STUDIES IN EUROPEAN REALISM

A Sociological survey of the Writings of
BALZAC, STENDHAL, ZOLA,
TOLSTOY, GORKI
and others

By
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Foreword by
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LONDON
HILLWAY PUBLISHING CO.
1950

FOREWORD

THIS IS I BELIEVE, the first book by George Lukács, the Hungarian Marxist, to be translated into English. Some of his studies have appeared in *International Literature,* and I have drawn attention to his work in three articles in the *Modern Quarterly* (for 1946, 1948 and 1949). It is much to be welcomed that we now have a volume of collected essays which allows closer acquaintance with the man whom *The Times* has called the Gamaliel of Central European communism, and whom Thomas Mann, more sincerely, described as "the most important literary critic of today."

Lukács, born in Budapest in 1885, was educated in and into the new German pan-tragic irrationalism of the first decade of this century, and his earliest works, *The Soul and its Forms,* and *The Theory of the Novel,* are part of what he calls the ideology of the age of imperialism. He shows in them a mind of great range, supple and subtle, but dissolving real man and real history into spiritual abstractions. In *The Theory of the Novel,* for instance, he defines the modern novel as the search for the expression of the irrational, the soul, in and through an alien and hostile reality; the principle of its form is, in his view at that time, derived from the consciousness that "inwardness" has its own, independent value.

The first World War, the submergence of spiritual values in the struggles of predatory imperialisms, taught Lukács that the way to true humanism lay in and through the struggle for the classless society. He joined the Hungarian Communist Party in 1918 and was a member of Bela Kun's revolutionary government. Reaction forced him into exile, which he spent mainly in Berlin until the advent of Hitler to power. He spent the next twelve years in Moscow, working in the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Science, returning to Hungary on its liberation by the Red Army. He is at present Professor of Aesthetics at the University of Budapest. His social and political experience taught him that the subjectivism and irrationalism of the intellectual bourgeoisie, to which he had belonged, are hallucinations which obscure reality and the insistent demands of true humanism. He discovered that his own early work hid the true sources and character of literature, reflecting only the situation of a privileged ideological class; and that, in interpreting literature and thought in terms of irrational

forces, in treating the phases of spiritual experience as absolutes, he was not only distorting reality and pandering to the interests of the dominant class, but also preventing himself from formulating a method of overcoming the social and spiritual tensions of which he was aware. Since 1923, when his book *History and Class-Consciousness* appeared, his critical work has been directed towards a double objective : to analyse the real constituents of the ideological world, that is, to show the process of literary and ideological production as part of the general social process; and thereby to point out the practical task of our own time, the rejection of an oppressive society and a culture grown sterile, and the building of a class-less society and a new humanity in which the tensions between man and nature, art and science, subjective "freedom" and social necessity, theory and practice become fruitful relations, stimulating men to productive communal labour, and in which art and poetry focus and intensify men's powers and joy.

The change in method and purpose is startlingly clear if one compares Lukács' analysis of Balzac or Tolstoy in *The Theory of the Novel*—a work he has himself condemned as "reactionary and false"—and the present volume. The complexity of Balzac's imaginative world appears, in the earlier volume, as a symbol of "chaotic, daemonic irrationality"; in the present essays it appears as the expression of the real social process of his times, the reality which gave shape and significance to Balzac's ideas. In the earlier book he defined the unity of Balzac's work abstractly as arising from "the obscure surmise of the coherence of life"; in this volume he discovers its real and specific coherence, the coherence of a social situation and process, the impact of capitalism upon the activities, relations, ideas, beliefs and feelings of men. His Marxism has enabled Lukács to come to true literary criticism, that is the analysis of literary forms and their development in terms of the reality and content of particular times, of the changes in society and the subjective experience of the writer.

Three important books of Lukács have recently been published in German, in which his method and insight may be studied—*German Literature in the Age of Imperialism,* 1946, *Goethe and his Time,* 1947, and *The Young Hegel,* 1948. The present volume of studies shows the same blending of literary criticism, philosophical and psychological analysis, and sociological grasp. Its unity studies in the theory of the novel as, in its highest artistic manifestations, it sums up the crisis of the last hundred years, the vio-

lent distortion of human life through the impact of capitalism. In them Lukács seeks, not only to lay bare the social tensions which gave rise to the work of Balzac, Stendhal, and the great Russian critics and novelists, not only to show the unity of this great humanistic tradition of protest against capitalism, but also to formulate, on the basis of their relationship to humanity, principles of objective æsthetic judgment. The work of art is not considered as mere historical evidence, but its peculiar character and function in the dialectics of life are sought.

