

slowly, carefully, right down and over her feet. Then with a quiver of exquisite pleasure he touched the warm soft body, and touched her navel for a moment in a kiss. And he had to come into her at once, to enter the peace on earth of her soft, quiescent body. It was the moment of pure peace for him, the entry into the body of a woman.

She lay still, in a kind of sleep, always in a kind of sleep. The activity, the orgasm was his, all his; she could strive for herself no more. Even the tightness of his arms round her, even the intense movement of his body, and the springing seed in her, was a kind of sleep, from which she did not begin to rouse till he had finished and lay softly panting against her breast.

emotional
costs

It is a modest example, but then it is a modest act and Constance Chatterley is exhausted with the deaths of ~~the world~~ ^{her previous} ~~she is carrying within~~ since they will make other kinds of love later, the prosecutor will have cause enough to be further enraged, but the example can show how the tone of Lawrence's prose is poisoned by the acids of inappropriate comment. "Mellors concedes one kiss on the navel and then gets to business." Indeed! Take off your business suit, Comrade Millett.

she and
her
new
lover

But it is hardly the time for a recess. We will want to look at another exhibit. The quoted lines up for indictment are from *Women in Love*:

Having begun by informing Ursula he will not love her, as he is interested in going beyond love to "something much more impersonal and harder," he goes on to state his terms: "I've seen plenty of women, I'm sick of seeing them. I want a woman I don't see . . . I don't want your good looks, and I don't want your womanly feelings, and I don't want your thoughts nor opinions nor your ideas." The "new" relationship, while posing as an affirmation of the primal unconscious sexual being, to adopt Lawrence's jargon, is in effect a denial of personality in the woman.

Or is it a denial of personality in Lawrence? Witness how our literary commissar will void the strength of Lawrence's style by cutting off our acquaintance with the marrow of his sensibility, the air of his senses. For Lawrence is always alert to the quiet ringing of the ether, the quick retreat of a mood, the awe of the thought about to be said, then left unsaid, then said after all. But

his remarks cannot be chopped out of their setting. A bruised apple at the foot of a tree is another reality from a bruised apple in the frigidaire.

There was silence for some moments.

"No," he said. "It isn't that. Only—if we are going to make a relationship, even of friendship, there must be something final and irrevocable about it."

There was a clang of mistrust and almost anger in his voice. She did not answer. Her heart was too much contracted. She could not have spoken.

Seeing she was not going to reply, he continued, almost bitterly, giving himself away:

"I can't say it is love I have to offer—and it isn't love I want. It is something much more impersonal and harder—and rarer."

There was a silence, out of which she said:

"You mean you don't love me?"

She suffered furiously, saying that.

"Yes, if you like to put it like that. Though perhaps that isn't true.

I don't know. At any rate, I don't feel the emotion of love for you—no, and I don't want to. Because it gives out in the last issues . . ."

How different is all this from "going beyond love to 'something much more impersonal and harder,'" how much in fact we have the feeling they are in love.

"If there is no love, what is there?" she cried, almost jeering.

"Something," he said, looking at her, battling with his soul, with all his might.

"What?"

He was silent for a long time, unable to be in communication with her while she was in this state of opposition.

"There is," he said, in a voice of pure abstraction, "a final me which is stark and impersonal and beyond responsibility. So there is a final you, and it is there I would want to meet you—not in the emotional, loving plane—but there beyond, where there is no speech and no terms of agreement. There we are two stark, unknown beings, two utterly strange creatures, I would want to approach you, and you me. And there could be no obligation, because there is no standard for action there, because no understanding has been reaped from that plane. It is quite inhuman—so there can be no

calling to book, in any form whatsoever—because one is outside the pale of all that is accepted, and nothing known applies. One can only follow the impulse, taking that which lies in front, and responsible for nothing, asking for nothing, giving nothing, only each taking according to the primal desire.”

Ursula listened to this speech, her mind dumb and almost senseless, what he said was so unexpected and so untoward.

“It is just purely selfish,” she said.

“If it is pure, yes. But it isn’t selfish at all. Because I don’t know what I want of you. I deliver myself over to the unknown, in coming to you, I am without reserves or defenses, stripped entirely, into the unknown. Only there needs the pledge between us, that we will both cast off everything, cast off ourselves even, and cease to be, so that that which is perfectly ourselves can take place in us.”

As we shall soon see, Lawrence will go further than this, he will come to believe that a woman must submit ~~a most blood-enriching submission~~, bet on it. Yet in that book where such submission takes place, in *The Plumed Serpent*, where Kate Leslie has her most profound sex with a man who insists on remaining a stranger and an Indian, the moral emerges that he wants her by the end, wants Kate Leslie just so deeply as she desires him. Lawrence’s point, which he refines over and over, is that the deepest messages of sex cannot be heard by taking a stance on the side of the bank, announcing one is in love, and then proceeding to fish in the waters of love with a ~~breadbasket~~ full of ego. No, he is saying again and again, people can win at love only when they are ready to lose everything they bring to it of ego, position, or identity—love is more stern than war—and men and women can survive only if they reach the depths of their own sex down within themselves. They have to deliver themselves “over to the unknown.” No more existential statement of love exists, for it is a way of saying we do not know how the love will turn out. What message more odious to the technologist? So Millett will accuse him endlessly of patriarchal male-dominated sex. But the domination of men over women was only a way station on the line of Lawrence’s ideas—what he started to say early and ended saying late was that sex could heal, sex was the only nostrum which could heal, all other medicines were part of the lung-scarring smoke of factories and healed nothing, were poison, but sex could heal only when one

completely,

creed

was without "reserves or defenses." And so men and women received what they deserved of one another. Since Women's Lib has presented itself with the clear difficulty of giving modern woman a full hard efficient ego, Lawrence's ideas could not be more directly in the way. Still, it is painful to think that, quickly as men are losing any sense of fair play, women—if Millett can model for her sex—are utterly without it. Maybe Millett is not so much Molotov as Vishinsky. What a foul exhibit must now be displayed!

Passive as she is, Connie fares better than the heroine of The Plumed Serpent, from whom Lawrentian man, Don Cipriano, deliberately withdraws as she nears orgasm, in a calculated and sadistic denial of her pleasure:

"By a swift dark instinct, Cipriano drew away from this in her. When, in their love, it came back on her, the seething electric female ecstasy, which knows such spasms of delirium, he recoiled from her. . . . By a dark and powerful instinct he drew away from her as soon as this desire rose again in her, for the white ecstasy of frictional satisfaction, the throes of Aphrodite of the foam. She could see that to him, it was repulsive. He just removed himself, dark and unchangeable, away from her."

The passage restored will be of interest to any jury looking for further evidence on the virtues or deterrents of the clitoral come:

She realised, almost with wonder, the death in her of the Aphrodite of the foam: the seething, frictional, ecstatic Aphrodite. By a swift dark instinct, Cipriano drew away from this in her. When, in their love, it came back on her, the seething electric female ecstasy, which knows such spasms of delirium, he recoiled from her. It was what she used to call her "satisfaction." She had loved Joachim for this, that again, and again, and again he could give her this orgasmic "satisfaction," in spasms that made her cry aloud.

But Cipriano would not. By a dark and powerful instinct he drew away from her as soon as this desire rose again in her, for the white ecstasy of frictional satisfaction, the throes of Aphrodite of the foam. She could see that to him, it was repulsive. He just removed

himself, dark and unchangeable, away from her.

And she, as she lay, would realise the worthlessness of this foam-effervescence, its strange externality to her. It seemed to come upon her from without, not from within. And succeeding the first moment of disappointment, when this sort of "satisfaction" was denied her, came the knowledge that she did not really want it, that it was really nauseous to her.

And he, in his dark, hot silence, would bring her back to the new, soft, heavy, hot flow, when she was like a fountain gushing noiseless and with urgent softness from the volcanic deeps. Then she was open to him soft and hot, yet gushing with a noiseless soft power. And there was no such thing as conscious "satisfaction." What happened was dark and untellable. So different from the friction which flares out in circles of phosphorescent ecstasy, to the last wild spasm which utters the involuntary cry, like a death-cry, the final love-cry. This she had known, and known to the end, with Joachim. And now this too was removed from her. What she had with Cipriano was curiously beyond her knowing: so deep and hot and flowing, as it were subterranean. She had to yield before it. She could not grip it into one final spasm of white ecstasy which was like sheer knowing.

