists compete for government research chores;  
foundations become indifferent to solitary writers and delight in “teams”; the possibility of  
living in decent poverty from moderately serious literary journalism becomes more and more  
remote. Compromises are no doubt necessary, but they had better be recognized for what they  
are.

Perhaps something should be said here about “alienation.” Involved, primarily, is a matter of  
210 historical fact. During most of the bourgeois epoch, the European intellectuals grew  
increasingly alienated from the social community because the very ideals that had animated  
the bourgeois revolution were now being violated by bourgeois society; their “alienation” was  
prompted not by bohemian willfulness or socialist dogmatism but by a loyalty to Liberty,  
215 Fraternity, Equality, or to a vision of a preindustrial society that, by a trick of history, came  
pretty much to resemble Liberty, Fraternity, Equality. Just as it was the triumph of capitalism  
which largely caused this sense of estrangement, so it was the expansion of capitalism that  
allowed the intellectuals enough freedom to express it. As Philip Rahv has put it: “During the  
greater part of the bourgeois epoch . . . [writers] preferred alienation from the community to  
220 alienation from themselves.” Precisely this choice made possible their strength and boldness,  
precisely this “lack of roots” gave them their speculative power. Almost always, the talk one  
hears these days about “the need for roots” veils a desire to compromise the tradition of  
intellectual independence, to seek in a nation or religion or party a substitute for the tenacity  
one should find in oneself. Isaac Rosenfeld’s remark that “the ideal society . . . cannot afford  
225 to include many deeply rooted individuals” is not merely a clever mot but an important  
observation.

It may be that the issue is no longer relevant; that, with the partial submission of “wealth” to  
“intellect,” the clash between a business civilization and the values of art is no longer as  
urgent as we once thought; but if so, we must discard a great deal, and mostly the best, of the  
230 literature, the criticism, and the speculative thought of the twentieth century. For to deny the  
historical fact of “alienation” (as if that would make it any the less real!) is to deny our  
heritage, both as burden and advantage, and also, I think, to deny our possible future as a  
community.

Much of what I have been describing here must be due to a feeling among intellectuals that  
235 the danger of Stalinism allows them little or no freedom in their relations with bourgeois  
society. This feeling seems to me only partly justified, and I do not suffer from any inclination

to minimize the Stalinist threat. To be sure, it does limit our possibilities for action—if, that is, we still want to engage in any dissident politics—and sometimes it may force us into political alignments that are distasteful. But here a crucial distinction should be made: the danger of Stalinism may require temporary expedients in the area of *power* such as would have seemed compromising some years ago, but there is no reason, at least no good reason, why it should require compromise or conformity in the area of *ideas*, no reason why it should lead us to become partisans of bourgeois society, which is itself, we might remember, heavily responsible for the Stalinist victories.

3

“In the United States at this time liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition.” This sentence of Lionel Trilling’s contains a sharp insight into the political life of contemporary America. If I understand him correctly, he is saying that our society is at present so free from those pressures of conflicting classes and interests which make for sharply defined ideologies, that liberalism colors, or perhaps the word should be, bleaches all political tendencies. It becomes a loose shelter, a poncho rather than a program; to call oneself a liberal one doesn’t really have to believe in anything. In such a moment of social slackness, the more extreme intellectual tendencies have a way, as soon as an effort is made to put them into practice, of sliding into and becoming barely distinguishable from the dominant liberalism. Both conservatism and radicalism can retain, at most, an intellectual recalcitrance, but neither is presently able to engage in a sustained practical politics of its own; which does not mean they will never be able to.

The point is enforced by looking at the recent effort to affirm a conservative ideology. Russell Kirk, who makes this effort with some earnestness, can hardly avoid the eccentricity of appealing to Providence as a putative force in American politics: an appeal that suggests both the intensity of his conservative desire and the desperation behind the intensity. Peter Viereck, a friskier sort of writer, calls himself a conservative, but surely this is nothing more than a mystifying pleasantry, for aside from the usual distinctions of temperament and talent it is hard to see how his conservatism differs from the liberalism of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. For Viereck conservatism is a shuffling together of attractive formulas, without any effort to discover their relationship to deep *actual* clashes of interest: he fails, for example, even to consider that in America there is today neither opportunity nor need for conservatism (since the liberals do the necessary themselves) and that if an opportunity were to arise, conservatism could seize upon it only by acquiring a mass, perhaps reactionary dynamic, that is, by “going into the streets.” And that, surely, Viereck doesn’t want.

