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EDITORIAL....

The Literary Journal for July - December 1981 makes its appearance and we are glad to introduce new critical talent in the Department. Critical endeavour among Literature students is alive and well as can be seen from not only the variety of authors, forms and periods brought under scrutiny but also from their attempts to break new ground among works and authors seldom covered by syllabi and examinations. The potentiality for sound critical reading among our students is certainly promising and we invite you to a stimulating encounter with their research and opinions.

Social Criticism in A. J. Cronin

The concern of a writer, is essentially with his age. Cronin lived in one of the most turbulent periods of history—a periods of rising social unrest, the growing power of trade unions, extension of franchise and the consciousness of the power that reposed in the hands of the people. The power of agnosticism was growing and the final shattering of the last remnants of Victorian self-complacency came with the onset of the first world war and the mass carnage that followed. The Post War period brought a ditch of employment, the great depression and the women's suffragette movement. Socialism gradually spread its tentacles. The carnage started by the first world war, was completed by the second. No writer can remain unaffected by such great social changes and Cronin all the more so. Using weapons tempered at the forge of experience, he launched a savage, impassioned attack upon the self complacent bureaucrats of his age, the smug economic imperialism and perhaps most of all, upon man himself, upon a world of oppression and greed.

The writing of a social novel tests the concentration and artistic approach of the novelist. As the French critic J.L.A. Farge notes :

" Many works of fiction that have a moral aim fail artistically. An author may put moral sentiments into the mouths of his characters, but the characters will seem nothing but puppets, and the book will have the effect of a Sermon or an Oration. Such authors forget that 'character is plot'. The clash of character with character, of character with opposing forces is a study of absorbing interest. The supreme artist who has felt life deeply can so fuse his social message, with his potrayal of the struggle of character, so as to produce a book, that not only grips our interest, but also moves our conscience ".

This is Cronin's technique.

Cronin began with initial attacks upon the decadent medical system, using the medium of the idealistic young medical practitioner, Dr. Marson, fighting against social forces which threaten to overwhelm him in 'The Citadel'. In 'The Northern Light' he moved on to a thorough investigation of the unscrupulous and underhand means used by journalists. The protest here is effectively registered through the medium of the small time editor cum owner of the Northern Light, Henry Page, holding his own, against a group of distorted minds who strive to cause the premature death of his paper. He later moved on to a criticism of Prison conditions and the unequally balanced scales of justice in the novel, 'Beyond this Place'.

But it is the novel, 'The Stars look down' that remains his greatest book. It looks as though all of Cronin's energy, agonized vituperations and disgust at the meaningless cruelty of man to man, is concentrated into one great explosive, mocking, soul searching novel—The Stars look down ! It blazes its way in a white hot heat into the mind of the reader. As the Sunday Times observes :

> " It is a book deep in human sympathy, to stir the conscience of a nation. "

What the social critic must guard himself against is melodrama. If the work degenerates into an overwhelming absorption with the emotions only, so much so that emotion obscures reason, it will leave no lasting scars upon the public conscience. At the same time, it must not become a work of supreme

indifference. If it does not move the writer, it is not likely to move the reader. The social novelist must preserve a balance between the two, thus producing a novel that is at once noted for its truth, realistic and throbbingly alive.

The language of Cronin has often been described as raw and crude. This is precisely so. It is made up of the stuff of life itself—the language harsh in its simplicity, unvarnished, with no external trappings—the language of the common and the poor. There is a dynamic energy, a sense of unleashed force, a cutting irony behind each sentence. A blazing example is provided by his description of the poverty stricken miner's row.

> "All the miner's rows in sleescale were named after the glorious Victories of the Crimea. The top row, David's row was Inkerman, the next Alma, the one below Sebastopol; and the lowest of all Joe's row was Balaclava."

There is a sustained irony about the whole description. The apathy and defeat of the miner's row is in stark contrast to the superficial victories of war.

> ".....the square chimneys, broken and uneven looked drunken; the long line of roofs undulated from subsidences, like a wavy sea; the Yards were palinged with decayed railway sleepers, broken stubs and rusty corrugated iron, backed by heaps of slag and pit waste. Each yard had its closet and each closet had its pail. An iron pail.

The fact, that Cronin insists here and elsewhere, is that the labourers provide the life blood of the industry. Bleed the labourer—and the mighty heart of the nation is murdered. Capitalism, he holds is evil in its effects. In 'The Stars look down' he does a very radical critique of a laissez-faire capitalist in Richard Barras, the man who would stop at nothing for money. His workers were just so many hands, just so many human machines to be drained of the last drop of human blood.

"For beyond everything, the secret and consuming passion of Barras' soul was his love of money. Though he masked it cleverly, deceiving even himself, he adored money. He hugged it to him and nourished it, the glowing scene of his own wealth, his own substance.

Cronin asserts that only nationalization of industries can solve the problem and provide the miners with a living wage, better conditions of work and better sanitation. But nationalization can be effected only by a party and a parliament, which has the welfare of its labourers at heart. He hits out at the sauvity and underhand means used by politicians to secure votes. Cronin emphasizes that these politicians, who during the campaigning, offer the people, golden dreams—dreams empty of substance and solidarity, once elected, used their position for their own selfish ends or spend their,

> ".....rare visits to the House standing treats in the bar and doing cross word puzzles in the smoke room".

The people, the salt of the earth, suffer. It is this fact which is constantly asserted.

"Day in, day out..... the gaunt cheeks of the men, the women, yes, even the children, the darkness that lay on every face, the streets without laughter, without play.....; Could man inflict this cruelty upon man? The war to end war, to bring great and lasting peace, a new and glorious era in our civilization. And now this! Take your pittance, slaves and toil in the underworld, in sweat and dirt and danger, yet take it or starve.

.....Margarine and bread; Bread and margarine; sometimes not that. To raise a sturdy son to sing the song of the Empire".

On the face of it, Cronin seems to expound Marxist theories. He disapproves enormously of most institutions—the parliament, the law, all the forms of social order. But it is very understandable that Cronin's attitude like that of his Dickens is permeated by a deep fear of the underdog, when he breaks loose—the destruction that can be accomplished by a people tried too far, the kind of destruction that destroys Arthur Barras' mines in 'The Stars look down'. Combined with this is his knowledge of how many people, are on the edge of a total breakdown—people like Jack Reedy, whose life had shaped him into a mould of bitterness,

> " He was all pain inside and his pained eyes, looked upon a world of pain. The disaster had shaped Jack, and the war and the peace—the degradation and misery of the dole, the pinchings and shifts and pawnings, the brutality of want, the desolation of a soul that is worse than hunger. All this talk drove him to despair; it was all big mouth and wind.... .....words and still more words which meant nothing, did nothing and led nowhere. A great hopelessness came over him ".

