

Dictionary of Literary Biography

Volume 34:

**British Novelists,
1890-1929:
Traditionalists**

Dictionary of Literary Biography • Volume Thirty-four

British Novelists, 1890-1929: Traditionalists

Edited by
Thomas F. Staley
University of Tulsa

A Bruccoli Clark Book
Gale Research Company • Book Tower • Detroit, Michigan 48226

Advisory Board for
DICTIONARY OF LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

Louis S. Auchincloss
John Baker
D. Philip Baker
A. Walton Litz, Jr.
Peter S. Prescott
Lola L. Szladits
William Targ

Matthew J. Bruccoli and Richard Layman, *Editorial Directors*
C. E. Frazer Clark, Jr., *Managing Editor*

Manufactured by Edwards Brothers, Inc.
Ann Arbor, Michigan
Printed in the United States of America

Copyright © 1985
GALE RESEARCH COMPANY

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Main entry under title:

British novelists, 1890-1929: traditionalists.

(Dictionary of literary biography: V. 34)

"A Bruccoli Clark book."

Includes index.

1. English fiction—20th century—History and criticism. 2. English fiction—19th century—History and criticism. 3. Novelists, English—20th century—Biography—Dictionaries. 4. Novelists, English—19th century—Biography—Dictionaries. 5. English fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. 6. English fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Staley, Thomas F. II. Series.

PR881.B724 1984 823'.912'09 84-18723
ISBN 0-8103-1712-5

Plan of the Series

. . . *Almost the most prodigious asset of a country, and perhaps its most precious possession, is its native literary product—when that product is fine and noble and enduring.*

Mark Twain*

The advisory board, the editors, and the publisher of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* are joined in endorsing Mark Twain's declaration. The literature of a nation provides an inexhaustible resource of permanent worth. It is our expectation that this endeavor will make literature and its creators better understood and more accessible to students and the literate public, while satisfying the standards of teachers and scholars.

To meet these requirements, *literary biography* has been construed in terms of the author's achievement. The most important thing about a writer is his writing. Accordingly, the entries in *DLB* are career biographies, tracing the development of the author's canon and the evolution of his reputation.

The publication plan for *DLB* resulted from two years of preparation. The project was proposed to Brucoli Clark by Frederick G. Ruffner, president of the Gale Research Company, in November 1975. After specimen entries were prepared and typeset, an advisory board was formed to refine the entry format and develop the series rationale. In meetings held during 1976, the publisher, series editors, and advisory board approved the scheme for a comprehensive biographical dictionary of persons who contributed to North American literature. Editorial work on the first volume began in January 1977, and it was published in 1978.

In order to make *DLB* more than a reference tool and to compile volumes that individually have claim to status as literary history, it was decided to organize volumes by topic or period or genre. Each of these freestanding volumes provides a biographical-bibliographical guide and overview for a particular area of literature. We are convinced that this organization—as opposed to a single alphabet method—constitutes a valuable innovation in the presentation of reference material. The volume plan necessarily requires many decisions for the

placement and treatment of authors who might properly be included in two or three volumes. In some instances a major figure will be included in separate volumes, but with different entries emphasizing the aspect of his career appropriate to each volume. Ernest Hemingway, for example, is represented in *American Writers in Paris, 1920-1939* by an entry focusing on his expatriate apprenticeship; he is also in *American Novelists, 1910-1945* with an entry surveying his entire career. Each volume includes a cumulative index of subject authors. The final *DLB* volume will be a comprehensive index to the entire series.

With volume ten in 1982 it was decided to enlarge the scope of *DLB* beyond the literature of the United States. By the end of 1983 twelve volumes treating British literature had been published, and volumes for Commonwealth and Modern European literature were in progress. The series has been further augmented by the *DLB Yearbooks* (since 1981) which update published entries and add new entries to keep the *DLB* current with contemporary activity. There have also been occasional *DLB Documentary Series* volumes which provide biographical and critical background source materials for figures whose work is judged to have particular interest for students. One of these companion volumes is entirely devoted to Tennessee Williams.

The purpose of *DLB* is not only to provide reliable information in a convenient format but also to place the figures in the larger perspective of literary history and to offer appraisals of their accomplishments by qualified scholars.

