

production was concerned, Diaghilev might never have been. The sets were pure Alma Tadema, most of the costumes unfortunate, and the colours impure; we seemed to wait interminably before anybody began to *dance*—all through there was far less dancing than mime, and pretty ham it was, some of the time. In fact, it was less like ballet, as we recognize it today, than some kind of unsung opera. But the great moments far outweighed the indulgent disappointment; the mounting excitement of the street fighting, for instance, when the attack spread exactly like fire in dry grass, running irregularly in outbreaks of flashing steel, and the orchestra rose to frenetic climax. And Sergei Koren as Mercutio was all that we had been led to expect of the Soviet male dancer; athletic, virile, he looked like Villon with his long nose and his long legs, and danced with the same mordant wit. Ulanova is extraordinary: not beautiful, yet, like Garbo, with something more than beauty; fragile as a rapier is fragile, with a lyricism never weighed down by her intrinsic nobility. To have seen her dance in Friar Lawrence's cell, coming with Romeo to her marriage is, like Florizel, to wish her a wave o' the sea, that she might ever do nothing but that.

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THE NEW HERO

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MR GEORGE SCOTT'S *Time and Place*¹ is a semi-autobiographical analysis of the influences which he believes have contributed towards the formation of a new kind of hero in everyday life—echoes of whom are to be found in fiction—and also of the state of contemporary society in Britain. He posits an imaginary, composite hero—alluding to Mr Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* as an indicator—whose passions are ended before he starts on his journey; who distrusts his own intellectual pretensions and emotions even more than those of others; one who is 'fearful above all of not being "wide" enough to forestall delusion' and who 'is forced back into the defence of laughter, at himself and at the world'. And if he finds within himself 'any weakling inclination towards constructive ideas for the world, for "crusades" or any phoney nonsense of that kind, then he must secrete them in some dark cellar lest the neighbours discover them and subject him to ridicule. . . . He brings with him the supposed coarseness of the hobnailed navy and the Teddy Boy's fear of being thought soft.'

1 Staples; 16s.

This is a convenient and, probably, to some extent, true analysis of certain kinds of people with whom most of us are familiar. Whether or not they are to be regarded as heroes in reality the next fifty or hundred years may demonstrate; and whether or not they are likely to be interesting as fictional heroes it is also a little early to forecast. So far it would seem otherwise.

Mr Scott associates himself with these new heroes, though sometimes, I fancy, he would rather he had not. He believes that he belongs to a 'new generation of potential leaders and influential men', the 'new powerful', the 'legatees' of a 'revolutionized Britain'. He believes that for those who, like himself, 'have come from the terraced houses and the back streets, who have come with the aid of State education from the lower deck of society', it is a necessity of self-preservation to sweep away the work of the previous generation because they seem to be incapable of giving the kind of leadership that is required. No doubt they have done very well, but does their own relatively unaided work entitle these new heroes, if they are heroes, to conduct a purge at the expense of those who have done much to habilitate them, or rehabilitate them as the case may be, and who have even given them the opportunity of becoming heroes?

Unfortunately Mr Scott does not seem to be aware of exactly at whom he is aiming. He has grudges, he is sorry for himself (this is particularly apparent throughout despite denial) and he is almost angry, though precisely why is seldom clear. He gives himself and his prejudices away too often. As one bred in a back street of Middlesbrough—though not of working-class origin—he finds much with which to charge the so-called upper classes. He even has geographical antipathies: 'A pinewood in Surrey, with the tall sun slanting down; the warm soft downs; the mellow ivy-cheeked village church of the Home Counties; these all give me pleasure indeed, but pleasure which is effeminate and slightly shameful in its lazy, conventional prettiness.' Such comments scarcely conceal his distaste for the epicurean Mammonae whose homes are, by repute, to be found in such areas. Then he snipes at his 'brilliant elders' fixated by war and searching for support; at those who have found comfort 'by burying their heads in the deep bosom of the Roman Church, receiving absolution for their sins and balm for their agonies. They', asserts Mr Scott, 'are concerned only with finding peace for their own souls and are content to let the world soul writhe in torment.' This, perhaps, is an immoderate simplification of motives. Nor does he acquit those who console themselves by abstraction into the clouds of mysticism and metaphysics. However, these may provoke compassion and may be allowed 'spiritual public assistance'. It is this anomalous residue of lost causes which Mr Scott

wishes to dispossess. He wants to 'tip them out of their seats of power and dignity' to make room for what he refers to as 'us'. He concedes that it is as yet too early to say that 'we have inherited the earth' but, he adds, 'we are rapidly acquiring our fair share of it'. Unhappily we are not told what is going to happen when 'they' have inherited the earth. And it may be asked: 'Is the earth worth inheriting anyway?'

This curious mixture of the arrogant and the naïve informs much of Mr Scott's book, and rather spoils it; because when he is not engaged in 'saturation bombing' much of what he writes is interesting and entertaining. Moreover he has done something valuable in promoting some inquiry into the possibility of the conception of a certain new kind of hero both in reality and in fiction.

