Decorum in the Novel

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THESE ARE THE days when the chickens of liberation are coming home to roost and are turning out to be, not any sort of neat domesticated fowl, but instead, rampaging hawks and buzzards—or even condors. The old empires have been dissolving into what Dryden would have called "the dregs of a democracy." The spectacle has jarred Walter Lippman—that habitually cheerful prophet—into occasional moments of melancholy apprehension. He has even permitted himself to wonder out loud "how this multitude of governments can be saved from becoming an excited and explosive mob."

For better or worse, we have no Walter Lippman of the arts to wonder, as well he might, about disorders nearer home, particularly in the literary arts, and above all in the modern novel. These, too, are among the phenomena of liberation. And since the novel is our dominant literary form—important to us as epic and drama were in previous cultures—it would surely be the height of irresponsibility and recklessness not to show some concern when novelists lose all conception of prose fiction as high art and are willing, in the name of freedom, to practice novel-writing as a low art, indeed to claim for this low art a certain eminence and purity, especially when it abandons all the common restraints as to subject matter and language, and crosses the border into what is admittedly the realm of obscenity and debasement.

The liberation of the novel began, in a legal sense, at least as far back as December 6, 1933, in the case of *United States* v. *One Book Entitled Ulysses* (5 Fed. Supp. 182—S.D.N.Y. 1931) when Federal District Judge John M. Woolsey concluded his decision by saying that "whilst in many places the effect of 'Ulysses' on the reader is somewhat emetic, nowhere does it tend to be an aphrodisiac. 'Ulysses' may therefore be admitted into the United States."

Morris L. Ernst, attorney for the publishers in the *Ulysses* case and other important preceding cases, trumpeted his legal victory as "a major event in the history of the struggle for free expression" and lightly ignored the plain judicial indication that the book, in places, was disgusting to the point of nausea. In general, our critics and

novelists—when they have bothered to speak on the issue—have monotonously repeated the Ernst motif—"free expression." Indeed, when the matter comes up, they stop being critics and novelists and become crusading liberals, and seldom fail to insinuate that objections to literary obscenity come only from bigots and originate in some hidden inward vileness and impurity. This characteristic emphasis appears in the letter of Archibald MacLeish which Grove Press prefixed to their unexpurgated edition of Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*:

> The book as written is forthright and unashamed and honest. Only those to whom words can seem impure per se, or those to whom "certain subjects" cannot be mentioned in print though they are constantly mentioned in life, or those to whom the fundamental and moving facts of human experience are "nasty" could conclude that *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, as Lawrence wrote it, is obscene.
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> For the test of obscenity in good law and in good sense, is Judge Woolsey's test in the *Ulysses* case: dirt for dirt's sake. And in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* there is no dirt for dirt's sake. The purpose of the book is manifestly pure: pure as being the high purpose of a serious artist; pure as being the cleansing purpose of a social reformer who hates the devil himself.[1]

Accepting for the moment Mr. MacLeish's terms, are we being urged to think that while "dirt for dirt's sake" is clearly obscene and deplorable, dirt for art's sake is not obscene, is highly laudable? Here we seem to be on the brink of a formula, or, better, an aesthetic theory that might determine a proper place for obscenity in art, and thereby a principle, if not a rule, of decorum for the novel. But no! A second look reveals that Lawyer MacLeish (LL.B., Harvard, 1919) has tugged the coat-tails of Poet MacLeish and kept him back in the safe and sound territory of *U.S. v. One Book Entitled Ulysses*. MacLeish takes his stand upon a *legal*, not an aesthetic, definition of obscenity and as advocate draws from the legal definition the rhetorical fireworks that will dazzle the jury—in this case the American public—and secure a verdict favorable to his client.

This has been the typical strategy of the liberationists, ever since Judge Woolsey handed down his decision in the *Ulysses* case. Publishers, authors, and critics seem content, on the whole, to pass off the legal view of obscenity in literary art as having an aesthetic and moral sovereignty to which all must bow. And indeed, the *Ulysses* case is a landmark. In his thoroughgoing and judicious book, *The Smut Peddlers*, James J. Kilpatrick by no means overstates its far-reaching effect when he writes: "Whenever a publication having the slightest literary merit is brought before the court, the rule of *Ulysses* offers a highly persuasive voice in favor of holding the publication not obscene."[2] That is to say, both author and publisher of many a book may count on a fairly slight simulation of literary merit to give them protection in the Federal courts while a heavy content of fairly obvious pornographic appeal brings in the sales. And who would deny that the confidence of such authors and such publishers has not been justified by the results? From the nineteen-twenties on, the liberationists have steadily forced the issue, without too much damage to the material resources of authors and publishers. With the metropolitan press, in general, on their side, along with most of the literati—who are always pro-freedom and contra-censorship—they have felt assured of ultimate victory in the courts and of over-riding all protest, organized or unorganized, in what Mencken used to call the Hinterland.

