Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 6

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Volume 6

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers Who Lived between 1900 and 1960, from the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations

Sharon K. Hall
Editor

Dennis Poupard
Associate Editor

Gale Research Company
Book Tower
Detroit, Michigan 48226

STAFF

Sharon K. Hall, *Editor*

Dennis Poupard, *Associate Editor*

Thomas Ligotti, James E. Person, Jr., *Senior Assistant Editors*

Earlene M. Alber, Marsha Mackenzie Check, Kathleen Gensley, Thomas Gunton, Marie Lazzari, Mark W. Scott, Anna C. Wallbillich, Denise Wiloch, *Assistant Editors*

Phyllis Carmel Mendelson, *Contributing Editor*

Carolyn Bancroft, *Production Supervisor*
Lizbeth A. Purdy, *Production Coordinator*

Robert J. Elster, *Research Coordinator*
Carol Angela Thomas, *Research Assistant*

Linda M. Pugliese, *Manuscript Coordinator*
Donna DiNello, *Manuscript Assistant*

Cherie D. Abbey, Elizabeth Babini, Frank James Borovsky, Laura L. Britton, Ann K. Crowley, Lee Ann Ferency, Jeanne A. Gough, Denise B. Grove, Serita Lanette Lockard, Gloria Anne Williams, Robyn Vernell Young, *Editorial Assistants*

L. Elizabeth Hardin, *Permissions Supervisor*
Filomena Sgambati, *Assistant Permissions Coordinator*
Anna Maria DiNello, Janice M. Mach, Mary P. McGrane, Patricia A. Seefelt, *Permissions Assistants*

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 76-46132

ISBN 0-8103-0180-6
ISSN 0276-8178

CONTENTS

PREFACE

It is impossible to overvalue the importance of literature in the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual evolution of humanity. Literature is that which both lifts us out of everyday life and helps us to better understand it. Through the fictive life of an Emma Bovary, a Lambert Strether, a Leopold Bloom, our perceptions of the human condition are enlarged, and we are enriched.

Literary criticism is a collective term for several kinds of critical writing: criticism may be normative, descriptive, textual, interpretive, appreciative, generic. It takes many forms: the traditional essay, the aphorism, the book or play review, even the parodic poem. Perhaps the single unifying feature of literary criticism lies in its purpose: to help us to better understand what we read.

The Scope of the Book

The usefulness of Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC),* which excerpts criticism of current creative writing, suggested an equivalent need among literature students and teachers interested in authors of the period 1900 to 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, and playwrights of this period are by far the most popular writers for study in high school and college literature courses. Moreover, since contemporary critics continue to analyze the work of this period—both in its own right and in relation to today's tastes and standards—a vast amount of relevant critical material confronts the student.

Thus, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)* presents significant passages from published criticism on authors who died between 1900 and 1960. Because of the difference in time span under consideration *(CLC* considers authors living from 1960 to the present), there is no duplication between *CLC* and *TCLC.*

Each volume of *TCLC* is carefully designed to present a list of authors who represent a variety of genres and nationalities. The length of an author's section is intended to be representative of the amount of critical attention he or she has received in the English language. Articles and books that have not been translated into English are excluded. An attempt has been made to identify and include excerpts from the seminal essays on each author's work. Additionally, as space permits, especially insightful essays of a more limited scope are included. Thus *TCLC* is designed to serve as an introduction for the student of twentieth-century literature to the authors of that period and to the most significant commentators on these authors.

Each *TCLC* author section represents the scope of critical response to that author's work: some early criticism is presented to indicate initial reactions, later criticism is selected to represent any rise or fall in an author's reputation, and current retrospective analyses provide students with a modern view. Since a *TCLC* author section is intended to be a definitive overview, the editors include between 30 and 40 authors in each 600-page volume (compared to approximately 100 authors in a *CLC* volume of similar size) in order to devote more attention to each author. Because of the great quantity of critical material available on many authors, and because of the resurgence of criticism generated by events such as an author's centennial or anniversary celebration, the republication of an author's works, or publication of a newly translated work or volume of letters, an author may appear more than once.

The Organization of the Book

An author section consists of the following elements: author heading, bio-critical introduction, principal works, excerpts of criticism (each followed by a citation), and, beginning with Volume 3, an annotated bibliography of additional reading.

- The *author heading* consists of the author's full name, followed by birth and death dates. The unbracketed portion of the name denotes the form under which the author most commonly wrote. If an author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the

author heading and the real name given in parentheses on the first line of the bio-critical introduction. Also located at the beginning of the bio-critical introduction are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertainty as to a birth or death date is indicated by a question mark.

- The *bio-critical introduction* contains biographical and other background information about an author that will elucidate his or her creative output.

- The *list of principal works* is chronological by date of first publication and identifies genres. In those instances where the first publication was other than English language, the title and date of the first English-language edition are given in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication.

- *Criticism* is arranged chronologically in each author section to provide a perspective on any changes in critical evaluation over the years. For purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the publication date of the essay are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism.

- A complete *bibliographical citation* designed to facilitate location of the original essay or book by the interested reader accompanies each piece of criticism. An asterisk (*) at the end of a citation indicates the essay is on more than one author.

- The *annotated bibliography* appearing at the end of each author section suggests further reading on the author. In some cases it includes essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights. An asterisk (*) at the end of a citation indicates the essay is on more than one author.

Each volume of *TCLC* includes a cumulative index to critics. Under each critic's name is listed the author(s) on which the critic has written and the volume and page where the criticism may be found. *TCLC* also includes a cumulative index to authors with the volume number in which the author appears in boldface after his or her name.

Acknowledgments

No work of this scope can be accomplished without the cooperation of many people. The editors especially wish to thank the copyright holders of the excerpts included in this volume, the permission managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in locating copyright holders, and the staffs of the Detroit Public Library, University of Michigan Library, and Wayne State University Library for making their resources available to us. We are also grateful to Fred S. Stein for his assistance with copyright research and Louise Kertesz for her editorial assistance.

Suggestions Are Welcome

Several features have been added to *TCLC* since its original publication in response to various suggestions:

- Since Volume 2—An *Appendix* which lists the sources from which material in the volume is reprinted.

- Since Volume 3—An *Annotated Bibliography* for additional reading.

