Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 267

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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers Who Lived between 1900 and 1999, from the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations

Kathy D. Darrow
Project Editor

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Gale
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI, 48331-3535

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Preface

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Every fourth volume of *TCLC* is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (*CLC*) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between *CLC* and *TCLC*.

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.

- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style,* 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

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Kuester, Martin. "Myth and Postmodernist Turn in Canadian Short Fiction: Sheila Watson, 'Antigone' (1959)." In *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations,* edited by Reginald M. Nischik, pp. 163-74. Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism.* Vol. 206, edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau, 227-32. Detroit: Gale, 2008. The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 7th ed. (New York: MLA, 2009. Print); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Cardone, Resha. "Reappearing Acts: Effigies and the Resurrection of Chilean Collective Memory in Marco Antonio de la Parra's *La tierra insomne o La puta madre.*" *Hispania* 88.2 (May 2005): 284-93. Rpt. in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism.* Eds. Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudeau. Vol. 206. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 356-65. Print.

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Contents

Georges Bernanos
1888-1948

(Full name Paul Louis Georges Bernanos) French novelist, essayist, short story writer, and playwright.

The following entry provides an overview of Bernanos's life and works. For additional information on his career, see *TCLC,* Volume 3.

INTRODUCTION

Bernanos is considered an important French author and thinker of the early twentieth century. He is primarily remembered for his political essays, as well as several provocative novels, including *Sous le soleil de Satan* (1926; *Under the Sun of Satan*), *Journal d'un curé de campagne* (1936; *The Diary of a Country Priest*), and *Monsieur Ouine* (1943; *The Open Mind*). In these and other writings, the author responded to the atrocities and violence of his era, including World War I, the Spanish Civil War, and World War II, and exposed the ever-present struggle between good and evil in society and the individual. Raised in the Catholic Church, Bernanos maintained his faith throughout his life, often promoting a return to traditional Christian values as an answer to society's decline; he also greatly valued the innocence of childhood, which was a primary thematic focus of his work. Critically acclaimed during his lifetime, Bernanos is still respected for his impeccable prose style, formal innovations, and powerful spiritual vision. Writing in 1947, Rayner Heppenstall described him as "a serious and at times an exquisite artist," a "superb rhetorician," and "a profound judge of motive," asserting that his prose "is massive and simple in its weight, fluid and direct in its address."

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Bernanos was born Paul Louis Georges Bernanos on February 20, 1888, in Paris, to Marie-Clémence Moreau and Emile Bernanos. An ill child, he nearly died at the age of eighteen months; his subsequent recovery his devoutly Catholic parents attributed to the intercession of the Virgin Mary. Beginning in 1898, Bernanos attended the Jesuit school at 391 rue de Vaugirard, and later the preseminary school of Notre-Dame-des-Champs in Paris, where he developed a love for French composition. After failing his first and second *baccalauréat,* he enrolled in the Collège Sainte-Marie at Aire-sur-la-Lys, where he completed secondary studies in philosophy in 1906. That fall, Bernanos began studying at the Faculté de Droit at the Université de Paris and over the next three years completed his license in law and literature. During this time, the author became involved with the nationalistic Action Française youth guard and participated in various demonstrations, some of which were violent. As early as 1907, his first short stories appeared in royalist publications. In 1909, his studies were completed and Bernanos was called for obligatory military service, but his health failed during the training process, and he was released in 1910 to recuperate. After a brief return to Paris, Bernanos traveled to the provinces in 1913 to edit the journal *L'Avant-garde de Normandie,* where he published essays and short stories. In Rouen, the author met Jehanne Pauline Marie Talbert d'Arc, who became his wife in 1917.