If conservatism is taken to mean, as in some “classical” sense it should be, a principled rejection of industrial economy and a yearning for an ordered, hierarchical society that is not centered on the city, then conservatism in America is best defended by a group of literary men whose seriousness is proportionate to their recognition that such a politics is now utterly hopeless and, in any but a utopian sense, meaningless. Such a conservatism, in America, goes back to Fenimore Cooper, who anticipates those implicit criticisms of our society which we honor in Faulkner; and in the hands of serious imaginative writers, but hardly in the hands of political writers obliged to deal with immediate relations of power, it can become a myth which, through abrasion, profoundly challenges modern experience. As for the “conservatism” of the late Senator Robert Taft, which consists of nothing but liberal economics and wounded nostalgia, it lacks intellectual content and, more important, when in power it merely continues those “statist” policies it had previously attacked.

This prevalence of liberalism yields, to be sure, some obvious and substantial benefits. It makes us properly skeptical of the excessive claims and fanaticisms that accompany ideologies. It makes implausible those “aristocratic” rantings against democracy which were fashionable in some literary circles a few years ago. And it allows for the hope that any revival of American radicalism will acknowledge not only its break from, but also its roots in, the liberal tradition.

At the same time, however, the dominance of liberalism contributes heavily to our intellectual conformity. Liberalism dominates, but without confidence or security; it knows that its victories at home are tied to disasters abroad; and for the élan it cannot summon, it substitutes a blend of complacency and anxiety. It makes for an atmosphere of blur in the realm of ideas, since it has a stake in seeing momentary concurrences as deep harmonies. In an age that suffers from incredible catastrophes it scoffs at theories of social apocalypse—as if any more evidence were needed; in an era convulsed by war, revolution and counterrevolution it discovers the virtues of “moderation.” And when the dominant school of liberalism, the school of realpolitik, scores points in attacking “the ritualistic liberals,” it also betrays a subterranean desire to retreat into the caves of bureaucratic caution. Liberalism as an ideology, as “the haunted air,” has never been stronger in this country; but can as much be said of the appetite for freedom?

Sidney Hook discovers merit in the Smith Act: he was not for its passage but doubts the wisdom of its repeal.<sup>1</sup> Mary McCarthy, zooming to earth from never never land, discovers in the American war economy no less than paradise: “Class barriers disappear or tend to become porous; the factory worker is an economic aristocrat in comparison to the middle-class clerk. . . . The America . . . of vast inequalities and dramatic contrasts is rapidly ceasing to exist.” Daniel Boorstin—he cannot be charged with the self-deceptions peculiar to idealism—discovers that “the genius of American politics” consists not in the universal possibilities of democracy but in a uniquely fortunate geography which, obviously, cannot be exported. David Riesman is so disturbed by Veblen’s rebelliousness toward American society that he explains it as a projection of father-hatred; and what complex is it, one wonders, which explains a writer’s assumption that Veblen’s view of America is so inconceivable as to require a home-brewed psychoanalysis? Irving Kristol writes an article minimizing the threat to civil liberties and shortly thereafter is chosen to be public spokesman for the American Committee for Cultural Freedom. And in the committee itself, it is possible for serious intellectuals to debate—none is *for* Senator McCarthy—whether the public activities of the Wisconsin hooligan constitute a serious menace to freedom.

One likes to speculate: suppose Simone de Beauvoir and Bertrand Russell didn’t exist; would not many of the political writers for *Commentary* and the *New Leader* have to invent them? It is all very well, and even necessary, to demonstrate that Russell’s description of America as subject to “a reign of terror” is malicious and ignorant, or that Beauvoir’s picture of America is a blend of Stalinist clichés and second-rate literary fantasies; but this hardly disposes of the problem of civil liberties or of the justified alarm many sober European intellectuals feel with regard to America. Between the willfulness of those who see only terror and the indifference of those who see only health, there is need for simple truth: that intellectual freedom in the United States is under severe attack and that the intellectuals have, by and large, shown a painful lack of militancy in defending the rights which are a precondition of their existence.<sup>2</sup>

It is in the pages of the influential magazine *Commentary* that liberalism is most skillfully and systematically advanced as a strategy for adapting to the American status quo. Until the last few months, when a shift in editorial temper seems to have occurred, the magazine was more deeply preoccupied, or preoccupied at deeper levels, with the dangers to freedom stemming

from people like Freda Kirchwey and Arthur Miller than the dangers from people like Senator McCarthy. In March 1952 Irving Kristol, then an editor of *Commentary*, could write that “there is one thing the American people know about Senator McCarthy: he, like them, is unequivocally anti-Communist. About the spokesmen for American liberalism, they feel they know no such thing. And with some justification.” In September 1952, at the very moment when McCarthy had become a central issue in the presidential campaign, Elliot Cohen, the senior editor of *Commentary*, could write that McCarthy “remains in the popular mind an unreliable, second-string blowhard; his *only* support as a great national figure is from the fascinated fears of the intelligentsia” (emphasis mine). As if to blot out the memory of these performances, Nathan Glazer, still another editor, wrote an excellent analysis of McCarthy in the March 1953 issue; but at the end of his article, almost as if from another hand, there again appeared the magazine’s earlier line: “All that Senator McCarthy can do on his own authority that someone equally unpleasant and not a Senator can’t, is to haul people down to Washington for a grilling by his committee. It is a shame and an outrage that Senator McCarthy should remain in the Senate; yet I cannot see that it is an imminent danger to personal liberty in the United States.” It is, I suppose, this sort of thing that is meant when people speak about the need for replacing the outworn formulas and clichés of liberalism and radicalism with *new ideas*.

