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**FIRST**

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**STATEMENT**

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IRVING LAYTON

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ENIGMA—

JOHN B. SQUIRE

**ARTICLES CRITICISM & REVIEWS**

JUNE & JULY

VOL. 3, NO. 1.

**CANADIAN PROSE & POETRY**

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# FIRST STATEMENT

VOL. 3 NO. 1

JUNE—JULY 1945

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# Portrait of the Poet as a Nobody

—A.M. KLEIN

## I

Not an editorial-writer, bereaved with bartlett,  
mourns him, the shelved Lycidas.  
No actress squeezes a glycerine tear for him.  
The radio broadcast lets his passing pass.  
And with the police, no record. Nobody, it appears,  
either under his real name or his alias,  
missed him enough to report.

It is possible that he is dead and not discovered.  
It is possible that he can be found some place  
in a narrow closet, like the corpse in a detective story,  
standing, his eyes staring, and ready to fall on his face.  
It is also possible that he is alive  
and amnesiac, or mad, or in retired disgrace,  
or beyond recognition lost in love.

We are sure only that from our real society  
he has disappeared; he simply does not count,  
except in the pullulation of vital statistics —  
somebody's vote, perhaps, an anonymous taunt  
of the Gallup poll, a dot in a government table —  
but not felt, and certainly far from eminent —  
in a shouting mob, somebody's sigh.

O, he who unrolled our cultures from his scroll —  
the prince's quote, the rostrum-rounding roar  
who under one name made articulate  
heaven, and under another the seven-circled air  
is, if he is at all, a number, an x,  
a Mr. Smith in a hotel register,  
a being incognito and lacunal.

## II

The truth is he's not dead, but only ignored —  
like the mirroring lenses forgotten on a brow  
that shine with the guilt of their unnoticed worlds.  
The truth is he lives among neighbours, who though they will allow  
him a passable fellow, do think him eccentric, not solid,  
a type that one can forgive, and for that matter, forego.

Himself he has his moods, just like a poet.  
Sometimes, depressed to nadir, he will think all lost,  
will see himself as throwback, relict, freak,  
his mother's miscarriage, his great-grandfather's ghost,  
and he will curse his quintuplet senses, and their tutors  
in whom he put, as he should not have put, his trust.

Then he will remember his travels over that body —  
the torso verb, the beautiful face of the noun,  
and all those shaped and warm auxiliaries!  
A first love it was, the recognition of his own:  
O limbs adverbial, complexion of adjective,  
dimple and dip of conjugation!

And then remember how this made a change in him  
affecting for always the glow and growth of his being;  
how suddenly was aware of the air, like shaken tinfoil,  
of the patents of nature, the shock of belated seeing,  
the lonelinesses peering from the eyes of crowds;  
the integers of thought; the cube-roots of feeling.

Thus, zoomed to zenith, sometimes he hopes again,  
and sees himself as a character, with a rehearsed role:  
the Count of Monte Cristo, come for his revenges;  
the unsuspected heir, with papers; the risen soul;  
or the chloroformed prince awaking from his flowers;  
or — deflated again — the convict on parole.

## III

However, for bread and the occasional show,  
he finds him, kindler of copy, daily at desk.

For mongers and martmen he swinks it, writing  
their war-whoops, hailing their heroes, thrust to his task:

*Pirouette, pica; triumph, O twelve-point!*

*Throw the sword in the scales, proud asterisk!*

Skop of the sales-force, bard of their booty, he offers  
to shoddy his shrilling, his gusto for gussets, to zippers his zest.  
With housewives he's homey, and pally with paters, a kinsman,  
a con man, he butters his bosses, he jumps at their jests.  
A fighter with fables he is, and a queller with questions,  
chapman of chattels, hawker at hest.

## IV

He is alone; yet not completely alone.

Pins on a map of a colour similar to his,  
each city has one, sometimes more than one:

here, caretakers of art, in colleges;

in offices, there, with arm-bands, and green-shaded;

and there, pounding their catalogued beats in libraries, —

everywhere menial, a shadow's shadow.

And always for their egos — their outmoded art.

O, having lost the bevel in the ear,

they know neither up nor down, mistake the part

for the whole, curl themselves in a comma,

talk technics, make a colon their eyes. They distort —

such is the pain of their frustration — truth

to something convolute and cerebral.

How they do fear the slap of the flat of the platitude!

Now Pavlov's victims, their mouths water at bell,

the platter empty.

See they set twenty-one jewels  
into their watches; the time they do not tell!

Some, patagonian in their own esteem,

and longing for the multiplying word,

join party and wear pins, now have a message,

an ear, and the convention-hall's regard.

Upon the knees of ventriloquists, they own,

of their dandled brightness, only the paint and board.

And some go mystical, and some go mad.  
 One stares at a mirror all day long, as if  
 to recognize himself; another courts  
 angels, — for here he does not fear rebuff,  
 and a third, alone, and sick with sex, and rapt,  
 doodles him symbols convex and concave.

O schizoid solitudes! O purities  
 curdling upon themselves! Who live for themselves,  
 or for each other, but for nobody else,  
 desire affection, private and public loves,  
 are friendly, and then quarrel and surmise  
 the secret perversions of each other's lives.

## V

He suspects that something has happened, a law  
 been passed, a nightmare ordered. Set apart,  
 he finds himself, with special haircut and dress,  
 upon the reservation introvert.

And he does not understand it, and is full  
 of a sad conjecture, muscling in his heart.

He thinks an impostor, having studied his personal biography,  
 his gestures, his moods, now has come forward to pose  
 in the shivering vacuums his absence leaves.

O wigged with his laurel, that other, and faked with his face,  
 he pats the heads of his children, pecks his wife,  
 and is at home, and slippered, in his house.

So he guesses at the impertinent silhouette  
 that talks to his phone-piece and slits open his mail.

Is it the local tycoon who for a hobby  
 plays poet, he so epical in steel?

The orator, making a pause? Or is that man  
 he who blows his flash of brass in the jittering hall?

Or is he cuckolded by the troubadour  
 rich and successful out of celluloid?

Or by the don who unrhymes atoms? Or  
 the chemist death built up? O lost impostor'd pride,  
 it is another, another, whoever he is,  
 who rides where he should ride.

## VI

Fame, the adrenalin: to be talked about,  
 to be a verb; to be introduced as *The*:  
 to smile with endorsement from slick paper; make  
 caprices anecdotal; to nod to the world; to see  
 one's name like a song upon the marquees played;  
 to be forgotten with embarrassment; to be —  
 to be.

It has its attractions, but is not the thing;  
 Nor is it the ape mimesis who speaks from the tree  
 ancestral; nor the merkin joy.  
 Rather it is stark infelicity  
 which stirs him from his sleep, undressed, asleep  
 to walk upon roofs and window-sills and defy  
 the gape of gravity.

## VII

Therefore he seeds illusions. Look, he is  
 the  $n^{\text{th}}$  Adam taking a green inventory  
 in world but scarcely uttered, naming, praising,  
 the flowering fiats in the meadow, the  
 syllabled fur, stars aspirate, the pollen  
 whose sweet collision sounds eternally.  
 For to praise

the world — he, solitary man — is breath  
 to him. Until it has been praised, that part  
 has not been lived. O item by exciting item —  
 air to his lungs, and pressured blood to his heart. —  
 they are pulsated and breathed until they map,  
 not the world's, but his own body's chart!

And now in imagination he has climbed  
 another planet, the better to look  
 with single camera view upon the earth —  
 its total scope, its synthesis olympic,  
 fields where no negatives can live — and this,  
 this he would like to write down in a book!

To find a new function for the declass  craft  
archaic like the fletcher's; to make a new thing;  
to say the word that will become sixth sense;  
perhaps by necessity and indirection bring  
new form to life, anonymously, new creeds —  
O, somehow pay back the daily larcenies of the lung!

These are not mean ambitions. It is already something  
merely to entertain them. Meanwhile, he  
makes of his status as zero a rich garland,  
a halo of his anonymity,  
and lives alone, and in his secret shines  
like phosphorus. At the bottom of the sea.

