The Romantic Critic

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Since the nineteen-thirties and forties, when the late Sir Herbert Read, author of *Reason and Romanticism,* was an influential figure in literary England, Romanticism as an avowed literary attitude has suffered an eclipse, even if vulgarized forms of Romanticism are more prevalent in society at large than ever before. Less prominent than Read was the equally Romantic critic and moralist, J. Middleton Murry. Among Murry's younger associates was F. A. Lea, the author of several studies of Romantic writers including Shelley, Carlyle and Nietzsche. Now Mr Lea has come forward with a book of literary studies which again raises the Romantic banner. *Voices in the Wilderness,*[1] studies of six "prophetic" writers of the modern age, Blake, Wordsworth, Carlyle, D H Lawrence, Middleton Murry and Arthur Koestler, is the second volume of a dual work the first volume of which, *The Ethics of Reason,* is a philosophical examination of attempts from Socrates onwards to define "the good man". *Voices in the Wilderness,* however, is complete in itself, and constitutes a very revealing exposition of the Romantic viewpoint.

Like most people whose thoughts and feelings are not limited to their own immediate circumstances, Mr Lea is appalled by the joyless collectivism towards which human societies seem inevitably to be progressing. He diagnoses the root of our trouble to lie in the Utilitarian philosophy born, he believes, out of eighteenth-century materialism with its seductive creed of "happiness here", confused pragmatically and illogically with an abstract Christian altruism based on contradictory expectations of "happiness hereafter". One of the consequences of this pervasive Utilitarianism is a widespread present inability to achieve originality, i.e. to penetrate beyond general concepts fixed by language into the truth of particular perceptions: to see things as they miraculously *are.* Among much else, people are losing the faculty of appreciating the unique worth of specific works of art and literature and instead are intent upon merging them into a general stream of tendencies and influences, so that writers are supposed to be important not for their actual achievement but for their effect upon other writers. This is to be expected in a world in which contemplation is at a discount and wisdom overpowered by knowledge. Against Utilitarianism and Posit-

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ivists in all their guises, all those who would reduce life and thought to a sterile academicism and a calculus of individual and collective self-interest, Mr Lea sets the Romantics and, in Germany, the post-Kantian Idealist philosophers of whom Hegel is the star. His heroes, in fact, are Rousseau, Blake, Shelley, Carlyle, D H Lawrence; and Goethe, Kant, Hegel and Nietzsche. This may seem an unlikely concatenation of influences, but it is enlightening to follow the connexions made between them by Mr Lea's own mental processes. All these men having first suffered the contemporary ideological conflict in themselves and effected not without struggle a reconciliation of Head and Heart, intellect and emotion (Mr Lea gives us to understand) faced the situation of the world in their time, and seeing already the threat of a creeping mediocrity and mechanical collectivism, warned their contemporaries and attempted to prepare another and—as Mr Lea terms it—a more "rational" path. Mr Lea believes that they failed in their mission and that our culture is very likely doomed. The chapter on Lawrence ends with an uncharacteristic outburst—for Mr Lea has a generally urbane (though hardly lucid) style with agreeably sardonic overtones:

> . . . His ideal, after all, is not impugned by his own failure to fulfil it or portray it more clearly than he did. He portrayed it clearly enough. Both in *The Man Who Died* and repeatedly in the *Last Poems,* he has given us what fewer than half-a-dozen poets since Homer, and none since Nietzsche, have given, a completely new vision of man—and this without ceasing to insist that it depends on us, and us alone, whether, as he dreamed, the world will be thinly populated with a race of healthy, noble human beings altogether, or, as he feared and we may expect, overrun by millions upon millions of stunted, standardized, well-adjusted, telly-drugged, pop-happy degenerates, amassing theses on D H Lawrence.

That "race of healthy, noble human beings", it seems to me, gives Mr Lea's case away. It takes us straight back to Rousseau (whose *Emile* so disrupted the daily routine of Immanuel Kant), and raises the question whether a Romantic diagnosis of our troubles is valid, and whether it is indeed possible to appeal to or to establish a Romantic tradition in defiance of the prevalently Utilitarian and Positivist by-path along which the world is travelling. Will not any such "tradition" have to stop short at Rousseau and Kant, in other words at the Enlightenment out of which the Romantic movement emerged and against which it was in partial revolt? Mr Lea surmounts this objection by claiming Shakespeare and possibly Chaucer as Romantic ancestors. And certainly all the Romantics looked back past the Enlightenment to their then undervalued master, Shakespeare, the Schlegel translation of whose works was a seminal force in the promotion of the Romantic movement in Germany. The objection to this procedure, all the same, is that Shakespeare, a *pre*-Romantic, is self-evidently the fine flower of an indisputably

Christian culture.