We define literature as the *intellectual commerce of a nation*: not merely as belles lettres, but as that ample and complex process by which ideas are generated, shaped, and transmitted. *DLB* entries are not limited to "creative writers" but extend to other figures who in this time and in this way influenced the mind of a people. Thus the series encompasses historians, journalists, publishers, and screenwriters. By this means readers of *DLB* may be aided to perceive literature not as cult scripture in the keeping of cultural high priests, but as at the center of a nation's life.

DLB includes the major writers appropriate to each volume and those standing in the ranks immediately behind them. Scholarly and critical counsel has been sought in deciding which minor figures to include and how full their entries should be.

*From an unpublished section of Mark Twain's autobiography, copyright © by the Mark Twain Company.

Wherever possible, useful references will be made to figures who do not warrant separate entries.

Each *DLB* volume has a volume editor responsible for planning the volume, selecting the figures for inclusion, and assigning the entries. Volume editors are also responsible for preparing, where appropriate, appendices surveying the major periodicals and literary and intellectual movements for their volumes, as well as lists of further readings. Work on the series as a whole is coordinated at the Brucoli Clark editorial center in Columbia, South Carolina, where the editorial staff is responsible for the accuracy of the published volumes.

One feature that distinguishes *DLB* is the illustration policy—its concern with the iconography of literature. Just as an author is influenced by his surroundings, so is the reader's understanding of the author enhanced by a knowledge of his environment. Therefore *DLB* volumes include not only drawings, paintings, and photographs of authors, often depicting them at various stages in their careers, but also illustrations of their families and places where they lived. Title pages are regularly reproduced in facsimile along with dust jackets for modern authors. The dust jackets are a special fea-

ture of *DLB* because they often document better than anything else the way in which an author's work was launched in its own time. Specimens of the writers' manuscripts are included when feasible.

A supplement to *DLB*—tentatively titled *A Guide, Chronology, and Glossary for American Literature*—will outline the history of literature in North America and trace the influences that shaped it. This volume will provide a framework for the study of American literature by means of chronological tables, literary affiliation charts, glossarial entries, and concise surveys of the major movements. It has been planned to stand on its own as a vade mecum, providing a ready-reference guide to the study of American literature as well as a companion to the *DLB* volumes for American literature.

Samuel Johnson rightly decreed that "The chief glory of every people arises from its authors." The purpose of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* is to compile literary history in the surest way available to us—by accurate and comprehensive treatment of the lives and work of those who contributed to it.

The *DLB* Advisory Board

Foreword

The forty years between 1890-1929 were the most fertile and diverse period of the British novel. During these years, marked as they were by the Great War and by sweeping and revolutionary changes in the social, political, and economic structures of Britain, the novel became a much broader reflector of the aims, confusions, concerns, ideas, and attitudes of all classes of the British people, effectively mirroring forces of change in the culture. The British novelists of the nineteenth century shaped what F. R. Leavis has termed "The Great Tradition," but it was during the years after 1890 that the novel in Britain established itself as the dominant literary genre. More than any other literary form, it most completely absorbed and pointed to the fundamental changes in consciousness that were taking place.

These changes were so substantial and unalterable that Virginia Woolf proclaimed, "in or about December 1910 human character changed." This phrase is remembered more for its dramatic quality than its historical accuracy, but, nevertheless, it points with psychological accuracy to the profound changes in the way man was beginning to think about his universe, his social and governmental structures, and, most profoundly, about himself and his place in the world. In her choice of date, Woolf was referring specifically to the first postimpressionist exhibition in England, but her announcement serves as a summation of the developments that were to take place during the next twenty years.

It is simplistic and therefore rash to look for an exclusive periodicity in literature, just as it is arbitrary and naive to divide a period's literature into discrete categories; however, during the years from 1890 to 1929 there were two strong but not mutually exclusive impulses among novelists—first, to write largely out of the tradition that immediately preceded them at the same time that they confronted the changing shape of the world; and second, to attempt to break sharply from the traditions and values that they inherited and reflect in form, technique, and subject matter an altered vision of the world and the self. Such divisions are, however, obvious only on the surface. For example, the works of Joseph Conrad contrasted with those of James Joyce demonstrate this division, but there are important similarities in their fiction as well. Among

minor writers these distinctions blur. One point is clear: the British novel, as a whole, reflected the great transitions of the society and the nation itself.