At the onset of World War I, Bernanos returned to service and saw trench warfare firsthand. He was discharged in 1919 and moved to the seaside at Berck, where he began work on his first novel, *Under the Sun of Satan,* which was published in 1926 to widespread acclaim. For much of this period, the author was unemployed, and he and his growing family were forced to rely on outside family members for support. In 1922, Bernanos found a job as a traveling insurance agent, but with the success of *Under the Sun of Satan* he quit his job and devoted his time to writing a second novel, *L'imposture* (1927; *The Impostor*). Although his publisher provided the author with a monthly stipend, Bernanos continued to experience financial duress and completed his third novel, *La joie* (1929; *Joy*), in a state of panic. Shortly thereafter, the author was notified that his monthly income would cease until he repaid his debts. The family settled for three years in La Bayorre, but as financial pressures mounted during the 1930s, they were forced to leave everything behind and move to Majorca, Spain. Bernanos produced several works over the next decade, including a detective novel and the acclaimed *The Diary of a Country Priest.* The author returned to France with his family in 1937 and published *Les grands cimetières sous la lune* (1938; *A Diary of My Times*), which chronicled his experience of the Spanish Civil War. In 1938, with the dream of establishing a family farm abroad, Bernanos left Europe and settled briefly on a ranch in Brazil, where he completed *The Open Mind,* a novel he had begun a decade before. In 1945, however, he returned to France and continued to write over the next few years, despite his failing

health. On July 5, 1948, Bernanos died in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France, of liver cancer.

MAJOR WORKS

Bernanos's first novel, *Under the Sun of Satan,* was also one of his most successful works. Inspired in part by the author's experiences in the trenches during World War I, the novel examines human despair in three parts and demonstrates the ruthless power of the demonic in the affairs of humankind. One part of the narrative concerns Mouchette, a pregnant sixteen-year-old, who kills her lover for failing to live up to her romantic ideals. Another section of the work describes the last day in the life of the old saint of Lumbres, who is blessed with the gift of reading souls and who realizes on his deathbed that he has blasphemed in asking for miracles. The central part of the novel, however, focuses on a young priest called to sainthood, who is eventually seduced by Satan. The disparate threads of the plot are drawn together when Mouchette encounters the young priest, whose despair matches her own, and finally takes her own life. *The Diary of a Country Priest,* for many scholars, is one of Bernanos's finest achievements. While the central conflict of the novel is the tension between the idealistic protagonist-priest's spiritual struggle and his relationship with his parishioners, Bernanos also demonstrates the ways in which the divine and material worlds are at odds in the work, and shows the disparity between appearances and truth. As the priest deals with self-doubt, he becomes increasingly entangled in the secrets and dramas of his flock, and his best efforts to minister are often misinterpreted. Deemed a failure, the protagonist eventually learns he has cancer, a discovery that eventually leads to clarity and enlightenment. At the end of the novel, the priest utters his last words, "Tout est grâce," or "Everything is grace." *The Open Mind,* also published in English under its original French title, *Monsieur Ouine,* centers on the protagonist Monsieur Ouine, a professor who, as his name implies, says "yes" and "no" at the same time. Ouine presides maliciously over the nearby town of Fenouille, where Steeny, a fourteen-year-old boy, lives with his mother and her companion. On the night that Ouine seduces Steeny, another man is found murdered, which throws the town into chaos, and eventually culminates in multiple suicides and a lynching. The final chapter of the novel, written at the same time as the Nazi occupation of France, deals with the death of Ouine. Some scholars have suggested that the novel can be read as an allegory of Hitler's conquest of Europe, while others have pointed toward more universal themes in the work, such as the corruption and dissolution of society as a result of pervasive evil. *The Open Mind,* as well as other writings, reflect Bernanos's concern for the despair of children and the loss of innocence in the modern world.

