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Literature Today

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THE ALICE PARKER MEMORIAL LECTURE

LITERATURE TODAY

Delivered by
DR. GERMAINE BREE

Sponsored by
THE LINDENWOOD COLLEGE CHAPTER OF
THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

In cooperation with
The Department of Modern Languages
and
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of
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Dr. Bree's Introduction

"I consider it indeed an honor that the Lindenwood College Chapter of the AAUP invited me to deliver the memorial lecture given in tribute to Alice Parker-- a woman who achieved distinction in her chosen field of English literature. By the support she gave the Lindenwood College Chapter, she showed her belief in the value of the profession to which she devoted her life. Literature was her field as it is mine and it is of literature that, to honor her memory, I shall speak to you today."

Literature Today

Some time ago, the students at the University of Wisconsin organized a week of lectures on the state of our environment. Each one of the experts they called upon to speak had his very real concern: the population explosion; water, air, soil, food, DDT, nuclear pollution; waste. The lectures started with an objective appraisal of the situation, then leaped to the prophetic: as a species we were on the way out. They gave us ten or perhaps twenty years--unless.... The prescriptions were diverse, urgent and contradictory and it was clear that they could hardly be implemented within the span of time allotted. Toward the end of the week a group of students engaged in the ritual orgy of "trashing." True it was probably mere coincidence; but it is true too that when people feel impotent in the face of disaster they tend to react by perpetrating violence. At the end of the week three professors representing the Humanities--philosophy, history and literature--were called upon to conclude the debate and pronounce on the chances and modes of man's survival. We were baffled. For we had no answers as Humanists; we could speak only in terms of our subjective beliefs and common sense. Being closer than the students to our own private apocalypse, we could only say that yes, indeed, we thought humanity would survive. But I, for example, in the name of literature, could not truthfully say that it would help matters if literature were more vividly taught in schools and colleges and if more people read and wrote literary works.

If I recall this episode typical of many such today with the same attendant frustrations, it is because it illustrates the kind of misunderstanding which haunts the attempts of writers, readers and teachers to define with some degree of pertinency the function in our contemporary society of that particular human

activity--the creation of literature. I shall use the word here in the more special sense as referring to those works that belong to the sphere of "belles-lettres" and shall not attempt further to define it, for that would involve me in unlimited debate. We are dealing with an academic discipline whose realm is not strictly defined, for what makes a text "literary" is open to question, and which nonetheless is central to our educational edifice. What, some of our students are now asking, is the use of Shakespeare for example when we confront the dereliction of the ghetto? In practical terms the answer is "none." It is a fact that literature does not deal in immediate practical solutions. Then the question arises: in a time of urgent social problems why fiddle while Detroit burns? or while millions of human beings suffer hunger?

From time immemorial, the poet--taking the word in its broadest sense--and the nature of his activity have been topics of speculation: The poet has always been with us. Periodically--as has been the case in France, for instance, in the last half-century--the question arises "What is literature?" "Why write?" "For whom does one write?" It was Sartre, who raised these questions with great rhetorical urgency immediately after World War II. These questions have become one of our preoccupations today. Writers, philosophers, critics, educators join in the debate. And it seems they never fully agree as to the answer. Now as in the past no answer seems definitive. In learned journals and popular magazines time-honored definitions are proposed and writers themselves come forth with conflicting claims. We are living in a time when the literary experience is being newly scrutinized, from every angle--the writer's, the reader's, the critic's, the educator's, the psychologist's, the sociologist's, the philosopher's. But then so is our entire outlook on what the existentialist philosophers like to

call our "human reality." The connection is not accidental.

I do not intend to discuss the question of the present dissatisfaction with our culture; the revolt of the environmental scientists against what we are doing to our earth and concomitantly to ourselves is one of its aspects. Our students will challenge most of the time-honored justifications of literature: that it is a central part of our cultural heritage; that it is a source of inner enrichment and wisdom, expanding our awareness, refining our sensibilities; that it is in essence a celebration of life, of man's presence in and to the world; and one of the noblest repositories of men's dreams, insights and understanding; and that, consequently, it must be passed on from generation to generation giving the succeeding generations a sense of the values inherent in the human enterprise. They also challenge our assumption that, like all the other arts, literature is most indispensable to our post-Nietzschean age in which for many people "God is dead" and there is no reality beyond this earth, a recurrent theme in contemporary thought.

