

MORALS AND THE NOVEL¹

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DANTE, in the fifth canto of the *Inferno*, wandering among the souls of those damned for incontinence, meets the lovers, Paolo and Francesca. He is told that they fell from chastity after reading a book, the story of Lancelot. 'Several times that reading urged our eyes to meet, and changed the colour of our faces; but one moment alone it was that overcame us. . . .'

Galeotto fu il libro, e chi lo scrisse;

quel giorno più non vi leggemmo avante.

'The book, and he who wrote it was a Galeotto; that day we read in it no farther.' And as the commentators tell us, for 'Galeotto' we may read 'pandar'. Here we have what is, I think, a *locus classicus* for the problem under discussion: the meeting-place of behaviour and literature and morals; and an occasion for apprehension for both the moralist and the writer, though for very different reasons.

In discussing the particular question of 'Morals and the Novel', rather than the relations between morality and literature in general, the problem becomes both more defined and more acute. If we are talking about poetry,² or painting or music, it is possible to argue that the artist's basic concern is with his medium, with words or paint or sounds, and that his aim is to make an aesthetic structure in which the relation of parts to the whole will be consonant and harmonious. This kind of 'formalist' aesthetic will be familiar to readers of Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism*, where the author asserts the virtual independence of art and morals by claiming that the former is 'a virtue of the practical intellect in the field of making' while morals—or 'prudence'—is a 'virtue of the practical intellect in the field of action'. And something rather like this Neo-Thomist 'formalism' lies behind the criticism of poetry that has been written—often very brilliantly—in recent years by the 'New Critics' in America, by writers like Cleanth Brooks for instance. There, too, we see an insistence on the poem as an object, as an arrangement of resolved stresses and tensions in the verbal medium.

¹ A paper read at a Literary Weekend at Spode House, Hawkesyard Priory, in July 1958.

² That is to say, lyrical poetry: narrative or dramatic poems clearly present similar problems to the novel.

But if we consider the novel, we have to admit that this seductively neat approach is scarcely adequate. For the substance of the novel is not words or any material medium: it is human nature and human life itself. Maritain has admitted as much in one of the long notes to his book,³ where he has written of the novel, 'The object it has to create is human life itself; it has to mould, scrutinize and govern humanity', though Maritain himself has not made any great attempt to deal with the subject. We cannot hope to protect the novel from the suspicious attentions of the moralist merely by labelling it as a product of the practical intellect in the field of *making*, not of action, and so not his concern. The novelist and the moralist have, in fact, precisely the same subject: human behaviour. There can be no theoretical by-passing of their encounter.

If we are to prepare properly for the debate between them, we must first insist that the novelist has a certain status. If we are content to call him an 'entertainer' and hope he will thereby escape attention, then we are letting his case go by default. Art—all art—must, of course, give pleasure, but this is by no means the same as saying that its business is merely entertainment. In the present paper, I mean by 'the novel' works of a certain agreed literary merit. What the great, or at least the good, novel does is surely to enlarge our knowledge of humanity, and so of ourselves. And since self-knowledge is one of the beginnings of true wisdom the moralist should have no initial quarrel with the novelist. The very natural human desire to know and participate in the experience of others is in itself good, comparable with the intellectual desire for rational knowledge. It can, of course, be corrupted, but then so can our intellectual appetites; and no one, so far as I know, has made the possibility of error an argument against speculative thinking as such. Particular cases may well require special decisions, both in philosophy and art, and I hope to get on to the discussion of specific examples before long. Whilst still speaking in general terms, however, I should like to refer to a valuable essay by Allen Tate, 'The Man of Letters in the Modern World'⁴, in which the present rôle of literature is discussed in moving and urgent terms. As Tate remarks, in the world we live in, 'communication', which is something abstract and purely

³ *Art and Scholasticism* (1930), p. 171.

