

THE PROBLEM OF HIGH CULTURE AND MASS CULTURE¹

It would be idle to pretend that Mr. Macdonald's article is not about a most serious problem. In this age of disillusion one of the most serious grounds for concern, one of the deepest sources of the disillusion is the state of popular culture, if by culture we mean anything more than the sum of intellectual, moral, aesthetic habits of a people in any given moment of historical time. For to many observers who are hostile to the political movement of democracy, the present state of popular culture justifies all their fears, and to believers in democracy, the state of popular culture deceives some of the most profound hopes of the democratic movement since the French Revolution. And at this stage of the argument it is not, I think, worth making the distinction between popular and mass culture that Mr. Macdonald usefully insists on. Where the optimists have been deceived and the pessimists confirmed in their pessimism has been in the kind of culture that the people now choose or accept, and it does not, at the moment, matter whether the 'people' and the 'masses' are identical concepts.

What were the hopes? They were the hopes that, as a result of the growth of democratic forms of government, the culture of the *élite* of

¹A reply to Dwight Macdonald's 'A Theory of Mass Culture', published in *Diogenes* 3.

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the privileged classes would be extended to the people, if you like to the masses. Given the egalitarian bias of democratic thought, egalitarian not on a mere pragmatic basis, but on a value basis and on an environmental psychology, the hopes of the revolutionary generations were natural enough. Discarding the notion of natural inequality, discarding the claims of the existing aristocracies as based on accidental or tyrannical privilege, the early democrats were forced by passion and logic to believe that the visible differences between the culture of the courts, of the privileged orders, and of the peasantry and craftsmen were entirely artificial. And they could assert (as Rousseau and his disciples sometimes did) that the true cultural advantage lay on the side of the people or, while holding to the intrinsic superiority of the 'high' culture, assert that it should be and could be, to quote Wordsworth, a 'joy in widest commonalty spread'.

The first doctrine had many distinguished defenders and exponents after Rousseau. The collectors of folklore, the collectors of ballads, the preachers of the merits of Gothic (oddly seen as a primitive folk art, the work of anonymous teams, imitating the Germanic forest as Emerson thought), were all critics of the exclusive claims of high culture. Tolstoy, going to the peasants and mowing with them; Mark Twain as the 'Innocent Abroad'; both these men of genius were denigrators of the traditional high culture which was, for them, simply one more expression of the tyranny and exploitation of the people by the few. When Tolstoy said that all that the poor wanted of the rich was to get off their backs, he was speaking in more than crude economic terms. Like Mark Twain he had a special scorn for that highly exclusive and aristocratic and conventional art, opera. And there were many democrats and demagogues who followed these men of genius down the same road. The type we have still with us, the defender of the value of what the people apparently like because they like it, the snobs in reverse who show their superiority by their knowledge of what are, to the intellectual, esoteric arts, from bebop to tattooing. Of these it will be necessary to speak later in the modern or mass context. But they were not, in the development of the modern scepticism of the value of popular culture, nearly as important as were the disillusioned optimists.

To them, the fact that the peasantry, the craftsmen did not participate in the high culture was simply explained in institutional terms. The people were debarred from participation in the high culture by poverty, by illiteracy, by caste barriers. Thrown down the barriers and the great reservoir of natural good taste and of uncontaminated originality could be

tapped. The conception of 'the mute, inglorious Milton' popularised by Thomas Gray (of Eton and Peterhouse) in the *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard* is simply the most famous expression of this view in English, as the two comedies of M. Caron de Beaumarchais are in French. Nor was it a matter only of literary fashion. The age of Gray and Beaumarchais was the age of Franklin and Burns.

It would be possible but superfluous to give any more examples. This belief that the undoubted benefits of the high culture could be extended to vast bodies of men now excluded from them was the faith of Jefferson and Condorcet, of the National Convention, of the American democrats. It should be noted, however, that neither Jefferson nor Condorcet, Jefferson less perhaps than Condorcet, believed that the high culture would be available to or accepted by all. It was not in fact available to nor accepted by nor utilised by all or nearly all the privileged classes exposed to it. But if there was no reason to believe that all could attain the high culture, that was no reason to deprecate the value of that culture or deny access to it to the great bodies of men artificially excluded from it. The 'geniuses', as Jefferson put it, were to be a natural *élite*, not the *élite* that feudal artifice had produced. Talents whether you had ten or one (the origin of the word was then better remembered) were to be used to the full. None was to be compelled by political and institutional bad arrangements to wrap a talent in a napkin or bury it in the ground.