We also know, from experience that a high level of literary culture has not proved incompatible in our time--or in any time--with a fine capacity for organized brutality. The Nazi example, though the most dramatic, is unfortunately not the only example we might consider. Marx, besides, has suggested to us that writers are socially "conditioned" and may unknowingly wear the same blinders as their contemporaries, exhibit the same mental bounds. So that we may wonder to what extent and in what sense literature in fact informs us. In the past as sometimes still in the present, large claims have been put forward with messianic fervor and have not seemed entirely convincing. There was the surrealist claim that if literature were what it should be, it could "transform" life; the Marxist claim

that its function is to collaborate with History in the necessary and inevitable movement of human society through time; the liberal belief that it is the highest manifestation of a culture, carefully to be nurtured; and the flat assertion of a French poet--Malherbe--in the 17th century that a writer is of no more use to the state than a bowler--a point of view which we seem uneasily and unconvincingly to be struggling to disprove.

We feel, none the less, consternation, and sometimes a sense of suffocation as books proliferate, and we confront, in paperback, the acres of "bad, good, indifferent, eccentric and stuffy works" of literature that have come down to us through the centuries and from all across the earth. As they rush through academic reading lists, students acquire the feeling that they are caught in a treadmill of words and want to get out of it and live. Literature then may appear to them in a simple way as antithetical to life: and that too is a literary theme in itself. But, until the last quarter of a century we had assumed that if we as individual subjects are not here to stay, others would necessarily come after us to pursue the human venture where we left off, that there would be a continuity in the development of our civilization. We may no longer be too sure of what that "I" represented. Freud had split it at least in three, the Ego, the Id and the Super-ego; Marx had suggested that we were merely the products of economic forces; philosophers like Sartre taught us that we are nothing but the sum of our acts; others like Nietzsche and Wittgenstein had turned the spotlight on our language. We are living in the age of structural linguistics which proves to us that language, independently from our conscious will, controls our manner of being and creates our way of looking at the world. Biological structures, social structures, linguistic structures, literary structures. Non-experts are wary

today of making any statements describing human beings and their activities. The French novelist Nathalie Sarraute claims that today's writer lives in the "age of suspicion" in regard to his craft. We might prefer to call it the age of questioning.

In the meantime Professor McLuhan has proclaimed in a widely diffused book that "the book" is on the out, at least in the form we know, displaced by the electronic audio-visual media and ephemeral psychedelic environmental forms of art. We have realized of course that we were living in a period of unusually fast-change and witnessing the destruction, gradual or abrupt, of many social and esthetic assumptions and traditions. Rightly sometimes, though rashly at other times the young men and women around us were intimating that they did not intend to let us continue with staid placidity producing well-worn answers to their questions. "How can you put on yesterday's clothes," the Surrealists already had queried rather more forcibly than avant-garde groups before them.

Now, in discussions such as the one I alluded to, environmental experts, in their anxiety over the predicaments they had diagnosed had created an unprecedented situation for us: they were cutting us off from the continuum of time. Unprecedented is not quite the right term; human beings, periodically, have been haunted by the specter of the end of the world. But this "sense of an ending" was developing in the context of scientific study of phenomena not religious, or visionary prediction, and thereby was unprecedented in its impact. In his articles Professor René Dubos has spoken of what may happen to human beings when changes in their outer and inner environment are too abrupt. And the two are not unrelated. What we tend to forget in our debates is the inner environment, the inner ambiance to which the debates are related and the inner disturbances they engender. Since

Hiroshima that "sense of an ending" has been with us and a latent unease born of the individual's impatience with a society that spells out the danger and yet apparently will not change, and so must be radically rejected and smashed.

To speak of literature in this perspective seems inappropriate: a poem, a novel, all "irrelevant" barring some magic formula, can hardly compete against the fascination, the power over imagination of such an anticipation. If the Apocalypse is near, speech of any kind would appear as nothing but senseless chatter, a noisy form of silence.