To what does one conform? To institutions, obviously. To the dead images that rot in one’s mind, unavoidably. And almost always, to the small grating necessities of day-to-day survival. In these senses it may be said that we are all conformists to one or another degree. When Sidney Hook writes, “I see no specific virtue in the attitude of conformity or non-conformity,” he is right if he means that no human being can, or should, entirely accept or reject the moral and social modes of his time. And he is right in adding that there are occasions, such as the crisis of the Weimar republic, when the nonconformism of a Stefan George or an Oswald Spengler can have unhappy consequences.

But Professor Hook seems to me quite wrong in supposing that his remark applies significantly to present-day America. It would apply if we lived in a world where ideas could be weighed in free and delicate balance, without social pressures or contaminations, so that our choices would be made solely from a passion for truth. As it happens, however, there are tremendous pressures in America that make for intellectual conformism and consequently, in this tense and difficult age, there are very real virtues in preserving the attitude of critical skepticism and distance. Even some of the more extreme antics of the professional “bohemians” or literary anarchists take on a certain value which in cooler moments they might not have.<sup>3</sup>

What one conforms to most of all—despite and against one’s intentions—is the zeitgeist, that vast insidious sum of pressures and fashions; one drifts along, anxious and compliant, upon the favored assumptions of the moment; and not a soul in the intellectual world can escape this. Only, some resist and some don’t. Today the zeitgeist presses down upon us with a greater insistence than at any other moment of the century. In the 1930s many of those who hovered about the *New Masses* were mere camp followers of success; but the conformism of the party-line intellectual, at least before 1936, did sometimes bring him into conflict with established power: he had to risk something. Now, by contrast, established power and the dominant intellectual tendencies have come together in a harmony such as this country has



not seen since the Gilded Age; and this, of course, makes the temptations of conformism all the more acute. The carrots, for once, are real.

Real even for literary men, who these days prefer to meditate upon symbolic vegetables. I would certainly not wish to suggest any direct correlation between our literary assumptions and the nature of our politics; but surely some of the recent literary trends and fashions owe something to the more general intellectual drift toward conformism. Not, of course, that liberalism dominates literary life, as it dominates the rest of the intellectual world. Whatever practical interest most literary men have in politics comes to little else than the usual liberalism, but their efforts at constructing literary ideologies—frequently as forced marches to discover values our society will not yield them—result in something quite different from liberalism. Through much of our writing, both creative and critical, there run a number of ideological motifs, the importance of which is hardly diminished by the failure of the men who employ them to be fully aware of their implications. Thus, a major charge that might be brought against some New Critics is not that they practice formal criticism but that they don't; not that they see the work of art as an object to be judged according to laws of its own realm but that, often unconsciously, they weave ideological assumptions into their writings.<sup>4</sup> Listening last summer to Cleanth Brooks lecture on Faulkner, I was struck by the deep hold that the term "orthodox" has acquired on his critical imagination, and not, by the way, on his alone. But "orthodox" is not, properly speaking, a critical term at all; it pertains to matters of religious or other belief rather than to literary judgment; and a habitual use of such terms can only result in the kind of "slanted" criticism Mr. Brooks has been so quick, and right, to condemn.

Together with "orthodox" there goes a cluster of terms which, in their sum, reveal an implicit ideological bias. The word "traditional" is especially tricky here, since it has legitimate uses in both literary and moral-ideological contexts. What happens, however, in much contemporary criticism is that these two contexts are taken to either be one or to be organically related, so that it becomes possible to assume that a sense of literary tradition necessarily involves and sanctions a "traditional" view of morality. There is a powerful inclination here—it is the doing of the impish zeitgeist—to forget that literary tradition can be fruitfully seen as a series of revolts, literary but sometimes more than literary, of generation against generation, age against age. The emphasis on "tradition" has other contemporary implications: it is used as a not very courageous means of countering the experimental and the modern; it can enclose the academic assumption—and this is the curse of the Ph.D. system—that the whole of the literary past is at every point equally relevant to a modern intelligence; and it frequently includes the provincial American need to be more genteel than the gentry, more English than the English. Basically, it has served as a means of asserting conservative or reactionary moral-ideological views not, as they should be asserted, in their own terms, but through the refining medium of literary talk.

