Art and Social Responsibility

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"He [Josef Kramer] wasn't a bad chap really... He simply couldn't see what he had done wrong in obeying orders..."

—PRESS REPORT

"Le regne de la poesie est peut-être plus proche que je n'ose le penser. Que restera-t-il aux vivants de demain? Leurs yeux pour pleurer, des mauvaises herbes et des fleurs des champs, une terre ravagée, des cabanes aufond des bois, un carré de ciel, et des sentiments violents. Pour un poete, les conditions necessaires et suffisantes."

—RAYMOND DUMAY

I

Partisan Review, published in New York, advertised this year a number to be devoted to exposing the 'New Failure of Nerve' in Western liberalism.[1] The advertisement catalogued a series of the tendencies which the editors regarded as retrograde, obscurantist, reactionary. They included the abandonment of the historical for the metaphysical approach to politics and ethics, a return to the idea of Original Sin, and the appearance once again of the semi-deterministic conception of sociology. It struck me that so many of these concepts were, in fact, the principles of thought and art which are tending more and more to guide the artists who have begin to appear publicly since the war broke out; belonging to that generation, I am perfectly aware of the influence of such ideas on myself. I have examined them fairly often, and whether out of personal prejudice or out of conviction I must refuse to admit that they are in essence obscurantist principles. We have just passed through a period of classicism in English poetry which has no parallel in American work, and we have seen a few of its limitations. History has driven us from classicism to romanticism, and the migration has been almost universal among sensitive writers.

I do not believe that the conflict between human beings and society is the product of the Industrial Revolution, socialism, fascism, or any other contemporary cause—it is as old as the hills, and the common man knows it well enough. He has not been bludgeoned into the armies of eight or nine millennia for nothing. The reason that the existence of such a conflict requires mention in this essay is that for the first time in a good many years the creative artist, who has previously, by reason of his occupation, contrived to dodge the issue and claim special privileges, is finding himself involved. The end of regionalism liberated him from it; the collapse of urban centralisation confronts him with it again. Just as friars contrived to escape being impressed to fight at Crecy, artists have contrived, and still are contriving, if they are prepared to sell their humanity, to avoid the issue of accepting society or rejecting it. To the peasants of Alsace or China none of this would need saying—they know armies and causes for what they are—but to a great many writers, those of *Partisan Review* included, brought up in an essentially urban culture, who have no such timeless, hereditary awareness of disobedience, it badly needs saying. In England, at any rate, the realisation of the active irresponsibility of society has come as such a thunderbolt to writers reared in an atmosphere of socialism (as we were) that they have had no time to make up their minds. Caught on the wrong foot, they have postponed the decision, either by preparing 'to defend the bad against the worse', or, far less creditably, by using their

[1] 1942.

status as artists to detach themselves from general conscription, which is somewhat comparable with the action of the doctor who claims priority air transport away from a cholera epidemic, because he is an important asset to society.

These terms, classic and romantic, stand for more than differences of style. The classic sees man as master, the romantic sees him as victim of his environment. That seems to me to be the real difference. I regard the periods of English literature as an alternation between these two concepts. It is as if the awareness of death, the factor which, at root, determines the degree to which we feel masters of our circumstances, ebbed and flowed, alternately emphasised and obscured as a factor in interpretative art. The classical periods are periods of economic and mental security, when the drive is towards action and where the majority of the people is in possession of a satisfactory interpretation of the universe and of themselves, religious or political (it can be either). They are periods during which the burdens of realising and interpreting the most ghastly of all conflicts, between the man's and the artist's desperate desire for permanence, and factual death which he discovers, fall upon individual shoulders. These artists, standing in a period of general complacency, are the major poets—frequently psychopathic, since their insecurity is endogenous. The Victorian period was one such, and it produced its Arnolds and Mark Rutherfords who agonised as much quantitatively if not qualitatively within the structure of the times as did Rilke or Thompson, or Unamuno and Lorca in contemporary Europe.

The active periods with their extroverted public alternate with ages when the realisation of the Tragic Sense becomes general, spreads over continents, reaches men who are conscious only of being afraid. There are no major poets, because what they have to say, everybody already knows. The times need not revealers but concealers, a hierarchy of men who will hide the truth of death from humanity, or life becomes empty. I am convinced that a large part of cultural barbarism arises from this source. Perhaps this is the true failure of nerve. Major poetry is the vicarious function of the single artist—he takes the weight of tragic awareness to shield the rest of humanity from it. I rather doubt if ever in history there have been so many who realised the emotional fact of death. Megalopolitan civilisation is living under a death sentence. That has become a personal realisation over great areas of the world. We are at the turn of a major period of classicism (Victorian) which produced major romantic poets, and finally classical poets using the husk of romantic technique. Slack water was at about 1900, and suddenly the face of social disintegration and personal death began to be seen by more and more people. The private knowledge of the Dostoievskys and Unamunos of the past was becoming general. A numb silence fell on everyone, except Monro and his Georgians, who could not understand what was happening and shouted to fill the gap. There were few attempts to reinstate a classical, secure approach. The Imagists wrote, with increasing tragic awareness. The socialist poets attempted to deny the awareness and to turn to society, but in Spain the face of the unpleasant black figure was unveiled. The poets went out to fight, taking Marx with them, and came back with Unamuno and Lorca. It was then that the dialectical-historical approach became hollow. In some strange fashion the same knowledge, unconditioned by history, was growing up in innumerable childhoods—Dylan Thomas knew it early in life, long before the Spanish defeat. Art does not move always by sudden transition—Steiner's concept of the Zeitgeist is truer than it looks. The transition is a matter of relative numbers who reach a viewpoint together, independently. Artists reflect it now only because it is the general temper of the public.

II

The awareness of death, the quasi-priestly but secular attitude, are omnipresent for anyone who knows contemporary English art and letters. No artist of my generation is uninfluenced by them. I should make it clear that I do not wish to argue for them, only to state that they are here. The new climate is a thing into which we grew up. The ideas that lie behind it are the obscurantist ideas of the Editor of *Partisan Review*, and analysis of what has been written suggests that they are these.