It is the hopelessness which operates upon him and he uses it, in his turn to set ablaze a huge conglomeration of human emotions.

" They're not going to help us! Nobody's going to help us. Nobody! We have got to help ourselves. If we don't, we will never get out the bloody gutter where capitalism has shoved us. Christ Almighty, can't you see it, lads, the whole economic system is rotten as dung. They have got the money, the motor cars, fine houses, carpets on the floor, and it is all bled out the likes of us. We do the slavin' and sweatin' for them. And what do we get ? We don't even get food lads, nor fire, nor proper clothes, nor boots for our kids.....We didn't see it when they had the disaster in this bloody Neptune and murdered a hundred men. We didn't see it in the war, when they murdered millions of men. But by Christ, we see it now! We can't stand it lads. We've got to do something. I'm goin' to do something, lads, and them that wants to, can come along. Now I'm goin' to wreck the pit, lads. I'm goin' to do a bit of payin' back on my own. Are you comin' with me or are you not ? ".

An inflamed mob has no intelligence, only emotions that play havoc with the reason. A mob has only one object in view—Destruction. It is this complete breakdown of reason, the coming of anarchy, violence and destruction, both in individuals and society, that Cronin fears.

With his deep insight into the psyche of men and women, he urges a new look at war and what war can do to people, the reactions it can trigger off. He explores the chaotic absurdity of the time worn hollow cliches of patriotism, herioism and glory. "If a German gets your mother, what will you do?" This is the trump card used by politicians, in whose hands we confidingly place our life and our destinies. But Cronin observes that the very same question might have been asked on the other side. The war is being fought to end the war. That is what has always been said and will be said in the years to come. Enlistment or Prison. Prison for those who think like Arthur Barras.

" I haven't got any religion very much, not religion in your sense. But you talk about Christianity, the religion of Christ. Well, I can't imagine Jesus Christ taking a bayonet in His hands and sticking it into the stomach of a German soldier or an English soldier either for that matter. I can't imagine Jesus Christ sitting behind an English machine gun or a German machine gun, mowing down dozens of perfectly guiltless men ".

Neither man knows why the other man is his enemy. They kill because it is the whim

of the dictators, the liars, the hypocrites. Only in the trenches, in the midst of fear and the red stench of blood, do they learn the truth—that they are but fodder for the cannons. But it is too late then, as Stanley Millington must have realized in some cells of his disordered brain. All of Stanley's splendid sense had got blown out of Stanley by a shell in France. 'Our Mr. Stanley', who had set out to war, believing that one Britisher was equal to five foreigners.

".....The topping fellow who wanted a smack at the Fritzes, don't you know for St. George and England, the full blooded Briton, who wished he'd joined the Flying corps.....Great adventure, what? very lights, Public School Battalion, number nines .....our Mr. Stanley who thought war simply marvellous".

Cronin's ironical humour is often cruel. But it effectively serves its purpose—ridicule of war and the propagators of it—the great the glorious war, the war to end wars.

Cronin also satirizes Hetly Todd, the desire of women that their lovers, husbands, and fathers, be war heroes, that they fight, kill, murder, that they lust for blood—the German blood for King and country.

He also asserts that war does not mean death and destruction to all. To the liars and so called patriots like Joe Morgan and Richard Barras, war means prosperity, triumph, fame.

Cronin stresses again and again that man must not be limited by narrow nationalism. Attempts for world peace will not succeed, as long as men continue to uphold narrow nationalism. Only when men realize the fact that there are no barriers between one nation and another, could international peace be effected.

Inspite of the dark conception of Cronin's novels, they do not despair. It is true that the novels end in apparent defeat, note the word apparent. The heroes do not, in actual fact succumb to the social forces trying to destroy them, unless of course they are drawn as morally weak characters. In 'The Stars look down', this is particularly exemplified in David Fenwick. He is defeated by Joe Gowlon, but the defeat does not mark the end of the book. It is true that David goes back to work as a miner, back to darkness and obscureness, but it is a mere deceptive lull before forces are gathered to fight evil again. The book holds the promise that David would rise from the Pit.

"Perhaps one day he would rise again from the Pit, one day, perhaps, help this plodding army towards a new freedom. Instinctively, he lifted his head".

The promise is very much in the embryo, nevertheless it is there. It leads out of the book into the future. This approaches a new kind of social optimism—that good would triumph over evil. A target for sceptics and cynics no doubt, but still a moving and profound philosophy.

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The use of History in 'Tughlaq'

"The action of the play takes place first of all in Delhi in the year 1327, then on the road from Delhi to Daulatabad, and lastly in and around the fort in Daulatabad five years later".

Thus Karnad roots the action of his exquisitely constructed play in the mellowed pages of India's distant past. In doing this, he falls into the tradition of the use of history for the purpose of creative writing—indeed, there are many other plays in Kannada (the language in which 'Tughlaq' was initially written) whose themes are taken from history; yet Karnad's treatment of the theme is not historical. He impresses his creative genius on the material in such a way that what emerges is a compact, well-organised play enriched with all the qualities of good drama.

Karnad moves through the leaves of history into the period of the Tughlaq dynasty—that memorable age of gross mismanagement of administration—when Muhammad Bin Tughlaq was on the throne. He alludes to the well-known historical occurences which have made the King immortal as the perfect example of an unsuccessful ruler. The minting of copper coins instead of the usual silver ones; the shift of the capital to Daulatabad and back to Delhi; the enforcement of compulsory 'namaz' (prayer); the murders of Shohab-ud-din and Sheikh Imam-ud-din; and the growing lawlessness in the land which resulted due to the above. In fact all the events in the play are drawn straight from history as is shown by Karnad's particularising the dates of the action of.

Scene one AD 1327 and

Scene Eight : AD 1332, Five years later.

He picks on a period which "the greatest historians of the world would have given half their lives to see" (Barani in Scene Thirteen) because of the interesting events that took place.