In general, there has been a tendency among critics to subsume literature under their own moral musings, which makes for a conspicuously humorless kind of criticism.<sup>5</sup> Morality is assumed to be a sufficient container for the floods of experience, and poems or novels that gain their richness from the complexity with which they dramatize the incommensurability between man's existence and his conceptualizing, are thinned, pruned, and allegorized into moral fables. Writers who spent—in both senses of the word—their lives wrestling with terrible private demons are elevated into literary dons and deacons. It is as if Stendhal had never come forth, with his subversive wit, to testify how often life and literature find the whole moral apparatus irrelevant or tedious, as if Lawrence had never written *The Man Who Died*, as if Nietzsche had never launched his great attack on the Christian impoverishment of

425 the human psyche. One can only be relieved, therefore, at knowing a few critics personally:  
how pleasant the discrepancy between their writings and their lives!

But it is Original Sin that today commands the highest prestige in the literary world. Like  
nothing else, it allows literary men to enjoy a sense of profundity and depth—to relish a  
disenchantment which allows no further risk of becoming enchanted—as against the  
430 superficiality of *mere* rationalism. It allows them to appropriate to the “tradition” the greatest  
modern writers, precisely those whose values and allegiances are most ambiguous, complex,  
and enigmatic, while at the same time generously leaving, as Leslie Fiedler once suggested,  
Dreiser and Farrell as the proper idols for that remnant benighted enough to maintain a  
naturalist philosophy. To hold, as Dickens remarks in *Bleak House*, “a loose belief that if the  
435 world go wrong, it was, in some off-hand manner, never meant to go right,” this becomes the  
essence of wisdom. (Liberals too have learned to cast a warm eye on “man’s fallen nature,” so  
that one gets the high comedy of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. interrupting his quite worldly  
political articles with uneasy bows in the direction of Kierkegaard.) And with this latest  
dispensation come, of course, many facile references to the ideas supposedly held by  
440 Rousseau<sup>6</sup> and Marx, that man is “perfectible” and that progress moves in a steady upward  
curve.

I say, facile references, because no one who has troubled to read Rousseau or Marx could  
write such things. Exactly what the “perfectibility of man” is supposed to mean, if anything at  
all, I cannot say; but it is not a phrase intrinsic to the *kind* of thought one finds in the mature  
445 Marx or, most of the time, in Rousseau. Marx did not base his argument for socialism on any  
view that one could isolate a constant called “human nature”; he would certainly have agreed  
with Ortega that man has not a nature, but a history. Nor did he have a very rosy view of the  
human beings who were his contemporaries or recent predecessors: see in *Capital* the chapter  
on the Working Day, a grisly catalogue of human bestiality. Nor did he hold to a naive theory  
450 of progress: he wrote that the victories of progress “seem bought by the loss of character. At  
the same pace that mankind masters nature, man seems to become enslaved to other men or to  
his own infamy.”

As for Rousseau, the use of even a finger’s worth of historical imagination should suggest that  
the notion of “a state of nature,” which modern literary people so enjoy attacking, was a  
455 political metaphor employed in a prerevolutionary situation, and not, therefore, to be  
understood outside its context. Rousseau explicitly declared that he did not suppose the “state  
of nature” to have existed in historical time; it was, he said, “a pure idea of reason” reached  
by abstraction from the observable state of society. As G. D. H. Cole remarks, “in political  
matters at any rate, the ‘state of nature’ is for [Rousseau] only a term of controversy . . . he  
460 means by ‘nature’ not the original state of a thing, nor even its reduction to the simplest  
terms; he is passing over to the conception of ‘nature’ as identical with the full development  
of [human] capacity. . . .” There are, to be sure, elements in Rousseau’s thought which one  
may well find distasteful, but these are not the elements commonly referred to when he is  
used in literary talk as a straw man to be beaten with the cudgels of “orthodoxy.”

465 What then is the significance of the turn to Original Sin among so many intellectuals? Surely  
not to inform us, at this late moment, that man is capable of evil. Or is it, as Cleanth Brooks  
writes, to suggest that man is a “limited” creature, limited in possibilities and capacities, and  
hence unable to achieve his salvation through social means? Yes, to be sure; but the problem  
of history is to determine, by action, how far those limits may go. Conservative critics like to  
470 say that “man’s fallen nature” makes unrealistic the liberal-radical vision of the good  
society—apparently, when Eve bit the apple she predetermined, with one fatal crunch, that  
her progeny could work its way up to capitalism, and not a step further. But the liberal-radical

vision of the good society does not depend upon a belief in the “unqualified goodness of man”; nor does it locate salvation in society: anyone in need of being saved had better engage in a private scrutiny. The liberal-radical claim is merely that the development of technology has now made possible—possible, not inevitable—a solution of those material problems that have burdened man kind for centuries. These problems solved, man is then on his own, to make of his self and his world what he can.