In addition to novels, Bernanos also produced important essays during his literary career. *A Diary of My Times* chronicles the author's experiences living in Majorca during the late 1930s and his opinions regarding the Spanish Civil War. The French title of the work, which literally translates as "The Great Moonlit Cemeteries," reflects Bernanos's memory of an experience, when he discovered a pile of corpses that were doused with gasoline and set on fire. In addition to recording atrocities that he had witnessed, the author also rejected the position of conservatives within the Catholic Church, who considered Francisco Franco's war against the Spanish republic justified, instead arguing that the crisis was the result of the disintegration of Christian values in modern society. In other sections of the work, Bernanos asserted that there was no human compassion on either side of the conflict, and he correctly predicted that more widespread violence would sweep over Europe in the years to come. *A Diary of My Times* is also significant for its often-quoted preface, in which Bernanos reflects on his philosophy concerning childhood, a state he admired for its pure innocence. In *Nous autres Français* (1939), Bernanos attempted to articulate his thoughts regarding French honor, while he explored similar themes in *Lettre aux Anglais* (1942; *Plea for Liberty: Letters to the English, the Americans, the Europeans*). Another collection of essays, *Le chemin de la Croix-des-Ames* (1948), charts the author's reaction to daily news bulletins during World War II, while *Les enfants humilies: Journal 1939-1940* (1949), described as a "war diary," offers Bernanos's personal response to the onset of World War II.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Throughout his career, Bernanos enjoyed popularity and the admiration of critics for both his novels and nonfiction works. His first novel, *Under the Sun of Satan,* achieved both critical and popular success, and three years later, his third novel, *Joy,* was awarded the Prix Fémina. Despite the critical success of these early works, Bernanos constantly struggled with financial despair throughout his career, and he wrote many books, such as those of the early 1930s, out of desperation for money; for this reason, many of these works are generally viewed as his least successful as an author. In 1936, however, he produced *The Diary of a Country Priest,* which many critics regard as his most accomplished novel. Widely praised at the time, the work was awarded the Grand Prix du Roman de l'Académie Française. Bernanos won new admirers in 1938, with the publication of *A Diary of My Times,* including Paris publisher Gaston Gallimard and Simone Weil, the French philosopher and activist, who in a long letter to Bernanos asserted that he alone had revealed the truths of the Spanish Civil War. In 1926, 1937, 1940, and 1946, the author was offered the Légion d'Honneur, but in each case he

refused. Likewise, in March of 1946, when François Mauriac welcomed Bernanos into the Académie, the author again politely refused the honor. Bernanos's reputation flourished during the 1940s, and he was increasingly in demand as a lecturer in Europe and North Africa. At the time of his death in 1948, he was still perceived as a valued figure of French letters. Writing in 1949, Ernst Erich Noth [see Further Reading] described Bernanos as a "visionary," but argued that he also "gives testimony of his own time."

In the decades following Bernanos's death, scholars have continued to study the thematic and formal concerns of his work. During the 1950s and 1960s, a number of critics, including Donat O'Donnell [see Further Reading], Thomas Molnar, and Peter Hebblethwaite, examined Christian themes in Bernanos's writings. O'Donnell related the author's work to the Faustian tradition in literature and argued that his entire career was an effort "to convey to his readers his own burning conviction of the existence and power of the Devil," while Molnar focused on Bernanos's depiction of modern society as a "soulless collective force," which suffered as a result of its separation from God. Hebblethwaite emphasized Bernanos's stance as a Catholic writer but noted that his belief in the "sanctity" of life and his compassion for humanity make him relevant to modern readers. Both Hans Urs von Balthasar and Susan M. Keane highlighted the importance of dream in Bernanos's writings, while William Bush, in his 1969 study, contended that the "primacy of childhood" and the "suffering" of the innocent adolescent are the central themes of his work. A number of commentators, such as J. E. Flower [see Further Reading] and Arnold L. Weinstein, have praised Bernanos's formal techniques. Weinstein, writing in 1971, reflected on techniques the author used to create "chaos" in his writings, in order to "render the moral tensions of his work with immediacy" and challenge the reader to find meaning and order in experience. More recently, Stephen Maddux studied the evolution of Bernanos's characterization of Satan and the protagonist-priest throughout his career, while Bush, in his introduction to a newly translated 2000 edition of *Monsieur Ouine,* emphasized the author's facility with mixing narrative genres, including allegory, the detective novel, and the "story of initiation." As recent scholarship demonstrates, Bernanos continues to garner attention and admiration for his unique and visionary writings, and he has maintained his position as an important figure of modern French literature. Writing in 2007, Ralph McInerny remarked that Bernanos, "from the outset of his literary career, had an almost unique ability to provide his reader with an unforgettable sense of the stakes of life," concluding that his work "can be seen as a corrective to the banality of much modern fiction."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Sous le soleil de Satan [*Under the Sun of Satan*] (novel) 1926
L'imposture [*The Impostor*] (novel) 1927
La joie [*Joy*] (novel) 1929
La grande peur des bien-pensants, Édouard Drumont (essay) 1931
Jeanne: Relapse et sainte [*Sanctity Will Out*] (essay) 1934
Un crime [*A Crime*] (novel) 1935
Journal d'un curé de campagne [*The Diary of a Country Priest*] (novel) 1936
Nouvelle histoire de Mouchette [*Mouchette*] (novella) 1937
Les grands cimetières sous la lune [*A Diary of My Times*] (essays) 1938
Nous autres Français (essays) 1939
Scandale de la vérité (essays) 1939
Lettre aux Anglais [*Plea for Liberty: Letters to the English, the Americans, the Europeans*] (letters) 1942
Monsieur Ouine [*The Open Mind*] (novel) 1943
La France contre les robots [*Tradition of Freedom*] (essays) 1944
Le chemin de la Croix-des-Ames (essays) 1948
Dialogues des Carmélites [*The Carmelites*] (play) 1949
Les enfants humilies: Journal 1939-1940 (essays) 1949
Un mauvais rêve [*Night Is Darkest*] (novel) 1951
La liberté, pour quoi faire? [*Last Essays*] (lectures) 1953
Français, si vous saviez, 1945-1948 (essays) 1961
The Heroic Face of Innocence (short stories) 1999