And as the democratic movement spread, was reflected in institutions, in law, in customs, in more general education, in cheaper books and newspapers, great masses of men and smaller groups of women did in fact pass into the magic circle; they became in varying degrees 'cultured'. These were the days of societies for general self-education, of pamphlets and tracts which were 'digests' of the higher culture; of self-made scholars teaching themselves by candle light even in the depths and darkness of the mines; of 'self-education' and 'self-improvement'; of new folk heroes like James Watt and Elihu Burritt; of the 'Ligue pour l'Enseignement'; of the Russian intelligentsia 'going out to the people', but not in the Tolstoyan sense of merely learning *from* them; of the political optimism of the Benthamites about the results of education in democratic organisation; of the more narrowly cultural optimism of Ruskin and William Morris, of Anatole France and Jean Jaurès lecturing in the *universités populaires*. Like many other things, this optimistic view was out of date by 1914 when the old world began visibly to crumble. For it began to be noted that the first use of the new facilities was not the striking of a gusher

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of new talent or genius, but the destruction of the old popular culture by a new culture that was neither a folk culture nor the old aristocratic high culture now made available to and no doubt modified for the better by the natural *élite* of the people. For as far as the people produced recruits for that *élite*, they ceased to be of the people. They might stress their popular origins, but that did not alter the fact that the Café Royal, Sicily, Taos were worlds away from the Midlands where Lawrence was born and that Péguy, by scorning vulgar commercial success, was, perhaps, putting himself more out of touch with his 'people' than if he had made a 'success' of himself. Nor in fact did an immense gusher of new talent flood the parched fields of the old high culture. In 1900 it was possible to say that of the great English poets from Chaucer on, only three, Shakespeare, Keats, and Browning, had not gone to Oxford or Cambridge, and in the case of Browning that was an accident. It is still true. In France it was not so true, but Péguy, if a failed *normalien* was yet a *normalien*, and the two French writers who, in modern times, have excited most interest in France and abroad were not merely bourgeois, they were rich. What had the culture of Proust and Gide to do with the people? Nothing, and even when it was the policy of the French Communists to exalt Gide it was not their practice to read him.

This was the first disappointment and it was connected in its origins, I think, with the second, with the discovery of what the apparently spontaneous taste of the people was; it was for the worst sides of the taste of the bourgeoisie. This could be illustrated in many ways, one will suffice for it struck at the very heart of the political and cultural optimism of the democratic movement. In that movement, the place of the press was central. It was as important as democratic political institutions themselves. It was to be the great source of popular education. The agitation for the removal of taxes on newspapers was conducted in England under a slogan that can only evoke ironical laughter today. 'Abolish the taxes on knowledge.' Today the newspaper with the largest circulation in the world, *The (London) News of the World*, concentrates on sex, crime, and sport. The American paper with the largest circulation, the *New York Daily News*, does the same, and as Mr. Macdonald points out, is probably far more representative of the tastes, if not the strictly political views of its readers, than any 'liberal' or 'radical' journal has been.

I am in agreement, that is to say, with Mr. Macdonald's view that what he calls 'mass' culture is without any serious value; it is shallow, evasive, often bad in its own terms and performs no more important cultural

function than does tobacco. I will admit that it is habit-forming in a more serious way than is tobacco and often, though not always, forms an exclusive habit, one that excludes the possibility of other and, by the old tradition, superior forms of culture. To adopt the American idiom about tobacco (saying 'I don't use it' instead of 'I don't smoke'), one may say that the attitude of the addicts of the new mass culture is 'I don't use it' when confronted even with deodorised high mass culture, as in the album of gramophone records recently published in America under the title *Classical Music for Those Who Hate the Classics*.

That there are forms of culture not identical with mass culture and not identical with high culture I will assert, and my first reason for not being pessimistic as is Mr. Macdonald is that I think these distinctions are worth making. That is, we have to face not only mass culture, the poorest films, the silliest television, the most imbecile comics, but the problem of what value there is in the popular culture that (if I understand him aright) Mr. Macdonald condemns equally severely (at any rate in its contemporary form, for he has kind words for such stars of popular culture as the Chaplin films or the popular vaudeville of twenty-five years ago).