Both these conceptions are, I think, partly contingent upon a misunderstanding of and a confusion between the terms 'person' and 'individual' and their ancillaries 'personality' and 'individuality'. Nowadays the majority might be surprised to discover that they are not, properly, synonymous. Christian philosophy, on the other hand, makes a distinction clear. The word 'person' is used to describe substances which possess a spirit and their dignity resides in the existence of a soul independent of the sensible world. An individual, by contrast, is any unit of matter, including man. The term separates one from another. The point may be summarized in M. Maritain's words: 'As we are individuals we are subject to the stars. As we are persons we rule them.' Probably as a result of modes of thought incipient during the Renaissance, during which, in various ways, there were efforts to assert the independent nobility of man in material terms, to rehabilitate him as an 'individual', the acceptance of 'personality' was replaced by a search for it under the guise of individualism. Man, who had previously been regarded fundamentally as a person occupying a qualitative position in the world and in relation to God and only ulteriorly as an individual and therefore a 'quantity', became more and more the latter so that the acquisition of 'accidental' renown, wisdom, good manners, rewards etc. predominated over the continued cultivation of the essential and therefore spiritual life. Expressed in literary terms the form of man, what he did and said, his disposition and attitude became more important than the content: what the man was, in what his inner self consisted and to what it was directed. The apotheosis of man was an admirable corrective to the exaggerated theory of the corruptness of the natural world distilled during the later middle ages, but only admirable and useful so long as an established religious life and spiritual life prevailed. Unfortunately a plurality of religions has produced a plurality of heroes of the quantitative order. The popular conception of the popular hero today is palpable and the heroes are extraordinarily

transitory. Much of the press sees to that. Human beings must look up to something and lacking the support of a firm religion and a permanent 'Divine Hero' they tend to substitute film stars with the requisite sex-appeal, sportsmen with the necessary aggregates and victories, adventurers with the desired bravado and photogenic attributes. The idols are erected and demolished, often with amazing rapidity. Boredom is the affliction which must be avoided at all costs. It is a disease frequently symptomatic of an amoral doldrum. In literature we have an associated condition. The majority of fictional heroes function independent of any supernatural scheme—divine or diabolic. They occupy, in fact, an increasingly quantitative position. It so happens that the concept of a new kind of hero is closely related to humorous and quasi-satirical writing. Just as on the plane of reality rapid substitution of heroes is necessary to keep people interested, to provide them with something upon which to focus their attention, thus producing a vicarious worship and distracting them from the vacuity which is potential in them, so, on the level of fiction, the stimulation of laughter—somehow, anyhow—is a necessary antidote to boredom. Laughter is the safety valve in the barren mind, the irrigator of the neglected spirit. Perhaps that is one reason why so many writers are straining every inventive thew to alleviate the apathy of a multitude who experience the 'growing horror of nothing to think about'. Humour is an industry. Thousands of people are employed in the manufacture of jokes; papers bristle with cartoons; magazines are stuffed with witticisms; 'humorous' articles are in constant demand. There is an almost desperate attempt to keep people amused and curiously enough it seems to be becoming easier and easier to make people laugh. The popularity of writers like Mr Jennings, Mr Betjeman and Mr Amis seems to corroborate the extraordinarily flabby condition of society's risible chords. A further point is that we still find it difficult to laugh at ourselves. That, perhaps, is one reason why this age is unlikely to produce any satire worthy of the name. People do not understand it and there is remarkably little to keep in a state of good repair. It is futile to ridicule aberrations from a non-existent norm, to deride quarrels with so much ill-defined order. It is significant that Mr Huxley and Orwell have found it necessary to write futuristic satire, that Mr Waugh's most incisive satire, *The Loved One*, attacks institutions which many people find it difficult to believe exist, that Mr Bruce Marshall is a satirist on the dole because he cannot find any work worth while correcting, and that, in fact, most of the attempted humorous writing of Mr Amis, Mr Wain and Miss Murdoch lacks completely any coherent purpose and, for the most part, any pungency. Their heroes seem to be extraordinarily dull because they deride society without having any very clear idea of what they are deriding. In Mr Scott's words: . . . 'it is indiscriminating buffoonery

and it is in danger of resembling the would-be-clown who does not recognize when people have had enough of his grotesque antics.' Hitting out right, left and centre at imprecise targets is a very adolescent fashion of expressing displeasure as well as a rather ineffective form of correction. Satire is an eminently practical and surgical weapon and the efforts of the last three writers named turn it into a somewhat cumbersome fowling gun. Moreover, the style of writing employed becomes as irritatingly slap-dash as the offensive methods. Mr Amis, particularly, seeking the unpretentious becomes sloppy and casual; essaying satire he lapses into farce—which is usually good—and also, like Mr Wain and Miss Murdoch, into that worst deficiency of so many professional humorists in England—'whimsy'. But perhaps it would be too unkind to desire the extermination of this, for if it were, writers like Mr Jennings and Mr Betjeman would be in the embarrassing position of having to write solely for one another.

If the trio I have bracketed above are writing their books in order to make a living there can be little quarrel with them. It is to be hoped only that their work improves and is kept strictly in its place. If, on the other hand, they are attempting to write good satire then I think it is time they re-acquainted themselves with the principles involved. As they stand, their heroes are altogether too temporary, too obviously a product of immediate social problems—like Galsworthy's plays—to be of much interest for very long, though their chicaneries will provide a passing drug to modify the incursions of boredom. Like Mr Osborne's Jimmy Porter they are to be seen looking back in anger and forward without much hope. Neither their anger nor their pessimism is particularly interesting because they are individuals without much universal significance. If they had been created primarily as persons having qualities and defects in common with everybody and related to an extra-material world of one kind or another, then what they do and say would begin to mean something.

On the level of reality Mr Scott's recruits may have arrived but they are much too young in achievement to have been assimilated into the stock-pile which may yield the much sought after 'quantitative totems'. There may be a lot of Lucky Jims and a good many unlucky ones. It is time they stopped moaning and washed out their ears. Then they might well begin by reading *Zadig* and the *Praise of Folly* of Erasmus..