This volume of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* includes those novelists whose works by and large reflect affinities in form and content with the earlier novel, or, perhaps more accurately, novelists whose work is not preoccupied with what we have come to term the modernist temperament; this group will be included in *DLB 36, British Novelists, 1890-1929: Modernists*. Although many of the novelists included in this present volume reveal a new awareness in their fiction in both subject matter and theme, they did not view innovation or radical change as their primary purpose. That the novels of the period are so divergent is a tribute to the resilience and adaptability of the genre.

Conrad, the most imposing figure in this volume, retained the frame of the traditional realist novel, but his work reflects from the outset his preoccupation with the moral self. The shift from individual to social principles in the moral world lies at the center of his work, hence the sea, the jungle, the remote in general provide the contexts in which he studies his characters. It is important, too, to remember that despite the crucial influence of Conrad's fiction on the British novel, he was not British by birth or upbringing.

Closer to the tradition of the nineteenth-century realist novel in Britain were Arnold Bennett and John Galsworthy, whose novels reveal the changing social conditions in England. Both looked with irony at the unquestioned goals of progress, the iniquities and even injustices in society, but their work seldom transcends the period because of their failures to impose social consciousness needed to provide moral force. H. G. Wells, on the other hand, was the best-known popularizer of progressive thought in England. He was aware of thinkers such as Marx long before most other writers, yet his methods for conveying his ideas in fiction were conventional.

Ford Madox Ford and E. M. Forster have achieved greater stature than Bennett and Galsworthy, because, rather than embodying a distant or lofty moral objectivity, they brought to their novels a controlled subjectivity which gave them immediacy as well as a moral perspective. Forster's *Howards End*, centering on the liberal values of the

Schlegel sisters and the more “progressive” commercial values of the Wilcoxes, suggests through its symbolism and themes an optimistic alliance. Ford’s *The Good Soldier*, with its complex perspective on moral behavior, probes deeply the question of human deception and the relative nature of truth, a distinctly modern theme. While his fiction looks forward to the modernists, it owes much to earlier French fiction as well.

A number of the writers included in this volume were enormously popular in their own time, but their themes and concerns have limited their reputations. Kipling’s position is an interesting one. He frequently wrote from a distinctively modernist disposition with its allusive qualities and its economy of style, and, while his imperialist values are clearly reflected on the surface of his fiction, there is also in

Kipling’s work an attempt to prick the social conscience of the country. Yet he is remembered as the preeminent nationalistic writer. G. K. Chesterton, also an enormously popular public figure in his day, reveals in his work well-recognized liberal values of the period, but, in fact, his broad engagement with current issues has left much of his work dated. The writings of Oscar Wilde represent an important strain in the literature of the period with his concern with art for its own sake, a characteristic of so much of the writing of the 1890s that fell out of favor with the advent of modernism.

That the tradition of the well-wrought realistic novel remained strong even as the great modernists were expanding the genre attests to the novel’s vitality and flexibility.

—Thomas F. Staley

Acknowledgments

This book was produced by BC Research. Karen L. Rood is senior editor for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* series. The editorial staff includes Philip B. Dematteis, Jean W. Ross, and Margaret A. Van Antwerp.

Art supervisor is Claudia Ericson. Copyediting supervisor is Joycelyn R. Smith. Typesetting supervisor is Laura Ingram. The production staff includes Mary Betts, Rowena Betts, Kimberly Casey, Patricia Coate, Kathleen M. Flanagan, Joyce Fowler, Judith K. Ingle, Vickie Lowers, Judith McCray, and Jane McPherson. Jean W. Ross is permissions editor. Joseph Caldwell, photography editor, did photographic copy work for the volume.

Walter W. Ross did the library research with

the assistance of the staff at the Thomas Cooper Library of the University of South Carolina: Lynn Barron, Daniel Boice, Sue Collins, Michael Freeman, Gary Geer, Alexander M. Gilchrist, Jens Holley, David Lincove, Marcia Martin, Roger Mortimer, Jean Rhyne, Karen Rissling, Paula Swope, and Ellen Tillet.

The following booksellers provided invaluable assistance in providing illustrations for this volume: Bertram Rota Ltd., Clearwater Books, Guildhall Bookshop, Ian McKelvie Books, and Sylvester & Orphanos Booksellers & Publishers.

The editor also acknowledges with gratitude the significant contributions of Scott Simpkins, Charlotte Stewart, and Mary O'Toole.