The literary prestige of Original Sin cannot be understood without reference to the current cultural situation; it cannot be understood except as a historical phenomenon reflecting, like the whole turn to religion and religiosity, the weariness of intellectuals in an age of defeat and their yearning to remove themselves from the bloodied arena of historical action and choice, which necessarily means, of secular action and choice. Much sarcasm and anger has been expended on the “failure of nerve” theory, usually by people who take it as a personal affront to be told that there is a connection between what happens in their minds and what happens in the world; but if one looks at the large-scale shifts among intellectuals during the past twenty-five years, it becomes impossible to put *all* of them down to a simultaneous, and thereby miraculous, discovery of Truth; some at least must be seen as a consequence of those historical pressures which make this an age of conformism. Like other efforts to explain major changes in belief, the “failure of nerve” theory does not tell us why certain people believed in the thirties what was only to become popular in the fifties and why others still believe in the fifties what was popular in the thirties; but it does tell us something more important: why a complex of beliefs is dominant at one time and subordinate at another.

## 5

I have tried to trace a rough pattern from social history through politics and finally into literary ideology, as a means of explaining the power of the conformist impulse in our time. But it is obvious that in each intellectual “world” there are impulses of this kind that cannot easily be shown to have their sources in social or historical pressures. Each intellectual world gives rise to its own patterns of obligation and preference. The literary world, being relatively free from the coarser kinds of social pressure, enjoys a considerable degree of detachment and autonomy. (Not as much as it likes to suppose, but a considerable degree.) That the general intellectual tendency is to acquiesce in what one no longer feels able to change or modify strongly encourages the internal patterns of conformism in the literary world and intensifies the yearning, common to all groups but especially to small and insecure groups, to draw together in a phalanx of solidarity. Then too, those groups that live by hostility to the dominant values of society—in this case, cultural values—find it extremely difficult to avoid an inner conservatism as a way of balancing their public role of opposition; anyone familiar with radical politics knows this phenomenon only too well. Finally, the literary world, while quite powerless in relation to, say, the worlds of business and politics, disposes of a measurable amount of power and patronage within its own domain; which makes, again, for predictable kinds of influence.

Whoever would examine the inner life of the literary world should turn first not to the magazines or the dignitaries or famous writers but to the graduate students, for like it or not the graduate school has become the main recruiting grounds for critics and sometimes even for writers. Here, in conversation with the depressed classes of the academy, one sees how the Ph.D. system—more powerful today than it has been for decades, since so few other choices are open to young literary men—grinds and batters personality into a mold of cautious

520 routine. And what one finds among these young people, for all their intelligence and devotion  
and eagerness, is often appalling: a remarkable desire to be “critics,” not as an  
accompaniment to the writing of poetry or the changing of the world or the study of man and  
God, but just critics—as if criticism were a *subject*, as if one could be a critic without having  
at least four nonliterary opinions, or as if criticism “in itself” could adequately engage an  
525 adult mind for more than a small part of its waking time. An equally astonishing indifference  
to the ideas that occupy the serious modern mind—Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, Frazer, Dewey  
are not great thinkers in their right, but reservoirs from which one dredges up “approaches to  
criticism”—together with a fabulous knowledge of what Ransom said about Winters with  
regard to what Winters had said about Eliot. And a curiously humble discipleship—but also  
530 arrogant to those beyond the circle—so that one meets not fresh minds in growth but apostles  
of Burke or Trilling or Winters or Leavis or Brooks or neo-Aristotle.