And as it was in the love-act, so it was with him. She could not know him. When she tried to know him, something went slack in her, and she had to leave off. She had to let be. She had to leave him, dark and hot and potent, along with the things that are, but are not known. The presence. And the stranger. This he was always to her.

Yes, sex was the presence of grace and the introduction of the stranger into oneself. That was the only medicine for the lividities of the will. So Lawrence would preach, but he was a man in torture. If Millett had wished to get around Lawrence in the easiest way for the advance of the Liberation, she would have done better to have built a monument to him and a bridge over his work rather than making the mean calculation she could bury him by meretricious quotation. For Lawrence is an inspiration, but few can do more than respect him on the fly (the way a Soviet official might duck into an Orthodox church to smell the incense). The world has been technologized and technologized twice again in the years since his death; the citizens are technologized as well. Who will go looking for the "new, soft, heavy, hot flow," or the "urgent softness from the volcanic deeps" when the

air of cities smells of lava and the mood of the streets is like the bowels turned inside out? What he was asking for had been too hard for him; it is more than hard for us—his life was, yes, a torture, and we draw back in fear, for we would not know how to try to burn by such a light.

Yet he was a man more beautiful perhaps than we can guess, and it is worth the attempt to try to perceive the logic of his life, for he illumines the passion to be masculine as no other writer, he reminds us of the beauty of desiring to be a man, for he was not much of a man himself, a son despised by his father, beloved ~~of~~ his mother, a boy and young man and prematurely aging writer with the soul of a beautiful woman. It is not only that no other man writes so well about women, but indeed is there a woman who can? Useless for Millett to answer that here is a case of one man commending another man for his ability to understand women—what a vain and pompous assumption, she will hasten to jeer, but such words will be the ground meat of a dull cow. The confidence is that some of Lawrence's passages have a ring—perhaps it is an echo of that great bell which may toll whenever the literary miracle occurs and a writer sets down words to resonate with that sense of peace and proportion it is tempting to call truth. Yet whoever believes that such a leap is not possible across the gap, that a man cannot write of a woman's soul, or a white man of a black man, does not believe in literature itself. So, yes, Lawrence understood women as they had never been understood before, understood them with all the tortured fever of a man who had the soul of a beautiful, imperious, and passionate woman, yet ~~he~~ was locked into the body of a middling male physique, not physically strong, of reasonable good looks, a pleasant to somewhat seedy-looking man, no stud. What a nightmare to balance that soul! to take the man in himself, locked from youth into every need for profound female companionship, a man almost wholly oriented toward the company of women, and attempt to go out into the world of men, indeed even dominate the world of men so that he might find balance. For his mind was possessed of that intolerable masculine pressure to command which develops in sons outrageously beloved by their mothers—to be the equal of a woman at twelve or six or any early age which reaches equilibrium between the will of the son and the will of the mother, strong love to strong love, is all but to guarantee the making of a future tyrant, for the

by

sense of where to find one's inner health has been generated by the early years of that equilibrium—its substitute will not be easy to create in maturity. What can then be large enough to serve as proper balance to a man who was equal to a strong woman in emotional confidence at the age of eight? Hitlers develop out of such balance derived from imbalance, and great generals and great novelists (for what is a novelist but a general who sends his troops across fields of paper?).

So we must conceive then of Lawrence arrogant with mother love and therefore possessed of a mind which did not believe any man on earth had a mind more important than his own. What a responsibility then to bring his message to the world, unique message which might yet save the world! We must conceive of that ego equal already to the will of a strong woman while he was still a child—what long steps had it taken since within the skull! He needed an extraordinary woman for a mate, and he had the luck to find his Frieda. She was an aristocrat and he was a miner's son, she was large and beautiful, she was passionate, and he stole her away from her husband and children—they could set out together to win the world and educate it into ways to live, do that, do all of that out of the exuberance of finding one another.

But she was a strong woman, she was individual, she loved him but she did not worship him. She was independent. If he had been a stronger man, he could perhaps have enjoyed such personal force, but he had become a man by an act of will, he was bone and blood of the classic family stuff out of which homosexuals are made; he had lifted himself out of his natural destiny, which was probably to have the sexual life of a woman, had diverted the virility of his brain down into some indispensable minimum of phallic force—no wonder he worshiped the phallus; he, above all men, knew what an achievement was its rise from the root, its assertion to stand proud on a delicate base. His mother had adored him. Since his first sense of himself as a male had been in the tender air of her total concern—now, and always, his strength would depend upon just such outside admiration. Dominance over women was not tyranny to him but equality, for dominance was the indispensable elevator which would raise his phallus to that height from which it might seek transcendence. And sexual transcendence, some ecstasy where he could lose his ego for a moment, and his sense of self and his

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will, was life to him—he could not live without sexual transcendence. If he had had an outrageously unequal development—all fury to be a man and all the senses of a woman—there was a direct price to pay: he was not healthy. His lungs were poor, and he lived with the knowledge that he would likely have an early death. Each time he failed to reach a woman, each time he failed particularly to reach his own woman, he was dying a little. It is hopeless to read his books and try to understand the quirky changeable fury-ridden relationships of his men and women without comprehending that Lawrence saw every serious love affair as fundamental do-or-die: he knew he literally died a little more each time he missed transcendence in the act. It was why he saw lust as hopeless. Lust was meaningless fucking and that was the privilege of the healthy. He was ill, and his wife was literally killing him each time she failed to worship his most proud and delicate cock. Which may be why he invariably wrote on the edge of cliché—we speak in simples as experience approaches the enormous, and Lawrence lived with the monumental gloom that his death was already in him, and sex—some transcendental variety of sex—was his only hope, and his wife was too robust to recognize such tragic facts.

By the time of writing *Women in Love*, his view of women would not be far from the sinister. One of the two heroines would succeed in driving her man to his death. His rage against the will of women turns immense, and his bile explodes on the human race, or is it the majority of the races?—these are the years when he will have a character in *Aaron's Rod*, Lilly, his mouthpiece, say:

I can't do with folk who teem by the billion, like the Chinese and Japs and Orientals altogether. Only vermin teem by the billion. Higher types breed slower. I would have loved the Aztecs and the Red Indians. I know they hold the element in life which I am looking for—they had living pride. Not like the flea-bitten Asiatics. Even niggers are better than Asiatics, though they are wallowers. The American races—and the South Sea Islanders—the Marquesans, the Maori blood. That was true blood. It wasn't frightened. All the rest are craven . . .

It is the spleen of a man whose organs are rotting in parts and so, owner of a world-ego, he will see the world rotting in parts.

These are the years when he flirts with homosexuality, but is secretly, we may assume, obsessed with it. For he is still in need of that restorative sex he can no longer find, and since his psyche was originally shaped to be homosexual, homosexuality could yet be his peace. Except it could not, not likely, for his mind could hardly give up the lust to dominate. Homosexuality becomes a double irony—he must now seek to dominate men physically more powerful than himself. The paradoxes of this position result in the book *Aaron's Rod*, which is about a male love affair (which never quite takes place) between a big man and a little man. The little man does the housework, plays nursemaid to the big man when he is ill, and ends by dominating him, enough to offer the last speech in the book.

All men say, they want a leader. Then let them in their souls submit to some greater soul than theirs. . . . You, Aaron, you too have the need to submit. You, too, have the need livingly to yield to a more heroic soul, to give yourself. You know you have [but] perhaps you'd rather die than yield. And so, die you must. It is your affair.

He has separated the theme from himself and reversed the roles, but he will die rather than yield, even though earlier in the book he was ready to demonstrate that platonic homosexuality saves. It is the clear suggestion that Aaron recovers only because Lilly anoints his naked body, lays on hands after doctors and medicines had failed.

Quickly he uncovered the blond lower body of his patient, and began to rub the abdomen with oil, using a slow, rhythmic, circulating motion, a sort of massage. For a long time he rubbed finely and steadily, then went over the whole of the lower body, mindless, as if in a sort of incantation. He rubbed every speck of the man's lower body—the abdomen, the buttocks, the thighs and knees, down to his feet, rubbed it all warm and glowing with camphorated oil, every bit of it, chafing the toes swiftly, till he was almost exhausted. Then Aaron was covered up again, and Lilly sat down in fatigue to look at his patient.