## Shore Leave

— R. G. SIMPSON

Drift, and the sea drying, for days, on our faces. Fine white  
grit stinging sticky on the eyes. Wind whipped in our bellows-  
cheeks, drawing our breath and twisting the sea-dipped clouds  
Tumult of water, blue and white; sharp colours and sharp edges,  
held for a moment in the focus of a scuttle, like chips of purbeck  
marble; then away in a mad, oblique, soul-tearing, bowel-drawing  
picture of motion and the rushing, drifting world. Nothing else  
for days, watch on, watch off, for days and weeks.

Then the clouds, curled sleeping on the skyline, grow restive  
as we close, part slowly, like a tragic curtain, and leave a cliff,

a lighthouse, a few grey shanties, and the promise of a port beyond. An unspoken excitement grips the ship; activity and quick, careful dressing. And at last the unfamiliar quiet of the still engines. This, and the wharfs and warehouses, and the streets behind them, and their promise of pleasure . . . this, and the shrill of the bosun's pipe, and inspection while a boat grates impatiently alongside . . . all this is the long-awaited invitation to visit the world of our forgotten selves.

We perform the traditional rites of bondage. Then a tired, young officer, with the marks of sleeplessness at his eyes and mouth, nods. Someone bellows the carry-on. We scamper over the side, and in a flash of wake we are free, away from the orders and the cramped quarters and the bulkheads and the steel decks; away from the smell of boiling food and steam and the too familiar faces. We are heading for the jetty, and a world of our own desire. Feet on dry land, and head in free air. Here, where the streets twist in the twilight, and the gas-lamps splutter, where the shadows creep across the windows, and blinds are drawn, and doors open to a distant clatter of voices; here, where there is the thrill of strange people and strange things, there is adventure and romance. New streets to follow, new lights to explore, new sounds to identify. And always there is the dark rich inviting laughter of a woman.

So now, Icarus, where will you fly?

Gotta plan a campaign, says Tug. Gotta weigh the possibilities. Gotta do this and that, with the ingrained necessity. So three wait upon the jetty to consider the future in their judiciating palms.

A show, a beer . . . or a woman. There's a dance at the hut; always women at the canteen. But such dutiful women, full of patriotism and fervor and the quiet acceptance of their self-sacrifice. Make the boys anything but happy; full of modesty and righteousness. But there's a place on the corner by the church . . .

No no no. Not to pay money to a fat old hag to find yourself in a dirty bed with a tired, drab body and the smell of sweat. Never that. You want the moonlight and the soft rustle of trees, the soft springy grass beneath you, and someone there who is clean and soft and warm, and whose laughter drops like water into a deep pool. And afterwards you'll go inside and drink a mysterious foreign wine, and listen to Debussy and Chopin and

the Rachmaninoff Concerto. And at last you'll say good-night, and she'll smile, and there'll be a warm loving languor in her eyes, and she'll be sweet and soft in your arms and you know you'll come back and she'll be there waiting.

Yes, that's what you want. So we gotta plan a campaign, says Tug. We gotta figure this out. Only eight o'clock; four full hours to go. Four full hours of a lifetime and a destiny. So have a beer and figure it out. Yeah, says Tug. Have a beer and plan a campaign.

So saunter through the twisted darkening streets, past the still buildings and the empty ruins and the long, purple shadows of the summer night, and stop at last at the ancient sign of the Red Lion. Three crusading knights, about to do battle with the monster, wheel and charge with lancing arms the swinging lattice door. Sir Galahads, maybe, questing the Grail; or only Don Quixotes. Who can tell Icarus where he will fly?

The door swings shut on the evening coolness. You are there now with the cough and the cackle, with the brassy faces, with the smell of beer and stale breath and the faint pungence of urine. You are there with the moist marble counter and the wet rims that glasses make on the scarred wooden tables. So buy drinks and sit down. Slip your cap back, for this is freedom. Sip once and join the chatter. Say something. Wipe the froth from your lips with the back of your hand. Light a cigarette, sip again, lean back. Plan a campaign; yes, but look at that baggage by the door. Neat trick, that. Yes, but plan a campaign. Have another beer.

Too easy to grow with the prevailing temper; too easy to talk and settle what will never be settled, live the past again with greater heroism and greater wisdom. Too easy to buy beer, and feel the froth tickling and light on your lips, and the cold and bitter liquid tipping into your mouth. Too easy to think about the baggage by the door without her shield of skirt and sweater. Too easy to wonder and forget, to sit back and drink, smoke and talk, to join the easy laughter of the room. Smokey getting friendly with the buxom young barmaid, and Tug planning new campaigns every minute, and drawing his finger through a puddle of beer on the table to register concentration.

Figuring on the one by the door, and Tug telling you how, and telling you to get cracking and act quick. For already a

pigeon with glass eyes and a putty face is talking to her and raising his drink. Oh pigeon, you bird of augury, with your entrails torn in war, interred in the scientific temple where the priestly Sivorski, in flowing, flying robes, prognosticates your future greatness. Fly high, pigeon, for your need is greater. Holding her hand and looking intent, drain her smile with the beer. Finish it and turn together towards the door; push it open and let it fall closed behind you. But, damn. Oh damn, she's gone. Oh pigeon, she's gone, you bird of prey.

And Tug's hot grey eyes spell treason. Too slow, he says; you gotta get cracking. So have another beer, and plan a campaign. And what about the one just come in, he says. How's that, eh, he says. I'll tell you what to do.

But no. Christ. Beer on her lips and her breath hot. No exotic bouquet of foreign nectars; no stars and moon and the soft whisper of grass and trees; no plaintive night songs and the cry of a neglected heart. Remember Dilsey, somehow, sitting behind the big black piano, her throat soft and white, and the candle-light gleaming on her hair. No need to campaign there; she would be waiting, and her breath would be warm, but sweet with invitation and acquiescence.

Then Smokey comes from the marble counter with three beers in his hand and a grin on his face. Last round, he says. And the buxom barmaid is shouting: time please, time please, gentlemen. And Smokey says for us to go on without him. A little unfinished business, his grin says. So you tell him how lucky he is, and drink the beer, and with Tug swearing, you go out.

The night is cool and sharp smelling in the darkness. There is murmur of traffic over the roof-tops. The deep caverns of streets hollow the vagrant. Feet on cobbles turn cold and clangy, beat against walls and shudder the windows. No light in the lattices of secret rooms. Only the darkness, and the dankness of the sea creeping from cellars and coiling in drains. Only this, and the silent square and the post office with the glowing clock in its tower.

Ten-thirty.

Leave more than half gone. Icarus, where will you fly?

Wotta town, Tug says. Dead at ten o'clock. The pubs closed, the theatres empty. We turn to a strange street, sloping to the

harbour. It is shambly with old houses and the gloomy bulk of storage buildings. Christ, Tug says, there's nothing here.

But then a voice, a whisper from the darkness. The spine tingles. Is this adventure; is this the awaited romance? Black night, and the damp puff of wind from the sea. We stop in doubt, in apprehension, even in excitement. Then the voice again, a little hoarse, a little luring, a little thin and false. Hello, dearie.

In a doorway, deep in shadow, leaning against the wall is a woman, curved and sinuous as the mist. The gusts play at the hem of her short and flimsy skirt. Her arms are folded across her breast, guarding against the cold. Her pale face is luminous in the doorway. We can see her smile. Wanta come with me, sailor, she says.

Tug takes a step forward and looks at you. There is an ugly look on his face. A new campaign, already planned. Go ahead, you say; I'm going back. Turn quickly and run, almost, back to the deserted square, with each breath coming hard and a pain in your throat. Escape, you keep repeating. Escape, escape . . .

Think of something; think of Dilsey. And stop shaking. Yes, think of Dilsey, warm and loving Dilsey; sweet, clean and tender Dilsey. Pregnant now, and a thousand miles away. The lovely mother of your child. God. To escape the tortuous, sinuous night; to escape the coiling mist and the misty evil, the lurking tiger in dank streets. To escape the evil and the darkness.