Senseless chatter and silence indeed have furnished the content, if not the substance of some recent literature: of the early Ionesco plays, and increasingly, the work of Beckett. Yet, paradoxically, in the literary transmutation, the senselessness acquires meaning and the silence becomes communication. With his sardonic sense of humor Beckett has recently pushed his experiments with minimal expression to its limits: the vague glimpse of a medley of bodies, and a wail. Recently a French scholar and psychiatrist, Michel Foucault, has suggested that madness occurs when a person is placed in conditions such that, paralyzed by the sense of his finitude, he is no longer able to grasp any image of himself as engaged in the "signifying" (meaningful) human activities: language, work and living; overwhelmed by the "non-sense" of his being he then "throws in the towel." As the activities of Ionesco and Beckett suggest, the writer is the man who as long as he writes cannot "throw in the towel," because by the very fact that he is giving some shape or form to the words he gathers, he is engaged in a "signifying" activity. To write is to wager against the Apocalypse. This of course could probably be argued as holding true of all art. I shall now try to approach the topic of literature proper from another point of view.

In an issue of the New York Review of Books (April 9, 1970) Kenneth Koch of Columbia University tells of his experimental class in New York City the purpose of which was to teach fourth and fifth graders to write poetry. The article is entitled Wishes, lies and dreams, a Freudian title. Koch describes his method as follows: "I asked the class to write a poem together, everybody contributing one line... Everyone was to write the line on a sheet of paper and turn it in... I suggested we make some rules about what should be in every line...it would help to give the final poem unity... I gave an example putting a colon in every line." The poem was to be an "I wish" poem. "We ended up with the regulation that every line should contain a color, a comic-strip character, and a city or country." The method, as you see, recalls certain surrealistic experiments. The lines were shuffled; the title chosen by the children was "Feelings at P.S. 61." This is what came out:

I wish I was Dick Tracy in a black suit in England

I wish I were a Supergirl with a red cape; the city of Mexico is
where I live

I wish that I were Veronica in South America. I wish that I could
see the blue sky..." and so on.

The children, Mr. Koch tells us, were enormously excited first by writing the lines, then even more by hearing them read as a poem. They were, he says "talking, waving, blushing, laughing and bouncing up and down." Mr. Koch then had each child write his own "wish poem."

I wish I could leap high into the air and land softly on my toes

I wish I could dance in every country in the world...

And he read the best of these to the primary grades. "Within a few moments,"

he writes "first a few students then the whole class was shouting 'Yeah!' at the top of their lungs after every wish, that is after every line of every poem." They too wanted to write and they did.

The environment was drab, but the children were completely uninhibited by it, tremendously happy and totally absorbed in their activity. What they had discovered, one surmises, was their power over and freedom in language, their ability to take the words and sensations and feelings of everyday living and give them a new kind of presence, new yet specific and recognizable. And each wish of each separate child was recognized and hailed by them all.

In a recent book entitled The Seamless Web (Braziller, New York 1970), the poet and critic Stanley Burnshaw examines the artist's--more specifically the poet's--activity, in the light both of the psychophysiology of which Professor Dubos is an exponent and of linguistics. Poetry, he claims begins and ends with the body. He describes the creative process in terms of the biological processes described by contemporary biology whereby the "human creature" responds to the world as a total organism in order to maintain the equilibrium that allows it to survive in its environment. The "human creature" is the talking creature and still--pace McLuhan--in some reaches of our society the writing creature. Literature in its broadest sense Mr. Burnshaw sees as linked to the needs of the total organism and as such he defines it as "the joint creation of man and his universe." It is one of the means we have of creating the equilibrium between and the merging of man and world that can come into being through language. In our complex society, he suggests, as others also have suggested, this equilibrium is reached by the controlled expression--through pattern, rhythm, tempo, and all forms of stylisation--of those organic impulses driven into obscurity by the abstract computer-like

thought processes predominant in the organization of a high civilization. Literary creation in those terms is a necessary activity, a "life-sustaining" activity, a verbal "unburdening" that establishes a truce in our complicated conflict-ridden lives. For Burnshaw then writing and reading in the deepest sense are "natural" activities through which we re-establish our often fragile sense of existing as a part of what he calls "the seamless web of the world." Though I am not arguing that the lines written at P.S. 16 constitute "high" literature, they do in many ways corroborate Mr. Burnshaw's description of his much more conscious activity: the "unburdening," the link established between the I and the outer world, the joy in the pattern which is a sign of control.