Very little of this is the fault of the graduate students themselves, for they, like the  
distinguished figures I have just listed, are the victims of an unhappy cultural moment. What  
we have today in the literary world is a gradual bureaucratization of opinion and taste; not a  
dictatorship, not a conspiracy, not a coup, not a Machiavellian plot to impose a mandatory  
535 “syllabus”; but the inevitable result of outer success and inner hardening. Fourth-rate  
exercises in exegesis are puffed in the magazines while so remarkable and provocative a work  
as Arnold Hauser’s *Social History of Art* is hardly reviewed, its very title indicating the  
reason. Learned young critics who have never troubled to open a novel by Turgenev can rattle  
off reams of Kenneth Burke, which gives them, understandably, a sensation of having  
540 enlarged upon literature. Literature itself becomes a raw material which critics work up into  
schemes of structure and symbol; to suppose that it is concerned with anything so gauche as  
human experience or obsolete as human beings—“You mean,” a student said to me, “that  
you’re interested in the *characters* of novels!” Symbols clutter the literary landscape like the  
pots and pans a two-year-old strews over the kitchen floor; and what is wrong here is not  
545 merely the transparent absence of literary tact—the gift for saying when a pan is a pan and  
when a pan is a symbol—but far more important, a transparent lack of interest in represented  
experience. For Robert Wooster Stallman the fact that Stephen Crane looking at the sun felt  
moved to compare it to a wafer is not enough, the existence of suns and wafers and their  
possible conjunction is not sufficiently marvelous: both objects must be absorbed into  
550 Christian symbolism (an ancient theory of literature developed by the church fathers to prove  
that suns, moons, vulva, chairs, money, hair, pots, pans, and words are really crucifixes).  
Techniques for reading a novel that have at best a limited relevance are frozen into dogmas:  
one might suppose from glancing at the more imposing literary manuals that “point of view”  
is the crucial means of judging a novel. (Willa Cather, according to Caroline Gordon, was  
555 “astonishingly ignorant of her craft,” for she refrained from “using a single consciousness as a  
prism of moral reflection.” The very mistake Tolstoy made, too!) Criticism itself, far from  
being the reflection of a solitary mind upon a work of art and therefore, like the solitary mind,  
incomplete and subjective, comes increasingly to be regarded as a problem in mechanics, the  
tools, methods, and trade secrets of which can be picked up, usually during the summer, from  
560 the more experienced operatives. In the mind of Stanley Hyman, who serves the in  
dispensable function of reducing fashionable literary notions, criticism seems to resemble  
Macy’s on bargain day: *First floor, symbols; Second floor, myths (rituals to the rear on your  
right); Third floor, ambiguities and paradoxes; Fourth floor, word count ing; Fifth floor, Miss  
Harrison’s antiquities; Attic, Marxist remnants; Basement, Freud; Sub basement, Jung.*  
565 *Watch your step, please.*

What is most disturbing, however, is that writing about literature and writers has become an  
industry. The preposterous academic requirement that professors write books they don’t want  
to write and no one wants to read, together with the obtuse assumption that piling up more

and more irrelevant information about an author's life helps us understand his work—this makes for a vast flood of books that have little to do with literature, criticism, or even scholarship. Would you care to know the contents of the cargo (including one elephant) carried by the vessel of which Hawthorne's father was captain in 1795? Robert Cantwell has an itemized list, no doubt as an aid to reading *The Scarlet Letter*. Jay Leyda knows what happened to Melville day by day and it is hardly his fault that most days nothing very much happened. Edgar Johnson does as much for Dickens and adds plot summaries too, no doubt because he is dealing with a little-read author. Another American scholar has published a full book on *Mardi*, which is astonishing not because he wrote the book but because he managed to finish reading *Mardi* at all.

I have obviously chosen extreme examples and it would be silly to contend that they adequately describe the American literary scene; but like the distorting mirrors in Coney Island they help bring into sharper contour the major features. Or as Donald Davie writes in the English journal, *Twentieth Century*:

The professional poet has already disappeared from the literary scene, and the professional man of letters is following him into the grave. . . . It becomes more and more difficult, and will soon be impossible, for a man to make his living as a literary dilettante. . . . And instead of the professional man of letters we have the professional critic, the young don writing in the first place for other dons, and only incidentally for that supremely necessary fiction, the common reader. In other words, an even greater proportion of what is written about literature, and even of what literature is written, is "academic." . . . Literary standards are now in academic hands; for the freelance man of letters, who once supplemented and corrected the don, is fast disappearing from the literary scene. . . .

The pedant is as common as he ever was. And now that willy-nilly so much writing about literature is in academic hands, his activities are more dangerous than ever. But he has changed his habits. Twenty years ago he was to be heard asserting that his business was with hard facts, that questions of value and technique were not his affair, and that criticism could therefore be left to the impressionistic journalist. Now the pedant is proud to call himself a critic; he prides himself on evaluation and analysis; he aims to be penetrating, not informative. . . .

The pedant is a very adaptable creature, and can be as comfortable with Mr. Eliot's "objective correlative," Mr. Empson's "ambiguities" and Dr. Leavis's "complexities" as in the older suit of critical clothes that he has now, for the most part, abandoned.

Davie has in mind the literary situation in England, but all one needs for applying his remarks to America is an ability to multiply.

## 6

All of the tendencies toward cultural conformism come to a head in the assumption that the avant-garde, as both concept and intellectual grouping, has become obsolete or irrelevant. Yet the future quality of American culture, I would maintain, largely depends on the survival, and the terms of survival, of precisely the kind of dedicated group that the avant-garde has been.