He saw a change. The spark had come back into the sick eyes, and the faint trace of a smile, faintly luminous, into the face. Aaron was regaining himself. But Lilly said nothing. He watched his patient fall into a proper sleep.

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Another of his heroes, Birkin, weeps in strangled tones before the coffin of Gerald. It is an earlier period in Lawrence's years of homosexual temptation; the pain is sharper, the passion is stronger. "He should have loved me," he said. "I offered him." And his wife is repelled, "recoiled aghast from him as he sat . . . making a strange, horrible sound of tears." They are the sickly sounds of a man who feels ready to die in some part of himself because the other man would never yield.

But homosexuality would have been the abdication of Lawrence as a philosopher-king. Conceive how he must have struggled against it! In all those middle years he moves slowly from the man who is sickened because the other did not yield, to the man who will die because he, himself, will not yield. But he is bitter, and with a rage, which could burn half the world. ~~It is burning his lungs.~~

Then it is too late. He is into his last years. He is into the five last years of his dying. He has been a victim of love, and will die for lack of the full depth of a woman's love for him—what a near to infinite love he had needed. So he has never gotten to that place where he could deliver himself to the unknown, be "without reserves or defenses . . . cast off everything . . . and cease to be, so that that which is perfectly ourselves can take place in us," no, he was never able to go that far. By the time he began *Lady Chatterley*, he must have known the fight was done; he had never been able to break out of the trap of his lungs, nor out of the cage of his fashioning. He had burned too many holes in too many organs trying to reach into more manhood than the course of his nerves could carry, he was done; but he was a lover, he wrote *Lady Chatterley*, he forgave, he wrote his way a little further toward death, and sang of the wonders of creation and the glory of men and women in the rut and lovely of a loving fuck.

"When a woman gets absolutely possessed by her own will, her own will set against everything, then it's fearful, and she should be shot at last."

"And shouldn't men be shot at last, if they get possessed by their own will?"

"Ay!—the same!"

The remark is muttered, the gamekeeper rushes on immediately to talk of other matters, but it has been made, Lawrence

ready to
set fire to

} close-up by
half a line

} close-up by
half a line

D. H. LAWRENCE . 303

has closed the circle, the man and the woman are joined, separate and joined.

~~1200~~
again we are ending a long piece
with an all but empty page.
~~These two lines~~
~~It can be moved to the bottom of~~
page 302 where two lines have been ~~gained~~
gained.

place. *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, for example, is a slight book. Looking at it with a hard eye, it's a charlotte russe. On the other hand, if you are looking to capture a particular period in the Fifties in New York, no other book may have done it so well. In that sense, Capote is a bit like Fitzgerald. If I were to mount them on one wall, however, I'd certainly put Truman under Scott.

All the same, Truman Capote was wonderful when all was said. I think of that tiny man who lived through his early years with the public laughing at him. To go from being a pampered little darling with a few friends who catered to him egregiously on to mustering the balls, the enormous balls, to decide he was going to be a major figure in American life—that was his achievement. To hell with writing. He was going to give up writing in order to be a major social figure, and in doing this, I think he sacrificed the last ten or twenty years of his talent.

Kurt Vonnegut and I are friendly with one another but wary. There was a period when we used to go out together, ~~a great deal~~ *fairly often* because our wives liked each other, and Kurt and I would sit there like bookends. We would be terribly careful with one another; we both knew the huge cost of a literary feud, so we certainly didn't want to argue. On the other hand, neither of us would be caught dead saying to the other, "Gee, I liked your last book," and then be met with silence because the party of the second part could not reciprocate. So we would talk about anything else—we would talk about Las Vegas or the Galapagos Islands. We only had one literary conversation and that was ~~one night~~ *over an evening* in New York. Kurt looked up and sighed, "Well, I finished my novel today and it like to killed me." When Kurt is feeling heart-felt, he speaks in an old Indiana accent, ~~which I will do my best to reproduce~~. His wife said, "Oh, Kurt, you always say that whenever you finish a book," and he replied, "Well, whenever I finish a book I do say it, and it is always true, and it gets more true, and this last one like to killed me more than any."

Reading Toni Morrison, I say to myself: I know so little of black women who don't have a voice, and after all, I should know more. Toni certainly has a deep sense of such women, no question. But how good is she on black men? I feel less certain of those portraits. Finally, I decide that what she does with black

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women is an education and I respect her for that. I've only read one or two of her novels, by the way, so I may be reacting on too narrow a base.

Picasso had his bleak, dark, ugly view of women. On the other hand, he had the same hard view of other men and of himself. If you can pass through Picasso and still have a little love left for humanity, then you have arrived at some kind of peace. Picasso is like a doctor who's cleaning out a very ugly wound, the filth embedded in humanity.

It's the guys who pen wonderfully sweet books, who are, ^{however,} monsters. You know—they kick the wife, cuff the kids, and have the dog shrinking in horror. Then their books come out: "X once again delights the reader with his sense of joy."

the real

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 ↘ p 340
 A note on Heller and Bu

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and not even the author could be certain they were gone. Yet the length and similarity of one page to another gives a curious meat-and-potatoes to the madness; building upon itself, the book becomes substantial until the last fifty pages grow suddenly and surprisingly powerful, only to be marred by an ending over the last five pages that is hysterical, sentimental and wall-eyed for Hollywood.

This is the skin of the reaction. If I were a major critic, it would be a virtuoso performance to write a definitive piece on *Catch-22*. It would take ten thousand words or more. Because Heller is carrying his reader on a more consistent voyage through Hell than any American writer before him (except Burroughs, who has already made the trip and now sells choice seats in the auditorium), and so the analysis of Joseph H.'s Hell would require a discussion of other varieties of inferno and whether they do more than this author's tour.

Catch-22 is a nightmare about an American bomber squadron on a made-up island off Italy. Its hero is a bombardier named Yossarian, who has flown fifty missions and wants out. On this premise are tattooed the events of the novel, fifty characters, two thousand frustrations (an average of four or five to the page), and one simple motif: more frustration. Yossarian's colonel wants to impress his general and so raises the number of missions to fifty-five. When the pilots have fifty-four, the figure is lifted to sixty. They are going for eighty by the time the book has been done. On the way, every character goes through a routine on every page which is as formal as a little peasant figure in a folk dance. Back in school, we had a joke we used to repeat. It went:

"Whom are you talking about?"

"Herbert Hoover."

"Never heard of him."

"Never heard of whom?"

"Herbert Hoover."

"Who's he?"

"He's the man you mentioned."

"Never heard of Herbert Hoover."

So it went. So goes *Catch-22*. It's the rock and roll of novels. One finds its ancestor in Basic Training. We were ordered to have clean sheets for Saturday inspection. But one week we were given no clean sheets from the Post laundry, so we slept on our mattress covers, which got dirty. After inspection, the pla-

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PREFACE TO "SOME CHILDREN OF THE GODDESS" . 341

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toon was restricted to quarters. "You didn't have clean sheets," our sergeant said.

"How could we have clean sheets if the clean sheets didn't come?"

"How do I know?" said the sergeant. "The regulations say you gotta have clean sheets."

"But we can't have clean sheets if there are no clean sheets."

"That," said the sergeant, "is tough shit."

Which is what *Catch-22* ^{is all} should have been called. The Army is a village of colliding bureaucracies whose colliding orders cook up impossibilities. Heller takes this one good joke and exploits it into two thousand variations of the same good joke, but in the act he somehow creates a rational vision of the modern world. ~~Yet~~ the crisis of reason is that it can no longer comprehend the modern world. Heller demonstrates that a rational man devoted to reason must arrive at the conclusion that either the world is mad and he is the only sane man in it or (and this is the weakness of *Catch-22*—it never explores this possibility) the sane man is not really sane, because his rational propositions are without existential reason.

Of course,

On page 178, there is a discussion about God.

"... how much reverence can you have for a Supreme Being who finds it necessary to include such phenomena as phlegm and tooth decay in His divine system of creation. . . . Why in the world did He ever create pain?"

