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WITH AN AFTERWORD BY FREDRIC JAMESON

V **AESTHETICS
AND
POLITICS**

RADICAL'S
THINKERS

Ever since Baumgarten and Winckelmann, Germany has been the classical land of aesthetic thought in Europe. In the 20th century, Marxism itself has repeated the rule. No other country has produced a tradition of major aesthetic debate to compare with that which unfolded in German culture from the thirties to the fifties. The key texts of these great Marxist controversies over literature and art are now, for the first time anywhere outside Germany, assembled in a coherent order. They do not form a conventional collection of separate documents but a continuous debate between their *dramatis personae*. In exile before the war, Bloch and Lukács polemicized against each other over the nature of expressionism. Brecht attacked Lukács for literary formalism. Benjamin disputed over classical and modern works of art with Brecht. Adorno criticized Benjamin's hermeneutics, and challenged Brecht's poetics and Lukács's politics. The multilateral exchanges which resulted have a variety and eloquence without rival. Fredric Jameson, Professor of French at Yale University and author of *Marxism and Form* and *The Prison House of Language*, sums up their paradoxical lessons for art and criticism today, in an essay of theoretical conclusion. *Aesthetics and Politics* will provide a pole of reference and a source of illumination to students of literature throughout the English-speaking world.



Ernst Bloch
Georg Lukács
Bertolt Brecht
Walter Benjamin
Theodor Adorno

Verso

Aesthetics and Politics

Afterword by Fredric Jameson

Translation Editor: Ronald Taylor

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Georg Lukács

Realism in the Balance

In its day the revolutionary bourgeoisie conducted a violent struggle in the interests of its own class; it made use of every means at its disposal, including those of imaginative literature. What was it that made the vestiges of chivalry the object of universal ridicule? Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. *Don Quixote* was the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of the bourgeoisie in its war against feudalism and aristocracy. The revolutionary proletariat could do with at least one little Cervantes (*laughter*) to arm it with a similar weapon. (Laughter and applause.)

Georgi Dimitrov, Speech given during an anti-Fascist evening in the Writers' Club in Moscow.

Anyone intervening at this late stage in the debate on Expressionism in *Das Wort* finds himself faced with certain difficulties. Many voices have been raised in passionate defence of Expressionism. But as soon as we reach the point when it becomes imperative to specify *whom* we are to regard as the exemplary Expressionist writer, or even to include in the category of Expressionism, we find that opinions diverge so sharply that no single name can count on general agreement. One sometimes has the feeling, particularly when reading the most impassioned apologies, that perhaps there was no such thing as an Expressionist writer.

Since our present dispute is concerned not with the evaluation of individual writers but with general literary principles, it is not of paramount importance for us to resolve this problem. Literary history undoubtedly recognizes a trend known as Expressionism, a trend with its poets and its critics. In the discussion which follows I shall confine myself to questions of principle.

1:

First, a preliminary question about the nature of the central issue: is it really a conflict between modern and classical (or even neo-classical) literature, as has been implied by a number of writers who have concentrated their attack on my critical activities? I submit that this way of posing the question is fundamentally wrong. Its implicit assumption is that modern art is identical with the development of specific literary trends leading from Naturalism and Impressionism via Expressionism to Surrealism. In the article by Ernst Bloch and Hanns Eisler in the *Neue Weltbühne*, to which Peter Fischer refers,¹ this theory is formulated in a particularly explicit and apodictic way. When these writers talk of modern art, its representative figures are taken *exclusively* from the ranks of the movements just referred to.

Let us not pass judgement at this stage. Let us rather enquire: can this theory provide an adequate foundation for the history of literature in our age?

At the very least, it must be pointed out that a quite different view is tenable. The development of literature, particularly in capitalist society, and particularly at capitalism's moment of crisis, is extraordinarily complex. Nevertheless, to offer a crude over-simplification, we may still distinguish three main currents in the literature of our age; these currents are not of course entirely distinct but often overlap in the development of individual writers:

1) Openly anti-realist or pseudo-realist literature which is concerned to provide an apologia for, and a defence of, the existing system. Of this group we shall say nothing here.

2) So-called avant-garde literature (we shall come to authentic modern literature in due course) from Naturalism to Surrealism. What is its general thrust? We may briefly anticipate our findings here by saying that its main trend is its growing distance from, and progressive dissolution of, realism.

3) The literature of the major realists of the day. For the most part these writers do not belong to any literary set; they are swimming against the mainstream of literary development, in fact, against the two currents noted above. As a general pointer to the complexion of this contemporary form of realism, we need only mention the names of Gorky, Thomas and Heinrich Mann and Romain Rolland.

In the articles which leap so passionately to the defence of the rights

¹ E. Bloch and H. Eisler: 'Die Kunst zu erben', in *Die Neue Weltbühne*, 1938.

of modern art against the presumptuous claims of the so-called neo classicists, these leading figures of contemporary literature are not even mentioned. They simply do not exist in the eyes of modernist literature and its chroniclers. In Ernest Bloch's interesting work *Erbschaft diese Zeit*, a book rich both in information and in ideas, the name of Thomas Mann occurs only once, unless my memory deceives me; the author refers to Mann's (and Wassermann's) 'bourgeois refinement' [*soignierte Bürgerlichkeit*] and with that he dismisses the matter.

Views such as these turn the entire discussion on its head. It is high time to put it back on its feet and take up cudgels on behalf of the best modern literature, against its ignorant detractors. So the terms of the debate are not classics versus modernists; discussion must focus instead on the question: which are the progressive trends in the literature of today? It is the fate of realism that hangs in the balance.

2.

One of Ernst Bloch's criticisms of my old essay on Expressionism is that I devoted too much attention to the theoreticians of the movement. Perhaps he will forgive me if I repeat this 'mistake' here and this time make his critical remarks on modern literature the focal point of my analysis. For I do not accept the view that the theoretical descriptions of artistic movements are unimportant – even when they make statements that are theoretically false. It is at such moments that they let the cat out of the bag and reveal the otherwise carefully concealed 'secrets' of the movement. Since, as a theoretician, Bloch is of quite a different stature than Picard and Pinthus were in their day, it is not unreasonable for me to examine his theories in somewhat greater depth.

Bloch directs his attack at my view of 'totality'. (We may leave out of account the extent to which he interprets my position correctly. What is at issue is not whether I am right or whether he has understood me correctly, but the actual problem under discussion.) The principle to be refuted, he believes, is 'the undiluted objective realism which characterized Classicism'. According to Bloch my thought is premised throughout 'on the idea of a closed and integrated reality . . . Whether such a totality in fact constitutes reality is open to question. If it is, the Expressionist experiments with disruptive and interpolative technique are but an empty *jeu d'esprit*, as are the more recent experiments with montage and other devices making for discontinuity.'

Bloch regards my insistence on a unified reality as a mere hangover from the systems of classical idealism, and he goes on to formulate his

own position as follows: 'What if authentic reality is also discontinuity? Since Lukács operates with a closed, objectivistic conception of reality, when he comes to examine Expressionism, he resolutely sets his face against any attempt on the part of artists to shatter any image of the world, even that of capitalism. Any art which strives to exploit the real fissures in surface inter-relations and to discover the new in their crevices, appears in his eyes merely as a wilful act of destruction. He thereby equates experiments in demolition with a condition of decadence.'

Here we have a coherent theoretical justification of the development of modern art, one which goes right to the heart of the ideological issues at stake. Bloch is absolutely right: a fundamental theoretical discussion of these questions 'would raise all the problems of the dialectical-materialist theory of reflection [*Abbildlehre*]'. Needless to say, we cannot embark on such a discussion here, although I personally would greatly welcome the opportunity to do so. In the present debate we are concerned with a much simpler question, namely, does the 'closed integration', the 'totality' of the capitalist system, of bourgeois society, with its unity of economics and ideology, really form an objective whole, independent of consciousness?

Among Marxists – and in his latest book Bloch has stoutly proclaimed his commitment to Marxism – there should be no dispute on this point. Marx says: 'The relations of production of every society form a whole.' We must underscore the word 'every' here, since Bloch's position essentially denies that this 'totality' applies to the capitalism of our age. So although the difference between our views seems to be immediate, formal and non-philosophical, one which revolves instead round a disagreement about the socio-economic interpretation of capitalism, nevertheless, since philosophy is a mental reflection of reality, important philosophical disagreements must be implicit in it.

