

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 5

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Volume 5

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**

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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.

Beginning with Volume 2, *TCLC* includes an appendix which lists the sources from which material in the volume is reprinted. It does not, however, list every book or periodical consulted for the volume. Beginning with Volume 3, *TCLC* includes an annotated bibliography for additional reading. Beginning with Volume 4, *TCLC* includes another new feature—portraits of the author.

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

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 | Corvo, Baron (Frederick William Rolfe) 1860-1913 | Hall, (Marguerite) Radclyffe 1806-1943 | Marinetti, Filippo Tommaso 1876-1944 |
| Agate, James 1877-1947 | Crane, Stephen 1871-1900 | Harris, Frank 1856-1931 | Marriott, Charles 1869-1957 |
| Agustini, Delmira 1886-1914 | Crawford, F. Marion 1854-1909 | Hearn, Lafcadio 1850-1904 | Martin du Gard, Roger 1881-1958 |
| Alain-Fournier (Henri Alban Fournier) 1886-1914 | Croce, Benedetto 1866-1952 | Hergesheimer, Joseph 1880-1954 | Martínez Sierra, Gregorio 1881-1947 |
| Aldrich, Thomas Bailey 1836-1907 | D'Annunzio, Gabriele 1863-1938 | Hernandez, Miguel 1910-1942 | Mencken, H(enry) L(ouis) 1880-1956 |
| Annensy, Innokenty Fyodorovich 1856-1909 | Davidson, John 1857-1909 | Herrick, Robert 1868-1938 | Meredith, George 1828-1909 |
| Anstey, Frederick 1856-1934 | Davis, Rebecca Harding 1831-1910 | Hewlett, Maurice 1861-1923 | Meynell, Alice 1847-1922 |
| Arlen, Michael 1895-1956 | Day, Clarence 1874-1935 | Heyward, DuBose 1885-1940 | Milne, A(lan) A(lexander) 1882-1956 |
| Barea, Arturo 1897-1957 | Delafield, E.M. (Edme Elizabeth Monica de la Pasture) 1890-1943 | Hichens, Robert 1864-1950 | Mistral, Frédéric 1830-1914 |
| Baring, Maurice 1874-1945 | DeMorgan, William 1839-1917 | Hilton, James 1900-1954 | Mitchell, Margaret 1900-1949 |
| Baroja, Pio 1872-1956 | Doblin, Alfred 1878-1957 | Holtby, Winifred 1898-1935 | Monro, Harold 1879-1932 |
| Barry, Philip 1896-1949 | Douglas, Lloyd C(assel) 1877-1951 | Hope, Anthony 1863-1933 | Moore, George 1852-1933 |
| Bass, Eduard 1888-1946 | Douglas, (George) Norman 1868-1952 | Housman, Laurence 1865-1959 | Moore, Thomas Sturge 1870-1944 |
| Belloc, Hilaire 1870-1953 | Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan 1859-1930 | Howard, Sidney 1891-1939 | Morgan, Charles 1894-1958 |
| Benét, Stephen Vincent 1898-1943 | Dreiser, Theodore 1871-1945 | Howells, William Dean 1837-1920 | Morley, Christopher 1890-1957 |
| Benét, William Rose 1886-1950 | Drinkwater, John 1882-1937 | Hudson, Stephen 1868-1944 | Murray, (George) Gilbert 1866-1957 |
| Benson, E(dward) F(rederic) 1867-1940 | Duun, Olav 1876-1939 | Hudson, W(illiam) H(enry) 1841-1922 | Nervo, Amado 1870-1919 |
| Benson, Stella 1892-1933 | Eluard, Pual 1895-1952 | Ivanov, Vyacheslav Ivanovich 1866-1949 | Nietzsche, Friedrich 1844-1900 |
| Beresford, J(ohn) D(avy) 1873-1947 | Fadeyev, Alexandr 1901-1956 | Jacob, Max 1876-1944 | Norris, Frank 1870-1902 |
| Bethell, Mary Ursula 1874-1945 | Feydeau, Georges 1862-1921 | Jacobs, W(illiam) W(ymark) 1863-1943 | Noyes, Alfred 1880-1958 |
| Biely, Andrei 1880-1934 | Field, Michael (Katharine Harris Bradley 1846-1914 and Edith Emma Cooper 1862-1913) | James, M(ontague) R(hodes) 1862-1936 | Olbracht, Ivan (Kemil Zeman) 1882-1952 |
| Binyon, Laurence 1869-1943 | Field, Rachel 1894-1942 | James, Will 1892-1942 | Orczy, Baroness (Emmuská) 1865-1947 |
| Björnson, Bjørnstjerne 1832-1910 | Flecker, James Elroy 1884-1915 | Jerome, Jerome K(lapka) 1859-1927 | Pinero, Arthur Wing 1855-1934 |
| Blackmore, R(ichard) D(odd-ridge) 1825-1900 | France, Anatole (Anatole Thibault) 1844-1924 | Jones, Henry Arthur 1851-1929 | Pontoppidan, Henrik 1857-1943 |
| Blasco Ibanez, Vicente 1867-1928 | Freeman, John 1880-1929 | Kipling, Rudyard 1865-1936 | Porter, Eleanor H(odgman) 1868-1920 |
| Bojer, Johan 1872-1959 | Giacosa, Giuseppe 1847-1906 | Kuzmin, Mikhail Alekseyevich 1875-1936 | Porter, Gene(va) Stratton 1886-1924 |
| Bosman, Herman Charles 1905-1951 | Glyn, Elinor 1864-1943 | Lang, Andrew 1844-1912 | Powys, T(heodore) F(rancis) 1875-1953 |
| Bottomley, Gordon 1874-1948 | Gogarty, Oliver St. John 1878-1957 | Lawson, Henry 1867-1922 | Proust, Marcel 1871-1922 |
| Bourne, George 1863-1927 | Golding, Louis 1895-1958 | Levenson, Ada 1862-1933 | Quiller-Couch, Arthur 1863-1944 |
| Broch, Herman 1886-1951 | Gorky, Maxim 1868-1936 | Lewisohn, Ludwig 1883-1955 | Rappoport, Solomon 1863-1944 |
| Bromfield, Louis 1896-1956 | Gosse, Edmund 1849-1928 | Lindsay, (Nicholas) Vachel 1879-1931 | Reid, Forrest 1876-1947 |
| Buchan, John 1870-1953 | Gould, Gerald 1885-1936 | London, Jack 1876-1916 | Riley, James Whitcomb 1849-1916 |
| Bunin, Ivan 1870-1953 | Grahame, Kenneth 1859-1932 | Lonsdale, Frederick 1881-1954 | Rinehart, Mary Roberts 1876-1958 |
| Byrne, Donn (Brian Oswald Donn-Byrne) 1889-1928 | Gray, John 1866-1934 | Louys, Pierre 1870-1925 | |
| Cabell, James Branch 1879-1958 | Grey, Zane 1875-1939 | Lowndes, Marie Belloc 1868-1947 | |
| Caine, Hall 1853-1931 | Guiraldes, Ricardo 1886-1927 | Lowry, Malcolm 1909-1957 | |
| Campana, Dina 1885-1932 | Gumilyov, Nikolay 1886-1921 | Lucas, E(dward) V(errall) 1868-1938 | |
| Cannan, Gilbert 1884-1955 | Gwynne, Stephen Lucius 1864-1950 | Lynd, Robert 1879-1949 | |
| Capek, Karl 1890-1938 | Haggard, H(enry) Rider 1856-1925 | MacArthur, Charles 1895-1956 | |
| Chapman, John Jay 1862-1933 | Hale, Edward Everett 1822-1909 | Macaulay, Rose 1881-1958 | |
| Churchill, Winston 1871-1947 | | Manning, Frederic 1887-1935 | |
| Corelli, Marie 1855-1924 | | | |