There's a boat at eleven. Just time yet. Along the High Street and through the arch, and there's the jetty. Expanse of planed timber, clean and smooth, with lights and the fresh sea wind and spray. No refuse, and no coiling smells of evil.

Oh traveller! Oh Icarus! Thus in Italy we see the churches, dreamed silver in the moonlight and golden at noon, see them cracked and tumbling, disused and uncared for, covered in dust. And in Greece, the ancient temples, with the beauty of mercury, seem nothing but blocks of stone strewn over a tangled plain. And so forever are your hopes. Better to remember what you already know.

Dilsey, and the jetty and the sea. Drift, and the sea drying on our faces. Fine white grit stinging sticky on the eyes. Remember that.

And at last the boat.

# HOME

It is any hour of Thursday now at home,  
 The circling shades of morning are turning lightly;  
 The glaze of summer, shuttling familiar streets,  
 Dresses the outer, temperate city, neatly.

This ship, leaving the Celebes, the arching windy savannahs,  
 Floats in the tick of clocks to the clock's stop.  
 A gulf of iron Spring, a flowering green emblem,  
 Streams from the sea where dolphins leap and drop.

White sea birds float, then leap through surging booms  
 Their acrobatic sweeps and impulsive turns.  
 The naval gunners at their Bofors yawn, and dream  
 In phosphorous waves, where a great female dives and burns.

It is any year in New York's febrile fancies  
 With private dancers stumbling through the fogs,  
 As silk grooved avenues, concentric toward a flare  
 Of electrical trickery, bark with neon dogs.

Dull, drab, the curving coastal scarps  
 Of New Guinea's hot eternity come to view.  
 A week's gin junket in Sydney's jaded sun  
 Will temporize the vagaries of the crew.

It is any dream of a room and house you know,  
 Deep in the city's steel, personal mime.  
 A phonograph recording Purcell — O Dido's Lament!  
 There's the horn's alert. This is not the time.

— HARRY . ROSKOLENKO

## The Mask of the Heart

Silence is a gap, dividing nature from the heart,  
 Dividing the bee from its oversweet honey,  
 Taking the running rivers never to the running sea,  
 The land without Spring or snow or season of rain.

It is the open mouth, saying to the furious air  
 That the world has closed us into its city of sadness,  
 It has made the valleys into mountains, from mountains mere hills;  
 The place of the heart is among hawks and roofless towers.

The classical emblem is the pale, sick, fugitive face,  
 Combed in the agate eyes as a mummer of misery.

But if the body is stout, the bones broad, the muscles big,  
 How does the mask wear its outer sympathy.

HARRY ROSKOLENKO

## The Saviour

Even before the crusted moon  
 Drops boulders to the quarried sea  
 Men hide their faces. Points of voices  
 Heard at night, gathered without fires.  
 Sometimes the voices sing,

One, once a shepherd on these  
 Carbon hills, so loved His goat  
 He made a coat from the bombed hide—  
 The horns tear wind before His eyes.  
 Between split cartridges He sits  
 On charred bones. All listen to Him.  
 Listen on the broken streets,  
 Crouched under tin in the caves  
 Of the alive Above the din of walls  
 His voice is young, is young.

—GEORGE LEITE

## Seagulls

He lay on her island basking,  
 thought or felt something like a drop of water  
 descending, rose on his wings  
 and came down. Was she asleep.  
 He stretched like the ocean,  
 became a gull lost in the horizontal distance.  
 A noise. They awoke. Beating of wings,  
 slapping of thighs shook the air.  
 An eye opened in the sky,  
 round and white, warming the pellets on the clouds.  
 He raised his hand to the sun,  
     felt the wind suddenly blow  
 more and more around his ears and in the hollows of his throat.  
 Then a blast struck them together  
 as they lay on the sand, hit them again and again.  
 They hid by a rowboat;  
 lay still for an hour at the white side of it,  
     listening to the sun crackle on the grains.

—LOUIS DUDEK

## Enigma

—JOHN B. SQUIRE

We are concerned here with a lost generation of readers. They  
 were not banished or cheated or starved but self-exiled — cons-  
 cientious objectors to a literature they accuse of apostasy. Had  
 they been alive at the opening of the nineteenth century, they  
 would have read Goethe, Byron and Scott. Alive, and in England  
 with Chaucer, they would have read the Tales; or, with Spenser,  
 the Fairie Queene. But modern literature repels them. Joyce, Eliot,  
 Yeats, Proust, Rimbaud, Valery, even Mann, they find unreadable;  
 our greatest contemporary writers in prose and verse have, they  
 allege, gone off the deep end, courting obscurity, complexity,  
 experiment for its own sake, introversion, and a thousand other  
 ills of the written word, creating an arid wasteland, where eyes  
 burn and senses reel. Many of the group have, in disgust, picked  
 up the second-rate novel or the pitifully prosy poem; certain  
 others, saying "to hell with you" to the modern greats, have sought

refreshment at the wells of the past, re-discovering "Urn Burial", the "Apologia", and "The Drapier's Letters".

Now, our purpose is a simple one: it is to search out some of the reasons for this breach between reader and writer by finding out why modern literature is what it is; and to attempt to win back to what is great in the present a few of those who, in disgust or weariness, have fled to the comfortably mediocre, or to the past, propelled in that direction less by sympathy than by confusion.

The relation of creative effort and literature to the period in which it struggles for recognition is subtle, simple, profound and confusing; it leads that period, and is led by it; it is a cause *and* a reaction. Authors and their works are the spiritual derivatives of their age, not emanations of interstellar space. Each period has its peculiar cultural climate, with native problems, tempos and stresses. The insights, atavisms, limitations, prejudices (what you will), that determine just what a given period is, also, by the same token, set the confines of the dramatic, the humorous and the noble; and decide what are significant truths and what are merely platitudes. Ibsen's Nora and Oswald are no longer the dramatic figures they once were — to the future they may appear as high comedy; and the village idiot, now the subject of serious concern, once appeared in literature as a figure of fun. The historical complex, then, sets forth the essence of the relevant material from which are created the Canterbury Tales in the 14th century, Parsifal in the 19th, and Ulysses in the 20th; it also defines and determines just which creative natures will, in their spiritual struggles, come closest to human problems at a given time.

Now Goethe, Shakespeare, Mann and Joyce are examples of artists whose creative efforts and material are both deeply significant for their time; Gerard Manley Hopkins and Joseph Conrad are examples of artists whose creative efforts and techniques are deeper expressions of their time than their material is; and John Dos Passos represents those whose material has more significance and relevancy than their efforts to mould it.

Singular and intimate is the bond between the writer and the real world about him. In eighteenth century England and Germany this bond was direct, and expressive of mutually respected values: Johnson and Lessing are remembered chiefly as critics and evaluators, heightening and clarifying a culture known and accepted. But in the nineteenth century, with the coming of the bourgeois economic and social revolution, certain traditional cultural and religious values were questioned; and men, seeking a spiritual

lead for a civilization still dear to them, despised or idolized (according to their special beliefs) Ibsen, Dostoievsky and Wagner; responded fervently or remained oblivious to the preachings of Carlyle, Nietzsche and Emerson. Values had been upset and western man sought a lead from the highest representatives of the culture that had established his spiritual superiority in the world. Artists and thinkers, sharing his feelings and concern, tried to give that lead.

Questioned values and social unrest turned, with the coming of the twentieth century, into ideological conflicts and militant social divisions. The artist, once the creator of a stable and integrated culture's highest conceptions, then prophet or Judas to a disturbed humanity, eventually was forced into a position of isolation, there to patch together a mythology of his own: he became the more suspect, precisely because he was a symbol of culture, because he did have a culture of his own (even though it was incommunicable), when the bourgeois saw their world crumbling. The "practical" bourgeois, who never could bring themselves to take the artist seriously, thinking of him as an appendage to their commercial system, were quick to accuse *him* of being the diseased one; of spreading, like Socrates, defection among the young.