CRITICISM

Rayner Heppenstall (essay date 1947)

SOURCE: Heppenstall, Rayner. "The Priest as Scapegoat." In *The Double Image: Mutations of Christian Mythology in the Work of Four French Catholic Writers of To-day and Yesterday,* pp. 29-44. London: Secker & Warburg, 1947.

[*In the following essay, Heppenstall describes Bernanos's fiction as both "primitive, pre-Christian" and "post-Christian" in its appeal to "the theories of Freud and his successors," and he discerns at the core of the author's mythology "the figure of the scapegoat priest, on whom we load all our sins and send him out into the wilderness and who is the point at which primitive belief assumes the Christian paraphernalia."*]

Certain notions that I had entertained for a long time about the work of Georges Bernanos in particular were crystallised for me when I read the following in a paper by D. W. Winnicott and Clare Britton on *The Problem of Homeless Children*: 'Each child, according to the degree of his distrust, and according to the degree of his hopelessness about the loss of his own home (and sometimes his recognition of the inadequacy of that home while it lasted), is all the time testing the hostel staff as he would test his own parents. Sometimes he does this directly, but most of the time he is content to let another child do the testing for him. An important thing about this testing is that it is not something that can be achieved and done with. Always somebody has to be a nuisance. Often one of the staff will say: "We'd be all right if it weren't for Tommy . . .", but in point of fact the others can only afford to be "all right" because Tommy is being a nuisance, and is proving to them that the home can stand up to Tommy's testing, and could therefore presumably stand up to their own.'

It is curious how the psychological emphasis has shifted off 'repression' since the war. The feeling of insecurity and a lack of childhood discipline are now regarded as the chief source of our ills. If Dr. Winnicott were an army psychiatrist or any kind of official spokesman, I might be suspicious of his emphasis on 'discipline'. But I happen to know him for a peculiarly disinterested man with no axe to grind. Not even an anti-Freudian axe. For all the separate conclusions to which his extensive field-work in peace-time and war-time has brought him, Dr. Winnicott still regards himself as a Freudian and officiates for the British Institute of Psycho-Analysis.

His general view is that a child requires to have its original feeling of infinity closely delimited and its life confined within a circle. If the laws established by a child's parents prove unreliable, if the child can break them with impunity, the feeling of infinity becomes an abyss of nothingness and sets up acute distress and indeed despair in the child. He looks elsewhere for his circle of authority and tests the law personified by his teachers and later by the police. 'The young delinquent', says Dr. Winnicott in another paper on *Delinquency Research,* 'values and loves the policeman.' And he points out that 'the thief's inability to keep and enjoy what is stolen is well known. The boy who steals apples from an orchard and who eats the apples himself is not ill, is not a delinquent. He is just greedy, and his greed is relatively conscious. The anti-social child steals apples and either wastes them or gives them away. Intermediate is the boy who eats them and is sick, the sickness being a bodily form of feeling guilty.'

I am afraid that these considerations may seem a little remote from the subject proposed in the title of this essay. I offer them in elucidation of the first statement I have taken from Dr. Winnicott. This is entirely germane to my purpose.

