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TWO TYPES OF "HEROES" IN POST-WAR BRITISH FICTION

BY WILLIAM VAN O'CONNOR

IN NOVEL after novel," William York Tindall says, in *Forces in Modern British Literature*, "sensitive lads are apprenticed to life, formed by its forces, rebelling against them, sometimes failing, sometimes emerging in victory. . . . From 1903 onwards almost every first novel was a novel of adolescence." Samuel Butler, he adds, started the vogue with *The Way of All Flesh* (1903). He "wrote this book between 1872 and 1884 to express hatred for his father, admiration for himself, and his dearest prejudices."

Perhaps we can push the date back of 1903 to Huysmans' *À rebours* (1884) and his sensitive protagonist, des Esseintes. From Huysmans we go to Oscar Wilde, to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), which owes much to *À rebours*. The world in which these sensitive young men find themselves is Philistine, money-grubbing, dull, insensitive.

Many of the novels written in this convention have been notable contributions to modern British fiction. There was E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey* (1907), Arnold Bennett's *Clayhanger* (1910), Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913), Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* (1915), and Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). There are many other English novels in this vein.¹

What caused this convention? Probably there is no simple answer. In general, however, it reflected the artist's sense that he had turned away from an insensitive middle-class world, and that the latter rejected him. We have different names for the phenomenon, such as the Alienation of the Artist and the Literature of Exile. The more indifferent society was to the artist, the more contemptuous, the more self-consciously sensitive, and sometimes the more precious the poet or fiction writer became. We will all admit that modern literature, whether in poetry, fiction, or in criticism, is *intense, alert*, self-consciously as perfect as it is possible to be. One need, in proof, only invoke the names of T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf. The former was so intense about the purity of poetry that he was afraid that meaning—knowing what the poet wanted to say—would adulterate it. Mrs. Woolf would have nothing to do with middle-brow talents or tastes. Art, as she would have it, would be high-brow, or nothing.

Experimentation was characteristic of the period. Ways of telling a story were explored.

There was Joyce's impersonal mode, Lawrence's characters attracting or repelling each other as though in an emotional-electric field, and Mrs. Woolf insisting on discovering the secret life inside Mrs. Brown's head. There was the effaced narrator, the novel-of-ideas, stream-of-consciousness, and the novel seen as a poem. Yet throughout these experiments, two things usually remained constant: the protagonist, as alter ego for the novelist, continued to be the sensitive individual, and society insensitive. Usually sympathy was directed toward the protagonist, for he was among the elect, those who treasured art, literature, aesthetic states of being. There was something mysterious, almost sacred, about his sensibilities. Sometimes it was not merely society that was at fault, it was the universe itself, stonily indifferent.

II

English fiction in the years since World War II has produced a new kind of protagonist. He is a rather seedy young man and suspicious of all pretensions. He spends a lot of time in pubs, has any number of half-hearted love affairs. He gets into trouble with his landlady, his boss, and his family. There is nothing heroic about him, unless it is his refusal to be taken in by humbug. He is a comic figure, with an aura of pathos about him. *Lucky Jim* was one of the first, and is probably still the best, of these novels. Keith Waterhouse's first novel, *Billy Liar* (1960), is among the most recent.²

Billy Fisher is wildly imaginative. Like Jim Dixon he escapes into dream worlds; he calls them "fast excursions in Ambrosia." There he has upper-class parents who in earlier English novels were called Mater and Pater, or he carries on high-powered conversations with Bertrand Russell or Winston Churchill. Billy's own Yorkshire town is filled with "dark satanic power

¹ In America, the sensitive protagonist in an insensitive world was to be seen in Scott Fitzgerald's Amory Blaine, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), John Dos Passos' John Andrews, *Three Soldiers* (1921), Ernest Hemingway's Nick Adams, *In Our Time* (1924), William Faulkner's Bayard Sartoris, *Sartoris* (1929), and Thomas Wolfe's Eugene Gant, *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929). There are, of course, many similar novels in twentieth-century American fiction. We almost assume, in picking up a novel, that the protagonist will be poetic in temperament and in conflict with an indifferent, materialistic society.