⁴ *The Man of Letters in the Modern World*. New York, 1955, pp. 11-22.

conceptual, has largely replaced 'communion' in the relations between men. 'Communion' involves the whole personality, intellect, will and emotions: 'We *use* communication; we *participate* in communion', Tate writes. Today, with the decline of the social functions of religion, and the decay of so many other traditional bonds, imaginative literature—and particularly the novel—is one of the few ways in which we can still achieve a sense of the underlying community of human experience. Tate, who is a Catholic, does not, of course, think that literature can be a substitute for religion. Literature, in the last resort, is not essential to salvation. But I think we may content ourselves with the modest claim that it is useful.

Nevertheless, the moralists have usually shown an attitude to imaginative literature—and especially fiction—which is at best suspicious and at worst positively hostile. Here, for instance, is the only specific reference to the novel that I could find in a standard manual of moral theology:

'... much novel reading is dangerous for the young, as it fills their minds with thoughts on sex, and they fall victims to a not uncommon habit of thinking that sex is the only subject that matters, that sex pervades everything, and that it is the preoccupation of nearly half the race.'⁵

I should like, very tentatively, to suggest that perhaps a trained response to good fiction might be of some value in helping to discipline the unruly imaginations of the young, though I don't want to argue the point here. It was inevitable, with the present subject, that sex would have to be dealt with sooner or later. The moralists, of course, are suspicious of the novel precisely because it seems to deal so much with sex. The fear of the sin of Paolo and Francesca is, very properly, always with them. Looked at from the point of view of morals, the issue appears in black and white. Sexual pleasure was given by God to man as an incitement to and a reward for procreation, safeguarded by marriage, and any kind of indulgence in it outside marriage is absolutely forbidden. Similarly, anything likely to arouse such improper pleasure is also forbidden. Why, it is sometimes asked, must the novelist be so concerned with sex? Or, more generally, with the relations, often illicit, between men and women? Are there not other subjects, harmless or even edifying, he can write

⁵ Henry Davis, s.J. *Moral and Pastoral Theology* (1949) II, 227.

about? There is a precise answer to these questions, fortunately. The novelist, unlike the poet, cannot spend his life writing descriptions of landscapes or natural objects. His subject is human behaviour; and since fiction is an art, the finished work of art—the novel—must include the resolved stresses and tensions which, as the formalists correctly tell us, are characteristic of the aesthetic object. But they will be stresses and tensions in human life itself, as recreated by the novelist. And it doesn't take much thought to show that very many of such tensions are caused by sexual conflicts. These conflicts, and their resolution, are as much traditionally the novelist's—and indeed the dramatist's—province as descriptions of roses or the moon are the lyric poet's. There are other subjects, certainly. Struggles between men for power and position have an almost equal interest: one need only mention, for instance, the main plot of *Barchester Towers*, or, as a recent example, C. P. Snow's *The Masters*. But undoubtedly the kind of conflicts and dramatic situations that we can loosely include under the general heading of 'sex' have always formed a major interest of the novelist. What varies enormously is his manner of treating them: one thinks of Richardson and Jane Austen and Henry James and D. H. Lawrence.

To return once more to the Paolo and Francesca situation. What danger is there of us, as readers of novels in the modern world, falling into the same plight?⁶ To what extent are the moralists justified in their suspicions of the novel and its sexual preoccupations? As soon as we set out to examine this question, even before attempting an answer, the issue appears much less in black and white than before—as is so often the case with large questions. What Dante does not tell us is whether Paolo and Francesca were practised readers of French romances: if they had been, it might have made a difference to their fate. Having quoted from one clerical authority, I should now like to quote from another, from *The Nature of Art* by Fr Arthur Little, s.J., which is the best work on aesthetics by a Catholic author that I know. After discussing at some length a possible criterion of morality in art, Fr Little observes that this criterion

'is intended for an ideal audience. That is to say, it determines

⁶ It seems to me, incidentally, that the whole question of the effect of reading on the imagination and on our actions, which the moralists have traditionally treated in a very cut-and-dried fashion, might profitably be re-examined in the light of our present knowledge of affective psychology.