The central weakness of Mr Lea's position is inseparably connected to this. He does not recognize, and would almost certainly contest, that Catholicism, Reformation, Enlightenment, Romanticism and Idealism, Utilitarianism, Marxism and other movements of the last four hundred years are events within the comprehensive consciousness of Christendom (if we take that word to mean the Judaeo-Christian world-conception even in its pre-Roman Catholic and post-Reformation cultural phases); that none of them stands on its own feet and completes a self-contained cycle of life and thought but instead is contributory to a larger movement which of necessity must return to the central Christian position (which is continuous with that of Judaism, and hence with that of archaic humanity), beyond which it is inpossible to go without passing out of the integrally human into the super- or sub-human. His failure to recognize this would accord with his implicit rejection (or philosophical surmounting, *a la* Hegel) of Christian faith. Instead he takes his stand on Reason and (as will become plain) on Nature.

All Mr Lea's heroes, even Nietzsche and D H Lawrence, are in his view "rationalists", a rationalist being one "who follows reason wherever it leads." It is an unqualified devotion to Reason which recalls Herber Read. What led Rousseau, and after him Goethe, Hegel, Wordsworth and the rest into Romanticism was their convvincement by the conclusions of the Enlightenment, coupled with their involuntary revulsion from the baldly mechanistic Newtonian world-view. But their position was a more complex one than Mr Lea will allow. The Enlightenment, in making a clean sweep of superstition, had, in clipping the wings of both Protestant and Catholic Christianity as then practised, abolished the realm of the holy, the mysterious meeting place of finite and infinite, creature and creator, man and God, but also of man and man (= man and woman) as personal, that is, spiritual beings. Post-Newtonian man, if he tried to think out his situation, found himself both imprisoned in subjectivity and enclosed in an orderly but finite Nature, the creation of a remote First Cause. He felt himself to be a dual creature compounded of Reason and Passion (Mr Lea calls them Head and Heart). Subject to natural passions, he was faced with the simple task of subjecting them to an impersonal, quasi-divine, mathematical Reason. Now the Romantics, brought up for the most part in a rustic Christianity, but attempting to follow Reason and the post-Calvinistic and generally Unitarian secularists of the day, soon left naive and conventional Christian faith behind. Such a secularizing, rationalizing path as William Godwin's was by no means unusual among intellectuals; and as Mr Lea writes of the young Wordsworth:"Wordsworth, committed now to following reason wherever it led, could hardly have lit on a better guide than one, viz. Godwin whom it had led so far already—out of Calvinism and a comfortable living, through Deism, into a still precarious atheism." Wordsworth's inner turmoil,

he believes, sprang from his unreserved commitment to Reason, which meant for him a willed suppression of the affections, so that his rational course was "at enmity with all the tenderest springs of his enjoyments". and it was only with the help of Coleridge, who by the time of his meeting with Wordsworth had exchanged his own quasi-materialist Hartleyan associationism for a home-made version of German Idealism that he was able to effect a reunion of Head and Heart and go on to write the great poetry of his early maturity.

