

AGORA

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AGORA

The reader is hereby presented for approval the first issue of the Belmont Abbey College publication, Agora.

AGORA is a Greek word meaning market or meeting place. The editors and staff chose this title for the magazine because they sincerely believe that the result of the articles, stories, and poems herein contained will be to provide a common ground for the recognition and assimilation of ideas and experiences.

The editors feel the works contained to be fairly representative of the thought and productivity of the student body at Belmont Abbey College. Of course, the staff of the magazine is itself composed of members of that body.

Their effort has been to create an organ whereby the students may have a legitimate and worthwhile outlet for creative endeavors, and through which the fruits of such efforts may best be shown. In the completion of this task and service, despite serious handicaps and delays, the editors and staff of AGORA feel they may have been somewhat successful.

We therefore urge the reader to determine whether he agrees...

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THE
BEATNIK
MYSTIQUE

BY
JOHN CADMIUS

The latest, and perhaps the saddest, in semantic innovation of our time has been the word "beatnik." This word was introduced into our language some three or four years ago, and since that time it has been so widely employed, abused, and mystified that to this day scarcely anyone can satisfactorily define it. Its meaning has ranged to include everything from wispy homosexuals to patrons of foreign films. Further, its provisions have been extended to contain any individual or group of individuals who desire to express ideas, thoughts, or opinions that have not at once received and fully comprehended by the whole of society.

The word beatnik itself, of course, is a configuration of sloppy esoteric terminology used extensively by newspapermen, gossip columnists, and sensationalists in general. The use of a Yiddish diminutive *nik* has also been incorporated in such words as *squarenik*, *hipnik*, *Marlon Brandonik* and ad infinitum. Seemingly, the term is primarily applicable to those who would embody the principles (ephemeral, but there) of the Beat Movement.

In general, these persons are pictured as arty individualists who wear (or, at least, necessarily train) beards, sandals, and belted-in-the-back corduroy jackets. They are unkempt, befouled, amoral, and grouped together in the promiscuous confines of The Village and North Beach, in the cosmopolitan cities of New York and San Francisco respectively.

This movement of transition has as its leading exponents several widely circulated novelists and poets (each with disputed abilities). These are Jack Kerouac, Norman Mailer, Gregory Corso, Allen Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Nelson Algren, Henry Miller, and I suppose Truman Capote. I feel that it would be reaching a little to include Thomas Wolfe.

Two of these men have enjoyed the clean distinction of being the Disciple of these holy ones, but at separate intervals. The usurper Mailer claimed that the now disdained Kerouac sold out to Playboy, Esquire, and, most injuriously of all, to MGM. In any case, Mailer was shortly thereafter acclaimed king and impresario of the hip.

Before we can trace the first intimations, the exact start of the beat movement, we must first come to a tentative agreement as to the meaning of the word *beat*.

A few years ago a rather uncomfortable interviewer asked Kerouac what he meant by beat. The nonplused Canadian stated very simply, "sympathetic." Interpreted this curious remark as meaning this: We are sympathetic, or sympathetic, with mankind (not sorry for), and by breaking away from the conventionalities that bind us we can embrace man for his humanity and true self, rather than man as a man, not a falsetto puppet. I realize that to some this sounds like a great deal of much claptrap, but this is essentially what they feel. Through dissatisfaction with a maladjustment in life—whichever you choose, they had to break away from the thing that made their lives unbearable.

Actually the implications of the word beat are twofold. Firstly, as we have seen, the beats are disenchanted, "not making it this way," and downtrodden by man's insane pursuit of wealth and status. Beat here, becomes synonymous with beatitude, or like unto God. Secondly, they feel that they have transcended all of this by returning to the primitive and basic concept that man feels, man does. Finally then, the word beat reflects an attitude, a disposition and a state of mind.

*"Know thou thyself,
presume not God to
scorn."*

*The proper study of
mankind is man."*

—Alexander Pope

*"...to be with it is to
be closer to the secrets
of that inner unconscious
life which will nourish
you if you can hear it,
for you are then nearer
to that God which every
hipster believes is located
in the senses of his
body..."*

—Norman Mailer

In 1945 the war ceased to be. America could no longer contemplate its olive drab navel. The war effort had, overnight, been swept out to sea and people began to look around them. Normality was stifling. Great undercurrents of unrest began to seethe and thicken throughout the vast areas of the United States. Perhaps, in a sense, we were experiencing the same postwar throes that gave rise to the nihilist resurgence following World War I.

What is it about war that evokes this strange ebullience in man? Is it the same yeastiness that makes a writer say it, or the very spumous that compels the black jazzman to swing?

Frankly, I can't say. But suddenly there were those who were trying to say it. In 1946 J. D. Salinger, through a novel and short stories in the New Yorker, began expressing his thoughts on the way things are. Kafka, at last, was being read. And in the obscurity of a Bleeker Street walkup, Jack Kerouac began to scratch out his first pitiful, groping, little messages. There was no turning back. But it wasn't until the early nineteen fifties that Kerouac really first made the scene. In his rambling, exhortative *On The Road*, he unleashed the blind fury that was to lash out at the world and declare, "I protest!"

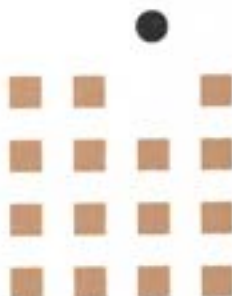
Man is an incredible mosaic of enigma and duality. The fact that he is human and alive makes him at once a thing of magnificence. He is a mystery. Nobody knows what man is all about. Never. His performance and vitality dips and soars from day to day. He'll kill himself on the Volkswagen account for five and a half straight days, entertain graciously in Darien on the weekend, and spend all day Monday staring sullenly, stupidly into containers of cold, cigarette studded coffee.

The thing that tears at his guts, always, is the fact that he cannot reduce his life to a concise, pragmatic formula. He can't make a list—humanity, number eight; rottenness, twenty-two; efficiency, priority one. Man never is and never was a *perfectible* being. He is an eagle and a dove; a braggart, a coward, and often, a very funny spectacle. You will never perfect this beautiful creature who was created to do these things. But man doesn't especially comprehend any of this and, very possibly, was never intended to. Just examine, however, what is happening as a result of this. The average individual in the United States today is almost totally unaware of the *reality* of life. His conception of humanity generally proceeds little further than Madison Avenue image, grudgingly, will permit.

And so he, in the long run, despite all the status and corporation "sociable" pap, is only man. But that is never quite enough.

It was this, and all the ramifications thereof, that caused Kerouac's insurgency. Let me make something perfectly clear: I do not propose that the beats are any closer to being fulfilled as human beings than the squares they would condemn. The remarks that I made on the preceeding page were all-inclusive, period.

On The Road finally set the long awaited example. It meant that the Prophet and the Koran both had arrived. Festering souls all over the country were comforted to know that there were others adrift and afoul in the sargasso sea of man's troubled existence. Kerouac was writing about Life, sometimes well and sometimes not. He spoke in abstraction with as much poetic license as he could possibly get away with. Thus, the bohemian would describe the characters in his pack as "knowing all about Pound," and the unenlightened ones remained, always, "the non-identify middle-class." The novel was a success and the movement was formalized.



Pads abounded. And the beats began to colonize. They came in stumbling droves from little towns in the midwest and from the far reaches of Washington and Sioux City. Greenwich Village, overnight, became such a catch that a spirit of competition arose to determine, seemingly, the real swingers. Soon Thompson Street, along with McDougal, became accepted as in, and poor old Second Avenue was marked inordinately as out.

San Francisco's North Beach became a similar haven, and down the line L.A. and Venice refused to be outdone. Coffee houses began to sprout up in the crusty regions of most large cities, much to the distress of the city-planning boards, true enough.

Soon, other writers wanted to be heard. Ginsberg made it big with his grotesque poem *Howl* and Corso slipped into literary harness around the same period. Exotic books were being digested hungrily. Kierkegaard, Stendhal, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and across the sea the Angry Young men in England and in France, the Existentialists, sent out their little goat cries of frenzied protest.

In this country the flame continued to burn brightly throughout the early and middle fifties, but, like all things that burn, soon began to flicker and die. Today? Only the word beatnik and a few after-hour phonies still stupidly remain. Some say that it is a climax that befits the turbulence and scorn. And some say nothing. The world is laughing hysterically, but never the less . . . loudly.

The Beats felt the Life-sting that scourges all free souls into revolt. But if it is to succeed, it must be as Albert Camus has said, "a silent revolt," and not an attempt at world devastation to prove dissatisfaction with the way things are. Needless to say, their revolt was anything but silent.

The primary, almost self-evident defect in the Beat Movement were the writers. Firstly, they lacked *humor* (in its true and vital sense—as opposed to comedy). This is obviously reflected in all their writings and in the desperate vindictiveness with which they put down their besuited fellow man.

The creative man is eternally surrounded by knaves and fools whose cunning and ing idiocy pummels him a little more each day. But is his reaction "an ear-splitting scream at dawn on Fourteenth Street" not a bit of it? He merely laughs, and just a bit harder at himself, because he is undeniably a part of all this insanity. There is a little of the knave and a quantity of the fool in each one of us called man. And the only way one can separate oneself (not escape) from the "general world" is to step back and observe it. In doing this, one will notice that everyone is paddling up Life's stream with a cracked oar, exactly like one's own. Unfortunately, the Beats could never do this. Theirs was a society that was basically narcissistic and which reflected nothing but their own bewilderment and despair. One escapes the world's idiocy in one's knowledge of it. And it is only through humor that you can ever really know it.

The second, and perhaps the most ingrained defect, is that they have no *self-love*. This term is often misinterpreted and bandied about with the meaning of self-respect. But it goes much deeper than common usage would imply. A noted psychiatrist once asked a patient what he deemed the most important thing in a man's life. The fellow babbled something about the golden rule and was quickly interrupted by the learned man, whose statement to the patient was to this effect: "It is only through self-love, (i.e. the understanding of our own weaknesses and strengths, predicating them universally to all of mankind)

we can ever love anyone else." Further, we must transmit this awareness of self to those around us, in order that love will be reciprocated from one member of humanity to another. If we cannot love (interpret) our *true* self, then it is impossible for anyone else to ever love us. Which is to say that, like the Beats, the unloving and the unloved soon wither on the vine and die. It is just as simple or as complicated as that.

The Beat individualist spoke and wrote endlessly of his great love for mankind. And yet he could never love his own humanity and self long enough to cease living like the animal that he had unmistakably become.

Before I close, I would just like to mention that something worthwhile, in my opinion, has arisen from the shambles of this Beat Generation. It is the result of a new and exciting concept in the world of ideas. And it lacks, I might add, the shallow itineracy that proved to be poltergeist in the downfall of the Beats. The adherents of this idea are not part of a definable movement. Nor is there a formalized colony of these visionary persons. They are simply groups of intelligent human beings who wish to express their ideas on the present condition of man. They do not discuss nuclear space travel, nor do they wear beards and invoke poetic invectives. But they do discuss *man* and his relation to the world.