the conditions under which a work of art is likely to do moral harm even to an audience of sufficient aesthetic culture to appreciate the work as art. An aesthetically uncultured man, even of the strictest morality, when studying a work that neutralizes by artistic power the immorality it treats, would most likely be tempted by it though he would repudiate the temptation. A man of artistic refinement, however unscrupulous, would not even be tempted.⁷

This is just and important. It explains the state of affairs that most of us have probably experienced at some time or another, of hearing our non-literary friends or relations complaining that some novel, which we have found more or less unexceptionable, is scandalously immoral. There is no need for self-congratulation, of course, in the degree of sophistication that we may have acquired in several years' habitual experience of literature. But it does underline the fact that almost any book demands its right audience. Quite apart from novels, certain estimable and necessary publications, such as medical text-books, may do harm if they fall into the hands of the young or inexperienced. But it is hardly practicable for the authors to see whose hands their books may or may not fall into. And isn't this true, even, of certain passages in Scripture?

The parallel with the novel is not quite exact, I admit; for the novel has always had more readers than the medical text-book. It was certainly a problem which worried the Victorians a great deal, partly because of their habit of reading books aloud to the assembled family, and I shall be returning to them. But paradoxically the issue is easier for the twentieth-century reader, simply because of that disastrous split in our culture that began in the final years of the nineteenth century and which has been recently documented in Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*. Nowadays, any work of literary merit is likely to be addressed to a minority audience which will already have the degree of experience and cultivation necessary to read it as it should be read. If we turn to so-called mass culture, we see a very different state of affairs. There the exploitation of sex for profit—in the sacred name of 'entertainment'—is deliberately aimed at the widest possible audience.

If is often asked if such and such scenes or descriptions in a

7 *The Nature of Art* (1946) p. 251.

novel, which some readers find objectionable, are really *necessary*? This question can only be answered by making a close critical examination of the whole work, and by asking ourselves the question in another way—would the novel be much impaired if these scenes were left out? If we think of Lawrence, for example, and novels like *The Rainbow* or *Women in Love*, which are devoted to an exhaustive—and exhausting—examination of human love in all its aspects, spiritual and psychological as well as carnal, the specifically sexual passages are integral parts of a much larger whole. Even in that great comic novel *Ulysses*, which was banned as obscene for many years, the sexual details of the lives of Leopold and Molly Bloom are necessary, since Joyce's total portrayal of the pathos of their lives would be manifestly incomplete without them. They are, in fact, demanded by the inclusiveness of his technique. Joyce is showing us in *Ulysses* that human beings can be amiable in their weakness, and in nothing is human weakness more laughably apparent than in the failure of our sexual aspirations—as Chaucer or Rabelais realized long ago. Apart from which, a good deal of the sexuality in *Ulysses* is represented as sordid and even repulsive, and I think we can agree that it is better to portray what is sordid *as* sordid rather than as speciously attractive.

On the other hand, a widely acclaimed recent novel, *Room at the Top*, seems to me to contain passages of sexual description which are peculiarly gratuitous. At the very least, they appear out of key with the rest of the book, as if the author had no serious artistic purpose in including them, but was merely indulging himself. There can, in fact, be no short answer to the question whether certain passages in a book are 'necessary' or 'justified', particularly since most of those who ask it have already made up their minds that they are not necessary. One can only find out by applying the methods of literary criticism, by attentively reading the whole book and comparing it with one's experience of other literature; and even then not everyone might agree with one's answer. Literary criticism, for better or for worse, is not an exact science. Nevertheless, it should by now be clear that where novels are concerned the questions of artistic and moral excellence—though they may be logically distinguished—are in practice inseparable. If the purpose of the novelist is the truthful portrayal of human behaviour in a recognizable context,

then he is writing about a creature with a supernatural destiny, and a whole world of values will inevitably be involved. It is inconceivable that a novel could be artistically a great success whilst totally reversing these values and treating the good as bad and the bad as good.