² Even more recent is *My Fried Judas* (1961), by Andrew Sinclair.

stations, house estates, and dark satanic tea-shops." Billy finds it insufferably dull.

Billy wears his sensitivity like armor. The platitudes of his father, mother, and granny—who are "just folks" with a vengeance—glance off it. None of his family would recognize a subtle remark if they sat on it—and they usually do. Billy works for two funeral directors. One of them keeps a copy of *The Loved One*, not for fun, but for ideas. His co-workers are elbow prodders and tellers of soggy jokes.

Billy is a compulsive and ingenious liar, and this talent earns him, among other things he hadn't hoped to earn, three fiancées, each more horrible than the other. If one has to be *the* most horrible, it is probably Barbara. For Barbara, human emotions are something best kept wrapped in cellophane. She prefers eating oranges to making love. Once Billy puts a passion pill into a piece of candy, hoping to arouse her, but the pill makes her sleepy.

Like Jim Dixon, Billy gets into hot water with his superiors. The chief of his problems is that he has not mailed the firm's calendars, several hundred of them. Instead, he has destroyed or hidden them, and pocketed the money he had been given for postage. There are a number of ludicrous scenes concerned with getting rid of the evidence and, finally, his being caught.

Billy writes comic skits, and hopes to get to London, where Success, of the sort he associates with Ambrosia, awaits him. After a number of embarrassing scenes with his mother, his fiancées, and an affair with a girl named Liz who unfortunately for Billy has wanderlust, he gets to the railroad station, headed for London. But something pulls at him, and he starts for home. Before he has gone many yards he is off on another excursion to Ambrosia.

Another recent novel is *This Sporting Life* (1960) by David Storey. Arthur Machin, the "hero," is a grizzly bear type of football player; he is selected to play on the company team. The followers of rugby are fierce and fanatical, and the rewards for the players, in money, prestige, are far greater than what they could expect in their grimy jobs as miners. Arthur Machin unquestioningly accepts the adulation, the social elevation, the attention of fast-living girls, and the money. On the football field he is vicious, skillful, and successful. He becomes a celebrity.

The conflict of the novel resides in the nature of the affair he has with a young widow, Mrs. Hammond; she is his landlady; and she is as fearful and retreating as he is courageous and aggressive. Whereas the young women in Arthur's life

very willingly give themselves to him, and add to the chorus of praise, Mrs. Hammond does not. She is suspicious of him, and although she accepts his gifts for herself and her two children, she does so most grudgingly. She is very ashamed in the presence of her neighbors, knowing what her reputation among them has become. Mrs. Hammond, in other words, refuses to accept the context in which Arthur Machin lives, refuses to accept his terms. Finally they separate, and she dies.

This Sporting Life is Arthur Machin's spiritual autobiography. He is undemonstrative and in many ways not speculative. Mrs. Hammond is also undemonstrative and unspeculative. When either arrives at a conclusion, however, there is something inevitable and final about it. Mrs. Hammond sees through pretense immediately, and there is a basic honesty to Machin's mind, even when he tries to deceive himself.

The setting is the world of John Braine's *Room at the Top*. Life is hard, grim, and the towns and landscape are desolate. The brutality of the rugby matches seems an altogether fitting response to the squalor and desolation, a symbol of it. For example, "He was too slow. I was moving away when the leather shot back into my hands, and, before I could pass, a shoulder came up to my jaw. It rammed my teeth together with a force that stunned me to blackness." Machin is describing the splintering of five of his upper teeth. Despite the teeth being destroyed, he continues, after wiping his mouth off with a sponge, to play, and to play well.

The novel begins slowly. The prose seems relatively undistinguished, to have something of the grayness of the subject; and the characters are not especially interesting. But by the point, half way though the book, when the nature of the conflict becomes clear, one's attention becomes taut and never slackens. Arthur Machin, not unlike John Braine's Joe Lampton, knows the taste of ashes in his mouth.