"Pain?" Lieutenant Scheisskopf's wife pounced upon the word victoriously. "Pain is a useful symptom. Pain is a warning to us of bodily dangers."

"... Why couldn't he have used a doorbell instead to notify us, or one of His celestial choirs?"

Right there is planted the farthest advance of the flag of reason in ~~his~~ ^{the new} cosmology. Heller ~~does not look for any answer, but~~ ^{there is} an answer, which might go that God gave us pain for the same reason the discovery of tranquilizers was undertaken by the Devil: If we have an immortal soul, some of us come close to it only through pain. A season of sickness can be preferable to a flight from disease, for it discourages the onrush of a death which begins in the center of oneself.

Of course,

*There is
= howards*

Admittedly, Give talent is due. Catch 22 is the debut of a writer with *P 338*

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then there's a question whether it's a novel by any set of standards other than the dictum that prose about imaginary people put between book covers is a novel. At any rate, the distinction is not important except for the fact that *Naked Lunch* is next to impossible to read in consecutive fashion. I saw excerpts of it years ago, and thought enough of them to go on record that Burroughs "may conceivably be possessed by genius." I still believe that, but it is one thing to be possessed by genius, it is another to be a genius, and *Naked Lunch* read from cover to cover is not as exciting as in its separate pieces. Fifty or sixty three-page bits about homosexual orgies, castration, surgeon-assassins, and junkie fuzz dissolving into a creeping green ooze leaves one feeling pretty tough. "Let's put some blue-purple blood in the next rape," says your jaded taste.

This is, however, quibbling. Some of the best prose in America is graffiti found on men's-room walls. It is prose written in bone, etched by acid, it is the prose of harsh truth, the virulence of the criminal who never found his stone walls and so settles down on the walls of the john, it is the language of hatred unencumbered by guilt, hesitation, scruple, or complexity. Burroughs must be the greatest writer of graffiti who ever lived. His style has the snap of a whip, and it never relents. Every paragraph is quotable. Here's a jewel among a thousand jewels:

DR. BENWAY . . . looks around and picks up one of those rubber vacuum cups at the end of a stick they use to unstop toilets . . .

"Make an incision, Doctor Limpf. . . I'm going to massage the heart." . . . Dr. Benway washes the suction cup by swishing it around in the toilet-bowl. . .

DR. LIMPF: "The incision is ready, doctor."

Dr. Benway forces the cup into the incision and works it up and down.

Blood spurts all over the doctors, the nurse and the wall. . .

NURSE: "I think she's gone, doctor."

DR. BENWAY: "Well, it's all in the day's work."

Punch and Judy. Mr. Interlocutor and Mr. Bones. One, two, three, bam! two, four, eight, bam! The drug addict lives with a charged wire so murderous he must hang his nervous system on a void. Burroughs' achievement, his great achievement, is that he has brought back snowflakes from this murderous void.

Burroughs is the surgeon of the novel.

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PREFACE TO "SOME CHILDREN OF THE GODDESS" . 339

Once, years ago in Chicago, I was coming down with a bad cold. By accident, a friend took me to hear a jazz musician named Sun Ra, who played "space music." The music was a little like the sound of Ornette Coleman, but further-out, outer-space music, close to the EEEE of an electric drill at the center of a harsh trumpet. My cold cleared up in five minutes. I swear it. The anger of the sound penetrated into some sprung-up rage that was burning fuel for the cold. Burroughs's pages have the same medicine. If a hundred patients on terminal cancer read *Naked Lunch*, one or two might find remission. Bet money on that. For Burroughs is the surgeon of the novel.

Yet he is something more. It is his last ability which entitles him to a purchase on genius. Through the fantasies runs a vision of a future world, a half-demented welfare state, an abattoir of science fiction with surgeons, bureaucrats, perverts, diplomats, a world not describable short of getting into the book. The ideas have pushed into the frontier of an all-electronic universe. One holds on to a computer in some man-eating machine of the future that has learned to use language. The words come out in squeaks, spiced with static, sex coiled up with technology like a scream on the radar. Bombarded by his language, the sensation is like being in a room where three radios, two television sets, stereo hi-fi, a pornographic movie, and two automatic dishwashers are working at once while a mad scientist conducts the dials to squeeze out the maximum disturbance. If this is a true picture of the world to come, and it may be, then Burroughs is a great writer. Yet there is sadness in reading him, for one gets intimations of a mind which might have come within distance of Joyce, except that a catastrophe has been visited on it, a blow by a sledgehammer, a junkie's needle which left the crystalline brilliance crashed into bits.

Now, beyond a doubt, of all the books discussed here, the one that most cheats evaluation is Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. It was the book which took me longest to finish, and I almost gave it up. Yet I think that a year from now I may remember it more vividly than *The Thin Red Line*. Because it is an original. There's no book like it anyone has read. Yet it's maddening. It reminds one of a Jackson Pollock painting eight feet high, twenty feet long. Like yard goods, one could cut it anywhere. One could take out a hundred pages anywhere from the middle of *Catch-22*.

~~quite out of the mainstream of American letters but a classic in the way *The Innocents Abroad* or *The Ox-Bow Incident* *The Informer* or *A High Wind in Jamaica* is classic.~~

Bellow's main character, Henderson, is a legendary giant American, an eccentric millionaire, six-four in height, with a huge battered face, an enormous chest, a prodigious pot belly, a wild crank's gusto for life, and a childlike impulse to say what he thinks. He is a magical hybrid of Jim Thorpe and Dwight Macdonald. And he is tormented by an inner voice, which gives him no rest and poisons his marriages and pushes him to go forth. So he chooses to go to Africa (after first contemplating a visit to the Eskimos) and finds a native guide to take him deep into the interior.

The style gallops like Henderson, full of excess, full of light, loaded with irritating effusions, but it is a style that moves along. *The Adventures of Augie March* was written in a way which could only be called *all writing*. That was one of the troubles with the book. Everything was mothered by the style. But Henderson talks in a free-swinging, easy bang-away monologue that puts your eye in the center of the action. I don't know if Bellow ever visited Africa, I would guess he didn't, but his imaginative faculty—which has always been his loot—pulls off a few prodigies. I don't know if any other American writer has done Africa so well. As for instance:

I was in tremendous shape those first long days, hot as they were. At night, after Romilayu had prayed, and we lay on the ground, the face of the air breathed back on us, breath for breath. And then there were the calm stars, turning around and singing, and the birds of the night with heavy bodies, fanning by. I couldn't have asked for anything better. When I laid my ear to the ground, I thought I could hear hoofs. It was like lying on the skin of a drum.

After a series of tragicomic adventures, Henderson reaches a royal almost Oriental tribe with a culture built upon magic and death. He is brought to the King, Dahfu, who lives in a wooden palace attended by a harem of beautiful Amazons. (One could be visiting the royalest pad in Harlem.) Dahfu is a philosopher-king, large in size, noble, possessed of grace, complex, dignified, elegant, educated, living suspended between life and death. The

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PREFACE TO "SOME CHILDREN OF THE GODDESS" • 351

King, delighted with his new friend, takes him into the secrets of his mind and his palace, and one begins to read the book with a vast absorption because Bellow is now inching more close to the Beast of mystery than any American novelist before him. Dahfu is an exceptional creation, a profoundly sophisticated man with a deep acceptance of magic, an intellectual who believes that civilization can be saved only by a voyage back into the primitive, an expedition which he is of course uniquely suited to lead.

As the action explores its way down into an underworld of plot and magical omens, one ceases to know any longer whether Dahfu is potentially an emperor who can save the world or a noble man lost in a Faustian endeavor. The book is on the threshold of a stupendous climax—for the first time in years I had the feeling I was going to learn something large from a novel—and then like a slow leak the air goes out of the book in the last fifty pages. Dahfu is killed in a meaningless action, Henderson goes home to his wife, and the mystery that Bellow has begun to penetrate closes over his book, still intact.