What I had been thinking about Bernanos was that all the priests who are central characters in his novels are employed as scapegoats in a quite primitive, magical sense. Then I began to compare Bernanos with other Catholic writers and with non-Catholic writers, and after a while it began to seem to me that all the key characters in fiction were scapegoats in one sense or another. Indeed, I began to wonder whether the whole of our narrative and dramatic literature were not a concerted effort to find and employ scapegoats.

I fancied that somewhere there must exist a heavy thesis by a German professor in which all this is set forth, but I have been unable to find it. Instead, I found 'Tommy' in Dr. Winnicott's Oxfordshire hostel, a link between primitive ritual and sophisticated literature, and I felt that the argument had already become a great deal less far-fetched. I opened *The Golden Bough* with an easy mind. The original scapegoat was Jewish. 'On the Day of Atonement, which was the tenth day of the seventh month, the Jewish high-priest laid both his hands on the head of a live goat, confessed over it all the iniquities of the Children of Israel, and having thereby transferred the sins of the people to the beast, sent it away into the wilderness.' Fraser is full of the most enchanting details of the use of animal and inanimate creatures for the private and communal expulsion of sin or sickness among the peoples of every part of the world, but of course a human scapegoat is the most efficient. 'The devices to which the cunning and selfish savage resorts for the sake of easing himself at the expense of his neighbour are manifold.' It is uncertain to what extent Fraser ever realised that 'the cunning and selfish savage' is ubiquitous and eternal. He never let on. He was a wise man and quietly finished his work. The dig at religious mythology was comparatively safe. 'The accumulated misfortunes and sins of the whole people are sometimes laid upon the dying god, who is supposed to bear them away for ever, leaving the people innocent and happy.' But I must not go on quoting from *The Golden Bough.* It is probably accessible to every reader of these pages. Before I move to literary territory, I would like simply to point out that a journalistic misuse of the word 'scapegoat' is widely current to-day and that it is no part of the word's original sense to imply blame. To-day we have lost the sense of our own guilt. It is always 'they' and never 'we' who have sinned. In this respect we have fallen below the moral and indeed the psychological level of 'the cunning and selfish savage'. Anti-Semitism and Vansittartism do not properly employ Jews or Germans as scapegoats. They impute sin to the victim and name it as the cause of the people's misfortunes. The function of a true scapegoat is beneficial, and scapegoats are to be loved.

The night a new priest arrives in the village, a man is murdered. The new priest, sensitive, pale and mysteriously ill, turns out in the end to be a girl. The murdered

man was the expected priest. The girl commits suicide after a confession. Lesbian practices lay at the root of her disorder. In other words, she had broken a very serious *tabu.* The priest paid the price of her guilt and unhappiness. After masquerading as a priest and thus taking his function to herself, she also must die. That is the plot of ***The Crime,*** the earliest, least sophisticated and perhaps even least mythological of Bernanos' novels and the only one in which the subject-matter is explicitly that of a thriller. However, no novel by Bernanos is without a body.

Bernanos is best known in this country for ***The Diary of a Country Priest*** and ***A Diary of My Times*** (***Les Grands Cimetières sous la Lune***). These were translated and published in England in 1936 and 1937. ***The Diary of a Country Priest*** had a popular success. But ***The Crime*** and ***The Star of Satan*** had been published in translation some years before and quickly remaindered. I bought both books in 1939 for sixpence and ninepence respectively from Woolworth's and from a tobacconist's lending library.

A Diary of My Times is not a work of fiction and does not concern us here. The work of Georges Bernanos divides cleanly into two parts, the fiction (whose theme is constant and obsessive) and the polemics. ***A Diary of My Times*** is a protest against the massacres perpetrated by Franco's men in Majorca. By it, Bernanos gained a great deal of credit among non-Catholics during the Spanish Civil War.

In ***The Diary of a Country Priest,*** a young priest already sick dies at his post. He dies for and from the sins of his village. These sins drain away through him, and in the end he chokes up (his only other food is dry bread and sour wine). The sin which finishes him off is the sin of excessive love of the creature on the part of the *châtelaine.* In terms of primitive *tabu,* this was a form of lingering incest wish. The young priest brings it to light and subjugates it in the manner of a psychoanalyst with a gift for the theatre (but the scene is also reminiscent of a medieval conjuration of demons), and that is the end of him. His cancer proliferates at an unheard-of rate, and he dies.

