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Art. 5

WAR, RESPONSE, AND CONTRADICTION

THE various arguments in recent years as to the relation between art and propaganda may have struck some observers as purely a haggle among literary specialists. Yet the issue is a vital one, and carries far beyond a mere matter of literary fashions. Aesthetical values are intermingled with ethical values—and the ethical is the basis of the practical. Or, put more simply: our ideas of the beautiful, the curious, the interesting, the unpleasant, the boring are closely bound with our ideas of the good, the desirable, the undesirable—and our ideas of the desirable and undesirable have much to do with our attitudes towards our everyday activities. They make us ask ourselves, more or less consciously: Are we doing the things we want to do? to what extent is there a breach between what we must do and what we should like to do? Probably for this reason, even the most practical of revolutions will generally be found to have manifested itself first in the “aesthetic” sphere.

Then it is no academic matter to concern oneself with the *implications* of books. And however much one may disagree with the results of Michael Gold's patient search for the faintest chemical traces of fascism and anti-Semitism in the “pure” poetry of Archibald MacLeish, one must grant that the intention is justified. Points of view first make themselves apparent in the realm of “fancy.” In time they come to be

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carried into the structure of our sciences, so that savants can train their telescopes upon the infinite or their microscopes upon the infinitesimal and find there what they were looking for. Even theories of psychology eventually succumb to the same pattern, the same “perspective”—and lastly, perhaps, the cultural lag of our social institutions themselves is made to budge somewhat, and the point of view which began as a poet's irresponsible “inkling” attains its embodiment in the very architecture of the state.

For such reasons, the question of the relationship between art and society is momentous—and the Battle of the Books now in progress is no mere tempest in a teapot. To an extent, books merely exploit our attitudes—and to an extent they may form our attitudes. The difference between exploitation and formation may be illustrated by war literature. A work picturing the “atrocities” of the enemy would *exploit* our attitude towards such atrocities. It would arouse our resentment by depicting the kind of incidents which we already hated prior to this specific work of art. Such a work might *form* our attitudes by picturing a certain specific people as committing these atrocities: it would serve to aggravate our vindictiveness towards this particular people.

The whole issue was revealed in some of its most perplexing aspects by the controversy (in *The New Republic* of September 20, 1933) between Archibald MacLeish and Malcolm Cowley on the subject of the volume, *The First World War*, edited by Laurence Stallings. MacLeish seems mainly concerned with the poet's response to experience, and Cowley with the public's response to the poet. There is thus some talking at cross-purposes; but the discussion is particularly vital, it seems to me, because it keeps so near to the heart of the problem. Art is a means of communication. As such it

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is certainly designed to elicit a "response" of some sort. And the present article will attempt, by using the MacLeish-Cowley controversy as a *point de départ*, to offer some considerations as to the nature of human response in general, and to make deductions from them.

MacLeish begins by objecting because *The First World War* pictures only the repellent side of the War. The War was heroic and adventurous as well as horrible, MacLeish asserts, yet Stallings here omits the heroic and adventurous aspects entirely. Though we are today largely what the War made of us, MacLeish seems to feel that we owe the War some courtesy, some allegiance: we must be "truthful" about the War. Even now we must not use the War to our purposes, but must continue to be victimized by it. If it was a "human" war, the honest poet must say so, and will say so, regardless of the effects upon society. Such seems to be MacLeish's position—and on the face of it, it does not look very defensible. Artistic scrupulosity is an expensive luxury, if it is to be obtained at the expense of society as a whole.

MacLeish may be confusing two issues. He seems to take it for granted that the new book, edited by Stallings, is about the last war. Hence, recalling by personal experience that the War had its profoundly human side, he complains that the new book is an incomplete record, artistically dishonest. For the artist must record "those things, seen or unseen, which have actually occurred . . . regardless of their effect upon the minds of the young or the minds of the old." Thus, a picture of the War should also include its noble and adventurous side, be the final effect "immoral" or not. Yet it is highly questionable whether the true subject of *The First World War* is an actual war at all. The very title would suggest that it is about an anticipated war. And I think that

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Cowley is more nearly correct on this point, since he is concerned with our responses to the possibility of war rather than with our responses to a war already gone into history. Now: anticipated events are quite properly idealized in art. It is a commonplace of psychology, human and universal enough for any poet to draw upon, that we expect things to be either much better or much worse than they turn out to be. Anticipation is by very nature an abstractive process, a simplification; as such, it has an interpretative or "philosophic" consistency which events in actuality do not have. The future itself is a "work of art" until it is actually upon us. Thus, one may be quite within his rights when picturing a future war either as all heroism and adventure or as all hideousness. Where indeed can MacLeish point to the authority of the events "as they actually occurred," when the occurrence is still confined to the poet's symbols themselves?