Christianity, material progress, social distinctions, the property concept, home, family, marriage — nearly every pillar upon which the bourgeois culture rested, suffered bitter criticism as the direction in which that culture pointed inspired men with fear and loathing. The findings of psychoanalysis, the re-reading of history, World War I, fascism, the bolshevik revolution, the depression, the propaganda of the left and of the right — this mad historical jumble in the twentieth century, served only to turn confusion and conflict into utter chaos. "Classes" among men struggled to achieve a wretched, narrow unity; the old community of feeling disintegrated and split into disparate dogmas and their attendant fanatics. Into the mud went those symbols, values, feelings, associations, which once made possible a profound and subtle cultural communion. Not only the artist was isolated and put on the defensive: in this world without goals or direction, worker hated capitalist, farmers hated both, and their separate worlds met only on the commercial battlefield.

Into all this, then, has the modern writer been born. Flaubert,

in the last century, faced with the "so ultra-vulgar . . . ultra-repugnant" bourgeois life of his time, chose to depict that vulgarity because it *did* repel him; and, depicting it, showing it up, he was forced the more into isolation. To portray this world about him, to be an artist in his time, Flaubert declared that it was necessary to forsake religion, politics and the fatherland; and, to this end, he isolated himself in the Provinces, in Croisset, as effectively as Proust did later in a cork-sealed room. To have continued the literary tradition of the past would have meant literary suicide in this new period of unrest. Besides the spiritual confusion, the writer was faced with a new problem; the break-up of society into warring social and ideological groups, meant the disintegration of the reading public. If he had continued to write traditionally, within the old cultural conceptions, his work would have been labelled "escapist", or "pornographic", or "decadent", or leftist," or "cynical", depending on the allegiance of the reader. There was only one alternative, and, in one form or another, it has been adopted by all the major modern writers: that is, to write for oneself, for the sake of one's art and for a sympathetic group of readers.

Only thus could the writer's art be exempted from the duty of having "values" in a world where, to have "values", meant to be involved in a most wretched and suffocating brawl. Only thus could literature live on during a period when it had no outer, social recognition, no distinct cultural place. Already, in the middle of the last century, Flaubert had said that the "morality of art consists in its beauty, and I value style even above truth." Art for itself, beginning as little more than a personal attitude, a faint encouragement in a hostile world, eventually came to mean the construction by each writer of a world of his own: a world of his own values, techniques and materials. These techniques became known, generally, as Symbolism.

Symbols have always played an important part in literary expression — as essences of feelings or facts common to reader and writer, heightening the art of communication. Symbolism as a literary movement, the outward, communicative aspect of the need to construct a distinctly *personal* literary world, has been defined by Edmund Wilson as "an attempt by carefully studied means . . . to communicate unique personal feelings." Another very limited definition has placed Symbolism as a second Romantic reaction — the first having been, of course, the reaction to eighteenth

century classicism, Symbolism the reaction to nineteenth century naturalism. These definitions, besides being over-simplified, ignore the negation of value, the isolation from the reading public, and the use of linguistic technique to beg the question of morals. Symbolism remains one technique among many used by contemporary artists to create a personal world.

In passing, it is interesting to note that the origins of Symbolism were in America, and that music has contributed heavily to Symbolist history. Poe's critical writings and stories, translated into the French by Baudelaire, gave Symbolism its first principles, which Mallarme and others were to carry forward. And with the symbolist Wagner, romantic music came closer to, and employed more of the effects of literature than ever before — and this at a time when literature (especially poetry) was most sensitive, on its side, to influences from music, as writers abandoned meaning and clarity for essentially musical virtues — mood, sound, imagery, mystery, imprecision in the best sense.

Throughout the whole of modern literature, then, runs this intense personal quality. But the isolation of the artist during this period has falsely convinced many that his work, as a result, has reached a peak in "individualism". The manipulation of parallels between antiquity and contemporaneity; the use in literature of the "typical" character, representative of a certain class or tendency or movement; the leitmotif and legend in music — such techniques and subject matter illustrate the fact that, while the artist was withdrawing himself from personal contact and involvement with the world, he was also employing its deepest conflicts and satisfying its deepest yearnings. Literary critics, in discussions of the novels of Dickens, Hardy, Dostoievski, Goethe, Tolstoy, Hugo, spend little time over their "meaning" for their age, their spiritual significance in the world of their time (except to "place" them historically), but turn most of their attention to the internal problems the works present, or to their significance in the history of literature. The atomic, individualistic novel of the past was not the spiritual confession of its time: confession presupposes conflicts of the kind that did not attain intensity until the 20th century. If they were confessions, then they were personal ones such as "Wilhelm Meister". But "Buddenbrooks", "The Magic Mountain", "Ulysses", "Remembrance of Things Past", are the spiritual confessions of our time, symbols of the plight of our world, as well as being great fictional creations.

An illustration can be borrowed from the life of Marx. Retiring to the seclusion of the British Museum, Marx wrote a colossus of what first appeared to be objective economics — factual, pitilessly real. It is now realized that he wrote a political creed for a hopeless, confused class of people who had renounced their faith in the conceptions that had previously ruled their life; that to do this he had to not only come to grips with the startling industrial picture he unearthed in the Museum (and not by factory experience), but also forge the “uncreated conscience” of the “working class” in a politico-economic sense; and, in turn, to do this he had to concern himself with the broad sweep of events and forces in the world, and to evoke, in a certain sense, the very things he was trying to describe. Few written works have had greater practical significance for the world; and few works have been written in such isolation from that world.

Literature has, then, in a sense, become the “literatures” of the writers concerned; and those separate creations have appealed to a more or less well-defined segment of the reading public. This block of readers, in order to be appreciative, has had to make a serious study of “its” writer or group of writers: a study of the special values, symbols, linguistic techniques, thought processes and knowledge involved. In addition, a knowledge of the personal life of the writer has become almost indispensable to the proper understanding of his work, due to the isolation of the artist and all that that fact means. Such studies, it may be alleged, have always been inseparable from true literary appreciation. This is true. But never have they been so imperative as they are now; never has literature *demand*ed such studies before disclosing its beauties. Joyce is a good example of this necessity to “work one’s passage” with modern writers. Asked by a prominent poet if he did not consider he had made his works too abstruse, even for the literarily wise, Joyce is reported to have answered: “I expect my readers to devote their lives to the study of my work.” Now after those acquainted with Joyce’s Shavian conversation habits (he is said to have greeted Yeats at their first meeting with: “You are too old to be influenced by me.”) have watered the statement down according to their judgement, an essential core of truth still remains: Ulysses and Finnegans Wake reward extensive study, and even the pared concision of the seeming-simple stories in Dubliners hides refined techniques. A knowledge of religious history, languages, Giambattista Vico, Thomas Aquinas, English prose development, Dublin,

and a thousand odd subjects, gives one access to deeper (and often essential) levels of Joycean appreciation.

This prevalent personal dilemma has been met in many ways — as many as there have been writers to meet it. Intimately personal symbols have been resorted to, especially among poets, and the writer has resigned himself to the limited audience dictated by this course. Some have tried to make their symbols self-explanatory, or have explained them in critical writings. Linguistic techniques themselves have been used to beg the question of “value” — the psychological, stream-of consciousness style, in presenting the totality of a character’s being, thereby escapes the necessity of accenting morality, opinion or any other “meaningful” aspect. In Conrad and in the first novels of Frederic Prokosch, an all-embracing mood is developed from immediate environmental influences, and “meanings” beyond or antecedent to that are not sought. The employment of timeless human symbols, spiritual and other, and the identification of past with present events and experience, has been another means of abstraction from an all too close involvement with the present discordant reality. Mann’s Joseph story is the classic example of this. The Biblical legend, with its strong emphasis on the identification of present with past, of the “present” individual with the archetype from which he has arisen (so that Joseph’s teacher, Eliezer, uses the first person when speaking of that remote Eliezer who was Abram’s servant) — nothing could be more alien to, yet meaningful for, the present transitional period. Proust’s giant personal world, *Remembrance of Things Past*, offers other instances of how the artist has bridged the gap between what was and what is to be.