The legal victory of the Grove Press in

the *Lady Chatterley* case a few years ago may seem to clinch the victory for utter liberation.[3] This case, indeed, with the corresponding *Lady Chatterley* case in England, may be a landmark notable as the *Ulysses* case of three decades ago. Undoubtedly the *Lady Chatterley* case inspired confidence in the publisher of the magazine *Eros,* which announced its appearance as "the result of recent court decisions that have realistically interpreted America's obscenity laws and that have given to this country a new breadth of freedom of expression." In a circular as forthright and unashamed as Mr. MacLeish could desire, the expensive new quarterly declared with bland explicitness: "We refer to decisions which have enabled the publication of such heretofore suppressed masterworks as 'Lady Chatterley's Lover.' *Eros* takes full advantage of this new freedom of expression. It is *the* magazine of sexual candor."

People who, for not the best of reasons, seek to exploit rulings of the Federal courts are too ready to forget that those who pray the protection of the courts are also at the mercy of the courts. A court ruling does not have the broad prescriptive effect of a statute. A legal complaint against any publication brings up a different case, which may be heard under a less literary-minded judge than Woolsey and may eventuate in a new ruling. We do not have here the kind of "class action" that, in the school segregation cases, permitted the U.S. Supreme Court to "legislate." Courts exist, after all, for the protection of the community, not for the promotion of literary experiments. Justice Frankfurter, dissenting with Jackson and Burton in the Winters case (1941), chided the permissive majority of the Supreme Court in sharp terms: "The essence of the Court's decision is that it gives publications which have 'nothing of any possible value to society' constitutional protection but denies to the states the power to prevent the grave evils to which, in their rational judgment, such publications give rise."[4] (The publication in this case—*Headquarters Detective*—had been convicted of obscenity in a New York state court.)

Furthermore, despite much "liberalizing" in recent decisions, Justice Brennan of the U. S. Supreme Court, delivering the opinion of the Court in the Roth-Alberts case, made it clear that obscenity is not to be held a kind of "free speech" coming under the protection of the First Amendment to the Constitution. Justice Brennan said:

> All ideas having even the slightest redeeming social importance. . .have the full protection of the guaranties, unless excludable because they encroach upon the limited area of more important interests. But implicit in the history of the First Amendment is the rejection of obscenity as utterly without redeeming social importance. . . .We hold that obscenity is not within the area of constitutionally protected speech of press.[5]

Nevertheless, it is equally clear that the present trend is quite the other way. Our novelists and their publishers are, by and large, assuming that obscenity is protected by the courts—indeed by the Supreme Court; or else—let us allow this as a possibility—they are assuming that there is no longer any such thing as obscenity. A peep into almost any current novel—whether in the drug-store paperback display or at the regular bookstore counter—is evidence enough.

II

LIKE THE PUBLISHER of *Eros,* the novelists of our time have not failed to "take advantage" of the new freedom allowed or invited by the *Ulysses* decision. Or it might be more realistic to say that the decision, combined with other trends, forced, or made it possible to force, a rath-

er wide conformity to the particular kind of freedom practiced by Joyce. This is the familiar cycle in which the non-conformity of one social or artistic phase becomes in its turn a rigid conformity. The eminence of Joyce as artist had already been certified by the most influential critics of the *avant-garde.* T. S. Eliot, for example, writing in the *Dial* of November, 1923, had said: "I hold this book to be the most important expression which the present age has found."

Then why should not the gifted younger authors imitate the master? And why should not the much more numerous less gifted camouflage their deficiencies by an open parade of the Joycean type of dirt? Was it not guaranteed to be Art by both Court and Critic? If their novels were suppressed, as often happened, by the censors of Boston or Gopher Prairie or the Sahara of the Bozart, so much the better! The news, instantly headlined by the metropolitan press, meant sales by the thousands and hundreds of thousands in the uncensored areas. It was "good business." A "trend" was established, which publishers were not only using to advantage in their acceptances, but also, one might suspect, in their editorial advice to aspiring authors, even in their requirements. To be decorous in prose fiction—even to be no more free in subject matter and vocabulary than Flaubert and Zola was, quite possibly, to sign one's own literary death-warrant. It was comparable to parading in aristocratic silks and lace before the mob of righteous *citoyens et citoyennes* in 1793. One must now be *sansculottes* in the twentieth-century Marxist proletarian or liberal way.

But this is pretty much the normal pattern of liberation—liberation of any sort—when it is imposed by the formula of what we have learned to call "permissiveness." It is actually one of the most drastic and corruptive forms of tyranny. For, because it comes to us first in the mask of liberty, its true nature may not be immediately discerned. When, after long implantation, it is at last discovered to be not liberty but tyranny, the intellectuals do not want to admit how greatly they have been deceived and in turn have deceived others. The vested interests naturally do not want to be disturbed. And others will find it difficult to understand what, after all, is wrong with tyranny. To recover true liberty then will seem hardly worth the pain and effort necessary. But without such recovery, the next phase can only be a tyranny harsher and more sweeping. Such is the affliction brought upon our modern life, in many deeply threatening forms, by "permissiveness," or the loosely sentimental concept of freedom as an unqualified right. And such is the moral and artistic chaos toward which the novel, as a specially privileged art form, for some time has been moving.

What is this special privilege? It is that, though the novel is certainly a public act, and in many ways affects the public interest, the author and his publisher expect, and now to a large extent are conceded, a freedom of language and of subject matter not conceded to other forms of public discourse, and not practiced by educational institutions, churches, legislatures, courts of law (except in certain criminal cases), newspapers, periodicals, and not commonly observed or allowed in either private or public occasions or in the ordinary course of daily life, whether in work or play. Some license of language has invaded the stage, but neither in opera, legitimate drama, movie, television, or radio is there any physically enacted parallel to certain scenes presented and language used by Joyce and Lawrence and their imitators. The only respectable, or at least tolerable, parallels worth mentioning would be found in medical and psychiatric clinics; or per-

haps, with less color of legitimacy, those university courses of a clinical nature in which abnormalities and crimes are studied.