The commonest charge against Marxism is that it degrades the life of the spirit. These studies show how unfounded is this charge. Spiritual values and aspiration, art and literature are, in fact, rescued from the unreal, abstract, ineffectual world to which idealists would ban them, and appear here in their full significance as functions of the total man in his total relations with living reality, with society. Marxist criticism shows how great literature crystallises attitudes, intensifies our consciousness of the world in which we live, and rallies us to participate more fully in this world. Just as it will tolerate no iron curtain between spirit and matter, between individual and society, so it sees the past living in the present, and formulates the principles of a new literature which, free of the specific conditions of the past, will reflect and fructify new forms of living in the class-less society now being built. This is the significance of Caudwell's work in England; and no greater tribute to the reality and might of man's cultural expressions could be paid than the recent discussions in the Soviet Union on the responsibilities of Soviet writers and musicians to their society.

Lukács rightly emphasises his pre-occupation in this volume with aesthetic problems. Marxism does not dissolve aesthetics into sociology, but gives a key to the understanding of æsthetic problems which have been the despair of idealists. We find here, not a completed system, but a most stimulating approach to such problems as the relation of form and content, the nature of realism and its relationship to naturalism and romanticism, the relationship of the particular and the type, of the conscious intentions of the creative writer and his actual achievement; the problem of objective aesthetic judgments. Here too is a new conception of the critic. The Marxist critic is not a mere teacher, like a Boileau or Lessing; he is not a mere subjective interpreter, as in the last hundred years. He is a man concerned with the artist in working out the destiny of man, the interpreter of the total insight and implications of the artist's work.

Lukács' criticism of the work of Thomas Mann, the greatest living German novelist, gives an excellent example of the function of the Marxist critic—we do not go too far in asserting that Lukács' warm appreciation and sharp criticism of Mann's achievement has contributed largely to the latter's development from the troubled aestheticism of his early years, as in *Death in Venice,* to the profound exposition of the corruption of modern bourgeois culture in *Dr. Faustus.* This is what Mann writes on receiving an article by Lukács on his work, entitled *In Search of the Bourgeois* (1945):—"This communist, who is so concerned for the 'inheritance of bourgeois culture' . . . had already made shrewd and honouring references to me in his series of essays on German literature in the age of imperialism; he had shown the capacity, indispensable to a critic, of distinguishing between opinion and being (or activity, the result of being), and of accepting only the latter as true coin. My own [non-political] opinions at the age of forty do not prevent him from associating me most decidedly with my [politically minded] brother and from saying: 'One can consider Heinrich Mann's *The Subject of the King* and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* as great precursors of that tendency which signalled the danger of a barbarous underworld within modern German civilisation, as its inevitable complementary product.' In this sentence he even indicates the connections between the Venice story and *Faustus.* And the remark is so good because the concept of the 'signal' is of first importance in all literature and its interpretation. The poet (and the philosopher too) as a recording instrument, a seismograph, a sensory organ, without clear knowledge of this his organic function, and therefore perfectly capable of making false judgments—it seems to me the only correct perspective. And so this essay, *In Search of the Bourgeois,* was a psychologico-sociological exposition of my being and work such as I had never experienced in so grand a style, and therefore made me feel seriously grateful—and not least because the investigator did not see my work merely 'historically', but brought it into relation with the German future." (*Entstehung des Faustus,* 1949, 126-7.)

These words of the great novelist are a tribute not only to Lukács, but to the spirit of Marxist criticism which, in analysing the relationships between living social forces and ideological productions seeks not only to contribute to the understanding of the past, but to shape a future worthy of human beings.

ROY PASCAL.

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

THE ARTICLES contained in this book were written some ten years ago. Author and reader may well ask why they should be republished just now. At first sight they might seem to lack all topicality. Subject and tone alike may appear remote to a considerable section of public opinion. I believe, however, that they have some topicality in that, without entering upon any detailed polemics, they represent a point of view in opposition to certain literary and philosophical trends still very much to the fore today.