It goes without saying that our quotation from Marx has to be understood historically – in other words, economic reality as a totality is itself subject to historical change. But these changes consist largely in the way in which all the various aspects of the economy are expanded and intensified, so that the 'totality' becomes ever more closely-knit and substantial. After all, according to Marx, the decisive progressive role of the bourgeoisie in history is to develop the world market, thanks to which the economy of the whole world becomes an objectively unified totality. Primitive economies create the superficial appearance of great unity; primitive-communist villages or towns in the early Middle Ages are obvious examples. But in such a 'unity' the economic unit is linked

to its environment, and to human society as a whole, only by a very few threads. Under capitalism, on the other hand, the different strands of the economy achieve a quite unprecedented autonomy, as we can see from the examples of trade and money – an autonomy so extensive that financial crises can arise directly from the circulation of money. As a result of the objective structure of this economic system, the surface of capitalism appears to ‘disintegrate’ into a series of elements all driven towards independence. Obviously this must be reflected in the consciousness of the men who live in this society, and hence too in the consciousness of poets and thinkers.

Consequently the movement of its individual components toward autonomy is an objective fact of the capitalist economic system. Nevertheless this autonomy constitutes only one part of the overall process. The underlying unity, the totality, all of whose parts are objectively interrelated, manifests itself most strikingly in the fact of crisis. Marx gives the following analysis of the process in which the constituent elements necessarily achieve independence: ‘Since they do in fact belong together, the process by means of which the complementary part become independent must inevitably appear violent and destructive. The phenomenon in which their unity, the unity of discrete objects makes itself felt, is the phenomenon of crisis. The independence assumed by processes which belong together and complement each other is violently destroyed. The crisis thus makes manifest the unity of processes which had become individually independent.’²

These, then, are the fundamental objective components of the ‘totality of capitalist society. Every Marxist knows that the basic economic categories of capitalism are always reflected in the minds of men, directly but always back to front. Applied to our present argument this means that in periods when capitalism functions in a so-called normal manner and its various processes appear autonomous, people living within capitalist society think and experience it as unitary, whereas in periods of crisis, when the autonomous elements are drawn together into unity they experience it as disintegration. With the general crisis of the capitalist system, the experience of disintegration becomes firmly entrenched over long periods of time in broad sectors of the population which normally experience the various manifestations of capitalism in a very immediate way.

² See *Capital*, Vol I, p. 209, London 1976 (Penguin/NLR edition).

3.

What has all this to do with literature?

Nothing at all for any theory – like those of Expressionism or Surrealism – which denies that literature has any reference to objective reality. It means a great deal, however, for a Marxist theory of literature. If literature is a particular form by means of which objective reality is reflected, then it becomes of crucial importance for it to grasp that reality as it truly is, and not merely to confine itself to reproducing whatever manifests itself immediately and on the surface. If a writer strives to represent reality as it truly is, i.e. if he is an authentic realist, then the question of totality plays a decisive role, no matter how the writer actually conceives the problem intellectually. Lenin repeatedly insisted on the practical importance of the category of totality: ‘In order to know an object thoroughly, it is essential to discover and comprehend all of its aspects, its relationships and its “mediations”. We shall never achieve this fully, but *insistence on all-round knowledge* will protect us from errors and inflexibility.’³ (G.L.’s italics)

The literary practice of every true realist demonstrates the importance of the overall objective social context and the ‘insistence on all-round knowledge’ required to do it justice. The profundity of the great realist, the extent and the endurance of his success, depends in great measure on how clearly he perceives – as a creative writer – the true significance of whatever phenomenon he depicts. This will not prevent him from recognizing, as Bloch imagines, that the surface of social reality may exhibit ‘subversive tendencies’, which are correspondingly reflected in the minds of men. The motto to my old essay on Expressionism underscores the fact that I was anything but unaware of this factor. That motto, a quotation from Lenin, begins with these words: ‘The inessential, the apparent, the surface phenomenon, vanishes more frequently, is less “solid”, less “firm” than the “essence”.’⁴

However, what is at issue here above all is not the mere recognition that such a factor actually exists in the context of the totality. It is even more important to see it as a factor in this totality, and not magnify it into the sole emotional and intellectual reality. So the crux of the matter is to understand the correct dialectical unity of appearance and essence. What matters is that the slice of life shaped and depicted by the artist

³ Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 32, p. 94.

⁴ Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 38, p. 130.

and re-experienced by the reader should reveal the relations between appearance and essence without the need for any external commentary. We emphasize the importance of shaping [*gestalten*] this relation because, unlike Bloch, we do not regard the practice of left-wing Surrealists as an acceptable solution to the problem. We reject their method of 'inserting' [*Einmontierung*] theses into scraps of reality with which they have no organic connection.

By way of illustration, just compare the 'bourgeois refinement' of Thomas Mann with the Surrealism of Joyce. In the minds of the heroes of both writers we find a vivid evocation of the disintegration, the discontinuities, the ruptures and the 'crevices' which Bloch very rightly thinks typical of the state of mind of many people living in the age of imperialism. Bloch's mistake lies merely in the fact that he identifies this state of mind directly and unreservedly with reality itself. He equates the highly distorted image created in this state of mind with the thing itself, instead of objectively unravelling the essence, the origins and the mediations of the distortion by comparing it with reality.

In this way Bloch does as a theorist exactly what the Expressionists and Surrealists do as artists. Let us take a look at Joyce's narrative method. Lest my hostile assessment put the matter in a false light, I shall quote Bloch's own analysis: 'Here, in and even beneath the flowing stream we find a mouth without Ego, drinking, babbling, pouring it out. The language mimes every aspect of this collapse, it is not a fully developed, finished product, let alone normative, but open-ended and confused. The sort of speech with puns and slips of the tongue that you normally find at moments of fatigue, in pauses in the conversation, and in dreamy or slovenly people – it is all here, only completely out of control. The words have become unemployed, they have been expelled from their context of meaning. The language moves along, sometimes a worm cut in pieces, sometimes foreshortened like an optical illusion, while at yet other times, it hangs down into the action like a piece of rigging.'

That is his account. Here is his final evaluation: 'An empty shell and the most fantastic sellout; a random collection of notes on crumpled scraps of paper, gobbledygook, a tangle of slippery eels, fragments of nonsense, and at the same time the attempt to found a scholastic system on chaos; . . . confidence tricks in all shapes and sizes, the jokes of a man who has lost his roots; blind alleys but paths everywhere – no aims but destinations everywhere. Montage can now work wonders; in the old

days it was only thoughts that could dwell side by side,⁵ but now things can do the same, at least in these floodplains, these fantastic jungles of the void.⁷

We found it necessary to quote this lengthy passage because of the highly important, even crucial role given to Surrealist montage in Bloch's historical assessment of Expressionism. Earlier on in the book we find him, like all apologists of Expressionism, making a distinction between its genuine and its merely superficial exponents. According to him, the genuine aspirations of Expressionism live on. He writes: 'But even today there is no artist of great talent around without an Expressionist past, or at least without its highly variegated, highly storm-laden after-effects. The ultimate form of "Expressionism" was created by the so-called Surrealists; just a small group, but once again that is where the avant-garde is, and furthermore, Surrealism is nothing if not montage . . . it is an account of the chaos of reality as actually experienced, with all its caesuras and dismantled structures of the past.' The reader can see here very clearly, in Bloch's advocacy of Expressionism, just what he regards as the literary mainstream of our age. It is no less clear that his exclusion of every realist of importance from that literature is perfectly conscious.

I hope that Thomas Mann will pardon me for making use of him here as a counter-illustration. Let us call to mind his Tonio Kröger, or his Christian Buddenbrook, or the chief characters from *The Magic Mountain*. Let us further suppose that they had been constructed, as Bloch requires, directly in terms of their own consciousness, and not by contrasting that consciousness with a reality independent of them. It is obvious that if we were confronted merely by the stream of associations in their minds, the resulting 'disruption of the surface' of life would be no less complete than in Joyce. We should find just as many 'crevices' as in Joyce. It would be a mistake to protest that these works were produced before the crisis of modernity – the objective crisis in Christian Buddenbrook, for example, leads to a more profound spiritual disturbance than in Joyce's heroes. *The Magic Mountain* is contemporary with Expressionism. So if Thomas Mann had contented himself with the direct photographic record of the ideas and scraps of experience of these characters, and with using them to construct a montage, he might easily have produced a portrait as 'artistically progressive' as the Joyce whom

⁵ Allusion to celebrated lines in Schiller's *Wallensteins Tod* (Act II, sc. 2)

"The world is narrow, broad the mind –
Thoughts dwell easily side by side
Things collide violently in space."