To summarize: our greatest modern novels are the most significant spiritual contribution to this age of disrupted values. An old culture’s disintegration, and the subsequent confused groping toward the future, has forced upon the artist (for whom cultural harmony, not revolution, is the natural climate) a lonely isolation and the necessity to use “silence, exile and cunning” in the creation of his personal literary world. This isolation, this inescapable feeling of having to create in a void, has fathered a loneliness of soul among artists; they, wandering orphans, following a nomadic star have laboured to bring forth an art, the significance of which would be beyond the destructive forces of the of the present day. To accomplish this end they have used techniques which allowed them to avoid direct contact with the em-

battled "values" of the present, and which — in the manipulation of subject matter deliberately chosen for its timelessly recurring type and its significance in the spiritual life of our time — would lend their works that cultural dignity and position so foreign to the age in which they were created.

We shall now illustrate, briefly, what relevance this general description of the enigma called "modern literature" has in two specific cases — of the two greatest novelists of our century, namely, Joyce and Mann. Both writers were born into a world of disintegrating values. Joyce remained a "non-political man" until his death a few years ago; Mann held aloof from politics until Nazi barbarism in his own country, when he was already an oldish man, convinced him the artist could and should not remain coldly indifferent. Both writers were painfully aware of their isolation from the mass of mankind. In all of Joyce's more important works, and Mann's two great novels, "Buddenbrocks" and "The Magic Mountain", the subject matter reveals the decomposition of the middle class. To give form and significance "to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history," in the words of T.S. Eliot, both men used every resource of technique and subject matter: both preoccupied themselves with the disintegration of values as represented in the decay of middle class culture; both used the "unheroic heroes" (Bloom, the international Jew; Castorp, "life's delicate child", played on by the dualistic forces of the world; both used technique to avoid real, down-to-earth, spiritual implications (Joyce, as mentioned before, presenting the complete, stream-of-consciousness picture, without accenting meanings and values; Mann by placing the controversial "Magic Mountain" away from the world and its values, in a sanatorium); both sought, at one point or another, the support of the universal and the timeless to establish the dignity of their works in the present period of anarchy (Joyce's of the Homeric parallel, of the Viconian theory of history, countless literary and historical allusions, etc.; the subject matter of the Joseph Story, behind and above the value-conflict of the present day, a plane whereon Mann could productively deal with the timeless problems of humanity): The list could be carried forward, but we will stop here.

Mann and Joyce diverge, in their reaction to the present spiritual chaos, as individuals, in their beliefs. Both have felt the deep necessity to erect giant spiritual edifices that would give coherence and form to an otherwise formless cultural scene. For

Joyce, the world, humanity, spirit, body, everything, was subject matter for the inscrutable, God-like artist to knead and shape. For Mann, whose concern for mankind, for spiritual values and distinctions, has never left him, a spiritual solution was necessary. His "Buddenbrooks" is an acute, tragic study in the downfall of an old world; his "Magic Mountain" is the portrait of the deepest spiritual crisis of mankind following that downfall; his "Joseph Story", his great, creative presentation of Joseph and Joseph's spiritual development in particular, is his "answer" to modern man. To give this answer, Mann stepped back from the fever-pitch and confusion of the twentieth century, into the broad and deep and timeless humanity of the Joseph legend.

## Piety

IRVING LAYTON

A high fence divided our back yards and we can still remember — ~~my~~ brothers and I — the odor of the slit bags drying on our neighbour's roof. They lay from Sunday to Friday like flat, brown shingles except when the wind disarranged them or cockled up their ends. And when that happened they looked like mid-summer rabbits and our kitchen filled with a thin, sweet, warmish smell of decayed potatoes.

A maple tree, the only one in the district, grew in our neighbour's yard. It was considered joint property and sheltered the two houses during the tropic months of July and August. My brothers freely straddled its boughs, occasionally abetted by Maxie Karpal. Sometimes the three of them made for the topmost branches. When Mrs. Karpal saw them, she flung away her sewing and screeched up at them her terrified, unavailing cries. Hearing her, my mother left the customer she was serving, and rushing to the nearest window, joined her forceful shouts to those of her neighbour's.

They were immigrants, the Karpal family, recently come from Galicia. The house which they tenanted was the shabbiest and most rickety in that street of shabby and rickety houses. It had a doleful, thrown-together appearance and when it rained the floors and ceilings wetted simultaneously. Damp and

cold in the winter, in the summer their dwelling became a dangerous, suffocating furnace. And ours, a red-bricked, stunted building, was not much better. The first wave of immigrants from Eastern Europe had broken against Ontario Street and as it receded it dug narrow channels; mean, dusty, refuse littered streets like St. Dominique, Sanguinet and St. Elizabeth. Running parallel to them, Cadieux St. had had its name for delicate reasons changed to De Bullion; nevertheless the whorehouses were left untouched.

The immigrants lived together peacefully, swarming into new neighbourhoods, pullulating, learning the strange ways of America. Russians, Poles, Bulgars, Jews, Rumanians. Day laborers, factory hands, tailors, peddlers, bricklayers, baisters. All having the same dream, to grow rich and move away to a better neighbourhood. Their children grew up together, fought and played on the streets, and went to the school on Sanguinet Street. No one envied his neighbour. Occasionally a drunk called someone a 'Jew' and a misplaced French-Canadian said 'Juif'. But the only really discordant element were the Italians, distributed along Demontigny Street. We dreaded the summer months. Stirred by memories of olive groves and warm skies their youth descended upon St. Elizabeth where the largest number of Jews lived. Brandishing stones and beer bottles they insisted, without regard for historical accuracy, that we had lately murdered their Christ. Only a blow to the face or a club landed sharply upon the obstinate head could convince them they were mistaken. Then the fight was on. It lasted until both factions had run out of stones or one faction, having a greater supply, had chased the other into their homes. Winter alone brought peace — with the approach of cold weather, an indifference that superficially passed for harmony.

I remember Mrs. Karpal more vividly than I do her husband, who was as unidiomatic as the refuse he collected in the city's lanes and alleys. There was a washed-out quality to him as though he had just escaped from his wife's corrugated washing board, a humility that was both irritating and attractive. His body was thin and slightly bent, his face always wore an air of troubled abstraction: as if wearied of announcing his salvaging mission through the unresponsive streets he had sunk himself, by an act of will, into an insulating silence that left him emasculated and alone. But Mrs. Karpal was different. She was a stout, swarthy woman with bulging, negro eyes and the nervous, energetic vigilance of a hungry cat. Her hair, prematurely greying, was coiled at the nape of her neck, and wavy, robbed the lined, bony face of some of its

harshness. Her competent fingers were always busy, poking among her husband's multi-colored rags, washing and sewing them up into saleable articles.

The older children, two daughters and a son, David, worked in sweatshops for pitifully small wages. And since they were Jewish children their religion forbade them to work on Saturday. They had to search about for a pious, co-religionist manufacturer and when they found him likely as not he paid them less than the current rates — God, he reasoned, wished to reward him for keeping the Sabbath hallow. My sisters worked in the same shop with Chanah and Bessie. Misery picked up its long needles and knitted a neighbourly friendship although, to speak the truth, my family considered itself superior because we ran a small grocery store while Mr. Karpal earned his bread as a ragpicker.