- Since Volume 4—*Portraits* of the authors.

- Since Volume 6—A *Nationality Index* for easy access to authors by nationality.

If readers wish to suggest authors they would like to have covered in future volumes, or if they have other suggestions, they are cordially invited to write the editor.

AUTHORS TO APPEAR IN FUTURE VOLUMES

Ady, Endre 1877-1919
Agate, James 1877-1947
Agustini, Delmira 1886-1914
Aldrich, Thomas Bailey 1836-1907
Annensy, Innokenty Fyodorovich 1856-1909
Anstey, Frederick 1856-1934
Arlen, Michael 1895-1956
Barea, Arturo 1897-1957
Baring, Maurice 1874-1945
Baroja, Pio 1872-1956
Barry, Philip 1896-1949
Bass, Eduard 1888-1946
Baum, L(yman) Frank 1856-1919
Belloc, Hilaire 1870-1953
Benét, Stephen Vincent 1898-1943
Benét, William Rose 1886-1950
Benson, E(dward) F(rederic) 1867-1940
Benson, Stella 1892-1933
Beresford, J(ohn) D(avys) 1873-1947
Besant, Annie (Wood) 1847-1933
Bethell, Mary Ursula 1874-1945
Biely, Andrei 1880-1934
Binyon, Laurence 1869-1943
Bjørnson, Bjørnstjerne 1832-1910
Blackmore, R(ichard) D(oddridge) 1825-1900
Blasco Ibanez, Vicente 1867-1928
Bojer, Johan 1872-1959
Bosman, Herman Charles 1905-1951
Bottomley, Gordon 1874-1948
Bourne, George 1863-1927
Brandes, Georg (Morris Cohen) 1842-1927
Broch, Herman 1886-1951
Bromfield, Louis 1896-1956
Buchan, John 1870-1953
Byrne, Donn (Brian Oswald Donn-Byre) 1889-1928
Caine, Hall 1853-1931
Campana, Dina 1885-1932
Cannan, Gilbert 1884-1955
Carman, (William) Bliss 1861-1929
Chapman, John Jay 1862-1933
Churchill, Winston 1871-1947
Corelli, Marie 1855-1924
Corvo, Baron (Frederick William Rolfe) 1860-1913
Crane, Stephen 1871-1900
Crawford, F. Marion 1854-1909
Croce, Benedetto 1866-1952
Crowley, Aleister 1875-1947
Davidson, John 1857-1909
Day, Clarence 1874-1935
Delafield, E.M. (Edme Elizabeth Monica de la Pasture) 1890-1943
DeMorgan, William 1839-1917
Doblin, Alfred 1878-1957
Douglas, Lloyd C(assel) 1877-1951
Douglas, (George) Norman 1868-1952
Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan 1859-1930
Dreiser, Theodore 1871-1945
Drinkwater, John 1882-1937
Duun, Olav 1876-1939
Eluard, Paul 1895-1952
Fadeyev, Alexandr 1901-1956
Franklin, (Stella Maria) Miles (Lampe) 1879-1954
Feydeau, Georges 1862-1921
Field, Michael (Katharine Harris Bradley 1846-1914 and Edith Emma Cooper 1862-1913)
Field, Rachel 1894-1942
Flecker, James Elroy 1884-1915
France, Anatole (Anatole Thibault) 1844-1924
Freeman, John 1880-1929
Gale, Zona 1874-1938
Giacosa, Giuseppe 1847-1906
Glyn, Elinor 1864-1943
Gogarty, Oliver St. John 1878-1957
Golding, Louis 1895-1958
Gorky, Maxim 1868-1936
Gosse, Edmund 1849-1928
Gould, Gerald 1885-1936
Grahame, Kenneth 1859-1932
Gray, John 1866-1934
Guiraldes, Ricardo 1886-1927
Gumilyov, Nikolay 1886-1921
Gwynne, Stephen Lucius 1864-1950
Haggard, H(enry) Rider 1856-1925
Hale, Edward Everett 1822-1909
Hall, (Marguerite) Radclyffe 1806-1943
Harris, Frank 1856-1931
Hearn, Lafcadio 1850-1904
Henley, William Ernest 1849-1903
Hergesheimer, Joseph 1880-1954
Hernandez, Miguel 1910-1942
Herrick, Robert 1868-1938
Hewlett, Maurice 1861-1923
Heyse, Paul (Johann Ludwig von) 1830-1914
Heyward, DuBose 1885-1940
Hichens, Robert 1864-1950
Hilton, James 1900-1954
Holtby, Winifred 1898-1935
Hope, Anthony 1863-1933
Housman, Laurence 1865-1959
Howard, Robert E(rvin) 1906-1936
Howard, Sidney 1891-1939
Howells, William Dean 1837-1920
Hudson, Stephen 1868-1944
Hudson, W(illiam) H(enry) 1841-1922
Huysmans, Joris-Karl 1848-1907
Ivanov, Vyacheslav Ivanovich 1866-1949
Jacobs, W(illiam) W(ymark) 1863-1943
James, Will 1892-1942
Jerome, Jerome K(lapka) 1859-1927
Jones, Henry Arthur 1851-1929
Kipling, Rudyard 1865-1936
Kornbluth, Cyril M. 1923-1958
Kuzmin, Mikhail Alekseyevich 1875-1936
Lang, Andrew 1844-1912
Lawson, Henry 1867-1922
Leverson, Ada 1862-1933
Lewisohn, Ludwig 1883-1955
Lindsay, (Nicholas) Vachel 1879-1931
London, Jack 1876-1916
Lonsdale, Frederick 1881-1954
Louÿs, Pierre 1870-1925
Lowndes, Marie Belloc 1868-1947
Lucas, E(dward) V(errall) 1868-1938
Lynd, Robert 1879-1949
MacArthur, Charles 1895-1956
Macaulay, Rose 1881-1958
McKay, Claude 1889-1948
Mais, Roger 1905-1955
Manning, Frederic 1887-1935
Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso 1876-1944
Marquis, Don(ald) Robert Perry 1878-1937
Marriott, Charles 1869-1957
Martin du Gard, Roger 1881-1958
Mencken, H(enry) L(ouis) 1880-1956
Meredith, George 1828-1909
Mew, Charlotte (Mary) 1870-1928
Mistral, Frédéric 1830-1914
Mitchell, Margaret 1900-1949
Monro, Harold 1879-1932
Moore, George 1852-1933
Moore, Thomas Sturge 1870-1944
Morgan, Charles 1894-1958
Morgenstern, Christian 1871-1914
Morley, Christopher 1890-1957
Murray, (George) Gilbert 1866-1957
Nervo, Amado 1870-1919
Nietzsche, Friedrich 1844-1900
Norris, Frank 1870-1902
Noyes, Alfred 1880-1958
Olbracht, Ivan (Kemil Zeman) 1882-1952
Pinero, Arthur Wing 1855-1934
Pontoppidan, Henrik 1857-1943
Porter, Eleanor H(odgman) 1868-1920
Porter, Gene(va) Stratton 1886-1924
Powys, T(heodore) F(rancis) 1875-1953
Proust, Marcel 1871-1922
Quiller-Couch, Arthur 1863-1944
Rappoport, Solomon 1863-1944