Contents

Plan of the Series.....	ix	Constance Holme (1880-1955).....	201
Foreword.....	xi	<i>Charlotte Stewart</i>	
Acknowledgments.....	xiii	Jerome K. Jerome (1859-1927).....	204
		<i>Ruth Marie Faurot</i>	
Maurice Baring (1874-1945).....	3	Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936).....	208
<i>Peter M. Irvine</i>		<i>Mary A. O'Toole</i>	
Max Beerbohm (1872-1956).....	9	Compton Mackenzie (1883-1972).....	221
<i>Ann Adams Cleary</i>		<i>Brian Murray</i>	
Arnold Bennett (1867-1931).....	17	Charles Morgan (1894-1958).....	231
<i>Anita Miller</i>		<i>Maureen Modlish</i>	
John Buchan (1875-1940).....	29	H. H. Munro (Saki) (1870-1916).....	235
<i>Barbara B. Brown</i>		<i>Maureen Modlish</i>	
G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936).....	36	J. B. Priestley (1894-1984).....	239
<i>Brian Murray</i>		<i>A. A. DeVitis</i>	
Joseph Conrad (1857-1924).....	43	Frederick William Rolfe	
<i>Kingsley Widmer</i>		(Baron Corvo) (1860-1913).....	249
Marie Corelli (1855-1924).....	82	<i>Maureen Modlish</i>	
<i>Margaret B. McDowell</i>		V. Sackville-West (1892-1962).....	255
E. M. Delafield (Edmée Elizabeth Monica		<i>Priscilla Diaz-Dorr</i>	
de la Pasture Dashwood) (1890-1943).....	90	Frank Swinnerton (1884-1982).....	265
<i>Margaret B. McDowell</i>		<i>Douglas M. Catron</i>	
Norman Douglas (1868-1952).....	97	Hugh Walpole (1884-1941).....	272
<i>Ralph D. Lindeman</i>		<i>Mary A. O'Toole</i>	
Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939).....	107	Sylvia Townsend Warner (1893-1978).....	277
<i>Richard F. Peterson</i>		<i>Barbara Brothers</i>	
E. M. Forster (1879-1970).....	121	Mary Webb (1881-1927).....	281
<i>Frederick P. W. McDowell</i>		<i>Margaret B. McDowell</i>	
John Galsworthy (1867-1933).....	151	H. G. Wells (1866-1946).....	292
<i>Brian Murray</i>		<i>Michael Draper</i>	
David Garnett (1892-1981).....	174	Oscar Wilde (1854-1900).....	315
<i>Roland Dille</i>		<i>Robert Boyle, S.J.</i>	
Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932).....	181	P. G. Wodehouse (1881-1975).....	331
<i>Margaret B. McDowell</i>		<i>Richard J. Voorhees</i>	
Maurice Hewlett (1861-1923).....	189	Supplementary Reading List.....	343
<i>Ann Adams Cleary</i>		Contributors.....	347
James Hilton (1900-1954).....	195	Cumulative Index.....	351
<i>Lauren H. Pringle</i>			

Dictionary of Literary Biography • Volume Thirty-four

British Novelists, 1890-1929: Traditionalists

Dictionary of Literary Biography

Maurice Baring

(27 April 1874-14 December 1945)

Peter M. Irvine
University of Tulsa

SELECTED BOOKS: *Hildesheim: quatre pastiches* (Paris: A. Lemerre, 1899; London: Heinemann, 1924);

The Black Prince and Other Poems (London & New York: John Lane, 1903);

Gaston de Foix and Other Plays (London: Richards, 1903);

Fifty Sonnets (London: Privately printed, 1905);

With the Russians in Manchuria (London: Methuen, 1905);

Mahasena (Oxford: Blackwell, 1905);

Sonnets and Short Poems (Oxford: Blackwell, 1906);

Desiderio (Oxford: Blackwell/London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, 1906; revised, 1911);

A Year in Russia (London: Methuen, 1907; revised, 1917; New York: Dutton, 1917?);

Proserpine: A Masque (Oxford: Blackwell, 1908);

Russian Essays and Stories (London: Methuen, 1908);

Orpheus in Mayfair and Other Stories and Sketches (London: Mills & Boon, 1909);

The Glass Mender and Other Stories (London: J. Nisbet, 1910); republished as *The Blue Rose Fairy Book* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1911);

Landmarks in Russian Literature (London: Methuen, 1910; New York: Macmillan, 1912);

Dead Letters (London: Constable, 1910; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910);