To be sure when writing of an anticipated war, the artist must select his material out of the past and the present. All anticipation is such selection, whether it involve one's forebodings about an international calamity or one's attempt to decide whether the red sky at night will be shepherd's delight and the red sky at morning shepherd's warning. For the poet, not all of such material is confined to objective events. Much of it lives in the memory, emphasizes interests, preferences, and apprehensions of his contemporaries. In writing, he handles not merely a past situation but also a present one. The Rosetta Stone was carved for the purpose of conveying certain information local to the times. It became important to us as a key for deciphering Egyptian. We owe the stone no allegiance. We use it for our purposes, for a "truth" which did not exist at the time of its erection.

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Is there a kind of naïve realism lurking at the bottom of MacLeish's exhortation? Though at one point he complains against Marxian "absolutism," does he not himself grow absolutist in assuming that the War possesses one definite, absolute character which must remain unchanged throughout history? To the people on Morgan's preferred lists, Morgan has a different "character" than he has for the people not on his preferred lists. Yet it is one and the same Morgan in both relationships. The analogy might suggest that "character" is largely a matter of relationship, and is necessarily changed by a change in relationship. And if our relationship to war is different now from what it was in 1916, why must we attempt to uphold, by strange canons of "truth," the "1916 character" of war?

Are not wars what we make of them—like stones and trees, like Napoleon and the history of Greece? And might we not very humanly want to make a different thing of them in anticipation than in actuality? When we are inescapably in one, the only wise thing to do is to make it as decent as we can, thereby maintaining some continuity of our humanness even under conditions of slaughter. But when we are not at war, no such grave psychological obligation is upon us—we are not vowed by the actualities of our predicament to tell ourselves that even war can be a cultural way of life.

Hence, I hold that MacLeish has been discussing a poet's response to a past actual war whereas the question is really about an audience's response to a future anticipated war. Yet strangely enough, when we consider the matter from this point of view, MacLeish's plea for a total picture of war has much to be said in its favor. There are some reasons for believing that the response to a *human* picture of war will be socially more wholesome than our response to an *inhuman*

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one. It is questionable whether the feelings of horror, repugnance, hatred would furnish the best groundwork as a deterrent to war. They are extremely militaristic attitudes, being in much the same category of emotion as one might conceivably experience when plunging his bayonet into the flesh of the enemy. And they might well provide the firmest basis upon which the "heroism" of a new war could be erected. The greater the horror, the greater the thrill and honor of enlistment. I can imagine an upstanding young fellow, when *Der Tag* is again upon us, pointing to photographs of mutilated bodies, and saying quietly but firmly to his sweetheart, who adores him: "See those? That is what war is. Dearie, this day I have enlisted in the service of my country." The sly cartoonists of *The New Yorker* might possibly do most to discourage militarism, while deeply pious tracts are but the preparation for new massacres. They may be the first stage of the next combat—the preparatory "aesthetic barrage"—staunchly building by the collation of military horrors the imagery which will be drawn upon in sharpening our concepts of heroism. In any event, we do know that a batch of such material preceded the "conversion" of Germany from the psychology of Wandering Birds to the psychology of Brown Shirts. 16330AA

Such possibilities bring us to a surprising state of affairs. If, by picturing only the hideous side of war, we lay the aesthetic groundwork above which a new stimulus to "heroism" can be constructed, might a picture of war as thoroughly human serve conversely as the soundest deterrent to war? I have never seen anyone turn from *The Iliad* a-froth with desire for slaughter. And might MacLeish, who fears that he is being socially irresponsible when he pleads for a "whole" war, with all its contradictions, really be pleading

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for the most ethical presentation of all? He would recall "a war of parades, speeches, brass bands, *bistros*, boredom, terror, anguish, heroism, endurance, humor, death." He would have a "human war," recorded with "neither morality, nor text, nor lesson." And though he is humble at the thought, and even willing to damn the artist as "an enemy of society" (at least, so far as a society's temporal aberrations are concerned) is there not much to be said in favor of his "human" war as deterrent where a picture of an "inhuman" war might act as stimulant?