L'Imposture and its sequel, ***La Joie,*** concern a priest who has lost his faith. He is presented rather unsympathetically, but it is implied that contemporary city life (he functions in Paris) has choked his channels of grace. He is in fact an inefficient scapegoat. Full of his own sins, how can he absorb the sins of others? The fact that he is a city priest is already symptomatic. To go to a remote village is a stage on the journey to the wilderness. This priest is refusing to take that journey. In Paris, an old man dies because of the priest's inability to bring down help from God or, contrariwise, to draw away the old man's sins. Then the priest leaves Paris for a remote village, but lives obstinately at the *château.* Here, in ***La Joie,*** he exerts a remoter influence upon a young, beautiful and well-born girl who is in an acute state of grace. The connection is not stated, but it appears to the imagination to be in some way as a result of this influence that the girl is presently murdered by the Russian chauffeur who cannot endure the spectacle of so much God-given joy and who has observed the girl at her prayers. Perhaps it is that the girl herself must be the scapegoat because the priest cannot or will not. However, not only has the murder itself a distinctly erotic flavour, but the seeing the girl at prayer is also done in the style of Susannah and the Elders, as if prayer were a thing peculiarly not to be observed by members of the opposite sex.

The Star of Satan presents a feminine type whose sin Bernanos looks upon with profound compassion and whose story he tells again in the ***Nouvelle Histoire de Mouchette,*** where, however, expiation is secured by non-clerical means. Mouchette is the girl ill-treated at home who goes wrong at a tender age, normally with older men who are her social superiors.

Again the connection is curiously inexplicit. But in some mysterious way the Mouchette of ***The Star of Satan*** is redeemed by the struggles of a clumsy young priest both with his own stubborn (caprine?) soul and with an exterior devil who causes him to lose himself at night (in the wilderness?) and to walk round in circles. The young priest in ***The Star of Satan*** flagellates and wears about his middle a rope so tight that it eats into his flesh.

A class of scapegoats with whom Bernanos has merely implicit dealings are witches. With the master of all covens, however, the prince of evil, the key-scapegoat, he makes overt play. And indeed Bernanos is the only known case of a novelist causing the devil himself to appear in the middle of a perfectly serious novel. In the ***Star of Satan,*** the devil personally presents himself to the Curé de Lumbres at night on that country road in the guise of a talkative wayfarer and causes the young priest to lose his sense of direction and fail in a mission, only to be confronted with a greater mission at the first light of dawn.

As I say, Bernanos does not explicitly broach the subject of witchcraft. His work nevertheless contains elements which only a knowledge of the secret paths of witchcraft will elucidate. Similarly, he does not explicitly broach the subject of *Poltergeister* and yet treads repeatedly on *Poltergeist* territory. Is the *Poltergeist* a scapegoat? In the sense that people blame their *alter ego,* the beast in themselves which is 'brought out', the 'something' which is 'bigger' than they are, he is. For he is clearly a disturbance caused in the environment by the individual who is pestered.

Let us note, at any rate, that Bernanos' portrait of the devil closely resembles the friendly little man in black or grey who recurs incessantly throughout the two hundred years of witchcraft trials. Let us also note that Mouchette is the type of *Poltergeist* girl in early puberty of which the most notable contemporary representative was Marguerite Rozier of Lyons, whose phenomena were first exhibited in 1930. Perhaps most significant of all is the fact that the young priest of ***The Star of Satan*** is modelled upon the Curé d'Ars and that the Curé d'Ars was troubled all his life by rappings, displacement of objects and inexplicable outbreaks of fire, which have made him as classic a *Poltergeist* figure as the Rev. Samuel Wesley and which Mr. Gerald Heard attributes to a form of electrical energy generated by intense prayer.

Let us be quite frank and admit that an element of Bernanos' appeal to his reader is pornographic. Flagellation, transvestism, the seduction of fourteen-year-olds by middle-aged rakes, the sadistic murder of pure girls of good family by proletarian debauchees who are foreigners and peeping Toms into the bargain . . . these are the familiar ingredients of rubber-shop literature, with or without the shutters of the confessional, the priestly robe, the candle-lit study and the clouds of incense.[1] Yet Bernanos is a serious and at times an exquisite artist. He is a superb rhetorician, a profound judge of motive, a man tender and generous (as only a Latin seems able to be) in his attitude to public affairs[2] and a considerable scholar. His narrative technique is possibly unequalled in our time. The prose is massive and simple in its weight, fluid and direct in its address. There is no other writer who could make a spasm of conscience last fifty pages and be neither dull and unconvincing, nor yet fantastic and buzzing with conceits.