Man needs to discuss man, for at best, we are almost totally incommunicable to one another. We each have our own wave lengths and seldom do our wires ever cross. But when they do, ah yes, that is *joie de vivre!* the purpose of it all.

So you see, you either dig or you don't dig. There are the grasshoppers and there are the ants. Some jump for the joy of living and some toil for the golden years. What is your choice . . . who really swings?

LAST WILL
AND
TESTAMENT

BY JEAN MOORE

Come! Journey through countryside,
Follow gray winding lane traced out by oil stain,
Breathe fresh-piped cancerous carbon monoxide.
Beside deafening dusty roar
Come relax. Drain a coke; shallow sounds rattle, like
Drills, the calm harmony out of the ear.
Speed past the distant beat of Nature's music sweet,
Unheard at fifty-five miles per hour.
Rest beside placid pool,
Angered by phonic chant—despoiling incessant
Blared incoherently-loud rock-and-roll.

No. The cultured city pulses beauty—
Discordant halls resounding cacaphony;
Profuse symbolic libraried unreality;
Confused dispirited unreality;
Diffused colors galleried, clashed
With geometrically distorted anguish splashed.
While hovering helicopters commuting clack
Overhead. And underground, "Musak"
Piped into swimming water, inescapably
Leaves Testament and Will of the twentieth century.

MALCOMB
AND
THE STREAM

BY

MICHAEL J. TORMA

Saplings along the stream's meandering path had long since matured into brooding, secretive weeping-willows. The falls at the stream's origin poured out their messages in slow cadence, only their muffled chorus ranging deeper to prove that years had passed. Great trout spawned in the depths of emerald pools, watched their hatchlings mature, and then died.

Here Malcomb was drawn, the melancholy enchantment of the place ensnaring him after long years of concentrated effort. His thoughts were troubled and confused. Remembering the feminine babble of the falls, he was confronted by a masculine baritone. During his life Malcomb had followed the stream outward for many miles, watched it broaden and mature. Now he had returned to its origin.

"I wonder how many times I fished this stream?" he asked of the twilight stillness. Timidly he inched his bare foot into the clear water. "Man, it's cold!" Of course, he could not remember that as a young man he had delighted in the coldness, had been invigorated by its sharpness.

Quickly he withdrew his foot, stealing furtive glances over his shoulder, reassuring himself of the fact that no human had witnessed his action.

"This place sure brings back good memories!" he said falsely. For his thoughts were not good. They were much saddened. As he remembered his own youth so was he forced to remember his son's.

He became aware that he was staring at his own drooping image reflected as it was, from the water's surface. How easily he could picture his own son standing beside him, laughing and talking. His son, who would laugh and talk no more. His son, whose happiness he had lived for, whose sickness and death would hasten his own.

Malcomb picked up a tiny pebble, threw, and shattered the image. Yet his sadness was not satisfied, the void was not filled. Like the water, his hurt rippled out in ever increasing circles, leaving marks where none had been before.

"I was a fool to come back!" he cried bitterly. Indeed, he had come for no reason which he barely understood himself. He knew, somehow, that at the bottom of the whirling pool of his loss there would be a pseudo-peace. Here he hoped to find it.

After the ringing bark of words, the stillness seemed even more depressing and menacing. And because of its closeness Malcomb became aware that he was not alone.

"Hello there, old fellow," the man who had just materialized grinned. "I'm glad to see you could make the trip!"

"You gave me quite a start. I didn't hear you coming up." Malcomb had taken a few steps, still surprised.

"Well, they seldom do, friend." Again the man, even older than Malcomb (though infinitely quicker), grinned. Indeed, he thought, they're always so busy looking that they don't see or hear at all.

"Have you done much fishing here?" Malcomb asked, trying to fathom the older man's curious manner.

"Quite a bit, actually."

"Where are the big ones biting?" Again Malcomb was disturbed. The man's tone seemed to suggest a mirthless game.

"Well, I do most all my fishing right here by the falls. As soon as they spill over that ledge up there, no matter how far they go downstream, they'll always come back sooner or later. And I'm generally here when they do, though a few sometimes escape me." Innocent fellow, this Malcomb, he thought.

"It looks an odd place though. It seems to me the booming of the falls would scare the fish away."

"Well, Malcomb, they generally are scared at first. But some, because of real or imagined agony, even welcome me."

With the casual mention of his name, Malcomb knew that the person before him was far from human, and that he, or it, had not been speaking of fish at all. Granted that insight, he grinned too, for he was happy. A great fester had been healed within his soul.

"Would you like to see the view from above the ledge now?"

"Yes," Malcomb answered, "I believe I would."

THE DESPICABLE BREED

BY

ROBERT A. SIEBERT

Weeds are the worst of plants

Pushing

Crowding

Killing

Creeping silently

Over the vast checkerboard

The motionless desert

Of God's unenlightened kingdom

The formidable realm

Of pressure

And of unchanging signs

The place where flowers know no home

Where the opponent dies

Not as a weed

But as a flower in full bloom

In a desert of iniquity.

AN ALLEY
AND
A FOOL

BY
F. J. KINCH

The alley was dark but not with the darkness of night. It was a dark place because the sun could not shine there. Two apartment houses, long and ugly with windows appearing as colorless eyes, boarded the alley blocking the sun from giving it's rays anywhere within the five-foot space between them. It was the shadowless place where dogs of the neighborhood gathered and rummaged garbage cans and buried bones. It was the place of deposit for refuse from the apartments above.

A woman sat in the alley on a small section of ground that had been cleared of refuse. Clutched tightly in her folded arms was a large, brown paper bag. The woman looked old; her face was wrinkled and lined with sweat. At regular intervals she drew a matted handkerchief from a pocket and wiped sweat from her forehead. When the handkerchief touched her face and the wrinkles were drawn into smoothness, it was evident that the woman could not have been much past twenty-five years of age. Her head was drawn, almost crooked, into a reclining position against the wall of the alley. She was crying. Tears flowed in abundance so that the upper portion of her dress collar was wet; she was crying truthfully.

The woman released the paper bag that she clutched in her arms, she let it fall to her side and with one hand drew from it's contents a long, silver, neck chain. With her handkerchief she polished the medal that hung from the chain—a small oblong medal that bore the image of another mourning woman. She put the medal on the ground beside her, clearing a place for it beside some refuse. She carefully spread the chain so that it formed a circle. Lifting the bag across her lap and placing it at her right side, the woman withdrew a second object, a small, half-worn whetstone, and placed it beside the medal. Other withdrawals followed: a wrist watch, a worn leather wallet, three toothpicks, a pocketknife, and sixteen cents in nickels and pennies. The woman carefully examined each of the articles. She polished the face of the watch with her handkerchief (as she had done with the medal), and set it by the watch on her own wrist. She arranged the contents of the wallet in a line before her and placed the toothpicks, the knife, and the money within the circle formed by the neck chain.

An afternoon was progressing outside the alley. Evening sun rays filtered slowly through the top levels of the chasms between the apartment houses, disappearing into the black pits beneath. The sun, even when at noon, could not bring light into the alley.

With the passing of the afternoon the woman rose from her position in the chasm. At her feet (spread neatly as they had been originally placed) lay the few items that had been contained in the paper bag which she still held tightly in her arms. The woman had stopped crying; her face was disfigured with the moisture of the tears. She looked pitifully at the items in front of her. Then, in a sudden frenzy that did not become the helpless expression she held on her face, the woman stepped brutishly upon the display; she scattered the items quickly and furiously. With a voice savage, and at the same time almost penitential, she screamed, "What a fool—what a perfect fool I've been!"

Then the woman walked out of the alley and into the late sun.

COLLEGE GRAD CONVICTED IN SWINDLING CASE

U.P.I. HEADLINE

There's a kind of cerebration,
And of Ratiocination,
That is common to the prison and the college;
For remission of tuition
In exchange for erudition
May eventuate in several kinds of knowledge.
Though the catalogue will mention
Universal comprehension
And the names of all the ways for you to gain it,
What you really will acquire,
When your need of it is dire,
Is the skill that will enable you to feign it.

In Cosmology, Biology
Or Cultural Psychology
Or Studies in Atomic Economics,
You'll be able to succeed
Although the only text you read
May be the polychromic Sunday morning comics.

Which is indication ample
That at Harvard, for example,
There's a moral tone that some cannot but censure,
And that inmates up at Yale
Share with those in any jail
Something more than their abbreviated tonsure.

Oh, a truculent psychologist,
A very stern geologist,
A chemist who will brook no imperfection,
May intimidate you briefly,
But his net effect is chiefly
To accelerate the process of selection

Which eliminates veracity
In favor of audacity,
And cultivates the Machievellian bent.
So when pleading with a judge
Not to bear a foolish grudge,
Discourse upon the college where you went,

And your tale of slow decay
In the greedy quest of "A"
May persuade a thoughtful jurist to relent.
Then the court will find a need
As you learnedly do plead
For some recognition of your better parts.

And your sentence, it is plan
Will not be a ball and chain
But a *Doctorate of Extra-Legal Arts*.

REFLECTIONS ON AN EDUCATED SWINDLER

CRITO

*Friday morning—**warm and sunny. Cotton
clouds slowly drifting
overhead. Clear blue sky
visible along the horizon.*

Adjacent to the mighty lions that guard the entrance to the New York Public Library is a small ten acre park called Bryant Park. Running parallel to 4th street, that green speck is passed by thousands of people on their way to the towering office buildings that dot the area between Fifth, Madison and Lexington Avenues. Once a Potter's Field and site of the 1853 Worlds Fair, it is now a haven for pigeons, old folks and the unemployed. It is peaceful here, away from the main thoroughfare. All morning the steady streams of people of all shapes, and forms, pass hurriedly by like so many Mad Hatters on their way to very important dates.

Behind the rock wall sit the retired, the lazy, and the unemployed. The folks doze or read the stock market page of the morning paper. The lazy sit and watch the rest of the world pass them by, the unemployed read the want section. Also in the park are the pigeon-feeders dolling out bits of bread crumbs to the city born pigeons, who rely on these morsels of bread for a good portion of their food.

When the gurgling fountain, which commands the park's center, reflects the overhead sun, the area is filled with music, supplied by the record room of the library. At noontime Bryant Park takes on a different face as the office workers swarm over the park, glad for the chance to sit under a tree or by the fountain. The regulars of Bryant Park are already in the minority, and all too soon from the clock tower, river boat, and factory whistle the hour of one o'clock to leaving the park to its own.