He is a curious writer. He has the warmest imagination, I think, of any writer in my generation, and this gift leads him to marvelous places—it is possible that Bellow succeeds in telling us more about the depths of the black man's psyche than either Baldwin or Ellison. He has a widely cultivated mind, which nourishes his gift. He has a facility for happy surprises, and in Henderson, unlike Augie March, he has developed a nose for where the treasure is buried. Yet I still wonder if he is not too timid to become a great writer. A novelist like Jones could never have conceived *Henderson the Rain King* (no more could I), but I know that Jones or myself would have been ready to urinate blood before we would have been ready to cash our profit and give up as Bellow did on the possibilities of a demonically vast ending. The clue to this capitulation may be detected in Bellow's one major weakness, which is that he creates individuals and not relations between them, at least not yet. Augie March travels alone, the hero of *Seize the Day* is alone, Henderson forms passionate friendships but they tend to get fixed, and the most annoying aspect of the novel is the constant repetition of the same sentiments, as if Bellow is knocking on a door of meaning that will not open for him. It is possible that the faculty of imagination is opposed to the gift of grasping relationships—in the act of coming to know somebody else well, the point of the imagina-

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that legendary

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Stet } tion may be dulled by the roughness of the other's concrete desires and the attrition of living not only in one's own boredom but someone else's. Bellow has a lonely gift, but it is a gift. I would guess he is more likely to write classics than major novels, which is a way of saying that he will give intense pleasure to particular readers over the years but is not too likely to seize the temper of our time and turn it. } Stet

For those who like the results of a horse race, it should be clear that the novels I liked the most in this round of reading were *Henderson*, *Naked Lunch*, and *Catch-22*. *The Thin Red Line*, if not inspired, was still impressive. *Another Country* suffered from too little style but compensated by its force. *Rabbit Run* was better than expected but cloyed by too much writing. *Set This House on Fire* was rich in separate parts and obese for the whole. *Letting Go* gave a demonstration of brilliant tactics and no novelistic strategy at all. *Franny and Zooey* and *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* were a literary scandal, which came in last. → 356

It has been said more than once that Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky divided the central terrain of the modern novel between them. Tolstoy's concern—even in the final pessimism of *The Kreutzer Sonata*—was with men-in-the-world, and indeed the panorama of his books carries to us an image of a huge landscape peopled with figures who changed that landscape, whereas the bulk of Dostoyevsky's work could take place in ten closed rooms: It is not society but a series of individuals we remember, each illuminated by the terror of exploring the mystery of themselves. This distinction is not a final scheme for classifying the novel. If one can point to *Moby-Dick* as a perfect example of a novel in the second category—a book whose action depends upon the voyage of Ahab into his obsession—and to *An American Tragedy* as a virile example of the first kind of novel, one must still come up short before the work of someone like Henry James, who straddles the categories, for he explores into society as if the world were a creature in a closed room and he could discover its heart. Yet the distinction is probably the most useful single guide we have to the novel and can even be given a modern application to Proust as a novelist of the developed, introspective, but still objective world, and Joyce as a royal, demented, most honorable traveler through the psyche. The serious novel begins from a

Note to reviewers

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part of the background

A CODA TO
"COLLEAGUES"

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I haven't looked at Jonathan Franzen's work yet, but by ^{some} reports, *The Corrections* is the first ^{important} ~~big~~ good novel that's come along in quite a while. Obviously, it has to be read if one wants any sense at all of what's going on in American letters. And I noticed when looking at the blurbs on the back that something like twenty writers ^{all} gave their salute, and ~~all~~ of them were of Franzen's generation. Updike wasn't there; not Bellow, not Roth; I wasn't there—the oldest was Don De Lillo, who gave the smallest praise. The others were new, respected names like David Foster Wallace, Michael Cunningham, and a host of others, all contemporary. Apparently, *The Corrections* is the book of a generation that wants to wipe the slate clean and offer a new literary movement.

I think the younger writers are sick of Roth, Bellow, Updike, and myself the way we were sick of Hemingway and Faulkner. When I was a young writer we never talked about anyone but them, and that feeling grew into resentment. Since they had no interest in us, we began to think, Yeah, they're great—now get off the stage! We want the lights on us!

→ p 356 A

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reviewers

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writing the above
 Since ~~then~~ I've read The Corrections. It is very good as a novel, very good indeed, and yet most unpleasant now that it sits in memory, as if one has been wearing the same

clothes for too many days. Frantzen writes superbly well sentence for sentence, and yet one is not happy with the achievement. It is too full of language, even as the nouveaux riches are too full of money. He is exceptionally intelligent, but like a polymath he lives

~~too~~ much of the time in Wonkville Hollow, for Frantzen is an intellectual dredging machine. Everything of novelistic use to him that came up on ^{the} his Internet seems to have bypassed the higher reaches of his imagination—it is as if he offers us more human

experience than he has literally mastered, and this is obvious when we come upon his set pieces on gourmet restaurants, or giant cruise ships. Such sections read like first-rate

magazine pieces, but no better. *They stick to the surface!* When he deals with what he does know directly and intimately, which is the family at the core of his book—an old father, a late middle-aged

mother, two grown sons, and a daughter—he is an exceptionally gifted observer. What waste, however! Nothing much is at stake for us with his people. They have almost no

changing relation to each other (considering that they have something like ^{six hundred} ~~600~~ pages to work up a few new mutual stances.) Three, maybe four of the five can legitimately be

characterized as one-note characters—only the daughter who becomes a passionate lesbian has much to tell us. It is not only that—*dare I use this* ~~stealing~~ the old book reviewer's

cliches—they offer us very little rooting interest, and ~~they~~ are for the most part, dank, but worse, nothing but petty repetitious conflicts arise from them. They wriggle forever in

the higher reaches of human mediocrity and incarcerated habit. The greatest joy to lift

The spine of the book from The Corrections is the author's vanity at how ^{talented} good he is. He may well have the

highest IQ of any American novelist writing today, ^{but unhappily} and he rewards us with more work

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than exhilaration since rare is any page in The Corrections that could not be five to ten lines shorter.

All this said, exceptional potential still remains. I think it is the sense of his potential that excites so many. Now, the success of The Corrections will change his life and charge it. Frantzen will begin to have experience at a more intense level; the people he encounters will have more sense of mission, will be more exciting in their good and in their evil, more open at their best, more crafty in their use of closure. So if he is up to it, he will grow with his new experiences (which as we ought to have some idea by now) is no routine matter, but if he succeeds, yes, he has the potential to become a major writer on a very high level indeed. At present, his negative characteristics predominate. Bellow and Company can still rest on their old laurels, I think I am almost ready to say, "Alas!"

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THE ARGUMENT REWUVIGORATED

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P 323

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~~p 306~~

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THE ARGUMENT REINVIGORATED . 323

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 page 313A
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 313 & 314)

criticism, some of it very critical. But then good writing is not an act to excite tolerance because it is good, but anguish because it is not better. Who can swear there has not been something catastrophic to America in the failure of her novelists? Maybe we are the last liberators in the land, and if we continue to thrive on much less than our best, then the being of all of us may be deadened before we are done.

That is a statement which sups on the essence of extravagance, and yet it is the distance of the bridge to be built. It may be necessary that a communication of human experience, of the deepest and most unrecoverable human experience, must yet take place if we are to survive. Such at least is the ~~common~~ opinion beneath the criticism which now follows.

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the Modern Language Association &
 that ~~which~~ ends this book.

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→ p 314

~~(see next page)~~

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~~THE ARGUMENT~~
~~REINVIGORATED~~

Assume I am a lecturer in the fields of Fellowship surrounding American Literature and am trying to draw some grand design on a twenty-minute talk devoted to "The Dynamic of American Letters." Knowing attention is iron for the blood of a Fellow, I will not be so foolish as to perish without a look at the topical. No, I will use "The Dynamic of American Letters" as preparation for a lightning discussion of *Herzog* and Terry Southern, with a coda on the art of the absurd. Let me then have my first sentence as a lecturer: "There has been a war at the center of American letters for a long time." That is not so poor. The look of absolute comprehension on the face of the audience encourages the lecturer to go on.