The coherence and logic with which the play traces the course of history, makes it a consummate piece of artistry. Every event follows the previous one as a natural follow-up developing to the final bewildered, yet poignant end in Muhammad's impossible position :

> "He looks around dazed and frightened,
> as though he can't comprehend
> where he is."

The play begins with the seeds of downfall sown by the King himself, and then traces the process downward to the abyss of chaos. This gives the play a well-balanced and neat structure.

"What struck me absolutely about Tughlaq's history" Karnad declares "was that it was contemporary". Thus, this play emerges as a political allegory. To him, the fact that "the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come to the throne" could be "one of the greatest failures too" and could be reduced to shambles within a short span of twenty years, was strikingly parallel to the situation in the India of the early sixties. 'Tughlaq' reflects "as no other play perhaps does, the political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehru era of idealism in the country" (U. R. Anantha Murthy in the Introduction to 'Tughlaq' 1971).

Yet, the play does not remain a mere political allegory with history as a medium. It rises above the allegory and the history, by

the sheer force of characterization. The whole imagination and sensibility of the playwright has acted upon the characters who played such ani mportant role in the history of India. In a word he humanizes history. He takes historical events and historical characters and analyses how these characters must have felt in those unique circumstances. The penetrating psychological insight into the characters endears the play to the reader.

With the central character Tughlaq an "elusive and haunting quality" (Murthy) is imbued in the play. He is realized as a complex personality, who dominates the entire action—a strange incompatible mixture of sophisticated intelligence and cunning and utter political naivete, the offspring of an irrepressible idealism. Though the basis of this character is undoubtedly from history, Karnad has interpreted the actual historical acts of the King psychologically. This dualism in Tughlaq's character becomes the source of tragedy. Tughlaq is arrogant when talking of his people.

> " They are only cattle, yet, but I shall make men out of a few of them ".

As a well-meaning king he invites his people to accompany him to Daulatabad. "This is only an invitation and not an order" (Scene one) he says. Yet he turns tyrant when he hears of insurgents and their 'treacherous' plots to kill him. "They'll only understand the whip." He is heart-breakingly aware that he is involved in a treacherous game of politicians, yet he cannot do anything to stop himself from behaving tyrannically. He loves Ain-ul Mulk and Shohab-ud-din and is yet aware of their disloyalty towards him; anguished, he exclaims:

> " Why must this happen, Barani ? Are all those I trust condemned to go down in history as traitors ? What is happening ? Tell me, Barani, will my reign be nothing more thana tortured scream which will stab the night and melt away in the silence ? "

Loving Shohab-ud-din as he does, he is yet compelled to kill him. He is a shrewd politician in that he can anticipate almost every move of his opponents, yet he feels so insecure that he needs a stepmother or a Najib or even a Barani to cling onto in his dealings, even though he does what he wants to in all cases. He is an enigmatic mixture of independence and dependence. What hope of peace for such a man ?

Lastly, Karnad has presented history in poetical terms. Using prayer as a lietmotif Karnad is highlighting the fact that his " life is corrupted at the very source " (Murthy). This symbol lends a depth to the play. Both Tughlaq (in murdering his father) and his enemies (in their attempt to murder him) use it for their devious designs. As Muhammad's land plunges into chaos, he is forced to issue a pained cry... "our sins have become shadows that entwine round our feet. They have become our dumbness and deprived us of prayer". The themes of sleep and sleeplessness of justice, of disguise intertwine gracefully into a poetic mixture. "If justice was as simple as you think or logic as beautiful as I had hoped, life would have been so much clearer" declares Tughlaq and he would not have alternately had to pray "not to sleep" and for sleep: Though intensely desirous of doing good for his people, Tughlaq is defeated into the feeling that he is "pursuing a mirage or fleeing a shadow." Hence the theme of appearance and reality. These themes are highlighted by the use of the imagery of disease which seems to infest Muhammads' land.

> " What would you prescribe for this honeycomb of diseases"?

he questions. The poetic language backs the themes and the symbolism in transforming history into meaning. Muhammad says :

> " Now I don't need a rose garden. I built it because I wanted to make for myself an image of Sadi's poems. I wanted every

rose in it to be a poem. I wanted every thorn in it to prick and quicken the senses. But I don't need those any trappings now; a funeral has no need for a separate symbol."

He can talk of "the moment" shedding its symbols, its questions and answers, "and standing" naked and calm where the stars throbbed in (his) veins. "I was the earth, was the grass. was the smoke, was the sky". The dryness of history is wiped off with this beautiful poetry.

The other characters are "dramatised aspects of his complex personality yet they also exist in their own right" (Murthy). All the characters may not have definite historical parallels like Aziz and Aazam, the comic pair who fall into the dramatic convention of Akara and Makara of Natak performances. They are created especially to throw light on Tughlaq's character, Aziz being an ironic parallel to the King's character. Yet, there is a realism in the presentation of history, nothing seening contrived and artificial. Actual historical intrigues are used to externalize dramatically "Tughlaq's tortured divided self" (Murthy). Thus, the poetry and the realism run parallel to each other, each informing and strengthening the other.

Thus, Girish Karnad masterfully revitalizes history, imbuing the play with a depth and a range which is peculiar to all great artistic creations.

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Oedipus

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE MYTH

" Hey . . . Did I ever tell you about the chappie who married his mother by mistake... His name was Oedipus, he was a Greek, I think. Well, the old hag turned out to be his mother . . . . So he scratched out both his eyes . . . . "

" Cut the dirty stories!"

A Taste of Honey : Shelagh Delany.

The Oedipus legend becomes either a dirty story or an intensely dramatic situation, depending on one thing—Oedipus motivation. Why did he do it? Why did he commit the twofold blasphemy of patricide and incest?

Most earlier critics — Whitman, Waldock, Letters, Ehrenberg, Knox, Kirkwood, Dodds, Kaufman etc. — are agreed on the essential moral innocence of Oedipus. He is held to be the helpless mortal persecuted for some reason by Gods and by Fate, a man not intentionally guilty of the crimes he commits. But the situation, for a present-day intellect, is too fraught with pregnant possibilities to be dismissed so lightly.

Oedipus, it must be remembered, is an intelligent man. The fact that he and he alone among all the Thebians is able to solve the Sphinx's riddle, is sufficient proof of this. Such

a man could not but have put two and two and got four. The indication of his guilt — the non-identification of Lavus' murderer, the time and place of the murder, Jocasta's age which brackets her with Merope's generation — the indications are too obvious to be ignored.

