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A new wave is breaking on the shores of English literature — or, to be more precise, a new tide has been coming in during the last decade, and its waves are rushing up the beach one after the other. This is not to say that the traditional writers have in any way been superseded — in fact many pre-war writers are still producing work that shows no perceptible falling off at all. There are also many new writers who work in traditional or entirely personal patterns and have produced some of the best work to appear since the War. In the same way, the current vogue for the verse of John Betjeman shows the stamina of poetic tradition despite all the work of Eliot and Pound, Lawrence and Auden, the "Apocalyptics" and the "Movement". Nevertheless, it is possible to observe certain new literary methods and preoccupations coming into use, especially in fiction and drama, and it may be illuminating to see what — if anything — they have in common.

The two key novels in the New Wave are generally thought to be Kingsley Amis's Lucky Jim (1954) and John Braine's Room at the Top (1957), but it would be highly misleading to suppose that they are the only significant ones. They are actually both very good novels, with strong plots and straight-

forward characters and situations, but their significance lies chiefly in the very wide publicity they attracted. It was in a review of Lucky Jim that Walter Allen first pointed out that "A new hero has risen among us" — the intellectual tough or tough intellectual, who has retreated from aestheticism into philistinism, from political commitment into non-committal dissent, from exquisite sensibility into simply decency, and who is sensitive not to what is cruel or wicked, but to what is bogus or phoney. This New Hero rides on the crest of the New Wave.

It was odd that Mr. Allen, who is himself a provincial writer of some distinction — his All in a Lifetime (1959) is an excellent novel — and who rightly compared Lucky Jim with John Wain's Hurry On Down (1953), did not also point out that the New Hero almost always comes from the Provinces and is often obsessed by the idea of London. (It should be noted that most of the writers in the New Wave themselves come from the Provinces, especially the Midlands and the industrial north.) And it was odd that he did not compare Lucky Jim with another earlier novel, Scenes from Provincial Life (1950) by William Cooper (the pseudonym of Harry Hoff, who is five years younger than C. P. Snow but is in every other way very much like him in his career and literary ideas). The sad thing is that none of these three writers has ever done anything as good as his first novel, though Amis and Wain have also written some good poetry and criticism.

Yet another novel with a New Hero before Lucky Jim was Under the Net (1953) by Iris Murdoch, who differs from the other writers in the New Wave not only by being a woman but also by subsequently writing more conventional novels of a very high standard. Even Under the Net was different, its hero being rather like Gulley Jimson in Joyce Cary's The Horse's Mouth (1944) and more like Murphy in Samuel Beckett's Murphy (1938). (This takes us back to the years immediately before the War, which is also the period in which the Scenes from

the Hunger Marches. Perhaps the rather confused and careless writers of the New Wave have helped to make Britain itself more human and humane. The pícaro with the heart of gold may for all we know be one of the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

Provincial Life take place — for the New Wave, the War exists only as an empty gap). It is possible at this point to make out two sides to the New Hero — the provincial ingénu who drifts, and the metropolitan pícaro who explores. The former appears as the hero of Scenes from Clerical Life and Lucky Jim, and then in Thomas Hinde's Happy as Larry[1] (1957), Keith Waterhouse's Billy Liar (1959) and Stan Barstow's A Kind of Loving (1960); the hero of Hurry on Down is an ingénu who turns into a pícaro; and it is the pícaro who appears in Under the Net and then in J. P. Donleavy's The Ginger Man (1955) and Colin MacInnes's City of Spades (1957) and Absolute Beginners (1959).

The picaresque tradition is of course an old one in English literature, going back to the pioneers of the novel in the 18th Century and even further to the Elizabethans; so when the New Hero appears as a pícaro he is simply an old hero in modern dress. His importance in the New Wave is that in this guise he can represent an Outsider more thoroughly and convincingly than either the rather negative provincial ingénu or Colin Wilson's unoriginal invention. He may be an American in Dublin, or an Irishman, African or teenager in London; he may be a real person, like Brendan Behan or Frank Norman; and it is no coincidence that Angus Wilson and Simon Raven write, as it were, mental picaresque. With a little more courage Lucky Jim would become a pícaro himself. In every New Hero there is a rogue struggling to get out; and it is when he does so that some of the best post-war fiction has been written.

As well as going out, the New Hero may go up. Give him a dose not of courage but of ambition, and you get John Braine's Room at the Top (1957). This remarkable New Wave novel harks back to great work like Le Rouge et le Noir and has been very successful. What makes it even more interesting is that the right-wing journalist George Scott has already described

[1] where he is a Londoner, for a change.

his own life in Time and Place (1956), revealing himself as a person not at all unlike Joe Lampton. Braine, alas, is yet another author who has never produced anything as good as his first novel. There is no doubt that the "mechanics of success", described by such different people as Colin Wilson and John Osborne, have a damaging effect on the later work of a successful young writer.