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Roberts, Elizabeth Madox 1886-1941	Shiel, M(atthew) P(hipps) 1865-1947	Tey, Josephine (Elizabeth Mackintosh) 1897-1952	Wallace, Edgar 1874-1932
Rølvaag, O(le) E(dvart) 1876-1931	Slater, Francis Carey 1875-1958	Thurman, Wallace 1902-1934	Wallace, Lewis 1827-1905
Rolland, Romain 1866-1944	Sologub, Fyodor 1863-1927	Tsvetaeva, Marina 1892-1941	Wassermann, Jakob 1873-1934
Rostand, Edmond 1868-1918	Squire, J(ohn) C(ollings) 1884-1958	Turner, W(alter) J(ames) R(edfern) 1889-1946	Webb, Mary 1881-1927
Roussel, Raymond 1877-1933	Stockton, Frank R. 1834-1902	Twain, Mark (Samuel Langhorne Clemens) 1835-1910	Webster, Jean 1876-1916
Runyon, (Alfred) Damon 1884-1946	Supervielle, Jules 1884-1960	Vachell, Horace Annesley 1861-1955	Welch, Denton 1917-1948
Sabatini, Rafael 1875-1950	Sutro, Alfred 1863-1933	Van Dine, S.S. (Willard H. Wright) 1888-1939	Wells, Carolyn 1869-1942
Santayana, George 1863-1952	Swinburne, Algernon Charles 1837-1909	Van Doren, Carl 1885-1950	Wells, H(erbert) G(eorge) 1866-1946
Scott, Duncan Campbell 1862-1947	Symons, Arthur 1865-1945	Vazov, Ivan 1850-1921	Werfel, Franz 1890-1945
Seeger, Alan 1888-1916	Synge, John Millington 1871-1909	Verne, Jules 1828-1905	Wister, Owen 1860-1938
Service, Robert 1874-1958	Tabb, John Bannister 1845-1909		Wren, P(ercival) C(hristopher) 1885-1941
Seton, Ernest Thompson 1860-1946	Tarkington, Booth 1869-1946		Wylie, Francis Brett 1844-1954
			Zamyatin, Yevgeniy Ivanovich 1884-1937
			Zangwill, Israel 1864-1926

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

Henri Barbusse

1873-1935

French novelist, poet, short story writer, essayist, biographer, and journalist.