Bloch admires so hugely.

Given his modern themes, why does Thomas Mann remain so 'old-fashioned', so 'traditional'; why does he choose not to clamber on to the bandwagon of modernism? Precisely because he is a *true realist*, a term which in this case signifies primarily that, as a creative artist, he knows exactly who Christian Buddenbrook, who Tonio Kröger and who Hans Castorp, Settembrini and Naphta are. He does not have to know it in the abstract way that a social scientist would know it; in that sense he may easily make mistakes, as Balzac, Dickens and Tolstoy did before him. He knows it after the manner of a creative realist: he knows how thoughts and feelings grow out of the life of society and how experiences and emotions are parts of the total complex of reality. As a realist he assigns these parts to their rightful place within the total life context. He shows what areas of society they arise from and where they are going to.

So when, for example, Thomas Mann refers to Tonio Kröger as a 'bourgeois who has lost his way', he does not rest content with that: he shows how and why he still is a bourgeois, for all his hostility to the bourgeoisie, his homelessness within bourgeois society, and his exclusion from the life of the bourgeois. Because he does all this, Mann towers as a creative artist and in his grasp of the nature of society, above all those 'ultra-radicals' who imagine that their anti-bourgeois moods, their – often purely aesthetic – rejection of the stifling nature of petty-bourgeois existence, their contempt for plush armchairs or a pseudo-Renaissance cult in architecture, have transformed them into inexorable foes of bourgeois society.

4.

The modern literary schools of the imperialist era, from Naturalism to Surrealism, which have followed each other in such swift succession, all have one feature in common. They all take reality exactly as it manifests itself to the writer and the characters he creates. The form of this immediate manifestation changes as society changes. These changes, moreover, are both subjective and objective, depending on modifications in the reality of capitalism and also on the ways in which class struggle and changes in class structure produce different reflections on the surface of that reality. It is these changes above all that bring about the swift succession of literary schools together with the embittered inter-necine quarrels that flare up between them.

But both emotionally and intellectually they all remain frozen in their own immediacy; they fail to pierce the surface to discover the under-

lying essence, i.e. the real factors that relate their experiences to the hidden social forces that produce them. On the contrary, they all develop their own artistic style – more or less consciously – as a spontaneous expression of their immediate experience.

The hostility of all modern schools towards the very meagre vestiges of the older traditions of literature and literary history at this time, culminates in a passionate protest against the arrogance of critics who would like to forbid writers, so it is alleged, to write as and how they wish. In so doing, the advocates of such movements overlook the fact that authentic freedom, i.e. freedom from the reactionary prejudices of the imperialist era (not merely in the sphere of art), cannot possibly be attained through mere spontaneity or by persons unable to break through the confines of their own immediate experience. For as capitalism develops, the continuous production and reproduction of these reactionary prejudices is intensified and accelerated, not to say consciously promoted by the imperialist bourgeoisie. So if we are ever going to be able to understand the way in which reactionary ideas infiltrate our minds, and if we are ever going to achieve a critical distance from such prejudices, this can only be accomplished by hard work, by abandoning and transcending the limits of immediacy, by scrutinizing all subjective experiences and measuring them against social reality. In short it can only be achieved by a deeper probing of the real world.

Artistically, as well as intellectually and politically, the major realists of our age have consistently shown their ability to undertake this arduous task. They have not shirked it in the past, nor do they today. The careers of Romain Rolland and of Thomas and Heinrich Mann are relevant here. Different though their development has been in other respects, this feature is common to them all.

Even though we have emphasized the failure of the various modern literary schools to progress beyond the level of immediate experience, we should not wish it to be thought that we decry the artistic achievements of serious writers from Naturalism to Surrealism. Writing from their own experience, they have often succeeded in developing a consistent and interesting mode of expression, a style of their own, in fact. But when we look at their work in the context of social reality, we see that it never rises above the level of immediacy, either intellectually or artistically.

Hence the art they create remains abstract and one-dimensional. (In this context it is immaterial whether the aesthetic theory espoused by a given school favours 'abstraction' in art or not. Ever since Expressionism

the importance attached to abstraction has been consistently on the increase, in theory as well as in practice.) At this point the reader may well believe that he detects a contradiction in our argument: surely immediacy and abstraction are mutually exclusive? However, one of the greatest achievements of the dialectical method – already found in Hegel – was its discovery and demonstration that immediacy and abstraction are closely akin, and, more particularly, that thought which begins in immediacy can only lead to abstraction.

In this context, too, Marx put Hegelian philosophy back on its feet, and in his analysis of economic relationships he repeatedly showed, in concrete terms, just how the kinship between immediacy and abstraction finds expression in the reflection of economic realities. We must confine ourselves to one brief illustration. Marx shows that the relationship between the circulation of money and its agent, mercantile capital, involves the obliteration of all mediations and so represents the most extreme form of abstraction in the entire process of capitalist production. If they are considered as they manifest themselves, i.e. in apparent independence of the overall process, the form they assume is that of the purely automatic, fetishized abstraction: 'money begets money'. This is why the vulgar economists who never advance beyond the immediate epiphenomena of capitalism feel confirmed in their beliefs by the abstract, fetishized world that surrounds them. They feel at home here like fish in water and hence give vent to passionate protests about the 'presumption' of a Marxist critique that requires them to look at the entire process of social reproduction. Their 'profundity, here as everywhere else, consists in perceiving the clouds of dust on the surface and then having the presumption to assert that all this dust is really very important and mysterious', as Marx comments à propos of Adam Müller. It is from considerations such as these that I described Expressionism in my old essay on the subject as an 'abstraction away from reality'.

It goes without saying that without abstraction there can be no art – for otherwise how could anything in art have representative value? But like every movement, abstraction must have a direction, and it is on this that everything depends. Every major realist fashions the material given in his own experience, and in so doing makes use of techniques of abstraction, among others. But his goal is to penetrate the laws governing objective reality and to uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated, not immediately perceptible network of relationships that go to make up society. Since these relationships do not lie on the surface, since the underlying laws only make themselves felt in very complex ways and are

realized only unevenly, as trends, the labour of the realist is extraordinarily arduous, since it has both an artistic and an intellectual dimension. Firstly, he has to discover these relationships intellectually and give them artistic shape. Secondly, although in practice the two processes are indivisible, he must artistically conceal the relationships he has just discovered through the process of abstraction – i.e. he has to transcend the process of abstraction. This twofold labour creates a new immediacy, one that is artistically mediated; in it, even though the surface of life is sufficiently transparent to allow the underlying essence to shine through (something which is not true of immediate experience in real life), it nevertheless manifests itself as immediacy, as life as it actually appears. Moreover, in the works of such writers we observe the whole surface of life in all its essential determinants, and not just a subjectively perceived moment isolated from the totality in an abstract and over-intense manner. This, then, is the artistic dialectic of appearance and essence. The richer, the more diverse, complex and ‘cunning’ (Lenin) this dialectic is, the more firmly it grasps hold of the living contradictions of life and society, then the greater and the more profound the realism will be.

In contrast to this, what does it mean to talk of an abstraction away from reality? When the surface of life is only experienced immediately, it remains opaque, fragmentary, chaotic and uncomprehended. Since the objective mediations are more or less consciously ignored or passed over, what lies on the surface is frozen and any attempt to see it from a higher intellectual vantage-point has to be abandoned.

There is no state of inertia in reality. Intellectual and artistic activity must move either towards reality or away from it. It might seem paradoxical to claim that Naturalism has already provided us with an instance of the latter. The milieu theory, a view of inherited characteristics fetishized to the point of mythology, a mode of expression which abstractly pinpointed the immediate externals of life, along with a number of other factors, all those things thwarted any real artistic breakthrough to a living dialectic of appearance and essence. Or, more precisely, it was the absence of such a breakthrough that led to the Naturalist style. The two things were functions of each other.

This is why the photographically and phonographically exact imitations of life which we find in Naturalism could never come alive; this is why they remained static and devoid of inner tension. This is why the plays and novels of Naturalism seem to be almost interchangeable – for all their apparent diversity in externals. (This would be the place to discuss one of the major artistic tragedies of our time: the reasons why Gerhart

Hauptmann failed to become a great realist writer after such dazzling beginnings. But we have no space to explore this here. We would merely observe in passing that Naturalism inhibited rather than stimulated the development of the author of *The Weavers* and *The Beaver Coat*, and that even when he left Naturalism behind him he was still unable to discard its ideological assumptions.)