Now although Mr Lea does not say this, at least a part of the truth about Romanticism is that it was a leap from the universe conceived as mechanism to the cosmos apprehended as organism. A cosmos which is no longer inorganically dead and determined in every particular by ineluctable mathematico-physical laws, but is experienced emotionally as vibrantly organic life and growth permits the release and authentication of passionate feeling and feeling-thought as in harmony with the creative-evolutionary processes of supernal Nature. In the nineteenth century it was the biological sciences rather than mathematics and physics that captured the interest of students; and, too, where the Enlightenment had tended to reduce women to a subservient role, the Romantics exalted Woman and glorified the erotic impulse—as the lives of Goethe, Byron and Keats in their different ways bear sufficient witness. The Hegelian dialectic itself might be said to have expressed a reproductive logic of organism. At the same time Romanticism, particularly in the form of philosophical Idealism, removed the emphasis from the external world to stress the creative, originative importance of the human subject. It was Romanticism's great defect that it was unable to break out of the organic and subjective into the realm of the spirit, of the personal, and of freedom, to promote the establishment of freely personal (that is, spiritual) relationships between human beings rather than compulsive erotic-emotional ones, and to set human and cosmic life in a traditionally metahistorical perspective instead of surrendering it tamely back to natural process, however "creative". Or rather, it could only do so by returning, over the heads of the men of the Enlightenment, to its Christian origins and antecedents—the course taken by Blake and Coleridge in England, and by neo-Kantian theologians who refused the temptations of Hegelianized Christianity like Fries and Schleiermacher in Germany. Since, however, Mr Lea is at once, one gathers, a naturalist, a rationalist and a Romantic, he is impelled to ignore the line of thought represented, say, by Kierkegaard; and, after Wordsworth, to investigate the volcanic figure of Carlyle.

Materialism to Carlyle, Mr Lea says, must have presented itself in the guise of a biblical temptation: "It is as Temptation in the Wilderness that he presents it himself in *Sartor:* and a wilderness was just what that Newtonian world of lifeless corpuscles looked like—the more desolate the longer he faced it, and the more completely his inward struggle cut him off from life-giving contact

with others." And he quotes the famous passage in which Carlyle likens the Universe (rather as had Fichte before him) to "one huge, dead, immeasurable Steam-engine, rolling on, in its dead indifference to grind me limb from limb. O, the vast, gloomy, solitary Golgotha, and Mill of Death!" Mr Lea calls this phase Carlyle's "dark night of the soul, recognizably akin to Wordsworth's," and points out that just as with Wordsworth there was at work in Carlyle an uncompromising rationalism "at enmity with all the tenderest springs of my enjoyments". Unhappily Carlyle had no Coleridge to guide him, and was forced back on the "one rational course" which remained to him, simple honesty and the pronunciation of his *retro me* in these terms:

> The Everlasting No had said: "Behold, thou art fatherless, outcast, and the Universe is mine (the Devil's);" to which my whole Me now made answer: "*I* am not thine, but Free, and forever hate thee!" It is from this hour that I incline to date my Spiritual New-Birth, or Baphometic Fire-baptism; perhaps I directly thereupon began to be a Man.

With this "retro me, Sathanas!" Mr Lea goes on, Carlyle/Teufelsdröckh exchanged darkness for "the Centre of Indifference", the twilight before the dawn. Daylight came with Carlyle's affirmation of the cosmic demiurge he called "The Everlasting Yea". While doubtless this was a decisive step towards that inner unification which made possible the writing of his first book, it can by no means be admitted that his position was equivalent to, still less an improvement upon, Christian conversion as orthodoxly understood. It stopped far short of that; and indeed Mr Lea proceeds quite happily to speak of Carlyle's inner act as the "self-negation of Christianity":

> Carlyle presents a classical, almost "scientifically pure" case of that conflict between the spirit and the conclusions of eighteenth- century science which first came to a head in Rousseau. The problem he faced was the philosopical problem of the time, the problem which (little as the commentators would lead one to think so) Kant devoted his life-work to solving. The seriousness with which nineteenth-century thinkers took it is virtually the measure of their rationalism, and therefore—"our culture" being a residue of the Utilitarian evasion— their relevance to us.
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> The "self-negation" or "self-surpassing of Christianity", the German philosophers would term this turning of Protestant rationalism against its own formulations. It was what Nietzsche had in mind when he dubbed the Lutheran pastor the parent of German metaphysics. And the priority it holds in Carlyle's experience seems to link him more closely with the Idealists abroad than with the Romantics at home . . .

No more than Carlyle himself, however, can Mr Lea refrain from the use or misuse of Christian terminology in his account of

his subject's inner struggles, for not only does he speak of the *temptation in the wilderness, Golgotha,* the *dark night of the soul* and the *spiritual new-birth,* but at one point he goes so far as to say of the marriage to Jane Welsh which his new-won financial independence made possible: "In Carlyle's case, the saying applies almost literally: Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all the rest shall be added unto you". Of the powerful influence of the Bible on Carlyle's prose style (was not the young Scot intended for the Presbyterian pulpit?) he affirms that the style is the man,". . . For, like Wordsworth and Blake, he is convinced that precisely this 'Spiritual New-birth' is what the New Testament taught—that the entire accomplishment of Voltairean scepticism, therefore, amounts to no more than having shown 'That the Mythus of the Christian Religion looks not in the eighteenth century as it did in the eighth."