The type of Christian faith which M. Bernanos exemplifies is dignified, modest and quite free from either sensationalism or hysteria. From his polemical writing, he must be judged to be a liberal moralist disinclined to debate points of theology with his religious superiors but of a resolute independence in his casuistry. He derives the manner of his eloquence from Léon Bloy and Charles Péguy, but displays none of Bloy's private anguish, none of his highly coloured, analogical and indeed allegorical theologising, and none of Péguy's affectations of a pre-Tridentine simplicity. The direct descendant of Bloy is Berdyaev, a Russian. The direct descendants of Péguy are Gill, Chesterton, Pepler, the bucolic, tankard-draining, hand-loom-weaving, one-acre-and-a-cow English Arcadians. In France itself, the Mendelian laws of intellectual descent operate with greater complexity, though from Péguy we derive J.O.C., the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique,* and the manual thought of M. Denis de Rougement. Like Bloy, Bernanos lives in the world and attacks *les bien-pensants,* but his fantasy has been chastened by Péguy. Like both, he is a French patriot. Unlike both, he shows no special predilection for the poor. So far as an infidel can judge, he stands in far less danger of excommunication than did either of his predecessors.

But a man gives away his predicament in dreams. In a body of work as cleanly divided as Bernanos', his fiction will represent the dream-life as T. S. Eliot's poetry does. A number of Eliot's prose doctrines are refuted in his verse, and much of Bernanos' rhetoric is given the lie by fictions produced when the censor was nodding and the will rampant.

The work of Georges Bernanos is at bottom primitive, pre-Christian. At the same time, its appeal is also post-Christian and not at all uncongenial to an audience conditioned by the theories of Freud and his successors. As music plays directly upon the rhythms of the heart-beat and the bowels, Bernanos, though he uses Christian stage-properties and Christian prestige, plays upon the most deeply flowing mass-impulses of mankind. Bernanos (in his fiction) is a witch-doctor. He is also a psycho-analyst for whom, and for his patients, primitive magic is still operative and primitive *tabus* still valid. The excitement attached to watching a girl pray is a marked instance. And always in the centre of the stage stands the figure of the scapegoat priest, on whom we load all our sins and send him out into the wilderness and who is the point at which primitive belief assumes the Christian paraphernalia.

There is a little recognised form of heresy or predisposition towards heresy which consists in taking the part for the whole or an attribute for the reality. All forms of idolatry indeed are in some sense identical with the erotic tendency known as fetishism. The heretic in such a case may never give overt expression to an heretical doctrine. He substitutes an ancillary for the central mystery and adores something other than incarnate God. It is not far from the truth to say that Bernanos adores the priestly function. Adores? At least he is obsessed with it. And the erotic analogy persists. The feeling changes with the object. The fetishist cannot be truly said to love the shoe or the fur-coat in the sense in which he ought to have loved its possessor.

Is it perhaps that for the intelligent, contemporary Catholic the priest is a figure he cannot accept? It must be obvious to an intelligent Catholic that priests are commonly stupid and that many of them mislead their flocks. Does he, therefore, wish to attach to them a primitive, magical and quasiphallic significance in order to fit them into his world-picture at all? To working-class Protestants in provincial towns, the Catholic priest is at once a figure of ridicule and fear. I was brought up to believe that when a Catholic priest visits the house of one of his parishioners, he leaves his umbrella on the door-step as a sign that nobody, least of all the husband, must enter.

Certainly, the rank-and-file, secular priest is the central figure in Catholicism, and certainly Catholic intellectuals are embarrassed by him. He must be either sentimentalised, deplored or haloed with primitive mystery. He is more popular with anti-clerical writers than with his co-religionists. The lecherous, tormented priests of Liam O'Flaherty, the bumbling idiots of Joyce, are more alive than anything in *croyant* literature. Léon Bloy ignored the secular priest, though he wrote of Trappists and Carthusians. Graham Greene has one book, *The Power and the Glory,* which I imagine to have been directly inspired by Bernanos. The priest here is placed in a country which Greene visited, hated and failed to understand, and he is a bibulous fellow of weak character but an efficient scapegoat. Otherwise, Greene ignores all priests, secular and cloistered. His liveliest cleric is an unfrocked Anglican.