What I am suggesting then is that what we question and argue about when we talk of literature is not so much the fact of the literary experience as the manner in which we should look at it and talk about it. The writer himself when he wants to communicate his experience often reaches out to the ideas and knowledge that are current in his society. Where some will settle for "genius," to explain what they do, others will speak of the unconscious self, and Mr. Burnshaw notes that "language speaks through me." But all are speaking of the literary venture as the discovery of something "other" than the everyday modes of speech. It is easy to see how aptly Mr. Koch worked somewhat as many modern artists work, by proposing to his class an arbitrary but single structure. One element was the subjective "I wish" that liberated the children from the restrictive context of the immediate reality around them and let them loose in a whole inner world of words, images and memory, free and excited by the discovery. He then directed their attention to random groupings of things--color, place, names of imaginary but familiar figures. And so he had made heterogeneous fragmented things hang together, show themselves in

unexpected ways, never the same things, never in the same way for two children.

The principle of unification proposed was not externally formal but it allowed the children to create forms while giving them an escape out of learned, expected associations. Part of the children's pleasure (what poet was it who said that we need to "redeem" pleasure?) certainly was due to their recognition of the recurrent design and of the inexhaustible diversity of the mutations that they could create within it. In an unsophisticated way they were at the heart of the literary experience. In a wholly unconscious manner they were experiencing what in their different theoretic approaches some of our "structuralists" are suggesting--whether in anthropology, psychology, art or linguistics--that a language is a symbolic system that "makes sense" because beneath the surface of the words there is an underlying structure that makes it possible to communicate variants which introduce modes of individual feeling and experience--the modes of feeling of a particular concrete physical being, in a particular setting, a particular society and time.

"Our man-made environment," writes an environmentalist, "is the most significant creation of all ~~the~~ time in that it has the most immediate effect on men's lives and souls." And yet, he continues, "the traditional humanistic education provides little guidance for anyone" who wants to "evaluate the complex changing environment." He has, I fear, forgotten the whole vast edifice of the arts and singularly of literature which is a privileged domain of speech. For to some extent there is no literature, when we become familiar with its patterns of language, that ultimately remains foreign to us. It is itself an environment, built in time, a collective enterprise in that sense, something abiding and that can be present to us if not actually in its entirety at least virtually so. And it transmits our multiple and complex relations with the world outside us--our "wishes, lies and

dreams" as well as being observations and experiences and what we make of them.

Mr. Koch's experiment with the fourth and fifth graders in New York City suggests that the impulse to create our own patterns of language from within the common language we speak is, just as Stanley Burnshaw says, basic; and, as Burnshaw also advances, that it is possibly the only way we have of fully living one of our potentialities. All of us will not realize that particular one; but all of us can recognize it in its realization. Mr. Koch gave a simple pattern to the children to work on. The serious writer must of course find his own patterns, that bridge as best they may the gap between his own personal relation to the world and the general more abstract views given him by his culture and latent in his language. The gap between the two in our contemporary world has seemed wide. We lack an over-all and explicit general view of our own being even when we are able to grasp the representations of biology, physics, astronomy and so on. We are people of many worlds, new worlds with new perspectives. Hence the restlessness in all the arts, what a critic has called "decreation," the artist's refusal of familiar, traditional forms. And in many people this break with past patterns engenders a sense of panic and hostility. With increasing rapidity artists establish and tear down one new pattern after another. The arts of our time--literature among them--are described in such terms as randomness, multiplicity of patterning, afocality, fragmentation, and often seem to the layman to be animated by what Morse Peckham has called "a rage for chaos." Avant-garde experiments are picked up, avidly discussed, theorized and buried under the following ones. It is not that the process is new. The dialectic of destruction and creation is familiar to us. But its disconcerting pace is new and the sense that in the arts it is often instigated from outside, by the needs of the reviews and journals which must have something "newsworthy" to report. Many young

Americans now look upon our traditional respect for art and literature as nothing more than a clever "put-on," a way to sell on the market another "bourgeois" commodity.

It is never easy clearly to see what is actually taking place in literature around us. (We know how easily we can persuade ourselves that we can distinguish the order we want to see.) And a great deal of insignificant writing does get published. Moreover no one can speak adequately of literature in general. Literary works have to be present to us each in its particularity, before we can say anything pertinent about them.

It is true of course that a predominant trend in contemporary literature surfaced when the Dadaists proclaimed that it was their purpose to destroy literature along with all the manifestations of our culture. Much of our literature does have a disturbing aura of "cruelty" in the sense in which Antonin Artaud used the word, in the thirties when he called for a "theater of cruelty." It deliberately aims at shocking our sensibility. But when we look more closely at our recent literature---(and since my own interest is more specifically centered on French literature, it is to French writers I refer) we also see other trends. There is for instance a determined effort to move our language out of abstract verbal patterns into a confrontation with the concrete world of bodies and objects. This is no doubt a perilous statement to make in the era of abstract art. But writers are struggling, if I may borrow the expression from an as yet unpublished work by Sanford Ames, to "put our minds back in our bodies and our bodies back in the world." The surrealist revolt in one of its aspects proclaimed the immediate presence of the human being as a whole person to the world and proposed that we renew the way in which we inhabit our world.