But my second reason for not being pessimistic (and the one I propose to deal with first) is that I think that Mr. Macdonald, so grimly critical of the present in America, is too kind to the past in America and to past and present in Europe. Mr. Macdonald rightly distinguishes between high culture and popular culture, in this being undemocratic enough to be sensible. The high culture that we treasure and that we see endangered has never been popular in either sense of the word. We have moved far from the romantic idea of Homer as a ballad singer or even the collective name of a committee of ballad singers. We have abandoned the idea of groups of anonymous craftsmen building Chartres, as we have abandoned the idea that the sculptors of Chartres worked that way because they were simply craftsmen not properly trained in the Beaux Arts tradition. We have abandoned in more modern times the belief that there *must* be this pool of hidden genius which general education can make available to us.

But we have not abandoned the idea that folk art was abundant and good and that its death has left the masses incapable of high art and deprived of the sustenance they got in the past from their own folk art. That there is some truth in this is evident. There are in museums, in antique shops, in rich, private houses enough products of folk art of all kinds to justify a modestly high opinion of its value. That there were many good craftsmen at work on cathedrals and churches and town

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houses is evident, craftsmen who probably would not get a chance to do that kind of work today. That there were illiterate 'literary' talents behind the ballads in many cases is probably true. But even in the Middle Ages, even in the Dark Ages, the great themes, the basis of the folk culture as of the high culture, was aristocratic. Roland, the 'Quatre Fils Aymon', Arthur, Maeve, Siegfried, Igor, these are princes or queens or heroes; they are dramatised or heightened versions of the life in court or castle. The peasants could look up at them, as they could look up at the sculptures on the façade of Chartres or Saint-André-des-Champs. They celebrate 'le donne e i cavalieri', as in Ariosto, the sins of popes and princes, as in Dante. We should at least contemplate the possibility that what we call high culture owes its possibility to a considerable degree of leisure that permits of the acquisition of the necessary knowledge for appreciation of the products of the high culture. We should at least contemplate the possibility that mass popular taste has never been positively good, even if it was not given the chance to be as positively bad such as the mass media provide today.

The ballad form is, when all is said and done, a primitive form; most ballads are dull and repetitive, as a cold study of the great collections would show. In what way is the farce of the minor Elizabethans better than the burlesque of today? The comedy even in Shakespeare is often a tickling of the ears of the groundlings that may have come off in 1600, but is tedious in the extreme today. If this scepticism of mine is justified, then we are not forced to be totally pessimistic today as we contemplate the level of popular taste or even the fact that mass art has killed the possibility of genuine self-produced art. However morally edifying it might be, it might also be dull, thin, naïvely moralistic or naïvely hedonistic. It might, except in its source, be much like what commerce provides today. We do not know this to be true, but we do not know that the dogma of the natural good taste of the primitive peasant or craftsmen is true either. It is not only no use crying over spilt milk, it is worse to cry over the spilling of what may have been buttermilk at best. The arts, even the popular arts that we inherited, came down from an aristocratic society in which the most valuable things now left to us were the work of high-brows of the intelligentsia, employed for mixed reasons by kings, popes, capitalistic republics like Florence and, a little later, by the direct ancestors of the modern businessman. And I think most people who have seen the efforts made in modern times to revive, or as it is usually put, to 'save' the old popular arts will agree that the average peasant or craftsman

today has little or none of the enthusiasm for his inheritance that his middle-class admirers attribute to him. In more than one case it has been necessary to *teach* the carriers of these traditions the meaning, the existence of the traditions. 'This tradition goes into effect next Monday' is, to borrow from a celebrated American anecdote, the attitude of many middle-class or even upper-class savers of the old cultural order.

This is not to say that the existence of a living popular tradition may not be of value. Thierry-Maulnier has pointed out how much French literature or, at any rate, French poetry has suffered by the complete breach between popular and cultivated taste. (Of course Thierry-Maulnier makes his point in part by firmly excluding from the body of French poetry authors whom a great part even of the French cultivated classes think are real or even, as in the case of Hugo, great poets.) Burns was far from being an unsophisticated peasant. The language he wrote was an artificial literary dialect spoken nowhere, but it had the air of being popular speech and so linked the real folk art with real sophisticated art. This was probably a good thing though the genius of Burns has been an excuse for a quite remarkably large production of *Kitsch* plus *Schmalz* in my native land. It may be that in Athens the voters had good and high-brow taste. The success of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes suggests that they had. But not only could the slaves not vote, but the member of the sovereign Demos had a lot of leisure. And in any case we owe our knowledge of the Athenian drama to the high-brow collectors of manuscripts and makers of anthologies. If we had the whole body of Athenian drama, we might find it as dull as the mass of the Elizabethan drama is, or a great part of the immense output of plays in France is. If literature is abundant, we can be pretty sure that a great deal of it will be bad, including some of the greatest successes. Our situation today may be so gross an example of a common situation that our case is desperate; but it is not novel or unique.