Let us begin with the general atmosphere: the clouds of mysticism which once surrounded the phenomena of literature with a poetic colour and warmth and created an intimate and "interesting" atmosphere around them, have been dispersed. Things now face us in a clear, sharp light which to many may seem cold and hard; a light shed on them by the teachings of Marx. Marxism searches for the material roots of each phenomenon, regards them in their historical connections and movement, ascertains the laws of such movement and demonstrates their development from root to flower, and in so doing lifts every phenomenon out of a merely emotional, irrational, mystic fog and brings it to the bright light of understanding.

Such a transition is at first a disillusionment to many people and it is necessary that this should be so. For it is no easy matter to look stark reality in the face and no one succeeds in achieving this at the first attempt. What is required for this is not merely a great deal of hard work, but also a serious moral effort. In the first phase of such a change of heart most people will look back regretfully to the false but "poetic" dreams of reality which they are about to relinquish. Only later does it grow clear how much more genuine humanity—and hence genuine poetry—attaches to the acceptance of truth with all its inexorable reality and to acting in accordance with it.

But there is far more than this involved in such a change of heart. I am thinking here of that philosophical pessimism which was so deeply rooted in the social conditions of the period between the two world wars. It was not by accident that everywhere there arose thinkers who deepened this pessimism and who built up their

Weltanschauung on some philosophical generalization of despair. The Germans, Spengler and Heidegger, and a considerable number of other influential thinkers of the last few decades embraced such views.

There is, of course, plenty of darkness around us now, just as there was between the two wars. Those who wish to despair can find cause enough and more in our everyday life. Marxism does not console anyone by playing down difficulties, or minimizing the material and moral darkness which surrounds us human beings today. The difference is only—but in this "only" lies a whole world—that Marxism has a grasp of the main lines of human development and recognizes it laws. Those who have arrived at such knowledge know, in spite of all temporary darkness, both whence we have come and where we are going. And those who know this find the world changed in their eyes: they see purposeful development where formerly only a blind, senseless confusion surrounded them. Where the philosophy of despair weeps for the collapse of a world and the destruction of culture, there Marxists watch the birth-pangs of a new world and assist in mitigating the pains of labour.

One might answer to all this—I have met with such objections myself often enough—that all this is only philosophy and sociology. What has all this to do with the theory and history of the novel? We believe that it has to do quite a lot. If we were to formulate the question in terms of literary history, it would read thus: which of the two, Balzac or Flaubert, was the greatest novelist, the typical classic of the 19th century? Such a judgment is not merely a matter of taste—it involves all the central problems of the æsthetics of the novel as an art form. The question arises whether it is the unity of the external and internal worlds or the separation between them which is the social basis of the greatness of a novel; whether the modern novel reached its culminating point in Gide, Proust and Joyce or had already reached its peak much earlier, in the works of Balzac and Tolstoy; so that today only individual great artists struggling against the current—as for instance Thomas Mann—can reach the heights already long attained.

These two æsthetic conceptions conceal the application of two opposite philosophies of history to the nature and historical development of the novel. And because the novel is the predominant art form of modern *bourgeois* culture, this contrast between the two æsthetic conceptions of the novel refers us back to the development of literature as a whole, or perhaps even culture as a whole.

The question asked by the philosophy of history would be: does the road of our present-day culture lead upwards or downwards? There is no denying that our culture has passed and is passing through dark periods. It is for the philosophy of history to decide whether that darkening of the horizon which was adequately expressed for the first time in Flaubert's *Education Sentimentale* is a final, fatal eclipse or only a tunnel from which, however long it may be, there is a way out to the light once more.