However, the position is complicated, since man has both a carnal and a spiritual nature, and many novelists in this post-Christian world are only aware of the former. Much of the fascination of Ernest Hemingway's fiction, it seems to me, comes from the spectacle of human beings reduced almost to their animal components, where the only detectable values are masculine valour and sexual assertiveness. Though in Hemingway's early novels, one should add, there were curious hints and intimations of man's spiritual potentialities. The following exchange from *Fiesta*, for example, has always stuck in my memory. Brett Ashley has decided to leave the young bullfighter rather than ruin his life; she says to the narrator, Jake (a lapsed Catholic):

“You know it makes one feel rather good deciding not to be a bitch.”

“Yes.”

“It's sort of what we have instead of God.”

“Some people have God”, I said. “Quite a lot.”

“He never worked very well with me.”

Quite often we may become aware of novels which are morally unsatisfactory, not because of any offensive scenes or passages, but simply because the author is presenting us a lesser good as a greater. Thus, human love is good, but chastity is a greater good, and a novel in which the author clearly wants us to approve of the efforts of two lovers to escape from the restraints of chastity is unsatisfactory to that extent, though it will still be a better work than one in which, say, the admired quality is merely lust. Again, it seems reasonable to assume that a novel holding up to admiration positive vices such as theft or murder cannot escape being immoral. But we must be careful not to over-simplify. A good novel might still quite well be written about a vicious character, provided vices were presented *as* vices and not as objects for admiration, and the essential nobility of man was somehow obliquely indicated in the very depths of degradation to which the character had sunk.

Henry James is a great novelist whose work sometimes poses

some interesting moral issues. *The Ambassadors*, for instance, for all its brilliance, seems to me in some ways a vulgar and rather unpleasant book, since it suggests that adultery may be 'right' and even admirable if it is carried on in an exquisitely civilized milieu in Paris with the ineffably gracious and charming Madame de Vionnet. Here James is erecting a system of purely 'aesthetic' values in place of traditional moral ones. One may compare his earlier novel, *The Portrait of a Lady*, where the heroine, Isabel Archer, is trapped into a wretched and unhappy marriage but nevertheless remains loyal to her husband, despite the entreaties of her faithful lover, Caspar Goodwood. As Mr G. H. Bantock has pointed out in an excellent article,⁸ to which I am indebted, Madame Merle, the 'villainess' of *The Portrait of a Lady*, would be by no means out of place in the admired Parisian scene of *The Ambassadors*. James, of course, was not a Christian, and in many respects he was a representative of that peculiarly modern kind of sensibility that believes in nothing, not even in belief. With such an attitude, moral and aesthetic values are apt to become easily confused. With this in mind, it is interesting to turn to Jane Austen's rather strange novel, *Mansfield Park*, in which, as Lionel Trilling has shown,⁹ we are meant to sympathize with the ailing and dull little heroine, Fanny Price, against the Crawfords, who exemplify the purely aesthetic virtues of energy and gaiety and high spirits, but are nevertheless morally on the side of darkness. As Trilling remarks, Fanny is a Christian heroine, and *Mansfield Park* (which is by no means without its faults as a novel) offers an unusually complete illustration of traditional moral values in action. James himself reproduced the essential situation of *Mansfield Park* in another early novel, *The Europeans*.

So far I have been talking about morals in the simplest and most easily understood sense of the word. We have been thinking about those actions which form the subject matter of the science of moral theology, and which may or may not infringe the natural law and help or hinder our salvation.¹⁰ But to consider an action *only* in its moral aspects may involve a fairly sharp degree of abstraction, and the novelist necessarily deals with a world of concrete and imaginative entities, not abstractions or moral

8 'Morals and Civilization in Henry James': *Cambridge Journal*, December 1953.

9 *The Opposing Self* (1955), pp. 206-230.