Another and more paradoxical reason for not sharing Mr. Macdonald's complete pessimism is that he exaggerates, I think, the bad eminence of the United States. Much of what he says is true of England, of France, of Italy, of Germany. It takes all kinds of pressure to prevent the complete Americanisation of European culture. We may despise the slick Hollywood productions, but the mass of the English, Irish, French, Italian masses don't. It is not only in America that the television masts are thickest in the poorest streets. Go to London by rail and see them thick over the roofs of the slum houses that lie around Liverpool Street or

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Victoria. *Horizon* may have been sold on station bookstalls, but it failed just the same. The flood of new critical reviews in Paris is an interesting phenomenon and an even more interesting financial one. But it not only represents an old and honourable French tradition that has no real parallel in either England or America, it also represents an aspect of French life that is less admirable, its bitter party spirit, for all of these reviews have a party or personal colour. More separates *La Table Ronde* from *Les Temps Modernes* than different literary taste, and the revival of *La Nouvelle Revue Française* has an immediate political interest that the revival of *Horizon* could not have. Over the French literary scene hangs not only the nimbus of a genuine devotion to literature, but a black cloud of hate; the ghosts of Drieu la Rochelle and Robert Brasillach are at this banquet of the intelligence. There are special circumstances in the American scene, and I shall deal with some of them later. But the difference between the American and European scene is not so great as to give me much hope if we are forced to despair of America. We are all in the same boat; all bailing out together.

What are the special circumstances of the American situation? I have already asserted that they do not produce a fundamental difference between Europe and America, but they do produce differences. The first is that it has been necessary to create a popular culture for an urbanised society that does not inherit a common national tradition, even an obsolete national tradition. All western societies have to create a new urban tradition because the fact of an urbanised society is new in England and Germany as well as in the United States. But they have not had to create a unified national tradition. The Americans have had to do both, to make the change from rural to urban culture and to create a unified urban culture to be 'sold' (in the special American sense of the term) to a population with recent roots in Sicily, Norway, Ireland, Kentucky, Croatia. To do this it has been necessary in the educational system to teach a thin, uniform, 'homogenised' culture, a highest common denominator culture, and the common denominator naturally cannot be very high. This explains the emphasis on literary mediocrity or worse. A versifier like Whittier is not a good poet, not perhaps a poet, but he may be politically useful, so may more modern authors like Stephen Vincent Benet, so may bad historical novels and films. It is very hard to distinguish between the grounds of approving or disapproving of an author when the grounds of judgment are necessarily confused. It is not improper to use authors this way; it is improper (and a critical sin often committed

in America) to transfer the political approval that such writers earn for their utility into an aesthetic judgment. But it is a sin often innocently committed. Even Mr. Macdonald commits it, for he contrasts the original *Atlantic Monthly* with the present *Atlantic Monthly* in terms that suggest to me that he overestimates the original and so is possibly unjust to the contemporary. It is only in the American context that the list cited by Mr. Macdonald is so impressive. Of the stars is any but Emerson of any general importance? What can a Frenchman or a German make of Lowell or Holmes? What should he make of them? The fact is (a point I shall come back to later), American literature by itself is not weighty enough to support at a high level the burdens Mr. Macdonald would impose on it. If he doubt this, let him contemplate what a review like the *Atlantic Monthly* published at the same time in Paris or London could have offered its readers. If it be said that no one review in Paris, for example, could have got Baudelaire, Sainte-Beuve, Flaubert, Taine, Michelet, Hugo to contribute to itself, that underlines another point, the strength of the New England *literature*, their unity, their common membership in a small, homogeneous (not homogenised) provincial society, and that is the reason why that New England culture, the 'genteel tradition' was inadequate for the urban, non-homogeneous American society of the twenties.