Barbusse was devoted to pacifism and human rights. He is best known for the harrowing realism of his war novel, *Le feu* (*Under Fire*), but very few of his other works, particularly his later political writings, are available in English.

Barbusse began his literary career as a journalist and a poet. The poems in his first book, *Pleureuses*, were influenced by the aestheticism of the *fin-de-siècle* symbolist poets, and give little indication of the political commitment central to his later works. Barbusse's first novel, *Les suppliants*, like *Pleureuses*, reveals little concern with social problems. Lyrical and semi-autobiographical, it examines the pursuit of happiness and truth.

L'enfer (*Inferno*), Barbusse's first major novel, marked a new stage in his literary development. Breaking from the lyrical concerns of his early works, Barbusse, in *Inferno*, sought a philosophical and moral basis for human life. Influenced by the naturalism of Zola, Barbusse depicts the agony and isolation of modern existence. Pointing to the futility and disappointment inherent in human relationships, *Inferno*'s violent realism yields only pessimism and despair.

Barbusse's World War I experience was crucial to the re-orientation of his views. Although he joined the French Army believing patriotically in the righteousness of its cause, he quickly became disillusioned by the filth and horror of war. In his masterpiece, *Under Fire*, Barbusse vividly recalls his life in the trenches and portrays, as no one had before, the realities of modern warfare. Characterized by precise attention to detail, moral fervor, and daring realism, *Under Fire* is praised as one of world literature's most powerful indictments of war.

Under Fire marks the beginning of Barbusse's commitment to world peace and human progress, and indicates the direction of his remaining works. Following the publication of *Clarté* (*Light*), a less successful war novel, Barbusse's writings were motivated entirely by his desire to benefit humanity. He joined the French Communist Party in 1921, and for the remainder of his life devoted himself to ideological writings, including studies of Lenin and Stalin. As Barbusse's writings became increasingly propagandistic and militantly communistic, his literary stature declined. None of Barbusse's postwar works ever received the acclaim of *Under Fire*.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Pleureuses (poetry) 1895
Les suppliants (novel) 1903
L'enfer (novel) 1908
 [*Inferno*, 1918; published in England as *Hell*, 1966]
Nous autres (short stories) 1914
 [*We Others*, 1918]
Le feu (novel) 1916
 [*Under Fire*, 1917]



Historical Pictures Service, Inc., Chicago

Clarté (novel) 1919
 [*Light*, 1919]
Jésus (biography) 1927
 [*Jesus*, 1927]
Staline (biography) 1935

STEPHEN GWYNN (essay date 1917)

[M. Henri Barbusse's *Le Feu*] is a grim book with a vengeance, and what discriminates it from any other that I have read is its entire freedom from convention. . . . [It is not] an improvisation suggested by the truth; [M. Barbusse] has made for the truth itself, and what lies behind it. Of course, the truth is truth as he sees it; the facts are presented under a prepossession, so ranged as to lead to a conclusion, or a group of thoughts—would it otherwise be a work of art? At any rate, of this purpose there is no concealment; the opening pages are symbolic, a kind of vision, and in the last chapter,

out of all the desperate realism there comes an echo of this vision and its hope.

Yet so little underlined or explicit is the teaching that a hasty reader might easily accept the book for a casually strung series of episodes and impressions, and fail to detect the underlying motive which gives unity to the whole. Certain things, too, are episodic, illustrations as it were of matters peculiar to France; whereas the whole is in a sense international, or, more properly, human in its outlook. It is a study of Frenchmen at war, yet as the theme progresses it is seen with how little difference the whole could be true of Germans. (p. 805)

How far [his] interpretation of the common soldier's mind will be accepted by those for whom M. Barbusse speaks, I cannot say. . . . But this I do know—that he does not and cannot, even with his Southern's special hatred of that muddy watery torment, overstate the greatness and the obscurity of their sacrifice. And if in all his book there is no trace of flinching, the reason is, first, that he rings true to France; but secondly and chiefly that, knowing what war means to the man on the firestep, he holds to his faith that the man on the firestep will make an end of war. (p. 817)

Stephen Gwynn, "The Man on the Firestep"
(reprinted by permission of the Estate of Stephen Gwynn), *The Nineteenth-Century*, No. CCCCLXXXVIII, October, 1917, pp. 803-17.

FRANCIS HACKETT (essay date 1917)

It is unnecessary to have been at the front to judge of M. Barbusse's veracity. One does not need to have killed a woman to accept *Crime and Punishment*. *Under Fire* . . . impresses its veracity in revealing its saturation with the war. There are other experiences of the war, as there are other men, but this is invincibly complete. It is a book that is no more to be questioned than the diary of Captain Scott or the deathless pages of Tolstoy. It composes the war for our understanding, making us familiar at the beginning with the men who are going to die, initiating us into trench life before the charge is launched over the top, ending the book in a supreme symbolism. But the wise composition that unites *Under Fire* is no more artificial than the due supervision of words as they stream from one's own brain to the penpoint. The facts have been disposed, even as a pointilliste disposes colors, only to keep them true.

