

were compelled to go to the American Relief Society which got them a room in the poorest part of Fulham. But it was near Chelsea and hence Parnassus ...

USES OF THE MANY-CHARACTERED NOVEL

Those who can live in the country or have rendez-vous only with themselves do still write novels in which man seeks to placate the ancient enemies, wind, fire, water, death and the unneighbourly; but necessity drives the writer to town and the many-charactered novel is as essential to metropolis as the many-windowed wall. The novel is eternally young because it never was classic — any fantasy, procès-verbal or dramatic involvement, that takes eighty thousand words and more to say, is mildly accepted by publisher, public and librarian as a novel, though critics rave; the number of characters may be one or one hundred or five thousand; it is usual for such a novel to have a plot, but not essential and its subject may be animals, ghosts or trees although human beings are more ordinary. The novel can be thus, the most ingenious, most instructive, useful and philosophic sort of imaginative writing, in its liberty and in its length. It is not possible to write about any creature for such a long time and in such libertinage, without secreting a timely philosophy, however the writer may wish to escape it. The novelist must take a round-trip and of all the mansions of his kind, there is only one he never sees, the ivory tower, to wit.

The many-charactered novel has two popular forms — the family novel and the costume novel; and two very celebrated forms, less popular with the circulating library — the picaresque and the novel of the natural history of social man. The family novel usually has about six characters of the first order, with one shadowy and deprecated protagonist; and numerous characters of the second order — blood-relations ruled over by one monstrous aunt or uncle. It is not so much a novel of character as a novel of status and tribal custom. The historical novel usually has a multiplicity of kirtles and small-clothes, but not of closely studied characters. The splendid and tempting picaresque novel does indeed use true contemporary characters, but only to have them crawl about the feet of the great idol age, and lose themselves in its pockets. The novel of reportage also uses true contemporary characters,

but those somewhat shopworn by frequent turns in the headlines and dressed in the limelight.

There are still several species of the many-charactered novel that use true flesh-and-blood characters, each revolving in his minor circle with others unknown to himself, working until an hour strikes — something shocking but necessary from another part of the mechanism which sounds like the folly or genius of one of the characters but is easily recognised as fate, dialectic or the zeit-geist. In this class we have novelised reportage, social transactions. (*La Comédie Humaine*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Conquerors* of André Malraux), grand literary vaudeville, (*Pickwick Papers*), the series of the Hogarths and Daumiers (*Oliver Twist*, *Lourdes*). Another species is famous today, the semi-fictional form represented by *The Forty-Second Parallel*, which seems to arise from the fright of the novelist when he looks at the *New York Times*, and feels he is a poor second to it. The sensation-making book and those social studies and cinematographic forms which resemble, approach, or imitate it, show most superficially the citified democracy and demagogy of our character-creators now. City-novelists educated in the clique, club and café have always liked to copy the number of their acquaintance in their numbers of their characters: some, like Dickens, do it intuitively, some only once or twice in their careers (Tolstoy). It is with them a form at least partly involuntary.

The many-charactered novel, if it is not to be a follies or the oil-painting of a historic occasion, has plenty of difficulties. In the first place, the writer finds it difficult to properly order the idiosyncrasies of so many creatures: in the second place, the critics who chiefly live on blurbs are sure to find the thing inchoate, and last, the reader of the novel, which is a \$2 to \$3 novel, is usually a middle-class woman, who "goes to the library to escape from problems, not to look for them". If some of the many characters have foreign names, the poor thing will lose all hope after page three. This is the more so, because once the writer has opened the door, he loses caution and characters begin to troop in and to spring up all around.

For the writer it is the most seductive of forms. He is eternally fertile and he is in the position of an impartial, disabused and merry god. There is little need to become prosy and hand down the tables of the law, for the characters provide all morals and checks by their many-sidedness. It is impossible to write a novel about a crowd of amiable and charming

characters, therefore we will have a parade of enormities, abuses, defects, or more incongruities which gives off a strong odour of insecurity, a faint odour of malice, even though no malice be intended. The author, too, is adjudged rather unclubbable, and like a real god, the indifferent or unkind witness of injustices, injustice to the bourgeoisie, injustice to the rich, the poor. There can be sudden conversions and scarcely any acts of God in the willful lives of so many equally endowed human creatures.