The war began as a class war; an upper middle class looked for a development of its taste, a definition of its manners, a refinement of itself to prepare a shift to the aristocratic—that was its private demand upon culture. This upper-class development of literature was invaded, however, at the beginning of the twentieth century, by a counter-literature, whose roots were found in poverty, industrial society, and the emergence of a new class. It was a literature which grappled with a peculiarly American phenomenon—a tendency of American society to alter more

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rapidly than the ability of its artists to record that change. Now, of course, one might go back two thousand years into China to find a society which did not alter more rapidly than its culture, but the American phenomenon had to do with the very rate of acceleration. The order of magnitude in this rate had shifted. It was as if everything changed ten times as fast in America, and this made for extraordinary difficulty in creating a literature. The sound, sensible, morally stout delineation of society which one found in Tolstoy and Balzac and Zola, in Thackeray and in Trollope, had become impossible. The American novelist of manners had to content himself with manners—he could not put a convincing servant into his work, and certainly not a working man, because they were moving themselves in one generation out from the pantry into the morning dress of the lady in the parlor and up from the foundry to the master of the factory. The novelist of manners could not go near these matters—they promised to take over all of his book. So the job was left to Howells, Stephen Crane, to Dreiser, and in lesser degree to such writers as Norris, Jack London, Upton Sinclair—let us say it was left to Dreiser. A fundamental irony of American letters had now presented itself. For in opposition to Dreiser was the imperfectly developed countertradition of the genteel. The class that wielded the power which ran America and the class which most admired that class banded instinctively together to approve a genteel literature, which had little to do with power or the secrets of power. They encouraged a literature about courtship and marriage and love and play and devotion and piety and style, a literature which had to do finally with the *excellence* of belonging to their own genteel tradition. Thus it was a literature that borrowed the forms of its conduct from European models. The people who were most American by birth, and who had the most to do with managing America, gave themselves a literature which had the least to say about the real phenomena of American life, most particularly the accelerated rate, the awful rate, of growth and anomaly through all of society. That sort of literature and that kind of attempt to explain America was left to the sons of immigrants, who, if they were vigorous enough, and fortunate enough to be educated, now had the opportunity to see that America was a phenomenon never before described, indeed never before visible in the record of history. There was something going on in American life that was either grand or horrible

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or both, but it was going on—at a dizzy rate—and the future glory or doom of the world was not necessarily divorced from it. Dreiser labored like a titan to capture the phenomenon; he became a titan; Thomas Wolfe, his only peer as giant (as the novelist-as-giant), labored also like a titan, but for half as long and died in terror of the gargantuan proportions of the task. Yet each failed in one part of the job. They were able to describe society—Wolfe like the greatest fifteen-year-old alive, an invaluable achievement, and Dreiser like some heroic tragic entrepreneur who has reasoned out through his own fatigue and travail very much how everything works in the iron mills of life but is damned because he cannot pass on the knowledge to his children. Dreiser and Wolfe were up from the people, and Dreiser particularly came closer to understanding the social machine than any American writer who ever lived, but he paid an unendurable price—he was forced to alienate himself from manner in order to learn the vast amount he learned. Manner insists one learn at a modest rate, that one absorb each step with grace before going on to the next. Dreiser was in a huge hurry, he had to learn everything—that was the way he must have felt his mission, so there is nothing of manner in his work; which is to say, nothing of tactics.

If the upper class quite naturally likes a literature which is good for them, a literature at the surface perhaps trivial but underneath amusing, elucidative, *fortifying*, it is because this kind of literature elaborates and clarifies the details of their life and thus adjusts their sense of power, their upper-class sense of power, which is invariably lubricated by a sense of detail. So too does that other class of readers in American literature, that huge, loose, all but unassociated congregation of readers—immigrant, proletarian, entrepreneur—wish in turn for a literature which is equally good for them. That is where Dreiser had to fail. He was only half-good for such readers. He taught them strategy as Americans had never gotten it before in a novel. If they were adventurers, he was almost as useful to them as Stendhal was exceptionally useful to a century of French intellectuals who had come to Paris from the provinces. But not quite. Dreiser, finally, is not quite as useful, and the difference is crucial. Because a young adventurer reads a great novel in the unvoiced hope it is a grindstone which sharpens his ax sufficiently to smash down doors now locked to him. Dreiser merely located

the doors and gave warnings about the secret padlocks and the traps. But he had no grindstone, no manner, no eye for the deadly important manners of the rich—he was obliged to call a rich girl “charming”; he could not make her charming when she spoke, as Fitzgerald could, and so he did not really prepare the army of his readers for what was ahead. His task was doubly difficult—it was required of him to give every upstart fresh strategy and tactics. No less than the secret sociology of society is what is needed by the upstart and that strategy Dreiser gave him. But tactics—the manners of the drawing room, the deaths and lives of the drawing room, the cocktail party, the glorious tactics of the individual kill—that was all beyond him. Dreiser went blind climbing the mountains of society, so he could not help anyone see what was directly before him—only what had happened and what was likely to come next.

might

That was the initial shape of the war, Naturalism versus the Genteel Tradition it has been called, and one might pose Henry James against Dreiser, but James is sufficiently great a writer to violate the generalizations one must make about the novel of manners, which must always—precisely because it deals with manners—eschew the overambitious, plus extremes of plot—which James of course did not. So let us say the war was between Dreiser and Edith Wharton, Dreiser all strategy, no tactics and Wharton all tactics. Marvelous tactics they were—a jewel of a writer and stingy as a parson—she needed no strategy. The upper-class writer had all strategy provided him by the logic of his class. Maybe that is why the war never came to decision, or even to conclusion. No upper-class writer went down into the pits to bring back the manner alive of the change going on *down there*, certainly not Edith Wharton, not James Branch Cabell, of course not, nor Hergesheimer nor even Cather or Glasgow, not Elinor Wylie, no, nor Carl Van Vechten, and no diamond in the rough was ever reshaped by the cutters of Newport. The gap in American letters continued. Upper-class writers like John Dos Passos made brave efforts to go down and get the stuff and never quite got it, mainly in Dos Passos's case because they lacked strategy for the depths—manners may be sufficient to delineate the rich, but one needs a vision of society to comprehend the poor, and Dos Passos had only revulsion at injustice, which is ultimately a manner. Some upper-class writers like Fitzgerald turned delicately upon the suppositions of their class, lost all

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borrowed strategy and were rudderless, were forced therefore to become superb in tactics, but for this reason perhaps a kind of hysteria lived at the center of their work; lower-class writers like Farrell and Steinbeck described whole seas of the uncharted ocean, but their characters did not push from one milieu into another, and so the results were more taxonomic than apocalyptic.

Since then the war has shifted. No writer succeeded in doing the single great work which would clarify a nation's vision of itself as Tolstoy had done perhaps with *War and Peace* or *Anna Karenina* and Stendhal with *The Red and the Black*; no one novel came along which was grand and daring and comprehensive and detailed, able to give sustenance to the adventurer and merriment to the rich, leave compassion in the icechambers of the upper class and energy as alms for the poor. (Not unless it was *Tropic of Cancer*.) Dreiser came as close as any, and never got close at all, for he could not capture the moment, and no country in history has lived perhaps so much for the moment as America. After his heroic failure, American literature was isolated—it was necessary to give courses in American literature to Americans, either because they would not otherwise read it or because, reading it, they could not understand it. It was not quite vital to them. It did not save their lives, make them more ambitious, more moral, more tormented, more audacious, more ready for love, more ready for war, for charity and for invention. No, it tended to puzzle them. The realistic literature had never caught up with the rate of change in American life, indeed it had fallen further and further behind, and the novel gave up any desire to be a creation equal to the phenomenon of the country itself; it settled for being a metaphor. Which is to say that each separate author made a separate peace. He would no longer try to capture America; he would merely try to give life to some microcosm in American life, some metaphor—in the sense that a drop of water is a metaphor of the seas, or a hair of the beast is for some a metaphor of the beast—and in that metaphor he might—if he was very lucky—have it all, rich and poor, strategy and tactics, insight and manner, detail, authority, the works. He would have it all for a particular few. It was just that he was no longer writing about the beast but, as in the case of Hemingway (if we are to take the best of this), about the paw of the beast or in Faulkner about the dreams of the beast. What a paw and what

dreams! Perhaps they are the two greatest writers America ever had, but they had given up on trying to do it all. Their vision was partial, determinedly so; they saw that as the first condition for trying to be great—that one must not try to save. Not souls, and not the nation. The desire for majesty was the bitch that licked at the literary loins of Hemingway and Faulkner: The country could be damned. Let it take care of itself.