[For one thing, a human war, picturing gentleness, companionship, humor, respect for courage (in the enemy as well as among one's own ranks), dignity in suffering, refusal to admire the jockeyings and elbowings for position which characterize so much of our efforts under conditions of capitalist peace—such a human picture might be less likely to encourage the hysteria which, in its intensity, can be converted into its antithesis at a moment's notice, becoming the counterhysteria of rabidity and ferocity. It may really serve to promote, not warlike zest, but a *cultural* approach towards the question of human happiness, a sense of critical appraisal, and incidentally, a realization that the purposes of humanity may best be attained through the machinery of peace.] If there is any sound reason for discovering the cultural superiority of peace over war, the surest way to arrive at it would be through a total, restful attitude towards war itself. Sunday-school texts have ever been considered by sophisticated moralists the essential stimulus to "sin"—and I see no reason why the same fact should not apply to a Sunday-school simplification in dealing with the problems of war. On the other hand, [let war be put forward as a *cultural way of life, as one channel of effort in which people*

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can be profoundly human, and you induce in the reader the fullest possible response to war, precisely such a response as might best lead one to appreciate the preferable ways of peace.

There is another paradoxical fact to be considered. A book wholly constructed of the repellent may partially close the mind to the repellent. It may call forth, as its response, a psychological callus, a protective crust of insensitiveness. Horrors strike deeper when they strike out of a sweet and gentle context, as the highly contradictory genius of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* testifies. And when they do strike, note how they strike: for one has been responding to the humanity of humans; one has been warmed; one presumably is aglow—and then of a sudden one sees these human concentration-points of courage and tenderness blasted into hell. What, in the end, would he carry away with him, if not a wincing, and a regret at the realization of how much is tossed away by war, the waste of full cultural possibilities which the way of culture-through-war really involves?

Is there not today in criticism the assumption that people are quite as direct as machines in their responses? Cowley, for instance, attributes MacLeish's difficulty to a very rudimentary kind of conditioning, a stimulus-response connection almost as simple and direct as the causal connection between pushbutton and doorbell. During the period of service in the last War, Cowley says, MacLeish saw many posters, proclaiming: "These dead shall not have died in vain." And now, still obedient to this stimulus, MacLeish responds automatically by insisting that the War was a noble war, in which men did not fight in vain, where "some few ridiculously believed in the thing for which (or so they thought) they died." Cowley suggests that "Echoing through

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his mind must be those words so often printed on posters," and as MacLeish recalls dead friends, he recalls them hal-
lowed by this slogan.

The slogan, to begin with, seems hardly such a cunning one as to have very deeply impressed a poet of MacLeish's stature, and particularly a poet of MacLeish's sophistication. I can even imagine that a great many real and very moving events must have had to occur behind the lines and in the trenches before the doubts raised by so blunt an advertisement could have been erased from the poet's mind. But that is too "sub-
jective" an approach. I shall turn to such matters of response as are more accessible to discussion.

It is understandable that, in an age intensely characterized by the "rationality" of its machines, we should attempt as much as possible to consider human psychology from the interpretative point of view, the "perspective," furnished us by the mechanistic metaphor. By this machine perspective, things may do one of two things: they either "go straight" or they "get out of order." Extending this metaphorical usage to people, we necessarily eliminate any intermediate position, such as the possibility that people might *go crooked and yet be in order*. Is it possible that the assumption of a rational psychology for explaining human responses is based too faithfully upon an analogy with the procedures of our masters, the machines? Do we tend to imagine a human psychology patterned too literally after the best factory models, a schema of stimulus and response whereby you put in leather and take out leather goods, or put in iron and take out iron pots? Or, returning to the issues of war: you put in war-horrors and take out antimilitarism, put in "human" pictures of war and take out war-spirit. It may be that the assumption is justified, that the approach to man from

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the perspective supplied by the processes of the machine really does yield all that we have to know about his ways of assimilation. Yet biological analogies would suggest that the putting-in and the taking-out are often qualitatively different. For the present, I wish merely to raise the question. Does a book act precisely as it seems to do on the face of it—a pro-this book making one pro-this, an anti-that book making one anti-that? Is the machine metaphor, the assumption that we have only a choice between "rationality" and "breakdown," enough to describe the ways of biologic response? And, if we do use the perspective of the factory, can we use it in this way: put humanity in, and you take culture out; put inhumanity in, and you take ferocity out?