Bourgeois æstheticists and critics, the author of the present book among them, saw no way out of this darkness. They regarded poetry merely as a revelation of the inner life, a clear-sighted recognition of social hopelessness or at best a consolation, an outward-reflected miracle. It followed with logical necessity from this historico-philosophical conception that Flaubert's *oeuvre,* notably his *Education Sentimentale,* was regarded as the greatest achievement of the modern novel. This conception naturally extends to every sphere of literature. I quote only one instance: the real great philosophical and psychological content of the epilogue to *War and Peace* is the process which after the Napoleonic wars led the most advanced minority of the Russian aristocratic *intelligentsia*—a very small minority, of course—to the Decembrist rising, that tragically heroic prelude to the secular struggle of the Russian people for its liberation. Of all this my own old philosophy of history and æsthetics saw nothing. For me the epilogue held only the subdued colours of Flaubertian hopelessness, the frustration of the purposeless searchings and impulses of youth, their silting-up in the grey prose of *bourgeois* family life. The same applies to almost every detailed analysis of *bourgeois* æsthetics. The opposition of Marxism to the historical views of the last 50 years (the essence of which was the denial that history is a branch of learning that deals with the unbroken upward evolution of mankind) implied at the same time a sharp objective disagreement in all problems of *Weltanschauung* or æsthetics. No one can expect me to give even a skeleton outline of the Marxist philosophy of history within the limits of a preface. But we must nevertheless eliminate certain commonplace prejudices in order that author and reader may understand one another, that readers approach without bias this book with its application of Marxism to certain important problems of literary history and æsthetics and not pass judgment on it until they have compared this application with the facts. The Marxist philosophy of history is a comprehensive doctrine dealing with the necessary progress made by humanity from primitive communism

to our own time and the perspectives of our further advance along the same road as such it also gives us indications for the historical future. But such indications—born of the recognition of certain laws governing historical development—are not a cookery book providing recipes for each phenomenon or period; Marxism is not a Baedeker of history, but a signpost pointing the direction in which history moves forward. The final certainty it affords consists in the assurance that the developmnt of mankind does not and cannot finally lead to nothing and nowhere.

Of course, such generalizations do not do full justice to the guidance given by Marxism, a guidance extending to every topical problem of life. Marxism combines a consistent following of an unchanging direction with incessant theoretical and practical allowances for the deviousness of the path of evolution. Its well-defined philosophy of history is based on a flexible and adaptable acceptance and analysis of historical development. This apparent duality —which is in reality the dialectic unity of the materialist world-view—is also the guiding principle of Marxist æsthetics and literary theory.

Those who do not know Marxism at all or know it only superficially or at second-hand, may be surprised by the respect for the classical heritage of mankind which one finds in the really great representatives of this doctrine and by their incessant references to that classical heritage. Without wishing to enter into too much detail, we mention as an instance, in philosophy, the heritage of Hegelian dialectics, as opposed to the various trends in the latest philosophies. "But all this is long out of date," the modernists cry. "All this is the undesirable, outworn legacy of the nineteenth century," say those who—intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or unconsciously—support the Fascist ideology and its pseudo-revolutionary rejection of the past, which is in reality a rejection of culture and humanism. Let us look without prejudice at the bankruptcy of the very latest philosophies; let us consider how most philosophers of our day are compelled to pick up the broken and scattered fragments of dialectic (falsified and distorted in this decomposition) whenever they want to say something even remotely touching its essence about present-day life; let us look at the modern attempts at a philosophical synthesis and we shall find them miserable, pitiful caricatures of the old genuine dialectic, now consigned to oblivion.

It is not by chance that the great Marxists were jealous guardians of our classical heritage in their æsthetics as well as in other

spheres. But they do not regard this classical heritage as a reversion to the past; it is a necessary outcome of their philosophy of history that they should regard the past as irretrievably gone and not susceptible of renewal. Respect for the classical heritage of humanity in æsthetics means that the great Marxists look for the true highroad of history, the true direction of its development, the true course of the historical curve, the formula of which they know; and because they know the formula they do not fly off at a tangent at every hump in the graph, as modern thinkers often do because of their theoretical rejection of the idea that there is any such thing as an unchanged general line of development.

For the sphere of æsthetics this classical heritage consists in the great arts which depict man as a whole in the whole of society. Again it is the general philosophy, (here: proletarian humanism) which determines the central problems posed in æsthetics. The Marxist philosophy of history analyses man as a whole, and contemplates the history of human evolution as a whole, together with the partial achievement, or non-achievement of completeness in its various periods of development. It strives to unearth the hidden laws governing all human relationships. Thus the object of proletarian humanism is to reconstruct the complete human personality and free it from the distortion and dismemberment to which it has been subjected in class society. These theoretical and practical perspectives determine the criteria by means of which Marxist æsthetics establish a bridge back to the classics and at the same time discover new classics in the thick of the literary struggles of our own time. The ancient Greeks, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Balzac, Tolstoy all give adequate pictures of great periods of human development and at the same time serve as signposts in the ideological battle fought for the restoration of the unbroken human personality.