10 Fr Herbert McCabe, O.P., has suggested that this is a very inadequate view of the nature of moral theology.

concepts. For a novelist, what society habitually thinks or feels about an action may mean more than its ultimate significance in terms of natural or divine law. And here we are moving away from 'morals', considered in isolation, towards the point where they meet with manners, and where both may be signified by that untranslatable word, *moeurs*.¹¹ The tendency of morals to become *moeurs* may often set us problems as Catholics. Thus, inevitably we will share very many—perhaps most—of the assumptions of our non-Catholic friends about what is or is not socially acceptable, particularly if we have the same background and professional or social interests. And in most cases these will be morally neutral questions. Nevertheless, there are questions which those around us may treat simply as matters of custom or usage, but which for us have an acute moral significance: divorce, for instance, or birth control. We all know the kind of social embarrassment that may occur when these issues are raised. And the novelist, or at least the good novelist, is extremely sensitive to *moeurs* and the innumerable assumptions that govern our attitudes to conduct. The point has been very well discussed, with particular reference to the American novel, by Lionel Trilling in another essay, 'Manners, Morals, and the Novel'.¹² There Trilling writes: 'What I understand by manners, then, is a culture's hum and buzz of implication. I mean the whole evanescent context in which its explicit statements are made. It is that part of a culture which is made up of half-uttered or unuttered or unutterable expressions of value. They are hinted at by small actions, sometimes by the arts of dress or decoration, sometimes by tone, gesture, emphasis, or rhythm, sometimes by the words that are used with a special frequency or a special meaning. They are the things that for good or bad draw the people of a culture together and that separate them from the people of another culture. They make the part of a culture which is not art, or religion, or morals, or politics, and yet it relates to all these highly formulated departments of culture. It is modified by them; it modifies them; it is generated by them; it generates them. In this part of culture assumption rules, which is often so much stronger than reason.'

¹¹ Though *moeurs* may themselves have a spiritual dimension: the relation between courtesy and charity is a profound one.

¹² *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), pp. 205–222.

As I have suggested, it is in the field of what Trilling calls 'manners', in this all-embracing sense, that we may feel, sometimes, most at variance with the assumptions of a society that is partly Protestant and partly post-Christian.

I should like to enlarge a little on the subject of divorce, since here we have both a moral issue and a social fact—though, of course, it has only quite recently become accepted as a social fact. In Dickens's *Hard Times*, published in 1854, the honest workman, Stephen Blackpool, has married badly at an early age. His wife has turned out a drunkard and a waster, and he wants to be rid of her so that he can marry the tender and kind-hearted working woman, Rachel, to whom he is devoted. He consults his unsympathetic employer, Mr Bounderby, about his problem.

"I ha' coom to ask yo, sir, how I am to be ridded o' this woman." Stephen infused a yet deeper gravity into the mixed expression of his attentive face. Mrs Sparsit uttered a gentle ejaculation, as having received a moral shock.

"What do you mean?" said Bounderby, getting up to lean his back against the chimney-piece. "What are you talking about? You took her for better for worse."

"I mun' be ridded o' her. I cannot bear't nommore. I ha' lived under 't so long, for that I ha' had'n the pity and comforting words o' th' best lass living or dead. Haply, but for her, I should ha' gone hottering mad."

"He wishes to be free, to marry the female of whom he speaks, I fear, sir", observed Mrs Sparsit in an undertone, and much dejected by the immorality of the people.

"I do. The lady says what's right. I do. I were a coming to 't. I ha' read i' th' papers that great fok (fair faw 'em a'! I wishes 'em no hurt!) are not bonded together for better for worst so fast, but that they can be set free fro' *their* misfortnet marriages, an' marry ower agen. When they dunnot agree, for that their tempers is ill-sorted, they has rooms o' one kind an' another in their houses, above a bit, and they can live asunders. We fok ha' only one room, and we can't. When that won't do, they ha' gowd an' other cash, an' they can say 'This for yo' an' that for me', an' they can go their separate ways. We can't. Spite o' all that, they can be set free for smaller wrongs than mine. So, I mun be ridded o' this woman, and I want t' know how?"