Authors to Appear in Future Volumes

Reid, Forrest 1876-1947
Riley, James Whitcomb 1849-1916
Rinehart, Mary Roberts 1876-1958
Roberts, Sir Charles (George Douglas) 1860-1943
Roberts, Elizabeth Madox 1886-1941
Rogers, Will(iam Penn Adair) 1879-1935
Rölvaag, O(le) E(dvart) 1876-1931
Rolland, Romain 1866-1944
Roussel, Raymond 1877-1933
Runyon, (Alfred) Damon 1884-1946
Sabatini, Rafael 1875-1950
Saltus, Edgar (Evertson) 1855-1921
Santayana, George 1863-1952
Schreiner, Olive (Emilie Albertina) 1855-1920
Seeger, Alan 1888-1916
Service, Robert 1874-1958
Seton, Ernest Thompson 1860-1946
Shiel, M(atthew) P(hipps) 1865-1947
Slater, Francis Carey 1875-1958
Sologub, Fyodor 1863-1927
Squire, J(ohn) C(ollings) 1884-1958
Sternheim, Carl 1878-1942
Stockton, Frank R. 1834-1902
Stoker, Bram 1847-1912
Supervielle, Jules 1884-1960
Swinburne, Algernon Charles 1837-1909
Symons, Arthur 1865-1945
Tabb, John Bannister 1845-1909
Tarkington, Booth 1869-1946
Teilhard de Chardin, Pierre 1881-1955
Tey, Josephine (Elizabeth Mackintosh) 1897-1952
Tsvetaeva, Marina 1892-1941
Turner, W(alter) J(ames) R(edfern) 1889-1946
Vachell, Horace Annesley 1861-1955
Van Dine, S.S. (Willard H. Wright) 1888-1939
Van Doren, Carl 1885-1950
Vazov, Ivan 1850-1921
Wallace, Edgar 1874-1932
Wallace, Lewis 1827-1905
Webb, Mary 1881-1927
Webster, Jean 1876-1916
Wedeking, (Benjamin) Frank(lin) 1864-1918
Welch, Denton 1917-1948
Wells, Carolyn 1869-1942
Werfel, Franz 1890-1945
Wister, Owen 1860-1938
Witkiewicz, Stanisław Ignacy 1885-1939
Wren, P(ercival) C(hristopher) 1885-1941
Wylie, Elinor (Morton Hoyt) 1885-1928
Wylie, Francis Brett 1844-1954
Zamyatin, Yevgeny Ivanovich 1884-1937
Zangwill, Israel 1864-1926

Readers are cordially invited to suggest additional authors to the editors.

Alain-Fournier

1886-1914

(Born Henri Alain Fournier) French novelist, poet, short story writer, essayist, and playwright.

In his short life Fournier completed only a single novel, but it is one which readers and critics continue to admire as a minor classic. *Le grand Meaulnes (The Wanderer)* is regarded as a remarkably successful embodiment of neoromanticism, "the most delicate rendering so far achieved in literature of the romantic adolescent consciousness," according to critic Robert Gibson. The novel treats perennial themes in the opposition between idealism and reality, imagination and intellect, childhood dreams and adolescent disillusionment. It is primarily a modern version of the traditional tale of the quest, the search for some lost or unseen ideal. In Fournier's novel this ideal takes the form of lost love and the "country without a name."

Courtesy of French Cultural Services

Fournier was born at La Chapelle d'Angillon, a pastoral region in central France which served as the inspiration for the idyllic and haunting countryside of Saint-Agathe in *The Wanderer*. He attended secondary school in Paris at the Lycée Lakanal. There he met Jacques Rivière, future editor of the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, where *Le grand Meaulnes* originally appeared. In the lengthy published correspondence of the two friends, Fournier's artistic and psychological development can be followed. The most crucial episode of Fournier's emotional life was a few brief meetings in Paris with a young woman, Yvonne de Quiévrecourt, who did not return his profound affection. They were separated, and Fournier devoted years to finding her again, an ordeal paralleled by Meaulnes's search for Yvonne de Galais in *The Wanderer*. When Fournier later discovered that de Quiévrecourt was married and a mother the sense of loss he felt remained with him the rest of his life.

The Wanderer is distinguished by its simple style which nonetheless achieves an atmosphere of rich detail and a subtle fusion of reality and dreams. These qualities can in part be attributed to the influence on Fournier of the English Pre-Raphaelite artists and French symbolist poets such as Francis Jammes. "Evocative" is the word commonly used to describe the sensory texture and magical aura of childhood that characterizes the novel and expresses the personality of its narrator, Seurel. Critical interpretations often view Seurel as only one aspect of an ideal protagonist formed by three persons: the memory-haunted narrator Seurel, the quixotic Augustin Meaulnes, and the enigmatic Frantz de Galais. The adventures of the trio as they search for lost loves and lost time make up a plot that some critics have found contrived and unrealistic. Likewise the opposition between the sacred and profane loves embodied by the innocent Yvonne and the sexually experienced Valentine Blondeaux adds to the effect of an implausibly neat storyline. However, the frequent comparisons of Fournier's novel with medieval quest narratives and traditional fairy tales argue for the position that it was never the author's intention to write a strictly realistic work. Fournier himself stated that his novel would be "a constant imperceptible shifting back and forth between dream and reality." Most critical readings take this ambition into account and find that the resulting ambiguity lends the tale an elusive quality which defies analysis.