It is here that journalists have played their part in the New Wave. At first it looked as if the theatre was unaffected by changes in fiction. Up to 1955 the biggest sensation on the British stage since the War was Waiting for Godot, and semi-nonsensical fantasy has been booming ever since. As well as the work of Ionesco and Beckett himself, there have been many plays by new writers — Nigel Dennis's Cards of Identity (1956) and The Making of Moo (1957), N. F. Simpson's A Resounding Tinkle (1958) and One-Way Pendulum (1959), John Mortimer's The Dock Brief (1958) and I Spy (1958), Harold Pinter's The Birthday Party (1958) and The Caretaker (1960). But in 1956 John Osborne's Look Back in Anger brought the New Wave roaring into the theatre, and it was at this point that the idiotic Fleet Street tag — Angry Young Man"[2] — was adopted and used freely when any writer under the age of 40 wrote anything at all unconventional. Exactly the same thing has happened more recently with the word "Beatnik", and very much the same fate overtook the young writers in the Thirties. The really irritating thing is that while Osborne *is* an angry young man, very few of the other people who have been given the title deserve it at all; Kingsley Amis and John Braine, for example, could be called impatient or conceited, but hardly angry in the way Lawrence and Orwell were angry. One genuinely angry young man is Dennis Potter, whose revealing book The Glittering Coffin (1960) showed a real New Hero coming from the provinces to Oxford and also showed how bad anger is for

[2] which did not apparently come from Leslie Paul's book of that name.

— the New Wave owes more than it knows to Lawrence and Orwell. Its tone is personal rather than general, emotional rather than intellectual, insular rather than cosmopolitan (remember Amis's I Like It Here), wary rather than bold, ironical rather than idealistic.

But although the New Wave is not orthodox littérature engagée, it is "committed" all the same. It has already been noted that the authors are mostly left-wing, tending towards pacifism and individualism. Their commitment is essentially autonomous and antinomian, adhering to no ideology and demanding no shibboleths — it is commitment in the age of the Cold War, the Welfare State and the Affluent Society. The New Wave is above all an unorganised and muddled phenomenon. Even when it produces something more specific, the message is still highly personal — I'm Talking about Jerusalem is an odd socialist play, The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner is an odd revolutionary story, Mankowitz's My Old Man's a Dustman (1956) is an odd anarchist fable and required reading for anyone interested in modern anarchism. Everything is likely to be stood on its head: failure is interpreted as a form of unexpected success; laughter is better than tears; irony is better than anger.

I think the New Wave may turn out to be important. It represents an attempt to bring literature back into contact with life as it is lived (this is a particular concern of Arnold Wesker), and in effect to free English literature from wholly aesthetic preoccupations and — as John Holloway has pointed out — from continental influences. By rejecting recent tradition, its members have unwittingly returned to a tradition older in this country than either artistic elegance or thorough-going commitment — the tradition of Dekker and Defoe and Dickens, a narrow but deep tradition, red-blooded and rich, obstreperous and soft-centred, noisy and affectionate. Teenagers and the New Left and the Aldermaston Marches are more human and humane than Bright Young Things and the Popular Front and

To begin with, they write mostly novels and plays (though Christopher Logue is a poet), and — as we have seen — they tend to come from the provinces and to write about provincial people. Geoffrey Gorer has noted that their heroes tend to marry above themselves. Many people have pointed out that they like to cock a snook at the Establishment but appreciate the approval of the Establishment if they can get it; Somerset Maugham called them "scum" but they are glad to get his prize if they can.

They are constantly preoccupied with certain problems, such as nuclear and colonial war, the tension between generations and that between classes. It will be objected that these are old problems, but the point is the way they are handled — the generation-struggle is not the open war of Ann Veronica, but more a matter of bewildered incomprehension; the class-struggle is not between capitalists and workers (or prefects and fags), but between the cultured and the uncultured; the accentless and the accented, the whites and the coloured — the haves and the have-nots defined in a subtler sense than Marx ever knew; and the attack on war is made not in the direct terms of Sassoon or Aldington, but in indirect and often allegorical terms.

The plays are, as might be expected, more poetic and rhetorical than the novels, and they tend to be more urgent and disturbing. Even so their messages are usually oblique — The Hostage and Sergeant Musgrave's Dance are quite different from Death of a Hero and All Quiet on the Western Front. (When, however, we are given realism, it is frighteningly realistic — compare The Long and the Tall and the Short with Journey's End). It is true to say that nearly all comment in the New Wave is oblique. The only thing that is always condemned outright is the bogus; the worst thing a New Hero can say about someone is, after Holden Caulfield, that he is "strictly phoney". And even this condemnation must be spontaneous, for sophistication is nearly as bad as phoneyness

coherent writing (though Osborne can do it, as in his contribution to Declaration). In general the New Wave is not really an angry movement at all.