But great man as he was, Carlyle was as mistaken as Hegel, or Middleton Murry, or George Eliot (of whom Mr Lea says in a revealing aside that " . . . thanks to Carlyle and German Idealism she had resolved the conflict of faith and reason before ever finding her vocation in fiction") in supposing he had effected an improvement upon orthodox Christian belief, profoundly and imaginatively understood, when he had not yet found his way to it—and in fact had *lost* his way, as the melancholy final phase of his life bears witness; for Mr Lea himself tells us that for the last thirty years of his life Carlyle's mainspring was broken following the disappointment of his political expectations: " . . . as Hopkins shrewdly observed, Carlyle, though earnest, was no longer *in* earnest. He had ceased to expect any response. His conversation itself became a savage, satirical monologue."

And here I cannot but think that we encounter the nisus of Mr Lea's whole endeavour: that he too is vainly attempting to plot his way through the Utilitarian wilderness by means of a self-sufficient Reason unilluminated by and unanchored in Faith. His outlook, like Carlyle's, is not so much anti-Christian as philosophically super-Christian. It resembles that of Middleton Murry who, it will be recalled, in the religious phase of his career wrote two books, *God: An Introduction to the Science of Metabiology,* and a *Life of Jesus,* from the "enlightened" viewpoint of extreme liberal naturalism. (Though drawn to the human personality of Jesus, Murry was unable to acknowledge him as Christ; and though inclined to believe in a Deity who was working out an uncertain purpose in human history, he could not identify this Deity with "the Creator of the illimitable universe", which, finally, was ruled by inscrutable and terrible Necessity.) What are we to say, then, of this Reason followed so persistently wherever it led by Mr Lea's exemplary and prophetic Romantics? At least in the present volume, there is no explicit definition of the status of Reason, and we are left to suppose that it is an autonomous thinking faculty developed in the course of the struggle for natural survival by that highly evolved animal, Man: a

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faculty which is at its best when united with feeling to become an organ of the "total self" comprising Head and Heart in unison. This seems to me to be a most unsatisfactory position, far inferior to the traditional Christian synthesis of Greek rationality with Hebrew faith, which identifies the Logos as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity and so makes faith in Christ identical with faith in God. To attempt in some merely abstract way to follow Reason (the rational faculty) "wherever it leads" without a prior commitment to ultimate being and truth and value—might this not be an adventure which may end in unfortunate consequences? Unenlightened rationalism can lead to utter ruin, as Mr Lea himself concedes in the case of Arthur Koestler's fictional revolutionist, Rubashov—"a man who throughout his career has followed reason wherever it led, regardless of any suffering it might entail for himself or others, and will continue to do so until the end." Is it really reasonable to be so rational? Some further light is thrown on Romantic views of rationality in these observations on D.H.Lawrence, where Head and Heart are now transcribed as Intellect and Instinct:

> Reason, he affirms—actually in the same words as Nietzsche—is "the finest instrument we have": and the finer the better, for we know what purpose a blunt instrument serves. Without it, we would not be men at all, let alone whole men. "We must all develop into mental consciousness", therefore, or else remain overgrown babies. But must we, on that account, develop into a mental consciousness that dislocates the instincts? This he denies. By a wise upbringing, the dislocation might be forestalled—and one of his aims in the *Fantasia* is to lay down the lines of such an upbringing. By using our reason to the full, moreover, we may still undo the effects of its abuse. We may still, in other words, by becoming conscious of the *whole* self, to which reason is instrumental, rectify a dislocation it is too late to forestall—or, failing that, supplant the prevalent *un*wise upbringing. His principal aim, in fact, is to propagate such a consciousness, which is wisdom itself.
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> "We must learn anew", said Nietzsche, "in order that at last, perhaps very late in the day, we may be able to do something more—*feel* anew". As Lawrence puts it:
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> We *must* know, if only in order to learn not to know. The supreme lesson of human consciousness is to learn how *not to know*. That is, how not to *interfere*. That is, how to live dynamically, from the great Source, and not statically, like machines driven by ideas and principles from the head, or automatically, from one fixed desire. At last, knowledge must be put into its true place in the living activity of man. And we must know deeply, in order even to do that.