Edmund Fuller, in his *Man in Modern Fiction*, is one of the very few writers bold enough to state an issue that for our critics in general seems to be among the unmentionables.

> Because the legal regulations and standards of customary practice, which govern newspapers and periodicals, are more restrictive than those relating to books, there are frequent cases where it would be impossible . . . to quote fully and extensively from passages under debate. The critic may find himself prevented from exhibiting the thing against which he protests (or which he defends). In the same way, common restraints of taste and a due regard for public opinion (without any question of Nice Nellyism) limit and inhibit such textual quotation and discussion on the platform or for any public gathering unless in the relatively clinical tone of some classrooms. . . . *We have a literature today a considerable portion of which could not be read aloud in public without inviting either the police or the lynch rope.* (Italics added.)[6]

Inured though we are to the phenomena of liberation, it is still difficult to imagine a priest reading aloud to his parishioners, either for edification or denunciation, the scatological portions of the writings of Joyce, Lawrence, and numerous other novelists displayed on almost every bookstore counter. Nor does it seem likely that the Methodist Board of Education will soon recommend *Lady Chatterley's Lover* as suitable to be read—aloud or in silence—around the campfires of Methodist youth. In the English obscenity trial of Lawrence's book, Canon T. R. Milford, though testifying for the defense, shrank from any idea of public presentation:

> I think I would make a distinction here about the thing which is done in public—for instance I think it would be indecent to show scenes such as are described in this book on the cinema, still more to do them in public. I think the book is meant to be read by oneself. I should not think it suitable in general to read out in public. Secondly, I think it is incorrect to say we are invited in this book to make a third on any of these occasions. When these two people are together doing things which quite properly are done in private, as I see it and as I felt when I was reading that book, we are invited to identify ourselves with them and not to be a third in the party. I think those scenes would be offensive if someone else was there or someone had been observing from behind a tree.[7]

Here we may do well to notice that Mr. MacLeish, for all his praise of Lawrence's forthrightness and honesty, shows a delicate restraint when he comes to the main issue—that is, when he says that Lawrence, after all, is only using "one of the old familiar four-letter Anglo-Saxon words which we all know about but which the hypocrisy of censorship pretends we do not."[8] But in his approving letter-preface Mr. MacLeish does not quote a single example of Lawrence's use of the old familiar Anglo-Saxon words that he supposes we all know. In this restraint he follows the example of Judge Woolsey in the *Ulysses* decision. The Judge praised Joyce for using "old Saxon words" in "his honest effort to show exactly how the minds of his characters operate."[9] Yet the Judge did not quote a single illustrative passage or so much as mention a single one of these "old Saxon words." Similarly, in the English trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, al-

though the prosecution on occasion read to the jury sensationally lurid passages and did not fail to quote the "old Saxon words," Mr. Justice Byrne, in his charge to the jury, was as puritanical in vocabulary and reference as an Anthony Comstock could have wished. The eminent British critics who paraded as witnesses for the defense—Graham Hough, Helen Gardner, Dame Rebecca West, Kenneth Muir, *et alii*—showed an astounding Victorian capacity for avoiding, themselves, the obscenities that they were so heartily and happily commending in Lawrence.

There is, then, a decorum to be observed in prefaces, in court, in literary criticism at large—a decorum from which the novel is exempted. Apparently so. But we need to examine closely Canon Milford's remark that *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in its questionable scenes, is not suitable "to read out in public."

In our time the novel is distinguished from poetry and drama' by the fact that, whether or not it contains obscenities, it makes not the slightest pretense of being suitable "to read out in public." All contemporary novels, whether noble, trifling, realistic, surrealistic, or downright vile are definitely meant (in Canon Milford's phrase) "to be read by oneself." Who could conceive of a Joyce, a Faulkner, a Hemingway, or any of their ilk going on tour to read from their literary productions as Dickens once did? Prose fiction as a literary medium is now almost entirely dependent upon the printed book or periodical and is heavily conditioned by that circumstance. Novel and story belong to the lone and silent reader, locked in quiet submission to the voiceless page. More than ever before in our history, prose fiction is aimed at that reader, whose name is Multitude and who in abstract mass includes all elements of modern society. The author of this fiction is always distant from his Multitude and, as a person, is invisible to it, except as the meager ritual of the autograph party, the special college lecture, and other such managed appearances may allow. His act of imagination proposes to unroll before the mind's eye—and only before the mind's eye—a "drama" of real life that he hopes to make stronger in its impression than actual life itself, and more lasting. This is a large responsibility for him to undertake. It is *his* responsibility, first of all. But, once his art work is complete, he shares responsibility with his intermediaries who make him known to the Multitude: the publisher above all, the bookseller next, then the educator, and (let us never forget) the librarian. All of these intermediaries are most decidedly public characters.