The artistic limitations of Naturalism quickly became obvious. But they were never subjected to fundamental criticism. Instead, the preferred method was always to confront one abstract form with another, apparently contrary, but no less abstract form. It is symptomatic of the entire process that each movement in the past confined its attention entirely to the movement immediately preceding it; thus Impressionism concerned itself exclusively with Naturalism, and so on. Hence neither theory nor practice ever advanced beyond the stage of abstract confrontation. This remains true right up to the present discussion. Rudolf Leonhard, for example, argues the historical inevitability of Expressionism in just this way: 'One of the foundations of Expressionism was the antagonism felt towards an Impressionism which had become unbearable, even impossible.' He develops this idea quite logically, but fails to say anything about the other foundations. It looks as if Expressionism were utterly opposed to, and incompatible with, the literary trends that preceded it. After all, what Expressionism emphasizes is its focus on essences; this is what Leonhard refers to as the 'non-nihilistic feature of Expressionism.'

But these essences are not the objective essence of reality, of the total process. They are purely subjective. I will refrain from quoting the old and now discredited theoreticians of Expressionism. But Ernst Bloch himself, when he comes to distinguish the true Expressionism from the false, puts the emphasis on subjectivity: 'In its original form Expressionism meant the shattering of images, it meant breaking up the surface from an original, i.e. subjective, perspective, one which wrenched things apart and dislocated them.'

This very definition made it inevitable that essences had to be torn from their context in a conscious, stylized and abstract way, and each essence taken in isolation. When followed through logically, Expressionism repudiated any connection with reality and declared a subjectivist war on reality and all its works. I would not wish to intervene here in the debate about whether, and to what extent, Gottfried Benn can be thought of as a typical Expressionist. But I find that the sense of life which Bloch describes so picturesquely and fascinatingly in his account

of Expressionism and Surrealism, finds its most direct, candid and vivid expression in Benn's book *Kunst und Macht*: 'Between 1910 and 1925 the anti-naturalist style reigned supreme in Europe to the exclusion of almost everything else. For the fact is that there was no such thing as reality, at best there were only travesties of reality. Reality – that was a capitalist concept. . . . Mind [*Geist*] had no reality.' Wangenheim, too in his highly eclectic apologia for Expressionism, arrives at similar conclusions, although by a less analytical, more descriptive route: 'Successful works could not be expected in any quantity, since there was no reality corresponding to it [i.e. to Expressionism. – G.L.] . . . Many an Expressionist longed to discover a new world by abandoning terra firma, leaping into the air and clinging to the clouds.'

We can find a perfectly clear and unambiguous formulation of this situation and its implications in Heinrich Vogeler. His accurate assessment of abstraction in Expressionism leads him to the correct conclusion: 'It [i.e. Expressionism – G.L.] was the Dance of Death of bourgeois art . . . The Expressionists thought they were conveying the "essence of things" [*Wesen*], whereas in fact they revealed their decomposition [*Verwesung*].'

One inescapable consequence of an attitude alien or hostile to reality makes itself increasingly evident in the art of the 'avant-garde': a growing paucity of content, extended to a point where absence of content or hostility towards it is upheld on principle. Once again Gottfried Benn has put the situation in a nutshell: 'The very concept of content, too, has become problematic. Content – what's the point of it nowadays, it's all washed up, worn out, mere sham – self-indulgence of emotions, rigidity of feelings, clusters of discredited elements, lies, amorphous shapes. . . .'

As the reader can see for himself, this account closely parallels Bloch's own description of the world of Expressionism and Surrealism. Needless to say, their respective analyses lead Bloch and Benn to entirely opposite conclusions. At a number of points in his book, Bloch clearly sees the problematic nature of modern art as something arising from the attitude he himself describes: 'Hence major writers no longer make their home in their own subject-matter, for all substances crumble at their touch. The dominant world no longer presents them with a coherent image to depict, or to take as the starting-point for their imagination. All that remains is emptiness, shards for them to piece together.' Bloch goes on to explore the revolutionary period of the bourgeoisie down to Goethe. He then continues: 'Goethe was succeeded not by a further development

of the novel of education, but by the French novel of disillusionment, so that today in the perfected non-world, anti-world or ruined world of the grand bourgeois vacuum, "reconciliation" is neither a danger nor an option for the writer. Only a dialectical approach [?! - G.L.] is possible here: either as material for a dialectical montage or as an experiment in it. In the hands of Joyce even the world of Odysseus became a kaleidoscopic gallery of the disintegrating and disintegrated world of today in microscopic cross-section - no more than a cross-section, because people today lack something, namely the most important thing of all . . .'

We have no desire to quibble with Bloch over trifles, such as his purely idiosyncratic use of the word 'dialectics', or the mistaken logic which allows him to suggest that the novel of disillusionment follows directly upon Goethe. (My early work, *The Theory of the Novel*, is partly to blame for Bloch's *non-sequitur* here.) We are concerned with more vital issues. In particular, with the fact that Bloch - although his evaluation is the reverse of ours - expresses the notion that the subject-matter and the composition of works of literature depend on man's relationship to objective reality. So far so good. But when Bloch comes to demonstrate the historical legitimacy of Expressionism and Surrealism, he ceases to concern himself with the objective relations between society and the active men of our time, relations which, as we can see from *Jean Christophe*,⁶ even permit a novel of education to be written. Instead, taking the isolated state of mind of a specific class of intellectuals as his starting-point, he constructs a sort of home-made model of the contemporary world, which logically enough appears to him as a 'non-world' - a conception which, regrettably enough, turns out to be very similar to that of Benn. For writers who adopt this kind of stance towards reality there obviously cannot be any action, structure, content or composition in the 'traditional sense'. For people who experience the world like this it is in fact perfectly true that Expressionism and Surrealism are the only modes of self-expression still available. This philosophical justification of Expressionism and Surrealism suffers 'merely' from the fact that Bloch fails to make reality his touchstone and instead uncritically takes over the Expressionist and Surrealist attitude towards reality, and translates it into his own richly imaginative language.

Despite my sharp disagreement with all of Bloch's judgements, I find his formulation of certain facts both correct and valuable. In particular,

⁶The major work of Romain Rolland, a novel in 10 volumes whose theme is Franco-German relations as reflected in the life of a German musician.

he is the most consistent of all defenders of modernism in his demonstration that Expressionism necessarily leads to Surrealism. In this context he also deserves praise for having recognized that montage is the inevitable mode of expression in this phase of development. Moreover, his achievement here is all the greater because he shows that montage is important not only in modernist art, but also in the bourgeois philosophy of our time.

However, one consequence of this is that he brings out the anti-realistic one-dimensionality of the entire trend much more starkly than other theoreticians who think along these lines. This one-dimensionality – about which, incidentally, Bloch has nothing to say – was already a feature of Naturalism. In contrast to the Naturalist, the artistic ‘refinement’ introduced by Impressionism ‘purifies’ art even more completely of the complex mediations, the tortuous paths of objective reality, and the objective dialectics of Being and Consciousness. The symbolist movement is clearly and consciously one-dimensional from the outset, for the gulf between the sensuous incarnation of a symbol and its symbolic meaning arises from the narrow, single-tracked process of subjective association which yokes them together.

Montage represents the pinnacle of this movement and for this reason we are grateful to Bloch for his decision to set it so firmly in the centre of modernist literature and thought. In its original form, as photomontage, it is capable of striking effects, and on occasion it can even become a powerful political weapon. Such effects arise from its technique of juxtaposing heterogeneous, unrelated pieces of reality torn from their context. A good photomontage has the same sort of effect as a good joke. However, as soon as this one-dimensional technique – however legitimate and successful it may be in a joke – claims to give shape to reality (even when this reality is viewed as unreal), to a world of relationships (even when these relationships are held to be specious), or of totality (even when this totality is regarded as chaos), then the final effect must be one of profound monotony. The details may be dazzlingly colourful in their diversity, but the whole will never be more than an unrelieved grey on grey. After all, a puddle can never be more than dirty water, even though it may contain rainbow tints.

This monotony proceeds inexorably from the decision to abandon any attempt to mirror objective reality, to give up the artistic struggle to shape the highly complex mediations in all their unity and diversity and to synthesize them as characters in a work of literature. For this approach permits no creative composition, no rise and fall, no growth

from within to emerge from the true nature of the subject-matter.