By Reason here is meant "mental consciousness" as distinct from instinctive awareness; it must be developed, yes, but not allowed to get in the way of the infallible instincts. With Lawrence the great

aim is to get back to the instinctive level of life and "live dynamically, from the great Source", like the Hopi Indians, of whom he believed—"Just as children might be spared the dislocation their elders had suffered, so, thanks to their 'vital sanity', might these. Assimilating as much, and only as much, of our knowledge as corresponded to their actual desire or need, they might, if the missionaries were forestalled, bypass the Christian epoch, and so furnish the world with that 'new revelation' for want of which it was perishing." Middleton Murry's following of reason wherever it led entailed a similar mental and emotional confusion. "In nothing was he more consistent than his bewildering propensity for adopting or adapting whatever idiom—Keatsian, Christian, Hindu or Dialectical Materialist—lent itself best to communication with the audience of the moment. 'The only truth I know which does possess a real finality', he affirmed, 'is that which, in one idiom or another, impresses upon men the necessity of a continual self-annihilation: that is to say, a continual surrender of the finality of one's own truth'" . . .

> What he was as a literary critic, he remained as a religious and social—himself a "thoroughfare for all thoughts". There was no good reason, after all, for confining the thoroughfare to poets and novelists. Just as, instinctively and reluctantly at first, he had identified himself with these, making one viewpoint after another his own, so he would identify himself with mystics, historians, sociologists and the opposing movements they represented; refusing to purchase unity at the price of diversity, content to linger in 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts', until a 'hierarchy of comprehension' emerged. Not until *all* his responses, intellectual, emotional and instinctive were unified, did he ever feel free to speak or act *in propria persona*.
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> . . . Since it was only when all his responses were unified that he felt free to act, he would then feel free to do nothing else. Hesitation, deliberation, choice were things of the past. "It takes me always a very long while to get my mind and heart in unison—and anyway *I* can't do anything about it; I simply have to wait: but when the moment comes and my mind and heart are in unison, then something has to be done"—and done it was, with a totality and intensity of commitment only matched by the detachment which empowered him, time after time, when the result refuted the hypothesis, to surrender his "truth"; in other words, allow his whole self to be "annihilated" and constituted afresh.

If this is Reason in action, then Reason is a guide that can lead a man anywhere, and in fact Murry's career was largely one of self-contradiction, the abandonment of positions taken up, the advancing along paths that petered out, the writing of books that are now, with a few brilliant exceptions, unreadable period pieces.

Consistent with this, as it would seem, ungrounded view of Reason is Mr Lea's disposition to see the human crisis, as it affected

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his subjects, in limiting terms of the discordance and reconciliation of Head and Heart, intellect and feeling, reason and instinct. Then, taking the part for the whole, he tends to assume that their happy unification is equivalent to Regeneration, as understood in the Christian tradition. But regeneration is by definition a condition affecting not merely heart and head, instincts and intellect, but the entire man, body, soul and spirit. Doubtless Mr Lea, like Murry, believes that he *is* concerned with the entire man; but this is not so. He omits to consider the spiritual part of man through which he stands in relation to God—or in disrelation from God, anciently defined as disobedience, or sin. *Sin* is conspicuously, however, not a word in the Romantic any more than it is in the Utilitarian vocabulary; it is hardly in the modern vocabulary at all, and is a word which, significantly, is abhorred equally by the romantic poet and the utilitarian legislator.

The Christian insight is not so much concerned with the discordance of head and heart, painful as this must be, as with that deeper disease which, affecting the will and the self as a whole, requires a remedy from beyond the closed system of our present world-order. This clashes head-on with the Romantic view, for which there is no "beyond" which is not finally subsumed in Nature itself (or herself); for Romanticism is pantheistic. When it takes place, Christian regeneration is no mere individual psychological upheaval, but an event in reality itself through which the order of the world is changed. For this reason, the perspectives of faith open out from Nature and History into the supernatural and the metahistorical.