1. "That there is no correspondence between the physical essence of the universe and the psychological and so-called 'spiritual' aspirations of man—that no human activity can be said to have 'permanent' or 'absolute' significance, and that ethics and aesthetics exist because we make them and assert them, not in conformity with Platonic absolutes but in the teeth of material reality. That the common enemy of man is Death, that the common tie of man is ultimate victimhood, and that anyone who, in attempting to escape the realisation of that victimhood in himself, increases its incidence upon others, is a traitor to humanity and an ally of death.
2. "That history, in so far as it is the history of power, is not to be regarded as a steady progress in any direction, whether moral or political, e.g. towards civilisation, goodness, socialism, but as an oscillation about a fixed point, a series of self-limiting ecological changes, an ebb and flow between certain fixed limits which have not within human record been exceeded. We see it as a fluctuating conflict between biological freedom and power. One cannot suggest on the recorded evidence that man is either 'morally better' (however that be defined) or politically more capable of forming a society which does not involve the abuse of power. His achievement fluctuates sufficiently for one to be able to say that democracy is 'better'—i.e. more humane or less exacting—than fascism, or that the Greece of 450 BC was preferable to the Rome of AD 50, but the statement that absolute qualitative charge has taken place between 500 BC and AD 1943 is without meaning for us. Such comparisons are in themselves historically meaningless. We do not believe that irresponsible society is any less of an evil than irresponsible society then, or society when Godwin saw it. Every society based upon power is, to us, vitiated by the fact, whoever the rulers may be, and where free communities have come into existence their freedom has to be constantly asserted, or they degenerate slowly or rapidly into the adoption of power. In other words, the recurrent tendency of society is to degenerate into barbarism. We accept this hypothesis for the same reason that we call the tendency to live between fifty and eighty years a human property—evidence tends to suggest that in a majority of cases it is factually true. One does not detect the tendency so freely in individuals as the Adlerians would lead us to believe—it is not a question of individual lust-for-power, but a different property, belonging to masses, and able to vitiate the most enlightened decisions. It seems that in any society, acting as a society, once responsibility and mutual aid are submerged, the constructive impulses tend to cancel out, and the

> negative and destructive summate. This is as true of the Communist Party as it is of feudal Poland or the Roman Empire. It is as though we were to have a boat full of blindfold rowers. They pull in different directions and no progress is made, but the weights of the crew add up and she sinks. There is a good deal of argument possible whether education can in any degree remedy this tendency. One can call it original sin if one wishes. I do not care what name I give it—for me as an artist it is real, the most real feature of society in all ages. It is possible that, in reality, it is a feature of the collapse-phase only—certainly its recognition is—yet all ages speak of deterioration as a journey down hill. Social conduct is described as harder than its opposite. It is no new idea. But the state of irresponsibility once reached, the viciousness of an organisation tends to be proportional to its size. Democracy in a barbarian state is a priori impossible, because it involves the refusal to admit that the majority is never right. Fascism is the attempt to summate the destructive influences and to use them as a basis for a society. It teaches that the individual is unreal, and therefore death, the termination of the individual, is unreal also. If this does not explain the genuine satisfaction which all authoritarian societies give to their adherents, then I have misunderstood society. But I have no use for a Swedenborgian Hell by common consent. One cannot propel the boat by the weight of its rowers."

Romanticism is our ideology. It is based upon a metaphysical theory. The most serious difficulty in the discussion of romanticism and its place in sociological and literary criticism is the progressive loss of meaning which critical illiteracy has inflicted on the name itself. Romanticism is not a stylistic term, and the criterion of its application is not how the subject writes, but what he believes—otherwise we might find it difficult to explain the clarity and definition with which we can speak of romantic painting, romantic poetry, romantic sculpture and romantic music, with equal readiness and an exact correspondence in the quality described. It has become fashionable to deride any attempt to relate artistic criticism to cosmological theory, except among those who confuse mystical speculation with metaphysics. To attempt such a relation is one of the stigmata which characterises 'loss of nerve' in the eyes of the neo-classicists. But without coherent metaphysics art is no more a comprehensible activity than travel without a sense of direction. The nature of reality is the first concern not only of poetry but of intelligent biology or political ethics, and the only claim of romanticism to the status of an ideology, and a historically valid ideology, lies in the coherence of its metaphysics, and its root in observed fact.

The romantic believes that the particular qualities which make up humanness—mind, purpose, consciousness, will, personality—are unique in known phylogeny, and are so far at variance with the physical conditions in which man exists that they are irrelevant to the general structure of physical reality. Christian and pagan metaphysicians of opposing ideologies (including the Marxists, who believe in historical inevitability) have contended either that Man was made in God's image, in which case ethical obligation corresponded with the nature of a Creator, or that the Universe was made in Man's image, and that some of the values to which human individuals tend to aspire (beauty, goodness or order) were incorporated in the physical universe itself. The distinguishing feature of the metaphysical theory which underlies romanticism is that it rejects the ideals themselves. They exist only so long as Man himself exists and fights for them. The en-

tire romantic ethic and body of art rests upon this assumption of insecurity, an insecurity which begins at the personal level of mortality, and extends into all the intellectual fields where insecurity is least tolerable. It is comical that such a view should be characterised as wish-fulfilment. The romantic has only two basic certainties—the certainty of irresoluble conflict which cannot be won but must be continued, and the certainty that there exists between all human beings who are involved in this conflict an indefeasible responsibility to one another. The romantic has two enemies, Death, and the obedient who, by conformity to power and irresponsibility, ally themselves with Death. There is no hint of mysticism in this—romanticism is the ideology of a whole human being looking at the whole universe.

Romanticism, the belief in the human conflict against the Universe and against power, seems to me to be the driving force in all art and science which deserves the name. In Western civilisation today there are only two recognisable elements which can be said to differentiate it from total barbarism, our art and our medical science, and both are based upon this romantic ideology. The ethical content of romanticism has always been the same. The romantic bases his ethic upon his belief in the hostility or the neutrality of the Universe. He does not deny the existence of absolute standards, but he denies their existence apart from Man. The conceptions of artistic beauty or moral goodness did not exist before the emergence of consciousness, and they will return to oblivion with its extinction, but they are none the less good for their impermanence. And because of this one-sided battle which the romantic believes himself to be fighting, he recognises an absolute and imperative responsibility to his fellow men as individuals—both because he, unlike the Christian, is defending standards in which he believes but which are not by nature assured of triumph, which he feels will only exist so long as they are defended, and because his pessimistic interpretation of philosophy makes him feel towards his fellow men much as you might feel towards fellow survivors on a raft.

It is from this metaphysical idea of conflict, of principles which are maintained only by struggle, that romanticism draws the tremendous force of its social and philosophical criticism, and the equally tremendous emotional and intellectual appeal of its artistic statements. It is a force which alone among artistic forces seems to preserve perpetual virility and perpetual youth. Compare the *Enthronement of Our Lady*, which Ruskin called the most outstanding work of art in the world, with the works of Brueghel and see which seems to you to be the more true—the order and peace of the first, or the tumult of the second. The ideal of beauty and order is the same in each case, but for the Italian master the battle is already won, God is on His throne. For Brueghel, in the world, in society, in his own body, the battle continued as bloody and as fierce as ever.

The romantic recognises a perpetual struggle upon two levels, the fight against Death which I have described, and the struggle against those men and institutions who ally themselves with Death against humanity, the struggle against barbarism. These are the two subjects of the Brueghel paintings, The Triumph of Death and The Massacre of the Holy Innocents. In the first, a gigantic host of skeletons is riding down mankind. In the second, the Duke of Alva's soldiery are butchering Flemish peasants and their children. I regard these paintings as the highest level which the expression of the romantic ideology has ever reached—and Brueghel is not in any lecture catalogue of romantic painters. These are the enemies of humanity, and of the standards of beauty and of truth which exist only for and in humanity—Death and Death's ally, irresponsibility. The relevance of romanticism today lies in the fact that of all ideologies it alone declares this basic antagonism and moulds its course accordingly.