Imagine setting a lamp on the very edge of a table. Suppose that it gave you better light there for your purposes, unless someone knocked it off. If knocked off, it might do great damage. . . . Are any literary effects of this sort? Does literature ever promote ways which are "neutral" in themselves (as is the lamp), but which, depending upon other circumstances, may either give light or burn down one's house? At least we know that such is the case with moral systems. A moral attitude may be adopted by one class, for instance, to *help* them in their work, and may be promoted by another class to *keep* them at their work. Again, how accurate a gauge of response is verbalization? Consider the many questionnaires which used to fly about, in the heyday of the New Era, when philanthropists were financing all sorts of ingenious fact-finding escapades as a social-minded way of cutting down their income taxes. To what extent were the answers a just revelation of attitude? For my own part, I can only say: God pity the findings of such investigations in those persons who were interrogated were not vastly more

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skilled in the verbalizations of their attitudes under such conditions than I am.

For the moment, we leave the issue vague. I believe that there *are* good grounds for suspecting that man's responses are *normally* of a contradictory nature. There is a kind of "one to one" correspondence between stimulus and response which is assumed in much contemporary criticism, and I believe that it is not justified. Does antimilitarism produce antimilitarism, corruption corruption, quietude quietude, acceptance acceptance, individualism individualism, etc.? I think that the entire issue must be broadened considerably.

I wish to offer evidence for suspecting that *irrationality*, or *contradictoriness of response*, is basic to human psychology, not merely as error, but for sound biological reasons; and this particularly at those depths of human sensitivity which are implicated in the religious, ethical, poetic, or volitional aspects of man (the four adjectives are synonymous for my purposes, but the reader may prefer one or another of them).

Continuing with the controversy over *The First World War*, I would note a dismaying paradox which arises at the beginning of Cowley's article. After matching some of MacLeish's statements against others, he holds that they cancel one another. On the face of it, no procedure in controversy could be sounder than that of exposing "contradictions" in the assertions of one's opponent. But where do we stand if we find these contradictions exposed in a magazine which is continually and valuably instructing us as to the "contradictions of capitalism"? Now, if our capitalist social structure contains fundamental contradictions, and the poet's imagination is piously and sensitively constructed after the environmental patterns among which he arose, how could

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a man born and bred under capitalism be expected to honestly and totally express his attitudes without revealing a contradiction in them? In a society plagued by contradictions, one might more justly employ the opposite kind of rebuttal, and seek to discredit a man's thinking by exposing the fact that it was poor in fundamental contradictions.

This is no plea for loose thinking. Our statements should certainly be required to meet the tests of compatibility, at least to the extent that, where they are at odds, we offer a shuttle concept for getting from one to the other. Cowley is certainly justified in exposing any point at which, to his mind, such shuttle concepts are needed and are lacking. But in so far as our statements are taken merely to indicate our underlying attitude, they should in some way or other reveal a contradiction of attitudes if they arose out of our response to an economic structure distinguished above all by the genius of the contradictory. Liberals have long suffered in silence under this curse, since they are half the time advocating reforms when they know that reforms interfere with fundamental change. And even the Communists, who in America are still living by the dictates of capitalism, became involved in a similar contradiction when they began pleading for unemployment insurance which, if adequate, might put off the Revolution forever. John Maynard Keynes once noted a similar predicament among the English socialists: put them in power in an ailing capitalist structure, and they inevitably fall into the muddle-headed position of attempting to patch up the very structure they would abolish.

I believe there is a corresponding emotional contradiction in our society which has done much to interfere with a unified moral attitude, radically splitting our ethical re-