And of course the country did. Just that. It grew by itself. Like a weed and a monster and a beauty and a pig. And the task of explaining America was taken over by Luce magazines. Those few aristocratic novelistic sensibilities which had never seen the task of defining the country as one for them—it was finally most unamusing as a task—grew smaller and smaller and more and more superb. Edith Wharton reappeared as Truman Capote, even more of a jewel, even stingier. Of writers up from the bottom there were numbers: Dreiser's nephews were as far apart as Saul Bellow and James Jones. But the difference between the two kinds of writers had shifted. It had begun to shift somewhere after the Second World War, and the shift had gone a distance. One could not speak at all now of aristocratic writers and novelists whose work was itself the protagonist to carry the writer and his readers through the locks of society; no, the work had long since retreated, the great ambition was gone, and then it was worse, even the metaphor was gone, the paw of the beast and the dreams of the beast, no, literature was down to the earnest novel and the perfect novel, to moral seriousness and Camp. Herzog and Candy had become the protagonists.

Frank Cowperwood once amassed an empire. Herzog, his bastard great-nephew, diddled in the ruins of an intellectual warehouse. Where once the realistic novel cut a swath across the face of society, now its reality was concentrated into moral seriousness. Where the original heroes of naturalism had been active, bold, self-centered, close to tragic, and up to their nostrils in their exertions to advance their own life and force the webs of society, so the hero of moral earnestness, the hero Herzog and the hero Levin in Malamud's *A New Life*, are men who represent the contrary—passive, timid, other-directed, pathetic, up to the nostrils in anguish: The world is stronger than they are; suicide calls.

Malamud's hero is more active than Herzog, he is also more likeable, but these positive qualities keep the case from being so

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pure. There is a mystery about the reception of Herzog. For beneath its richness of texture and its wealth of detail, the fact remains: Never has a novel been so successful when its hero was so dim. Not one of the critics who adored the book would ever have permitted Herzog to remain an hour in his house. For Herzog was defeated, Herzog was an unoriginal man, Herzog was a fool—not an attractive God-anointed fool like Gimpel the Fool, his direct progenitor, but a sodden fool, over-educated and inept, unable to fight, able to love only when love presented itself as a gift. Herzog was intellectual but not bright, his ideas not original, his style as it appeared in his letters unendurable—it had exactly the leaden-footed sense of phrase that men laden with anxiety and near to going mad put into their communications. Herzog was hopeless. We learned nothing about society from him, not even anything about his life. And he is the only figure in the book. His wives, his mistress, his family, his children, his friends, even the man who cuckolds him are seen on the periphery of a dimming vision. Like all men near to being mad, his attention is within, but the inner attention is without genius. Herzog is dull, he is unendurably dull—he is like all those bright pedagogical types who have a cavity at the center of their brain.

Yet the novel succeeds. There is its mystery. One reads it with compassion. With rare compassion. Bored by Herzog, still there is a secret burning of the heart. One's heart turns over and produces a sorrow. Hardly any books are left to do that.

Of course, Herzog is alive on sufferance. He is a beggar, an extraordinary beggar who fixes you with his eye, his breath, his clothing, his dank near-corrupt presence; he haunts. Something goes on in Herzog's eye. It says: I am debased, I am failed, I am near to rotten, and yet something just as good and loving resides in me as the tenderest part of your childhood. If the prophet Elijah sent me, it is not to make you feel guilt but to weep. Suddenly, Herzog inspires sorrow—touch of alchemy to the book—Herzog is at the center of the modern dilemma. If we do not feel compassion for him, a forceful compassion that sends blood to warm the limbs and the heart, then we are going to be forced to shoot him. Because if Herzog does not arouse your compassion, there is no other choice—he is too intolerable a luxury to keep alive in his mediocrity unless he arouses your love. The literary world chose to love him. We were not ready to shoot Herzog. It

all seemed too final if we did. Because then there would be nothing left but Camp, and Camp is the art of the cannibal; Camp is the art which evolved out of the bankruptcy of the novel of manners. It is the partial thesis of these twenty minutes that the pure novel of manners had watered down from *The House of Mirth* to the maudlin middle reaches of *The Rector of Justin*; had in fact gone all the way down the pike from *The Ambassadors* to *By Love Possessed*. So one does not speak of the novel of manners any longer—one is obliged to look at the documentary, *In Cold Blood*, or one is obliged to look at satire. The aristocratic impulse turned upon itself produced one classic—Terry Southern's *The Magic Christian*. Never had distaste for the habits of a mass mob reached such precision, never did wit falter in its natural assumption that the idiocies of the mass were attached breath and kiss to the hypocrisies, the weltering grandeurs, and the low stupidities of the rich, the American rich. The aristocratic impulse to define society by evocations of manner now survived only in the grace of any cannibal sufficiently aristocratic to sup upon his own family. *The Magic Christian* was a classic of Camp.

Note then: The two impulses in American letters had failed—the realistic impulse never delivered the novel that would ignite a nation's consciousness of itself, and the aristocratic impulse clawed at the remaining fabric of a wealthy society it despised and no longer wished to sustain. Like a Tinguely machine that destroys itself, Camp amused by the very act of its destruction.

~~Since it was also sentimental, the artifacts were necrophilic.~~ 3

Literature then had failed. The work was done by the movies, by television. The consciousness of the masses and the culture of the land trudged through endless mud.

The American consciousness, in the absence of a great tradition in the novel, ended by being developed by the bootlicking pieties of small-town newspaper editors and small-town educators, by the worst of organized religion, a formless force filled with the terrors of all the Christians left to fill the spaces left by the initial bravery of the frontiersman, and these latterday Christians were simply not as brave. That was one component of the mud. The other was the sons of the immigrants. Many of them hated America, hated it for what it offered and did not provide, what it revealed of opportunity and what it excluded from real opportunity. The sons of these immigrants and the sons' sons took over the cities and began to run them, high up in

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the air and right down into the ground; they plucked and they plundered and there was not an American city which did not grow more hideous in the last fifty years. Then they spread out—they put suburbs like blight on the land—and piped mass communications into every home. They were cannibals selling Christianity to Christians, and because they despised the message and mocked at it in their own heart, they succeeded in selling something else, a virus perhaps; an electronic nihilism went through the mass media of America and entered the Christians and they were like to being cannibals, they were a tense and livid people, swallowing their own hate with the tranquilizers and the sex in the commercials, whereas all the early cannibals at the knobs of the mass media made the mistake of passing on their bleak disease and were left now too gentle, too liberal, too programmatic, filled with plans for social welfare, and they looked and talked in Show Biz styles that possessed no style and were generally as unhealthy as Christians who lived in cellars and caves.

Yes, the cannibal sons of the immigrants had become Christians, and the formless form they had evolved for their mass media, the hypocritical empty and tasteless taste of the television arts they beamed across the land encountered the formless form and the all but tasteless taste of the small-town ~~or eating~~ cannibal mind at its worst, and the collision produced schizophrenia in the land. Half of America went insane with head colds and medicaments and asthmas and allergies, hospitals and famous surgeons with knives to cut into the plague, welfares and plans and committees and cooperations and boredom, boredom plague deep upon the land; and the other part of America went ape, and the motorcycles began to roar like lions across the land and all the beasts of all the buried history of America turned in their circuit and prepared to slink toward the market place, ~~there to burn the mother's hair and bite the baby to the heart.~~ One thought of America and one thought of aspirin, kitchen-commercials, and blood. One thought of Vietnam. And the important art in America became the art of the absurd.

~~There will be talk before this book is done of the nature of the art of the absurd, there will be perhaps even an attempt to explain it, but for now we have come to another explanation. For a good deal follows about the writing of contemporaries, there is~~

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tion may be dulled by the roughness of the other's concrete desires and the attrition of living not only in one's own boredom but someone else's. Bellow has a lonely gift, but it is a gift. I would guess he is more likely to write classics than major novels, which is a way of saying that he will give intense pleasure to particular readers over the years but is not too likely to seize the temper of our time and turn it.

For those who like the results of a horse race, it should be clear that the novels I liked the most in this round of reading were *Henderson*, *Naked Lunch*, and *Catch-22*. *The Thin Red Line*, if not inspired, was still impressive. *Another Country* suffered from too little style but compensated by its force. *Rabbit, Run* was better than expected but cloyed by too much writing. *Set This House on Fire* was rich in separate parts and obese for the whole. *Letting Go* gave a demonstration of brilliant tactics and no novelistic strategy at all. *Franny and Zooey* and *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* were a literary scandal which came in last.