Against the tale that M. Barbusse has told there is the conspiracy of a thousand conventions. He is a Frenchman fighting for France, la belle France, in what many consider the last extremity of her effort to remain a "first-class" power. To sustain that effort it is vital, even if untruth is required, to give a good account of the organization of the army and its esprit. . . . A good patriot is not supposed to tell the world of filth, of lice, of corpses in ridiculous attitudes, of bad food, of muck in language, of bloodshed sought and enjoyed. If a man tells these things or breathes a word contrary to the unanimity of national purpose, he is treasonable. The facts are of no consequence. The impossibility of keeping them suppressed is of no consequence. If the sun rises on a national delinquency or ineptitude, it is the sun that is treasonable. From the guns of such a conspiracy M. Barbusse is also under fire.

But when one has faced machine-guns, it appears, it is not impossible to face machine-minds. One can feel in M. Barbusse a disdain for those feeble men of Europe who, within boundaries insisted upon by themselves, brought about a war that is the crashing bankruptcy of all their theories, all their pretensions, their idols, their sanctity. . . . [They] ask M. Barbusse to take his mind from the actuality he has experienced, and disregard the war as a harvest of their statesmanship. But the author of *Under Fire* is too sure of war not to be sure of something about peace which is more than non-war. He is for peace, not a peace that will save his own skin now but a peace that will be embodied in the plans of a society which takes full stock of its own bestiality, its own madness.

It is not the picturesque beginning of this book that lets one see M. Barbusse the accuser of war. He is content at the beginning to give us the mucky trench, the rag-bag cave-dwellers who are his comrades, the Falstaffian humor of their masculinity, the jocularly that is the jewel in the toad. . . . It is at [the] point, perhaps, with the disaster to Poterloo, that one is gripped by the inhuman remorselessness of all too human device.

No description of bombardment surpasses M. Barbusse's, even in translation. And no description of going forward, so it seems to me, can equal his chapter *Under Fire*. To quote from it is unfair. It is like giving one stilled picture of a terrific movement. (p. 358)

[Only by] profound acceptance of his comrades is M. Barbusse enabled to speak as he does in the concluding chapter, and also in that moment of superb magnanimity at the end of the advance when the dignified Bertrand permits himself to say, "It was necessary." . . .

It was necessary! One does not doubt that M. Barbusse has himself said so, in the face of all it means. But in the domicile that his mind gives this war there is no mysticism, no patriotism, no acquiescence. He knows that the war is evil. He has accepted it as the lesser of two evils. His book is great because it is able to encompass everything, even the necessity of living by dying. (p. 359)

Francis Hackett, "A War of Men," in *The New Republic* (© 1917 *The New Republic, Inc.*), Vol. 12, No. 156, October 27, 1917, pp. 358-59.

ROBERT HERRICK (essay date 1918)

[Barbusse's "*Le Feu*" is] the most searching, the most revealing statement of what modern war means both morally and physically. The book has all those intimate signs of truth that carry immediate conviction even to him who has had no personal experience with which to corroborate its record (as all vital literature convinces—as Dostoevsky or Gorky convince millions who know nothing personally about Russia and Russians). I have read many books, private as well as published diaries, which attempt to reveal what men suffer and endure in this most hateful of all wars. Not one of them—and there are many honest revelations, unaffected, simple, and sincere efforts to put into words the meaning of this monstrous calamity—has approached "*Le Feu*" in perception, in sheer capacity for truth. Nothing since heard or read has effaced its stinging impression. Others deal with familiar surfaces, with personal and incomplete reactions, often noble

and sensitive, humorous and philosophical; but Barbusse gives the thing itself—War. (p. 133)

Barbusse has shown us soldiers, not only as dirty and unidealistic, degraded by the occupation to which they are condemned, but also as too obviously the blind sport of life—human sacrifices of human society, killing and being killed in a war that is insanity, whose origin and conclusion they cannot affect. (pp. 133-34)

[What] Barbusse believes and what the person who thinks in terms of newspaper and politician formulae cannot see, is that War is most of all an awful process of religious conversion through which the minds of all men will be awakened to the recognition of supreme sin. It must drag on its dreary, blood-stained course until all whose selfish, thoughtless conduct in times of peace, all grasping and power-loving statesmen, journalists, business men, indifferents, have received sufficient vision to recognize their errors, which cause wars. (p. 134)

Robert Herrick, "Unromantic War," in *The Dial* (copyright, 1918, by The Dial Publishing Company, Inc.), Vol. LXIV, No. 760, February 14, 1918, pp. 133-34.

LOLA RIDGE (essay date 1918)

Seen through that opacity that training and environment spreads before them like a curtain, men are essentially alike. This is a truth Barbusse brings out in *The Inferno* as well as in his famous book *Under Fire*. And not only in the debate between the doctors, where even the old traditionalist admits: "man is more closely knit to man than to his vague compatriots," and that "the cult of the fatherland" is the cancer of the world, but in the mere depiction of the vivid and flitting characters of *The Inferno*. For these French souls grope in barren spaces, clutching and rebuffing each other, bored and unhappy as Chekhov's Russians. Totally unlike the Slav writer in temperament and style, Barbusse yet sees with him eye to eye.