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sponses into two largely antithetical compartments. Under typical industrialized capitalism, there are important influences making for *acquiescence* to its ways and equally important influences tending to carry one *beyond capitalism*. The doctrines of "emancipation" are a case in point. It was under the aegis of "emancipation" that the commercial state arose and conquered the feudal state—yet this same stressing or emphasis threatens to endanger the commercialists' hegemony itself, once they become thoroughly entrenched in their privileges. In this sense, the very kingpin of Marxian exhortation is a virtue stressed by capitalist enterprise, a standard developing out of the very *laissez-faire* psychosis which Communism would abolish. It is a principle of change, hence interferes with the stabilization of any *status quo*. Similarly, a certain degree of literacy has been a necessary instrument for shaping contemporary man to his place as customer, salesman, and potential soldier—yet this same literacy has afforded all sorts of people momentous glimpses into the critical lore of mankind, thus serving again and again to hamper the processes of naïve accommodation that might otherwise have taken place. The freedom of criticism which, originally aimed at priesthood and nobles, was finally turned to practical and acquisitive purpose by the rising commercial class, tended throughout the nineteenth century to transcend this function and become a criticism of commerce itself. The writings of Marx are perhaps the purest example of this tendency in the theoretical sphere; the same trend was exemplified in the imaginative sphere by the various social satirists, Bohemians, paradoxists, romantic, neoclassical, and primitivistic poets of "refusal," culminating perhaps in the symbolizations of the Ivory Tower, writers whom Edmund Wilson has treated somewhat un-

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fairly, as they did not content themselves with a merely negative attitude towards the contemporary state of affairs, but went aggressively to work depicting alternative existences, other and preferable worlds.

In the end, we have here "two moralities"—and the active, conscientious, well-educated member of Western culture showed himself thoroughly versed in both of them. The one prevailed largely in "glimpses," compensating by intensity for what it lacked in permanence, as earnest and uneasy young men, browsing about their local libraries in the indeterminate years before they had definitely settled down to "serious business," found opportunities and incentives to nibble at the fringes of a humanistic, cultured way of life. They even tentatively encouraged in themselves such characteristics and interests and standards as would prepare them to be decent integers in a world so constructed. Here was the possibility of poetry, which they could find substantiated in the imagery of books, and at certain moments even dared think might attain its parallels in the architecture of the state.

However, the need of a counter-morality clearly made itself felt. For a morality is but a set of attitudes and ways of thinking which enable us the better to do the things we must do—and unless one happened to be supported by unearned increment from the capitalist structure, he found it imperative that he either cultivate the "capitalist virtues" or perish. As Veblen once neatly pointed out, opportunities to get ahead are likewise opportunities to fall behind—and though one may well ask himself whether a desire to triumph in the Scramble marks a very high cultural ideal, neither is it very "cultural" to find oneself edged further and further into the ditch. Some people supported by

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coupon-clipping could afford to "scorn" the very virtues of salesmanship, bluster, and brass out of which their income was arising; likewise, the artists could escape to an extent, sometimes by addressing their imagery to the class of coupon-clippers themselves, but more often by writing for what might be called the coupon-clipping portion of the mind of drudges. In general, however, the entire populace had to equip itself for the demands of the Scramble by adopting a morality in keeping. This they could best accomplish by accepting a picture of the "good life" built around the ideal of the "live-wire" salesman, with culture taken to mean the maximum purchase of manufactured commodities.

The result was a moral split which became more and more sharply characterized in imaginative literature as the character of the nineteenth century took form. Out of books, out of delightful moments in one's personal life, out of sporadic voyages, out of *vacational* experiences as distinct from *vocational* ones, people got visions of a noncompetitive structure of living, a "good life" involving gentle surroundings, adequate physical outlets, the pursuit of knowledge, etc., and the very slogans of the commercial ethic assured them that they were "entitled" to all this. At the same time they had to meet the conditions of the daily Scramble—jockeying, outselling, outsmarting—demands better justified by the price they brought than by the wholesome calls they made upon mind and body. This contradiction led to the artistic phenomenon generally and inappropriately designated a "breach between art and life." It was naturally in the field of the aesthetic (the "vacational") that the opposition to practical ("vocational") demands could best be kept alive. Conditions of economic combat necessarily silenced or stunted the noncommercial morality between the hours of

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nine and five. Often, the problem was resolved by a man's enjoying vicious satire and the contemplation of lovely or hectic alternative worlds with the "after hours" portion of his mind while each day, grimly and cynically, buckling down to equip himself in precisely the kinds of effort and accomplishment for which he had, in his freer moments, soundly damned all mankind. Observable also is the "Faustian" split between "serious pursuits" and "dissipation." In New York, the discrepancy regularly took the form of privately playing the stock market and publicly praying for the revolution. Such was an inevitable incongruity, since capitalism fed both a capitalist morality and a morality beyond capitalism—yet I believe it has embittered a great many people's relations with one another in recent years.