The avant-garde first appeared on the American scene some twenty-five or thirty years ago, as a response to the need for absorbing the meanings of the cultural revolution that had taken place in Europe during the first two decades of the century. The achievements of Joyce,

Proust, Schoenberg, Bartók, Picasso, Matisse, to mention only the obvious figures, signified one of the major turnings in the cultural history of the West, a turning made all the more crucial by the fact that it came not during the vigor of a society but during its crisis. To counter the hostility which the work of such artists met among all the official spokesmen of culture, to discover formal terms and modes through which to secure these achievements, to insist upon the continuity between their work and the accepted, because dead, artists of the past—this became the task of the avant-garde. Somewhat later a section of the avant-garde also became politically active, and not by accident; for precisely those aroused sensibilities that had responded to the innovations of the modern masters now responded to the crisis of modern society. Thus, in the early years of a magazine like *Partisan Review*—roughly between 1936 and 1941—these two radical impulses came together in an uneasy but fruitful union; and it was in those years that the magazine seemed most exciting and vital as a link between art and experience, between the critical consciousness and the political conscience, between the avant-garde of letters and the independent left of politics.

That union has since been dissolved, and there is no likelihood that it will soon be re-established. American radicalism exists only as an idea, and that barely; the literary avant-garde—it has become a stock comment for reviewers to make—is rapidly disintegrating, without function or spirit, and held together only by an inert nostalgia.

Had the purpose of the avant-garde been to establish the currency of certain names, to make the reading of *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses* respectable in the universities, there would be no further need for its continuance. But clearly this was not the central purpose of the avant-garde; it was only an unavoidable fringe of snobbery and fashion. The struggle for Joyce mattered only as it was a struggle for literary standards; the defense of Joyce was a defense not merely of modern innovation but of that traditional culture which was the source of modern innovation. And at its best it was a defense against those spokesmen for the genteel, the respectable, and the academic who had established a stranglehold over traditional culture. At the most serious level, the avant-garde was trying to face the problem of the quality of our culture, and when all is said and done, it faced that problem with a courage and honesty that no other group in society could match.

If the history of the avant-garde is seen in this way, there is every reason for believing that its survival is as necessary today as it was twenty-five years ago. To be sure, our immediate prospect is not nearly so exciting as it must then have seemed: we face no battle on behalf of great and difficult artists who are scorned by the official voices of culture. Today, in a sense, the danger is that the serious artists are not scorned enough. Philistinism has become very shrewd: it does not attack its enemies as much as it disarms them through reasonable cautions and moderate amendments. But this hardly makes the defense of those standards that animated the avant-garde during its best days any the less a critical obligation.

It has been urged in some circles that only the pressure of habit keeps serious writers from making “raids” upon the middlebrow world, that it is now possible to win substantial outposts in that world if we are ready to take risks. Perhaps. But surely no one desires a policy of highbrow isolation, and no one could oppose raids, provided that is what they really are. The precondition for successful raids, however, is that the serious writers themselves have a sense—not of belonging to an exclusive club—but of representing those cultural values which alone can sustain them while making their raids. Thus far the incursions of serious writers into the middlebrow world have not been remarkably successful: for every short story writer who has survived the *New Yorker* one could point to a dozen whose work became trivial and frozen after they had begun to write for it. Nor do I advocate, in saying this, a policy of evading temptations. I advocate overcoming them. Writers today have no choice, often

enough, but to write for magazines like the *New Yorker*—and worse, far worse. But what matters is the terms upon which the writer enters into such relationships, his willingness to understand with whom he is dealing, his readiness not to deceive himself that an unpleasant necessity is a desirable virtue.

665 It seems to me beyond dispute that, thus far at least, in the encounter between high and middle culture, the latter has come off by far the better. Every current of the zeitgeist, every imprint of social power, every assumption of contemporary American life favors the safe and comforting patterns of middlebrow feeling. And then too the gloomier Christian writers may have a point when they tell us that it is easier for a soul to fall than to rise.<sup>7</sup>

670 Precisely at the time that the highbrows seem inclined to abandon what is sometimes called their “proud isolation,” the middlebrows have become more intransigent in their opposition to everything that is serious and creative in our culture (which does not, of course, prevent them from exploiting and contaminating, for purposes of mass gossip, everything that is serious and creative in our culture). What else is the meaning of the coarse attack launched by the  
675 *Saturday Review* against the highbrows, under the guise of discussing the Pound case? What, for that matter, is the meaning of the hostility with which the *Partisan Review* symposium on “Our Country and Our Culture” was received? It would take no straining of texts to see this symposium as a disconcerting sign of how far intellectuals have drifted in the direction of cultural adaptation, yet the middlebrows wrote of it with blunt enmity. And perhaps because  
680 they too sensed this drift in the symposium, the middlebrows, highly confident at the moment, became more aggressive, for they do not desire compromise, they know that none is possible. So genial a middlebrow as Elmer Davis, in a long review of the symposium, entitled with a characteristic smirk “The Care and Feeding of Intellectuals,” ends up on a revealing note: “The highbrows seem to be getting around to recognizing what the middlebrows have known  
685 for the past thirty years. This is progress.” It is also the best possible argument for the maintenance of the avant-garde, even if only as a kind of limited defense.