The second special weakness of the American cultural position is that it is part of a bigger cultural tradition that for the convenience of shorthand I shall call 'English'. The American poet is competing with perhaps the longest and richest poetical tradition in western history. The novelist, the critic is competing at any rate with an old and rich tradition even though he is better off than if he were competing with the French tradition. And American high culture in general is competing with mass culture but often has to do so and would be foolish not to do so with what are, from the national point of view, borrowed weapons. And this state of affairs strengthens the forces in American life that make high culture suspect and foreign. I do not for a moment wish to assert that the average English boy or girl 'understands' Shakespeare, even if he has been born in Shakespeare's native county of Warwick (chief city, Birmingham). But he is less cut off; if he has some natural taste and talent, he comes more easily to that admiration, that reverence for supreme achievement which is part of the high culture, its foundation and its achievement as well.

There is one last handicap that affects American high culture. In cultural as in other matters the American is irreverent. It is not accidental that the

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one American author whom the disciples of the high culture and of the popular culture both admire, Mark Twain, wasted a great deal of his life, and not only in *The Innocents Abroad*, in debunking (a most American word) the pretensions of the high culture. It was dull (as in Jane Austen); politically dangerous as in Sir Walter Scott; obscene (as in Titian). And this was the attitude of many who had not written *Huckleberry Finn*. Even so liberated a spirit as Hawthorne shows astonishing limitations in a man of his calibre in *The Marble Faun*. Politically I am prepared to defend the American high school, but high culture is put not on the defensive but driven into full retreat when Shakespeare and secretarial science (stenography) are treated as equal 'skills', equal means of access to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'. (Of course they are not; secretarial science and machine-stop practice are for most pupils *real*. Shakespeare is not.) European high culture gains by the surviving if decaying aristocratic tradition. It suffers, also, for those traditions foster and support academism. There are other special features of the American scene that give support to Mr. Macdonald's thesis, but I think I have dealt with the most important of them. America exaggerates or is a pioneer in a change in the cultural atmosphere which is serious enough but which is not as deadly as he suggests. For we must remember, again, not to idealise the past; if we do we shall rightly despair of the present.

We should realise that a general habit of reading at a high level has never existed in the past and may never exist in the future. General reading of any kind is a novelty. When an English peasant a generation ago said, 'I'm no scholar', he simply meant that he couldn't read or at any rate couldn't write. Even today with education 'universal' over the western world, a great many people cannot, in any real sense, read. Nor do they feel the lack unless some external pressure reveals it to them. Thus the coming of conscription in England has brought out a startling degree of illiteracy. But it has also shown that a good many conscripts who found that they could hardly exist in the army, certainly could never get out of the awkward squad, learned to read but for purely practical purposes. For most of them at any rate the 'comics' continued to be the only books they needed. (The now nearly universal application of the word 'book' to any printed matter other than a daily newspaper is of some significance. *Life* and *Mickey Mouse* are both 'books' in England and America.) The standards of high culture have been created in the past by what used to be called in the twenties the *literati*. The whole western educational tradition was literary. We have plenty of evidence that for very many of those

subjected, for social reasons, to this education, it was a waste of time. The college graduate who 'never cracked a book' after he graduated existed before Columbus discovered America. The *literati* have ignored the fact that reading at a high cultural level has always been a minor side of life for the majority even of the privileged classes. It neither surprises nor shocks me that America spends so much more on sport than on books. All societies in the past have done so. Louis XIV no doubt enjoyed Molière and patronised Racine, but he enjoyed hunting more than either. Nor is this all. The place of literature in the national culture can vary greatly from country to country. English and French cultures are overwhelmingly literary even though France was pre-eminent in architecture in the Middle Ages, and, in much more recent times, in painting. But other cultures are not necessarily predominantly literary. Where was German literature in the age of Leibnitz and Bach? Where was Italian literature in the age of Vico or in the old age of Verdi? There are also in cultures periods of occultation that may last a generation or more, periods of sterility or of barren experiment. There may be explosions of literary production as in nineteenth-century Russia or twentieth-century Ireland. It is true that Mr. Macdonald deals by allusion with the other arts, with painting, architecture, with at any rate popular music. But his main thesis is the degradation of literature (including the drama) by the mass media serving or creating mass culture.