In Greene's novels, the plumbing system of grace is in full flow, but the scapegoats are laymen, preferably criminals and almost certainly lapsed Catholics. But the machinery of fear is altogether more elaborate and sophisticated in Greene. Fear itself is his obsession, fear his theme. In *Brighton Rock,* which has been commonly regarded as Greene's masterpiece, it is explicitly stated that the forces of good and evil must be felt with maximum impact and that a bad Catholic is superior to a good pagan for this reason. In other words, faith increases the *frisson.* The chief argument for belief is that, if you do not believe, you cannot be damned.

Tommy can be truly said to misbehave himself on behalf of the other children. From the children's point of view, he is a true scapegoat. 'The others can only afford to be "all right" because Tommy is being a nuisance.' But the children are not the whole community. There are also the members of the staff who say, 'We'd be all right if it weren't for Tommy'. The wilderness into which the other children send Tommy is the wilderness of adult disapproval, and unfortunately the wilderness in this case has a point of view of its own. To the child community, Tommy is a scapegoat. To the adult community, he is a young criminal.

It is probable that there must always be a similar ambiguity in the rôle of scapegoat in a highly developed and complex society. I have already remarked on the journalistic misuse of 'scapegoat' to mean 'those on whom one lays the blame'. The Jews for the anti-Semite, the Germans for Lord Vansittart, the war itself for the man in the street, the *bourgeoisie* for orthodox communists, the machine for the Arcadians . . . are all fulfilling some of the functions of a true scapegoat, but the fact is unrecognised by those who employ them. The scapegoat's function, of which all men feel the need, has receded into unconsciousness, and 'the cunning and selfish savage' of the twentieth century has succumbed to the final indignity of hating the useful saviour-beast on whom he lays the burden of his sins.

On the other hand, a class of scapegoats who formerly met with unmitigated disapproval have in the modern world received something like adulation from certain groups in society. Now here we have a situation like that in Dr. Winnicott's hostel. The criminal of the gangster films is 'Tommy'. Who are 'the other children'? Can it be that they are the orphans of industrial capitalism, the working classes and the dispossessed in general? As a matter of demonstrable fact, they are. The upper and middle-classes do not read *No Orchids for Miss Blandish.* They read Edgar Wallace or the academic thriller, in which the police or the private detective are the heroes, though we must not forget the vogue of Raffles among the displaced members of the officer class who sold vacuum-cleaners after the last war.

It is evident that the German professor who writes that heavy thesis will have to be a Marxist. To-day is not the only hey-day of the property criminals. We remember Villon and other *poètes maudits.* The greatest popular hero this country ever had was a property criminal, Robin Hood, who retired to the wilderness of Sherwood Forest. The type of mild and amiable scapegoat hero in a more settled age was Robinson Crusoe.

But these are impure types. The criminal scapegoat, the scapegoat hero and another, the scapegoat-fool . . . are the only considerable mythological figures so far employed in Hollywood. The fool has his own history. Mr. Polly was the type of many scapegoat-fools in the English novel, Rip van Winkle in the American. Both were inferior to Chaplin on the films. The Germans may be said to have created the scapegoat leader or in other words to have formed themselves up in a column with the goat at their head and all marched into the desert together.

This is in fact the only method by which a scapegoat may be employed for revolutionary purposes. To have an efficient scapegoat makes for contentment and good behaviour. From their own point of view, our rulers do well to encourage the proletarian adulation of gangsters on the films, if not indeed to allow a substantial criminal class to flourish within the social framework on the American pattern. The members of the hostel staff will no doubt bear this in mind.

A final point of mythological interest. The human scapegoats of the ancient world, although frequently the representatives of God, were invariably chosen for some physical peculiarity, deformity or condition of sickness. Moreover, to give them a positive, fertilising function in addition to their primary task in the expulsion of evil, they were in some communities chastised upon the genital organs 'with squills and branches of the wild fig'. Contemporary creators of literary scapegoats have unconsciously returned with increasing clarity to these original types.