Whenever these artistic trends are dismissed as decadent, there is a cry of indignation against 'pedantic hectoring by eclectic academics'. Perhaps I shall be permitted, therefore, to appeal to Friedrich Nietzsche an expert on decadence whom my opponents hold in high regard on other matters too: 'What is the mark of every form of literary decadence?' he enquires. He replies: 'It is that life no longer dwells in the totality. The word becomes sovereign and escapes from the confines of the sentence; the sentence encroaches on the page, obscuring its meaning; the page gains in vitality at the cost of the whole – the whole ceases to be whole. But that is the equation of every decadent style: always the same anarchy of the atoms, disintegration of the will. . . . Life, the same vitality, the vibrance and exuberance of life is compressed into the most minute structures, while the rest is impoverished. Paralysis, misery, petrification or hostility and chaos everywhere: in either case the consequences are the more striking, the higher one rises in the hierarchy of organization. The whole as such no longer lives at all; it is composite, artificial, a piece of cerebration, an artefact.'⁷ This passage from Nietzsche is just as truthful an account of the artistic implications of these literary trends as that of Bloch or Benn. I would invite Herwarth Walden, who dismisses every critical interpretation of Expressionism as a vulgarization and who regards every example used to illustrate the theory and practice of Expressionism as an instance of 'vulgar-Expressionism' which proves nothing, to comment on the following adaptation of Nietzsche's theory of decadence to the theory of literary language in general: 'Why should only the sentence be comprehensible and not the word? . . . Since the poets like to dominate, they go ahead and make sentences, ignoring the rights of words. But it is the word that rules. The word shatters the sentence and the work of art is a mosaic. Only words can bind. Sentences are always just picked up out of nowhere.' This 'vulgar-Expressionist' theory of language comes in fact from Herwarth Walden himself.

It goes without saying that such principles are never applied with absolute consistency, even by Joyce. For 100 per cent chaos can only exist in the minds of the deranged, in the same way that Schopenhauer had already observed that a 100 per cent solipsism is only to be found in a lunatic asylum. But since chaos constitutes the intellectual cornerstone of modernist art, any cohesive principles it contains must stem from

⁷ The words significantly omitted by Lukács after 'disintegration of the will' are ' . . . freedom of the individual, in moral terms – generalized into a political theory: "equal rights for all"'. F. Nietzsche, *Der Fall Wagner*.

subject-matter alien to it. Hence the superimposed commentaries, the theory of simultaneity,⁸ and so on. But none of this can be any more than a surrogate, it can only intensify the one-dimensionality, of this form of art.

5
The emergence of all these literary schools can be explained in terms of the economy, the social structure and the class struggles of the age of imperialism. So Rudolf Leonhard is absolutely right when he claims that Expressionism is a necessary historical phenomenon. But it is at best a half-truth when he goes on to assert, echoing Hegel's celebrated dictum, that 'Expressionism was real; so if it was real it was rational.' Even in Hegel the 'rationality of history' was never as straightforward as this, although he occasionally contrived to smuggle an apologia for the actual into his concept of reason. For a Marxist, 'rationality' (historical necessity) is unquestionably a more complex business. For Marxism the acknowledgment of a historical necessity neither implies a justification of what actually exists (not even during the period when it exists), nor does it express a fatalistic belief in the necessity of historical events. Once again we can illustrate this best with an example from economics. There can be no doubt that primitive accumulation, the separation of the small producers from their means of production, the creation of the proletariat, was – with all its inhumanities – a historical necessity. Nevertheless, no Marxist would dream of glorifying the English bourgeoisie of the period as the embodiment of the principle of reason in Hegel's sense. Even less would it occur to a Marxist to see thereby any fatalistic necessity in the development from capitalism to socialism. Marx repeatedly protested against the way in which people fatalistically insisted that the only possible development for the Russia of his day was from primitive accumulation to capitalism. Today, in view of the fact that socialism has been established in the Soviet Union, the idea that undeveloped countries can only achieve socialism via the route of primitive accumulation and capitalism, is a recipe for counter-revolution. So if we concur with Leonhard, and agree that the emergence of Expressionism was historically necessary, this is not to say that we find it artistically valid, i.e. that it is a necessary constituent of the art of the future.

⁸ Theory developed by Robert Delauney, who together with Kandinsky was one of the pioneers of abstraction in art. In his great series of 'Window' paintings starting in 1912, he sought to put it into practice. Taking the transparent interpenetrating colours of Cézanne's later period, he fused them with the forms of analytical Cubism, and claimed that the result, a simultaneous impact of two or more colours, gave the picture a dynamic force.

For this reason we must demur when Leonhard discerns in Expressionism 'the definition of man and the consolidation of things as stepping-stone towards a new realism'. Bloch is absolutely in the right here when, unlike Leonhard, he looks to Surrealism and the dominance of montage as the necessary and logical heir to Expressionism. Our dear old Wangenheim inevitably arrives at completely eclectic conclusion when he tries to use the debate on Expressionism for his own purposes i.e. to salvage and preserve the formalistic tendencies of his early work-tendencies which so often inhibited and even suppressed his native realism - by bringing them under the umbrella of a broad and undogmatic conception of realism. His aim in defending Expressionism is to rescue for socialist realism a priceless heritage of permanent value. He attempts to defend his position in this way: 'Fundamentally, the theatre of Expressionism, even when its effects were powerful, reflected a world in tatters. The theatre of socialist realism reflects uniformity amidst all the diversity of its forms.' Is this why Expressionism has to become an essential component of socialist realism? Wangenheim has not got a single aesthetic or logical argument in reply, merely a biographical one: reluctance to jettison his own earlier formalism.

Taking as his starting-point the historical assessment of Expressionism clearly stated in my old essay, Bloch goes on to make the following criticism of me: 'The result is that there can be no such thing as an avant-garde within late capitalist society; anticipatory movements in the superstructure are disqualified from possessing any truth.' This accusation arises from the circumstance that Bloch regards the road that leads to Surrealism and montage as the only one open to modern art. If the role of the avant-garde is disputed, the inescapable conclusion in his eyes is that any ideological anticipation of social tendencies must be called in question.

But this is quite simply untrue. Marxism has always recognized the anticipatory function of ideology. To remain within the sphere of literature, we need only remind ourselves of what Paul Lafargue has to say about Marx's evaluation of Balzac: 'Balzac was not just the chronicle of his own society, he was also the creator of prophetic figures who were still embryonic under Louis Philippe and who only emerged fully grown after his death, under Napoleon III.' But is this Marxian view still valid in the present? Of course it is. Such 'prophetic figures', however, are to be found exclusively in the works of the important realists. In the novels, stories and plays of Maxim Gorky such figures abound. Anyone who has been following recent events in the Soviet Union attentively and dis-

passionately will have realized that in his *Karamora*, his *Klim Samgin* his *Dostigayev*, etc., Gorky has created a series of typical figures which have only now revealed their real nature and who were 'prophetic' anticipations in Marx's sense. We might point with equal justice to the earlier works of Heinrich Mann, novels such as *Der Untertan* and *Professor Unrat*.⁹ Who could deny that a large number of the repellent, mean and bestial features of the German bourgeoisie, and of a petty bourgeoisie seduced by demagogues, were 'prophetically' portrayed here and that they only blossomed completely later under Fascism? Nor should we overlook the character of Henri IV in this context.¹⁰ On the one hand, he is a historically authentic figure, true to life; on the other hand he anticipates those humanist qualities which will only emerge fully in the struggles leading to the defeat of Fascism, in the fighters of the anti-Fascist Front.

Let us consider a counter-illustration, likewise from our own time. The ideological struggle against war was one of the principal themes of the best expressionists. But what did they do or say to anticipate the new imperialist war raging all around us and threatening to engulf the whole civilized world? I hardly imagine that anyone today will deny that these works are completely obsolete and irrelevant to the problems of the present. On the other hand the realist writer Arnold Zweig anticipated a whole series of essential features of the new war in his novels *Sergeant Grischa* and *Education before Verdun*. What he did there was to depict the relationship between the war at the front and what went on behind the lines, and to show how the war represented the individual and social continuation and intensification of 'normal' capitalist barbarity.

There is nothing mysterious or paradoxical about any of this – it is the very essence of all authentic realism of any importance. Since such realism must be concerned with the creation of types (this has always been the case, from *Don Quixote* down to *Oblomov* and the realists of our own time), the realist must seek out the lasting features in people, in their relations with each other and in the situations in which they have to act; he must focus on those elements which endure over long periods and which constitute the objective human tendencies of society and indeed of mankind as a whole.