It is with one implication of Mr. Macdonald's article that I shall conclude. He assumes that today there is nothing between high culture and mass culture, between the masterpiece and *Kitsch*. Again I suggest that this pessimistic view of the present is in part held because of too optimistic a view of the past. There are few masterpieces even in English and French literature. A great part of the 'classics' in these literatures is second or perhaps even third rate stuff. It is not fourth or fifth or tenth rate. That a great deal of what is admired uncritically today will seem feeble or worthless tomorrow is true. That a great deal that is excessively admired today will be moved down the scale is certain. Tennyson was over-estimated, then underestimated but at no stage was he Eddie Guest or Martin Tupper. Trollope had the same fate and is probably a watered stock at the moment. Certain minor but interesting writers can either be treated as Peacock is, as a minor master or as a pedantic trifler. It is useless and pointless to hope to get a final judgment on cases like this, to understand why Meredith was so highly esteemed or is so completely neglected today. An author may be fantastically variable in quality by modern

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standards as in the case of Barrès. But it is worth while discriminating or attempting to discriminate. For example, both Arnold Bennett and Zola, both overestimated in their life-time, will come back, have come back as serious if lesser writers. It seems to me that the only harm done by the exaltation of the obviously second-rate is the destruction of standards in appreciating the first-rate. Mr. Macdonald is rightly scornful of the exalted rank given to Mr. Maugham in America, and there was something comic in the solemn reception of one of his manuscripts by the Library of Congress. And Mr. Maugham's arrogance is such that it is difficult to be just to him. But we had better try and we should remember, in any case, that the judgment of one country on the writers of another is peculiarly likely to exaggerate merit or to ignore it all together. It was not the British Museum that solemnly received the Maugham manuscripts; it was no American authority, not even *Time*, that chose to give the Nobel prize to Mrs. Buck. We must allow in all literary pages for a great deal of waste, for the years in which Gerard Manley Hopkins was unpublished, for the years in which Stephen Phillips was admired. It is as much as we can do to try to reduce the blurbs of publishers, the yells of reviewers to some due proportion, to ask book critics to remember the great achievements of the past before we acclaim a new Balzac, a new Jane Austen, a new Dickens, a new Alain Fournier.

Whether things are worse today than they were a generation, two generations ago may be doubted. It is a century since Macaulay used Robert Montgomery as a sample of what puffing could do and did, for Montgomery did not suffer in reputation. His readers did not read the *Edinburgh Review* any more than the uncritical admirers of Mr. Marquand read *Partisan Review*. Nor should we forget that not all *avant-gardes* avoid the blind alley. It is possible to believe that in his last work Joyce was his own *epigone*. Literary history is full of novel, brilliant, false starts. Writers have always found it hard to get published and live without becoming hacks. Some have become hacks, hacks of genius like Dryden and Johnson. Others have had patrons, have had jobs in government, have been fellows of colleges, deans of cathedrals, some, a few have been wealthy like Browning (and Cézanne). Some are doctors, some insurance executives, some high officials of the Quai d'Orsay. In every age the problem arises in new forms, the annals of Grub Street are always new; the candidates for admission to the *Dunciad* embarrassingly numerous. Carlyles will be born before Keatses and live full of honours into the administration of Chester Arthur. But these accidents have not killed poetry, only poets.

And again, the *literati* make literature too exclusively their criterion. It may be in a bad way in the United States today compared with twenty-five years ago, but music is in a much better way. Whereas it does not matter much whether books are well or ill printed, it does matter a great deal whether music is well or ill performed, and who can doubt the general improvement? We have to guard against the nonsense that takes *South Pacific* as a serious work of art, but fewer people take *South Pacific* as a serious work of art in 1953 than would have done so in 1923, fewer confuse '*Voi che sapete*' with 'I'm in love with a Wonderful Guy'.

It is not going to be easy; it never has been easy to uphold the standard of high art. It is perhaps more difficult to uphold them in a democratic society where what I may call the Kinsey theory of morals is applied to the arts as well, decision by majority practice. There are special technical problems presented by films and television. (The fact that Mr. Macdonald's heroes are producers suggests that there are. Who produced *Hamlet*, who the *Misanthrope*?) The serious artist has always been tempted or coerced by kings as well as by the slick paper magazines. It was not of a victim of Henry Luce that it was written:

All for a handful of silver he left us.

We should clear our minds of cant, as a hack writer, Dr. Johnson, put it (he was also for a great part of his life an anonymous writer). The danger is within us. The danger of inverted snobbery, of seeing in inferior forms of literature the fresh runnings of a new culture when it may be only the lees of the old. Between academicism and vulgarity, pedantry and philistinism the course is narrow and dangerous. The sirens have always been singing. The world of letters is full of things new and old, most not very good but not all to be despised. For as a minor poet and great scholar, A. E. Housman put it:

*'Tis true there's better brew than brine
But he that drowns must drink it.
But oh my lass! the news is news
That men have heard before.*