In particular it has aggravated the plight of poets whose emotional, nonmechanical emphases might, even without this added burden, have made them forlorn enough in an age of intense mechanistic striving. A critic might conveniently restrict his exhortations to the "morality beyond capitalism" if he chose, but the poet is tapping deeper levels of response. If he arose under conditions of pronounced moral duality, it is not likely that the flow of his imagery can be confined to whichever of the two moral channels he happens to consider preferable. This dilemma has in particular exposed him to the purist attacks of all rationalist criticism (of either the neo-Humanist or the neo-Marxian kind) which would programmatically suppress one or another aspect of this duality by critical *fiat*. As regards certain superficial manifestations such demands can possibly be met: for instance, if a poet is sufficiently impressed by some new critical canon, he might train himself to avoid the subject of Greek Isles and select the subject of workingmen instead. Or he

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can depict people "with or without will," depending upon which symbolic externalities the tastes of the season may deem more acceptable. But in the end, to a sharper eye, he will necessarily be found to symbolize the patterns of experience under which he was formed. At best, like the Lowlands painters, he will depict Calvary among windmills. Nor may it always be possible to say when the poet formed by capitalist contradictions is exemplifying the *acquiescent* response and when the *corrective* one. When a wild animal grows heavier fur with the approach of winter, is it "resisting" the demands of the season or "acquiescing to" them?

So much for "capitalist contradictions" and our suggestion that the "complete" response to a contradictory society should be contradictory. Not all people may agree that environments impress themselves upon the individual mind so accurately. They may even accuse me of secretly propounding much the same kind of "one to one" correspondence between social stimulus and emotional response as I had attempted to discredit—the only difference in my version being that I offer a combined "A to A and non-A to non-A" correspondence. Accordingly, I propose to consider the matter from another angle, suggesting this time certain psychological or physiological contradictions so indigenous to man that they might be expected to operate even in a thoroughly homogeneous economic or social order. In fact, the contradictory aspects of a given temporal society might even conceivably be traced back to this source, being taken as the outgrowth or social externalization of initial biologic contradictions. For contradictions are not confined to capitalism. Yeast, fermenting in the fruit mash, eventually generates enough alcohol to pickle itself in death. Or nobles under feudalism, at one point in their exploitation, pre-

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sumably had to do so contradictory a thing as restrain themselves from taking all they could, in order that their serfs might live and serve. Some contradictions may be considered as purely subjective phenomena, depending for their existence upon the "point of view." The "synthetic" act of walking, for instance, might well be described by an eloquent right foot as a fluctuating battle against a contradictory left. The glands of internal secretion "cancel" the effects of one another but from the standpoint of the body as a whole they may be said to "collaborate." Newton talked of planetary motion as a synthesis of centrifugal and centripetal forces, but he himself warned that the synthesis was the real event and the two contradictory concepts were purely mathematical conventions used in plotting it. *Das Wahre ist das Ganze*, wrote Hegel, in the backwash of whose thinking we now flounder. By the "really real" he meant the synthesis of unreal, contradictory concepts. But we need not endanger our discussion here by roaming into a region whereby even so contradictory an alignment as two armies opposed on a battlefield must seem like "coöperation" in the eyes of God. Rather, we shall confine ourselves to an attempted distinction between essayistic and poetic exhortation, attempting to show that the second necessarily carries us towards a contradiction.

Suppose that we favored the triumph of the workingman, and wrote a work embodying this attitude. Essayistically (critically, rationally) we should proceed as follows: We should line up all the reasons why the triumph of the workingman seems preferable, and we would presumably seek to refute arguments which seemed directly or indirectly to prejudice this position. But the poetic (tragic, ethical) method of recommendation would be quite different. The

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poet might best plead for his Cause by picturing people who suffered or died in behalf of it. The essayistic critic would win us by proving the serviceability of his Cause—the poet would seem as spontaneously to stress the factor of disserviceability. For how better recommend a Cause by the strategies of a fiction than by picturing it as worthy of being fought for? And how better picture it as worthy of being fought for than by showing people who are willing to sacrifice their safety, lives, and happiness in its behalf? Such facts must lead us to search in all deeply felt tragedies the symbol of a birth, and not of the dying we should rationally expect. I never so greatly felt the limitations of rationalist criticism applied to poetry as when I once heard Michael Gold complain about the “defeatism” in plays and novels written by labor sympathizers. He felt that there should be pictures of triumph, of glorification—perhaps somewhat as Ziegfeld found ways to glorify the American Girl. He took the tragic ending simply at its face value, despite the obvious fact that the tragedies were written by sincere labor sympathizers who were trying to commend their Cause in the symbols of art, and who did commend their Cause precisely as human Causes have ever been commended, by the symbol of the Crucifixion.