Are we to hold that an art work of this nature, devised to be read and contemplated in individual privacy, is *not* a public act? And does it for this implied reason acquire some strange immunity from all ordinary taboos and well-established prohibitions, whether of custom, good taste, or law, against indecencies of language and narrative discourse? Canon Milford—whom I find identified as Master of the Temple and author of a Student Christian pamphlet entitled *The Philosophy of Sex*—seems to be saying that the novel does have this immunity.[10] According to the Canon's canon, then, it is all right—and presumably not sinful or corruptive—to accept Lawrence's deliberately sensual invitation to "identify" with Connie and Mellors in their adulterous and lewd conduct, *provided* the identification is achieved through a silent, private reading in a comfortable armchair or leafy nook.

In his shrewd perception of the true nature of the novel as an art medium, Canon Milford seems to have been a little more alert than his fellow-witnesses at the *Lady Chatterley* trial. Still, his moral position is

a peculiar one for an eminent cleric to take. He does not think that Lawrence means for the reader to "make a third at the party." He himself would not wish to make such a third—to observe Connie and Mellors from behind a tree, for example. And, in his opinion, to watch a stage or screen representation of their completely ultra-ultra Lawrentian love-making would be to "make a third." But for the thousands of Lawrence's readers-in-seclusion, eyes glued to the seductive pages of *Lady Chatterley* in paperback—for these to "identify" with the adulterous pair is *not* harmful, in the Canon's opinion. He would not ban the book. He would reccommend it. He is a mental, not a physical liberationist.

Somehow I cannot think that St. Paul would accept the Canon's critical theory. There is, for example, a text in I Corinthians, 8 that reads: "But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak."

Despite the *Ulysses* decision of 1933 and all the liberation that has since taken place, Canon Milford's critical theory is still far from being generally accepted by a great many people outside the select fraternity of literati, publishers, booksellers, and their special friends. To these non-literary outsiders the old rule of Chief Justice Cockburn in *Regina* v. *Hicklin* still is good morals if not current law. "I think the test of obscenity is this," the Chief Justice said, "whether the tendency of the matter charged as obscenity is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences, and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall."[11] Most deeply concerned are municipal officials in cities and towns throughout the country who must somehow deal with the continuous drive of commercial pornography, sometimes secret, often open, that also seeks the protection of the First Amendment and quite regularly advertises its wares as "Art." The record in Mr. Kilpatrick's *The Smut Peddlers* tells the story. The *Ulysses* case by no means stopped effort, persistent and numerous, to censor at the state or local level, through boycott, protest, or police action. Evidently there are large, relatively inarticulate portions of our society that stand out for a stricter code of behavior in print than our novelists observe. What firm assurance can the literati give such persons that the particular works for which they claim extreme license do *not* tend to "corrupt and deprave?" The literati have no answer to such a question. They have only assertions and opinions in which it is difficult to find any coherent body of principles. They stand on the assumed right of the artist to do as he pleases so long as he produces art. More and more their tendency is to move toward the hooliganism of Henry Miller in his recent manifesto, "I Defy You." That position is:

> One, that no valid definition of "obscenity" has ever been established; two, that no man, no group, no court of law has the right to tell us what we may or may not read; three, that no proof has ever been offered that the reading of so-called obscene books has demoralized its readers; four, that by supposedly protecting the youth of the land through restricting the freedom of adults to read what they please, we are burning down the house to roast the pig.
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> And last but not least, what is wrong with obscenity, however it be defined? Do we live in a world so pure, so fragile, so delicate, that a little obscenity can wreck it? Does its use, whether in literature or action, endanger our lives?[12]

This is hooliganism in art—the adult parallel to teen-age vandalism, the litterbug's riotous enlistment on the side of

all disorder, the house-wrecker's jubilant impulse to pour molasses into the piano and empty garbage on the sofa. We need notice here only one of Mr. Miller's points—his rhetorical question, "What is wrong with obscenity, however it be defined?"

If what is indecorous to society is to be praised as decorous by the artist, indeed made into a principle of art, then the modern alienation of the artist from society, even from civilization itself, becomes disastrous both for society and for art. It is the extreme inversion of value, the journey away from order into chaos, that both art and society must in the end reject. Yet it is this chaos toward which the artist, with a good deal of cynical assistance from the book trade and reviewing media, seems to be leading us in his championship of dirt for art's sake. Dirt for art's sake, the converse of the "dirt for dirt's sake" principle, is held to distinguish art from mere pornography. But the champion of dirt for art's sake wants no court to restrict him, no law to bind him, no critic or preacher to lecture him in the matter of just when, just how, the art of using dirt for art's sake actually is good art, true art. He wants to be sole judge of that issue. But the fact is that he asks to be guaranteed in his irresponsibility and not in his responsibility. There are historical reasons, not often discussed nowadays, for the modern artist's assumption that he, or his book, is not *morally* responsible for the obscene actions or language of his characters.