“No how”, returned Mr Bounderby.
 After some further exchanges between Stephen and Bounderby, Dickens continues:

“Now, I tell you what!” said Mr Bounderby, putting his hands in his pockets. “There *is* such a law.”

Stephen, subsiding into his quiet manner, and never wandering in his attention, gave a nod.

“But it’s not for you at all. It costs money. It costs a mint of money.”

“How much might that be?” Stephen calmly asked.

“Why, you’d have to go to Doctors’ Commons with a suit, and you’d have to go to a court of Common Law with a suit, and you’d have to go the House of Lords with a suit, and you’d have to get an Act of Parliament to enable you to marry again, and it would cost you (if it was a case of very plain sailing), I suppose from a thousand to fifteen hundred pound”, said Mr Bounderby. “Perhaps twice the money.”

“There’s no other law?”

“Certainly not.”

“Why then, sir”, said Stephen, turning white, and motioning with that right hand of his, as if he gave everything to the four winds, “*tis* a muddle. ’Tis just a muddle a’ together, an’ the sooner I am dead, the better.”

Now if my reading of this scene is correct, it doesn’t contain any very discernible plea in favour of divorce as such. Our sympathy is directed at the pathetic figure who has got himself in such a ‘muddle’, and our easy resentment is aroused at the rich who manage to get out of their entanglements. But we are still within the fairly safe confines of Dickens’s sentimental radicalism, which, as many critics have observed, rarely moved far in advance of what public opinion was prepared to tolerate. His extremely cautious attitude, elsewhere in *Hard Times*, to trade unions and other questions affecting labour is a sufficient illustration.

It is revealing to move from *Hard Times* to a novel published rather more than forty years later, Thomas Hardy’s *Jude the Obscure*. By then, of course, divorce was easier in law and much closer to being socially acceptable. In that book, both Jude and his cousin Sue, with whom he is in love, make unsuitable marriages, and finally manage to extricate themselves by divorce. But by the time they are legally free to marry, Sue is beginning to have

doubts about the rightness of the whole thing, and at the end of the book she 'gets religion', to put it crudely, and insists on returning to her husband, even though she finds him utterly repugnant. Sue, Hardy clearly wants us to see, ruins both her life and Jude's by her fidelity to the ideal of marriage as indissoluble. In adopting such a position Hardy was, if anything, somewhat ahead of public opinion in the eighteen-nineties, which may partly account for the extremely hostile reception the book received. Nowadays, divorce is a universally accepted fact, and we as Catholics have to accept it as a *fact* about our society, no matter how we may deplore it on moral grounds. The following passage from the first page of Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (itself published thirty years ago) is illuminating:

'She had left her husband to live with Walter Bidlake; and Carling, who had Christian scruples, was feebly a sadist and wanted to take his revenge, refused to divorce her.'

In an age like the present, where divorce is looked on as the natural solution to marital difficulties, the novelist is robbed of much of the drama inherent in an unhappy marriage, and we even find him inventing obstacles by arbitrarily giving one of the partners in such a marriage 'Christian scruples', as here.

Quite apart from the purely moral aspects, social conventions in the field of *moeurs* are of the utmost importance to the novelist. If adultery had been as common and as easily condoned in Normandy in the eighteen-fifties as it appears to be in Hollywood today, how could Flaubert ever have given us *Madame Bovary*?

Perhaps I should make clear at this point that changes in *moeurs*, even of quite a radical kind, need not necessarily mean changes in morals. Thus, one of the conventions of our society is a supposed 'greater outspokenness about sex'. Certainly this is true compared with anything the Victorians officially permitted themselves. And as I have suggested, in many novels published today there seems no genuine reason for such outspokenness, except perhaps a desire for notoriety. But this outspokenness may be also employed in a serious and proper fashion. A few weeks ago I was present at some conferences on Marriage, organized by the Newman Society at Oxford, where doctors or priests discussed with undergraduate audiences—sometimes of both sexes—marital questions of a quite intimate kind: the results of this frankness seemed to

me very salutary, though no doubt two or three generations ago the clerical authorities might have considered such proceedings either extremely imprudent or downright immoral, and perhaps a similar attitude would prevail to this day in countries like Italy or Spain.