In sum, we might say that the difference between essayistic and poetic exhortation is that the essayistic can be consistent while the poetic is necessarily contradictory. “Business Christianity” is rational: it recommends religion quite simply and directly on the grounds that Church contacts help you get ahead. “Poetic Christianity” was contradictory, building its entire doctrine of salvation about the image of a god in anguish. So also, our great “tragedies of individualism” preceded the spread of individualist ethics

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throughout our social structure. And thus characteristically, we find so deeply ethical a poet as Baudelaire seeking to celebrate the flesh, not in the direct manner of our musical revues, but by recourse to the rationally repellent symbols of brutality, sterility, and even frigidity. And we may note the presence of this tragic device, in a more domesticated form, thus: In an age wherein the prestige of art was undergoing gradual eclipse, Flaubert tended to keep his vocation in good repute, in his own eyes at least, by forever grumbling about the annoyances caused him by the *problème du style*.

This fundamental distinction between the “rational” and “ethical” modes of exhortation or incitement seems especially apropos to the MacLeish-Cowley discussion. For it should reveal a process whereby many so-called “attacks” on war might come, through the vagaries of the sacrificial symbol, to serve pro-military ends. For such attacks generally stress the sufferings of war, and these are precisely the foremost ethical symbols of commendation. Of all the inconsistencies in which the human mind is entangled, this confusion between “goodness” and “sacrifice” seems the most unavoidable. Even were we to grant with the utilitarians that our notions of the “good” arise purely and simply from our notions of the “useful” or “usable,” the fact remains that the best argument in favor of a “good” is one’s willingness to sacrifice himself for it. Thus, by the ethical contradiction, categories as logically distinct as service and disservice, advantage and disaster, become fundamentally intertwined. It is not mere “compensation” that brings religion and failure together. By the “logic of the emotions” the religious feeling may *demand* failure as its symbolic counterpart. The confusion probably goes far to explain

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why so much of the propaganda for the good of society has been carried on antagonistically instead of by wheedling. The rational method would clearly be to plead for one's Cause by the most unctuous strategy one could command—but ethical attachment makes one tend to “testify” by invitation to martyrdom.

It is this discrepancy, I believe, which lies at the bottom of Unamuno's insistence upon the “tragic sense of life.” He is forever talking of plans for human benefit, while seeming to prize nothing so greatly as the thought of human suffering. His pages at times are a kind of bullfight, a gory spirituality concerned with the need to incur risk, to inflict and suffer misery, coexisting with an almost morbidly intense yearning to see mankind housed in a very pigeonry of ease. Thus, in his *Essays and Soliloquies*, he speaks of a groaning, heard at night from an adjoining room: “It produced upon me the illusion of coming out of the night itself, as if it were the silence of the night that lamented; and there was even a moment when I dreamt that that gentle lament rose to the surface from the depths of my own soul.” Is not this the “connoisseur” speaking? And in the social sphere, he sees in Don Quixote the tragic symbol under the guise of the ridiculous—for it is ridicule which puts us most cruelly apart from others, hence one may poetically commend his wares by the symbol of ridicule. Martyrdom creates the creed—though out of the creed in turn may come a “rationally compensatory” codicil to the effect that martyrdom will be rewarded.

The instance of Unamuno, whose ethics so confusingly intermingles ideals of peace and ideals of anguish, may serve to help us consider the same paradox from another angle. For it is undeniably a fact that even so brutal a performance

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as modern warfare is ethically rooted. The neurologist Sherrington has pointed out that, whatever “consciousness” may be, it is mainly manifested in those processes involved in the seeking and capture of food; whereas, once the prize is seized and swallowed, the organism's “awareness” is of a very blunt order. Unless the digestion is impaired, there is slight sensation beyond a vague state of wellbeing, relaxation, and somnolence. Now: what do we face here if not a fundamental contradiction in human incentives? The organism has at its command a keen and adventurous equipment for attaining the wherewithal to bring about a state of security, peace, relaxation, comfort, the benign sluggishness of satiety and warmth—yet this very equipment for attaining the state of worldly Nirvana is the soul of turbulence and struggle. Here is a “militaristic-pacifistic” conflict at the basis of morals. We seek peace ever by the questionable Rooseveltian device of fighting for it. In so far as the organism attains the state of quiescence, its militaristic equipment (that is: nervous agility, bodily and mental muscle, imagination, intellect, senses, expectation, “curiosity,” etc.) is threatened with decay. And in so far as this militaristic equipment is kept in vigorous operation, it makes impossible precisely the state of relaxation which it is designed to secure.