How often one walking at night stares avidly at curtained windows, longing to open those crystal cases where life burns so secretly, and watch the gesticulating figures in the abandon of their unconsciousness.

This is what Barbusse's *Inferno* has done.

Through a hole in the cracked plaster of the wall, he watches the people that come and go in the room with its common furniture "and the window like a human face against the sky." (p. 262)

In reading *The Inferno* one somehow thinks of [Frank] Swinerton's *Nocturne*—perhaps because he, too, sounds, though not so poignantly, that note of eternal isolation. But we see Mr. Swinerton's extraordinarily vivid characters as through an open door, and we are conscious always of the rank opacity of their flesh. The Frenchman's creations are like naked spirits—spirits seen through the pale luminosity of that *I* that enfolds them like an aura. This astounding ego encompasses and absorbs all that it envisions. The result is that we do not look through "a hole in the wall" at substantial people walking about, but through the lighted rift in a soul where strangely glowing shadows pass and repass. . . .

Eternal isolation, and yet eternal miracle—immensity within us—all the vast circumference of life, and all divine that

is. . . . This is the essence of the author's final illumination. If it be true, men are lonely Gods, incapable of fusing with each other, yet each seeking completion in the outward shadow of what lies within. And so it would seem that there can be no end to the human conflict, but that souls must go on crashing into each other's orbits like contending worlds. (p. 263)

Lola Ridge, "A Book of Souls," in *The New Republic* (© 1918 The New Republic, Inc.), Vol. 16, No. 204, September 28, 1918, pp. 262-63.

JOHN MANNING BOOKER (essay date 1919)

Americans consumed [Henri Barbusse's] *Under Fire* by the tens of thousands; thrilled, throbbed, and ached over it; went the full length of its implication that all was wrong with the world; and would, perhaps, have fallen into its melancholia had they not set about putting things to rights.

What will they make of the stories written in peace times by the same author—such as those in *We Others*? (p. 146)

[These] stories of pity that Barbusse has written either throw a pitiful object against a pitiless world or reveal pity awakening in a hardened nature (the awakening is generally caused by a stroke of apoplexy—a rather radical cure). In both cases the reader is led to turn from the pity of a particular instance to face the pity of life in general.

Such a quality of pity may be typical of modern French literature or it may be exceptional in it: that is not our present concern. In English literature such pity is exceptional, and it is on English literature that the American reader is reared. He meets in Barbusse a kind of pity that for him is even more of a depressant than a purgative, and, therefore, distasteful. He turns away from it with the feeling that these stories of pity do not match experience.

And he will turn away from the whole of such a collection of stories as *We Others* with the same feeling. You cannot make him believe that Fate always works unhappily, that the madness of love always ends tragically, that pity always remains unconsolated—in short, that life is such a desperately sad affair. The pessimism in which *Under Fire* is steeped is justified by the catastrophic nature of the war that gave it birth. The average American will accept that pessimism as a war product, but he will not accept it in peace. It does not match his experience—actual or imaginative. He will "pass it up." (pp. 147-48)

John Manning Booker, "Barbusse in Peace and War," in *The New Republic* (© 1919 The New Republic, Inc.), Vol. 20, No. 252, September 3, 1919, pp. 146-48.

MALCOLM COWLEY (essay date 1922)

There is something a little paradoxical in the attitude of Henri Barbusse toward the war [in his novel "Under Fire."] He hates it as much as St. Augustine hated the Devil, and yet the war was his salvation. Not because it made his name a common-place all over the world—fame has affected him very little—but because it resolved his difficulties as a man and as a writer. The books he wrote before 1914 were so blackly pessimistic that Schopenhauer beside them seems a booster for the Rotary Club. They deny every possibility of happiness; they deny even the reality of the world. They are

nightmares, dreamed by a great artist. "Under Fire" may also be a nightmare, but after reading it one feels that some things are good: work, comradeship, peace. And by 1919, when he wrote "Clarté", Barbusse had come to believe in the possibility of a better world, a possibility that is even now within the grasp of struggling mortals. He had received a new vision of life, and he owed it to his experiences in the trenches. (p. 180)

Barbusse is irritated when he hears himself dismissed as a propagandist. He says, for example, "I never intended 'Under Fire' for propaganda. My enemies made it political, and not my friends." On the other hand he will never write a book without some bearing on contemporary ideas. "The sort of literature", he says, "that exists in a fourth dimension and has no connection with modern life: 'pure literature', as people call it, is dead. But the literature of ideas is always living."