On the other hand, the reason for his not coming up with four, could be very simply because, what he had in the first place was not two and two. Granted Oedipus is too intelligent not to come up with the right solution when presented with the facts. But where he fails is with the facts themselves, the basic premises. For him, there has never been the slighest doubt concerning his parentage. Polybus and Merope, he accepts as his parents, simply because there has never been any cause to doubt it. His fatal ignorance could therefore be considered nothing but the inevitable derivation of his enormous innocence, an innocence too naive to even conceive of such grotesqueness... ....

Another important question raised is concerning the freedom of Oedipus. Did he have any chance at all against the decrees of the Oracle? Did his running away from Corinth serve any purpose at all, or, more important, could it have ? The Chorus at least does not think so.

" Fate guides us ; let fate have her way,
No anxious thought of ours can change
The pattern of the web of destiny",[1]

they say in Act V.

And a little later —

" Fear of his fate is many a man's undoing
Many a man has come upon his fate
Just where he thought to hide from it."

Therefore Oedipus, running away from Corinth and settling in Thebes under the impression that it is his sanctuary, ultimately finds in it, the very hell that he has been trying to avoid.

And this sort of duality is imposed, not only on Thebes but on Oedipus himself. "By the time the play begins, Oedipus has already committed the actions which he thinks he is still free to avoid . . . At the beginning of the action, Oedipus sees himself as the doctor but he is finally revealed as the sick man, the cause of pollution. He is the detective, but he turns out to be the criminal. He is both doctor and patient, the seeker and the sought, the finder and the thing found, the revealer and the thing revealed".[2]

This imposed schizophrenia is particularly significant because it considerably undermines any notions of his freedom. He is free only to find out that he is not free. His present actions are undercut by those of the past, and therefore he is forced to (unwittingly) mortgage his future —

" Grant that the man whose hand slew Laius
May find no rest, no home, no friendly hearth,
No hospitable land to shield his exile;
Darken his days ... ...
He shall find no pardon."

It is again of particular significance that Oedipus is just about the only person in the play who is unwilling to disclaim all responsibility, attributing his actions to Fate. He acknowledges the power of Fate but still holds himself responsible for his actions. Even Jocasta, who is after all, his accomplice in the incestuous deed can say :

" Blame Fate,
No man is blamed for what Fate does to him."

But Oedipus cannot be so satisfied :

" Fury was in his vein and soul, his face
Blazed with a fire of passion, and those eyes
Seemed starting from their sockets of themselves.
Mingled in his wild looks were wrath and madness,
Rage and determination... ...The fingers bent

And groped in haste to find the seeing eyes,
Then wrenched them from their roots and tore them out."

This is not the judicious self-inflictment of a condemned subject, carrying out the King's sentence of punishment. Such an intense, overpowering revulsion seems totally unwarranted in a morally innocent man whose only fault presumably is to have been born in the house of Labdacus.[3]

The important question again, is, — Why? Why should an essentially innocent man (essentially, because he is innocent in intention if not in act) feel such an enormous sense of guilt? The only possible answer would be that he was guilty, essentially guilty, guilty in intention.

Very early in the play, he confesses, when talking of his flight from Corinth —

"This terror drove me from my father's kingdom ;
Not by compulsion banished from the hearth,
But fearful of myself ... ... I see
Disaster everywhere. I doubt myself"

He recognises in himself, the potential for the very action that he dreads. He recognises his capacity for such action, if not at once, in the future at least. So he runs away. Now nobody knows better than Oedipus the power of Fate :

"He that goes in dread
Of some great evil cannot choose but fear
Even what seems impossible,"

he says in his first speech. So what did he hope to gain by running away from Corinth? A man who can acknowledge Fate's power over him to commit an act which fills him with such intense revulsion—

"I am ashamed
To utter what has been foretold of me"

— should acknowledge the fact that by running away, he could not hope to give the lie to the Oracle.

The only explanation for his flight therefore, would be plain cowardice. In running away, Oedipus was just evading the issue. He found himself faced with the frightening possibility of an incestuous affair with Merope, and promptly he turned tail.

And as luck (or fate) would have it, in running he did not even have repressed sexual instincts to contend with, for very soon, on reaching Thebes, he finds his mother figure, his surrogate mother in Jocasta.

This is not of course to claim that his marriage to Jocasta was consciously planned by him to satisfy his perverted sexual urges. It could have been and probably was, merely a matter of expediency — Laius had been murdered, and the Sphinx was threatening Thebes with destruction. Then along comes Oedipus to solve the riddle. So what better gesture of appreciation can the Thebans make, but appoint him King, hand him the crown, and the widowed Queen? Oedipus had 'stumble (d) upon a kingdom.' It could have been sheer expediency. It is particularly interesting that Oedipus should have been lucky (or fated) to find in his marriage with Jocasta, a lawful, perfectly acceptable relationship, which would, if effected with Merope, become a sexual aberration.

It is interesting at this point, to recognise in the Oedipus myth, a metaphor for one of the major preoccupations of a twentieth century individual — the search for self.

The entire action of the play stems from the search for Laius' murderer — Oedipus and since the search is initiated and carried out by Oedipus, the whole action would coincide with his search for himself. And the schizophrenia imposed would also be on a deeper dimension. Sartre introduces in this context, the idea of the divided self of a man who practises self-deception, where the duality of the deceiver and the deceived, the essential condition of the lie, is replaced by that of the 'Id' and the 'Ego'.[4]

And the Chorus' observation that one can never escape one's Fate would still be true, only, instead of Fate we would have to substitute 'oneself'. Throughout his life, or at least from the moment he has heard the prophecy (which would be equated with the first moment of self-awareness) Oedipus has been running. And Jocasta, Polybus and Merope in their persons are in various degrees his defence against himself —

'Of wife, my love, help me resolve my doubts'

he says after Creon returns with the damning news. And earlier

".....against the charge
Of sinful marriage, Merope defends me
For she is still the wife of Polybus
And Polybus still lives; my hands are clean
Of that offence. One parent witnesses
My innocence of murder, by the other
I am acquitted of inchastity".

For some fifteen years, he is allowed the freedom of the escapist. But then the Fates, or his own innate intelligence, intervenes, and he has to acknowledge his own self. And it is this act of acknowledgement, this self-awareness that elevates Oedipus to the stature of the tragic hero.