Though the moral law is itself unchanging, the accepted interpretation of it can vary enormously from one culture to another, as well as from one age to another. In the eighteen-sixties a reviewer of *Tom Brown at Oxford* remonstrated with the author for making his hero carry a girl who had broken her ankle: 'If this be muscular Christianity, the less we have of it the better.'¹³ It was quite common for Victorian daughters to be forbidden to read the third volume of *The Mill on the Floss*, or any of *Jane Eyre*, until marriage or middle-age, whichever came first. This extraordinary and indefensible reticence still exerts an influence, if only because of the reaction it provokes. Our rather self-conscious modern 'sexual frankness' is still in some ways a reaction against the awful shadow of Victorian repression. In fact, the Victorians showed themselves curiously preoccupied with sex even in their attempts totally to exclude it: the other side of the picture is the notorious extent of their pornography. The trouble with the Victorian attitude is that it is basically unbalanced, and does not spring from a properly integrated view of human nature. If we are too much on the watch for sexual offences, we may forget that there are greater sins—those against charity, for example. Dickens, doubtless, had this in mind in his portrayal of Mr Podsnap in *Our Mutual Friend*. Thackeray, who received his share of attacks for moral divagations, complained:

'Since the writer of *Tom Jones* was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN.'¹⁴

And this mention of Fielding reminds us that a healthier and better balanced account of human behaviour *can* be given in a novel without totally losing moral orientation. Tom Jones is a most imperfect hero, but we are aware that his sexual and other lapses are at least partly compensated for by other positive qualities—just as they might be in a real man. H. G. Wells once remarked that '*Tom Jones* is a powerful and effective appeal for a

¹³ Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties* (1954), pp. 56–57.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

charitable, and even indulgent, attitude towards loose-living men'.¹⁵ Possibly it is too indulgent, I don't know. But at least Fielding was able to forgive Tom Jones for his transgressions, just as Dante would surely have liked to forgive Paolo and Francesca for theirs, were they not already damned and in hell.

Having travelled from morals to manners, I have returned, by a somewhat devious route, to my starting point. My conclusion, such as it is, will be severely practical: it is one I have been hinting at throughout this paper. Our awareness of the moral quality of a book will emerge in the course of a responsible critical reading, and will complete the literary judgment. The question certainly can't be decided by making a cursory examination of a random sample—except in the case of works that don't deserve the name of literature anyway. And perhaps I ought to add that no amount of mere unassimilated morality can guarantee the literary merit of a novel.

Having opened this paper with one familiar quotation, I hope I may be pardoned for closing it with some others, almost equally familiar. They are from Newman's *Idea of a University*.

' . . . from the nature of the case, if Literature is to be made a study of human nature, you cannot have a Christian Literature. It is a contradiction in terms to attempt a sinless Literature of sinful man. You may gather together something very great and high, something higher than any Literature ever was; and when you have done so, you will find that it is not Literature at all. You will have simply left the delineation of man, as such, and have substituted for it, as far as you have any thing to substitute, that of man, as he is or might be, under certain special advantages. Give up the study of man, as such, if so it must be; but say you do so.

'Not till the whole human race is made new will its literature be pure and true. Possible of course it is in idea, for nature, inspired by heavenly grace, to exhibit itself on a large scale, in an originality of thought or action, even far beyond what the world's literature has recorded or exemplified; but, if you would in fact have a literature of saints, first of all have a nation of them.'¹⁶

¹⁵ *Henry James and H. G. Wells* (Ed. Edel and Ray, 1958), p. 144.

¹⁶ *The Idea of a University* (New York, 1947), pp. 203-204.