The Collected Poems of Maurice Baring (London & New York: Lane, 1911; enlarged, London: Heinemann, 1925; Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1925);

Diminutive Dramas (London: Constable, 1911; Bos-



Maurice Baring (photo by Bertram Park)

ton & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911);
The Russian People (London: Methuen, 1911);
The Grey Stocking and Other Plays (London: Constable, 1911);

- Letters From the Near East, 1909 and 1912* (London: Smith, Elder, 1913);
- Lost Diaries* (London: Duckworth, 1913; Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1913);
- What I Saw in Russia* (London & New York: Nelson, 1913; enlarged, London: Heinemann, 1927);
- Palamon and Arcite: A Play for Puppets* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1913);
- Round the World in Any Number of Days* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1914; London: Chatto & Windus, 1919);
- The Mainsprings of Russia* (London & New York: Nelson, 1914);
- An Outline of Russian Literature* (London: Williams & Northgate, 1914; New York: Holt, 1915);
- In Memoriam: Auberon Herbert* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1917);
- Poems 1914-1917* (London: Secker, 1918); enlarged as *Poems 1914-1919* (London: Secker, 1920);
- Manfroy: A Play in Five Acts* (London: Privately printed, 1920);
- R.F.C., H.Q., 1914-1918* (London: Bell, 1920); republished as *Flying Corps Headquarters, 1914-1918* (London: Heinemann, 1930);
- Passing By* (London: Secker, 1921);
- The Puppet Show of Memory* (London: Heinemann, 1922; Boston: Little, Brown, 1922);
- Overlooked* (London: Heinemann, 1922; Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1922);
- A Triangle: Passages From Three Notebooks* (London: Heinemann, 1923; Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1924);
- His Majesty's Embassy and Other Plays* (London: Heinemann, 1923; Boston: Little, Brown, 1923);
- C*, 2 volumes (London: Heinemann, 1924; Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1924);
- Punch and Judy and Other Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1924; Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1924);
- Half a Minute's Silence and Other Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1925; Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1925);
- Cat's Cradle* (London: Heinemann, 1925; Garden City: Doubleday, Page, 1926);
- Daphne Adeane* (London: Heinemann, 1926; London & New York: Harper, 1927);
- Catherine Parr: or, Alexander's Horse* (Chicago: Old Tower Press, 1927);
- French Literature* (London: Benn, 1927);
- Tinker's Leave* (London: Heinemann, 1927; Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1928);
- Cecil Spencer* (London: Privately printed, 1928; London: Heinemann, 1929);
- Comfortless Memory* (London: Heinemann, 1928); republished as *When They Love* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1928);
- The Coat Without Seam* (London: Heinemann, 1929; New York: Knopf, 1929);
- Poems 1892-1929* (London: Privately printed, 1929); republished as *Selected Poems* (London: Heinemann, 1930);
- Robert Peckham* (London: Heinemann, 1930; New York: Knopf, 1930);
- In My End Is My Beginning* (London: Heinemann, 1931; New York: Knopf, 1931);
- Friday's Business* (London: Heinemann, 1932; New York: Knopf, 1933);
- Lost Lectures: or, The Fruits of Experience* (London: P. Davies, 1932; New York: Knopf, 1932);
- Sarah Bernhardt* (London & Edinburgh: P. Davies, 1933; New York & London: Appleton-Century, 1934);
- The Lonely Lady of Dulwich* (London: Heinemann, 1934; New York: Knopf, 1934);
- Unreliable History* (London & Toronto: Heinemann, 1934);
- Darby and Joan* (London: Heinemann, 1935; New York: Knopf, 1936);
- Have You Anything to Declare? A Notebook with Commentaries* (London: Heinemann, 1936; New York: Knopf, 1937).
- OTHER: Leonardo da Vinci, *Thoughts on Art and Life*, translated by Baring (Boston: Merrymount, 1906);
- English Landscape*, compiled by Baring (London: Humphrey Milford, 1916);
- Translations, Ancient and Modern (with Originals)* (London: Secker, 1918);
- The Oxford Book of Russian Verse*, edited by Baring (Oxford: Clarendon, 1924);
- Last Days of Tsarskoe Selo: Being the Personal Notes and Memories of Count Paul Benckendorff*, translated by Baring (London: Heinemann, 1927);
- Algae, an Anthology of Phrases*, collected by Baring (London: Heinemann, 1928);
- Alfred Musset, *Fantasio, A Comedy in Two Acts*, translated by Baring (New York: Pleiad, 1929);
- Russian Lyrics*, translated by Baring (London: Heinemann, 1943).