Such writers form the authentic ideological avant-garde since they depict the vital, but not immediately obvious forces at work in objective

⁹ Translated into English as *Man of Straw* and *The Blue Angel* respectively.

¹⁰ The eponymous hero of two novels Heinrich Mann published in the 1930s: *Die Jugend des Königs Henri Quatre* and *Die Vollenhung des Königs Henri Quatre*.

reality. They do so with such profundity and truth that the products of their imagination receive confirmation from subsequent events – not merely in the simple sense in which a successful photograph mirrors the original, but because they express the wealth and diversity of reality, reflecting forces as yet submerged beneath the surface, which only blossom forth visibly to all at a later stage. Great realism, therefore, does not portray an immediately obvious aspect of reality but one which is permanent and objectively more significant, namely man in the whole range of his relations to the real world, above all those which outlast mere fashion. Over and above that, it captures tendencies of development that only exist incipiently and so have not yet had the opportunity to unfold their entire human and social potential. To discern and give shape to such underground trends is the great historical mission of the true literary avant-garde. Whether a writer really belongs to the ranks of the avant-garde is something that only history can reveal, for only after the passage of time will it become apparent whether he has perceived significant qualities, trends, and the social functions of individual human types, and has given them effective and lasting form. After what has been said already, I hope that no further argument is required to prove that only the major realists are capable of forming a genuine avant-garde.

So what really matters is not the subjective belief, however sincere, that one belongs to the avant-garde and is eager to march in the forefront of literary developments. Nor is it essential to have been the first to discover some technical innovation, however dazzling. What counts is the social and human content of the avant-garde, the breadth, the profundity and the truth of the ideas that have been ‘prophetically’ anticipated.

In short, what is at issue here is not whether or not we deny the possibility of anticipatory movements in the superstructure. The vital questions are: *what* was anticipated, in what manner and by whom?

We have already given a number of illustrations, and we could easily multiply them, to show what the major realists of our time have anticipated in their art, by their creation of types. So let us now turn the question round and enquire what Expressionism anticipated? The only answer we can possibly receive, even from Bloch, is: Surrealism, i.e. yet another literary school whose fundamental failure to anticipate social trends in its art has emerged with crystal clarity, and nowhere more clearly than from the description of it given by its greatest admirers. Modernism has not, nor has it ever had, anything to do with the creation of ‘prophetic figures’ or with the genuine anticipation of future develop-

ments.

If we have been successful in clarifying the criterion by which the literary avant-garde is to be distinguished, then it is no great problem to answer certain concrete questions. Who in our literature belongs to the avant-garde? 'Prophetic' writers of the stamp of Gorky, or writers like the late Hermann Bahr who, like a drum-major, marched proudly at the head of every new movement from Naturalism to Surrealism, and then promptly dismissed each phase a year before it went out of fashion? Granted, Hermann Bahr is a caricature, and nothing could be further from my mind than to put him on the same footing as the sincere defenders of Expressionism. But he is the caricature of something real, namely of a formalist modernism, bereft of content, cut off from the mainstream of society.

It is an old truth of Marxism that every human activity should be judged according to its objective meaning in the total context, and not according to what the agent believes the importance of his activity to be. So, on the one hand, it is not essential to be a conscious 'modernist' at all costs (Balzac, we recall, was a royalist); and, on the other hand, even the most passionate determination, the most intense sense of conviction that one has revolutionized art and created something 'radically new', will not suffice to turn a writer into someone who can truly anticipate future trends, if determination and conviction are his sole qualifications.

6.

This ancient truth can also be expressed as a commonplace: the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The validity of this proverb may on occasion appear with the force of a home-truth to anyone who takes his own development seriously and is therefore prepared to criticize himself objectively and without pulling any punches. I am quite willing to start with myself. In the winter of 1914–15: subjectively, a passionate protest against the War, its futility and inhumanity, its destruction of culture and civilization. A general mood that was pessimistic to the point of despair. The contemporary world of capitalism appeared to be the consummation of Fichte's 'age of absolute sinfulness'. My subjective determination was a protest of a progressive sort. The objective product, *The Theory of the Novel*, was a reactionary work in every respect, full of idealistic mysticism and false in all its assessments of the historical process. Then 1922: a mood of excitement, full of revolutionary impatience. I can still hear the bullets of the Red War against the imperialists whistling around my head, the excitement of being an outlaw in Hungary

still reverberates within me. Everything in me rebelled against the notion that the first great revolutionary wave was past and that the resolution of the Communist vanguard was insufficient to bring about the overthrow of capitalism. Thus the subjective foundation was revolutionary impatience. The objective product was *History and Class Consciousness* – which was reactionary because of its idealism, because of its faulty grasp of the theory of reflection and because of its denial of a dialectics in nature. It goes without saying that I am not alone in having had such experiences at this time. On the contrary, it also happened to countless others. The opinion expressed in my old essay on Expressionism which has aroused so many dissenting voices, namely the assertion that ideologically Expressionism was closely related to the Independent Socialists, is based on the aforementioned ancient truth.

In our debate on Expressionism, revolution (Expressionism) and Noske have been put in opposing camps – in the good old Expressionist manner. But could Noske have managed to emerge the victor without the Independent Socialists, without their vacillation and hesitation, which prevented the Workers' Councils from seizing power while tolerating the organization and arming of reactionary forces? The Independent Socialists were, in party terms, the organized expression of the fact that even those German workers who were radical at the level of their feelings, were not yet equipped ideologically for revolution. The Spartacus League was too slow in detaching itself from the Independent Socialists and it did not criticize them incisively enough; both failures are an important index of the weakness and backwardness of the subjective side of the German revolution, the very factors that Lenin singled out right from the start in his critique of the Spartacus League.

Of course, the whole situation was anything but straightforward. In my original essay, for instance, I drew a very sharp distinction between leaders and masses within the Independent Socialists. The masses were instinctively revolutionary. They showed that they were also objectively revolutionary by going on strike in munitions factories, by undermining efforts at the front and by a revolutionary enthusiasm which culminated in the January strike. For all that, they remained confused and hesitant; they let themselves be ensnared by the demagogy of their leaders. The latter were in part consciously counter-revolutionary (Kautsky, Bernstein and Hilferding) and worked objectively and expressly to preserve bourgeois rule, in collaboration with the old SPD leadership. Other leaders were subjectively sincere, but when it came to the crisis, they were unable to offer effective resistance to this sabotage of the revolution.

Notwithstanding their sincerity and their reluctance, they slipped into the wake of the right-wing leadership until their misgivings finally led to a split within the Independent Socialists and so to their destruction. The really revolutionary elements in the Independent Socialist Party were those who, after Halle,¹¹ pressed for the Party's dissolution and the repudiation of its ideology.

What then of the Expressionists? They were ideologues. They stood between leaders and masses. For the most part their convictions were sincerely held, though they were also mostly very immature and confused. They were deeply affected by the same uncertainties to which the immature revolutionary masses were also subject. In addition they were profoundly influenced by every conceivable reactionary prejudice of the age, and this made them more than susceptible to the widest possible range of anti-revolutionary slogans – abstract pacifism, ideology of non-violence, abstract critiques of the bourgeoisie, or all sorts of crazy anarchist notions. As ideologists, they stabilized both intellectually and artistically what was essentially a merely transitional ideological phase. From a revolutionary point of view, this phase was much more retrograde in many respects than the one in which the vacillating masses of Independent Socialists supporters found themselves. But the revolutionary significance of such phases of ideological transition lies precisely in their fluidity, in their forward movement, in the fact that they do not yield a crystallization. In this case stabilization meant that the Expressionists and those who were influenced by them were prevented from making further progress of a revolutionary kind. This negative effect, typical of every attempt to systematize ideological states of flux, received an especially reactionary colouring in the case of the Expressionists: firstly, because of the highflown pretensions to leadership, the sense of mission, which led them to proclaim eternal truths, particularly during the revolutionary years; secondly, because of the specifically anti-realist bias in Expressionism, which meant that they had no firm artistic hold on reality which might have corrected or neutralized their misconceptions. As we have seen, Expressionism insisted on the primacy of immediacy, and by conferring a pseudo-profundity and pseudo-perfection on immediate experience both in art and thought, it intensified the dangers which inevitably accompany all such attempts to stabilize an essentially transitional ideology.