Such viewpoints enable us to see the cultural and literary evolution of the nineteenth century in its proper light. They show us that the true heirs of the French novel, so gloriously begun early in the last century, were not Flaubert and especially Zola, but the Russian and Scandinavian writers of the second half of the century. The present volume contains my studies of French and Russian realist writers seen in this perspective.

If we translate into the language of pure æsthetics the conflict (conceived in the sense of the philosophy of history) between Balzac and the later French novel, we arrive at the conflict between realism and naturalism. Talking of a conflict here may sound a

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paradox to the ears of most writers and readers of our day. For most present-day writers and readers are used to literary fashions swinging to and fro between the pseudo-objectivism of the naturalist school and the mirage-subjectivism of the psychologist or abstract-formalist school. And inasmuch as they see any worth in realism at all, they regard their own false extreme as a new kind of near-realism or realism. Realism, however, is not some sort of middle way between false objectivity and false subjectivity, but on the contrary the true, solution-bringing third way, opposed to all the pseudo-dilemmas engendered by the wrongly-posed questions of those who wander without a chart in the labyrinth of our time. Realism is the recognition of the fact that a work of literature can rest neither on a lifeless average, as the naturalists suppose, nor on an individual principle which dissolves its own self into nothingness. The central category and criterion of realist literature is the type, a peculiar synthesis which organically binds together the general and the particular both in characters and situations. What makes a type a type is not its average quality, not its mere individual being, however profoundly conceived; what makes it a type is that in it all the humanly and socially essential determinants are present on their highest level of development, in the ultimate unfolding of the possibilities latent in them, in extreme presentation of their extremes, rendering concrete the peaks and limits of men and epochs.

True great realism thus depicts man and society as complete entities, instead of showing merely one or the other of their aspects. Measured by this criterion, artistic trends determined by either exclusive introspection or exclusive extraversion equally impoverish and distort reality. Thus realism means a three-dimensionality, an all-roundness, that endows with independent life characters and human relationships. It by no means involves a rejection of the emotional and intellectual dynamism which necessarily develops together with the modern world. All it opposes is the destruction of the completeness of the human personality and of the objective typicality of men and situations through an excessive cult of the momentary mood. The struggle against such tendencies acquired a decisive importance in the realist literature of the nineteenth century. Long before such tendencies appeared in the practice of literature, Balzac had already prophetically foreseen and outlined the entire problem in his tragi-comic story *Le Chef d'Oeuvre Inconnu*. Here experiment on the part of a painter to create a new classic three-dimensionality by means of an ecstasy of emotion

and colour quite in the spirit of modern impressionism, leads to complete chaos. Fraunhofer, the tragic hero, paints a picture which is a tangled chaos of colours out of which a perfectly modelled female leg and foot protrude as an almost fortuitous fragment. Today a considerable section of modern artists has given up the Fraunhofer-like struggle and is content with finding, by means of new æsthetic theories, a justification for the emotional chaos of their works.

The central æsthetic problem of realism is the adequate presentation of the complete human personality. But as in every profound philosophy of art, here, too, the consistent following-up to the end of the æsthetic viewpoint leads us beyond pure aesthetics: for art, precisely if taken in its most perfect purity, is saturated with social and moral humanistic problems. The demand for a realistic creation of types is in opposition both to the trends in which the biological being of man, the physiological aspect of self-preservation and procreation are dominant (Zola and his disciples) and to the trends which sublimate man into purely mental psychological processes. But such an attitude, if it remained within the sphere of formal æsthetic judgments, would doubtless be quite arbitrary, for there is no reason why, regarded merely from the point of view of good writing, erotic conflict with its attendant moral and social conflicts should be rated higher than the elemental spontaneity of pure sex. Only if we accept the concept of the complete human personality as the social and historical task humanity has to solve; only if we regard it as the vocation of art to depict the most important turning-points of this process with all the wealth of the factors affecting it; only if æsthetics assign to art the role of explorer and guide, can the content of life be systematically divided up into spheres of greater and lesser importance; into spheres that throw light on types and paths and spheres that remain in darkness. Only then does it become evident that any description of mere biological processes—be these the sexual act or pain and sufferings, however detailed and from the literary point of view perfect it may be—results in a levelling-down of the social, historical and moral being of men and is not a means but an obstacle to such essential artistic expression as illuminating human conflicts in all their complexity and completeness. It is for this reason that the new contents and new media of expression contributed by naturalism have led not to an enrichment but to an impoverishment and narrowing-down of literature.