Maurice Baring, a prolific writer of wide artistic range, belongs in the category of English Catholic authors with G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, Evelyn Waugh, and Graham Greene. His publications, numbering over fifty books, ranging



Ethel Smyth and Maurice Baring in Copenhagen, 1900

from poetry and drama to literary criticism and parody, included an autobiography and some fifteen novels. The novels, easily his greatest achievements, are unassuming portraits, written in the barest and most lucid of styles, of the star-crossed loves and spiritual quests of sensitive and cultivated members of the cosmopolitan elite. Remarkably consistent in subject, theme, and technique, they read almost as separate chapters of a single, continuous work. Although Baring's fictive world is a closed one, it is painstakingly realistic. The lives of princesses, lords and ladies, diplomats and writers strike one as being very ordinary. None of his protagonists, with all their flawed decisions and disappointments, are exceptional or strong enough to qualify as tragic figures. Yet their desperate search for love, their sensitivity and cultivation, their gentle melancholy, and above all their credibility as human beings make them worth getting to know.

The fifth son of Edward Charles Baring, a prominent London banker, and Louisa Emily Charlotte Bulteel, and kinsman of several English dignitaries, Maurice Baring began his elaborate education under a succession of governesses and tutors. In his early years he acquired a familiarity with French language and literature which rivaled his knowledge of English. When he was sent to

school in 1884 his masters were amused at his broken English, and at Eton College, nearly a decade later, he won the Prince Consort's French Prize with little difficulty. Thereafter he spent a few years abroad and at Cambridge and Oxford training for the diplomatic service, perfecting his knowledge of languages and refining his taste for the arts. In 1898 Baring was nominated attaché to the Paris embassy. For the next six years he held posts in several countries; during this time he visited Russia, learned the language, and wrote with authority on the land, the people, and the literature. By 1904 he had decided that he was better suited for a literary career than for diplomacy, and, upon the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, accepted a position as military correspondent for the *London Morning Post*. When, in 1909, he reached a spiritual crisis, he converted to Catholicism—"the only act in my life," he states in his autobiography, "which I am quite certain I have never regretted." At the end of World War I, having distinguished himself as a staff officer in the Royal Flying Corps, he devoted himself entirely to his writing. It was not until 1921, however, at the age of forty-seven, that Baring saw publication of his first novel, *Passing By*. A steady run of novels followed at the rate of nearly one per year in the ensuing decade, among which the most notable are *C* (1924),



"Mr. Maurice Baring, testing carefully the Russian sense of humour" (1908), caricature by Max Beerbohm (© Eva Reichmann, courtesy of Miss Elizabeth Williamson)

Cat's Cradle (1925), and *The Coat Without Seam* (1929).

The fourth of Baring's novels, *C* chronicles the brief, troubled life of Caryl Bramsley ("C."), who, misunderstood and disapproved of by his parents and educators, leads a repressed childhood, alternating between a London home and one in the country. After acquiring the standard education of an English gentleman, during which period his love for literature propels him in the bohemian world of artists and intellectuals, he resigns himself to a career in diplomacy. While studying in England and abroad he falls simultaneously in love with two young women who are to preoccupy him for the rest of his life. The one, Leila Bucknell, is a stunning worldly beauty for whom men are little more than playthings; the other, Beatrice Lord, is a more

ethereal beauty of Catholic upbringing for whom love is altogether sacred. Without becoming mere types or symbols, the two women effectively embody the conflict in C.'s character, which culminates, at his death, in a poignant effort toward an affirmation of faith.

C is typical of Baring's novels in many ways. It is written in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*, tracing patiently and meticulously the spiritual, intellectual, and emotional movement of a character on the fringes of the beau monde. It is narrated by an omniscient voice, in the straightforward, unpretentious style that characterizes all of the author's fiction. And it treats many of the themes that pervade the other novels: the search for meaning in life, typified as a conflict between a pagan sense of fate and retribution and the Christian concept of

grace and redemption; the vicissitudes of earthly love, as much a curse as it is a blessing, doomed from the outset to failure; and the loneliness and unsurety of the eternal exile.