There is another angry young man, though, who has written good stuff. This is Alan Sillitoe, whose Saturday Night and Sunday Morning (1958) and The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner (1959) are two of the best things in the New Wave. His heroes have the courage to be pícaros, but they prefer the bloody-minded life of semi-delinquents (sometimes not so "semi" either). His attitude is revolutionary anarchism verging on sheer nihilism, more extreme than any other New Wave writer except Osborne; but, significantly, they both remain individualists, giving full allegiance to no party or ideology. Indeed one of the most interesting things about the New Wave is that, while most of its members are left-wing and some give qualified support to the Labour Party or the nuclear disarmament campaign, there is no organised political philosophy to be found among them — they are what Amis called "political romantics", instinctive nonconformists. Dissent is far more characteristic of the New Wave than anger.

Look Back in Anger was the first play in the New Wave, and one of the worst. Osborne followed up his success with The Entertainer (1957), which was even worse and was saved only by its nostalgic topicality and Olivier's acting. Since then his work — represented by a musical and a television play — has been more interesting than impressive. Probably his best work is to be found in his journalism (which resembles that of Kenneth Tynan) and in an earlier play written in collaboration with Anthony Creighton, Epitaph for George Dillon. Incidentally, it is worth noting that, had The Ginger Man been published in London rather than Paris, Donleavy might have received much of the publicity that went to Osborne, for he described a situation much like that of Look Back in Anger much more convincingly; the dramatised version of his novel didn't have nearly as much impact in 1959 as it would have had in 1956.

Osborne had been forestalled in another way too, for Brendan Behan's The Quare Fellow (1956), which opened in the same month as Look Back in Anger, was a better play and subsequently had more influence. The London theatres which produced these two plays — the Royal Court in Sloane Square and the Theatre Royal in Stratford — have been the double cradle of the theatrical New Wave (though the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry has also done valuable work). It is ironical that the predominantly provincial novelists and dramatists of the New Wave owe their success to publishing and theatrical companies in London.

Despite Osborne's example, things only began moving in 1958 — the year of Behan's The Hostage, Shelagh Delaney's A Taste of Honey, Arnold Wesker's Chicken Soup with Barley, John Arden's Live Like Pigs and Willis Hall's The Long and the Short and the Tall (as well as plays of other kinds by Doris Lessing, Bernard Kops and Peter Shaffer, who are on the fringe of the New Wave). In 1959 came Frank Norman's musical Fings Ain't Wot They Used t'Be, John Arden's Sergeant Musgrave's Dance and Arnold Wesker's Roots. In 1960 the tide fell a little, but there were still Arnold Wesker's I'm Talking About Jerusalem, Alun Owen's Progress to the Park and Shelagh Delaney's The Lion in Love. No doubt many of these plays will never be produced again, since they often depend more on being lively than on being well-written, but at least the deathly cosy hush of the ten years following the War has been shattered.

Many of these plays have been foolishly criticised for dealing with low life — middle-class adultery is still thought to be more elevating than working-class fornication. The simple reply to attacks on "kitchen sink drama" is that there is still plenty of drawing-room french-window nonsense in the West End to satisfy all the people who are offended by Brendan Behan or Shelagh Delaney. It might also be worth inquiring why

murder and sudden death are preferable to crime and prostitution.

It has been far more difficult for the New Wave to invade the cinema than the theatre, partly for commercial and partly for social reasons — films involve large sums of money and large audiences. In general the British cinema is deplorably deficient in good creative work. There have been some recent films like Woman in a Dressing Gown and The Man Upstairs, but farce and melodrama usually win — as in I'm All Right Jack and The Angry Silence. Nevertheless, there have been the Free Cinema productions, linked in particular with the names of Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz, and there have been films of some of the novels and plays of the New Wave. On the whole these have been disappointing; the Osborne plays sound dreadfully artificial on the screen, and Lucky Jim is best forgotten; but Room at the Top was good, and many others are on the way. By far the best to date is Karel Reisz's production of Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, which is certainly one of the best British films ever made. What one hopes for in the future is not so much a series of screen versions of books and plays as some creative film work along the lines of Free Cinema and the American film Shadows. The same is true of television, which could make up for the fact that serious fiction and drama are tabu for most of the population of the country, but shows few signs of doing so.

The first thing to say about what I have called the New Wave is that it is not in any way an organised movement — even less so than the Bloomsbury group or the left-wing poets in the Thirties. More than any comparable literary movement, perhaps, its members are highly individualistic writers and people; though there are of course some cliques, notably that surrounding Colin Wilson (but then he scarcely belongs to the New Wave anyway). But the names I have mentioned do have more in common than being born mostly between 1922 and 1932 and becoming successful between 1950 and 1960.