The novel, *This Sporting Life*, as already implied, is similar to John Braine's widely acclaimed *Room at the Top* (1957). Joe Lampton, the protagonist of *Room at the Top*, is a quick-witted North Country working-class boy—and he is on the make. Having experienced poverty and watched it deaden the hopes and vitality of those closest to him, he becomes fascinated by the suburban managerial class. Joe has a keen eye for economic levels—which group wears what style of suit, drives which kind of car, or uses what brand of liquor. He moves with a pure single-mindedness of purpose, determined to rise.

But he has a soft spot, a flaw. He has been pursuing Susan Brown, the boss's daughter, but he falls in love with Alice, a woman ten years his senior. His opportunistic side wins, and he decides to marry Susan, who is pregnant by him. Alice, in effect, kills herself. When someone says that no one blames him, he cries out, "Oh, my God, that's the trouble."

Allen Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, yet another working-class novel, was published in 1959. The principal character, Arthur Seaton, is a factory hand and very similar to David Storey's Arthur Machin. He lives in a provincial city. He despises authority in any form, from the government on down. He becomes involved with the wife of a fellow worker. She becomes pregnant and has an abortion. He begins a relationship with her sister, which is discovered by her soldier husband. The latter and a friend of his give Seaton a severe beating. While carrying on these two affairs Seaton is attracted to a young woman whose ambition is marriage. Despite her appeal, Seaton resists, but finally capitulates.

The plot obviously is rather commonplace and unpromising, but Sillitoe, a serious writer, presents the working-class world convincingly. His characters are wholly believable. His observed detail, even when most dreary and depressing, is often poetic.

Obviously Arthur Seaton's lustiness and conflicts with society are very close to those of Arthur Machin. The world in which he lives, and finally accepts, is the one Joe Lampton is determined to leave behind him.

Neither Arthur Machin, Arthur Seaton, nor Joe Lampton belongs to the Lucky Jim type. The latter is seedy, ineffectual, comic. He is in a half-hearted contest with society, especially with the Establishment. The former, Machin, Seaton, and Lampton, are in conflict with society too, but their drama is more personal and moral and heavy. Both types have the Welfare State and postwar England as a common background, but there are significant differences. The Lucky Jim type is more akin to Samuel Beckett characters such as Murphy, except that they are comic and their alienation is not so absolute.

What was behind the Lucky Jim type, what caused him? In part he is an expression of two segments of English culture in conflict, the world of "Oxford accented culture," or the gentleman's world, and the culture of a recently educated class, those who, despite their working-class or lower-middle-class backgrounds, have gone to Oxford or Cambridge or a provincial university.

The first of these novels was Philip Larkin's *Jill* (1946), a story of war-time Oxford. Its hero, John Kemp, is bemused by his education and by the trauma he suffers upon giving up his class. Perhaps he is only in part the prototype of the new hero because he is pathetic and not comic. *Jill* was generally ignored.

John Wain created a similar hero in *Hurry on Down* (1953). Charles Lumley, fresh out of the university, takes on a succession of jobs—window cleaner, dope runner, hospital orderly, chauffeur, bouncer, writer of jokes for a radio show. Lumley is ineffectual to begin with, but his university training has compounded his inability to make a living. The action moves at a fast clip, with few pauses for reflection.

The protagonist for Wain's *Living in the Present* (1955), Edgar Banks, is also the new hero: frustrated, he decides to commit a murder and then kill himself. This leads to many bizarre adventures. Finally he goes back to his job as school teacher and to the dreariness of his daily living.

Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* (1954) has become the best known of these novels. Jim Dixon, the "hero," has an unerring eye for the pretentious, for the phoney, in institutions, in his colleagues (he teaches medieval history in a provincial university), and in himself. He "belongs" neither to the world of his childhood nor to the new world he inhabits, thanks to his university education and profession. He lives a strange fantasy life, and his frustrations sometimes cause him to be "quick off the mark" and sometimes a hopeless lout. But fortune favors him: he wins the girl and gets the job for which he has most talent, as a spotter of the phoney. *That Uncertain Feeling* (1955) has as hero John Lewis, a twenty-six year old satiric sub-librarian at Aberdarcy in Wales. Surrounded by drying diapers and underclothes in a small apartment, he and his family live a strictly middle-brow existence. Lewis and his wife are university graduates, but they are far from being dedicated to the pursuit of "high culture." Lewis' twin problems are controlling his lust and maintaining his integrity. Much of the book's humor is at the expense of those who are arty and pretentious. Lewis, however, is too settled to be classified with the Lucky Jim type.³

Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net* (1954) has as hero Jake Donahue, a writer who makes his living as a

³ Amis' two later novels, *I Like It Here* (1958) and *A Girl Like You* (1960), are clearly Welfare State novels, and the protagonists have obvious connections with Lucky Jim, but neither has enough of the latter's characteristics to put him in the line we are trying to delimit.

translator. Donahue is Irish and not a product of the Welfare State, but, as an unsettled hero in an unsettled world, he has a family resemblance to Joe Lumley, Lucky Jim, and Billy Fisher. And the shadowy world he inhabits, of writers, artists, theatre people, and left-wingers, is not very different from their often dingy, dimly-lit half worlds.⁴

Dennis Enright's *Academic Year* (1954), a novel about a young Englishman named Packet, who is teaching in Egypt, has been called "*Lucky Jim* with much more humanity and much less smart lacquer." Packet also has been a "scholarship boy." Unable to find a post in England, he takes a lectureship in Egypt. Enright's second novel, *Heaven Knows Where* (1957) sends Packet to the imaginary island of Velo, in the South China Sea. The fictional world is a highly fanciful one, but there are backward glances at the Welfare State and at Packet's working-class origins.

One could suspect that *Happy as Larry* (1957) by Thomas Hinde was written to order. Larry Vincent, a would-be writer, is filled with self-distrust. He is the most loutish and ineffectual of these Lucky Jim types. Marriage does not create in him any sense of responsibility. His wife's successful middle-class parents loom in the background, a constant reminder of his being a failure. He goes from one bizarre and brutal predicament to another. Everything is askew and distorted. All he has is an unhypocritical honesty—which makes him more pitiful than he might otherwise be. After a series of degrading failures, he sets out to borrow money from a friend whom he already owes several hundred pounds and who is in the hospital because of an accident Larry caused. One knows that the money will not solve anything; it will merely make possible another cycle of failure.

III

One of the earliest and most perceptive responses to the novel with the new hero was written by J. B. Priestley. It is entitled "The New Novelists."⁵ Priestley decided not to mention any novelists by name—but clearly he is discussing some of the novelists listed above.

He says that the *Zeitgeist* is producing the new fiction, and he minimizes the likelihood that any of the writers belong to a group. He sees them writing protest fiction—but not political protest nor protest against injustice in any form. Their novels represent a rejection of Society. At the very center of this fiction, he says, is the cry "Count us out." There is nothing militant: these novels do not openly denounce, nor do they sug-

gest better methods of organizing society. They reject it. Priestley obviously has the Lucky Jim type in mind, not the Joe Lampton.

Priestley sees two conventions operating in these novels. One, the worlds they present seem dream-like. "These pubs, these schools and colleges, these offices, these film studios, do not seem quite solidly set in the world I know. They are rather like stage scenery out of drawing and queerly coloured." Two, their central characters are deliberately unheroic. Priestley says he finds it rather hard to sympathize with them in their misfortunes. Some of these "melancholy caddish clowns and oafs do seem to need a nurse or a probation officer rather than a chronicler and a reader." Their chief ambition is to get by. They do not plan careers or take their jobs seriously. They own only a battered typewriter or a few gramophone records. If they earn or borrow money they spend it on seedy binges. Priestley finds them the loneliest characters in all fiction. He recoils from the unheroic hero—but he adds that one must assume these novelists know what they are doing.