III

If obscenity is viewed as something merely phenomenal, to be recorded as a facet of human behavior, then indeed the question of "wrong" and "right" may be said not to arise. What is "wrong" with bacteria, rocket fuel, Uranium 235, or switchblade knives, considered merely as phenomena? Mr. Miller's rhetorical question, "What is wrong with obscenity?" may lead us to the hidden sanction that lurks back of the libertine bravado of dirt for art's sake, or Obscenity as Art. The art involved here is not classic art, or Renaissance art, or romantic art, or the art of any of those pre-Darwinian periods from which the friends and disciples of Joyce and Lawrence like to cite misleading specimens of obscenity that they allege to be analogous to the practice of their own literary idols. It is post-Darwinian modern art that, slowly at first, but with increasing speed and thoroughness, has substituted for the classical sense of order and for Christian ethics its imitation of the skepticism and aloofness held to be proper in natural science. It is not the sanction of art, as known in former times, but the sanction of science that actually rationalizes the famous "objectivity" or assumed neutralism so much praised in modern prose fiction and so often recommended to young writers. This is the hidden factor in Judge Woolsey's decision in the *Ulysses* case. Joyce, said the judge, "sought to make a serious experiment in a new, if not wholly novel, genre"—that is, to represent a day in the life of persons of the lower middle class in Dublin in 1904—and for this purpose developed the technique with which we are familiar.

> If Joyce did not attempt to be honest in developing the technique which he has adopted in "Ulysses" [declared Judge Woolsey] the result would be psychologically misleading and thus unfaithful to his chosen technique. Such an attitude would be artistically inexcusable.
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> It is because Joyce has been loyal to his technique and has not funked its necessary implications, but has honestly attempted to tell what his characters think about, that he has been the subject

of so many attacks and that his purpose has been so often misunderstood and misrepresented. For his attempt sincerely and honestly to realize his objective has required him incidentally to use certain words which are generally considered dirty words and has led at times to what many think is a too poignant preoccupation with sex in the thoughts of his characters.[13]

In this passage, as elsewhere in the *Ulysses* decision, the terminology is prevalently scientific rather than literary, although the acquittal of *Ulysses* depended very heavily upon the establishment of the book as an art work of high merit. Hardly a hint of ethical issues enters into the judgment. With almost equal force the terms used might be applied to the publication, for the medical profession, of a psychopathic case study. The novel is, Judge Woolsey says, an example of "a new literary method for *the observation and description of mankind.*" (Italics added.)[14]

Exactly! How familiar the words are! In 1880, the year in which he also published his *Nana*, Emile Zola, in *Le Roman expérimental,* declared *"L' homme métaphysique est mort!"* and confidently predicted the triumph of scientific method in the novel and other art forms. "Doubtless the wrath of Achilles, the love of Dido will endure among our eternally beautiful images," Zola conceded. "But we need to analyze wrath and love, and to see just how those passions function in human beings. . . . The experimental method [i. e., the laboratory method], in literature as in the sciences, is about to define those natural phenomena, both individual and social, for which, up to now, metaphysics has given only irrational and supernatural explanations."[15] The role of the novelist, in short, is that of the detached observer. A modern Dido, if available, is of no more interest to him than a Nana. But since a prostitute is better adapted to clinical observation than a queen, he will generally find it convenient to observe and describe Nana.

It can be argued that Zola's manifesto in *Le Roman expérimental* and his further applications of naturalistic dogma may be taken as a rationalization of his own earlier performance in such works as *L 'Assommoir* or, in general, as "showmanship" and self-advertisement. But, like other dubious adventures in advertising, Zola's manifesto has had long-lasting effects. Zola preferred "Naturalism" to "Realism," Mr. F. W. J. Hemmings points out, "mainly because of the connexion immediately established with the natural sciences, and also because 'realism' had associations with an earlier school, that of Champfleury and Duranty. . . ." Mr. Hemmings goes on to say: "It was, of course, the constant reiteration of the word, and its remorseless application to every branch of art and sphere of knowledge, that gave the word its propaganda force. It convinced nobody, for it was not an argument; it impressed thousands."[16]

It impressed, and has continued to impress often in ways hidden or unacknowledged, because the drift of the times has so long favored an uncritical deference toward natural science as authoritarian, indeed as the arbiter of truth in great disputed issues. But a writer would not need to have read Zola to become, in principle, a naturalist. Any urban street corner, the front page of his newspaper, the howl of the police siren, the flicker of the news reel, the chatter of radio and television, the aimless movement of the faceless crowd, even, alas, the Sunday preachments of his pastor may thrust upon him the unrefuted —though not irrefutable—suspicion that metaphysical man must indeed be dead.

Zola sanctified his own "objective" type of realism by calling it naturalism. The

modern novelist no longer thinks of his writing as naturalism. He may be realist, impressionist, expressionist, symbolist, or some variation or combination of these. All the same he operates under the sanctions of naturalism and makes use of the license that it affords him. In the diagnostic clinic that is his novel he proposes to treat all his patients alike—saint or sinner, prince or pimp. Actually he is rather selective in his choice of patients and almost any day will prefer the unvirtuous woman, even the prostitute, to the virtuous woman. His taste runs to low-grade characters. These submit more readily to clinical examination, and publishers claim that they bring more sales. Heredity as causal determinant no longer gets the emphasis that Zola gave it. For heredity brings up the matter of race, and science (he erroneously thinks) has told him not to think about *that,* lest he entertain "prejudice." Environment still counts heavily—but only if it is ugly, confining, or depressing. Of fear, hunger, and sex—the three instinctive "drives" once used as causal motifs—sex is now most important, indeed has swallowed all. Out of this general pattern, too, comes the license to commit any kind of enormity with language, so long as it is, in Judge Woolsey's words, "frank, honest, and sincere." The low-grade characters of the typical modern novel cannot be expected to talk or behave like Jane Austen's people, or Fenimore Cooper's.