*Friday afternoon—**hot and sunny, lazy
clouds hanging overhead.
Dark blue sky visible
along the horizon.*

Scattered throughout lower Manhattan is a chain of restaurants named "Horn & Hardarts." For the most part, regardless of their location, the layout is the same and so are the prices. One of the restaurants of that chain is at 14th Street and Irving Place, in the heart of the bargain area of the city. Generally known as Union Square, this area has small factories, most of them clustered around 14th Street, and the most common sight is people. There are always people, during the rush hour of one p.m., during the quiet hour of three p.m. There will be people for always and forever. Outside H.&H. they line the curbs talking, jesting, arguing, looking, reading, smoking and existing. Inside H.&H. they line up at the change booth, the cashiers forever changing all denominations of money into nickels, the keys that open all doors at H.&H. How quickly the nimble hands fan out change for a quarter, half, or dollar; never over, never under—fast and accurate. With nickels in your palm and a tray in your hand

you are now ready to select your food from hundreds of brass-rimmed cubicles. Pastry, sandwiches, cakes, and plates hot or cold, are there before you, but you must move fast for the windows are never filled long. You move along the railing, hit the slot, turn the knob, remove the contents, and move along. Carry your tray, spot your seat and move, really move, along. By right of conquest you now own the chair you are sitting on. Have a dollar seventy-five hot meal or a ten cent cup of hot coffee, that chair is yours until you leave there, be it half an hour or four hours, if you can stand the noise:

Noise composed of the steady hum of human voices, the squeaking sound of pick-up carts, the clinking sound of eating utensils, the scraping sound of chairs on marble floors, the rumble of the underground subway, the clattering sound of plate on plate, the swishing sound of the revolving door, the distinct sound of a dropped fork, the muffled sound of shoe leather on marble—all fuses together, forming a steady, unbearable, maddening sound, if you were ever to take time to listen to it.

*Friday early evening—
a slight breeze brings
welcome relief from the
heat. Streaks of bright
rustic gold and blazing
orange visible along the
horizon.*

Dark and dreary like wind-swept canyons of a desolate wasteland, the tall buildings of Wall Street dominate what ever may be moving on the streets; narrow passageways of paved streets between giant pillars that touch the multi-colored canopy of the sky. The last minute office worker hurriedly leaves the tomb-like buildings, her footsteps taken up and carried through the streets, repeating the fast tap of heels on asphalt. The secretary rushes towards the safe subway where the thundering sound of the trains will reassure her that life exists elsewhere. Not wanting to give up the sounds it knows so well, Wall Street holds her retreating steps even after she has disappeared below the surface! The distinct click of high heels is held above by the buildings; passes back and forth down the dark empty streets. But soon the only sounds to be heard are the traffic signals and the rustling of paper. Wall Street goes into a deep hibernation and waits for Monday.

*Friday night—
cool and comfortable.
The reflected light of the
moon in its old crescent
phase competes with
the infinite array of
twinkling that is visible
along the horizon.*

Tired now and contented, an evenings fun over, couples move outward and away from the tired spots of the city. They wait to catch the local or express trains that will take them to the upper Bronx, Kew Gardens, Bay Bridge, or Staten Island and any of the dozens of places thought of as home. The rhythm of the city is now at a low pace, for it too needs a few hours rest. In a few hours it will be Saturday, and Saturday night in lower Manhattan is another story.

FRANCIS X. McNALLI

Father:

Greetings to you and mother and may this report from your son find you both in good health and prosperity. I hope the farm yields a bountiful crop for you—ah how I do miss the sweet smell of our land and the sight of our fruit trees swaying to the zephyr that comes from the ocean. I would also inquire how your project of recording the history of the country is proceeding.

I have news for you and also reasons for not writing home sooner. Right now I am on a slow moving craft which has just left Capri, and it is this intervening time between ports that I utilize to write to you. I hear the formation of your question as to how I came to be at Capri. Well before I answer, let me review all that has happened since last hearing from me. I have been moved to a new camp which is on the right bank of the river Rhine. It is below the ford where the Rhine and the Neckar rivers join. The town is called Civitas Nemetum and it is an old town with numberless remains about of some long-forgotten Celtic tribe. Reports say Caesar himself fought near here and this very area was given by him to a Germanic tribe, the Nemeters—hence the town's name—for service rendered. The former site of this town was on the left bank of the Rhine but due to the pressures of nomadic German tribes the site had to be yielded and a new camp built on the right bank. This is to be my new home for some time.

I had great hopes of being sent to Paris, where you served your time during the Great War, but luck was against me as far as that goes. I would have liked the idea of doing my service in Paris. You often talked of your stay there when I was a youngster, and your description of the Seine running through the center of your camp, and also through the surrounding countryside, had also produced desires in me to see that part of the world.—Oh well, a soldier goes where he is sent.

It was not to talk of what might have been that I write, but of my chance to visit Capri and of the reason for my being so far from my post of duty. I was ordered by my commander to bring some documents to Capri. It was and is a secret mission. After many hours of pondering why I was chosen, I have come to the conclusion that I was sent because of my name. In these troubled times of conflicting loyalties, when many names can be questioned, my name—the same as such a courageous fighter and official historian yours—was proof enough

my own loyalty. So I was dispatched to Capri. My knowing your interest in places you have not been to is another reason that I write—while the thoughts, sights, sounds and impressions are still fresh. I hope my poor observations will supply you with some information.

A watcher has just called the time and if I were above deck I would be able to see Vesuvius coming up on the fore side. Soon Vesuvius will be aft and Naples Harbour will come into view; once on the mainland I will again retravel the route that I took when I came from C. Nemetum. Naples is an illusion and should be seen from afar but not smelled or heard. The picturesque winding roads and small homes that ascend the heights are in reality a sham. The crooked meandering pathways lead to dead ends, mud hovels, garbage-spilled alleyways, beggarly people, stagnant air, and oppressive smells. Like the carcass of a hideous monster washed ashore, that bubbled and blistered in the sun, Naples rots, ravages, and ruins the surrounding country side.

The people stare and wait, stare at life and wait for death. Oh! this mummified Sheol acts alive enough: at the present time with the fleet in, the shrill laughter, painful shrieks, mournful whispers, and raucous snorting from behind the mud walls and darkened rooms are cognizant proofs that the people eat, play, sleep, drink, and dream—but all the while they only exist. Compared to this cess-pool, my Germanic camp is indeed a welcome destination.

Father, it is sometimes hard for a soldier to understand the world he lives in today. We are in garrison, far from the homeland, and yet when we meet people of our way of life, and citizens too, all they do is complain and demand. They leave the farm and flock to the cities, not realizing or not caring that all they do is swell the unemployment ranks and increase the burden of being taken care of. They demand government assistance, especially the veterans, who consider themselves the primary class in our society today. More and more are the politicians taking control, and less and less are the citizens participating. Even the Senate is losing out to the bureaucracy.

No more on politics. I will continue to describe my trip. From the remarks above I guess you know my opinion of Naples; so instead of staying there I went to Pompeii to find means of transportation to Capri. I did not stay in Pompeii long, but what I saw of it impressed me. As you know Father, Pompeii was seriously damaged by an earthquake some time ago. The city is a mixture of Greek and Roman architecture. There were many beautiful villas to be seen; in fact the emperors of Caesar's line had summer homes there. Of those places that I did visit, the one home that stands out is that of the Vetii brothers, both of whom were merchants. This house is truly breathtaking. Yet compared to some of the villas in Rome, those of Pompeii are insignificant.

Some of the sights to be seen are Victuals Market and the Temple of Apollo. Victuals Market, which is a very large public market near the Temple Jupiter, is the commercial center of the city. The wine which comes from the rolling hills around Vesuvius is a local product that is different and delicious. The other sight is exquisite: the Temple of Apollo, both petite and captivating. In all my travels I have not come across a more inspiring temple.

Transportation was found available and I had to leave Pompeii sooner than I had wished, setting sail for Capri. The trip was pleasant but uneventful. I was not prepared for what I was to see. Even before landing there I was a

captive to the beauty that glows from far around the place. Capri is a shimmering emerald that flickers in the Mediterranean. How can this magic island be described? Who is able to put into words the sights that can be seen, the sounds that play on the ears, and the smells that fill the air with a fragrance of their own? The peaceful landing invites you by its simplicity; and the grimness and drama of Naples is not to be felt, seen, or heard.

Once on land I had to take a long, winding hike up the mountain side. It was pure pleasure. Each turn of the bend, each ascending height offered a new sight to me, a new impression to be absorbed and stored away. You stop and look out—and always to be seen is the deep blue water reflecting majestic cliffs. Sunlight glances off it and winds play with it, small craft glide through it, and gulls dive into it and emerge fed by it. And all the while, the sea remains beautiful, and breathtaking. Higher up the mountain the sights you see become a blend of sky, water, and earth. The blue and green of the water and the white of the sky form a background for the rich green and brown of a forest that jets out from the land. Wind-swept and mighty, with stout trees and climbing vines swaying to the perpetual breeze, the cliff hangs—a gift from the gods. When you look down toward the small village of huts snuggled against the earth with multi-colored garlands covering them and neat patches of flowers and vegetables profusely nodding their heads to the invisible breeze, you are glad to be alive. At the top of the mountain can be seen a statue that stands facing the open sea, one arm stretched out. So too do all men become statues when their full beauty is revealed to their eyes.

Here, Father, is the place that existed only in the world of dreams. In the peace the longing eyes can rest, the wandering spirit find hope, the confused mind find peace, and the faltering body rejuvenation. Even now, when I see Capri in my imagination, do I feel at peace with the world. For Capri has sailed away from sight and can be conjured only in the mind. All too soon the real world again descend on me and on the craft.

Father, I must have been so absorbed in my feelings that I failed to notice the sounds that only now jostle my ears from above decks. There must be a storm coming up, because between the loud murmurings of the people above me, I hear the distant rumbling of a storm. Indeed Father, as I listen intently, I feel that the craft is in for a mighty storm. Some of the sky, visible through a starboard porthole on my left, is visibly being changed before my eyes. Its former clear blue and egg white now has ugly streaks of dark brown and dirty red. From the sounds I hear there must be complete embroilment above decks. I will go up to see if I can be of any assistance.

Father, pray for your son; the world is seemingly coming to an end. The whole of Vesuvius is showering forth its disapproval of mankind. The mountain is moving, devouring everything in its path: trees, homes, farms, and hills. As if being swallowed by a fiery, rusty wave of a slow moving, all-consuming mass of molten rock. What I can see of Pompeii—for it is covered by smoke and has a garish hue above it—is being blanketed with ashes and pumice stones. The sound about is deadening and the destruction devastating. The gods are trying to show their wrath this awesome day.

The captain of the craft is calling for all men to assemble above decks. I must go. I will finish this report later . . .

This scroll was found in a small oil skin bag. It had been unearthed by a family of sea shell pickers, near the town of Sorrento, Italy. The bag was in a small iron box—of the type used by Roman soldiers. Also found in the box were a Roman Legionnaire's insignia—radiated globe and eagle with outspread wings—and a few coins. The coins had the imprint of Emperor Vespasian of the Flavian line. The Flavianus ruled Rome from 69 to 96 A.D. It was during the reign of Vespasian that the catastrophic destruction of Pompeii took place when Vesuvius erupted on the 24th-28th of August, 79 A.D.