I suppose that I would summarise the social conclusions of contemporary romantics in some such form as this:

i. Man, considered individually, seems to be internally maladapted. He possesses a conscious sense of personality which, as far as one can reasonably guess, is not shared by other organisms, and which renders the emotional realisation of death intolerable and incompatible with continued enjoyment of existence. He therefore attempts universally to deny either that death is real or that his personality is really personal.[2]

ii. At the present time, one of the main human refuges in the past (the negation of death) is apparently sealed by scientific research. I say apparently, because the important factor from the viewpoint of social psychology is not the actual evidence but the acceptance of death as real and final by a high proportion of the populations which have so far evaded the realisation.[3] This acceptance, coming upon people whose humanity has been undermined by social organisation, is a root cause of the flight into barbarism.

iii. Accordingly, the emphasis is laid more than ever before in the negation of individual personality and responsibility, since to admit that I am an individual I must also admit that I shall cease to exist. The negation takes the form of a growing belief in the conception of an immortal, invisible and only wise society, which can exact responsibilities and demand allegiances. The concept is as old as human thought, but its acceptance is becoming more and more a refuge from the reality of self. Society is not only a form of abrogating moral responsibility, it is a womb into which one can crawl back and become immortal because unborn.

iv. But we have seen that it is a property of over-specialised groups that they submerge constructive impulses and summate destructive ones, so that the product of any group[4] action is by tendency destructive and irrational. The courses of action which the group mode of thought imposes upon the individual members are so grotesque and so wildly at variance with reason and with normal constructive activity that by reference to individual standards

[2] I am surprised that Fromm (*The Fear of Freedom*) and other psychologists do not make more of this. The fear of death is probably at root the fear of isolation, rather than of a cessation of experience. Total isolation is reached only in 'deteriorated' schizophrenia and in death, but one of the chief artistic grounds for attacking contemporary societies is that they produce a false sense of community while, in reality, they destroy the individual's true relation with his fellows and substitute a relationship to a fictitious dummy, the Group.

[3] Singularly enough, some critics again attempt to depict this view as a form of religious mysticism, largely because it uses the term 'human nature' and discusses the relationship of man to the Universe. Except in so far as philosophical pessimism is a 'religion', it is difficult to see in what way a romantic interpretation of history is any more 'religious' than a marxist of physiochemical interpretation. It certainly rejects every form of supernaturalism. As to Whitehead's conception of romanticism as a revolt against science, the romantic conception of metaphysics and politics is constituted in the same way as any scientific hypothesis—by reference to the observed facts of history or of psychology. Its interpretation may be fallible, but its method is surely above reproach, even from the rationalists, whose notion of the economic reform of society has no historical evidence to support it. I would have placed the romantic awareness high in the list of causes of scientific progress.

[4] In view of criticisms which have been made of this remark, it needs qualifying. I do not say that all groups are bad, any more than I say that because all men have stomachs they are dyspeptics. The tendency to degenerate into irresponsibility is inherent in every group, once its members cease to act as individuals, and transfer their responsibility from their fellow men to the group. Where I use the word 'society' in a derogatory sense, I mean a society in which this change for the worse has taken place.

> of human responsibility they are clinically insane. The consciousness of personal responsibility is the factor which differentiates human relationships from superficially similar animal societies: and contemporary irresponsibility has thrown it overboard.

The barbarian revolution occurs without external change at the point where mutual aid becomes detached from political organisation, civic delegation passes out of the control of the delegators, at the transition between a community of responsible individuals and a society of irresponsible citizens. At a definite point in the history of every civilisation, and shortly before its economic peak, there occurs a transfer of civic obligation, from the community based on mutual aid to the society based upon common irresponsibility. It may manifest itself as an industrial revolution, a megalopolitan development of the city, or as a change in national attitude from community to communal aggression. Every society has its Melian Dialogues, and thereafter the barbarian revolution has taken place, and the actions of that society are irresponsible, and its members insane.

The most terrible feature of this insanity is that it can be recognised in ourselves, in our friends. The man whom one knows—a good fellow, able to live as an individual a life which is free from any conscious assaults on the rights of others, who does not make a practice of beating his own head or the heads of others against the walls, who is sane, with whom one eats or drinks… this same man can very well return one evening to talk or drink with you again and catalogue the most grotesque and contemptible actions which he has performed, or which he supports, with full approval and a fixed delusional sense of their rightness, solely because he is now acting as a member of some organised and irresponsible group. He will pay any price to rid himself of the selfhood which, subconsciously, he knows must die. It is this frantic prostration before society/ this masochistic attitude which permits aggregate lunacy to torture him, kill him, or drive him to actions of unspeakable idiocy, which explains the obedience of so many populations to rogues and brutes who pull the strings and make Leviathan walk. Yet this fellow you eat and drink with is still a good fellow. If all those who supported tyranny, butchered each other, and generally raised hell and high-water, were personal blackguards, film Nazis, one could be happy. But I sat smoking last week with a great personal friend of mine who has just helped to exterminate, under orders, the population of a city where he has a good many acquaintances. He is filled with a sense of the rightness of his action, and he was willing to perform it at great personal risk. By participating in a human society, he had bought the abrogation of the fear of death at the price of his personality. He is not a fool nor a sadist—he is your friend or your son. His contact with society has made him perform an action which, a year ago, or if it had been performed yesterday by a society of which he was not a member, he would have called bestial and contemptible. He looks back on it with pride, because he has accepted it as an action on behalf of humanity.

Jailers, firing squads, thugs—the horror of it is that in many cases they owe the criminality of their acts not to themselves but to the fact that they are members of a society and possess no insight into its corporate actions. To call them insane, over the range of those actions, is not a figure of speech but a clinical fact. If insanity is a divorce between reality and perception which, by depriving a man of insight, renders him a peril to himself and others, then these men—my friend, all of them—are insane, over the whole section of their activity which is involved with the madhouse group. What else does the tag concerning Salus Populi mean, save the society abrogates rational conduct? What else is the contemporary phrase Military Necessity but a prelude to some grotesque piece of bestiality which we are being asked to accept? We are living in a mad-

house whenever society is allowed to become personalised and regarded as a super-individual. We are living in a madhouse now.

What will the artist, as an individual, have to say for himself when he looks at the results of this process in the present time? He will lay down, and I believe he is laying down, a set of cynical but reliable guides to conduct.

In a barbarian society, we are forced to live in an asylum, where we are both patients and explorers. Certain rules, arrived at empirically, will govern our conduct in terms of that analogy.