That winter was an exceptionally severe one. The snow lay in a chain of inert hills upon the streets and sidewalks. It swirled down to cover the roofs and faded balconies and muffled everything in a silence that would last for months. The children watched the horses pulling their loads, the harness tight against their bellies, the vapor pouring from mouth and nostrils. The wind whistled and howled, and probed for loose boards and broken windows. About the first week in January Mr. Karpal took sick. It's the flu, the young doctor said, he'll have to stay in bed. The same thing had happened a year ago, also the year before that. A trouble that comes regularly, my mother said, is no trouble at all. Mrs. Karpal didn't contradict her, but the grocery bill grew bigger each week. Then the worst, the unexpected happened. The coldest day of the year, their dilapidated stove broke down completely. As if through accumulated spite it had become a piece of junk and resisted the frantic efforts to repair it. When the neighbours learned their misfortune, they got together enough money to instal a second-hand stove. Mrs. Karpal was grateful but neither abashed nor truckling. She expected hard-pressed folk to understand. Today we're unlucky, tomorrow. . . .

Thirteen-year-old Maxie waited until his mother had done sweeping the floor. He took off his threadbare cap to scratch his head, close-cropped as an insurance against lice. He fidgeted with it before putting it on again. Jewish boys never went bare-headed except in school where orthodoxy wasn't reckoned with.

"Ma," he said nervously, "I want to tell you something." He watched Mrs. Karpal stoop to sweep the loose dirt onto a stiff piece of cardboard that did for a dustpan. She rose from her crouched position, supporting herself by means of the broomstick.

"Well, Maxie, what is it?" she said crossly. "Can't you see I'm not idle?"

He hesitated a moment. Then taking a long breath he said hurriedly, "Ma, I'm quittin' school."

If the Messiah had suddenly appeared in the doorway, Mrs. Karpal wouldn't have been more astonished.

"What was that I heard you say, Maxie!" she exclaimed, advancing towards him, her hand tightening on the broomstick. "You're what, Maxie?"

Maxie stepped back, but he met his mother's angry look unflinching. "It's like I say, Ma, I'm quittin' school."

Mrs. Karpal caught her son's arm and her fingers sank into the soft flesh, and although they hurt him he made no effort to free himself. His imagination had rehearsed the scene for him weeks ago. To be accurate, when the doctor had ordered his father to bed.

"It's no use beatin' me, Ma," he said gently, "My mind's made up."

The quietness in her son's voice made Mrs. Karpal release her grip. She sensed this was no disobedient child she was dealing with. She walked past him towards the corner of the room where she deposited the broom as if the weight had suddenly grown too much for her. From there she turned and faced him.

"Why do you want to leave school, Maxie?"

"School's a waste of time, Ma. Where'll it get us? I mean — Pa's sick in bed, there ain't hardly any food in the house. I wanna get a job."

"I thought you liked school. You've always been the head from your class. What will your Pa say? Don't you want to be a somebody, a doctor, a —"

"All I want is a job."

"Let's not do things in a hurry. I'll talk it over with Mrs. Miller. Sometimes she knows from what she's saying."

My mother brushed the snowflakes from her shawl and undid the neat knot under her chin. Methodically she folded the shawl and laid it on the chair beside her. During the winter Mrs. Karpal's kitchen was also the parlor and bedroom for the smaller children. The grey pipes radiating out from the squat, ugly stove made the room look like a boiler factory. They covered the ceiling and finally lost themselves in the streaked walls.

Mr. Karpal lay in bed, sheltered by coats and rags which he himself had collected during the autumn months. He turned his face towards my mother and his vague, little eyes seemed to flicker in amusement. It was as if in that way he were making a

commentary on human existence. This needn't surprise anyone for ragpickers are thoughtful people. Since they deal with the cast-off detritus of a city, they are as familiar with the final end of life as others are with its joyous beginnings. Theirs is the ripe wisdom of Ecclesiastes and with every cry of "rags . . . bottles" pronounce the ancient judgment of "Vanity, all is vanity".

My mother regarded him compassionately and when she asked him how he felt:

"A little better, Mrs. Miller. So little that why should we talk about it?" And drawing his hairy, white hands from under the covers he indicated the rags strewn over him. "God, as you see, provides for everything. I ask you, neighbor, could Rothschild be any warmer?" Mr. Karpal made a noise with his gums and laughed into his pillow.

My mother turned to Mrs. Karpal who was sitting at the foot of the bed. "Your Chaneh said you wanted to see me." Then she added as an afterthought, "Your Chaneh is such a pretty girl. With her you don't have to worry already. The men will fight for her without a dowry."

Mrs. Karpal made a quick, deprecating gesture with her hand. "With girls . . . who can tell? It's my Maxie I wanted to talk to you about."

"Yeh, Chaneh told me. He wants to leave school in the middle . . . is it true?"

"I almost broke a broomstick over his back. Only the devil has got into him. He says he wants to go to work." Mrs. Karpal leaned forward and covering her mouth with a hand, snickered, "He thinks he can make a better provider for me than his father can."

"You have to give me needles yet?" her husband said mournfully.

"Who meant anything," protested Mrs. Karpal.

My mother interposed good-humouredly, "He's sensitive . . . like a poet . . . Maybe Maxie could work at Chaneh's place."

"Then you think —"

"Well, maybe it's for the best. You know Mrs. Simon's boy, Avram. He also stopped in the middle and as they say in America, he's certainly bringing home the brisket."

There was a silence, broken only by the coals settling in the stove and the long withdrawing roar in the chimney.

"Finestone is a pig!" said Mrs. Karpal with sudden anger. "Maxie shouldn't work for him. It's enough my two daughters work for such a one." And then as if startled by his own exhibition

of spirit, he finished lamely, "What I mean —"

"Mr. Finestone is no diamond," my mother completed the thought for him. "I know because my Sammy worked for him. But he's a frummer mensch. He keeps his shop closed on Saturday."

"Sure, sure," said Mrs. Karpal. "Maxie can't take a job where he has to work Saturday. And if not Mr. Finestone, who?"

My mother considered a moment. She played with the fringe of her shawl, allowing the tassels to fall across the back of her fingers. They waited for her to speak.

"Do you know Mr. Grosnick?" she asked suddenly.

Mrs. Karpal shook her head. "From where should I know him?"

"How foolish of me. I forget you don't run a grocery. You know how it is . . . in business you have a chance to meet people. Mr. Grosnick sells me grocery bags, twine —"

"Then you think he has an opening job for Maxie?" said Mr. Karpal.

"For me he would do the favor." my mother replied.

"And Saturday?" enquired Mrs. Karpal, wishing to be reassured.

"How can you ask? . . . Would I . . . Mr. Grosnick even has his business next to the synagogue. I'll speak to him tomorrow. Monday morning you can send Maxie to work."

Mr. Grosnick was a middle-aged, stocky man, of medium height. He wore horn-rimmed spectacles with very thick lenses. When he removed them they left a broad scarlet line across the bridge of his nose. He spoke English fluently but like one who had learned it from a conversational reader. When he spoke he threw his head to one side with a jerky movement and mopped his face with a colored handkerchief.

"You'll wrap the parcels this way," he explained, and before Maxie had a chance to begin he had taken the parcel out of his hands and was wrapping it himself. "My slogan is a very simple one — a place for everything and everything in its place. In case you need anything hurriedly, you know where it is."

Mr. Grosnick patted his cheeks with his handkerchief. "Now again, what did you say your name was?"

"Maxie Karpal."

"Good. Now Maxie I want you to consider yourself like the superintendent of the stockroom. You're in charge here. There's nobody here but you, so you'll be fully responsible to me. Look around you. Is everything in tidiness, clean? Now do you think you can keep it that way?"

"I'll try, Mr. Grosnick" said Maxie.

"Very well. Now come with me." He led the boy to where a row of cartons were lined up against the wall reaching as far as the back entrance. They were packed tightly with the brown paper and containers that Mr. Grosnick sold to his customers.

"These boxes, I don't want you to touch, Maxie. Why you'll ask. Well, because they're too heavy for you. Do you understand, Maxie? If anything is to be done with them I'll do it myself. If I ever catch you touching them there'll be trouble. I don't want you to go straining yourself." Mr. Grosnick smiled, showing his strong, discolored teeth. "If you got a rupture, who would your parents blame? Not you . . . me, of course! You won't move them, eh Maxie?"