Author's Note

WELTSCHMERZ

BY JOSEPH GRAVES

Twisting, turning wistless world

I've held your fire and drunk your lust
And in vain I scratched the dark

Shrieked in pain, and saw your rust
Glad and Sad go hand in hand

The What is king, the Why is jester
World be mine when cruel or kind

Without you shine—within, you fester.

A LOVE

BY JOSEPH GRAVES

A lonely smile pierced in silence
a concrete wall of laughter

And stealthy fingers stole a dream
that someone else sought after

Midnight eyes that spoke of truth
drowned in a pool of sorrow

Mirrored youth's insanity
yet captured lost tomorrow

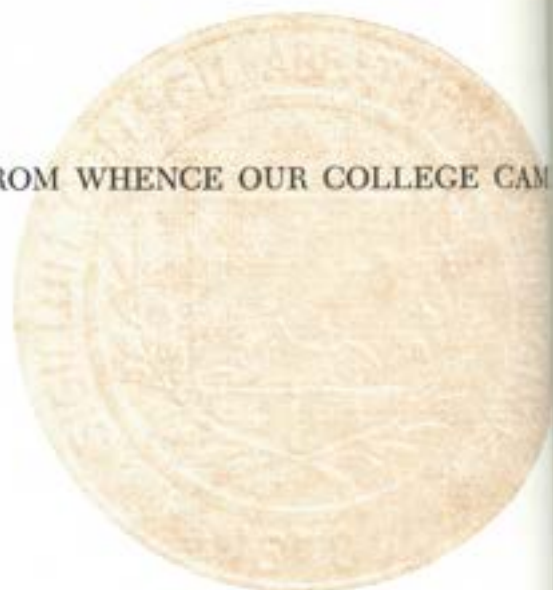
A word escaped from parted lips
to the sanctuary of heart

And quelled the native wonderlust
lest emotion and reason part

Time scattered hours few and precious
at Civilization's scar

So endless joy of girl and boy
flew past the farthest star.

ABBEY TRADITION: FROM WHENCE OUR COLLEGE CAME



Following the Civil War, the Caldwell plantation, a tract of about five hundred acres in Gaston county North Carolina, was purchased by the Rev. Jeremiah O'Connell. It was his desire that this land be accepted by some religious community. After the Benedictine monks of St. Vincent's Abbey in Latrobe Pennsylvania agreed to accept this land, Father Herman Wolf, who was stationed at St. Mary's church in Richmond, was sent by Abbot Boniface Wimmer to make the new foundation in North Carolina.

The actual beginning of Belmont Abbey was on April 21, 1876. Father Herman named it "Maria Stein" (Mary of the Stone) because of the shaft of granite that was located in the yard. Abbot Boniface, upon visiting the new priory in June, 1878, called it Mary Help of Christians. Four days later five brothers arrived from St. Vincent's to take charge of the farm, etc.

Arrangements were quickly made for the opening of a school. Four boys, two from Richmond and two from Charlotte, were the first students of the infant school that began classes in the fall of 1876. Thus the school began, with Father Herman, the superior of the little community, the five lay brothers, and the four students, all living in a log house on the premises. That same year Brother Ulrich commenced work on a frame building which was to be the College.

Archabbot Boniface realized the importance of this new community and decided to do all in his power to make the dependent priory independent. In the Fall of 1884 the chapter at St. Vincent's voted independence to Mary Help Priory and gave to her the Benedictine missions at Richmond, Va., Savannah, Ga., Skidaway, Ga., and also the Isle of Hope, Ga. Rome sanctioned the decision, and accordingly elevated Mary Help Priory to the dignity of an Abbey on November 9, 1884.

In February of 1885, the capitulars of St. Vincent's elected Father Oswald Moosmueller, O.S.B. as Abbot, but he declined the office. The Archabbot then

determined that the Abbot of Mary Help was to be elected not by the chapter of St. Vincent's, but by those monks who would agree to become members of the new abbey. As a result of this decision, the Archabbot called for volunteers who would transfer their vows to the newly created Southern abbey. On July 14, 1885 eight monks from St. Vincent's elected Father Leo Haid as their first abbot.

As soon as the monks arrived they commenced the recitation of the Divine Office. Plans were made and executed for the coming school year, and some new equipment was acquired. Before the Fall was over, Abbot Leo had received the solemn abbatial benediction at the hands of Bishop Northrop in Charleston, S. C.

Rome later appointed him Vicar Apostolic of North Carolina on December 9, 1887. At the Cathedral in Baltimore, Cardinal Gibbons consecrated him a bishop on July 1, 1888.

In 1910 new honors were accorded the Abbey when Pope Pius X raised it to the dignity of an "Abbey Nullius," thus making it the headquarters of a diocese and giving to its abbot full jurisdiction over the eight counties which then comprised its territory.

The work of the monks at Belmont continued: observing the liturgy, teaching, doing mission work, farming, building, founding new priories and in every way growing and prospering.

Abbot Haid died on July 24, 1924, leaving behind a tremendous task.

On August 20, 1924, Father Vincent Taylor, O.S.B., was elected Belmont's second abbot. The Holy See confirmed the election and Abbot Vincent was solemnly blessed by Archbishop Curley at the Abbey Cathedral on March 19, 1925.

The new abbot, realizing the necessity of a well trained faculty, launched a program of higher studies for his monks, and this program has continued, producing more than a score of graduate degrees earned by the monks.

By 1930 the college had received recognition from the state of North Carolina, and within a few years it was a full member of the Southern Association. In 1952 the college began its first year as a Senior College.

With the expansion of the curriculum, it was deemed necessary to add to the general equipment at the Abbey. Accordingly, the Haid Memorial gymnasium was erected in 1931 as a gift of Mr. Paul Haid in honor of his uncle, Bishop Leo Haid. Shortly afterwards the library, then located in St. Leo's Hall, and the scientific laboratories were enlarged and modernized. Improvements were made in the student's rooms, guest quarters and college chapel. The Abbey Cathedral was equipped with a new organ, a set of choir stalls, and a new floor covering. With the sinking of a deep well the community was rewarded with an abundant supply of pure water for its constantly increasing needs. The latest building to be added to our campus was the new Abbott Vincent Taylor library. Plans for it were started in 1951 when the college wished to become a regular senior college. In 1956 a preliminary study was started in earnest to find out just the type of library which would best serve our needs; in September 1958 the library was ready for use. Our brief history cannot stop here though because now we are embarking on an even greater venture, that of building an almost entirely new campus. Ground was broken for the first new dormitory this year.

BY BRIAN TISDALL & THOMAS McGRATH

THE
MODERN
NOVEL:
THE EXAMPLE
OF
MAURIAU
BY
EUGENE MURPHY.
Ph.D.

I know that you are all well acquainted with the following declaration:

"We must educate man first for what he is and then for what he
We must educate him for his ultimate end and then for the prop
the means to this end, i.e., full living."

You recognize in these words the wisdom of the educational i
philosophy of Belmont Abbey College. The present lectureship is in ho
saintly and scholarly man whose life has been zealously and selflessly ded
the realization of this ideal.

The invitation to hold the Abbot Vincent Taylor lectureship is inde
honor, of which I am duly mindful. I can only hope that these lectures
in some measure, a worthy tribute to the name they bear.

It is inevitable that I should experience a certain degree of hesi
addressing such an audience on such a subject as Francois Mauriac. M.
I am fully aware, has a widespread, though not solidly grounded, reput
disliking, even hating women. I am confident that none of my present
is a misogynist. Beyond this obstacle of the charge of misogyny, which I
feel is easily surmountable, there has been not a little unfavorable, even
criticism of Mauriac and his work in both non-Catholic and Catholic pub
As a kind of autobiographical hors d'oeuvre, may I say that it was a
priest, a very intelligent and a very holy man, who first introduced m
novels of Mauriac when I was an undergraduate at the University of
In a course on Contemporary French Literature we were reading M
Le Nœud de Vipères (The Vipers' Tangle); guided by a professor wh
priest, I discovered that this book was a profoundly Catholic novel fil
tremendous spiritual issues, an artistically dramatic illustration of the t
the real tragedy in human life is to mistake the ephemeral for the eterna

The novels of Mauriac are, as it were, a series of illustrations of th
that modern man, created with a yearning for the infinite, is doomed to
he seeks to satisfy this yearning with the finite. Finite, material goods
pine forests, vineyards, money, and human flesh, can never satisfy a lon
the infinite. All Mauriac's unhappy heroes and heroines testify to this tr
are immersed in materiality, have lost sight of the supernatural order,
sequently are truly miserable. Created to love the God Who made them,
trying in vain to find rest away from Him.

Mauriac's contribution to the Catholic Renaissance in French literatu
past half century is perhaps a negative contribution, but is none the l
and significant. Readers who would not be reached by Péguy's intellec
tests against rationalism, or by the magnificent poetic theology of Cla
by the dramas of Bernanos in which Divine Grace is the principal pro
such readers are affected by the spell of Mauriac, and are led by his wor
honest examination of their own consciences. Mauriac is indisputably on
leading writers of the Catholic Literary Revival, and he is a Catholic wri
in another sense of the term.

The Nobel prize for literature was awarded to a Frenchman for the f
in 1901, to the poet Sully Prudhomme. Five years ago, for the eighth
French writer received this well-known award of international recognit
1952 Nobel prize, as you may recall, was given to Francois Mauriac
penetrating analysis of the soul and artistically intense interpretation o
drama." This award marked the climax of a brilliant literary career whic
when Mauriac went to Paris from his native Bordeaux in 1906. Those am
who are students might find some small encouragement in the knowle
this eminent French academician once had to repeat a philosophy cour
failed an oral examination, and enrolled in the Ecole des Chartes prim
cause mathematics was not among the required subjects. Humble a
beginnings, therefore, do not necessarily preclude the possibility of pr
success in later life. Mauriac has described the people of Southwestern
especially the women, with an almost perforating perspicacity; but the

his seemingly provincial dramas are not exclusively French problems, and they have a universal appeal, and this universality is the best guarantee that some of Mauriac's novels may eventually become classics.

Mauriac's distinguished career which began almost fifty years ago has been a long series of successes and triumphs. He has produced masterpieces in several genres, but he is above all a novelist. It is to his novels that we must go to know him and to find his real message to twentieth-century man. His complete works which have recently appeared, to the deep and righteous satisfaction of their author, contain many books of memoirs, critical essays, poems, biographies, journalism, plays, and political thought, but, paradoxically enough, these writings do not reveal Mauriac in the measure that his fiction does. We may borrow an explanation from Mauriac himself who has this to say in the apologetic introduction to a never-completed autobiographical volume:

Is not the real reason for my laziness the fact that my novels express the real me? Fiction alone does not lie; it opens on the life of a man a hidden door through which glides, beyond all control, his unknown soul.