First, I recognise the seeds of madness in myself. I know that if ever, for any purpose, I allow myself to act as a member of such a group and to forfeit my responsibility to my fellows, from that moment I am a madman, and the degree of my insanity will be purely fortuitous.

Second, I must suspect all bodies, groups, teams, gangs, based on power, for where two or three hundred are gathered together, there is the potentiality of lunacy in the midst of them, whether lunacy that kills Jews, lunacy that flogs Indians, lunacy that believes Lord George Gordon or the Ku Klux Klan, or lunacy that bombs Berlin. Yet I shall not hate or distrust any of my fellow patients singly. They are exactly as I am. I can see how dangerous they are, but I can be as dangerous to them if I allow myself to become involved. It will be said that I deny social responsibility. I do not—I believe that responsibility is boundless. We have boundless responsibility to every person we meet. The foreman owes it to his men not to persecute them—he owes it as a man, not because there is an abstract power vested in the TUC which demands it. Barbarism is a flight from responsibility, an attempt to exercise it towards a non-existent scarecrow rather than to real people. Each sincere citizen feels responsibility to society in the abstract, and none to the people he kills. The furious obedience of the Good Citizens is basically irresponsible. 'The simple love of country and home and soil, a love that needs neither reasons nor justifications, is turned by the official apologists of the state into the demented cult of "patriotism": coercive group unanimity: blind support of the rulers of the state: maudlin national egoism: an imbecile willingness to commit collective atrocities for the sake of "national glory."'[5] We have no responsibility whatever to a barbarian society (we recognise no moral duties towards a gang of madmen): our responsibilities to each other I believe to be boundless.

Third, one must aim at concealment. When lunacy is a norm, cynicism is a duty. The chief task will be to remain unnoticed by these ranging gangs of fellow patients. Their main duty falls on anybody who, by remaining a person, reminds them of personality and death. One lives in perpetual danger from the hatred or the equally destructive desire of the Good Citizens, and we shall need to humour, to cajole, to deceive, to appease, to compromise, to run at the right moments. When two of these squealing packs are murdering each other we shall be denounced by both as traitors for failing to join in. The most we can do is to attempt to snatch out of the mob one or two of the pathetic figures, urged on by scamps, who compose such mobs. They are our friends.

The positive expression of such ideas is not in the ballot box but in the individual restoration of responsible citizenship, the practice of recalcitrant mutual aid, not in political organisation but in the fostering of individual disobedience, individual thought, small responsible mutual aid bodies which can survive the collapse and concentrate their efforts upon the practice of civilisation. It is the philosophy of direct action, of the deserter and the maquis, the two most significant and human figures of every barbarian age.

[5] Lewis Mumford, *Culture of Cities*, IV, 9, page 256.

In future, our responsibilities are to our fellow men, not to a society. The point at which responsibility becomes finally submerged is the point at which we no longer have common ground with society. Once the choice of barbarism has been made, the only remedy is in direct action. We now accept no responsibility to any group, only to individuals. This repudiation is not confined to 'artists'—'artists' have made it because they happen to be human beings. They enjoy no rights that shoemakers, doctors or housewives are not equally entitled to demand. The claim of society on bakers is just as much vitiated by irresponsibility as its claim on poets. There are no corporate allegiances. All our politics are atomised.

It is not that as artists we have deserted society. It has deserted or ejected us, and we live on in contact with it as tenants whom the landlord has not troubled to have thrown out. We have not seceded, but in clinging to personality we sling to something which everyone knows is the harbinger of death. They hate us for reminding them of it. They burrow deeper into society to lose sight of the fact which towers over them. Rather than face it, they become insane. Fascism is a refuge from Death in death. And fascism epitomises the historical tendency of barbarian society.

These are the necessary conclusions of an age in which a concept of society and of the universe—I mean the Victorian-Liberal-bourgeois concept, has collapsed. To describe them as obscurantist or a 'failure of nerve' contributes little to their discussion. They are the almost inevitable product of the time, and in practice they exercise everybody, even Marxist writers who repudiate them and find it hard to sympathise with 'romantics' who express them. They are far more a fact of social history than a result of conscious thought.

Further, they represent the conscious or unconscious state of mind of an entire generation of writers, both those who profess individualism and those who reject it. They are manifestly not identical with the ideas behind 'Art for Art's sake'—it would be far fairer to regard them as art for responsibility's sake. The generation which is influenced by such ideas is certainly making no special claims for itself, either of privilege or of insight. This set of ideas, this metaphysical and political attitude, is an ideology, and that ideology is correctly termed romanticism.

III

If this seems a cynical or a hysterical estimate of human society and of an artist's attitude to it, I feel that there is evidence, from what we have seen of history in some ten years of increasing political degeneration throughout societies whose barbarian revolution has taken place, that it may be true. Perhaps the environment was a very unfavourable one. I have lived only in a social system generally admitted to be at the end of its tether. I belong to a generation brought up in the certainty that it would be killed in action on behalf of an unreality against an insanity. But war is not a special case. The English public is madder now than in 1938—it kills and tortures with as little scruple as its enemies did them—but war is only an aggravation of barbarism. The shock effect of such ideas as I have expressed is present only to people who, like the American and Fjiglish artists of the present day, are politically and humanly semi-adult. The Chinese, the peasants of Europe, the peasants of sixteenth-century England, artists like Brueghel and Shelley, would not require their formulation. They would find them too obvious to require stating. Of course the artist is a responsible individual. It is only the artist who is recovering from a period of dehumanised Victorianism or industrialism who needs to be reminded of them. Brueghel, unlike

the intellectuals of classicism, would not have been surprised and disoriented because obedient citizens massacred Jews or Germans, because the Japanese raided Pearl Harbour. These ideas are part of the humanity which we re-learn in becoming romantics. However, the romantic is certainly obliged to face the criticism that he denounces other people's doings when he cannot say what principles guide his own actions. I say emphatically that war is wrong, and do not know why I say it. The position is illogical, but I see no way out. I cannot give so many reasons for believing any one action to be wrong as I can give for believing a work of art to be bad. Yet as I am confident that aesthetics are real, and find myself obliged to act accordingly, so in the field of ethics I must act on some of the convictions that compose humanity. The only coherent ethic is that of responsible humaneness. I believe, therefore, in reason against insanity, in responsibility against barbarism. A society of irresponsible, obedient citizens to my mind is as morally null as it is historically doomed. The ethic of romanticism is an ethic derived entirely from man, and for the artist and the scientist, concerned with humanity and nothing else, it is true and coherent. Apart from human beings, neither 'goodness' nor 'beauty' have any absolute significance. They are human things and the seeking of them is a human obligation. The romantic launches his protest and bases his conduct upon an ethic, an agathistic utilitarianism, which he finds in the alliance for mutual aid of all human beings against a universe which does not exist for their comfort nor share their aspirations.