One could complain that Baring amasses more material than necessary in his detailing of character and event. At times he merely skates along the surface, routinely cataloguing the traits of new characters only to drop them pages later and reintroducing old ones of no consequence. The protagonist is occasionally forgotten in a flurry of parties, theatergoings, and country outings. Yet there is a reason for all this. If the reader is left feeling jaded and impatient, then he is experiencing a very real aspect of the milieu which Baring is striving to depict. One is made to feel, in such instances, the very numbness or deadness of heart that the protagonist is suffering.

Baring's 1925 masterpiece, *Cat's Cradle*, surpasses *C* as a Bildungsroman. It presents the long, stirring history of Blanche Clifford, who, after spending years of unhappiness married to an Anglo-Italian prince, Guido Roccapalumba, falls in love with and eventually marries a young English Catholic gentleman, Bernard Lacy, who is fifteen years her junior. Never able to find fulfillment in life, she punishes herself for the misery and deaths of a succession of admirers whom she is never guilty of encouraging. She struggles against jealousy for her younger cousin and protégée, Rose Mary Clifford, Bernard's one real love. And she even blames herself for Guido's death, though it occurs long after she has left him. In a supreme act of self-sacrifice, she resigns herself to Bernard's love for Rose Mary and dies of "heart starvation."

Unlike *C*, *Cat's Cradle* employs a central metaphor as a unifying device, which Baring goes so far as to have two of his characters explain: "our lives are like the pattern in a game of cat's cradle, as if someone was playing cat's cradle with us . . . as if we were the threads," one says. "Yes," agrees the other, "it's a funny pattern they make. . . . the same threads get changed into different patterns and combinations." The image describes in simple terms the complex relationships of a half-dozen characters whose cross-loyalties, reversals, and frustrations in love result in a number of unhappy unions and broken hearts. And it embodies, as well, the author's curious strain of determinism, in which happenstance and fate are conceived as playing equally important roles in human destiny.

Though Baring's story of Princess Blanche is his only full-scale portrait of a woman, it is told with sensitivity and skill. In portraying the tragedy of

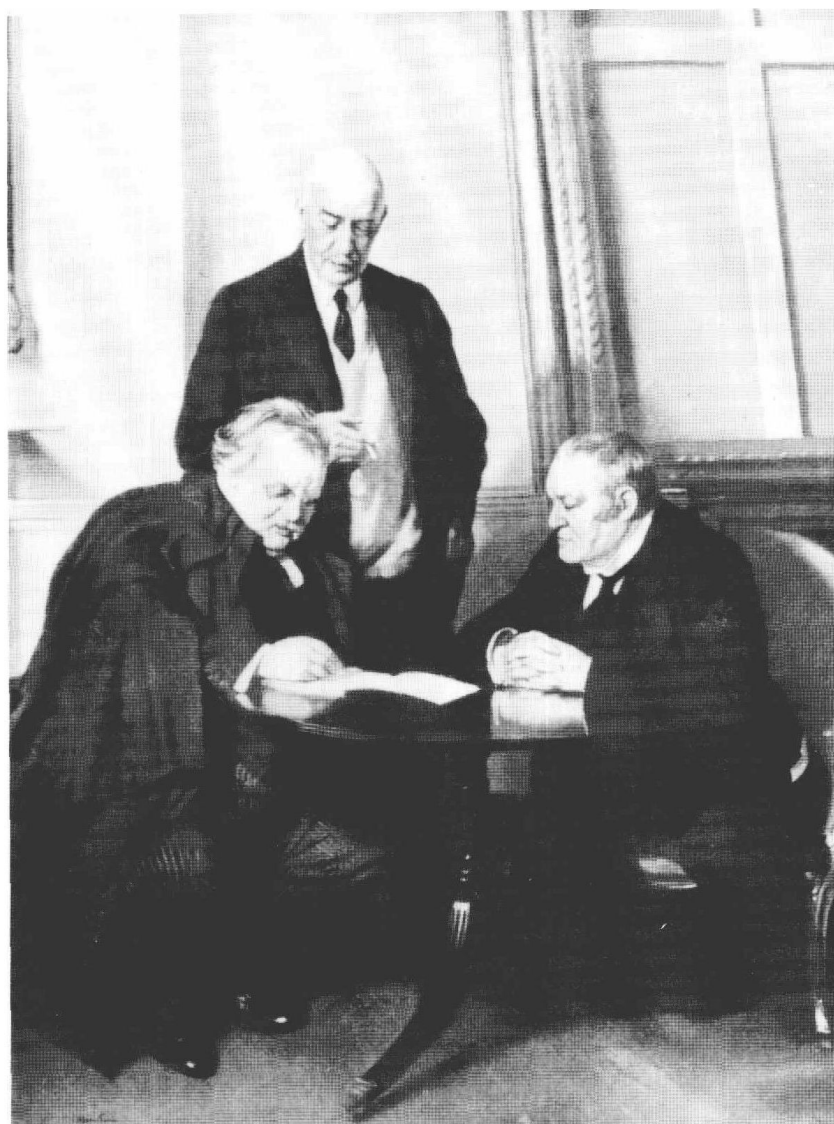
wrongheaded self-commitment—of unrequited love—through the medium of a woman of exceptional beauty and charm, Baring scores his greatest triumph in the novel. Blanche, as the center of consciousness, provides him with the essential degree of distance which he fails to achieve in *C*, with its numerous semiautobiographical digressions.