We have the right therefore to seek Mauriac's true personality and his true message in his fiction. Within his fictional writings we may confine ourselves to his novels, because this novelist of stormy hearts and stormy climates is convinced that progress in the knowledge of human nature is the proper object of the art of the novel.

In the curriculum of your personal lives, you are all probably very busy people, with limited leisure to enjoy the reading of novels, a distraction that Anatole France cleverly defined as the "opium of the Occident." It is quite easy to be intelligent without reading novels, and history tells us that highly developed civilizations have done tolerably well without prose fiction. The ancient Greeks, for example, as the French critic Thibaudet reminds us, were unaware of two of life's great luxuries, the reading of novels and smoking of cigarettes. In our own century I know some people who pretend to be humanists and who think it a crime to waste one's time reading novels. I trust that you and I will agree that novel reading can be, and sometimes is, a good and profitable human activity, provided the novel is of a superior kind. I have chosen to speak to you about one of modern France's greatest writers because I have unbounded personal admiration for his work. My remarks will be limited for the most part to a single novel, a novel that is a drama involving human responsibilities, and consequently, I feel, not an inapposite subject here.

François Mauriac is not a simple person, and I use the word *simple* in its strictest etymological sense. Mauriac's own interior life which is exteriorized in his fiction is a series of dilemmas, debates, and discontent. His is a highly paradoxical personality, filled with antinomies and apparent contradictions. His writings have been a very controversial subject, both within and without the Catholic Church, of which he has always been an active member. Mauriac has heard charges of pornographer, pernicious writer, corruptor of youth, and spiritual homicide. At the same time he has been hailed as one of contemporary France's greatest spiritual leaders. He has sympathized with Gide and opposed Maritain; again he has bitterly denounced the author of *Les Faux Monnayeurs* and frequently praised the eminent Thomist. Mauriac has been the subject of numerous articles and full-length studies in recent years. No two opinions of him are identical. One of the most recent, and perhaps the best study of Mauriac was written by a woman who professes to be an agnostic. Mauriac himself wrote the preface to the book and claims therein that this woman has understood him better than any other of his critics, including the Catholic Charles DuBos.

This lecture might have been entitled "The Message of Mauriac." But the message of a writer or of a book always remains a personal matter between the reader and the book itself. Only the reader can know his own emotional and intellectual debts to a book, and these debts are incommunicable. The experiences

Romanic Languages at Hobart and William Smith College, N. Y., is a Summa Cum Laude graduate of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, who won his Ph.D. from the Johns Hopkins University in 1951. He has taught at Grinnell College, Johns Hopkins, and the University of South Carolina, Phi Beta Kappa from Johns Hopkins. His lectures on French literature at Belmont Abbey College, where he was Abbot Vincent Taylor lecturer for 1957-58, were among the most enthusiastically received ever to be heard on our campus.

of the soul in the presence of masterpieces are always literally ineffable. I tell you my own subjective debts to the writings of Mauriac, nor do we all would receive the same message from his words. But if I talk as I am able, perhaps you will be led to read or reread some Mauriac by owe him a greater debt yourselves. And you will be doing him good. For, as my late and beloved colleague and teacher the Spanish Salinas, always insisted, the only real way to honor an author is to read his works with love.

In an issue of the *Yale French Studies* devoted to the modern French novel we read an interesting letter from Francois Mauriac to Professor Hebert. In this letter M. Mauriac says that he feels his career as a novelist is over and that he intends to devote his remaining years to the drama for which he is naturally adapted. He had the feeling that his public would find him "just another Mauriac." At the time Mauriac had authored twenty novels. The temptation to write more novels has, however, proved to be irresistible since the letter to Professor Peyre, Mauriac has produced three more. Which you may be acquainted either directly or by way of recent reviews.

In the spring of 1951 Mauriac finished *Le Sagouin*, the novel which he was to discuss this evening. The book has appeared in an English translation as *"The Weakling"*. (Within parentheses I would remark that *"The Weakling"* has been discussed in *The New Yorker* by Anthony West in a review that is a gross misunderstanding of Mauriac and his work. Among other misstatements M. West speaks of Mauriac's "strained hatred for the abominable Thérèse." M. West gives her name to his "Thérèse". I cannot even imagine how any intelligent reader could possibly conclude that Mauriac hates Thérèse.

Thérèse is M. Mauriac's most cherished creature. Her destiny is the subject of two novels, two short stories and a fleeting, yet intense, chapter in *The Weakling* that really has nothing to do with her. She has in a sense obsessed Mauriac frequently mentions his unhappy Thérèse in his essays and his writings, in the novels he often addresses her directly and personally in a language that is informed with love.) [Thus for the parentheses.]

Mauriac resembles Racine in many respects, especially in the debility of his French. There is always a loss or gain in any English translation of Racine; the same is true of Mauriac.

The English title *"The Weakling"* is a poor translation of *Le Sagouin*. The word "weakling" can connote various kinds of debility, physical, mental, or moral. In French *un sagouin* is an animal, specifically a squirrel-monkey. It is used with human application to denote a slovenly person. More precisely it designates, with a measure of contempt, a physically dirty child, with a head in mourning and nose desperately in need of a square piece of lint. It is significant that Mauriac's novel bears the name of an animal as its title. One of the most striking features of Mauriac's prose style is the predominance of animal metaphors, words, metaphors and similes, all with application to human behavior. *proie* (prey) and *gibier* (game), the verbs *flairer* (scent) and *roder* (to sniff) appear so frequently that they are almost the signature of the novel. This is so true that among resistance writers of World War II, Mauriac is the least in concealing his identity. Pseudonyms were useless. He continued writing in a certain style that betrayed him continually.

An example of Mauriac's resistance prose is this sentence which he wrote with reluctance:

In June 1940, in vain did the Reich howl its joy to the microphone of the Occident, and (in vain) did the Maurassiens of Vichy trembling with joy submit the system upon a France bled by all the suckers, by all the tentacles of the Reich.

To anyone in France the identity of the author of this statement is unmistakable.

Le Sagouin contains many animal figures with human reference. This can be said of any of Mauriac's books. Animals as such seldom appear in his books.

of Mauriac's; they seem to have no separate existence. Perhaps the reason for this absence is the fact that Mauriac has so consciously incorporated animality into his notion of the nature of man. In any event, I feel that the textual detail of the animalistic terms must not be overlooked in any attempt to study seriously Mauriac's "concrete metaphysics," as he himself has styled his novels.

Le Sagouin is, as its creator prophesied, "another Mauriac." This compact drama (the book numbers but four chapters and 158 pages) is quite typical of Mauriac, both in its matter and literary manner. Within the economic proportions of a short story the author has again concentrated the essence of a complete novel; the unbridled romanticism of the subject matter is artistically contained and canalized in a classical structure. The art rises from unrest and tends toward serenity. Mauriac is a classical writer if we accept André Gide's definition of classicism as the art of expressing the most by saying the least. François Mauriac says a great deal in a little. His inevitable sentences require careful reading for there is always a fund of meaning beyond the words themselves. The romantic writers leave nothing unsaid; their readers do not have to seek meanings on the other side of the words. But a writer such as Mauriac with a marked tendency toward litotes and a deep preference for suggestion over direct expression—such a writer may be read again and again. Such prose is poetic, for poetry, it has been well said, always consists in the indefinite progression of an unlimited series of associations. As a rule, people do not re-read novels. A single acquaintance with plot and characters seems to satisfy. Novels seldom find their way into great-book lists, or mythical desert island lists. Rarely do novels merit the honorary title of classic. Mauriac belongs to that minority of novelists whose works are frequently re-read, because one reading cannot exhaust the world of meaning in his poetic prose.

If I recount in summary the plot of this particular novel, I am certain that I will not deprive your own possible reading of genuine enjoyment. Any novel of Mauriac richly rewards a second, third or even later reading.

Le Sagouin is set in a provincial community near Bordeaux. Paule de Cernès has been married for 13 years to *le baron* Galéas de Cernès. As far as Paule was concerned the marriage took place because she was dazzled by the title of baroness. She has never been in love with her husband, who, as the novel opens, is presented as being stupid and ugly, physically and intellectually impotent. The miserable couple has one child, Guillaume, the Sagouin, who is now 12 years old and the wretched replica of his feeble father. Because he is the image of his father, Paule despises the child. Paule's mother-in-law has just returned from conference with the local schoolmaster whom she has unsuccessfully tried to persuade to tutor her retarded grandson. The elder baroness is pleased with her failure because the *instituteur* has a reputation for advanced ideas and professes to be an enemy of the upper classes. We learn that one of the schoolmaster's reasons for refusing is a past scandal involving Paule and young priest. Paule is determined now that the school teacher *Robert Bordas* shall instruct her son. Her real reason is her desire to tell the teacher the truth about the scandal; this truth we learn by way of a retrospective monologue in the mind of Paule. Her association with the young priest was completely innocent; it had been only a meeting of two unhappy solitudes. Vicious tongues in their diabolical way, magnified and distorted reality until the priest was transferred elsewhere and Paule acquired the reputation of dangerous woman. Paule wants to meet the intelligent school teacher to exchange words and ideas with him whom she secretly admires, and to rid herself of the intolerable weight of the truth concerning the sacerdotal scandal. Her son's education will serve as an excellent pretext for meeting Robert Bordas. After a bitter verbal exchange with her mother-in-law Paule decides to call on the teacher. The teacher and his wife Leone have one child, Jean-Pierre, first in all his school activities, a bright, clean, good-looking boy, all that Guillaume Sagouin is not. In spite of his wife's premonitions the teacher agrees to experiment with Guillaume. Paule credits herself with an initial triumph. The next day, by the force of threats, she takes her son, to his first lessons. For the first

time in his life the child experiences some measure of human warmth. The Brodas treat him gently and gradually succeed in getting some oral reading. They show him their own son's room and personal pictures of him, and trophies of his scholastic accomplishments. Cernès and loves Jean-Pierre whom he will never see. The initial success for Guillaume, though no one at home shares his secret joy, is usual, ridiculed and chased away when he attempts to describe himself. Robert Bordas is interested in the boy but he is more interested in his own life. He does not need his wife's persuasion to convince himself that he is true to his social credo and have nothing to do with the aristocratic family. His refusal reaches the château the following day. A bitter family quarrel. The *sagouin* hears his life and destiny debated. In violent language she nounces her husband and son and praises Bordas for being loyal to his beliefs. Galéas takes his son to the cemetery for a routine visit, the only one in the 12 year old's existence. Two interior monologues follow, one for the soul of *le Sagouin*, the other within the father. The bodies of father and son are found later in a nearby river. Their exact fate is left a mystery.