It has been said more than once that Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky divided the central terrain of the modern novel between them. Tolstoy's concern—even in the final pessimism of *The Kreutzer Sonata*—was with men-in-the-world, and indeed the panorama of his books carries to us an image of a huge landscape peopled with figures who changed that landscape, whereas the bulk of Dostoyevsky's work could take place in ten closed rooms: It is not society but a series of individuals we remember, each illuminated by the terror of exploring the mystery of themselves. This distinction is not a final scheme for classifying the novel. If one can point to *Moby-Dick* as a perfect example of a novel in the second category—a book whose action depends upon the voyage of Ahab into his obsession—and to *An American Tragedy* as a virile example of the first kind of novel, one must still come up short before the work of someone like Henry James, who straddles the categories, for he explores into society as if the world were a creature in a closed room and he could discover its heart. Yet the distinction is probably the most useful single guide we have to the novel and can even be given a modern application to Proust as a novelist of the developed, introspective, but still objective world, and Joyce as a royal, demented, most honorable traveler through the psyche. The serious novel begins from a

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fixed philosophical point—the desire to discover reality—and it goes to search for that reality in society or else must embark on a trip up the upper Amazon of the inner eye.

It is this necessity to travel into one direction or the other up to the end which makes the writing of novels ~~and for~~ one's talent and finally ~~for~~ one's health, as the horns of a bull ~~are final~~ doom for the suit of lights. If one explores the world, one's talent must be blunted by punishment, one's artistic integrity by corruption: Nobody can live in the world without shaking the hand of people he despises; so an ultimate purity must be surrendered. Yet it is as dangerous to travel unguided into the mysteries of the Self, for insanity prepares an ambush. No man ~~explores into his own nature without submitting to a curse from the root of biology, since existence would cease if it were natural to turn upon oneself.~~

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This difficulty has always existed for the novelist, but today it may demand more antithesis and more agony than before. The writer who would explore the world must encounter a society that is now conscious of itself and so resistant (most secretly) to an objective eye. Detours exist everywhere. There was a time when a writer had to see just a little bit of a few different faces in the world and could know that the world was still essentially so simple ~~and so phrased~~ that he might use his imagination to fill in unknown colors ~~in the landscape~~. Balzac could do that, and so could Zola. But the arts of the world suffered a curious inversion as man was turned by the twentieth century into mass man rather than democratic man. The heartland which was potential in everyone turned upon itself; people used their personal arts to conceal from themselves the nature of their work. They chose to become experts rather than artists. The working world was no longer a panorama of factories and banks so much as it was reminiscent of hospitals and plastic recreation centers. Society tended to collect in small stagnant pools. Now, any young man trying to explore that world is held up by pleasures that are not sufficiently intense to teach him and is dulled by injustices too elusive to fire his rage. The Tolstoyan novel begins to be impossible. Who can create a vast canvas when the imagination must submit itself to a plethora of detail in each joint of society? Who can travel to many places when the complexity of each pool sucks up one's attention like a carnivorous cess-fed flower? ~~Of all the writers mentioned here, only Jones, Heller, and Burroughs~~

even try to give a picture of the world, and the last two have departed from conventional reality before financing the attempt. It may be that James Jones is indeed the single major American writer capable of returning with a realistic vision of the complex American reality. But by his method, because of the progressively increasing confusion and contradiction of each separate corner in American society, he will have to write twenty or thirty books before he will have sketched even a small design.

Yet a turn in the other direction, into the world of the Self, is not less difficult. An intellectual structure which is ~~cancerous~~ and debilitating to the instinct of the novelist inhabits the crossroads of the inner mind—*psychoanalysis*. An artist must not explore into himself with language given by another. A vocabulary of experts is a vocabulary greased out and sweated in committee and so is inimical to a private eye. One loses what is new by confusing it with what may be common to others. The essential ideas of psychoanalysis are reductive and put a dead weight on the confidence of the venture. If guilt, for example, is neurotic, a clumsy part of the functioning in a graceful machine, then one does not feel like a hero studying his manacles or a tragic victim regarding his just sentence but instead is a skilled mechanic trying to fix his tool. Brutally, simply, mass man cannot initiate an inner voyage unless it is conducted by an expert graduated by an institution.

~~Set This House on Fire, Another Country, Rabbit, Run, Letting Go, Henderson, and the Glass stories were all amateur expeditions into the privacy of the Self, but they are also a measure of the difficulty, because one could sense the exhaustion of talent in the fires on the way, as if a company of young, untried men were charging a hill that was mined and laid across with fire lanes for automatic weapons.~~

Yet the difficulty goes beyond the country of psychoanalysis. There are hills beyond that hill. The highest faces an abyss. Man in the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, man even in the nineteenth century, explored deep into himself that he might come closer to a vision of a God or some dictate from eternity, but that exploration is suspect in itself today, and in the crucial climactic transcendental moments of one's life, there is revealed still another dilemma. God, is it God one finds, or madness?

~~The religious temper of these books is significant. Of them all, only *The Thin Red Line, Naked Lunch, Another Country, and Letting*~~

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~~Go have no overt religious preoccupation. Yet altogether one could make a kind of case that *Naked Lunch* and *Another Country* are not divorced from religious obsessions. The suggestion of still another frontier for the American novel is here. A war has been fought by some of us over the last fifteen years to open the sexual badlands to our writing, and that war is in the act of being won. Can one now begin to think of an attack on the stockade—those dead forts where the spirit of twentieth-century man, frozen in flop and panic before the montage of his annihilation, has collected, like castrated cattle behind the fence? Can the feet of those infantrymen of the arts, the novelists, take us through the mansions and the churches into the palace of the Birch, where the real secrets are stored? We are the last of the entrepreneurs, and one of us homeless guns had better make it or the future will smell like the dead air of the men who captured our time during that huge collective cowardice which was the aftermath of the Second War. Nothing less than a fresh~~

~~new vision of the ~~past~~ ongoing and conceivably climactic war between God and the Devil to that vision for which we pass through the desert of the last century and the dire omens of the new are hundred to come.~~

~~If this is prodigiously gloomy I can only add that I can hardly believe in my own pessimism too thoroughly and why would I have bothered to put together a book that assumes gloom to assume by the very thoughts ~~that~~ collected in it that novelists will continue to appear, will write better and better, and may yet ~~some~~ — given the vigorous consciousness of the world be ready to save the world.~~

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math of the Second War. Nothing less than a fresh vision of the ongoing and conceivably climactic war between God and the Devil can slake our moral thirst now that we have passed through the incomprehensibilities of the last century. Before us stand the dire omens of the new hundred to come.

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If this is prodigiously gloomy, I can only add that I am not able to believe in my own pessimism too thoroughly or why would I have bothered to put together this book? It obviously assumes that novelists will continue to appear, will write better and better, and may yet—given the ripening consciousness of the world—be as able as any statesman, doctor, or politician to give life to our beleaguered earth, our would-be great society dwelling still in the bonds of misperception that Marx once thought could be liberated entirely by a new vision of economics.

No, it is the theological misperception that enchains us, the notion that the Creator is All Good and All Powerful when indeed it is enough that He (or—is it possible—She?) has been the apocalyptic and still searching Artist who is now in need of us. For we, we humans, are the most advanced presence to emerge from that ongoing exploratory Creation these many millions of years old, this Creation with all its evolutionary triumphs and defeats, its errors, its tragedies, its disasters, its catastrophes and its ongoing creative hope of a more creative world. How much we are needed! How much God is in need of all we may yet discover if we do not destroy it all. Let us never assume there is not more and more, and more and more, and then more to write about, yes, we are the philosophers who are there to make sense of those concentrated if frozen fantasies we pretend to call

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facts. Someday, may it be, we will say, those old fantasies we used to call facts until we learned how to unpack them. What characterizes the beauty and the terror of the Creation is that it is not fixed, not absolute, not imperishable, but is existence itself and so may rise to more or decompose, and/or explode into less. How much fear this arouses in us, and on rare splendid days, what exaltation.

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