The Romantic perspectives are interestingly different. Mr Lea refers in his book to the Romantic Myth—"the theory of man's development by three stages, from unconscious, collective union with nature, through alienation, towards conscious, collective reunion."

> In the last of his unfinished works, *Introduction to Pictures*, Lawrence postulates a time in the past when man was to all intents and purposes an animal—a human animal, naturally, or one could not refer to him as "man", but still as spontaneous as the cat or the bird. "Then the self had not really become aware of itself, it had not separated itself off, the spirit was not yet born". He has in mind the epoch whose last, flickering representatives were the Etruscans.
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> We have heard of this epoch before. It is that of Rousseau's primordial Amerindians, Hegel's orientals, Nietzsche's blond beasts. Nobody familiar with nineteenth-century philosophy or literature can fail to recognize the opening phase of what I call the Romantic Myth—the theory of man's development by three stages, from unconscious, collective union with nature, through alienation, towards conscious. collective reunion. The affinity becomes only the more evident when, like Blake, Lawrence himself refers us to "the old myths" harking back to the time when "we lose our 'innocence', we partake of the tree of

knowledge, and we become 'aware of our nakedness'." One could guess, without knowing, how the essay would have concluded—with the vision of a race of complete men, as knowledgeable as their dislocated ancestors, yet "with the grace and poise and quickness of an animal in *all* their human doings".

Transparently, however, the Romantic Myth is but a stunted form of the Christian Myth; Christianity without Christ—without Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection, and without, therefore, the Apocalyptic third stage, the eternal marriage of Heaven, Hell and Earth which succeeds the Last Judgment. Instead, there is a somewhat lame or bathetic relapse into Nature—a Nature, as it were, utopianised. To put it differently, instead of William Blake's tripartite and visionary series, *Innocence–Experience–Imagination,* in which Imagination is indicative of "the real and eternal World, of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow, and in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more", there is a substitution of the mutilated series, *Innocence–Experience–Innocent Experience.*[2] Lawrence's unbearably melancholy treatment of the Resurrection story in *The Man Who Died* (or *The Escaped Cock* as it was titled in the original version), which Mr Lea takes to be "not only a poignant and perfect work of art, but the epitome of all Lawrence's thought, emphasised this. For, again to quote, it is the story of " . . . a Jesus who has returned from the grave to abjure his gospel; a Jesus resurrected into that unity of spirit and sense which he consummates in contact with a woman as complete as himself . . . The Jesus who has 'died' is the epoch that bears his name; resurrected in the flesh, he personifies the new which may, or may not, succeed it." This "new" means no doubt the new world of healthy, sane, sexually-fulfilled Etruscan or Mexican–indian type Europeans and Americans, living without machines in village communes and free of the last evil taint of guilt-bearing Christianized consciousness.

While Romanticism cannot be dismissed out of hand as a mere aberration, it must, I think, be conceded that inasmuch as they had ceased to situate themselves in the central religious and metaphysical tradition of humanity (of which, it is true, both Protestantism and medieval Catholicism, as well as the Deism of the Enlightenment, may be regarded in part at least as deviant forms) the Romantics were on a path which of itself could lead only to self-stultification. The biographies of individual Romantics, not only Carlyle and Nietzsche, but Lawrence and Murry and many more, seem to bear this out. Early Romanticism was idealist with Goethe and Hegel, but as the century wore on and social thought became permea-

[2]Misunderstanding Blake as a typical Romantic, rather than as one who had transcended Romanticism and formulated his own version of apocalyptic Christianity, Mr. Lea speaks on one page of Blake's 'seeing man as part of nature', which Blake emphatically never did. For him, however incomprehensibly to the positivist and naturalist, nature was part of man, and (regenerate) man part of Jesus, i.e., the cosmic Christ.