Thus, to the extent that Expressionism really had any ideological

¹¹ At its Congress in Halle in 1920, the USPD voted by a majority to merge with the KPD.

influence, its effect was to discourage rather than to promote the process of revolutionary clarification among its followers. Here, too, there is a parallel with the ideology of the Independent Socialists. It is no coincidence that both came to grief on the same reality. It is an oversimplification for the Expressionists to claim that Expressionism was destroyed by Noske's victory. Expressionism collapsed, on the one hand, with the passing of the first wave of revolution, for the failure of which the ideology of the Independent Socialists must carry a heavy burden of responsibility. On the other hand, it suffered a loss of prestige from the growing clarity of the revolutionary consciousness of the masses who were beginning to advance with increasing confidence beyond the revolutionary catchwords from which they had started.

But Expressionism was not dethroned by the defeat of the first wave of revolution in Germany alone. The consolidation of the victory of the proletariat in the Soviet Union played an equally important role. As the proletariat gained a firmer control of the situation, as Socialism began to permeate more and more aspects of the Soviet economy, and as the cultural revolution gained wider and wider acceptance among the masses of the workers, so the art of the 'avant-garde' in the Soviet Union found itself gradually but inexorably forced back on to the defensive by an increasingly confident school of realism. So in the last analysis the defeat of Expressionism was a product of the maturity of the revolutionary masses. The careers of Soviet poets like Mayakovsky, or of Germans such as Becher, make it clear that this is where the true reasons for the demise of Expressionism have to be sought and found.

7.

Is our discussion purely literary? I think not. I do not believe that any conflict between literary trends and their theoretical justification would have had such reverberations or provoked such discussion were it not for the fact that, in its ultimate consequences, it was felt to involve a political problem that concerns us all and influences us all in equal measure: the problem of the Popular Front.

Bernhard Ziegler raised the issue of popular art in a very pointed manner. The excitement generated by this question is evident on all sides and such a vigorous interest is surely to be welcomed. Bloch, too, is concerned to salvage the popular element in Expressionism. He says: 'It is untrue that Expressionists were estranged from ordinary people by their overweening arrogance. Again, the opposite is the case. The *Blue Rider* imitated the stained glass at Murnau, and in fact was the first

to open people's eyes to this moving and uncanny folk art. In the same way, it focused attention on the drawings of children and prisoners, on the disturbing works of the mentally sick, and on primitive art.' Such a view of popular art succeeds in confusing all the issues. Popular art does not imply an ideologically indiscriminate, 'arty' appreciation of 'primitive' products by connoisseurs. Truly popular art has nothing in common with any of that. For if it did, any swank who collects stained glass or negro sculpture, any snob who celebrates insanity as the emancipation of mankind from the fetters of the mechanistic mind, could claim to be a champion of popular art.

Today, of course, it is no easy matter to form a proper conception of popular art. The older ways of life of the people have been eroded economically by capitalism, and this has introduced a feeling of uncertainty into the world-view, the cultural aspirations, the taste and moral judgement of the people; it has created a situation in which people are exposed to the perversions of demagogy. Thus it is by no means always progressive simply to collect old folk products indiscriminately. Nor does such a rescue operation necessarily imply an appeal to the vital instincts of the people, which do remain progressive against all obstacles. Similarly, the fact that a literary work or a literary trend is greatly in vogue does not in itself guarantee that it is genuinely popular. Retrograde traditionalisms, such as regional art [*Heimatkunst*], and bad modern works, such as thrillers, have achieved mass circulation without being popular in any true sense of the word.

With all these reservations, however, it is still not unimportant to ask how much of the real literature of our time has reached the masses, and how deeply it has penetrated. But what 'modernist' writer of the last few decades can even begin to compare with Gorky, with Anatole France, Romain Rolland or Thomas Mann? That a work of such uncompromising artistic excellence as *Buddenbrooks* could be printed in millions of copies, must give all of us food for thought. The whole problem of popular art would, as old Briest in Fontane's novel used to say, 'lead us too far afield' for us to discuss it here. We shall confine ourselves therefore to two points, without pretending to an exhaustive treatment of either.

In the first place, there is the question of the cultural heritage. Wherever the cultural heritage has a living relationship to the real life of the people it is characterized by a dynamic, progressive movement in which the active creative forces of popular tradition, of the sufferings and joys of the people, of revolutionary legacies, are buoyed up, preserved, trans-

cended and further developed. For a writer to possess a living relationship to the cultural heritage means being a son of the people, borne along by the current of the people's development. In this sense Maxim Gorky is a son of the Russian people, Romain Rolland a son of the French and Thomas Mann a son of the German people. For all their individuality and originality, for all their remoteness from an artiness which artificially collects and aestheticizes about the primitive, the tone and content of their writings grow out of the life and history of their people, they are an organic product of the development of their nation. That is why it is possible for them to create art of the highest quality while at the same time striking a chord which can and does evoke a response in the broad masses of the people.

The attitude of the modernists to the cultural heritage stands in sharp contrast to this. They regard the history of the people as a great jumble sale. If one leafs through the writings of Bloch, one will find him mentioning the topic only in expressions like 'useful legacies', 'plunder', and so on. Bloch is much too conscious a thinker and stylist for these to be mere slips of the pen. On the contrary, they are an index of his general attitude towards the cultural heritage. In his eyes it is a heap of lifeless objects in which one can rummage around at will, picking out whatever one happens to need at the moment. It is something to be taken apart and stuck together again in accordance with the exigencies of the moment.

Hanns Eisler has expressed the same attitude very clearly in an article he and Bloch wrote together. He was – rightly – highly enthusiastic about the *Don Carlos* demonstration in Berlin.¹² But instead of pondering what Schiller really represented, where his achievement and his limitations actually lay, what he has meant for the German people in the past and still means today, and what mountain of reactionary prejudices would have to be cleared away in order to forge the popular and progressive aspects of Schiller into a usable weapon for the Popular Front and for the emancipation of the German people – instead of all that, he merely puts forward the following programme for the benefit of writers in exile: 'What must our task be outside Germany? It is evident that it can only be for us all to help select and prepare classical material that is suitable for such a struggle.' Thus what Eisler proposes is to reduce the classics to an anthology and then to reassemble whatever 'material is suitable'. It would be impossible to conceive of a more alien, arrogant or negative attitude towards the glorious literary past of the German people.

¹² Hanns Eisler/Ernst Bloch: *Die Kunst zu erben*.

Objectively, however, the life of the people is a continuum. A theory like that of the modernists which sees revolutions only as ruptures and catastrophes that destroy all that is past and shatter all connection with the great and glorious past, is akin to the ideas of Cuvier,¹³ not those of Marx and Lenin. It forms an anarchistic pendant to the evolutionary theories of reformism. The latter sees nothing but continuity, the former sees nothing but ruptures, fissures and catastrophes. History, however, is the living dialectical unity of continuity and discontinuity, of evolution and revolution.

Thus here, as everywhere, everything depends on a correct appreciation of content. Lenin puts the Marxist view of the cultural heritage in this way: 'Marxism attained its world-historical importance as the ideology of the revolutionary proletariat by virtue of its refusal to reject the most valuable achievements of the bourgeois era. Instead, it appropriated and assimilated all that was valuable in a tradition of human thought and human culture stretching back over 2000 years.' So everything depends on recognizing clearly where to look for what is truly of value.

If the question is correctly formulated, in the context of the life and the progressive tendencies of the people, then it will lead us organically to our second point: the question of realism. Modern theories of popular art, strongly influenced by avant-garde ideas, have pushed the sturdy realism of folk art very much into the background. On this issue, too, we cannot possibly discuss the entire problem in all its ramifications, so we shall confine our observations to one single, crucial point.

We are talking here to writers about literature. We must remind ourselves that owing to the tragic course of German history, the popular and realistic element in our literature is nothing like as powerful as in England, France or Russia. That very fact should spur us to attend all the more closely to the popular, realistic literature of the German past and to keep its vital, productive traditions alive. If we do so, we shall see that despite the whole 'German *misère*', popular, realistic literature produced such major masterpieces as the *Simplizissimus* of Grimmelshausen.¹⁴ It may be left to the Eislers of this world to take the book to

¹³ Georges Cuvier (1769–1832). According to his theory every geological era terminated in a catastrophe and every new one was brought about by an immigration and a re-creation. He rejected theories of evolution.