Much has been written about the improvement of cultural standards in America, though a major piece of evidence—the wide circulation of paperbound books—is still an unweighed and unanalyzed quantity. The basic relations of cultural power remain unchanged, however:  
690 the middlebrows continue to dominate. The most distinguished newspaper in this country retains as its music critic a mediocrity named Olin Downes; the literary critic for that newspaper is a philistine named Orville Prescott; the most widely read book reviewer in this country is a buffoon named Sterling North; the most powerful literary journal, read with admiration by many librarians and professors, remains the *Saturday Review*. Nothing here  
695 gives us cause for reassurance or relaxation; nothing gives us reason to dissolve that compact in behalf of critical intransigence known as the avant-garde.

No formal ideology or program is entirely adequate for coping with the problems that intellectuals face in the twentieth century. No easy certainties and no easy acceptance of uncertainty. All the forms of authority, the states and institutions and monster bureaucracies,  
700 that press in upon modern life—what have these shown us to warrant the surrender of independence?

The most glorious vision of the intellectual life is still that which is loosely called humanist: the idea of a mind committed yet dispassionate, ready to stand alone, curious, eager, skeptical. The banner of critical independence, ragged and torn though it may be, is still the best we  
705 have.



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1. The Smith Act, passed in 1940, was a loosely worded piece of legislation that made it unlawful to “conspire to advocate the overthrow of the government by force and violence.”

2. It must in honesty be noted that many of the intellectuals least alive to the problem of civil liberties are former Stalinists or radicals; and this, more than the vast anti-Marxist literature of recent years, constitutes a serious criticism of American radicalism. For the truth is that the “old-fashioned liberals” like John Dewey and Alexander Meiklejohn, at whom it was once so fashionable to sneer, have displayed a finer sensitivity to the need for defending domestic freedoms than the more “sophisticated” intellectuals who leapt from Marx to Machiavelli.

3. It may be asked whether a Stalinist’s “nonconformism” is valuable. No, it isn’t; the Stalinist is anything but a nonconformist; he has merely shifted the object of his worship, as later, when he abandons Stalinism, he usually shifts it again.

4. This may be true of all critics, but is most perilous to those who suppose themselves free of ideological coloring. In a review of my Faulkner book—rather favorable, so that no ego wounds prompt what follows—Robert Daniel writes that “Because of Mr. Howe’s connections with . . . the *Partisan Review*, one might expect his literary judgments to be shaped by political and social preconceptions, but that does not happen often.” Daniel is surprised that a critic whose politics happen to be radical should try to keep his literary views distinct from his nonliterary ones. To be sure, this is sometimes very difficult, and perhaps no one entirely succeeds. But the one sure way of not succeeding is to write, as Daniel does, from no very pressing awareness that it is a problem for critics who appear in the *Sewanee Review* quite as much as for those who appear in *Partisan Review*.

5. Writing about *Wuthering Heights* Mark Schorer solemnly declares that “the theme of the moral magnificence of unmoral passion is an impossible theme to sustain, and the needs of her temperament to the contrary, all personal longing and reverie to the contrary, Emily Brontë teaches herself that this was indeed not at all what her material must mean as art.” What is more, if Emily Brontë had lived a little longer she would have been offered a Chair in Moral Philosophy.

6. Randall Jarrell, who usually avoids fashionable cant: “Most of us know, now, that Rousseau was wrong; that man, when you knock his chains off, sets up the death camps.” Which chains were knocked off in Germany to permit the setting up of death camps? And which chains must be put up again to prevent a repetition of the death camps?

7. Thus Professor Gilbert Highet, the distinguished classicist, writing in *Harper’s* finds André Gide “an abominably wicked man. His work seems to me to be either shallowly based symbolism, or else cheap cynicism made by inverting commonplaces or by grinning through them. . . . Gide had the curse of perpetual immaturity. But then I am always aware of the central fact about Gide—that he was a sexual pervert who kept proclaiming and justifying his perversion; and perhaps this blinds me to his merits . . . the garrulous, Pangloss-like, pimple-scratching, self exposure of Gide.” I don’t mean to suggest that many fall so low, but then not many philistines are so well educated as Highet.