Fournier's early short stories and poems, written between 1905 and 1911 and collected in *Miracles*, share much the same nostalgic themes and mood as *The Wanderer*. But as critic Karen D. Levy points out, the play fragment *La maison dans la forêt* and the unfinished novel *Colombe Blanchet* suggest that Fournier's later work would have taken a quite different direction, one of less fantastic idealism. Whatever might have been the nature of his mature works, Fournier's death in action during the First World War determined that *The Wanderer* alone would survive as his artistic testament.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Le grand Meaulnes (novel) 1913
[*The Wanderer*, 1928; published in England as *The Lost Domain*, 1959]
Miracles (poetry, sketches, short stories, unfinished drama, and unfinished novel) 1924
Jacques Rivière et Alain-Fournier: Correspondence, 1905-1914 (letters) 1926

HAVELOCK ELLIS (essay date 1928)

Le Grand Meaulnes holds us, not as a brilliant achievement of rural romance such as George Sand accomplished in *La Mare au Diable,* nor as a fantastic fairy-tale allegory such as Theodore Powys has presented in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine.* Alain-Fournier put forth no magnificent effort. He remained true to his early maxim of the unity of life and art. It is possible to say that there is nothing in ***Le Grand Meaulnes*** from one end to the other but the trivial details of real life as its author had known life. Only they had fallen slowly from childhood on to a peculiarly sensitive and vibrant organism and when at last they were transformed into art a miracle was achieved and the water had become wine.

We realise the fidelity to his own life of the episodes and the atmosphere in Fournier's novel when we read [his] correspondence. Not only is he himself in the narrative all through, so that, as he once remarks, he hardly knew whether he was Meaulnes or young Seurel or Frantz or the writer of the book, but we may note how in the smallest details he seeks to come as close as he can to his own personal life. . . . The sounds and sights and odours that sank into the sensitive spirit of the real youth—all the traits of this remote and lonely spot of old France—live again transposed in the novel. Nor must we conclude that Alain-Fournier was merely a regional novelist. His outlook was too wide for this; his alert intelligence and emotional sensibility were equally alive in the totally different atmosphere of cities. (pp. xvi-xvii)

[Jacques] Rivière has somewhere remarked that it is not easy to describe the method of Fournier in words that might not equally apply to the method of Maeterlinck's early plays. The methods are, however, totally different. Maeterlinck's structures were of romantic material, heightened by the skilful use of silence, even (to use the phrase of Villiers) a *crescendo* of silences. Fournier's structure was severely realistic in every detail, and it was the interstices of the structure itself that were subtly interpenetrated with dream-life. Rivière, always a severe critic of his friend, told him in early life that he was inclined to be sentimental, and to find everything 'touching.' That certainly was the danger for Fournier; but he was saved by his own acute self-criticism, in spite of his profound contempt of the intellect, and, above all, by his instinct as artist. All his life he was haunted by dreams, but it was his good fortune to be instinctively aware that, as Paul Valéry has put it, 'to tell one's dreams one must be infinitely awake.' (p. xviii)

In every poet—in the heart of everyone who shares in the poet's spirit—there is a certain restless homesickness of the soul for which each seeks to find his own expression. Alain-Fournier was inspired by his own life, and if we seek in prose an expression of this nostalgia of the soul we can perhaps nowhere find it so well expressed as in a book which may now be counted among the permanent human possessions, ***Le Grand Meaulnes.*** (p. xix)

Havelock Ellis, in his introduction to The Wanderer *by Alain Fournier, translated by Françoise Delisle (translation copyright 1928 by Houghton Mifflin Company; copyright © renewed 1956 by Françoise Lafitte-Cyon; reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company), Houghton, 1928, pp. iii-xix.*

***THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT* (essay date 1929)**

"Le Grand Meaulnes" will appeal much more to one kind of reader than to another. Without the fascinating evidence of the four volumes of the correspondence between Fournier and Rivière—published last year—the strangely adoring and spellbound atmosphere of the novel is likely to seem a mere convention of literary romanticism to some people. Romantic the book certainly is—it is in essence a fairy-tale—but it records a process of poetic experience in which the dream is indistinguishable from actuality, and which bathes commonplace scenes in a radiant and miraculous light. "Behind every moment of life I seek the life of my Paradise; behind every landscape I feel the landscape of my Paradise." These words of Fournier's . . . apply equally well to the facts of his life and to the scheme of his novel. . . .

[It] is the magic which suffuses the incidents of the story, the wandering gleam upon it, which makes it so remarkable an experiment in fiction. Outwardly there is only the story of Augustin Meaulnes, a schoolboy of seventeen, who ran away from school one afternoon in a peasant's cart, lost himself in the pursuit of a schoolboy prank, and discovered the girl Yvonne de Galais in an old forsaken château during the course of a fantastic fête in honour of her brother's engagement. After an absence of four days the boy returned to his school, thenceforth to dream upon the mystery and to plan his way back to the scene of his adventure. Here is no allegory of unearthly beauty and human ecstasy, no cautionary tale of a search for perfection. The writing, though it bears the impress of an uncannily vivid sensibility, is simple and straightforward in the extreme; at no point does it strain after effect. But the naturalistic manner of the narrative does not deceive a reader with a sympathetic turn of fancy. The whole conception of the novel is lit by a sort of poetry of regret for lost innocence and vanished enchantment. The "lost land" of Augustin Meaulnes is actually the country from which, as Fournier said, he was exiled, but it is transformed by the dreaming passion with which he evoked it into the unattainable region inhabited by Yvonne de Galais. . . .

A summary of this kind is a long way from being fair to the novel; inevitably it threatens to make nonsense of its poetic symbolism. The book must be read with something of the concentration one gives to symbolist poetry if one is to appreciate its peculiar and haunting quality. Perhaps the most astonishing thing in it is the effect of the miraculous in the most realistic passages; the schoolboy adventure is equally coherent on the naturalistic plane and on the plane of pure fantasy. . . . But **"Le Grand Meaulnes"** is not in the least romantic in structure; in one respect it is a painstakingly faithful picture of rural life. For the rest, it is a grand gesture in the style of absolute self-expression, akin in this respect to the poetry of Rimbaud.