"No, Mr. Grosnick I won't."

"Swear it."

"I swear — by God."

"H'm." With that, Mr. Grosnick turned on his heel and walked noisily out of the stockroom into the office.

"Miss Applebaum," Maxie heard him say, "how many times must I tell you to do your toilette at home? This is no place to leave hairpins. I don't use them, nor do my customers order them from me." There was a silence as he threw the hairpin upon her desk. "You've been my stenographer for so many years, I can't impress upon you I'm not running a beauty parlor."

Miss Applebaum raised her hands guiltily to her head. "My heavens, did I drop those things again?"

But Mr. Grosnick had already forgotten her. He had seated himself on the edge of a chair and was reading the death notices in his newspaper. Suddenly he sprang up. "How terrible, Miss Applebaum — Saul Garson is dead! I can't believe it. Why it seems like only yesterday that he used to sit here and discuss affairs. Look at this pen, Miss Applebaum, you remember he gave it to me. A ten dollar pen! Too bad, too bad. He was a very nice man, a gentleman, 'a frummer', and a wonderful friend. 'Oh, poor Mrs. Garson — she must be heart-broken. Write a letter to Mrs. Garson and tell her how sorry I am, Miss Applebaum.'"

"Yes, it is too bad," said Miss Applebaum. "But you know he looked terrible the last time he was here."

"Terrible! Why he looked awful, he looked even worse than my sister, the sick one."

Mr. Grosnick sat down heavily and pulled out his handkerchief, but he didn't mop his face. He held it in his hand, opening and closing his fingers over it like a nervous kitten her claws.

When the stenographer had finished writing he snatched the letter from her and read it over quickly. Then he laid it on the desk corner and Miss Applebaum had to lean forward to retrieve it.

"Don't seal the envelope and you'll only need a two-cent stamp. What a loss, my day is ruined!"

"Yes," said Miss Applebaum ironically, "I'm sure it is."

Mr. Grosnick jumped up from his chair and rushed into the stockroom to see what Maxie was doing. He was back in a minute.

"Miss Applebaum, take a letter to Mrs. Garson. Her husband owed me \$150. you know. Now's the best time to remind her, when she's settling all his affairs."

"Mr. Grosnick!" Miss Applebaum exploded. "Why don't you let the man get cold in his grave!"

"Don't be stupid. Is it my fault if Garson didn't have a bean to his behind?"

"Shall I put both letters in the same envelope?" said Miss Applebaum coldly.

Mr. Grosnick stopped pacing the floor to ponder the question. "No-o, that wouldn't be very nice," he said finally.

When he had gone, Miss Applebaum turned to Maxie who had been within hearing distance. "That's your boss. One moment he bemoans the loss of his friend and the next he sends lawyer letters to his widow."

Spooning out the thick, aromatic cabbage soup, Mrs. Karpal asked: "Well, Maxie, how's my big provider? Do you like your job?"

"It's alright, I guess," her son replied, and between mouthfuls he related the day's experiences.

"There's a lot I don't understand, Ma."

"What, Maxie?"

"Oh . . . nothing. Mr. Grosnick took me with him to the synagogue. Says he's goin' to take me every day. It's right next door, you know."

Mr. Karpal stirred noisily in his bed and his family glanced up from the table to look at him. "That's all that's necessary," he muttered, frowning his colorless lips.

"And did you hear, Yankel," said Mrs. Karpal to her husband, "He wouldn't let Maxie strain himself? That's what I call a good man."

"Te . . . te . . ." came softly from the pile of rags, and it sounded like a cricket chirping in the walls.

Maxie finished his supper in silence. He felt restless, cut off by new, inexpressible sensations from the family. At that moment its sovereign interest as a unit didn't exist for him, he was too remote. Anyhow he had always found it difficult to talk to his brother and sisters. He was a highstrung, stubborn boy and full of moods. Anything might set him off, and so the family forebore to question him. He watched his sisters helping their mother put the supper things away. David had drawn up his chair beside the stove. A world different from theirs, greatly different, was beginning to shape itself within him. He tried terribly hard to put his feelings into words but they wouldn't come. The failure left him bitter, desolate, excitable. Maybe a walk outside would do him good. He rose, put on his goloshes and overcoat and closed the door noiselessly behind him.

It was a fine night, strangely mild. The street seemed unusually bright and a few people were visible. A cat crouched in a doorway. Maxie walked toward Demontigny, turned left and crossed the snow-filled lanes that were only a little less narrow and dark than the street itself. The Chinese laundry was still open, its warm, chemical smell penetrated from the doorway. When he reached De Bullion he noticed a group of people gathered in front of a house. He went towards it. A 'raid' was on. The policemen had already banged the door open, the crowd was waiting to see the inmates led out. The girls came out laughing and joking, but the men crouched dejectedly beside their escorts, pushing their crushed hats against their faces. The men in the crowd guffawed when they saw them, every one pushed forward a little. Then someone standing beside Maxie, said loudly:

"Well, kid, how'ja like the fat one . . . that one over there?"

This set the crowd to laughing again. Maxie became frightened because he didn't know why they laughed. Instinctively he moved towards a woman, feeling she would protect him, women were kinder than men. And now it seemed to Maxie that every one was looking at him. He moved closer to the woman. He heard her neighbor mutter something to her in a foreign tongue and they both began to snicker. There was something dark and brutal about these people, something full of danger to him. He backed away. And then the van drove off and the crowd began to disperse. Maxie darted out of the dissolving circle and ran towards the lights and illuminated windows of St. Catherine St.

Who were these people? Why had they laughed at him? He could still hear them, he thought, and he turned his head around fearfully, quickening his steps. A light, powdery snow

was beginning to fall, the flakes twirled past the street lamps like soft, white moths. They clung to the shop windows and the men's bowlers. It was growing late. Maxie hurried on, keeping close to the buildings. He was still shaken by his experience, the wind was like a mocking laughter. And then he remembered something that had happened to him during the summer. Returning from an errand one afternoon, he had 'stolen' a ride on the rear of an ice wagon. And another wagon had drawn up alongside and the driver reining his horses to one side had slashed his whip across Maxie's face. And as the horses pulled away the man had laughed. It was not the pain, though that had been sharp enough, which made him cry out. Why had the man done it? It wasn't *his* wagon that he was riding on. And now the remembrance of the man's cruelty and his laughter afterwards made Maxie run his finger down the faint scar across his cheek. He returned home nervous and exhausted. That night he dreamt a woman had tied him to an ice wagon and was whipping him. She was shouting at him in a strange tongue and if only he could understand what she was saying she would stop whipping him. But he couldn't and the blows descended on his face harder and harder . . .

The months passed and at last the snow began to melt. The long, swollen, cruel icicles crashed down upon the sidewalks and the noise their breaking made was the sweetest music. Real touch of spring, the children appeared with their gay marbles. The streets became dirty and colorful, began to breathe again. Here and there the storm windows disappeared and it was as if the houses were expelling a long held-in breath. Even the puddles were welcomed because they held bits of warm, blue sky in them.

And now sex awakening in Maxie, he gave his heart to Miss Applebaum. He thought himself in love with her. She troubled his sleep and when he was near her was ill at ease. He approached her tremblingly, stupidly. For her part Miss Applebaum was too pre-occupied and efficient to notice her young lover. Sometimes his discomfort made him pass his hand over her back and shoulders and when she was late coming from dinner he would sit in her chair and move his hands along the edge of the desk where he thought her bosom must have pressed against. The curve of the blouse over her hard, round breasts made him restless, frustrated him. When he met his former classmates on the street he felt superior to them, — possessed of a knowledge they didn't have.