Can we not, then, expect more discretion and taste in the high-grade characters? Not at all. The high-grade characters, if they appear, must act like low-grade characters. As sophisticates, they must be democratic, for that is the pose of the age—or in the current idiom, its "posture" or "stance." They may be represented, indeed, as more knowledgeable in dirt and eroticism than their ignorant counterparts. Why not? They have read James Joyce, maybe Krafft-Ebing, surely Freud, or at least have had a course in abnormal psychology at Vassar or Harvard. As for the middle-grade characters, they can be ignored, since they probably belong to the John Birch Society or are "segregationists."

If it be argued—in the interest of realism—that high-grade characters do not in actual life use four-letter words, either in public or in private, as freely as is represented, the modern novelist has his answer. "What about their minds?" he queries darkly. "What about their streams-of-consciousness and especially their subconsciousness?" Granted that they will not necessarily be scatological at a formal dinner party and other polite occasions, what are they *thinking* at almost any time?

Thus the Freudian psychology, for the modern novelist, opens every door that Queen Victoria's Darwin, Zola's Claude Bernard, and even our more recent atom-busters left discreetly closed. We must have in mind not only the regular doors—which after all open only on bathrooms and bedrooms—but the trapdoors in the cellar where the imprisoned complexes and inhibitions have been locked up. Since Sigmund Freud can pass for some sort of scientist—if psychology is a science—the practicing novelist can make shift to claim for his obscenities a direct sanction that Darwin's biology and Claude Bernard's medicine did not, in truth, extend to Zola's naturalism. If the novelist is *frankly* (not furtively?) scatological, *honestly* (not dishonestly—that is, erroneously? cheatingly?) obscene, and *sincerely* (not commercially?) erotic, then, along with Joyce the Great, he is passing Judge Woolsey's legal-critical test. He is using dirt for art's sake, not "dirt for dirt's sake." He is portraying "objective reality." And "objective," even more than "reality," is one of the principal god-words of the modern regime.

To explore the nature of this objectivity

in all its applications would carry this discussion far afield. But at least we can ask whether the objective method affords the novelist any firm principle of selection that will enable him to decide when obscene matter (in language or action) is artistically justifiable and when it is to be excluded as inartistic.

The answer to this question plainly is: No such firm principle has been established by the objective method, and no such principle can be established. For the materials and procedures of the art of fiction do not submit to any laws comparable to the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, and the like. The novelist's "objectivity" is clearly not the laboratory objectivity of the scientist. It is not even a plausible equivalent of that austere mental attitude. It is a rhetorical fiction, a technical device. Thinking of it in favorable terms, we might consider it a mask that the artist puts on in order to reduce his natural partisanship toward his own creations. It helps him to practice a salutary degree of neutralism toward his "observations" and also toward his imaginings and contrivings. From Flaubert and Henry James on down to Conrad, Lawrence, Hemingway, and their successors, this device has brought about an increasingly skillful application of the "limited point of view," with its sharp focus, its intense effects, and its imitation in "discriminated scenes" of the dramatic effects of the stage play. One general result has been a remarkable development of the "form" of the novel, and almost any young first novelist can claim—if he condescends to permit a comparison that to him will be only amusing—that he knows more about *how* to write a novel than Scott, Thackeray, and their contempories ever did.

But with this development, unfortunately, has come the notion that the artistic responsibility of the novelist ends when he has given his work the "form" that he thinks it ought to have. For the "content" he is not responsible—not if through right technique he has *discovered* the "form" belonging to this "content." If the discovered "form" does not automatically screen out certain obscenities in the content, then the novelist's conclusion must be that the obscenities belong to the form and, as art, are not to be impugned, but stubbornly defended.

That is what seems to be implied in Mr. Mark Schorer's notable essay, "Technique As Discovery," though he nowhere takes up the problem of decorum. This essay gives us the ultimate refinement in critical theory of the Flaubertian-Jamesian objective method. "Technique alone," writes Mr. Schorer, "objectifies the materials of art; hence technique alone evaluates those materials. This is the axiom which demonstrates itself so devastatingly whenever a writer declares . . . that he cannot linger with technical refinements."[17]

It seems rather unusual for an axiom to demonstrate itself or to be demonstrated. Nevertheless Mr. Schorer demonstrates this axiom by comparing some novelists who do not "linger with technical refinements" with those who do. For example, the sociological, crusading H. G. Wells of *Tono-Bungay* and the early and decorous, but technically careless Lawrence of *Sons and Lovers* are compared with the James Joyce of *A Portrait of the Artist As a Young Man* and *Ulysses*. The latter novel is, for Mr. Schorer, "the most brilliant technical operation ever made in fiction." He says:

> If we read *Ulysses* with more satisfaction than any other novel of the century, it is because its author held an attitude toward technique and the technical scrutiny of subject matter which enabled him to order, within a

> single work and with superb coherence, the greatest amount of our experience.[18]

Granting that Joyce's command of the objective method enabled him to "order" in *Ulysses* some fairly sizable chunks of human experience—rather low-grade experience on the whole—are we not entitled to ask Mr. Schorer some questions about how the technique works? For example, what, exactly, is the nature of the "satisfaction" that "we" are supposed to derive from Joyce's continual and indeed tedious "discovery," through his technique, of the fecal, sexual, and certainly often pornographic obsessions of Leopold Bloom and certain other characters? How did Joyce's technique "evaluate" this material so that "we" can take it as a good art and not as offensively obscene trash? And—to name some novelists not mentioned by Mr. Schorer—would Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor,* Balzac's *Cousin Betty,* Dostoevsky's *The Possessed,* Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* really have been better novels in every way if the secrets of technique known to Joyce could somehow have been revealed to these eminent outmoded authors?