He has a surprising sympathy with the experiments of younger writers. Most novelists who call themselves "advanced" are content to be advanced in politics alone; their prose has developed no further than that of Voltaire or Macaulay. Examples are numerous. Anatole France is by far the greatest. . . . That is not the fashion of Barbusse. He watches with interest each new experiment in prose or verse, and even makes bold experiments himself. "It is ridiculous", he says, "to try to cast the present age into molds which we have inherited from the eighteenth century." (p. 182)

Malcolm Cowley, "Henri Barbusse," in *The Bookman*, New York (copyright, 1922, by George H. Doran Company), Vol. LVI, No. 2, October, 1922, pp. 180-82.

BRIAN RHYS (essay date 1926)

[Henri Barbusse's first book, *Pleureuses*, is] a slender volume of verses. Slight, light even, delicately artificial, they take us into the atmosphere of the drawing-room; it would be difficult indeed to find here any trace of the real Barbusse. (p. viii)

In *Les Suppliants* we are at the parting of the ways. The young man relives the sensitive, reluctant hours of his childhood, but the emotion so long pent up begins to flow in a rhythmical prose, surcharged with poetic imagery. . . . [In *L'Enfer* Barbusse] declares his fierce and sombre powers, affirms himself as a poetic realist. . . . *L'Enfer (Inferno)* is a terrible book. At first glance it might be taken for one of those *livres hardis* which constantly appear to prick on the Parisian's appetite for sensation. The theme frankly lends itself to the crude naturalism of a Zola. . . .

Its violent realism only ends in emptiness and blackness of mind. (p. ix)

[In *Nous Autres (We Others)*] a number of short stories are brought together and grouped under three headings: Fate, the Madness of Love, Pity. Barbusse does not reveal himself as a master in the art of the short story. Those in the first section are violent, rapid in surprise, often improbable. In the second, however, there are one or two—*The True Judge*, for instance—that a Guy de Maupassant might have approached from a slightly different angle and worked out to an inevitable close. In the third section Barbusse seems at first surer of himself and is near to abandoning realism. But in the later pages the story tends to dwindle away and become

a moral. We are reminded that mere artistry never appealed to Barbusse. . . .

We are far away enough now from [World War I]. It is time to look back dispassionately to the books which were written then, and to separate the true from the dross. The conviction comes that *Under Fire* will remain on record as the greatest novel of its kind. Other books seem to tell us about war, about our emotions in war-time. *Under Fire* is war. In the trenches Barbusse finds himself. The noise and horror seem to give calmness and counterpoise to his mind. The tenderness that was unexpressed in childhood and marriage finds its object in the men—the children—who live and suffer around him. These men do not think, talk, laugh or feel as we do; their very irritations are not ours. They seem to have been fighting for years. They have none of our illusions about bravery; and though they can pay passing homage to the man who dies for an idea, they do not waste words on patriotism. But when their sufferings are past human endurance, cries burst from their lips, and they curse their destiny. (pp. xi-xii)

[The] picture is carefully, admirably composed; it spares us some of the "raggedness" of modern warfare, though none of its fearful intensity. Yet there is a noble restraint in the words that Barbusse places at the end of this book: "If the present war has advanced progress by one step, its miseries and slaughter will count but little." (p. xii)

Brian Rhys, in his introduction to *Under Fire* by Henri Barbusse (copyright 1947 by J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd.), Dent, 1926, pp. vii-xii.

HENRI BARBUSSE (essay date 1927)

My purpose [in writing the biography *Jesus*] was . . . to address myself to the restless and tormented spirits of our own age—an age in which the march of economic and social events, of political and moral events, is inciting man to follow a sacred example which he has been permitted only to glimpse, and to become a breaker of idols.

My purpose was to display, for the sake of all those who live in waiting, the great parallel which can be rigorously drawn between the decadence of our own world, now at its summit of material progress, and that of the ancient world; between the beginnings of Christianity and the new levers which are setting themselves to raise the universe. (p. 11)

Henri Barbusse, in his note to his *Jesus*, translated by Solon Librescot with Malcolm Cowley (copyright, 1927, by The Macaulay Company), Macaulay, 1927, pp. 9-13.

COLIN WILSON (essay date 1956)

At first sight, the Outsider is a social problem. He is the hole-in-corner man.

In the air, on top of a tram, a girl is sitting. Her dress, lifted a little, blows out. But a block in the traffic separates us. The tramcar glides away, fading like a nightmare.

Moving in both directions, the street is full of dresses which sway, offering themselves airily, the skirts lifting; dresses that lift and yet do not lift.

In the tall and narrow shop mirror I see myself approaching, rather pale and heavy-eyed. It is not a woman I want—it is *all* women, and I seek for them in those around me, one by one. . . .

This passage, from Henri Barbusse's novel *L'Enfer*, pinpoints certain aspects of the Outsider. His hero walks down a Paris street, and the desires that stir in him separate him sharply from other people. And the need he feels for a woman is not entirely animal either, for he goes on:

Defeated, I followed by impulse casually. I followed a woman who had been watching me from her corner. Then we walked side by side. We said a few words; she took me home with her. . . . Then I went through the banal scene. It passed like a sudden hurtling-down.

Again, I am on the pavement, and I am not at peace as I had hoped. An immense confusion bewilders me. It is as if I could not see things as they were. *I see too deep and too much.*

Throughout the book, this hero remains unnamed. He is the anonymous Man Outside.