Perhaps the most important factor which has led to the widespread acceptance of romanticism today is that it offers an adequate explanation of contemporary Western society and has shown itself capable of predicting accurately the future course of that society. Man's only weapon against the anarchy of the universe is his civilisation, the responsible adoption of each individual of his social rights and duties. The growth of Western society has been coterminous with the gradual passage of these functions of justice, law, mutual aid and creative work out of the hands of individuals and into the hands of professional exponents, but never until the total unhinging of the whole system of individual civilisation by the Industrial Revolution had the ascendancy of barbarism been absolute, and the existence of a public possessing no single element of normal human activity or culture become widespread. The megalopolitan pattern is irreversible, if any historical process is irreversible, and it was possible to predict with accuracy the total collapse of the megalopolitan communities and the survival only of such groups as were able or could become able to revert to the practice of mutual aid, as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. The only persons from whom this process was concealed were the inevitable progress party, who required yet another demonstration of the inevitability of post-revolutionary tyranny inherent in any revolution which retains the concept of centralised power. They have had that demonstration in France, in Russia, in Germany. Romanticism is fully vindicated as a theory of life, and its offspring anarchism as a theory of politics, by the only valid arbiter, the historical event.

Romanticism postulates the alliance of all human beings against the hostility of the universe, and against power, which is the attempt to push off the burden of personal responsibility on to other shoulders. Both biologically and historically, it is a wholly realistic view. It comprises no conclusion which is reached by any process save the examination of human experience and observation, and the anger of the classicists against it is based entirely upon the romantic rejection both of the wholly illusory ideas of historical and inevitable progress and of the implicit metaphysical assumption that human ideals have some unexplained entity, in a psychological

vacuum called 'ultimate reality'—the ideals to which the most hardened dialectical materialist unconsciously appeal when he talks about 'social justice'.

Even more urgently romanticism rejects the form of social order in which human responsibilities are curtailed, to a point at which none of the conceptions which constitute justice or freedom retain any meaning save that which the stateholders confer on them, the condition of society in which we now live, and which is correctly termed barbarism. With the moral extinction of Christianity, romanticism remains the only ideology which has a coherent system of moral judgments on which it can rely, and because its morals and its sociology, its conception of human need and of human duty, coincide and have a common historic and scientific origin, it can confidently predict the self-destruction of every barbarian order.

The failure of nerve which the writers of *Partisan Review* deplore on ideological grounds is no more a failure of nerve on the part of the artist than a bad prognosis is a failure of nerve on the part of the doctor. Western civilisation is not moribund as a result of the failure of its social organisation; it is far more probably moribund through the failure of the individual to assert his resistance to organisation of an irresponsible kind, and through a sort of natural decay which seems to afflict civilisations much as mortality afflicts individuals. I find it difficult to decide what it is that makes a 'civilisation', but one anthropological essential is a group ethic in which the individual retains his responsibility. Renan, a cynic would say, may well have been right in doubting whether, in the absence of some form of theocratic supernaturalism, however untrue, civilisations can remain coherent at all. Marxist historians point to the decay of the medieval theology and its successor, Victorian evangelicalism, as symptoms of the dialectical decay of medieval feudalism and Victorian capitalism—it is probably more true to say that the collapse of economic organisation and the collapse of bodies of belief and thought were parallel phenomena, determined by some third factor, the semi-organic process, through its rise and decay, of a complete civilisation.

Because romanticism has always been aware of the tragic aspects of human life, it has always tended to preach personalism, to base its ideology on direct responsibility and upon political anarchism. The romantic awareness of Death and the romantic awareness of personal human responsibility are indissolubly united. The political component results from the metaphysical. Because we are all in the same boat, therefore we are inevitably responsible to one another, as if we were afloat on the same raft. In those same periods of social expansion when the 'progressive' aspects of society are uppermost, it is hard enough for the artist to recognise that he is ultimately the enemy of society, but in a disintegrative phase such as the present the necessity for accepting the role of masterless men, in the face of 'total war' and total society, has been sprung on writers totally unprepared to grapple with it. The technical complexity of contemporary barbarism has produced a genuine loss of nerve among ex-classicists who have become dependent on it, and argue that while totalitarianism is manifestly loathsome, society is the giver of town-drainage and safe appendectomy as well as of mass raids on Hamburg and massacres in Poland. The romantic view is now what it has always been—that in dealing with acephalous societies one is perpetually at sea with Captain Bligh—when he orders the taking in of sail, he is obeyed with perfect discipline; when he orders us to flog a man, not a soul stirs. That is the lesson of responsibility which the peasant and the experienced human being know. The industrial abolition of humanity only obscured a conception which would have a universal assent in any responsible community. It is the rediscovery of the beastliness of which obedient citizens, educated in the Western virtues of citizenship, are capable, which has so utterly overturned this generation. The Victorians had

forgotten Death—it was swallowed up in Victory—and their excesses were removed to parts of the globe where they were inconspicuous to the artist. The lunacy of obedience played itself out on distant frontiers under the anaesthetic of an evangelical Christianity.

It was upon our generation that the decision was forced. Either we had to evade it by pleading some sort of artistic immunity (and thereby cease to be human beings), with the likelihood that even such a plea would not go down with the total society (I can see somebody getting his ticket from the German Army because he was an artist), or by cynical co-operation of the Ehrenburg-McLeish-Suarez brand, which might at least save our skins; or, we must face the choice between becoming good citizens and accepting our role as human beings and masterless men.

I say that to the Chinese or to the peasants of Europe or of Ireland, more adult in humanity than most American or English artists, these things would have been obvious, and no such choice would have presented itself. But when the acceptance of the romantic attitude is characterised as a failure of nerve, it means that to apologise for it I must return to first principles. The romantic ideology of responsible disobedience is as much the logical produce of this age as responsible Christianity was the product of praetorian Imperial Rome. We are romantics because we have grown up romantics, and because we are human beings. In romanticism, art and science join hands, because both take the side of man against the compulsions of his environment, against Death, against power.

IV

I have described romanticism sympathetically, but not because I fail to see its fallacies. The classicist is running the perpetual risk of forfeiting his responsibility—the romantic of forfeiting his sanity. He is performing a continual tightrope walk over a series of intellectual abysses, of self-pity, self-dramatisation, mysticism, conversion to Roman Catholicism, acquiescence in political reaction, or pathological despair. The danger of such a collapse is greatest when the romantic ideology is thrown up half-consciously by a semi-emotional sense of impending social disaster, just as revolutionary classicism is at its most irresponsible when it comes into violent conflict with historical and sociological fact. But we are no more entitled to denounce romanticism in terms of romantics who have lost their nerve than we are entitled to abolish coal gas because some persons use it as a means of suicide. Every idea and every ideology carries in itself the potential destruction of its adherents. The prediction that a social order is bound to destroy itself, while it is an unnerving conclusion, is no more a loss of nerve in itself than the conclusion upon scientific observation or common experience that a man is likely to die or a volcano to erupt. It is in the consciousness of common humanity and the retention of this wholly scientific conception of history that the validity of romanticism persists.