"Alain-Fournier," in The Times Literary Supplement *(© Times Newspapers Ltd. (London) 1929; reproduced from* The Times Literary Supplement *by permission), No. 1424, May 16, 1929, p. 390.*

DAVID PAUL (essay date 1947)

In both [Alain-Fournier and Andrew Marvell] there is a balance of passion and delicacy, of nostalgia and clarity which denotes a rare, if retiring spirit. The affinity denotes something else. Though Alain-Fournier was, as he said himself, 'profondément paysan'—and of the French soil—there is a quality in his work which is almost unique in French writing. The French mind, even the mind of a La Fontaine, tends to dwell exclusively in the world of experience. Alain-Fournier is one among

the very few of his countrymen who could have been perfectly at home in the worlds of innocence of Blake and Shakespeare, of [Henry] Vaughan and [Thomas] Traherne. With Wordsworth and Traherne in particular he has this in common, that his whole work is dominated by the memory, and the continuance of sensations which were most deeply felt in childhood.

The landscape of a happy childhood is at once familiar and mysterious. Every object, every person, every movement and gesture possesses value, grace and significance; a value and a grace which belong, like the details in a picture, to the scheme of which they are a part; a significance which can be felt, like that of music, but not explained. (pp. 440-41)

In the solitary novel which he left behind, before disappearing on the German front in 1914, Alain-Fournier has left perhaps the last version of the world of childhood which can be compared with those of Wordsworth or Traherne. That alone, of course, does not indicate or explain the novel's significance as a whole. ***Le Grand Meaulnes*** was conceived in childhood, intensely felt and brooded over in adolescence, and at last written in the author's middle twenties, apparently with the dictated ease which sometimes follows long premeditation. On the surface it is, as the author called it, simply a 'novel of adventure and discovery.' But the surface is the least part of it, and though the surface seems transparent, it cannot disclose the dimension in which the adventures take place, or the nature of the discoveries. The novel contains its own interior illumination, and little light can be thrown on it from without. But some help in penetrating its recesses is afforded by Alain-Fournier's other writings, and most of all by his long correspondence with his closest friend, the critic Jacques Rivière. (p. 442)

The characters of the two friends are the kind of opposites which chime: Alain-Fournier, brusque, vigorous, occasionally impassive and given to bouts of silence, afflicted at times with inarticulacy like a toothache, qualifying or confirming Rivière's enthusiasms, reading more with a view to assimilating his own than with the critic's impersonal appraisal of what he read; Rivière, feminine, nervous, excitable, an exhaustive and acutely intelligent reader, subject throughout his early twenties to a series of prostrating and agonised admirations—almost like a series of illnesses—for one literary figure after another—the ascendants and declines of Maeterlinck, Barrès, Claudel and Gide, follow each other like breakers in a heavy sea; Fournier 'refusing to formulate himself'; Riviere perpetually searching for a formula, like a quick-change artist ransacking a jumbled wardrobe. . . . All the crises and monotonies of both lives are reflected, the plans and sudden reversals, the examinations failed, the agonies of military service, the literary dreams and projects, the essays and free-verse poems tremblingly submitted to select reviews, the rejections, the condolences, the excitement of a letter elicited from Claudel in China and the resultant religious crisis, an introduction to Gide. As the years pass a change gathers over the letters. They contract under the pressure of outside events, become nerveless and off-hand. Their reflective quality is rippled over by the continual current of events and emergencies. The legendary expansive leisure of the earlier years is gone.

It is the earlier part of the correspondence which therefore offers the greater interest; and Alain-Fournier's letters, inevitably, are today of greater significance than those of his friend. While Rivière gravitates excitedly from one idea to another, Fournier, having early divined the world of his own art, gravitates steadily towards that alone, so that the sense of his letters is more deeply continuous. The earlier letters, at least, can be justly compared with those of Keats. The disadvantage of such a comparison lies with the French writer. He did not lead so retired an existence. He had to contend with all the distractions of good health, of finding a way of earning a living, of military service . . . and finally of daily journalism in Paris. In spite of all, his letters have something of the leisured penetration, the wisdom and the charity of Keats. (pp. 442-43)

Alain-Fournier was neither a precocious nor a prematurely sophisticated writer, and it is natural that the early letters should speak with the voice of adolescence. Few writers have felt or evoked with such eloquence the nameless, overpowering impulses of youth, but the intensity never wanders into vagueness, and rarely into sentimentality. On the contrary it tends always to transfer itself to something seen—a landscape glimpsed from the train, a Paris backwater, a family of gipsies, with their caravans—to concentrate its quality, not on an abstraction, but on some exterior object, often an unexpected one. . . .

Even the most youthful of the letters cannot be qualified as those of a belated romantic. Alain-Fournier's impulse was always direct and never literary. He was possessed by an interior passion which, after concentrating a moment on the objects and persons round him, shot past them into infinity. His relationship with Yvonne de Galais—whose name he quite simply gave to the heroine of his novel—can only be compared, if to anything, to Dante's relationship with Beatrice. (p. 444)

At a first reading, ***Le Grand Meaulnes*** is as clear and as defiant of explanation as would be the surface of a lake reflecting a sky which one cannot see. At a further reading it may be more deeply felt, but it becomes no easier of explanation. Its meaning is of the kind which one feels in certain pictures, more particularly in those of Watteau and Giorgione. Giorgione has been called an abstruse and allegorical painter, but both terms miss the mark. No amount of abstruse speculation or allegorical ingenuity will even begin to elucidate such a picture as the Pastoral Concert, in the Louvre. Every detail of the picture—the white urn-shaped woman turning to dip a jug in the cistern, the two dark-faced musicians leaning secretively towards each other, the woman playing the flute, the sun-soaked background—is weighted with a value beyond its purely aesthetic, functional significance. No appeal to allegory or the pastoral convention will explain it either. The whole picture is intent with a meaning beyond meaning in any explicable sense of the term. It is precisely this kind of symbolism which provides the unknown and immeasurable dimension throughout ***Le Grand Meaulnes***—until it unfortunately fails and vanishes a little before the close. It might seem that no quality could be less calculable, and in a way this is true. Yet the letters show how constantly, how critically and how consciously (in so far as consciousness can help the artist) this quality was sensed and searched for by Alain-Fournier for years before the novel was written. (pp. 445-46)