The Old Man and Creon try to dissuade him;
Old Man; "Let a secret that has long lain hidden.
Whether by chance or by design, remain
Hidden forever."

And in another instance :

Creon : "When medicine is foul/The cure
may be unpleasant".

But Oedipus remains unshirking in the performance of a self-appointed unpleasant task, unflinching in quest of the truth, at whatever cost of terrible self-revelation'.[5] That is why, though 'driven to the summit of passion by agony of body and soul,' ultimately he can claim with such a passionately reverent humility :

All's done — well done — .....
This darkness is my peace .....
This face is the true face of Oedipus."

It is only fitting that a life that has been subjected to such a number of paradoxes as his has been, should be crowned with another such. Therefore in blinding himself, he at last sees himself (and therefore the world) in true perspective, in total self-revulsion he can find self-resignation, and in going headlong to meet his Fate, he is able to overcome what he could not avoid by running away.

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1. This and all other quotations of the text are from :
'Seneca—Four Tragedies and Octavia' : The Penguin Classics translated by E.F. Watting.
2. Brian Vickers : Towards Greek Tragedy.
3. "Not yours, not yours the fault that brought such peril to us. Not for that do the Fates bear hard on the house of Labdacus. We are assailed by the ancient anger of the Gods"
—The Chorus, Act III, Oedipus-Seneca.
4. Sartre, Jean Paul : Being and Nothingness : Chap. Two :
Bad Faith: I Bad Faith and Falsehood—Pg. 92.
5. Watting, E.J. : Introduction to 'Sophocles —The Theban Plays. Pengiun Classics Pg. 15.

Feeling and Convention in Lycidas

In a lecture delivered on the King's name-day, 12th October 1806, in the Academy of Science at Munich, the German philosopher had made this interesting observation : 'Definitions of form in nature is never a negation but always an affirmation..... ...For the ability to set one's own bounds is everywhere regarded as excellence, indeed as one of the highest.'[1] If, in this connection, one were to consider the pastoral elegiac form of Lycidas, it would be only fair to draw the conclusion that 'Lycidas' is not a highly polished sophistry, but a subtle articulation, through convention, of the poet's emotional energy.

Now, as to this reconciling of emotion to the discipline of a convention it can be said that the poet, to evolve a creative pattern out of the struggle of two contraries has very subtly fused the forces of elementality and design so that 'the inacceptable is brought within the framework of order.'[2]

The pastoral convention, which can be considered a form of primitivism, rests on the belief that rural life is superior to urban life; by implication this creation of a prelapsarian world conjured up by a conspiration of imagination and memory helps to create a not too distant world of comparative felicity. It is a timeless world, that of the mind in regression from reality prevailing over a landscape of ideas. Thus this peculiar originality of the pastoral has caused it to interpenetrate other forms as a creative element acting as an ethos or informing principle. For as Grey says, 'The pastoral, whatever its form always needed and assumed some external circumstance to give point to its actual content. The interest seldom arises from the narrative itself. It only receives meaning in relation to some ulterior intention of the author'.[3] This would also be true of the pastoral elegy that at once assumes the form as a meaningful and familiar ritual. In its essence then, the assumption of the pastoral stance at once is the prelude to an escape from a overwhelming present into a sanctified past or a bright and hopeful future.

Now, Milton, confronted with conflicting forces of elementality, the lust for life on the one hand and the futility of a life of greatness fostered by talent on the other, sought to resolve his agitation through the discipline of a convention that would assist him to come to terms with the complexity of his existence by retiring temporarily into a world of comparative simplicity. But since the retirement into a pastoral stance is a preparation for engagement with the world of reality, it becomes the beginning of a quest and not the end. The poem then becomes 'a precarious mannerist balancing of two forces', of ferocious feeling and convention — a convention that needs must stand the assault upon the poet's own assumption that forced it into birth, so that self-discovery emerges out of the limitations of design (Rajan).

The death of Edward King awakened in Milton feelings that were in most part a mingling of fear, despair and despondency. For now on the threshold of life, even as King had been, Milton needed a clarification of his artistic, moral and intellectual purpose. It had become an urgent necessity for 'Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,. Hence the pastoral apparel served his purpose, for he meant to use it, with an awareness of its high function as an illuminating experience, and no more. The pastoral as a microcosm of the greater world would only help him explore his 'commitment to poetry and to the exploration of the relative worths of the active and contemplative existence !' (Marinelli)

The statement of his purpose in his composition are those lines that start, 'Begin then, sisters of the sacred well.....' and last till '.....by fountain shade and rill'. The convention is formally adhered to from then on, though the pall of a partial view of death overhangs and makes those lines 'As killing as the canker to the rose' and 'of frost to the flowers that their gay wardrobe wear' suggest the inherent suffering that has to wait long till True Joy emerges.

This feeling is more than obvious in the first of those three digressions wherein the relative worths of an epicurean existence and of that which demands commitment to a vocation are examined, till the unsatisfactory reply marks the prologue to a forced return to the convention. This slight tilt of a mind as taut as Milton's, towards a personal agony more than reflects the rage in his mind for order that had to progress in the act of making itself manifest, at the cost of an assault on the form that in essence was 'a dally with false surmise.'

The second digression, that of St. Peter's famous speech is also an offspring of the abovementioned condition that seeks to recompense the malignancy of arbitrary destruction. For those who with 'their lean and flashy songs/Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw,' 'creep and intrude, and climb into the fold!' while 'the remorseless deep closed over the head' of 'loved Lycidas'.

There is, it would be apparent, an effort, towards a prospect Desired, of progression that sought to accept with equanimity the shock of reality without the sacrifice of the sence of design'. But this examination of reality through conventions only rendered it more proximate in its essence, giving rise to ambivalent feelings. Hence the repeated trials of adherence to the tradition that would propel self-discovery through its own limitations, which had to be overwhelmed in the process, till Hope ascended. The Bier passage testifies to this final assault on order that mellowed the poet's sensibilities so that he could look with on equanimity on Death and rejoice in the day star that 'yet anon repairs his drooping head' and 'Flames in the forehead of the morning sky.'

As Rosemund would have it, the poet by virtue of his power and confidence had delivered 'the most poignant and controlled statement in English poetry' of the acceptance of that in the human condition which seems to man inacceptable.' But in its fundamental approach the poet's imagination exploring existence selected images as occasion and struggle demanded so that in the end it came out as 'the most poignant and controlled statement.'