Priestley's main point is a good one. The image presented in these novels is that of a new form of alienation. In the nineteenth century and earlier in this century, the hero, as we have said, was often a sensitive esthete who pursued the arts in lonely isolation. The new hero is sometimes an oaf, sometimes an opportunist; if he is responsible, it is usually to some need in himself. In the little worlds of these novels, ordinary public life and the affairs of responsible citizens usually appear as though off in the distance, and not only remote but frequently rather idiotic.

In the Christmas issue of *The Sunday Times*, 1955, Somerset Maugham chose *Lucky Jim* as one of the books of the year. He indicated his respect for its author's talent but he gave his primary attention to the "new world" *Lucky Jim* represents and foretells:

Lucky Jim is a remarkable novel. It has been greatly praised and widely read, but I have not noticed that any of the reviewers have remarked on its ominous significance. I am told that today rather more than sixty percent of the men who go to the universities go there on a Government grant. This is a new class that has entered upon the scene. It is the white-collar proletariat. Mr. Kingsley Amis is so talented, his observation is so keen, that you cannot fail to be convinced

⁴ Certain of Iris Murdoch's novels, and especially the latest, *A Severed Head* (1961), present the contemporary England—of London, of dons, artists, leftwingers, and the searching, skeptical young—but she has apparently dropped the Donahue type as protagonist.

⁵ *The New Statesman and Nation*, 26 June 1954.

that the young men he so brilliantly describes truly represent the class with which his novel is concerned.

They do not go to the university to acquire culture, but to get a job, and when they have got one, scamp it. They have no manners, and are woefully unable to deal with any social predicament. Their idea of a celebration is to go to a public house and drink six beers. They are mean, malicious, and envious. They will write anonymous letters to harass a fellow undergraduate and listen in to a telephone conversation that is no business of theirs. Charity, kindness, generosity, are qualities which they hold in contempt. They are scum. They will in due course leave the university. Some will doubtless sink back, perhaps with relief, into the modest class from which they emerged; some will take to drink, some to crime and go to prison. Others will become schoolmasters and form the young, or journalists and mould public opinion. A few will go to Parliament, become Cabinet Ministers and rule the country. I look upon myself as fortunate that I shall not live to see it.

Mr. Maugham's view of the post-war generation is jaundiced and disgruntled. But he has pointed out a significant fact: the cultural life of England is passing to a new class, to those who have gone to the university on their brains and regardless of their origins. One sometimes hears that the new writers are products of the new redbrick universities—but Mr. Maugham is generally right in saying "the university," by which he means Oxford or Cambridge. Mr. Maugham singles out their beer drinking for censure—but this is probably only a symptom of their representing a newer, perhaps still inchoate, culture, one that is different from Maugham's traditional "gentleman culture."

A couple of weeks later (8 January 1956), C. P. Snow replied to Mr. Maugham. His letter does not censure the generation described by Amis—it attempts to account for their actions and feelings.

Sir,—

I was distressed by Mr. Maugham's remarks about Mr. Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*. We have taken it for granted for so long that anything Mr. Maugham writes will be generous, temperate, and sensible. We shall of course go on thinking of him so; but this outburst was none of those things.

Why is it so contemptible to go to a university on a Government grant? Why is it so bestial to celebrate by drinking pints of beer? Mr. Amis has invented a highly personal comic style, and this style seems to have gone to the heads of some readers, Mr. Maugham surprisingly among them. At least I can see no other explanation why a wise man should regard Mr. Amis's favourite characters as horrors. It would be more justifiable to see them as the present-day guardians of the puritan conscience—enraged by humbug, unrealistically shocked by the compromises and jobberies of the

ordinary worldly life, more anxious than their seniors to show responsibility to those whom they love or who love them.