Apparently similar trains of thought were already put forward

in early polemics directed against Zola and his school. But the psychologists, although they were more than once right in their concrete condemnation of Zola and the Zola school, opposed another no less false extreme to the false extreme of naturalism. For the inner life of man, its essential traits and essential conflicts can be truly portrayed only in organic connection with social and historical factors. Separated from the latter and developing merely its own immanent dialectic, the psychologist trend is no less abstract, and distorts and impoverishes the portrayal of the complete human personality no less than does the naturalist biologism which it opposes.

It is true that, especially regarded from the viewpoint of modern literary fashions, the position in respect of the psychologist school is at the first glance less obvious than in the case of naturalism. Everyone will immediately see that a description in the Zola manner of, say, an act of copulation between Dido and Aenas or Romeo and Juliet would resemble each other very much more closely than the erotic conflicts depicted by Virgil and Shakespeare, which acquaint us with an inexhaustible wealth of cultural and human facts and types. Pure introspection is apparently the diametrical opposite of naturalist levelling-down, for what it describes are quite individual, non-recurring traits. But such extremely individual traits are also extremely abstract, for this very reason of non-recurrence. Here, too, Chesterton's witty paradox holds good, that the inner light is the worst kind of lighting. It is obvious to everyone that the coarse biologism of the naturalists and the rough outlines drawn by propagandist writers deform the true picture of the complete human personality. Much fewer are those who realize that the psychologists' punctilious probing into the human soul and their transformation of human beings into a chaotic flow of ideas destroy no less surely every possibility of a literary presentation of the complete human personality. A Joyce-like shoreless torrent of associations can create living human beings just as little as Upton Sinclair's coldly calculated all-good and all-bad stereotypes.

Owing to lack of space this problem cannot be developed here in all its breadth. Only one important and, at present, often neglected point is to be stressed here because it demonstrates that the live portrayal of the complete human personality is possible only if the writer attempts to create types. The point in question is the organic, indissoluble connection between man as a private individual and man as a social being, as a member of a community. We

know that this is the most difficult question of modern literature today and has been so ever since modern *bourgeois* society came into being. On the surface the two seem to be sharply divided and the appearance of the autonomous, independent existence of the individual is all the more pronounced, the more completely modern *bourgeois* society is developed. It seems as if the inner life, genuine "private" life, were proceeding according to its own autonomous laws and as if its fulfilments and tragedies were growing ever more independent of the surrounding social environment. And correspondingly, on the other side, it seems as if the connection with the community could manifest itself only in high-sounding abstractions, the adequate expression for which would be either rhetoric or satire.

An unbiassed investigation of life and the setting aside of these false traditions of modern literature leads easily enough to the uncovering of the true circumstances to the discovery which had long been made by the great realists of the beginning and middle of the nineteenth century and which Gottfried Keller expressed thus: "Everything is politics." The great Swiss writer did not intend this to mean that everything was immediately tied up with politics; on the contrary, in his view—as in Balzac's and Tolstoy's—every action, thought and emotion of human beings is inseparably bound up with the life and struggles of the community, i.e., with politics; whether the humans themselves are conscious of this, unconscious of it or even trying to escape from it, objectively their actions, thoughts and emotions nevertheless spring from and run into politics.

The true great realists not only realized and depicted this situation—they did more than that, they set it up as a demand to be made on men. They knew that this distortion of objective reality (although, of course, due to social causes), this division of the complete human personality into a public and a private sector was a mutilation of the essence of man. Hence they protested not only as painters of reality, but also as humanists, against this fiction of capitalist society however unavoidable this spontaneously formed superficial appearance. If as writers, they delved deeper in order to uncover the true types of man, they had inevitably to unearth and expose to the eyes of modern society the great tragedy of the complete human personality.