Lycidas thus assumes the format of a pattern that helps the elegist to relive in song the emotional progress which led him to sing. Built on movements of thought and emotion, the poem while serving as the medium for expression of the poets conflicting emotions, is held under the most 'impersonal artistic control,'[4] so that finally peace silences the poet's questionings and the path is clear for him to advance to 'fresh woods and pastures new.'

Finally, the creative pattern not only permits Milton to seek a Truth but also in effect forms a consecrative process — from one poet to another — of the highest resolution of the one who had arrived at it to the one that was worthy of it. Hence Lycidas as an elegy could well be called the highest tribute one poet would pay another, for only 'NOBLENESS ENKINDLETH NOBLENESS'.[5]

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1. Schelling, Fredrich Von, Translated by Michael Bullock.
2. Rajan, Balachandran : 'The Lofty Rhyme'.
3. Marinelli, Peter V. : 'Pastoral'.
4. Bush, Douglas : Some Minor Poems, Milton.
5. Lowell, James : Yussouf.

Galling Wine

Impressions on Maxim Gorky's "Makar Chudra", "My Travelling Companion", "Grandfather Arkhip and Lyonka", and "Old Ilergil".

"I am a bitter writer; and you will find galling the wine I have prepared for you to drink ; my words will be distressing to your ears" : This is what Gorky's 'Visiting card' told the readers of the world, for his name 'Gorky' means "the bitter one".

"Maxim Gorky is regarded as a colossal workers correspondent", said Anatoly Lunacharsky. When one reads Gorky, one finds that he was a man who having found out how the "moles" lived was prepared to give the "children of the sun" a brilliant, stupendously artistic report on the evils of life, on the horrors of those forms of existence revealing a mutilated mind which he found flooding his country in a strong dark tide. In his short story "Grandfather Arkhip and Lyonka", he sums up the relationship between the "moles" and the "children of the sun" through the bitter ranting of Grandfather Arkhip. "But to go about asking for alms is a better lot—even for me, an old man. Bow your head to every one, beg from everybody. And they curse you, strike you sometimes, send you packing .....Do you think anyone thinks of a beggar as a real person? No one! It's ten years now since I've been on the roads. I know. They value a piece of bread at a thousand roubles. A man'll give you a piece of bread and you can see how he's thinking the gates of heaven are swinging open for him as he does it. Do you think there's any other reason people have for giving? As a sop to their own consciences, my friend; that's their reason, not because they're sorry for you! They push a piece your way so's the food shouldn't stick in their own gullets's. A full man is a beast. And he has no compassion for the man who is hungry. They are enemies —the full man and the hungry, and they'll be motes in each other's eyes for ever and ever. Because it's not possible for them to understand or pity one another....."

Gorky's world outlook is crowded with thick shadows, frightening and hateful, but they are offset by his tremendous faith in human happiness and in idealism. In "grandfather Arkhip and Lyonka", Gorky creates Lyonka as the flamebearer of his idealism. Lyonka is a beggar boy scarcely eleven years old, a beggar like his grandfather. But, the richness of his spiritual world makes the materialism of his grandfather disgusting, until one day, when he realises that his grandfather has stolen a scarf from a child, he burst out: "Stop it!" Something seemed to flare up inside Lyonka. 'Better keep your mouth shut! I'd die, you say, I'd die..... but you don't die.....you steal!' squealed Lyonka and suddenly, all of a tremble, leapt to his feet 'You're an old thief!.....Oo—Oo!' And, clenching his dry little fist, he began shaking it before the nose of his suddenly silent grandfather and sunk heavily back to earth again, continuing between his teeth: You stole from a child.....Ah! a fine way to behave! An old man, and still a sinner.....There'll be no pardon for you in heaven for this!"

N. Savin wrote about Lyonka, "Lyonka is not quite a usual child and his phychological make-up hardly has a parallel in the whole of Russian Literature about children". This was meant as a high appraisal of the writer's skill in creating the image of Lyonka noting the little boy's unique qualities.

Gorky had a vision of how men ought to live, and how good that would be; and a knowledge of how things actually were! They stood poles asunder before him: the appalling truth of life and the great urge for happiness, for peace, for love, for a life sharply contrasting with the barbarous reality he had to face. In Lyonka one finds this dual view, a tremendous awarenes of the possibilties latent in man and a great sensitivity of the reality around him. This idealism which remains firmly rooted, almost like an instinct, inspite of bitter experiences, is beautifully illustrated in the following extract from "Grandfather Arkhip and Lyonka."

"He loved the steppe. Trudging over it in the daylight, he liked to look ahead to where a vault of heaven came down to rest on its wide breast. Away over there, he imagined big and wonderful towns inhabited by kindly people such as he had never met with, of whom it would not be necessary to beg bread. They would give of themselves, without being asked. And when the steppe, stretching wider and wider before his eyes, would suddenly reveal just another village, familiar before he reached it, its buildings and people just like all those that he had seen before, he would feel sad, hurt, cheated".

Whenever Gorky portrayed evil mindedness among the lower classes, he did not put the blame on them but on their environment. He violently denounces greed or selfishness, but he does not do this because he is accusing the working man of it. He was aware that the working man had been made coarse and rapacious by all the conditions of his life. Prince Shakro the travelling companion of Gorky in "My Travelling Companion", is a confidence trickster, with a naivity that is at odds with his profession. He is selfish, a glutton, and lazy. He virtually lives off Gorky (this story is autobiographical) and does this with a curious conviction that he has every right in making such confident and bold demands on Gorky's help and care. Yet, inspite of all the free for alls and wounded pride which is inevitable when sensitivity is in close proximity with coarseness, Gorky could not bring himself to leave him and go away which he could have done easily. He felt morally responsible for the never-do-well vagabond. An extract from the story will speak for the tolerance and understanding Gorky had in his dealings with people who were not endowed with the finer qualities.

"He persuaded me of this so clearly and convincingly that, instead of losing my temper with him for his naive cynicism, I was filled with a feeling of profound pity for him. What else is it possible to feel for a man who, with the brightest of smiles and in the most sincere tones, informs you of his intention to kill you? What was there to be done about him, if he looked on this act as an endearing witty joke?".

