

## SPARKENBROKE AND HARDY

SINCE novels are often books of science, as scientific anyhow as the whimsical symbolical sketch that journalism has made of modern physics, they fall under two heads according as the tale adorns the moral or the moral adorns the tale; which is roughly what historians of philosophy mean when they class their creatures by the deductive and inductive methods; the latter coming in with Bacon, Francis to some, Roger to others. Great novels, however, like great systems of thought, are not so easily settled, and in *Sparkenbroke*<sup>1</sup> there is such unity of philosophy and poetry and prose, such fusion of insight and love and everyday sense, that to criticize it as a didactic piece is like the recent attempt to turn Beaudelaire into commercial verse.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Morgan's aspiration may be Platonic, yet his art is Aristotelian; ideas are embodied, the universal made concrete, the mind continued into sense.<sup>3</sup> *Sparkenbroke* may say that Emily Brontë desired more than Marvell could give her: "*My outward sense is gone—Gone. Even the green thought in the green shade—gone. No sight in the open eyes; no challenge of the brain; an 'unutter'd harmony,' Earth lost, the whole shell of being utterly dissolved*": he may think his senses a leash withholding him from a higher world of experience,<sup>4</sup> yet often are they charged with spirit without losing their own colouring. *Propter melius animae est ut corpori uniatur.*<sup>5</sup>

Two sentiments in the hero's epitaphs run through his life; first, his positive view of death as a re-entry into a continuous reality from which birth and sensuous existence are a divagation, and second, that the text, *blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God*, may have justice and truth in

<sup>1</sup> By Charles Morgan. (Macmillan, London; pp. 553; 8/6.)

<sup>2</sup> *Flowers of Evil*. Translated by George Dillon and Edna St. Vincent Millay. (Hamish Hamilton; 10/6.)

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *X de Verit.*, 5. References, unless otherwise stated, are to St. Thomas.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Ia, lxxxiv, 8.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ia, lxxxix, 1.

its application to an artist, however irregular his carnal life.

One follows from the other, for if spirit and matter are set in different worlds, if Sparkenbroke is among the *platonici materiam a privatione non distinguentes*,<sup>6</sup> if matter is unreal, *in ordine non entis*, then the outer life is irrelevant to the inner life of man. The Manichee movement in the Midi is evidence of this; not until the thirteenth century was it faced with the religious metaphysic that matter is real and con-created, and may be infused in substantial communion with mind. Centuries later, with the condemnation of Molinos went unofficial suspicion of the mysticism of St. John of the Cross.

*Ens est analogum*, another way of saying that creation is all of a piece: all the modulations and variations are real: the individuality of things in matter is not negative purely, *distinctio rerum est ex intentione primi agentis*<sup>7</sup>; sense appearances are derivations from the spiritual heart of reality, though we may treat them as curtains; even *in cognitionem aeternitatis oportet nos venire per tempus*.<sup>8</sup>

But to Sparkenbroke there are two worlds, he must lose one to find the other, and this by his lasting theory, not interim ethics. "Did she not know that he himself turned all things to art, that everything he heard and saw and touched was turned to glass for him by his passion to discover, beyond it, a reality more intense than its own? From this obsession he had for a few hours escaped. Swimming, riding, talking, laughing, he had been able to take life at its face value."

The discontinuity may not be Mr. Morgan's, for Sparkenbroke is contrasted with Hardy, who thought that "men who shot their wrist-watches in the face of providence, women, like restless monkeys, who were for ever snatching at the tail of their engagements, had lost touch with the reason of existence. What good was there in life if you hadn't time to smell the flowers as you passed, or, when a pony came whinnying across a meadow, to allow it to nuzzle in your

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<sup>6</sup> *Div. Nom.*, cap. I, lect 1.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ia, xlvii.

<sup>8</sup> Ia, x, 1.

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hand?" And with Helen, who gave you marks as long as you got the meaning clear and pronounced the final consonants.

Both of them shape a more complete reality than Sparkenbroke would reach for all his intensity; both of them have the steady talent of virtue, integral characters violating nothing; while he is divided, one part desperately urgent to find release, the other breaking the ordinary codes and regularities of life.

Hardy is not content to play round-games in his own gutter, but his great acts of transcendence are not escapes; it is in his power to accept facts, in delicate discovery not dull acquiescence; to understand his friend knowing that Plain Sensualist and Plain Cad don't exist, they are ciphers of the moralists, angry noises, no more; to reach a passionate tranquillity in his beloved, while Sparkenbroke must search her and pass beyond to death.

Why is it that the Hardys are doctors and the Sparkenbrokes write verse, that the loveliest praise of sense comes from those who would escape it, that this thing of patches must posture against a piece of noble prose, that Aquinas is cold where Augustine glows, that few Aristoteleans but many Platonists can sing?

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