He comes to Paris from the country; he finds a position in a bank; he takes a room in a 'family hotel'. Left alone in his room, he meditates: He has 'no genius, no mission to fulfil, no remarkable feelings to bestow. I have nothing and I deserve nothing. Yet in spite of it, I desire some sort of recompense.' Religion . . . he doesn't care for it. 'As to philosophic discussions, they seem to me altogether meaningless. *Nothing can be tested, nothing verified.* Truth—what do they mean by it?' His thoughts range vaguely from a past love affair and its physical pleasures to death: 'Death, that is the most important of all ideas. Then back to his living problems: 'I must make money.' He notices a light high up on his wall; it is coming from the next room. He stands on the bed and looks through the spy-hole. . . . (pp. 11-12)

The action of the novel begins. Daily, he stands on the bed and stares at the life that comes and goes in the next room. For the space of a month he watches it, standing apart and, symbolically, above. His first vicarious adventure is to watch a woman who has taken the room for the night; he excites himself to hysteria watching her undress. These pages of the book have the kind of deliberate sensationalism that its descendants in post-war France were so consistently to be accused of (so that Guido Ruggiero could write: 'Existentialism treats life in the manner of a thriller').

But the point is to come. The next day he tries to recreate the scene in imagination, but it evades him, just as his attempt to recreate the sexual pleasures with his mistress had evaded him:

I let myself be drawn into inventing details to recapture the intensity of the experience. 'She put herself into the most inviting positions.'

No, no, that is not true.

These words are all dead. They leave untouched, *powerless to affect it, the intensity of what was.*

At the end of *L'Enfer*, its nameless hero is introduced to a novelist who is entertaining the company with an account of a novel he is writing. A coincidence . . . it is about a man who pierces a hole in his wall and spies on all that happens in the next room. The writer recounts all of the book he has written; his listeners admire it: Bravo! Tremendous success! But the Outsider listens gloomily. 'I, who had penetrated into the very heart of mankind and returned, could see nothing human in this pantomimic caricature. It was so superficial that it was fake.' The novelist expounds: 'Man stripped of his externals . . . that is what I wish to show. Others stand for imagination . . . I stand for truth.' The Outsider feels that what he has seen *is* truth.

Admittedly, for us, reading the novel half a century after it was written, there is not so much to choose between the novelist's truth and the hero's. The 'dramas' enacted in the next room remind us sometimes of Sardou, sometimes of Dostoevsky when he is more concerned to expound an idea than to give it body in people and events. Yet Barbusse is sincere, and this ideal, to 'stand for truth', is the one discernible current that flows through all twentieth-century literature.

Barbusse's Outsider has all of the characteristics of the type. Is he an Outsider because he's frustrated and neurotic? Or is he neurotic because of some deeper instinct that pushes him into solitude? He is preoccupied with sex, with crime, with disease. (pp. 12-13)

The Outsider's case against society is very clear. All men and women have these dangerous, unnamable impulses, yet they keep up a pretence, to themselves, to others; their respectability, their philosophy, their religion, are all attempts to gloss over, to make look civilized and rational something that is savage, unorganized, irrational. He is an Outsider because he stands for Truth.

That is his case. But it is weakened by his obvious abnormality, his introversion. It looks, in fact, like an attempt at self-justification by a man who knows himself to be degenerate, diseased, self-divided. There is certainly self-division. The man who watches a woman undressing has the red eyes of an ape; yet the man who sees two young lovers, really alone for the first time, who brings out all the pathos, the tenderness and uncertainty when he tells about it, is no brute; he is very much human. And the ape and the man exist in one body; and when the ape's desires are about to be fulfilled, he disappears and is succeeded by the man, who is disgusted with the ape's appetites.

This is the problem of the Outsider. (pp. 13-14)

Barbusse has suggested that it is the fact that his hero *sees deeper* that makes him an Outsider; at the same time, he states that he has 'no special genius, no message to bestow', etc., and from his history during the remainder of the book, we have no reason to doubt his word. Indubitably, the hero *is* mediocre; he can't write for toffee, and the whole book is full of clichés. It is necessary to emphasize this in order to rid ourselves of the temptation to identify the Outsider with the artist, and so to oversimplify the question: disease or insight? Many great artists have none of the characteristics of the Outsider. (p. 14)

Barbusse has shown us that the Outsider is a man who cannot live in the comfortable, insulated world of the bourgeois, accepting what he sees and touches as reality. 'He sees too

deep and too much', and what he sees is essentially *chaos*. For the bourgeois, the world is fundamentally an orderly place, with a disturbing element of the irrational, the terrifying, which his preoccupation with the present usually permits him to ignore. For the Outsider, the world is not rational, not orderly. When he asserts his sense of anarchy in the face of the bourgeois' complacent acceptance, it is not simply the need to cock a snook at respectability that provokes him; it is a distressing sense that *truth must be told at all costs*, otherwise there can be no hope for an ultimate restoration of order. Even if there seems no room for hope, truth must be told. . . . The Outsider is a man who has awakened to chaos. He may have no reason to believe that chaos is positive, the germ of life (in the Kabbala, chaos . . . is simply a state in which order is latent; the egg is the 'chaos' of the bird); in spite of this, truth must be told, chaos must be faced. (p. 15)

[Like the protagonists of other modern novels, such as Romain Rolland's *La Nausée*, Barbusse's Outsider] alone is aware of the truth, and if all men were aware of it, there would be an end of life. In the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king. But his kingship is kingship over nothing. It brings no powers and privileges, only loss of faith and exhaustion of the power to act. Its world is a world without values.