Because of these two provisos, romanticism today is not a destructive or a defeatist force. Its adherents in the sociological field predict the destruction of megalopolitan societies as a historical probability, and for that reason they tend to concentrate their practical activity in the cultivation of mutual aid, direct action, and the other communal activities which are the basis of culture, and in terms of which human life will survive. Such activity is essential, whether the destruction of barbarism occurs violently in mass air raids or by consent—those who predict violent disintegration on historical grounds have to remember that there is no such thing as inevitability in any historical process: they are dealing with probabilities, nothing more. Other factors than war or

civil violence may operate to terminate the barbarian phase, and the resuscitation of mutual aid, personal responsibility and direct action, the three criteria of a civilised community, may occur by some form of political consent. There are also a good many historical examples of barbarian states surviving in an extended form, in which culture passes into a state of suspended animation: Rome underwent such a period between AD 70 and the final and gradual disintegration of Imperial barbarism: this alternative, the prolongation of servile barbarism by consent in the Western and American states, is a more menacing one for human culture than the prospect of the breakdown of megalopolitanisms by direct violence. It can be combated only by the encouragement of autonomous civilised activities from within—activities which deny the validity of the barbarian political system.

A few years ago, my immediate predecessors were chiefly influenced by the concept of the class war. I believe that the concept, as a force for progress, has outlived its truth (not because it was, in the first place, false—nobody in his senses could deny that it was and is an historical event) and become a partial truth only. We are beginning to see that 'classless' societies can be as preposterous in their demands on the individual conscience as any others, and as heavily impregnated with barbarism. Where they have succeeded, it is because they have permitted the fragmentation of the state into individuals, civilised by mutual aid. Where they have not permitted it, they have become more tyrannical than the manifestly unjust societies that went before. The war is not between classes. The war is at root between individuals and barbarian society. The beginnings of every revolutionary movement show stages—the first, when it moves forward to overthrow a society whose demands on the individual are insane, being itself a free association of individuals; the second, when it stands still, and a Leviathan acquires a body; the third, when Leviathan becomes Frankenstein and the fitting object for a fresh revolution. Revolution is not a single act, it is an unending process based upon civil disobedience. The demands become increasingly exorbitant, abstract notions of solidarity are made concrete, a state is invested with powers and properties, centralisation inflates the vices of individual leaders to titanic proportions, and once again it preys on its individual members, with or without their consent. It is with this whole idea of society as a super-person that responsibility is at war, and class struggles are superseded by this struggle.

Certainly, this struggle, the relevant struggle, is overlapped by others—the class war, the European war. Many participants in fact remain participants through confusion of the two struggles. A good many of the dynamitards and secret journalists of Europe will resume their weapons against whatever carpet-bag state the Allies install. A good many communists—like the Old Guard—will be forced to continue their war against the classless state if they get it. The most discouraging thing is to see sincere people who appreciate the nature of society mistaking one struggle for the other. The war for freedom is the war against society. There is no other enemy.

And for those who can see the present war as a struggle for human freedom, I can only say that that is what they are fighting for but not what they will get. In a rigged society the scenery can be so skilfully changed. The obviously right course of action can be doggedly pursued until with the collapse of the stage scenery its true enormity appears. The people are the only victims and the only losers. Whoever wins it will not be they, and whatever results it will not be freedom. We are sitting now and awaiting the swindle.

What are we to teach the people? As writers and artists we cannot avoid teaching them. In all wars we are neutral, not because we ignore wrongdoing, but because as individuals we must apply identical standards to the actions of both sides. Acquiescence in the murder of the

population of Lidice is as evil as acquiescence in the murder of the population of Hamburg. We cannot be bothered with the interminable nonsense of causes and nations, because we know it to be fraudulent. It is a waste of breath to argue the intentions of the Allies or the Germans, the superiority of one set of professions over another, because both are fictitious—the electric hares that neither we, nor any other people that follow them, will ever be permitted to catch. Military action is a part of barbarism, and as such it cannot salvage civilisation. The 'obviously righf cause is so only because of the stage scenery which has been set up by society. Only people matter to us. When Diamond was fighting Capone, he missed a golden chance. He should have raised a citizen army to support him, on the ground that he only robbed while Capone cut throats: he should have denounced non-participants for acquiescing in murder. Our pity extents to every individual who is the victim of history—the persecuted Jews, the persecuted Indians. Stripes are red whatever back they are upon. We are neutral not because we feel too little of evil, but because we feel too much. At every move we make to assist a sufferer, crash goes our foot in an equally innocent face. To say 'all peoples are our friends, all societies are our enemies' is not as foolish as it sounds. We will say it.

As we look at Europe today, we cannot see it as writers of the thirties saw it. We do not see it as a clear-cut issue between progress and reaction. We see defrauded and deluded peoples engaged in utterly purposeless destruction, because the objects for which they fight are unreal hopes dangled in front of their noses by the respective governments of their countries. Because these peoples have abrogated their right to employ their intelligence and have agreed to act as Good Citizens, their sincerity and self-sacrifice count for absolutely nothing. (There is an equal sincerity and an equal self-sacrifice on both sides, exploited for diametrically opposite but equally fraudulent objects.)

The barbarian citizen, fascist or democratic, has delegated his culture to professional artists, his coition to professional film stars, his juridical duties to professional policemen, his civic rights to professional politicians. He remains alone with idleness, and the last human attribute, Death. For him all wars are irrelevant unless they destroy the mechanism of delegation and leave him a human being again, faced with the necessity for mutual aid.

I have referred to stage scenery. The young man of my own generation was pushed by society on to a stage where certain events were being enacted, shown the villain, and instructed to choose between shooting him and being shot. Now in the circumstances of the play, and assuming all the conventions of melodrama, there was only one right course of action, but no sooner has one pursued it, for a year or a scene, than down comes the scenery and a fresh set-up, a fresh set of conventions appears, and one is told, 'now do your obvious duty' (which has become the direct opposite of what it was in Scene I, because the villain has been altered and several of the heroes have gone to the bad). And some of us have made up our minds that we will no longer be party to a bloodstained and fraudulent charade in which the weapons are loaded and the helpless audience are the only victims. We reject the dramatic conventions. From now on we will be concerned with people, not conjuring tricks.

But what are we to make of our subject? Europe stinks of blood and groans with separation. What are we to make of a world where disablement and sickness are priceless possessions, as sort of passport to life? How many wives would buy a game leg or a hunchback for their husbands—how many mothers for their sons? I was present at a strange celebration. We sat round a table drinking to a young man's future. A week before the house had been in mourning as if he were already dead. He was reaching his eighteenth birthday, when one chooses between a butcher's

life and a sheep's death. The papers had come. During the day he fell into his machine at work. One of his legs became shorter than the other. It was as though he had been given a paper certifying: 'This man is out of the hands of the Lunatics. If he looks sharp and is lucky, he may form a cell for himself into which the gangs of Good Citizens, who patrol the world looking for people to educate by cutting their windpipes, may fail to break'.