Nothing in Mr. Schorer's brilliant essay answers such questions. Indeed, they are avoided. What Mr. Schorer gives us is his apotheosis of the Flaubertian-Jamesian method, under which the novelist can manage as never before to *organize* his fiction without seeming to reveal himself as the story-teller, and, while so doing, to avoid, or seem to avoid, forcing any sort of moral or metaphysic upon his reader. The more we examine this kind of neutralism, the more we are likely to perceive that it is but a thin disguise for the uneasy skepticism or the inner moral uncertainty characteristic of our age. Joyce himself gives the secret away in the sentence, remodeled from Flaubert, that he puts into the mouth of young Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist*: "The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails." This is wonderfully skillful rhetoric; but the cold Joycean sneer of the final phrase suggests very well the degree of irresponsibility intended. It is a modern novelist's way of saying: "The public be damned!"

The modern critic, defending the objective method, is obliged to be more chaste in his language, since he does not have the privileges of the novelist. But he is fully as irresponsible in those rare instances where we find him disposed to face the issue. Mr. Schorer, as author of the Introduction to the Grove Press unexpurgated edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover,* avoids a direct and explicit defense of obscenity, yet argues in general terms that the novel is realism of a sublimated kind, indeed is "symbolic":

> The progress from the first through the third version of *Lady Chatterley* is the history of an effort to make the events at once maximumly plausible in realistic terms and maximumly meaningful in psychic terms. The result in the third version is a novel in a solid and sustained social context, with a clear and happily developed plot, in which the characters function fully and *the author allows them to speak for themselves*; at the same time it is a novel in which "every bush burns," and which *in itself* finally forms one great symbol. . . ."[19] (Italics added.)

This amounts to a claim that obscenity is to be excused or tolerated both on the ground that it is realistic and on the ground that "symbolism" may sublimate away its viciousness.

But if neither custom nor rule of art can any longer tell the novelist *what* is obscene

and what is not, or *when* the obscene may with artistic propriety be used in literature, and if the novelist is also accorded the broad license of the objective method and with it the libertine vagaries of symbolism, then he has little left to guide him but his temperament, and we his readers are at the mercy of that temperament.

Custom, among the literati at least, has offered less and less guidance and control in the thirty years since the *Ulysses* decision. As to rule of art, it is hard to find anything explicit set forth by the masters of modern criticism. A rule of art is perhaps implied in Mr. Schorer's strangely worded appeal to realism as a canon: "maximumly plausible in realistic terms." This is the rule, or argument, of verisimilitude. The four-letter words used by Mellors in *Lady Chatterley* (especially those addressed to Connie in the love scenes and in the repulsive letter with which the book ends) are to be considered "proper" because they are in character; Mellors is the kind of man that would use those words. So the typical argument would run. But the argument of verisimilitude is the feeblest weapon in the modern aesthetic arsenal. The modern movement in all the arts has been steadily directed away from verisimilitude. To claim both the sanction of hard, coarse, matter-of-fact realism (actually naturalism) with its reliance on science, and also the sanction of highly refined symbolism, as Mr. Schorer does, is not convincing. The "reality" of realism (or naturalism) and the "reality" of symbolism are not so easily reconciled.

The British critic, Mr. Graham Hough, more shrewdly says that Mellors' four-letter words "are *meant* to show his frank carnality and vivifying power." (Italics added.)[20] But to discover what Lawrence *meant* to achieve, in this and other particulars, is to discover how fully we are at the mercy of Lawrence's temperament. Lawrence *meant*, this excellent critic says, to convert the public to his own "belief" in sheer sensuality as a purifying force, and the conviction that somehow it can become the regenerating force for society as a whole."[21] From various other sources, including Lawrence's direct pronouncements, we know that Lawrence thought of himself as crusading for the open and general use of the "four-letter words" in the naïve hope that mere frankness would automatically end vileness. Can any art be truly great that is deeply infected by such folly?

If Lawrence's temperament has its dangerous aspects, Joyce's temperament is still more dangerous—dangerous, that is, to art as well as to society—because the coldness, the dry aloofness, the seeming logicality of his technique conceals, better than Lawrence's the obsessive predilections of Joyce the man. But the predilections are there, and are hardly less than satanic. His contemporary, John Cowper Powys, though on the whole favorable to Joyce, long ago noted Joyce's abnormal inclination toward the pornographic and obscene:

> Sex, in Joyce's writings, is not invariably accompanied by pleasure, but it is invariably accompanied by the presence of something repulsive and excremental . . . It remains harsh, dry, discordant, erudite, and obsessed by a sort of ice-cold, insane obscenity. . . .
>
> What in English writers—since the eighteenth century—is sentimental, what in French writers is voluptuous and ironical, becomes, the moment Joyce touches it, associated with the school dormitory and the school latrine. . . .[22]

If any confirmation is needed of what Powys wrote, thirty years ago, one has only to read passages of some of Joyce's own letters to his wife Nora in which he indulges himself (to use his words) in "wild filth and obscenity." In a recent critical study, Mary T. Reynolds notes that

passages in these exceedingly candid letters "will be found reproduced both in wording and in context in *Ulysses*."[23] Miss Reynolds makes it clear that "erotic stimulation" was the purpose of the letters. But we hardly need such evidence to convince us of this all but psychotic feature of Joyce's temperament. No technique or combination of techniques, no symbolic system, no smooth pretense of objectivity can hide from us that the streams-of-consciousness of Stephen Dedalus and of Leopold and Molly Bloom are portions of that *Cloaca Maxima* which flowed in the mind of James Joyce.