We are left to wonder whether the tragedy has ended in a death or a combination of mercy-killing and suicide, or a suicide and accident. Paule herself is moribund at the conclusion of the narrative, not from illness she does not experience, but from a malignant tumor. She has no fear of death after life. She does not believe in that invisible world where we share the fates of those beings who have been confided to us and who through their actions have been destroyed. Paule is glad to be rid of the whole Cernès family, not responsible, because no one is master of his own nausea, she feels. In her eyes the only inexplicable crime is her having married *le baron* in the first place.

The plot is one of stark simplicity. A child is tragically destroyed, unloved and misunderstood by these whose solemn duty was to love and stand.

Le Sagouin is indeed "another Mauriac." His readers recognize the types and familiar situations handled in a familiar way. The cruel, unhappy woman, the solitary, misunderstood priest, a loyal servant, a dull husband, a righteous, duty-doing grandmother, a household shattered by war, all these have their patterns in the earlier novel. An unusual feature is the choice of a child as the principal personage around whom the drama unfolds. Guillaume is the first child among Mauriac's novels. Abundant too are familiar fictional techniques and prose peculiarities. A shift of time planes, deftly wrought interior monologues, a minimal detail and physical description, and these always through the eyes of the characters themselves and never exploited for their own sake in the manner of Balzac whom Mauriac has called his chief influence among French novelists.

Le Sagouin is a work of art, but it is art with a human message. It is a reminder of the terrible responsibility that we all have not to violate the trust of those whose destiny is entrusted to us. This reminder is implicit in all of Mauriac's fiction. It is a theme he enunciates in his essays and journals again and again. Witness this dreadful challenge from the first volume of his *Journal*:

"You fancy yourself innocent. Then dare to call the roll of the living and the dead; to trace in each of these destinies. Have you not stolen the happiness of others? The faith, the hope, the purity of anyone? In truth no man has the right to give himself alone to this terrible game. No man can look himself innocent except on his knees, under the glance of God."

Many pages have been written by the critics in their attempt to decide whether Mauriac is a Catholic novelist or a Catholic and a novelist. In the terminology we may prefer, it is a fact that there is no explicit Catholicism in the novels and nowhere does Mauriac attempt to describe the mystery of Divine Grace in a soul. His proper province is the portrayal of human life.

hearts and stormy climates. He shows the necessity of Grace only by illustrating the lamentable and tragic consequences of its absence. Now and then in the world of Mauriac Catholics do appear but their Catholicism is severely castigated; it is a religion of the letter unformed by love, and this to Mauriac is one of the greatest of evils. There is no specific Catholic tenet or teaching set forth in the novel I have summarized, but the entire book demonstrates the frightening portions of human relations devoid of love. I know of no more pathetic scene in modern literature than the scene in *Le Sagouin* where Guillaume is forced by his mother to go to see the school teacher; this mother has no love for her child but merely wants to use him in her search for new experiences.

Le Sagouin can hear his mother and grandmother discussing his fate. His mother threatens him with the lycée or house of correction if he refuses to be tutored.

"So often had she threatened Guillou with them that he had a certain vague and terrifying idea of houses of correction. He began to tremble and moaned: No, mama! no, no . . . and he threw himself against Fraulein, his face in her soft bosom.

-Don't believe her, little one . . . Do you think that I shall let her . . .

-Fraulein has no voice in the chapter. And this time there is no joking. I have already made inquiries, I have some addresses, added Paule with a kind of joyous excitement.

What finally crushed the child was the old grandmother's burst of laughter:

-Daughter, why not put him in a sack? Why not throw him in the river like a kitten?

Crazed with terror he kept rubbing his face in his filthy handkerchief:

-No, mamie, no, not in a sack!

He had no feeling for irony, took everything literally.

-Little boob! said the baroness drawing him to her.

But she pushed him away.

-You don't know by which end to take him. What a sagouin! Take him, Fraulein. Go wash your face, go on . . .

His teeth were chattering:

-I'll go to the schoolteacher's, mama. I'll be good!

Paule's unnaturalness is eloquently brought out in another passage where Guillaume in the solitude of his room is reflecting on the events of the afternoon, his first lesson and his contact with the life and world of Jean-Pierre. Paule has ignored Guillaume completely, though he is overflowing with joy:

"Long after sleep had taken him, a smile still lit up that very old child's face with its hanging, moist lip, a smile at which his mother would have perhaps been astonished had she been one of those who come to tuck in bed and bless their sleeping little boy."

The responsibility of the teacher is the theme of a famous French novel of the late nineteenth-century. I am referring to *Le Disciple* of Paul Bourget. Bourget was concerned primarily with intellectual responsibilities. In *Le Sagouin* Francois Mauriac is concerned with more broadly human responsibilities. Robert Bordas, the teacher, holds a tremendous power for good. An opportunity to exercise that power is presented to him in the person of an unloved 12 year old boy. The teacher succeeds in making the boy read aloud as if no one were listening; he has accomplished the seemingly miraculous:

"He might have, he should have wondered at hearing that fervent voice of the child who passed for an idiot. He might have, he should have rejoiced at the task which was assigned to him, at the power that was his to save this tiny quivering creature. But he could hear the child only through his own tumult." Thereupon the teacher's own ideas, desires and ambitions come between him and the child, and he is blind to his capacities for good.

It is curious that the conclusion of the novel deals not with the mother who has failed, but with the teacher. It is a rainy afternoon. Robert Bordas, alone in his house, wanders into his son's room and picks up the very book from which he

sagouin had read to him that fateful afternoon:

"Guillou... the mind that was incubating in that wretched flesh, ah! how marvelous it would have been to help it burst forth! Perhaps it was for that that Robert Bordas had come into this world. At the Ecole normale one of the professors taught them etymologies: * institutes humanity in man; what a beautiful word. Other Guillou would be met on his way perhaps. Because of the child whom he had let die, he would refuse nothing of himself to those who would come toward him. But none of them would be that little boy who had died because M. Bordas had taken him in one evening and then cast him out with those stray puppies that we warm only for an instant. He had given him the darkness that would keep him forever. But was it really darkness? His gaze searches beyond things, beyond the walls and frontiers, the tiles of roof, and the milky night, the constellations of the winter, searches, searches for that kingdom of spirits whence perhaps the child eternally living beholds this man and on his cheek dark with beard, the tear that he neglects to wipe." In an essay on the nature of the novel written many years ago, M. claimed that in his fictional creations he was trying to portray the modern proportions of the pascalian theme: *la misère de l'homme sans Dieu*. This he has consistently tried to do. Too many of his critics and reviewers fail to realize that the novelist from Bordeaux, with his writing cheerful fiction has none the less succeeded very well in doing what he has proposed to do.

In a famous letter, André Gide annoyed Mauriac with the following remark: "Yours novels are less suited to bring sinners back to Christianity than to remind Christians that there is something else on earth besides heaven," Gide, of course, was taunting Mauriac, accusing him of a compromise with evil and of making sin attractive to his readers. But Gide's words lend themselves to another interpretation. M's novels do remind Christians that evil exists on this earth, and they warn us that we are capable of being transformed into beasts. If Mauriac's begotten monsters, they are monsters with a message, and the word monster must be taken in its most literal sense. It is good to remind men that they are not beasts but sometimes it is better to remind them that they are potential beasts. Such a reminder is especially desirable in an age that tends to deny fundamental truths. The serious reader of M. is reminded of man's dual nature, of the two laws that work within him, and of the real necessity of supernatural forces in human destinies.

In the literature of recent decades there is an excess of nausea, both physical and metaphysical, and an absence of hope. The important fact about Mauriac's world is that hope is not abandoned; on the contrary, when this French novelist leaves his creatures, they are looking into their hearts and souls, they are reaching for Grace. Evil is present in the world, but he implies so is hope, because only in a redeemed world. In a recent apology for his art, Mauriac humbly sums up his opinion of his personal contribution to the literature of France:

Peut-être n'ai-je été créé et placé dans ce petit canton de l'univers à l'époque où la Révolte est le thème sur lequel s'exerce le plus volontiers nos beaux esprits, que pour attester la culpabilité de l'homme devant l'innocence infinie de Dieu et, comme l'écrivait à propos de *Sagouin* R. Albères: "pour opposer à la littérature métaphysique où l'homme se plaint tout, une littérature psychologique où il ne se plaint que de lui-même."

Perhaps, at a time when Revolt is the theme on which contemporary writers most readily exercise themselves, perhaps I was created and placed in this small district of the universe only to bear witness to the guilt of man before the infinite innocence of God, and, as the critic Albères wrote concerning *le Sagouin* "to set in opposition to metaphysical literature in which man complains of everything, a psychological literature in which he complains only of himself."

**Instituteur* from *Institutor*, one who establishes, one who instructs, one who institutes.

THE
NINETEENTH
CENTURY
NOVEL:
THE EXAMPLE
OF
BALZAC
BY

JOE MURPHY, Ph.D.

Three weeks ago this evening we examined in outline and with some detail the literary vocation of the contemporary French novelist Francois Mauriac. The novelist whom I would bring to your attention this evening is still living in a very real sense, although he finished his mortal life a century ago. Honoré de Balzac, whose creative range has never been surpassed, has certainly survived himself in his work; he has lived on through changes in taste, and has come through the criticism, not always favorable, of several generations. The novels of Balzac are not gathering dust today in the necropolis of the never-read; all French readers know their Balzac; in the words of the latest of his commentators in France, "Balzac's characters of Goriot, Chabert, Grandet, or Birotteau are so vivid in the remembrance of French readers that they are used involuntarily as tests and types in our apprenticeship to life." Outside of France one or two at least of his great novels are always present in all-time favorite novel lists drawn up now and then by writers as well as critics.

The modern novel is very much a mirror of the modern world; it is the most ambitious of literary types. With no apparent frontiers, the novel resists, almost defies, definition. In France alone contemporary novelists are legion. A few years ago a compendious volume appeared bearing the title "The French Novel Since 1900"; in this enterprising enchiridion the courageous critic surveys the work of some 280 novelists whom he considers of the first and second orders. If Balzac is the father of modern French fiction, his progeny is numerous indeed; in spite of the fact that contemporary tendencies and techniques in French fiction are quite removed from the conventions that obtained a hundred years ago, the best, and some of the worst, of present-day French novelists all owe some debt to Balzac. More than Stendhal, certainly more than Flaubert, Balzac continues to exercise a profound influence on French practitioners of the craft of prose fiction. In his recent study, at once scholarly and popular entitled *The Contemporary French Novel*, Yale Professor Henri Peyre assesses in these words the present position of Balzac in France:

"Balzac's greatness is overpowering. The number and the quality of the books written about him between 1935 and 1950 exceed any other body of admiring criticism about any French writer. He has traversed most of the avenues which may tempt the modern novelist. Visionary novelists hail Balzac as their ancestor and master; so do several illuminists, occultists, and fervents of mystical correspondences. But Balzac is also the master of those who undertake to embrace in several volumes the social, economic, and sentimental life of a whole generation. Authors who attempt to create monstrous monomaniacs or to explore the world of financiers . . . or inventors . . . are easily called Balzacian. Francois Mauriac has confessed his admiration for Balzac; Proust was fascinated by him, and probably reoriented the course of his fictional epic out of admiration for the "Comédie humaine." Professor Peyre then adds that Balzac can have but few real imitators in the modern novel, simply because his genius is too enormous, too baffling and too exasperating to admit of emulation.