For this reason this form of novel is all a sidelong critique and mostly ironic. In the man-to-fate-man-to-man, or man-to-nature novel, the insoluble problems of life are stated in one or two simple moral propositions and from them are resolved. Here, it is not easy to take sides: the reader must draw his own conclusions from the diverse material, as from life itself. The author is not impartial, but not minatory, either.

Therefore this form of novel is noticeably philosophic. It cannot be as much an unconscious product as some of the great autobiographic, one or two character novels have been: it is a novel of strife, a world without whose only glimmer is in some philosophic view. Yet, on account of its same vast entertainment possibilities, it easily escapes the accusation of "thesis", the wicket of the wicked critic.

Of course, it is a simple observation that the many-charactered novel is the novel of the metropolitan today. This has its workmanlike and slipshod sides. It is the easiest thing to do, to try to fix in a multiplication of characters the relatively classless, and again hugely stratifying social organisms of man, the democratic surges, international sympathies and populist appeals of all colours. (The artist is always a déclassé: the change is not in him but in the stools he falls between) Multiplicity, incongruity, disillusion, produce worldly wisdom, destroy family and national ideals, increase causes for laughter, anger, action — for hope not in the grubby present, but in other lands, causes, times and states. In reality man is rarely happy, always wishes to be for a moment *may* be, and sometimes is lethargic. To fix all this by merely flinging down on paper anything that comes into the mind, is a gay but slipshod business. But again, since socially acceptable truth does not exist in any single form, it is also a serious bit of work to ask the question, *what* is truth, and to give it some answer, however partial.

Possibly the first thing of all to the writer, though, is the temptation

this type of novel offers, to greater and greater synthesis: it is a form of the unattainable. The synthesis of so many creatures, one feels, can only be made by forming some conception of the soul of man, by creating a man in gigantic proportions. Man is ashamed of being such a small individual at the moment: I am all very well in my own small way, says he, but I can never forget there are eleven million people with eleven million hungers in New York, for example. The individual only emerges to master an organised society. When society is disorganised, he is ashamed. People are flustered, and do not know where they stand. The great story, the writer may think, would be this — a sea of many lives, the world of today, from which rises a greater life, drawing sustenance from them, acting, sinking, back to them — Dimitrov, Lenin, the section organiser?

EXTRACTS FROM A SPANISH DIARY

JUNE 3. GIBRALTAR. Small, unhealthy, unhappy, blond "Tommies" in thick wool uniforms looking as if they have wandered by mistake into this Spanish town. They leave their bones here beside the heroes of Trafalgar. A free port, free ownership of property by foreigners. The shopholders, Parsees, Chinese, Jews; the goods, beautiful Eastern silks, ivories, laces. The buyers: absent. No other Gibraltar apes are visible. An active black market in pesetas. A wide-open town; raucous dirty pick-up bars for sailors. In the damp, shady, hot streets in the morning, Spanish women in Parisian dresses and beautiful little paleskinned, darkeyed Spanish virgins in communion costumes richer than the robes of Spanish madonnas. The families of many southern Spanish land-owners are here, a refuge from vague "troubles" that are expected.

JUNE 4. ALGECIRAS. With thirteen pieces of luggage including some long and exceptionally heavy trunks of books and linen, we are obliged to take a first-class ticket to Ronda, to have room for them. "Millionaires" says a banana-seller on the station. The doors and shutters are chalked with U.H.P.C.N.T. and the hammer and sickle. Strangely enough the gendarmerie and officials in the customs do not examine our passports, ask us to declare our money or look at any of our baggage despite its unusual weight. We ask if we should declare our money and are told: no. The baggage of the third-class people is examined. We