The beautiful simplicity of his style and technique by which the deepest of philosophies are clothed makes his stories easy reading, but never light reading. He has no pretensions, no bombastic rhetoric, no artificial trimmings, to adorn his philosophy. His characters are people one can easily identify oneself with, and easily understand because their basic instincts are our own; their basic instincts are universal; and yet, they never degenerate into types. Each character is an individual although he shares the universal characteristics of man. Makar Chudra and Old Izergil are story tellers, yet it would do them injustice to classify them into mere story tellers; they are poles apart and even after reading their story they have to tell, one thinks of them essentially as Makar Chudra and Izergil and it is not surprising that Gorky has named the stories after them.

Gorky is a superb story teller. The reader is hardly aware that he is telling him a story: it is more in the tone of a confession, a confidence. There is a certain intimacy between the author and the reader. It is almost as if Gorky himself is hearing the story for the first time and with a casual introduction,

the reader is taken into the enchanted circle beside the campfire.

The story teller beside a campfire whose flame "seemed a great flaring bouquet of red and yellow flowers", resembles, in purpose, the bards and minstrels of old, the wise old men or the aged crone as in 'Makar Chudra' and 'Old Izergil'. The characters whether they are semi-fairy-tale characters done in gold and vermillion and purple, like Donko who ripped open his breast and tore out his heart that his people might be free, beautiful Radda "whose beauty no words could describe. Perhaps it could be played on a violin, but only by one who knew the instrument as he knew his own soul", or old Arkhip, "his eyes the dull inflamed eyes of an old man, the lids red and swollen, blinking anxiously, and the face with its web of wrinkles set in an expression of weary misery"..... are so vividly painted that they spring up before one's eyes without the least conscious effort at building up a picture.

Nature is not just a passive background against which Gorky's dismal dramas are depicted. The narration is drenched with the beauty of Nature, Nature which is vibrant with a life and emotion of its own, dynamic, even cruel, but always fascinating. "Makar Chudra" begins with the picture of the steppe in the darkness of the autumn night.

"Now and then, a gust would lift up some shrivelled yellow leaves and whirl them into our camp–fire, causing the flames to flame up, then the darkness of the autumn night would shudder and start back in fright, giving us a glimpse of the boundless steppe to the left, the boundless sea to the right.....". It sets the mood for the sad tale of love between Loiko Zobar, the bravest gypsy youth in Hungary, Bohemia and Slavonia, and Radda the proud maid who enslaved Zobar.

In "Old Izergil" Gorky captures the colour and movement of the moon with an artistry that cannot be rivalled by the best of landscape painters. "The moon came up. Large, round and blood-red, it seemed to have emerged from the bowels of that steppe which had swallowed up so much human flesh and blood; this, perhaps, was why it was so rich and fertile. The old woman and I were caught in the lacy shadow of the leaves as in a net. Across the steppe, which extended to our left, flitted cloud shadows made pale and transparent by the blue moonshine....."

Gorky's stories are enriched with drama, the words themselves throb with life, they are taut with suppressed energy, making one's imagination race with excitement, and suddenly, the words drop with the heaviness and muffled stillness of stones sinking into quagmire. In Old Izergil" he writes : "And suddenly, he ripped upon his breast and tore out his heart and held it high above his head. It shone like the sun, even brighter than the sun, and the raging forest was subdued and lighted up by this torch, the torch of a great love for the people, and the darkness retreated before it and plunged, quivering, into a yawning bog in the depths of the forest. And in their astonishment, the people were as if turned to stone."

Experiencing Gorky is like watching a spider's web, which has the double potential of light and darkness. Reality seems dank and grey but Gorky's humanism is like the sunlight which changes even the miserable looking cobweb into a beautiful and intricate silver filigree work.

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Sources of Humour in P. G. Wodehouse :

"If asked whom I thought the most illustrious living novelist born in England, I would unhesitatingly say P. G. Wodehouse ...in prose fiction I believe Wodehouse without peer. First, the mere weight of his achievement..... coupled with sustained talent is impressive. Then his appeal is universal, the young like him as do the old—an amazing fact in our culture of warring generations ... So says Colin Mc Innes in his New York Time Review. One of the leading writers of the 20th Century, Wodehouse was one who conveyed to his readers that rarest of human emotions any writer can, which is simply joy. The reason for his undoubted appeal lies in his humor, the sources of which will be investigated in this paper.

One of the primary sources of humour in Wodehouse is in his thoroughly complicated and involved plots. Various social types all play their parts in these mazes of misunderstanding, intrigue, blackmail and theft. The complexity is bewildering and the unravelling of the tangled threads of cross-purposes gives rise to tremendous humour. For example in 'Full moon' there is the arrival of the pennyless lover at Blandings to rescue the incarcerated niece, who is forced to try and kidnap the Empress of Blandings (Lord Emsworth Prize Pig,) so that Lord Emsworth will give his consent to their marriage thereby releasing the nieces fortune so that the young man can start a foreign soup bar, which all his "pals" assure him "rakes" in oodles of money!".

In most of these plots you have the merry manipulator - Uncle Fred, Frederick Altamont Twisleton, fifth Earl of Ickinham, the hon. Galahad Threepwood or Jeeves. These master minds are often pastmasters at fibs, blackmail and as Jeeves, succintly puts it "understanding the psychology of the individual".

However, humour in Wodehouse occurs not just from the actual situations but also from presentation and character. Wodehouse skillfully exploits the levels of awareness in each character, the manipulator being the only one wholly aware of the situation and its further implications. Only he can judge the weight of an incident and often unscrupulously use it to his advantage. The various social types are clearly contrasted in this light — the woolly aristocracy, domineering and stubborn, the wordly wise class of domestic servants. It is interesting to note how acute and perceptive most of these servants are. They can judge character to a nicety, turning tables efficiently on their supposed superiors, the aristocratic employers, more often than not rescuing those feckless and ineffective characters from ruin and scandal. These incongruities give rise to humour, the contrast between the idyllic, perfect setting and the confusion and chaos ensuing, portrayed through the reactions of the characters.

Wodehousian character portrayal is another important source of humour. His names themselves are extremely evocative. In fact his characters are all studied portraits of certain social classes, exhibiting particular mannerisms of speech and behaviour. Wodehousian names for instance — Stitton Cheese Wright (an outright pun) Oofy Prosser, the hon. Iredrick Threepwood — all aristocrats with ancestral Castles. Soapy Molloy and Chimp Trust are criminals and of course Jeeves and Beech the impressive gentleman's gentleman. The classification is rather simple. The main categories are the ineffectual "pink" young man — rather the dandy — very conscious of his dress; the elderly eccentric Aunt or Uncle, imperious and dictatorial or meek and menial, the domestic servant — the butler, footman or chauffeur.