These prefatory remarks will, I trust convince you that Balzac is today a living novelist, a vital force in French fiction, and that our topic has not been exhumed from the dust-covered nether-world of forsaken library shelves.

It is not without some hesitation that I approach the subject of this lecture. It is a subject with which you are all already familiar in varying degrees, and a subject on which so much has been thought and written that it is almost impossible to think or to say something new. Let me give an illustration of what I mean: In 1829 Carlyle prefaced his famous essay on Voltaire with these words:

If we simply counted the books and scattered leaves, thick as the autumnal in Vallombrosa, that have been written and printed concerning this man (Voltaire), we might almost fancy him the most important person, not of the eighteenth century, but of all the centuries from Noah's flood downwards.

With a slight adjustment, Carlyle's words might well apply with greater reason

and with less exaggeration one hundred years later to the personality of Honoré de Balzac. For in 1929 the Balzac Bibliography by the American scholar W. Royce appeared with 4010 entries on Balzac and his work. And since 1929 a stream of studies on Balzac has flowed and swelled almost without interruption.

I feel that I could do worse this evening than begin by recalling to you something about the man before proceeding to comment on his work. For the facts and virtues, the qualities and defects of the work are all immanent in some measure in the man himself. Tremendous and prodigious, once such vigorously meaningful epithets, and now devitalized by Hollywood and Madison Avenue must remain the terms most frequently and inevitably applied to this man and his work. The Human Comedy in the proportions in which this Frenchman produced it could only be the product of a preternatural brain.

In the barest outline the important biographical facts about Balzac are these. He was born in Tours in 1799 and as a young man went to Paris. After a failed and half-hearted attempt to do his father's will and become a lawyer, he turned to writing and feverishly devoted the major portion of his life to literary activity. His habits of work resulted in a virtual claustrophobia from the world, a significant intrusion, however, must be mentioned. In 1832 he received a letter from the Polish countess Eve Hanska, who had read with wonder his novel *Peau de Chagrin*. After years of correspondence with this woman, who had signed her first letter, *L'Etrangère*, Balzac married her in March, 1850. The marriage survived the marriage by one month.

Over a twenty-year period the exuberant imagination of Balzac brought forth nearly one hundred novels; he averaged two thousand pages a year. It took Flaubert six years to write a single novel; consequently the author of *Madame Bovary* wrote comparatively very little. Balzac composed *Le père Goriot* (Goriot), probably his masterpiece, in less than six weeks. We read in a letter to Madame Hanska concerning this novel:

This work was done in forty days; during the forty days I slept only eight hours. But triumph I must!

Balzac worked consistently as much as sixteen hours a day. It is little wonder that the word prodigious is so often used to describe his life. Someone has said that Balzac worked on his novels like a maniac. In a simple room on the rue Cassini, he would go to bed shortly after a light supper and then get up at night to attack his work. He would always wear a white dressing gown and like the habit of a Dominican monk. The creator of the Human Comedy would interrupt his work only to fortify himself with generous doses of a carefully concocted coffee. In his *Treatise of Modern Stimulants*, Balzac himself has examined and romantically described the action of this beverage on his brain:

"This coffee falls into your stomach, and straightforward there is a great commotion. Ideas begin to move like the battalions of the Grand Army on a battlefield, and the battle takes place. Things remembered arrive full of ensign to the wind. The light cavalry of comparisons deliver a magnificent playing charge; the artillery of logic hurry up with their train and amaze the shafts of wit start up like sharp-shooters. Similes arise; the paper is covered with ink; for the struggle commences and is concluded with torrents of sweat and water, just as a battle with powder."

In the composition of his novels Balzac merged his own personality with that of the creatures his mind has begotten; the creation of his great characters is almost an exorcism. One of his many biographers has depicted, somewhat imaginatively, this fusion of Balzac with Old Goriot, especially in the later chapters of that novel:

He brought the old man's life to its close in the hot airlessness of midnight while without, a brooding storm refused to break. He actually spoke, a hallucination, Goriot's own language—he suffered and agonized with the old father. The next morning his servant found Balzac at the window exculpated.

the freshness of the world outside. The room was ink-spattered and strewn with papers. Balzac had triumphed.

What was the physical appearance of this man who produced a fictional planet inhabited by two thousand characters, many of whom appear in many different novels? He was an unattractive block of a man, giving the impression of the unfinished and the undisciplined. You are all acquainted no doubt with the thick-set proportions and the leonine head of the statue of Balzac by Rodin. The Romantic poet Lamartine, who knew Balzac, once included in a lecture this visually-appealing physical portrait of the novelist:

"His exterior was as uncultivated as his genius. It was the shape of an element: big head, hair scattered over his collar and cheeks like a mane that scissors never trimmed, lips thick; eyes soft but of flame; costume clashing with every elegance; clothes too small for his colossal body; waistcoat unbuttoned; linen coarse; blue stockings; shoes that made holes in the carpet; an appearance as of a schoolboy on holiday, who has grown during the year and whose stature has burst his garments. Such was the man that by himself wrote a whole library about his century, the Walter Scott of France, not the Walter Scott of landscape and adventure, but what is much more prodigious, the Walter Scott of characters, the Dante of the infinite circles of human life, the Moliere of read comedy, less perfect but more fertile than the Moliere of played comedy. Why does not his style equal his conception? France would then have two Moliere's and the greater would not be he who lived first."

In any lecture on Balzac it is almost a tradition, which I feel I must respect, to recount the famous incident involving Balzac and the playwright Jules Sandeau. The two writers were sitting in a café in Paris one afternoon in the early 1830's. Balzac's friend was asking questions about this and that, and finally inquired about the health of an ailing relative. Balzac's fat fist furiously hit the table as he exclaimed: "Revenons à la réalité! Qui va épouser Eugénie Grandet?" (Let's get back to reality! Who is going to marry Eugénie Grandet?) The reality that mattered to him was his Human Comedy, his own world, more real to him than the everyday world at his elbows. In Croce's words, it was a world altogether fantastic and marvelous. The young lady with whom he was concerned is Eugénie Grandet, the heroine of one of the early, great novels of Balzac's enterprise. In outline this novel might sound like just another sentimental novel, an idyll, the awakening of love in a maiden's heart, a dream, and the brutal shattering of that dream. But the novel is far more than just another sentimental novel. It is a powerful, pitiless study of a monster whose monomania is money and of the tyrannical rule of that miser's household. Nothing could be added to Balzac's presentation of Grandet, the miser. Here is but a single sentence from a portrait that runs for pages.

"Financially speaking, M. Grandet resembled the tiger and the boa: he could lie in waiting, crouch, study his prey for a long time, and jump on it; then he would open the mouth of his purse, swallow up a burden of coins, and lie quietly, like the digesting serpent, impassive, cold, methodical."

The Grandet novel properly belongs to the group called Scenes of provincial life. As you know, the Human Comedy is arranged in scenes and studies—scenes of private life, of provincial life, of Parisian life, of political, of military, of country life, philosophical studies and analytical studies.

The novel I would have you revisit with me in some detail is *Le Père Goriot*, the very heart of the Human Comedy. *Le Père Goriot* is generally considered the best possible introduction to the world which Balzac portrayed on paper. One reason is that so many re-appearing characters are included here. Rastignac, the young student, has a role in twenty-one other novels. Vautrin, Bianchon, and the Nucingen also appear significantly elsewhere.

Old Goriot (The best English rendering of the title) traces the gradual impoverishment of a fond father by his two daughters, married the one to a noble-

man, the other to a banker. When the husbands have received their dowry, they turn against their father-in-law, who is a plebeian. They refuse to see him unless in secret. In their grand and gilded surroundings the daughters lose the little filial affection they may have had, and shame their father's worship of them. If they visit him in the boarding-house which he has retired after selling his house to endow them more generously, solely to extract from him for their pleasures that portion of his wealth which he has retained for his own needs. And he never refuses them, but sells and at last he is reduced to lodging in the garret of the boarding house and almost the refuse from the table. Around the tragic central figure of the novel are grouped the fellow boarders of the pension Vauquer: Rastignac, a young law student with little money and aristocratic affiliations; Bianchon, a student who attends lectures and practises dissections; Victorine Taillefer, a rejected daughter of a guilty millionaire; Mademoiselle Michonneau, a spinster who ferrets out the identity of her fellow-boarder Vautrin, a criminal outlaw who has installed himself so safely in Madame Vauquer's pension.

Typical of Balzac's manner and method, approximately one-third of the novel is devoted to exposition. The presentation of the boarding-house is just what Balzac describes in remarkable detail the dismal district of Paris where the most light-hearted of passers-by are touched with melancholy. After a visit to the gloomy boarding-house quarter the Catacombs he comments his metaphor is a true comparison, for who can say which is the more horrible to look upon: a withered heart or an empty skull? He presents the shadowy street, the gloomy houses, the exterior of Madame Vauquer's boarding house, and by room we see the interior of this house in which the tragedy will be played. The parlor is brought before us in such vivid details that the reader can almost detect the boarding-house smell which the novelist has described. But in the depressing horrors the parlor is as elegant and fragrant as a boudoir in a palace. The dining room which adjoins it. The description of this district is among the most famous in fiction. Our time permits only a portion of the description in an English translation. After a lengthy catalogue of the contents of the room, Balzac intervenes:

"In order to explain in how great a degree this furniture is old, rotten, rickety, corroded, shabby, disabled, crippled, and ruinous, I am obliged to write a description that would diminish the interest of my readers, but that busy people could never forgive. The red floor is full of inequalities caused by the waxing and the various coats of paint. In short, here poverty reigns supreme—shabby, economical, concentrated poverty. If it has not yet reached a condition of positive filth, it is squalidly dirty; if there are absolute rags and tatters, everything will soon fall to pieces from rotting. The room is to be seen in all its glory just at the moment when, toward seven in the morning, Madame Vauquer's cat precedes her mistress and jumps on the sideboards, sniffs the milk that is contained in various bowls and saucers, and sets up her matutinal purr. The widow soon makes her appearance, attired in a tulle cap, underneath which hangs a mass of ill-adjusted hair. When she comes in shuffling in her slippers full of wrinkles. Her round elderly face, in which the salient feature is a nose, shaped like the beak of a parrot, her little hands, her person plump as a partridge, and her gown that hangs about her, are all in harmony with the room reeking with squalor and with the love of sordid gain, the close, warm air which she can breathe with disgust. Her face is as fresh as the first frost of autumn, and the expressive wrinkled eyes passes rapidly from the forced smile of an opera dancer to the scowl of a bill discounter; in short, her whole personality explains the boarding-house, as the boarding-house suggests her personality. The jail cannot exist without the jailer; you cannot imagine one without the other. The little woman's wholesome plumpness is the product of her life . . . Her knitted wool undercoat hangs below the outer one that is made from the stuff of an old gown."

through the rents of which the wadding is protruding; it sums up the parlor, dining room, and garden, announces the kitchen, and prepares us for the boarders."