The function of Alain-Fournier's work was, of course, 'escapist,' just as all art is escapist in some sense of the term. He was seeking to escape into his own reality. Unlike the romantic, who constructs or invents it, he was trying to discover it. He has something, but only a little, in common with Gérard de Nerval. There is a delicate but strong foundation of ordered and conscious purpose, of self-critical shrewdness in his work which is not to be found in the writings of that rare, but undeniably deranged visionary. (pp. 446-47)

His novel, when he at last succeeded in bringing it into words, was the growth not simply of ten years but of a lifetime, and

it proved to be rooted in life as firmly as a flower is rooted in the soil. It fulfilled a function which is very rarely appreciated or carried out by the novelist. It is true that every novel contains a kind of symbolism, but it is too often of the kind which Alain-Fournier appraised and rejected in Ibsen—and a similar criticism might be applied to the novels of Kafka. Or else it is of the inchoate, unconscious and obsessive kind which dominates Dickens and many lesser novelists. For the novelist in general, symbolism either does not exist, or else it possesses a fascination which dominates his work, reducing every other element to a mechanism which will serve its ends—it becomes as deadly as a didactic purpose. Between the two extremes, ***Le Grand Meaulnes*** seems almost to stand alone. It is difficult to think of any other novel with which it can be classed. (p. 447)

David Paul, "The Mysterious Landscape: A Study of Alain-Fournier," in The Cornhill Magazine *(© John Murray 1947; reprinted by permission of John Murray (Publishers) Ltd.), Vol. 162, No. 972, Autumn, 1947, pp. 440-49.*

DONALD SCHIER (essay date 1952)

Le Grand Meaulnes has always struck me as being far from a masterpiece and, indeed, as a poor book. . . .

Most novels, if they are to have any claim to serious consideration as works of art, must be about credible events that happen to apparently real people. Not that the novel must necessarily be "realistic" in the narrow sense; but it must be convincing. . . . [In ***Le Grand Meaulnes***], Fournier intended to re-create and then to transfigure certain aspects of reality, and it is my argument that he has failed. Not only are his people the merest puppets . . . but the action of the novel is so wildly improbable that one cannot take it seriously. (p. 129)

Stripped of its stylistic draperies, the plot of ***Le Grand Meaulnes*** is . . . a creaking collection of old tricks. The coincidences which are responsible for the Valentine episode are of a kind which no serious novelist since Dickens has dared to use. The oath sworn by Seurel and Meaulnes (which cannot fail to remind one of *Tom Sawyer*) is preposterous enough when one considers the age of Meaulnes and Frantz; but Frantz's whistle on the day of the wedding, like a thin, shrill echo from *Hernani,* reduces the fantastic to the absurd.

The rusty squeaks of the plot machinery are aggravated by the unsoundness of Fournier's primary assumption. This is that in late adolescence one idealizes the simplicity and purity of childhood and seeks to return to it, impelled by the last, glimmering memories of "the clouds of glory." Thus Meaulnes finds in the Domain a land of heart's desire not only because of Yvonne, but because the guests were, by Frantz's wish, children and old people, the two pure extremes of impure life. Similarly Frantz, after the failure of his attempt at suicide, seeks in vagabondage both the uncomplicated joys of childhood and the lost Valentine.

Now I submit that this is an entirely artificial conception. Youths of eighteen or so do not ordinarily idealize childhood, and they are quick to feel insulted at being still considered children at that age. . . . Since the whole book is based on the notion that Meaulnes and Frantz trail their clouds of glory proudly, the reader is faced at the outset with an improbability great enough to invalidate the feeling of psychological consistency upon which even fantasy must rest. Peter Pan as a little boy may be acceptable if worst comes to worst; but a Peter Pan who, like Frantz, has tried to blow his brains out over the desertion of his beloved, or who, like Meaulnes, has taken a mistress in the absence of his Beatrice, is merely preposterous. (p. 130)

[Although] Fournier's characters were not conceived as real people, they are forced, through Fournier's intention to join the real to the dream world, to act from time to time in the context of ordinary existence. Thus Fournier's plan for the book was doomed from the start. (p. 131)

Meaulnes at his most Byronic is credible and human beside Frantz de Galais. A youth with the airs of a little boy even when he has become a frayed and haggard mountebank, a brother so abysmally self-centered that he does not hesitate to take from his sister her husband of less than one day, Frantz de Galais is little short of a monster. In him the catch-penny melodrama of the book comes to a sharp focus. His vagabondage, the oath, his general air of being both helpless and an evil genius, in all this one can see only the last degradation of the Romantic hero. It is with a real sense of shock that one leaves him at the end of the book established in improbable domesticity with the errant Valentine.

In Fournier's favor it must be said that the realistic aspects of the novel, the descriptions of landscapes, for example, and the *lycée,* of Seurel's mother and the village of Sainte-Agathe are excellent. They are, as one learns from reading the letters to Rivière, Fournier's own memories translated into fiction. In them one does often perceive a high degree of literary skill. The nameless melancholy of adolescence, the wistful, dreamy atmosphere conjured up in the pictures of gloomy winter days in the bare rooms and courtyard of the *lycée,* these have real charm. Yet in themselves they are not enough to force one to admit that Fournier has succeeded in joining the real to the dream world, especially since the most poetic of these evocations, for instance Seurel's revery during a school outing in the woods, deal rather with remembered reality than with the fantasy world of the Domain.