Nothing can upset the order of light
 Where I am only myself
 And what I love
 And on the table
 This jug full of water and the bread of rest.¹

This insistence on the immediate and the specific is at the heart of Camus's work which is modern in its sensibility while its forms evolve within the mainstream of French literary tradition; and that is most certainly a factor in its appeal. That insistence on the immediate and specific is the facet of the Surrealists' venture which is still very much with us. A quite differently inspired writer like the poet Ponge whose work seems at the opposite pole from the Surrealists' has the same fascination with regard to objects. He makes a careful and slow descriptive approach to the most familiar objects--like a glass of water or a cake of soap--in his effort to evoke every aspect of them in the verbal web of his poem. He thinks of his poems as a kind of game: he is the man of the "objeu" a game he is playing with the world. And he explains his activity: "Yes we are working on a new way of thought but no, it is not one prescribed to us by Marx or Hegel. Yes we are working on a renewal of minds, but not in what concerns their social relationships (yes, that too) rather in what concerns their relationships with the mute world."² His function as he sees it is to reach via speech the specificity of each object as it truly impinges on his sensitivity, and it gives him intense enjoyment. He has done away with the existential theme of anguish and calls upon us to play our role con-

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1. Paul Eluard quoted by Mary Ann Caws in The Poetry of Dada and Surrealism, Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 24.
 2. "Ponge and the poetry of self-knowledge," Sarah N. Lawall in Contemporary Literature, University of Wisconsin Press, Spring 1970, p.

fidentially as "creators and users of language." One may not like what he does with language but though he is unique in the way he writes he is not unique in his orientation. What a number of contemporary French writers are seeking is to increase our attentiveness to the world around us and thereby, our acuity of perception and our sensitivity to that world; perhaps, as a quite different poet Alain Bosquet suggests, it is because since Hiroshima the poet, at least, feels a new responsibility toward our earth, a new tenderness almost when faced by its vulnerability at our hands. And when Ponge rejects the dictates of abstract constructs, he is also indirectly re-iterating a theme which is fundamental in our present literature, that is the uncompromising assertion of the writers' need for freedom. As Robbe-Grillet says of the activity of the writer "the slightest external directive paralyzes him." This acute sensitivity to the menace of outer control is different in kind from the great Romantic rebellion. Writers who, of necessity, use language have proved our best allies in our struggle against the assault made upon our freedom through the use of language. And their revolt is often connected with their discomfort in that sphere. These are merely fragmentary examples of the positive trends in our literature. They do indicate that contemporary literature cannot, despite its many disturbing facets, be dismissed as basically insignificant and destructive. Slowly, as we read it, write about it, discuss it out of the overwhelming mass of publications, and despite the shock of such catastrophes as war and the confusion of crises, events, predictions and publicity that crowd in upon us, the quiet configurations of our literature begin to appear and they furnish a deeper, steadier more sustained accompaniment to our lives.

I should like to end by considering for a brief moment the case of Beckett.

Far from asserting or celebrating the presence of the world, Beckett reduces it until it has virtually disappeared in darkness and silence. And he proposes no purpose either for his own activity as writer nor in the world. Yet he is read by a number of people with passionate interest, and a host of studies have collected around his writing.

In one of his rare press interviews, Beckett made a surprising statement. He never, he declared, reads philosophers and does not understand them. The key to his writing, he said, must be sought in his sensibility for it is there and there alone that his strange characters and their strange environment are, somehow, born. Yet Descartes is the narrator of one of his poems; he alludes to Democritus and Schopenhauer; and the Pythagoreans and Guelinck have never ceased to haunt his world. His novels--especially Watt--contain a quasi-Rabelaisian parody of all the logical and rhetorical devices that have permitted Western man, like his own strange Ubu-esque creation, the "man-pot" Mahood, to hold over his skull for protection a "partially waterproof tarpaulin." Most of us I think know Wallace Stevens' poem:

I placed a jar in Tennessee
 And round it was upon a hill
 It made the slovenly wilderness
 Surround that hill

Beckett's "man-jar" is a rather different creation, though it does oblige us to look again at that strange human being to which we are so accustomed. As the critic Howard Nemerov remarked of Wallace Stevens' jar, the spell cast over the chaos by the poet's act is temporary, the formless "wilderness" is still there. No systems of order in which we find shelter are entirely waterproof in Beckett's view. It

was not he, he remarked in the interview, who had created the confusion. It was there, so he had to let it in.