ted with Darwinism, it declined into a sub-human Vitalism. There was no God, and thus no sense of alienation from God;[3] there was instead an emergent cosmic force or "great Source" immanent in natural process itself which found its way towards concourse with the most intensely vital men, with which the dessicated individual was urged to connect himself for revitalisation, or serpentine "rebirth". But in denying God and losing touch with the holy, and extinguishing thereby the lingering sense of sin, of existence in a "fallen" world, the later Romantics also debarred themselves from the realm of the personal. They might not all be as isolated and as introverted as Nietzsche; but such relationships as they could sustain were confined to the functional and emotional levels (the levels of *physis* and *psyche*) as Lawrence's novels make brilliantly clear. More, they were impelled to glorify natural impulse *per se*. In the name—it might be, as with Middleton Murry—of Keat's "the holiness of the heart's affections", pure eroticism or impure libidinousness alike were invested with a transcendental aura. Such men were driven to seek ecstatic reunion with cosmic Nature through undifferentiated female sexuality. The guilt arising from the loss of personal integrity was both vigorously denied and, by displacement, blamed upon the inhibiting legacy of Puritanism. Christianity it was which, by its supposedly repressive attitude to sex, had poisoned the sources of men's natural pleasures and delights. Lawrence was unusually consistent in openly demanding the extirpation of Christianity—although, like Nietzsche, who preceded him in railing against it (admittedly they had cause in the types of bourgeois Christianity they were acquainted with) he could not do without its symbolism. It was inevitable that his desperate and anguished attempts to proclaim the sanctity of unredeemed sexuality should have led him, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, to actual profanity, and that this novel, in course of time, should have been instrumental in opening the sluices for the latterday desecrating and cheapening of sex which is the necessary accompaniment to the machine-culture's vulgarization of life on all levels.

Certainly Mr Lea is commendably sharp with the worst excesses of Lawrence; but though he rightly castigates as "fatuous" the credo of Mellors in that novel: ". . . I believe if men could fuck with warm hearts, and the women take it warm-heartedly, everything would come all right", he appears to concur in Lawrence's more temperate and sympathetic but hardly less purblind expression, at the time of *The Rainbow*: "I do so break my heart over England. And I am so sure that only through a re-adjustment between men and women, and a making free and healthy of this sex, will she get out of her present atrophy." And Middleton Murry's even more

[3]But as to this, a pointed remark of Mr. E.W.F. Tomlin from his *Living and Knowing* (1955), comes to mind: 'It is difficult to believe that the preoccupation of D.H. Lawrence in his last Death Poems with 'alienation from God' or 'falling out of the hand of God' does not represent a genuine dilemma of the naturalist.'

blinkered Romanticism was following much the same old ruts. As Mr Lea points out:

> Like Lawrence, Murry saw the immediate cause [of the destructiveness inherent in modern life] in the organization of society for mass-production; its ultimate cause in that bourgeois revolution which, at one and the same time, had destroyed the village community and declared full-scale war on "the flesh". He believed accordingly . . . that the energy needed for reversing the trend would always prove insufficient, unless it were continually replenished in the most intimate of personal relations. "You and I know that Lawrence was right", he wrote to J.H. Watson . . . "The only real basis for life is 'individual sex-fulfilment' and *all* that he meant by it". And again, to the young composer, William Wordsworth: "I have thought, and probably deep down always think, that the re-assertion or rediscovery of 'religious' marriage is the *primal* necessity of this bewildering age". His own matrimonial experiments, like Lawrence's, were an integral part of his "life-and-thought-adventure".

Murry's tragi-comic matrimonial and extra-marital experiments, however, are hardly edifying or enlightening unless seen in relation to his intellectual-political alarums and excursions, and perhaps not even then, very much. Should we be surprised that so many Romantics ended, if they lived long enough, in idealizing the humdrum life of the peasant proprietor, with his beasts, his garden and his buxom mate—or priestess of Isis? Three years before he died at sixty-eight, Murry was claiming: "I am abnormally normal, so to speak: at least that seems a fair description of a man whose literary criticism ends up by putting him in charge of a co-operative farm. (I mean this quite literally: my farming is the direct consequence of my effort in literary criticism.) Or, to put it differently, my mysticism is a mysticism of descent." So it was. We are reminded of the conclusion of the second part of Goethe's *Faust*, where the old man, exhausted by his lust for life, finds a possible escape from the clutches of Mephistopheles through useful work—draining land so that corn may be grown for human sustenance. It is almost Utilitarianism. "All Murry had to show for his prodigious exertions that wore him out prematurely," writes Mr Lea admiringly, "were a Grade A farm and a village hall." Drained lands, farms and village halls are good and useful things; we cannot do without them. But it needs no Moses come down from Sinai to tell us this.[4]