Henri Gillet, an admirer of Fournier, says that on the day when the latter decided to write simply and directly a story which could be his own, he found his road to Damascus. Yet it must certainly be clear from what has been said here that whatever else ***Le Grand Meaulnes*** may be, it is not a simple story simply told. The plot has manifold complications; the characters, because they are neither convincingly real nor satisfactorily unreal are merely incredible; and Fournier's intention of showing both the child's world and the adult's only results in making the problems of love and birth and death in the latter hang upon the arbitrary willfulness proper to the former. (p. 132)

Donald Schier, "'Le grand Meaulnes'," in The Modern Language Journal, *Vol. XXXVI, No. 3, March, 1952, pp. 129-32.*

ROBERT CHAMPIGNY (essay date 1954)

A hero cannot present himself as such in the first person. The hero of Alain-Fournier's novel is Meaulnes; the narrator, Seurel. As far as possible, Fournier avoids letting his hero express himself directly. In the first part of the novel, Meaulnes relates his discovery of the "nameless country" to Seurel. But it is Seurel, the confidant, who relays the story to the reader. . . . Numerous details and comments in the story prevent us from forgetting that we are in direct contact with Seurel, not Meaulnes. The last chapters of the novel, which deal in retrospect with Meaulnes's affair with Valentine, reveal the same preoccu-

pation of the author. At first, we are given a direct account of Meaulnes's diary. . . . The directness of the method is already much weakened by the fact that we are presented with written, not spoken, words, and with past events. But even this approach is considered too direct by Fournier; for the rest of the account . . . Seurel again assumes the role of narrator. . . . Fournier felt that even at this point in his novel the indirect method had to be maintained. (pp. 1-2)

It is true that the indirect method permits the worst kind of hero worship. The hero whose deeds are related by a dull, silly, awe-stricken narrator seems to be magnified in his heroism. This criticism, however, does not seem to apply to ***Le Grand Meaulnes.***

First of all, Fournier does not expect the reader to take Seurel's point of view for granted. . . . Fournier has given the reader enough pointers to intimate that Seurel's conception of Meaulnes is inadequate. Meaulnes himself has to realize that he is not a sublimated Seurel. This realization is of central interest. . . . It is not through Seurel that Meaulnes is a hero, but in spite of Seurel.

Two questions then arise: Why did Fournier try to deceive his readers? Why did he use an inadequate narrator? The answers are that the choice of a narrator was an artistic necessity and that the choice of this particular narrator was required by Fournier's loyalty to experience. (pp. 2-3)

The novel is no gratuitous creation; it springs from the memory of Fournier and is based on the reality that he experienced. Fournier chose Seurel as narrator because he had lived most of his childhood and adolescence as Seurel. (p. 6)

Fournier stands between Seurel and Meaulnes. Seurel believes that the marvelous lies in the thing-in-itself, in what is beyond perception. Fournier has lost this faith: the secret box has been opened and found empty. The marvelous is not an objective secret; it is a subjective mystery. Meaulnes, not Seurel, is able to grasp this mystery as such. The poet can try to reveal it directly, not the novelist. (p. 8)

Thought, for Fournier, is not limited to the faculty which permits man to attain scientific or pseudoscientific truth. It is the total psychological activity which permits him to progress toward a personal truth, that is, an adequate interpretation of his experience. Dream enters into this definition of thought, especially since Fournier has taken care to define it as a "vision of the past." He is always afraid of losing the substance of his experience through an abstract interpretation. . . . (p. 11)

Even in ***Le Grand Meaulnes*** Fournier will leave the task of conceptual interpretation to the critic. The correspondence between Rivière and Fournier is doubly interesting from this point of view, because Rivière was attracted by what repelled Fournier: abstraction and myth.

Rivière reproaches Fournier for what he calls his passivity. As a matter of fact, Fournier was passive ethically. . . . He let the coming of the event take care of itself. But he was remarkably active aesthetically. Unlike Rivière, Fournier did not always read with good will. Rivière gave himself over to Claudel completely. In Claudel, as Rivière himself remarked, Fournier took only what was agreeable to his own experience, to his own aesthetic choice.

Ethical passivity, aesthetic activity: His double allegiance to art and experience may be compared to the method of the researcher. Like the researcher, Fournier needs both hypothesis and fact. From 1905 to 1911, Fournier's experience becomes experiment. His early experience . . . gives rise to an aesthetic project, or hypothesis. But he is careful not to let his imagination run wild; he is careful not to lose contact with the contents of experience. The hypothesis will determine future experiments, not in their absolute happening, but in their possible meaning, in relation to the aesthetic project. Experiment brings new material to the hypothesis and informs it gradually, but the hypothesis, on the other hand, predetermines in a certain way the meaning of the experiment. In order to find something, one has to know what one is looking for, though in an open, questioning way.

This boldness and this caution, this will-to-art and this loyalty to experience are illustrated in Fournier's letters to Rivière. From time to time, Fournier restates and reshapes his hypothesis. The hypothesis, in its final form, is no other than Meaulnes himself. What the experiments must isolate is Meaulnes so that the shadow may become a portrait. (pp. 11-12)

Robert Champigny, in his Portrait of a Symbolist Hero: An Existential Study Based on the Work of Alain-Fournier *(copyright 1954 by Indiana University Press), Indiana University Press, 1954, 164 p.*

MARCIA C. STUBBS (essay date 1958)

Le Grand Meaulnes seems to glide through a sequence of dreamlike events. The tone is muted, at times mysterious, continually evoking what Fournier once described to his friend, Jacques Rivière, as "the strange lost paradise which I inhabit." But conscious of the barriers the symbolists had erected between themselves and their readers with their shadowy, abstracted characters, Fournier was careful to make his characters credible people. They are, for the most part, young boys. They feel the fears, hopes, doubts and joys of youth. Woven in and out of their extraordinary adventures are the rather prosaic duties and pleasures of the schoolboy. They study with familiar impatience, and with a violence peculiar to youth, participate in school yard games or oppose each other in arguments. And the world in which they live is as credible as they. Fournier pays very minute attention to details. (p. 121)

Fournier's technique emphasizes experience; his purpose is to affirm the reality of the experiences he describes, however strange they may seem. Through the objectivity of the details he brings the reader close to the events so that he may enter into them without difficulty. There are no private symbols and the senses perform as usual. Through the strangeness and the mystery he increases our consciousness of the world we have entered. (p. 122)

Le Grand Meaulnes is the story of a romantic search for a beautiful girl met briefly at a strange festival, an attempt on the part of an individual to order all experience to the attainment of a single desire, to achieve tranquillity out of restlessness, to fulfill expectations of happiness roused by a chance encounter. Chance encounter? No, not so. When the hero, Meaulnes, realizes that he has begun his journey without premeditation he is filled with a profound joy, when he enters the drive of the forsaken manor, "a strange contentment urged him on, a perfect and almost intoxicating peace, the assurance that his goal had been reached and that he had now nothing but happiness to expect." . . . The assurance of peace, the experience of happiness, the dream of fulfillment are no more chance occurrences to Meaulnes, or to Fournier, than was the

meeting with Beatrice to Dante, or the promises of heaven to the Christian whose will is bent on eternal rest.