Describing, reasoning, discussing, examining--Beckett's characters never tire of these activities, though no two of them ever proceed in the same way. They share our "deplorable mania" not only to want "when something happens to know what" but furthermore to know why. Beckett is something of a contemporary Faust who through the agency of his characters mimes with ferocious humor and so undermines our past and present attempts to "think out" our situation, to give it an intelligible structure. Not without reason did he invent Macmann, the character Malone talks to by himself who, while believing that "he had done as any man of good will would have done in his place and with very much the same results", nonetheless admits that, in gardening, he is "incapable of weeding a bed of pansies or marigolds and of leaving one standing." The sentence in French turns on a pun, "pensées" as both flower and thought. Macmann, like Beckett, is a gently compulsive iconoclast. Beckett's verbal clowning produces the same devastation in our own flower-beds by indirection and mime. His curious invention--such as his invention of the "man-pot"--allow him to reduce his characters' relations with the physical world to the most schematic: two pots for nourishment and evacuation; a bag of canned foods; a pebble or, in prosperous times, sixteen pebbles to suck. With a particular brand of humor he externalizes in his novels and places a "mental country", in which everything unfolds in the "imperfect shade" and "doubtful light" which one of Beckett's characters, Malone, calls "my light". They are strangely intent on travel, if only in spirit, and when bedridden or "in jars", they insist on telling the story of their travels. They are all related, each emerging out of another, and they all wear the Beckett uniform or what remains thereof and there always

remains the long white hair, dirty and matted by the accumulated filth of centuries.

We soon realize that it is the same adventurer that goes his way from book to book. We realize that, as writer, Beckett is following his own adventure on the trail "of that little creature in numerous disguises who haunts him." He too, like his characters, must set out again after each book. Grim, pathetic, funny, his own adventure rejoins the long monotonous human voice and memory inscribed in our written language; and so Beckett has obliged us to take another look at that small mythic figure, man. "Grey face, two pale blue eyes, small body, beating heart, alone upright." When all is torn away the small human figure still stands erect, a haunting presence with a kind of courage confronting the world. In this image there is a power of emotion, a truth we recognize and, on Beckett's part, an unspoken respect. All valid literature, even the most satiric, reaches out, it seems to me, for such forms of respect, for people, for things; forms of truth.

It is not easy to define the literary experience. Wallace Fowlie, in a brilliant essay,³ states what he sees as the role of art through the centuries. In the Middle Ages, the artist tried to reconcile man with God; in the neo-classical age, the artist tried to reconcile man with reason; in the nineteenth century with science. In the twentieth century, he suggests the artists, the great writers have tried to reconcile man with himself. I should prefer to say that they have tried to confront man, imaginatively, with himself; and the confrontation has been cruel particularly when writers have felt that language itself was being debased. It seems fairly true to say, as one of the younger writers of some stature, Michel Butor has said, that contemporary literature works at obliging us

3. "A Stock-taking French literature in the 1960's," Contemporary Literature, Spring 1970, pp. 137-54.

to "become contemporary." But not through its ideological content primarily. Beckett, for example, may or may not be, as a commentator has claimed, the "most qualified spokesman for the atheistic nihilism" of his age, but that is in itself rather unimportant. What counts is the emotional power of his plays and novels. His greatness does not lie perhaps in the fact that he may have dramatized the theme of the Hegelian "unhappy consciousness," for example. But as Neal Oxenhandler states it,⁴ he was able to make profoundly traditional use of the novel as an emotional matrix where a complex exchange between reader and novelist takes place." And this, Neal Oxenhandler concludes, "as Beckett himself would say, is an argument for which there is no proof."

"Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought?...Every year fewer and fewer words and the range of thought a little smaller." This is the formula for perfect thought control. The writers in our time have risen in insurrection against that control. If we then make of literature the "residence of forms without force," we may miss its essential value which is perhaps not so much to tell us how to live as to "allow us to breathe" more freely while we live.

4. "Toward the New Aesthetic," Contemporary Literature, Spring, 1970, pp. 169-91.