The merry manipulator usually is either one of the aristrocracy, or a domestic servant, Wodehouse delights in contrast. The exaggeration of foibles in accentuating extremes adds considerably to the humour.

These social divisions are vividly brought alive through dialogue and imagery. The very strict and rigid British social divisions, the etiquette governing their behaviour gives rise to much of the comic situations. There is a distinct refutation of these connections in Wodehouse. Its very incongruity gives rise to humour. The classic example is that of Jeeves and Bertis Wooster the classical ; super intelligent Jeeves, who can quote from Browing to Neitzche and Wooster, the ineffectual dandy, with unfortunate taste, kept off harm only through the timely intervention of Jeeves who, "dash it all", is only a valet.

Over and above and all these above mentioned sources, humour arises from Wodehouses use of language. He invests it with a purely Wodehousian dimension.

> "He spoke with a certain what — is — it in his voice and I could see that if not actually disgruntled, he was far from being gruntled. So I tactfully changed the subject".

Sometimes it is not so much the situation as its narrative which captures the readers, imagination. The language explodes with humour in every quip, pun and simile.

> " I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw a house ".

Wodehouse is very sensitive to the aural possibilities of language. Tone of speech and dialogue are very important. The following passage from " The Mating Season " illustrates this.

"There are of course many ways of saying " well ". The speaker who had the floor at the moment—Dame Daphne Winkworth—said it rather in the manner of a prudish Queen of a Monarch of Babylon who has happened to wander into the banqueting hall just as the Babylonian orgy was beginning to go nicely ". (This after Bertie Wooster and Esmond Waddock are found by Dame D rather uninhibitedly rendering a hunting song causing her to utter that memorable word " well ".)

Imagery is another important element of Wodehousian humour. There are no studied portraits. The reader's imagination is fired from certain graphic similies and comparisons or rough descriptions of reactions and behaviour. Of Aunt Dahlia, Bertie Wooster says,

> " If all other sources of income fail she could always call the cattle home across the sands of Dee ".

Or we have Jeeves "trickling" or "shimmering" into the room.

Wodehouse makes free use of slang but it is never vulgar or bawdy :

" The old bean " ; "Instantly begged it" ; "hoof it up" ; " pretty hot potato ". Wodehouse is also a past-master at similies :

" Sir Rodrick sort of just waggered an eyebrow ... and I saw that it was back to the basket for Bertram. I never met a man who had such a knack of making a fellow feel like a waste product ".

The humour from Wodehousian similes arises not only from their aptness but also their originality. Dialogue also plays a very important role in Wodehousian humour. The very construction of sentences reveal minute details of character, all the time confering the picture of a certain social class. Here is a sample from " Young men in Spats " at that eternal stronghold of male superiority, the Drones Club.

" Old Freddie's back, " he observed (a Crumpet).

Some moments elapsed before any of those present felt equal to commenting on this statement. Then a Bean Spoke.

" Freddie who? "

" Freddie Widgeon ".

" Back where? "

" Back here ".

" I mean, back from what spot? "

" New York ".

" I didn't know Freddie had been to New York "

" Well you can take it from me he has. Or else how," " argued the Crumpet, " would he have got back? ".

The Bean considered the point.

" Something in that ", he argued. " What sort of time did he have? "

" Not so good. He lost the girl he loved ".

" I wish I had a quid for every girl Freddie Widgeon has loved and lost, "

Sighed an Egg wistfully. " If I had, I shouldn't be touching you for a fiver ".

" You aren't ", said the Crumpet.

" The Bean frowned. His head was hurting him and he considered that the conversation was becoming sordid."

Another interesting element of Wodehousian humour is his portrayal of prejudices. Very much the correct British gentleman, most of his characters have prejudices described in the most hilarious terms. Here is an extract from his note on the importance of being clean shaven.

> " But let a man omit to shave for a single day and mark the result. He feels hot and scrubby. Within twelve hours his outlook has become jaundiced and captious."

" If his interests lie in the direction of politics, he goes out and throws a bomb at someone. If he is an employer of labour, he starts a lock-out. 1f he is a writer, he sits down to write his criticism with the determination that by the time he has finished, the author will know he has been in a fight.

" You have only to look about you to appreciate the truth of this. All whiskered things are testy and short tempered ..... pumas, wildcats, Benard Shaw and in the mating season shrimps. Would Ben Jonson have knifed a man on account of some literary disagreement if he had not been bearded to the eyebrows? Can you imagine a nation of spruce, clean shaven Bolsheviks smelling of bay rum?. "

These prejudices give rise to many plots, each as humorous as the prejudice itself. It causes the non-golfing Rodney Spelvin to lose his lady love (The Clicking of Cuthbert) the teetotaller to die in a car accident, the extremly eligible but pig-hating young aristocract to lose Angela Lord Emsworth's niece to the pennyless young man who gets the Empress eating again. (Pighooey) This list of prejudices extends to school mistresses, Pekinese Puppies, domineering aunts (Aunt Agatha is supposed to conduct human-sacrifices on full moon nights) and efficient secretaries like the efficient Baxter in the Blandings series.

Wodehouse's view of life is on the whole benevolent, an attitude of avuncular indulgence. We laugh with the characters at their foibles, never at their misfortunes. Nobody is the victim of the comedy. There is no derision in the laughter. It is spontaneous, caused by the ridiculous mess of the situation, its incongruity, the contrast between what is portrayed and what reality is. There is deception but never treachery. The extent of villainy is selling shares in non-existent oil-wells or stealing diamond Necklaces which are paste all the time. The admiring public has bought some 30 million volumes of these comic fantasies.

Set in a never-neverland of unambiguous, upper clas twists, where it is always a bright spring morn with nary a cloud of poverty, malice or lust, no matter what confusion reigns supreme in the book, at the end there is always a return to the calm and peace of the spring morning.

"The Lark's on the Wing and the Snail on the thorn
God's in his heaven and all's right with the world".

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NOTE:

The opening quotation is from Collin Mac Innis in the New York Times Book Review.

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