And Meaulnes, during his adventure, is pure will. In accepting the schoolboy we also, and at once, participate in his dedicated search. (pp. 122-23)

Fournier molds a tragic and consequently moving story. The conflict is simple in its scope. It is subjective in so far as it concerns the receptivity of the hero to the forces he is destined to encounter in and about him. But it is not "psychological." If Fournier moved away from symbolism with the personal discovery that "there is no art and no truth but of the particular" it was not to employ his art examining "the ephemeral, the mechanism, the mask social and inconstant," the province of "naturalism" or "realism" in art, but in service of what he called, for lack of a better word, "dreams." "There are errors of dreams, false trails, changes of direction, and it is all this that lives, that excites, snags, loosens, and throws into disorder. The rest of the character is more or less of a mechanism—social or animal—and is not interesting." ***Le Grand Meaulnes*** is not concerned with a divided will, or personalities in conflict with each other, or man in "society" or the opposition of social forces. The stresses that give rise to conflict all come from one direction.

Looking only at Meaulnes' search, the conflict, the failure to achieve his objective rises in part, ironically, from the intensity of his desires and the perfection of his memory. When Frantz is reunited with Valentine his simple adventure ends and he is apparently at rest. It is almost as if time stood still from the moment of their separation to the moment of their marriage, that the intervening history, the "errors of their dreams" are illusions merely. Not so with Meaulnes. Marriage to Yvonne increases his torment. The end of his search appears now within his grasp but he can not yet claim it. For he had met Yvonne at a fête intended to celebrate the marriage of Frantz, a celebration interrupted by Valentine's "scruples, fear, lack of faith," and in the course of his wanderings, his attempt to find once more the lost manor and the beautiful girl, he has met Frantz and committed himself to a vow to restore the conditions of the meeting. It is the vow that dooms Meaulnes. . . . (p. 124)

That Fournier's hero is engaged in a mission is, I think, a more accurate word-description than search or wandering. Meaulnes' experience at the festival was, in a sense, a religious conversion. In one instant he had seen his paradise, and from that instant the rest of his life takes form. The vow, that Seurel comes to think of as "childish," is, for Meaulnes, a sacred rite. There is no question, for him, of the authority of Frantz' quest; they are as fellow communicants to the same mystery. Mission, too, suggests the passion, the religious fervor with which Meaulnes pursues his ideal. And the end of his search *is* ideal. Meaulnes tells Yvonne on their wedding night, "I am not worthy of you," and at one point, though reluctant to disbelieve in the promise, despairs of completing his mission in this world. (p. 125)

If Meaulnes is on a mission the crucial characterization is Yvonne de Galais, for it is the purpose of his search that gives it validity and that transforms ***Le Grand Meaulnes*** from a melancholy evocation of childhood, as it has often been regarded, to the affirmation Fournier wanted to record. . . . The fragile beauty, the spiritual grace of Yvonne, her quiet wisdom, even her dress, so simple as to seem at first eccentric, justify Meaulnes' joy in meeting her and his agony when he despairs of finding her again. But what of the terror he feels at their approaching marriage, and his deliberate flight?

It is clear that Fournier intended Meaulnes' flight as a renunciation of human happiness, and his terror as a revelation of the power he had innocently encountered. (pp. 125-26)

The purpose of the hero's search in ***Le Grand Meaulnes,*** which comprehends both approach and flight, joy and terror, becomes clear when Yvonne first appears at the crisis of his adventure, the mysterious fête, but it had been conceived long before, revealed in a dream "a vision that he had had when a child, and of which he had never spoken to anyone." A purpose that is clearly divine in nature, and that receives its earthly affirmation when Meaulnes and Yvonne meet. "Who are you? What are you doing here? I don't know you. And yet it seems to me that I do know you," Yvonne's glance seemed to say. "Oh, saith the heavenly Christian, I know both whither I go and to whom. I have gone this way many a time before."

Yvonne, attracting Meaulnes to perfection by her presence, embodies the feminine ideal, chaste but maternal, emerging from France's Christian past that Fournier had celebrated in **"Le Corps de la Femme."** But she does not appear to the other characters, nor to the reader, as an allegorical personage or symbol. Though suggesting another world out of space and time, she does not merely represent it; she brings it clearly within the bounds of this world. . . . She appears within the action surrounded by light, but she casts real shadows too, reminding us less perhaps of a medieval illumination than of the wholly natural appearances in myths and legends of gods and goddesses to the mortals and half-mortals of their choice. Nor does ***Le Grand Meaulnes*** "instruct" in the manner of an allegory. Though rising from the first to the high ground of the Grail tradition, it springs not so much from a system of thought or body of truth logically employed as from an intuition, a particular way of perceiving the nature of reality. Rendered as a narrative of what might have been, and in fact largely was, an actual experience, with all of its sensuous details immediately present, ***Le Grand Meaulnes*** catches us off guard as a myth does, and engaging us step by step, leads us to an imaginative participation of the senses in a drama of the spirit. (pp. 126-27)

For Fournier there were no coincidences and no machines, and the suggestion of a power beyond human power, both permeating and directing experience, is present in his novel in more than the obvious sequence of events. It subtly penetrates the entire tone of the prose. At every turn in the story a dream perhaps, a vision, an inexplicable feeling, a sudden decision, enters the consciousness of each character to suggest some unknown power urging him on, some unseen hand coloring his experience, some quality of his search that sets it apart from all other earthly events. The insistence upon mystery, strangeness, ineffability and purpose is repeated in the casual but recurrent use of delicate, illusive images—sand, rain, wind, changes of weather; and in a diction that is not exactly archaic but odd, as if secretly engaged. (p. 128)

But if it is providence that transforms Meaulnes' simple desire for an afternoon adventure into a mission, if it is a power benevolent and divine that guides him to the land promised in a vision, one must think again about his failure, and account for the evil in ***Le Grand Meaulnes,*** the evil that kills Yvonne, reduces Meaulnes to despair and leaves Seurel troubled and unhappy. . . . The hero's search is repeatedly arrested at points where success seems most certain, the vision torments more than it consoles him, and the outcome is not rest but resignation to perpetual striving. (p. 129)