IV

WHAT OF THE future, with the untrammeled artistic temperament as the judge of decorum, in a time of loose manners and loose morals, sensationalism, vast confusions and equally vast complacencies? Predictions hardly seem worth while. The novelists and their ever articulate followers, the critics, show little concern. On the legal side the decisions in the *Ulysses* case, the *Lady Chatterley* case, and subsequent less prominent cases apparently fill the literati and their publishers with blithe assurance. Like the ebullient ex-colonials of the Congo and other liberated regions and tribes, they seem to prefer the shibboleth of freedom to any notion of self-restraint. Will they then allow, even encourage the cult of literary obscenity to proceed without any check other than what may be encountered and (they may suppose) overcome in the courts of law? Certainly no other course, at this writing, is being advocated by notable literary figures, or influential societies of authors or scholars.

It is true that Mr. Wayne Booth in a final brief chapter of *The Rhetoric of Fiction,* expresses some faint qualms about the morality of "impersonal narration." "Is there no limit to what we will praise, provided it is done with skill?" he asks, after commenting on a technically admirable novel about a homicidal maniac.[24] But his answer is evasive. And Graham Hough, after a critical defense of *Lady Chatterley*, adds this: "Lawrence was partly wrong, all the same. There are arcana in nature as well as in religion, and nothing that affects the emotional life as intimately and individually as sex can or ought ever to be fully 'in the open.'"[25] But present tendencies in our prose fiction threaten to pass all limits and leave no arcana. Deterioration and decline of the novel as an art form must surely be the penalty, in the end, for such indulgence—a license which would be nothing less than art for dirt's sake, as indeed it already is in many obvious instances. But no society can for very long harbor such evil and survive. Censorship, then, would be the deplorable fate toward which the liberationists are hustling us. Much better would be the rise of a new fiction to supplant the now wearisome old, and of writers and publishers wise and bold enough to assert the moral responsibility of the artist to his public and to posterity.

[1]D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. With an Introduction by Mark Schorer, New York: Grove Press, 1959.

[2]James Jackson Kilpatrick, *The Smut Peddlers*. Avon paperback edition, p. 119. In Part II, Chapter 1 of this indispensable book (published originally by Doubleday & Co.), Mr. Kilpatrick reviews not only the entire course of the *Ulysses* case but also several more recent cases.

[3]*Grove Press, Inc.* v. *Christenberry* (175 F. Supp. 488—S.D.N.Y. 1959).

[4]See Kilpatrick, 126-130 for a discussion of the Winters case. (*Winters* v. *New York*, 333 U.S. 507, 1948).

[5]Quoted, Kilpatrick, 105. See *Roth* v. *United States* (354 U.S. 476, 1957).

[6]Edmund Fuller, *Man in Modern Fiction: Some Minority Opinions on Contemporary American Writing,* New York: Random House, 1958, pp. 67-68.

[7]*The Trial of Lady Chatterley: Regina v. Penguin Books Ltd.* C. H. Rolph, ed., Penguin Books, 1961, p. 145.

[8]*Lady Chatterley's Lover,* Grove Press edition, p. v.

[9]James Joyce, *Ulysses,* Random House edition, 1934, p. xii.

[10]*The Trial of Lady Chatterley,* p. 145.

[11]Kilpatrick, *op. cit.* p. 107.

[12]Henry Miller, "I Defy You," *Playboy Magazine,* January, 1962, p. 102.

[13]Joyce, *op. cit.* pp. xi-xii.

[14]*Ibid.* p. xiv.

[15]Emile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental,* Paris, 1923, p. 52.

[16]F. W. J. Hemmings, *Emile Zola,* Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1953, p. 120.

[17]Mark Schorer, "Technique As Discovery," *Hudson Review* I (1948), p. 73.

[18]*Ibid.,* p. 80.

[19]Lawrence, *op. cit.* p. xxvii.

[20]Graham Hough, *The Dark Sun: A Study of D. H. Lawrence,* New York: The MacMillan Co., 1957, p. 161.

[21]*Ibid.* pp. 151-152.

[22]John Cowper Powys, "Modern Fiction," in *Sex in the Arts: A Symposium.* Edited by John Francis McDermott and Kendall B. Taft, New York: Harper & Bros., 1932, pp. 47-48.

[23]Mary T. Reynolds, "Joyce and Nora: The Indispensable Countersign." *Sewanee Review* LXXII (Winter, 1964), pp. 28, 40, 60.

[24]Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction;* Chicago: 1961, p. 196.

[25]Hough, *op. cit.,* 160 f.