That, until the fall of barbarism at its own hands, is how Freedom comes.

I say all this, because I believe that in essence art is the act of standing aside from society, with certain important qualifications. (I ask my critics to abstain from quoting this until they have heard the rest of the story.) Herbert Read has pointed out that in truly free communities art is a general activity, far more cognate with craft than it can ever be in contemporary organised life, and he consigns the professional artist to his father the devil. I accept the proposition: it seems to be merely another statement of the hostility between barbarism and humanity which I have described. A state of affairs in which art could become a part of all daily activity, and in which all activity was potentially creative, would be a free community, and not a society—that is, a personified body treated as though it were an entity in itself—of the kind I have attacked. Art, when it is professionalised, consists in standing aside.

But it is essential that there should be no bitterness in the action. It may take any form, from the pure escape of decoration to the analysis of dreams and impulses in the myth, and to the most savage denunciation. But there must be no bitterness against humanity, or the artist defeats his own end. Neither must there be an attitude of superiority. He has absolutely no right to claim exemptions or privileges except in his capacity as a human being. The artist employs his form as the voice of a great multitude. It is only through the vicarious activity of creation that the great multitude ever finds a voice. Every creative activity speaks on behalf of utterly voiceless victims of society and circumstance, of everyone, finally, since man is always at some time the victim of his environment: and since they have undergone the supreme indignity, on behalf of the dead. The artist in barbarian society is the only true representative of the people.

That is what I mean by saying that the essence of romanticism is the acceptance of a sense of tragedy. All creative work speaks on behalf of somebody who would otherwise be voiceless, even the decoration of the potter who protests against the monotony of his work. I am always conscious of these submerged voices, as much in the tentative and nervous forms of early expression—savage and childhood productions, bad derivative art produced, under civilised conditions, by people striving to express themselves—as in the technically professional work of the great ages of painting. No creative activity is free from the sense of protest. It is the sole way open to man of protesting against his destiny.

In the actual circumstances of contemporary writing, the standing aside must take different forms, though if it involves bitterness, hatred, a sense of moral and aesthetic superiority, or any form of ivory-towerism, it defeats itself. On the one hand, one can and must stand aside, though one can at the same time admire the scale and tragic quality of an event, or the courage which has gone to make an achievement. Anyone who is not deeply moved by events is probably not capable of creation. There is not the smallest reason why a poet should not write odes to the Russian Revolution or the Dneiper Dam if these subjects move him, and represent the message which, on behalf of some of the submerged voices, he is attempting to interpret, any more than there is a reason why he should not hate a tyrant or drive a concrete-mixer. But the poetry is subsequent to the fact that whoever writes it has already stood far enough away from his subject to be able to see it in reasonable and historical proportion. It is the right to do this, even in a

community whose ideals inspire sympathy, that is utterly fundamental to good writing, and it is precisely this right which contemporary society is unanimous in denying. When it comes to the interpretation of the war, both publics and their leaders realise, consciously or unconsciously, that there is no more serious threat to the will to continue fighting than the existence of a body of objective art. It requires to be explained away, blackguarded into silence, conscripted, or ignored, according to the methods in vogue in the society concerned. But it continues to exist. The right to stand aside is contested everywhere. Leaders who have acclaimed the work of a particular artist because he denounced their opponents are exasperated to find that the denunciatory criticism extends to themselves.

And on the other hand there is the essential prerequisite on which all romantic theory is founded—the community of the artist with his fellow men: in other words, his humanity. He must cater for the need to stand aside by regarding all movements and societies neutrally, not in that he refuses to judge them at all, but that he judges them on the same basis. He cannot afford to have in his bag divers weights—that is one of the traits of civic lunacy. The artist's isolation and humanity are no different from the isolation and humanity of other responsible people—isolation from barbarism, solidarity with other human beings. It is a tribute to English letters that in a period of almost unparalleled national insanity England should have produced Trevelyan's *Social History*. This is the history of the relationships and the experience from which there is no standing aside, the story of humanity in its incessant war with society. If the artist is to take the side of man, he is fulfilling both his duties of isolation and humanity.

I disagree with the idea that the artist is primarily the interpreter of the symptoms and processes of economic change—to follow Caudwell's conception is to limit the number of levels on which art could or should exist. The unit with which the artist is concerned is first of all the individual human being. The romantic artist sees him exactly as the physician sees him—an individual who shares his organs and a high proportion of his psychological make-up with every individual who has existed within historical time, and with the artist himself. Like the physician, the artist is one of humanity, subject to every branch of human experience, from politics to death, but possessing by virtue of his talent the faculty which the physician acquires through training, of elucidating, interpreting, assisting. His sensibility corresponds to the physician's medical training—consciously or unconsciously he is aware of the individual's position and of the roots in anthropology, psychology and evolution which make up humanness. He is neither a superman nor a privileged person, any more than the physician is. It is with this quality of humanness that the romantic is primarily concerned—it is the origin of the romantic sympathy, the concept of shared, responsible experience, and of man as the product and victim of environment, which makes romanticism and defines it. In addition to this prerequisite consciousness, there is the technical mastery, learned or acquired, which is needed to express it. One might almost continue the analogy and say that classicism bears some resemblance to operative surgery—there is the same emphasis on technical virtuosity and the same preoccupation with intervention rather than with organic process. To the artist as a human being, and to the physician in his practice, the sense of continuity of circumstances and difference of environment are perpetually present the human being and the patient, for the purposes of art and medicine, are fundamental constants. There is no difference between Hagesichora and any other young girl dancing, between the Homeric warriors and any other soldier—you cannot tell whether the man under the theatre towels is a Nazi or an anarchist; that aspect of his existence concerns you very little—you are interested in him as a man. The neutrality of medicine has survived this war well. The neutral-

ity of romantic art will also survive it, because it is based on the far larger community of man, which society tends to destroy, which one finds only in London's slums or America's prisons. It seems to me that it is this university in art which Marxist classicism misses, just as in the political sphere it does not extend 'working class solidarity' into the responsible and anti-authoritarian conception of human solidarity. It is the extension of this evaluation of man into politics which makes up anarchism, and the common foundation of anarchism and romanticism renders them inseparable in the evolution of art, just as medicine as a practice, if we are to oppose it to the technical vetinary surgery of such people as army psychologists, whose aim is something other than plain human welfare, is inseparable from a similar human neutrality.