Many of the disagreements among moralists might be traced to the fact that they have selected one of these factors, rather than the other, to form the keystone of their ethical schemas. Perhaps Nietzsche was the modern thinker who plagued himself most spectacularly with this problem of the militaristic-pacifistic conflict. His madness may account for the inadequate means of communication which he sometimes adopted in his attempt to symbolize his preoc-

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cupations (as with the excesses of the "blonde beast," for instance), but this fact should not lead us to overlook the genius and fertility of his perception and the wide range of human activities which he saw implicated in this confusion. He knew that the morality of combat is no despicable thing, that morals are fists, and that we cannot stop at noting the savagery of some slayer or the greed of some financial monopolist. There is the same fanaticism, tenacity, and even pugnacity underlying the efforts of the scientist, artist, explorer, rescuer, inventor, experimenter, reformer. Militaristic patterns are fundamental to our "virtue," even the word itself coming from a word which the Latins applied to their warriors.

One could consider the matter from other points of view. In particular, for instance, I believe that a kind of "egoistic-altruistic merger" can be established whereby a man may be found honestly "devoting" himself and "sacrificing" himself to activities which are primarily pursued because they net him large profits. How many business men actually do warp and ruin their lives in the getting of fortunes which the very intensity of their devotion unfits them to enjoy? And when an ape "protects" his women, perhaps even losing his life in the effort, is that act "egoistic" or "altruistic"? It seems to be something of both. Who lives by the sword dies by the sword? In terms of the "egoistic-altruistic merger" we might restate it: If one possesses a resource or device that greatly sustains or protects him, he will even risk his life to keep it or improve it.

As possible confusions to complicate human response we have, then: the Bohemian-practical; the useful-sacrificial; the militaristic-pacifistic; the egoistic-altruistic, as effected through "devotion to work."

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There is also a wide "neutral" area of response wherein such confusions do not seem to arise. Generally, if one wishes to strike a match, he simply takes it and strikes it in the most direct, convenient, rational way his experience has taught him. (Even in this field, however, I must recall an occasional "poetic" or "ethical" match-striker, particularly among those drawing-room martyrs to form who willingly endanger their health and happiness by striking matches with their thumbnails, a sacrificial technique which sometimes lodges bits of fizzing sulphur between the nail and the quick.) Science is the attempt to extend this "neutral" area to as many procedures and relationships as possible. Ideally, it would have all our responses to stimuli obey the rational pattern, so that contradictions would arise purely from "error," from "insufficient knowledge." Science hopes to impose this neutrality of approach upon a kind of mental and bodily structure which, according to Veblen, is best fitted for a state of "mild savagery." It would impose mechanistic ideals upon a non-mechanistic organism.

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FREUD— AND THE ANALYSIS OF POETRY

THE reading of Freud I find suggestive almost to the point of bewilderment. Accordingly, what I should like most to do would be simply to take representative excerpts from his work, copy them out, and write glosses upon them. Very often these glosses would be straight extensions of his own thinking. At other times they would be attempts to characterize his strategy of presentation with reference to interpretative method in general. And, finally, the Freudian perspective was developed primarily to chart a psychiatric field rather than an aesthetic one; but since we are here considering the analogous features of these two fields rather than their important differences, there would be glosses attempting to suggest how far the literary critic should go along with Freud and what extra-Freudian material he would have to add. Such a desire to write an article on Freud in the margins of his books, must for practical reasons here remain a frustrated desire. An article such as this must condense by generalization, which requires me to slight the most stimulating factor of all—the detailed articulacy in which he embodies his extraordinary frankness.

Freud's frankness is no less remarkable by reason of the fact that he had perfected a method for being frank. He could say humble, even humiliating, things about himself and us because he had changed the rules somewhat and could