He worked hard and Mr. Grosnick was pleased with him. A tidy boy, he called him. Maybe you'll grow up to be my partner, he

said. When it grew dark, Maxie brushed his clothes, and waited for Mr. Grosnick to take him to the synagogue next door. It was a small, dingy place that had formerly been a private residence. There were no chairs, only long, wooden benches one behind the other and an aisle between them leading up to the Holy Ark. Maxie intoned his prayers with deep feeling, thinking Mr. Grosnick would like him to do so. He noticed that Mr. Grosnick himself recited the prayers as if he were shouting commands to someone. Maxie was embarrassed when he heard them above the murmured, indistinct supplications of the other worshippers. Was that the way to speak to God? Not that Maxie had any very clear ideas about God. He thought of Him as somehow imprisoned Friday night between his mother's old silver candlesticks, escaping only when the blue flame in the wicks had expired. He thought that for the rest of the week God was imprisoned in the Ark, the cabinet containing the holy scrolls. But since God was all-powerful, Maxie reasoned it was a self-imposed imprisonment, like he himself going to work when his friends were still at school.

Maxie was tidying himself for the evening service.

"We haven't missed a day yet," commented Mr. Grosnick from the carton he was sitting on.

"No, Mr. Grosnick, we haven't."

"And why should we? It's right next door, after all. Does it hurt us to go in for a few minutes? It doesn't. Does it make us any poorer?"

Maxie had observed his employer's habit of asking questions to which he didn't expect an answer. He said nothing. Mr. Grosnick, continued:

"Well, the way I figure is like this, who knows whether there's a God, a Supreme Be-ing, or not. I'm a self-educated man, and some philosophers say there is and some there isn't. Though the greatest, mind you, Platon and Aristootle, say there is. But who knows, who knows?"

Mr. Grosnick jerked his head to one side and screwed up his eyes. This weightiest of problems was not really beyond him, it suggested. Then he took out a toothpick and began chewing it.

"I don't understand," said Maxie slowly, "Do you think there mightn't be a God? Is —"

"Now who said that?" exclaimed Mr. Grosnick, shaken from his reverie. "I'm only telling you what the philosophers, the greatest thinkers of the human race, have thought, have conceived. Why a man without God is like — is like this toothpick." He flung out his arm, holding the toothpick so that Maxie could see it. His

hand shook a little. "Why, of course there must be a God. I haven't missed a day at the synagogue, and you see how my business prospers. . . Ah, you're ready. Come."

That evening, seated between Mr. Grosnick and another worshipper, Maxie gazed apprehensively at the Ark, the cabinet containing the holy scrolls. He wondered whether God hadn't escaped from there too and was never coming back. God was free. But if that were so what were all these people doing here? There was no one to hear their prayers and like a strict teacher mark them according to the merits of their recitation. What were Mr. Grosnick and himself doing here? His thoughts ran on until they frightened him, he raised his voice in prayer with greater earnestness than before.

A few days later Mr. Grosnick called him into the office. He handed him his pay envelope telling him at the same time excitedly to open it. Maxie pulled out three soiled one dollar bills and then felt at the bottom of the envelope something hard and round. He let it fall into his open waiting palm. It was a fifty cent piece. Mr. Grosnick laughed at his surprise.

"A raise, Maxie. You've been a good worker, a tidy boy. From now on I pay you three-and-a-half dollars a week. Satisfied?"

"Thank you, Mr. Grosnick," said Maxie and because he couldn't think of anything else to say, he added quickly, "Won't Miss Applebaum be glad when I tell her Sunday morning!"

"Oh, she!" Mr. Grosnick's voice was disapproving. "She takes no interest in the business. She can be here another ten years and she won't get a raise."

Maxie's face fell. He busied himself with putting the money back into the envelope.

"It isn't six yet, and where is she? She's already gone home."

"Yes, Mr. Grosnick."

"Well, I'm going out for a few minutes. If anyone comes, tell them they can wait for me."

Maxie walked back to the stockroom to give a last check up. Fridays he went straight home after work. From there, after washing himself and putting on his good suit, he went to the synagogue with his family. Satisfied that everything was in order, he took out the fifty cent piece and pressed it between his fingers. He liked the hard feel of it. His mother would be happy and proud of him. He pictured himself telling the family at the supper table. He knew just how he would begin. Slowly at first, telling how Mr. Grosnick had called him into the office, what he had said

to him, and finally he would take out the money and show it to them. He pictured their astonishment and delight. And Miss Applebaum, maybe she would notice him now. He would buy some books, and read those philosophers Mr. Grosnick had mentioned. He would be learned and wise and know what happened to God after he left the candlesticks and the cabinet.

He flipped the coin, once, twice, catching it each time in his cupped hands. He flipped it again. This time it came down on his wrist and falling on the floor, began rolling towards the cartons. Maxie started after it but he was too late. It had disappeared through the narrow crack and he heard it scrape against the wall. Maxie stared for a moment in perplexity at the square, heavily-filled cartons. Would he have time to move them before Mr. Grosnick got back? He put his hands on one and with his back pressing against the other he managed to separate them sufficiently to slide through his head and shoulders. He felt with his fingers for the coin. As they curved over it, they came in contact with a strip of wire. He tried to pull it out but it was fastened to the wall. He squirmed between the cartons, pushing them apart to enable him to bring his head in further. What he saw filled him with horror. He tugged at the wire again to convince himself he was not mistaken. It refused to give away. He peered into the narrow space between the cartons and the wall and saw the wire extended towards the back door where it flowed into a socket-like arrangement to the right of it. At the other end the wire lost itself into a tiny hole that had been bored specially for the purpose. It could lead to only one place — the synagogue next door. Mr. Grosnick was stealing electricity from the synagogue! Maxie quickly crawled out and began frantically to push the cartons back into place. When Mr. Grosnick returned, he tried to look indifferent but his knees were trembling.

That evening when the family was ready to leave for the synagogue, Maxie said quietly:

“I’m not going.”

“What’s the matter, Maxie, don’t you feel well?” Mrs. Karpal asked, looking at her son anxiously, while the other children gathered around.

“It isn’t that. I don’t want to go to the synagogue any more. I’m never going.”

He was trying, by licking his lip, to keep it from trembling and instinctively looked towards his father who was sitting up, an old coat thrown over his thin shoulders.

They all stared at him. "Have you gone crazy?" demanded his brother, David. "Have you gone out of your mind? Get your coat on!" But Mr. Karpal, closing his eyes and nodding his head, said mildly, "Don't be a fool my son. It may not do you any good but it can't do you any harm either. Believe me, I wish I could get off this cursed bed and go with you."

"Pa, I can't go! What I saw —"

"Never mind what you saw," David shouted hoarsely, "Get your coat on, I say."

"I won't. Why don't you —"

It was then Mrs. Karpal rushed up to her son and with a lunge knocked him to the floor. Maxie fell on his face, his hands hitting against the bedpost. Mrs. Karpal fell upon him with her knees, pressing them against the small of his back so that he felt he couldn't breathe, and with her elbows working like devilish inventions she began to beat him about the neck and shoulders.

"You won't go to the synogogue! You won't go — you tramp, you athiest, you *mishimit!* I'll — show — you, you tramp!"

Mrs. Karpal dug her fingers into his cheeks and tore at the flesh. The blows came faster and faster and Maxie, pinned under his mother's powerful knees, thrashed about with his hands and legs to defend himself. But he didn't cry out. The children watched silently, no one daring to interfere. Mr. Karpal turned his face away towards the window. The bun at the back of Mrs. Karpal's neck had come apart and a braid fell across her cheek. She was breathing heavily. Finally she rose and staggered towards the table for support. She looked fiercely at the quivering body of her son and said bitterly:

"You should have run out of my belly before you were born."

David kicked his ankle and Maxie felt the crazy pain shoot through his body, exploding into numbness.

Mrs. Karpal took a deep breath, smoothed her dress, coiled the braid into its place, and adjusting the shawl about her shoulders, glanced into the stove mirror to see if she was proper for the synagogue.

"Come, I don't think Maxie feels strong enough to go with us," she said.

As they closed the door behind them they could still hear Maxie sobbing to the floor.

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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HARRY ROSKOLENKO served during the earlier part of the war with the American forces in the Pacific. He has contributed to *Harper's*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Poetry* (Chicago), and many other magazines.

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