Critics have complained that Balzac errs in giving so much detail in the long description of the boarding-house; they argue that these sad surroundings explain only the personality of Madame Vauquer who is merely a secondary character. But the boarding-house atmosphere is important, too, in that it forms the atmosphere of *Rastignac*, the law student. Structurally, the novel contains two principal plots—the plot of the decline and fall of Old Goriot, and concurrently, the rising plot involving *Rastignac*, the arriviste. As Goriot goes down, *Rastignac* rises. Aided and encouraged in his ambitions by the amoral advice of the cynical *Vautrin* (whom I once heard defined as a Mephistophélian existentialist), *Rastignac* is convinced that his adolescent idealism is no longer practical in Paris. The contrast between the luxury of Parisian society and the squalor of the boarding-house—as the young man shuttles between the two environments—this contrast plays a significant part in arousing *Rastignac*'s worldly ambitions and therefore contributes directly to his famous resolution, when after Goriot's wretched funeral he looks upon Paris and flings his proud challenge at the city, "a nous deux maintenant!" (Now the war is between the two of us!)

Balzac shows no mercy in his execution of the fall plot—the degradation of Goriot. In a series of hammer blows or turns of the screw he submits the poor father to torture upon torture in the descent from wealth and respectability through paroxysms of paternal passion to misery and death.

Le père Goriot is in a very real sense a tragedy. Balzac himself refused to call the work a fiction or a novel. He may have been consciously avoiding a word and a genre held in bad odor in the 1830's. The novel *was* at that time considered a low literary form and respectable people, particularly women, had to hide to read novels. At any rate Balzac addresses his readers in an early charge to insist that *Le père Goriot* is not a mere novel:

After having read the secret sorrows of Old Goriot, you will eat your dinner with a good appetite, laying your insensibility to the charge of the author, whom you will accuse of poetic exaggeration. But, believe me, this drama is neither fiction nor novel. It is all true, so true that each one of you may recognize its elements in his own family, perhaps in his own heart.

Le père Goriot is a tragic drama. Goriot falls from two causes: the first is a weakness, an inordinate love of his daughters, and as the inevitable correlative to this fatuous attachment, a total lack of respect for "the father in him." The lamentable proportions of this lack of respect are eloquently brought out in several scenes. Goriot has set up an apartment for *Rastignac* to receive Delphine; he furnishes the apartment for the young student on condition that he, Goriot, may have an attic room above, in order to be near his adored daughter. Delphine, *Rastignac*, and Goriot may then dine together. The scene is among the most painful in the whole *Human Comedy*:

"They behaved like children all through the evening, and old Goriot was not the least wild of the three. He sat at his daughter's feet and kissed them. He gazed long into her eyes, rubbed his head against her dress, and, in short, was as foolish as the youngest and most tender lover could be.

"You see," said Delphine to Eugène, "when my father is with us, I am obliged to give him all my attention. It will be a bore sometimes."

The second cause of the calamity is the ingratitude of Goriot's daughters, Delphine and Anastasie. The father has always satisfied every whim, every fancy of his children, who only exploit his misguided kindness all the more, and finally stride over his pauper's corpse while on their way to a ball. Readers who look for messages in fiction (and Balzac would not object for he conceived the role of novelist as a didactic or moralizing role, at least in part), such readers will find

an urgent lesson here—a lesson not without profit to twentieth-century parents who tend to think that any form of discipline or denial is unkind, old-fashioned and not in their children's interest. The great lesson of Goriot is this stern reminder: the ingratitude of children is often in proportion to the imprudent ease of affection which their parents have shown them.

Balzac reproduced on paper the Paris and the France of his time. He finds himself a historian recording the customs and the features of his age. He is, however, immortal as a social historian or as a scientific novelist, but rather a creator of universal types, inhabiting the planet he called the Human Comedy. Goriot is a universal type, so is Grandet, so are Birotteau, Claës, Hulot, and his cousinette Bette. They are gigantic abstractions, of paternal affection, avarice, ambition, the passion for discovery, debauchery, and jealousy; composite photographs, as it were, of all the concrete individuals who exhibit their particular temperament or vice or mania. The clarity and precision and convincing completeness with which Balzac draws these enormous types will probably never be surpassed. Their classicality seems assured.

There is much that is bad in Balzac. There are defects, perhaps serious defects in his work. He does not resist the temptation to intervene in his narrative; he intervenes too much, with the result that the illusion of reality is less sustained than it might be. And too often the interventions take the form of sententious maxims that are not very profound. It is true, too, and perhaps too true, that his pages are rife with the romanticism of melodrama. Chosen at random and you will surely find peeping through keyholes, or people moving about stealthily, an atmosphere of mystery and suspicion, dark passages, back stairways, unexpected meetings, overheard conversations, gambling, drug poisonings, substitutions, and dripping sentimentality.

And the superabundance of material detail, so frequent and so fatiguing, especially to the non-native-French reader, has lost Balzac the sympathy of a few. The plethora of furnishings in so many of the novels led one Frenchman to cry out against what he called "Balzacian bricabracology," and prompted Willa Cather to write an essay in protest against furniture in fiction. But Louis Stevenson loved Balzac but impatiently felt the urge to blue-pencil his excess of descriptive detail. In his Letters Stevenson regrets that Balzac is smothered under forcible-feeble detail. Henry James found this extravagance in detail a great and grave fault. The uncomplimentary testimony of many others could be adduced.

But Balzac could not not write the way he did; his teeming brain could not contain itself in the presence of physical details, and he was convinced, as any other novelist perhaps, that characters are determined and moulded by the material milieu in which they move. The accentuated predominance of descriptive detail does reinforce the illusion of reality, and the creation of this illusion is beyond question one of Balzac's preeminent virtues.

I mentioned earlier that Madame Hanska, the Polish countess, had been filled with wonder at Balzac's novel *La Peau de chagrin*. The French title translates as *The Skin of Bitterness*, but the English title is more literal. It is a talisman, a magic piece of a wild animal's skin. The possessor of this talisman may have his any wish satisfied, but with each wish the talisman shrinks. When it has shrunk into nothingness, the possessor's life will end. The possession of such a talisman makes for an intriguing and dramatic keeper.

I can still remember the pleasure of my first reading of *La Peau de chagrin* while an undergraduate at Toronto.

A young man, financially ruined and in despair, is looking at the river St. Lawrence waiting for darkness to descend and veil his suicide plunge. While waiting he wanders into an antique shop where he browses through rooms filled with the debris of 50 centuries.

Balzac's imagination erupts like a volcano before these marvelous ruins which he calls *gorgées de civilisation*. (trans.)

With a cascade of detail he describes each room and its relics—souvenirs of Egypt, India, Greece, and Rome, of Renaissance Italy, of American Indians and natives of Tahiti.

The descriptive art of Balzac so transfigures the antique shop, and so detaches the reader from this world that when a lean, little old man, with bright eyes in a pale, narrow face, steps forth to offer the young man the wonderful talisman, the reader's disbelief has been so effectively suspended that he, too, is tempted to reach forth his hand and accept the dreadful gift.

In passing I should remind you that there are some critics of literature who assume as their principal mission the discovery of defects in a work of art. Such critics have had no difficulty finding faults even in Homer and Dante, Shakespeare, Racine and Goethe. But is the absence of all defect an indispensable condition of genuine artistic grandeur? The eminent German critic of French literature, Ernst Robert Curtius, recalls to us that centuries ago, Longinus, in his famous Essay on the Sublime, asked the same question—a fundamental question indeed in any aesthetic criticism. Longinus concluded that great poets, such as Homer, Pindar, and Sophocles, carried away by what he called a "divine spirit," which they could not control as they would, often departed from strict perfection. The obvious fact, and this we may say of Balzac, is simply that grandeur with some defects is superior to perfect mediocrity.

There are at least two reasons why contemporary novelists no longer write novels à la Balzac, in which a type or character is presented as the incarnation of a dominating passion. To begin with, Balzac succeeded so well that any imitation of him seems doomed to frustration. In a curious piece of criticism, T. S. Eliot once proclaimed that Keats had to write lyric poetry because the inimitable greatness of Shakespeare and Milton made it impossible for Keats to write dramatic or epic poetry of real worth. Great writers, Eliot argued, exhaust the literary forms in which they write. If this is true, then after Balzac, the great synthetic novel of character is simply impossible.

In the second place, modern novelists, especially the French, with a debt to Stendhal, Dostoevski, and Proust, tend to be analysts rather than synthesists. In the best of modern fiction, man is probed and studied not as a simple, coherent, logically consistent subject—easy of exposition and explanation, but rather as a highly complex, indeterminate, often chaotic creature, resisting facile definition but inviting limitless investigation.

The honest critic should not seek his touch stone outside the work of art under his consideration. Before we condemn Balzac as shallow, over-simple in his psychology, and naive, we must be careful not to judge or classify him by current standards or trends in fiction, or by the achievements of other novelists. We need only remember that in the house of fiction there are many mansions; Balzac's is a high and splendid mansion and he seems destined to be its permanent tenant.

There are three words in French which have been applied to people who read novels: these words are *lecteur*, *civeur*, and *liseur*. The *lecteur* is the reader who reads hastily and remains on the surface of the pages before him; the *civeur* is the person who lives what he reads, whose life and destiny are profoundly affected and changed by what he reads; this is a dangerous category, depending on the choice of novels, and includes such illustrious novel readers as Don Quixote and Emma Bovary. The middle class are the *liseurs*; the *liseur* is he for whom the world of novels exists; he knows the ineffable magic that lies in the rereading of good books, for with each new reading a good book releases more of its magic and more of its meaning. If as a result of my remarks some of you become *liseurs* and are led to read or better still to reread some Balzac and thereby discover some new magic in his pages, then and only then may I feel with any justice that I have not been totally inadequate to my task.

A VISION
OF THE SOUTH

BY
MICHAEL J. TORMA

There are two phantom ships sailing
On sea-cold washes of time.
The one's sails are filled and strained
By the driving fist of eternity
Toward a distant and cleared
Horizon, where the stars are
Heroes of justice and the
Moon is the throne of God.
This ship moves like a queen,
Her wake a silver-white train of
Wrinkled lace sewn for an instant
To the fabric of the ocean.
The other ship too is yet a noble lady,
But for her there is no silky-patterned
Afterthought of royal hue. Such luxuries
Need motion to sustain them, and though
Her sails are stiffened,
'Tis only the vapors of an already-spent
Era that fills them: she lies heavy
In her timbers and lacks a freshening breeze.

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