In the works of such great realists as Balzac we can again find a third solution opposed to both false extremes of modern literature, exposing as an abstraction, as a vitiation of the true poesy of life,

both the feeble commonplaces of the well-intentioned and honest propagandist novels and the spurious richness of a preoccupation with the details of private life.

This brings us face to face with the question of the topicality today of the great realist writers. Every great historical period is a period of transition, a contradictory unity of crisis and renewal of destruction and rebirth; a new social order and a new type of man always come into being in the course of a unified though contradictory process. In such critical, transitional periods the tasks and responsibility of literature are exceptionally great. But only truly great realism can cope with such responsibilities; the accustomed, the fashionable media of expression, tend more and more to hamper literature in fulfilling the tasks imposed by history. It should surprise no one if from this point of view we turn against the individualistic, psychologist trends in literature. It might more legitimately surprise many that these studies express a sharp opposition to Zola and Zolaism.

Such surprise may be due in the main to the fact that Zola was a writer of the left and his literary methods were dominant chiefly, though by no means exclusively, in left-wing literature. It might appear, therefore, that we are involving ourselves in a serious contradition, demanding on the one hand the politization of literature and on the other hand attacking insidiously the most vigorous and militant section of left-wing literature. But this contradiction is merely apparent. It is, however, well suited to throw light on the true connection between literature and *Weltanschauung*.

The problem was first raised (apart from the Russian democratic literary critics) by Engels, when he drew a comparison between Balzac and Zola. Engels showed that Balzac, although his political creed was legitimist royalism, nevertheless inexorably exposed the vices and weakness of royalist feudal France and described its death agony with magnificent poetic vigour. This phenomenon, references to which the reader will find more than once in these pages, may at first glance again—and mistakenly—appear contradictory. It might appear that the *Weltanschauung* and political attitude of serious great realists are a matter of no consequence. To a certain extent this is true. For from the point of view of the self-recognition of the present and from the point of view of history and posterity, what matters is the picture conveyed by the work; the question to what extent this picture conforms to the views of the authors is a secondary consideration.

This, of course, brings us to a serious question of æsthetics.

Engels, in writing about Balzac, called it "the triumph of realism"; it is a problem that goes down to the very roots of realist artistic creation. It touches the essence of true realism: the great writer's thirst for truth, his fanatic striving for reality—or expressed in terms of ethics: the writer's sincerity and probity. A great realist such as Balzac, if the intrinsic artistic development of situations and characters he has created comes into conflict with his most cherished prejudices or even his most sacred convictions, will, without an instant's hesitation, set aside these his own prejudices and convictions and describe what he really sees, not what we would prefer to see. This ruthlessness towards their own subjective world-picture is the hall-mark of all great realists, in sharp contrast to the second-raters, who nearly always succeed in bringing their own *Weltanschauung* into "harmony" with reality, that is forcing a falsified or distorted picture of reality into the shape of their own world-view. This difference in the ethical attitude of the greater and lesser writers is closely linked with the difference between genuine and spurious creation. The characters created by the great realists, once conceived in the vision of their creator, live an independent life of their own; their comings and goings, their development, their destiny is dictated by the inner dialectic of their social and individual existence. No writer is a true realist—or even a truly good writer, if he can direct the evolution of his own characters at will.

All this is however merely a description of the phenomenon. It answers the question as to the ethics of the writer: what will he do if he sees reality in such and such a light? But this does not enlighten us at all regarding the other question: what does the writer see and how does he see it? And yet it is here that the most important problems of the social determinants of artistic creation arise. In the course of these studies we shall point out in detail the basic differences which arise in the creative methods of writers according to the degree to which they are bound up with the life of the community, take part in the struggles going on around them or are merely passive observers of events. Such differences determine creative processes which may be diametrical opposites; even the experience which gives rise to the work will be structurally different, and in accordance with this the process of shaping the work will be different. The question whether a writer lives within the community or is a mere observer of it, is determined not by psychological, not even by typological factors; it is the evolution of society that determines (not automatically, not fatalistically, of

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