They seem to me very much like the bright young men who came, as I did myself, from the same social origins twenty-five or thirty years ago. I can see only one significant difference. In my time bright young men from the lower middle classes did not regard themselves as socially fixed; they thought there was a finite chance that they might some day live as successful men had lived before them.

Mr. Amis's characters cannot and do not imagine this for themselves. Starting with no capital, Lucky Jim will not accumulate enough money to change his way of life. He is never going to starve, but he cannot have a dramatic rise in the world, and he will not be able to leave money to his children.

It is an unexpected result of the Welfare State that in this sense it should make the social pattern not less rigid but much more so. Mr. Amis's characters take it with a grin, but, like all people clamped down in a rigid society, they sometimes feel that the whole affair is no concern of theirs.

V. S. Pritchett is another of the older writers who has tried to characterize and evaluate these novelists. His article is entitled "These Writers Couldn't Care Less."⁶ His is not a sympathetic account, but it is not so unsympathetic as its title implies. The hostile side of his argument is his claim that the central characters in these novels are trimmers and pursuers only of self-interest. On the other hand, he sees their authors as a new class of uprooted people, belonging neither to the class of their origins nor committed to the "dying culture" of the "class for which they can now qualify."

Pritchett also makes some useful remarks about the style and structure of many—certainly not all—of these novels. It tends to be, he says, a "talking style of people making war upon the assumptions of the middle-class culture, by refusing to wear its masks. It is a debunking style." Certainly it is true that much of the writing has the quality of a rather vulgar voice, using hit-or-miss expressions. When the occasion is right it is effective because it is satirizing the tones of the "educated voice" and objects venerated by those who take pride in their cultivation.

Secondly, Pritchett points out that a number of these novels are picaresque. These young novelists "discerned that the picaresque novelists were products of revolution: that they were engaged in adventure; and the modern adventure was a rambling journey from one conception of society to another."

⁶ The New York Times Book Review, 28 April 1957.

Varied formulas have been given to account for the new hero. Geoffrey Gorer, in "The Perils of Hypergamy," says his tensions are consequent upon marrying into a higher class than that of his origins. This accounts in part for Joe Lampton and Larry Vincent. Jim Dixon marries out of his class too, but by the time he does so, his tensions seem to be behind him. Hypergamy is not a problem for most of the other new heroes. Perhaps one should say that the new hero has problems that grow out of his essential classlessness.

The moods of a generation or a nation are not easy to diagnose—and the mood of the post-war writer in the English Welfare State is no exception. Probably there is no single mood. But common to most of these novels is an air of being hemmed-in, restricted, of characters trying to find their way in new social and cultural situations.

Clearly shifts in literary conventions are in response to social changes. English fiction, in the past, was mostly a product of upper-class culture. Settings could include middle- and upper-class homes, country houses, and expensive flats, nannies, tutors, public schools, and long weekends. This more recent fiction is likely to describe institutions, small libraries, hospitals, or village governing offices. It can exhibit small flats, slick picture magazines, radio programs, jazz records, movies, and pubs. It is a world largely Americanized.

The very style and structure of the novels are appropriate to the world the fiction evokes. The style has none of Virginia Woolf's literary elegance and carefully thought-out metaphors, E. M. Forster's urbanity, or Joyce's preciseness. This latter style is less concerned to awe or to create a lasting, impersonal work of art. It is likely to be flip, as though out of the side of the author's mouth, to be closer to bright journalism.

Virginia Woolf criticized the conventions of Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, and John Galsworthy. In general, she objected to the *externality* of life in their novels. "Life," she said in a now famous sentence, "is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end." For her generation, for the moderns, or for the "Georgians" as she also called them, "the point of interest lies very likely in the dark places of psychology."