[4]Cast into prophetical form, Murry's message, for what it is worth (circa 1934, and quoted by Mr. Lea) emerges like this. - 'For a man's deep desire is to be used for what Keats called 'a great human purpose'. That sounds high-falutin; unless we see, quite simply, that the only great human purpose is all-inclusive. It is creation: making something, letting the manifold creativity of Life create itself anew. From a goodly turnip to a comely child, from a new indistrial process to a new vision of the world - all is creation. And man's only satisfying reason for maintaining himself alive is to maintain himself as an instrument of creation. Not that man has to have a satisfying reason for maintaining

Mr Lea's concluding chapter on that able but over-rated writer, Arthur Koestler is puzzling until one grasps that Koestler is praised for his later attempts to establish connexions between the scientific outlook, the phenomena of organism and the activities of mind, including "creative" activities. Koestler's magnum opus, *The Act of Creation,* considering its declared theme, is remarkable in that it contains not a single reference to spirit, freedom, the eternal, the infinite, suffering, evil, death, revelation or the new. "Creation", for Koestler, is organismic. He offers only an updated version of pantheism, in which the holy is unknown, personality unrealised, faith, decision and commitment rendered otiose. "Not since Nietzsche," declares Mr Lea, "has a major artist thrown so much light on his own propagative act, or come so far towards making an experience still invested with an aura of supernaturalism appear as eminently natural as child-birth." This simile, too, is revealing, in that it shows that Mr Lea has never asked himself—or the father or mother of an actual child—how "natural" child-birth can be said to be.

As between Romanticism and Utilitarianism, who that cared for literature and art would not choose Romanticism? Yet is the implied antithesis a true one—are they such poles apart? Socialism, from the days of Marx and William Morris, has quite obviously been compounded of both Romantic and Utilitarian elements, while such influential figures as Shaw, Wells, Russell could all fitly be described as Romantic Utilitarians.

Romanticism speaks beguiling words, and has lofty pretensions. Some of its representatives have been men of genius, it they have not often been men of wisdom or common sense: some have declined into misanthropy, or into madness, or suicide. But a radical unsoundness in its premises makes it vulnerable to error, and its error can be seized upon and exploited by the worst in human nature. What ever we may think of Hegel's Absolute Monism, Hegel still cannot be held directly responsible for Marx, nor Marx for Stalin; nor was Hitler the direct descendant of Carlyle and Nietzsche; but it would be obstinate blindness to insist that there were *no* connexions between them. (It is true, however, that the Christ-

himself alive. He does that, or tries to, by instinct; but the purpose of the instinct is that he may be an instrument of creation. And this, however unconscious of it he may be, is his deepest desire: so deep, so primal, that if it is thwarted he goes mad. Mad, not in the sense of being conventionally insane: for what passes for sanity in a world so sick as this is itself a madness: but mad, in the deeper sense, that his instinct for creation is turned in upon itself and becomes a frenzy of life-destruction.' The operative words here are *desire, life, instinct* and *unconscious*. The order of Creation is stressed to the neglect of the order of Redemption - and, even so, creation is confused with procreation. As with Lawrence and his "great Source", Romantic man appears to be driven by a deep, primal, unconscious desire to participate in the organically creative processes of deified Nature. The final perception indicates, to me, something unhealthy in this exaggerated preoccupation with "health" and "sanity".

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ian tradition itself is liable to perversion, and there are some who would point to a line of descent from the doctrines of St Paul to the ideology of Calvin and the fanaticism of Robespierre.) The primitivism of a Lawrence could conceivably lead to a widespread cultural degeneration, and this in spite of Lawrence's own great gifts as an artist; while Murry, the renegade pacifist, invaded, it may be, by his own "frenzy of life-destruction", came round in the late nineteen-forties to denouncing pacifists as traitors to the democratic cause and advocating the declaration of nuclear war should the Soviet Union (which he had then come subjectively to identify with inhuman cosmic Necessity) not obey the behest of the Western powers to enter fully into the democratic-humanist comity of nations. Perhaps as between the two, Romanticism and Utilitarianism, and if there were no other choice – as, happily, there is – one might be forgiven for opting for Utilitarianism after all.

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