¹⁴ H. J. Chr. von Grimmelshausen (c.1621–76). His picaresque novel, *The Adventures of a Simpleton* (1669) set in the Thirty Years' War is the major German literary work of the 17th century.

pieces and estimate their montage value; for the living tradition of German literature it will continue to survive intact in all its greatness, and with all its limitations.¹⁵

Only when the masterpieces of realism past and present are appreciated as *wholes*, will their topical, cultural and political value fully emerge. This value resides in their inexhaustible diversity, in contrast to the one-dimensionality of modernism. Cervantes and Shakespeare, Balzac and Tolstoy, Grimmelshausen and Gottfried Keller, Gorky, Thomas and Heinrich Mann – all these can appeal to readers drawn from a broad cross-section of the people because their works permit access from so many different angles. The large-scale, enduring resonance of the great works of realism is in fact due to this accessibility, to the infinite multitude of doors through which entry is possible. The wealth of the characterization, the profound and accurate grasp of constant and typical manifestations of human life is what produces the great progressive reverberation of these works. The process of appropriation enables readers to clarify their own experiences and understanding of life and to broaden their own horizons. A living form of humanism prepares them to endorse the political slogans of the Popular Front and to comprehend its political humanism. Through the mediation of realist literature the soul of the masses is made receptive for an understanding of the great, progressive and democratic epochs of human history. This will prepare it for the new type of revolutionary democracy that is represented by the

¹⁵ The plural formulation 'It may be left to the Eislers . . .' provoked Brecht to write the following *Minor Correction*: 'In the debate on Expressionism in *Das Wort* something has happened in the heat of battle that stands in need of a minor correction. Lukács has been wiping the floor, so to speak, with my friend Eisler, who, incidentally, is hardly anyone's idea of a pale aesthete. It appears that Eisler has failed to exhibit the pious reverence towards the cultural heritage expected from the executors of a will. Instead he just rummaged around in it and declined to take everything into his possession. Well, it may be that, as an exile, he is not in a position to lug so much stuff' around with him. However, perhaps I may be allowed a few comments on the formal aspects of the incident. Reference was made to "the Eislers", who were alleged to be doing, or not doing, something or other. In my opinion, the Lukácses ought to refrain from using such plurals when in fact there is only one Eisler among our musicians. The millions of white, yellow and black workers who have inherited the songs Eisler wrote for the masses will undoubtedly share my opinion here. But in addition there are all sorts of experts on music who think highly of Eisler's works, in which, so they tell me, he magnificently builds on and extends the cultural heritage of German music, and they would be very confused if the German émigrés should seek to outdo the seven cities of Greece, who quarrelled about which of them had produced a single Homer, by allowing themselves to start boasting that they had seven Eislers.' When the essay was revised for republication in book-form (Aufbau, Berlin 1948) Lukács rewrote the sentence to read 'It may be left to Eisler and Bloch . . .', while in vol. 4 *Probleme des Realismus*, Luchterhand 1971, we find: 'It may be left to Eisler . . .'

Popular Front. The more deeply anti-Fascist literature is embedded in this soil, the better able it will be to create contrasting types of good and evil, models of what should be admired and what hated – and the greater will be its resonance among the people.

In contrast to this, it is but a very narrow doorway which leads to Joyce or the other representatives of avant-garde literature: one needs a certain 'knack' to see just what their game is. Whereas in the case of the major realists, easier access produces a richly complex yield in human terms, the broad mass of the people can learn nothing from avant-garde literature. Precisely because the latter is devoid of reality and life, it foists on to its readers a narrow and subjectivist attitude to life (analogous to a sectarian point of view in political terms). In realism, the wealth of created life provides answers to the questions put by the readers themselves – life supplies the answers to the questions put by life itself! The taxing struggle to understand the art of the 'avant-garde', on the other hand, yields such subjectivist distortions and travesties that ordinary people who try to translate these atmospheric echoes of reality back into the language of their own experience, find the task quite beyond them.

A vital relationship to the life of the people, a progressive development of the masses' own experiences – this is the great social mission of literature. In his early works Thomas Mann found much to criticize in the literature of Western Europe. It is no accident that his objections to the problematic nature and remoteness from life of many modern works were counter-balanced by his indication of an alternative creative ideal, in his description of the Russian literature of the nineteenth century as 'sacred'.¹⁶ What he had in mind was this very same life-creating, popular progressiveness.

The Popular Front means a struggle for a genuine popular culture, a manifold relationship to every aspect of the life of one's own people as it has developed in its own individual way in the course of history. It means finding the guidelines and slogans which can emerge out of this life of the people and rouse progressive forces to new, politically effective activity. To understand the historical identity of the people does not of course, imply an uncritical attitude towards one's own history – on the contrary, such criticism is the necessary consequence of real insight into one's own history. For no people, and the Germans least of all, has succeeded in establishing progressive democratic forces in a perfect

¹⁶ Lukács is evidently referring to the celebrated discussion on the value of literature in *Tomio Kröger*.

form and without any setbacks. Criticism must be based, however, on an accurate and profound understanding of the realities of history. Since it was the age of imperialism which created the most serious obstacles to progress and democracy in the spheres of both politics and culture, a trenchant analysis of the decadent manifestations of this period – political, cultural and artistic – is an essential prerequisite for any breakthrough to a genuinely popular culture. A campaign against realism, whether conscious or not, and a resultant impoverishment and isolation of literature and art is one of the crucial manifestations of decadence in the realm of art.

In the course of our remarks we have seen that we should not simply accept this decline fatalistically. Vital forces which combat this decadence not just politically and theoretically, but also with all the instruments at the disposal of art, have made and continue to make themselves felt. The task that faces us is to lend them our support. They are to be found in a realism which has true depth and significance.

Writers in exile, together with the struggles of the Popular Front in Germany and other countries, have inevitably strengthened these positive forces. It might be thought sufficient to point to Heinrich and Thomas Mann, who, starting from different assumptions, have steadily grown in stature in recent years both as writers and thinkers. But we are concerned here with a broad trend in anti-Fascist literature. We need only compare Feuchtwanger's *Sons* with his *History of the Jewish Wars* to see the strenuous efforts he is making to overcome the subjectivist tendencies which distanced him from the masses, and to assimilate and formulate the real problems of ordinary people. Just a short while ago Alfred Döblin gave a talk in the Paris SDS¹⁷ in which he declared his commitment to the historical and political relevance of literature and in which he saw a realism of the kind practised by Gorky as exemplary – an event of no little importance for the future course of our literature. In the third number of *Das Wort*, Brecht published a one-act playlet (*The Informer*)¹⁸ in which he turns to what is for him a novel, highly differen-

¹⁷ SDS – *Der Schutzverband deutscher Schriftsteller* (Association for the Protection of the Rights of German Authors) where Döblin gave an important lecture *Die deutsche Literatur (im Ausland seit 1933)* in January 1938.

¹⁸ A scene from *Furcht und Elend des dritten Reichs*, trans. by Eric Bentley as *The Private Life of the Master Race*. Brecht's reaction to Lukács's praise has been recorded in his *Arbeitsjournal* (vol. I, p. 22): 'Lukács has welcomed *The Informer* as if I were a sinner returning to the bosom of the Salvation Army. At last something taken from life itself! He has overlooked the montage of 27 scenes and the fact that it is really no more than a catalogue of gestures, such as the gesture of falling silent, of looking over one's shoulder, of terror, etc.; in short, the gestures of life under a dictatorship'.

triated and subtle form of realism as a weapon in the struggle against the inhumanity of Fascism. By depicting the fates of actual human beings, he provides a vivid image of the horrors of the Fascist reign of terror in Germany. He shows how Fascism destroys the entire foundations of the human community, how it destroys the trust between husbands, wives and children, and how in its inhumanity it actually undermines and annihilates the family, the very institution it claims to protect. Along with Feuchtwanger, Döblin and Brecht one could name a whole series of writers – the most important and the most talented we have – who have adopted a similar strategy, or are beginning to do so.

But this does not mean that the struggle to overcome the anti-realist traditions of the era of imperialism is over. Our present debate shows, on the contrary, that these traditions are still deeply rooted in important and loyal supporters of the Popular Front whose political views are unquestionably progressive. This is why such a forthright but comradely discussion was of such vital importance. For it is not just the masses who learn through their own experiences in the class-struggle; ideologists, writers and critics, have to learn too. It would be a grave error to overlook that growing trend towards realism which has emerged from the experiences of fighters in the Popular Front and which has even affected writers who favoured a very different approach before their emigration.

To make this very point, to reveal some of the intimate, varied and complex bonds which link the Popular Front, popular literature and authentic realism, is the task I have set out to accomplish in these pages.

Translated by Rodney Livingstone