The value of Marxist criticism has lain, however, in its perpetual emphasis on the environmental concern of the artist. Once fortified with this conception of humanity and his knowledge that he is a part of it, not an observer, the artist is under obligation to concern himself with the entire environment of the times, both by interpreting it and by modifying it. Writers who are afraid to throw their weight into the cause of the humanity they recognise will find little in the tradition of romanticism to support their abstention. This criticism is valuable in itself, but at present is pretty consistently directed against the wrong people. It is the concept of irresponsible society, whatever its social organisation, that is now and always has been the enemy of the romantic conception of man, and in a period of disintegration, with irresponsibility at a premium, the artist who reflects and interprets is accused of decadence, and the artist who advocates responsibility is accused of disruption. I cannot see an iota of difference between the attacks of sycophants and clowns who propagate a theory of cultural bolshevism (that Joyce and Proust were responsible for the fall of France, for instance) and those of the political actives who charge romantic individualism with losing its nerve. They are both imitating the man who smashes the barometer because it points to rain.

VI

This characteristic phase of a collapsing culture is very obvious in England and America at present. It merits further discussion. The stupid and illiterate attacks of Alfred Noyes on Proust, the venom with which bourgeois formalism has been denounced by the communists, and the suppression of the work of Klee by the Nazis, had this in common they were all attacks upon images of disintegration by people who feared the disintegration itself and could not see its cause. Some of them were the product of mere personal or political malice. Yet there remains a valid ground for attack, upon purely disintegrative and analytic forms such as surrealism—they are not fully human. The real treason lies not in reflecting disintegration but in failing to reflect anything else.

There is still confusion of mind among the enemies of disintegration who have rather more grasp on its causes than the dealers in cultural bolshevism. Perhaps the most striking instance of this confusion is to be found in their attempts to defend art. I have in mind the pamphlets and counter-pamphlets of 1943–44: it is the nearness of the disintegration which upsets them, precisely as it has upset and unnerved the poets.

The right-wing critic can see that the pretensions of artists of the disintegrative school to be immune from the collapse by virtue of their function as artists are preposterous: he can see that the common individual, who retains his humanity in the face of everything, is sound, but he rushes to identify the Cause of Man with the Cause of Humanity sponsored by the *Daily*

Telegraph. The aristocrat can see that the war is a fraud, but pins the blame on the anti-cultural bias of the masses. This controversy is conducted in the same historical Wonderland as that of A.L. Rowse, who prophesies a 'new Elizabethan age'—a remark historically equivalent to predicting a new Secession of the Plebs in the reign of Nero, or a new set of milk-teeth in a centenarian.

Yet there is a real failure of nerve in the manuscripts which 1944 brought in to every English poetry magazine, in which the sole images present are images of disintegration—one reads of nothing else: it is the schizophrenia of writers who are unable to cut themselves off from the collapse of society, because to do so would involve them in an adult awareness of humanity, including an awareness of death. *Partisan Review* and Horizon are full of the praises of schizophrenia. The failure of nerve is common to the people who attack it, if one excludes the sycophants and the congenital idiots, and a great many of the people they are attacking. The romantic wholeness involves a good deal more than the passive acceptance of collapse—there is also the assertion of responsibility to one's fellows, and the exhortation to disobey the irresponsible directives of barbarism. I think that the best example of this wholeness in the face of barbarism is Brueghel. The disquietening images of disintegration are there—Mumford selects him as the symbolic exponent of the medieval collapse—but one feels that the artist has no share in them. It is not he who is disintegrating but the society whose irresponsibility he hates—the society of expressionless unanimous skeletons, the forest of lances that supports Herod. The humanity of Herod's soldiers is stressed as much as their unanimity. These are the lunatics, but at home they are also peasants. The victims and killers are interchangeable. The subject of each of these masterpieces is an aspect of the romantic struggle of Man against his environmental enemies, the fully human Man who is shown us with his physical and mental equipment of faults and virtues in the 'peasant' pictures. The Triumph of Death, the Massacre of the Innocents, Man against Obedience, Man against Death. If we cannot win the second battle we can at least win the first.

Accordingly, we apply the same standards to every cause or body which presents itself, without owing allegiance to any of them. We recognise boundless responsibility to men, especially to all those who are deprived of their voices, but ultimately to all men, since they will in time become silent. We must demand the right to secession as the one square foot of ground which is solid and from which we can look and interpret the gigantic chaos of human existence. We are learning ourselves to live in the structure of insane societies while defying them, practising to retain our lives as if we were really sane men in an asylum where all individuals were allies and all bodies were bent on killing us, and we teach others, as far as we can, to do likewise.

The weak are inheriting the earth, though we are forced to fight, plot, deceive for every inch of the legacy. They are taxed, killed, frightened, conscripted, swindled, interned, collectively; the gangs of good citizens drive them like sheep, they are dragged from their standing ground by the innumerable pressure of the flood around them, and the ranks of Bedlamite citizenship are recruited from them. They inherit by default, like small animals inhabiting the floor of a forest, and dying off like flies, but they strike back ineffectually and, by sheer weight of numbers, invincibly. Their aggregate intervals of sanity suffice to overthrow the entire edifice of society which has been built on their backs and out of their flesh. Their sane moments are ultimately decisive. Their clinging among the wreckage to mutual aid perpetuates civilisation. In the ultimate explosion of the barbarism structure, islets of true civilisation, the nuclei of future cultures which have still their upward cycle to run, persist and grow. Then in a decade or two they begin like coral insects to construct a new load for their backs. But all of them are ready now and again, in the time of barbarism, to assert their personality from time to time. The woman who fails to fuse a

shell securely, the clerk who does not look a second time at a pass, the girl who hides a deserter and the idiot who misdirects an escort, whatever their nationality, are acting as members and soldiers of the community of the weak, the greatest conspiracy in history, which is ceaseless. It is quite irrelevant that at the next moment they are killing Jews, bombing cities, supporting Jacks-in office and believing lies. At times every one of them has struck a minor blow for personality. It is to these people that art owes a responsibility which is hard to measure. Among modern writers one feels that only Arnold Zweig and Giono have achieved it continuously, and some reports suggest that the German occupation has disorientated even Giono.

It is rare that a free community of such people can come into existence. One finds islands of community which have escaped the curse of personified societies scattered everywhere—the shelters during the air raids, the Cossack villages, some primitive tribes, prisoners in Dachau or Huyton, the Russian collective farms. These are the largest communities in which anarchism is real and the standing aside preliminary to creation is not resented to the same degree as in the societies of clockfaces, whose sole virtue is their unanimity in error. This virtue is a virtue of death. They do not escape death by evading it in the renunciation of life. It is not for nothing that Brueghel's skeletons have all the same faces. And artistic responsibility consists in taking all this upon our shoulders—in providing voices for all those who have not voices. The romantic ideology of art is the ideology of that responsibility, a responsibility borne out of a sense of victimhood, of community in a hostile universe, and destined like Prometheus, its central creation, to be the perpetual advocate and defender of Man against Barbarism, community against irresponsibility, life against homicidal and suicidal obedience.

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