This is the position that Barbusse's Outsider has brought us to. It was already explicit in that desire that stirred as he saw the swaying dresses of the women; for what he wanted was not sexual intercourse, but some indefinable freedom, of which the women, with their veiled and hidden nakedness, are a symbol. Sexual desire was there, but not alone; aggravated, blown-up like a balloon, by a resentment that stirred in revolt against the bewilderment of hurrying Paris with its well-dressed women. 'Yet in spite of this I desire some compensation.' In spite of the civilization that has impressed his insignificance on him until he is certain that 'he has nothing and he deserves nothing', in spite of this he feels a right to . . . to what? Freedom? It is a misused word. We examine *L'Enfer* in vain for a definition of it. (p. 26)

The Outsider tends to express himself in Existentialist terms. He is not very concerned with the distinction between body and spirit, or man and nature; these ideas produce theological thinking and philosophy; he rejects both. For him, the only important distinction is between being and nothingness. Barbusse's hero: 'Death, that is the most important of all ideas.' . . .

Barbusse's approach can be called the 'empirical'. His hero is not a thinker; he accepts *living*; it is its values he cannot accept. (p. 27)

Colin Wilson, "The Country of the Blind" and "World without Values," in his *The Outsider* (copyright © 1956 by Colin Wilson; reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company), Houghton, 1956, pp. 11-26, 27-46.*

MARTIN SHUTTLEWORTH (essay date 1966)

[In *Hell*, Barbusse demonstrates that] men are lonely and lost, but also that man is magnificent; that he carries his remedy within him. For Barbusse this remedy was political: somehow mankind should get together, because there is no God; because the universe is terrible. This is the cry of a tormented man who is trying to find a political answer to a

question that he is asking despite himself in religious terms. *Au Feu*, his book about the trenches, is an even more tormented cry. Barbusse is a deeply unsettling writer, because he is just not quite a great one: if you deny the existence of God; describe man as a God, then put all the blame for the predicament he is in on a God you protest does not exist, something, somewhere, has gone wrong with your logic. But, logic or no logic, his books remain among the most passionate and sincere cries against the tears of things that have risen from the earth this century.

Martin Shuttleworth, "Old and New Novels: 'Hell'," in *Punch* (© 1966 by Punch Publications Ltd.; all rights reserved; may not be reprinted without permission), Vol. CCLI, No. 6568, July 27, 1966, p. 162.

JOHN DANIEL (essay date 1966)

[*Hell*, by Henri Barbusse,] is sex as Divine Service, Apocalyptic Revelation and all. . . . [It] tells how a young bank clerk staying in a hotel finds a hole in his bedroom wall, through which he watches the occupants in the next room. This promising beginning is unfortunately the last touch of realism in the novel. Everything happens in the next room, and it happens in a semi-mystical prose that becomes increasingly more gorgeous. The steady parade of adulterers, lesbians, fumbling adolescents, old men and young women is sadly unerotic, and hardly discernible through the philosophy. A woman gives birth to a child; a man dies; a priest storms over religious truth and a poet reads a full-length epic poem.

What were breathtaking assertions against patriotism and Catholicism have gathered dust, and even the long descriptions of women undressing have a coy and perverted flavour. It is understandable that the sight of a human knee in 1908 was worth half a page, but one can't help feeling that the author's paeans to eternal beauty owe a lot to the prudery of the bourgeoisie. Still, the book was scandalous at the time . . . and retains a period interest.

John Daniel, "Rake's Progress," in *The Spectator* (© 1966 by The Spectator; reprinted by permission of The Spectator), Vol. 217, No. 7207, August 12, 1966, p. 210.*

THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT (essay date 1966)

Barbusse's first reactions to the martyrdom of man were concerned, in his own words, more with harmony than precision. In the poems of *Les Pleureuses* . . . , having taken stock of the miseries and disappointments of earthly life he retreats, as the age rather demanded, into the twilight of a bedroom or the shade of a fountain, to sing, but not too loudly, of his sadness. With such certainty did the young poet depress all the right keys it was inevitable that the clubbable Symbolists of the day should shuffle a little closer together on their sacred slopes in order to make room for him. . . .

[But] of course there are signs in *Les Pleureuses* of the ambition that ultimately turned Barbusse into an embattled director of consciences. . . . [In] some of the poems he looks forward to the day when an "implacable" truth may be asked of him, and when he will be able to speak on behalf of the inarticulate, a precise forecast of his relationship to the hu-