The authors of the post-war fiction discussed above have ceased being interested in the murky darkness of the individual consciousness, the

light and shadow in an isolated mind. The characters are social beings insofar as they play roles in society, as students, employees, or young men jimmying a lock and trying not to be caught. Emphasis is on the action, the movement of the story. There is neither interest in nor time for explorations of a single consciousness, such as Mrs. Woolf explored in *Clarissa Dalloway* or Mrs. Ramsay. The author's point of focus is external, and his tone, appropriately, likely to be satiric.

We have been discussing two types of "heroes" in British fiction since World War II. Obviously there are many novels excluded from consideration. For example, Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandrian Quartet*, recently and justifiably acclaimed, does not belong in either of our categories. His four novels are a successful experiment in technique, a continuation of experiments that go back to Proust, Joyce, and Faulkner. The technique has sometimes been called the principle of "simultaneity"; Joseph Frank called it the "doctrine of spatial form." William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, also justifiably acclaimed, suggests a kinship with the novels of the years of the great experiments. It suggests the anti-utopian novels of Aldous Huxley and George Orwell.

Another group is represented by such names as Joyce Cary, Anthony Powell, L. P. Hartley, C. P. Snow, and Angus Wilson. Despite mid-century preoccupations their novels seem related to the solidities of an older world, say the Edwardians, in some ways akin to Galsworthy, but not to John Braine or Kingsley Amis. Even so, one detects a similarity of another sort: all of them, Cary, Snow, Amis, Miss Murdock, appear largely indifferent to the experiments of the twenties and thirties.

Graham Hough in his recent book, *Reflections on a Literary Revolution*, on the poetics of Eliot and Pound and related matters, makes a pertinent point:

Two influential novelists of the present generation who are not at all parochial but very much men of the world, Mr. Angus Wilson and Sir Charles Snow, have expressed or implied or suggested a large lack of interest in the experimental fiction of the twenties; their suasions are toward the large-scale socially oriented novel, the presentation of the world as it actually works, without any fiddle-faddle about form and verbal nicety.

Mr. Hough enters a demurrer or two on the dangers of slipping too far away from concerns with form and verbal niceties. But the point remains. He ties the modernist movement in poetry

to the modernist movement in fiction: "But we can now discern a much larger and more general reason for the restricted influence of the new poetry. It was not the vehicle of great spiritual force; it did not have behind it the flow and impetus of a great movement of society and ideas." The first wave of the Romantic Movement, he says, had behind it the flow and impetus of such a movement and ideas. By implication he is saying that by definition an isolated or "exiled" literature, however brilliant its techniques, will not serve as a sufficiently powerful leavening moral force; it will exhibit the sensibilities of its authors.

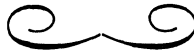
If Hough is right, these various post World War II writers, the question of their respective talents aside, have returned the novel to its traditional role, the relation of man to man in society. Probably the preoccupations of the experimenters of the twenties and thirties will not be ignored. They can be used in newer ways, but not as ends in themselves.

To return to our creators of two types of "heroes" in post World War II fiction: There is

little to be gained at this point in claiming that Amis is among the finest comic talents since Wells or Evelyn Waugh, or that Miss Murdoch is a philosophical novelist of such and such an order, or that John Braine is as subtly preoccupied with money and caste as Arnold Bennett was. They should not be asked to carry the burden of such criticism until they are more firmly established and have many more novels to their credit.

What is clear is that these writers have produced a different set of literary conventions. The books of John Braine, David Storey, and Alan Sillitoe are not very different from Bennett's, and deal with their subjects in a manner he might have employed. They leap back of Mrs. Woolf and Joyce—to the pre-modern Bennett. And as we have seen some of their older contemporaries have done the same thing. The Lucky Jim type is new. He and his kind have appeared with enough frequency and are sufficiently interesting to have won a small place for themselves in the history of English fiction.

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DIGRESSIONS, incontestibly, are the sunshine, they are the life, the soul of reading; take them out of this book, for instance, you might as well take the book along with them; one cold eternal winter would reign in every page of it; restore them to the writer, he steps forth like a bridegroom, bids all hail, brings in variety, and forbids the appetite to fail.—Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, Vol. 1