In 1929 Baring produced *The Coat Without Seam*, a novel which combines many elements of the two earlier ones. It is, predictably, a personal history, tracing in this case the unhappy life of Christopher Trevenen, a "dreamy, obstinate, inattentive" young man born of the upper classes but forced into a life of poverty. Yet another one of Baring's many self-defeating protagonists, Christopher, laboring under a persecution complex, ruins chance after chance for advancement in life and botches one love affair after another. At the moment of his death in battle at the end of World War I, he realizes that the fate of his soul is more important than his life in the world.

Baring again uses a controlling image in this novel, though less subtly than in *Cat's Cradle*. "The coat without seam" is the holy coat for which the Roman soldiers bartered on the day of Christ's death. Interpolating passages from old letters, legends, and other Church memorabilia, Baring traces the coat's history through the ages as it passes from hand to hand, symbolically correlating it with the worldly career and spiritual development of Christopher Trevenen. "Perhaps everybody's life is really a Coat Without Seam," says Christopher at one point. "But mine seems like a patchwork full of holes, and seamed and darned and ragged and tattered and dirty." Each time Christopher happens upon a new chapter to the legend, he invariably experiences a disappointment; the coat, so to speak, receives another tear.

At the worst, Baring's method seems contrived. As well-constructed a novel as it is, *The Coat Without Seam* lacks the careful balance between realism and symbolism found in *Cat's Cradle*, and it is marred, though to a lesser extent, by the same sort of bland semiautobiographical lapses which make *C* such plodding reading in places. Yet in spite of the flaws, Christopher Trevenen remains an interesting and convincing study of a troubled, obstinately proud and sensitive personality.

Although Baring was censured in his time by his non-Catholic readers for his seeming Tractarianism, he deserves credit for the sincerity and delicacy with which he treated his religious themes. He is never overbearing or complacent in his belief, even in a novel as overtly religious in tone as *The*



Conversation Piece, by James Gunn: G. K. Chesterton, Maurice Baring, and Hilaire Belloc (National Portrait Gallery, London)

Coat Without Seam. If his picture of life is bleak, it is devoid of bitterness or condemnation. As Paul Horgan aptly notes in *Maurice Baring Restored* (1970): "It is Baring's triumph that, in a literary world generally oriented to skepticism, he is able to make religion a matter of reality and importance in his writing. . . . He is never bantering or patronizing, like Chesterton, or rude, impatient and contemptuous, like Evelyn Waugh, or glumly rebellious, like Graham Greene." Regardless of one's leanings, one can appreciate how intelligently and candidly Baring examines so many of the important religious questions which continue to perplex humankind.

Most of Baring's critics look upon his novels as minor masterpieces in character study and social depiction. Limited as they are in subject and theme,

the novels are no longer in vogue except among a few readers who prefer a realistic but tame version of upper-class life to one that is overly romanticized or sensationalized. They can be read and appreciated today for the accuracy with which they reproduce the extinct world of the late Edwardian elite, for the purity and simplicity of their style, and for the erudition and sensitivity which they display.

References:

- Princesse de Bibesco, "Mes admirables compagnons de voyage. II: Maurice Baring," *Revue de Paris*, 76 (March 1969): 9-16;
 Ian Boyd, "Maurice Baring's Early Writing," *Downside Review*, 92, no. 3 (1974): 160-170;
 Manuel D'Almeida, "Maurice Baring," *Broteria*, 62 (1956): 31-46;