NINETEEN FIFTY-ONE

A Survey of Cultural Trends of the Year

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Britannica Book of the Year 1952 (Chicago/Toronto/London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.), xxii–xxxi

I

One of the most notable characteristics of the literary and artistic scene during the year 1951, not merely in Western Europe but beyond its confines, was the revival of religion, in the widest as well as the narrowest sense of the word, as a central issue of discussion. Historians of opinion have often noted the fact that periods of doubt and scepticism, of criticism and analysis directed against the dogmatic certainties and orthodoxies of previous periods, are as a rule followed by new periods of faith and irrationalism.

But as a rule the ages of faith are to some degree also those of reason; there is a dominant opinion, there is also an opposition; during the ascendancy of sceptical rationalism, the voices of anti-rationalist faith are never wholly silent, and, during the rise of orthodoxy or emotional abandonment to ideals conceived as either above or at any rate beside empirical or rational enquiry, are seldom allowed to occur unchallenged but are compelled to run the gauntlet of what is usually described as radical or left-wing opposition.

Nevertheless, during the year, it appeared almost as if the rising preoccupation with religious or quasi-religious – metaphysical and eschatological – issues was becoming almost a monopoly. Who were the most discussed authors in Western Europe in the course of the year? In England they were, among the novelists, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene. These were authors noted not merely for the fact that both were members of the Roman Catholic Church, but because the issues with which they dealt were concerned with specifically religious problems and provided by them with specifically religious solutions. Indeed, the popularity of Graham Greene – his novels, stories and articles for journals – or of broadcasts and films directly or indirectly founded upon his works seemed to derive as much from the issues with which he

dealt as the purely literary skill and depth with which he dealt with them.

Similarly there was interest in the work of Herbert Butterfield, because he was an avowedly Christian historian who discussed historical and metaphysical problems which occupied the thoughts of many persons; and this was one of the most powerful causes of the continued interest displayed in Europe, and far more deeply in the US, in the views and writings of Arnold Toynbee.

Among poets and essayists, T. S. Eliot occupied an easily pre-eminent place, again perhaps as much because in his essays and last plays he dealt with what were to him the most fundamental issues – the condition and destiny of the individual soul – which now after many years had become a topic which captured the intellectual imagination of the general public to a greater degree than at any time, perhaps, during the last two centuries. Some among the most distinguished literary critics in England – C. S. Lewis, Lord David Cecil, Basil Willey – were writers, if not on religious topics, at any rate with much implicit religious feeling. Even the purveyors of lighter forms of art – the popular playwright Christopher Fry, for example – found themselves treating religious issues not so much because of any obvious pre-occupation with them as because of a sensibility of the currents of thought and sentiment, a natural inclination responsive to the nature of the public interest of the times.

In France the works of François Mauriac had long been the centre of growing interest and fascination: his articles in *Le Figaro* had about them a magistral quality possessed, perhaps, by no other public prophet; and the mere fact that he was able to denounce Jean Cocteau's last play – *Bacchus* – as heretical, and formally to read the author out of the Church, was an event scarcely conceivable in the France, let us say of twenty years before. It seemed almost as if with André Gide and Paul Valéry the last great secular voices of France had ceased to speak; for Paul Claudel, their great Catholic friend and **[xxiii]** violent opponent, had won; Cocteau replied to Mauriac in a tone certainly as serious as that in which his religious views had been impugned. It is scarcely conceivable that such an exchange on such a topic could have occurred, with such solemnity, between, say, Valéry and Charles Péguy. Yet Mauriac was able to thunder; Cocteau replied with great earnestness and dignity; the public was profoundly interested.

And although the Existentialists, who still to some degree dominated the literary and intellectual scene, were by no means all formal adherents of established faiths, yet even the atheistical Jean-Paul Sartre or Simone de Beauvoir dealt with the human predicament in a sense which nearly touched the attitude of those to whom metaphysical and religious issues were of the deepest concern. And this, of course, was even more true of such religious thinkers as Gabriel Marcel, one of the most widely admired of French *penseurs*.

It is what Luther called the human abyss that was the central topic of the most prominent writers of France, and those who did not deal with this – say Valéry or Jean Giraudoux, or even the celebrated Alain, who died in 1951 – seemed more out of date, less relevant to contemporary discussion, than Pascal or Renan or Péguy. The plays of Marcel, the plays and philosophical essays of Sartre and Albert Camus, the philosophical essays of such writers as Jacques Maritain or Jean Wahl and Kojève, the interest increasingly taken in the Russian theological essayist Nikolay Berdyaev, or the Jewish theologian Martin Buber, the brooding presence of Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, and behind them the greater figures of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, dominated French intellectual circles to the relative exclusion of older liberal and humanistic writing.

Against this, virtually the only voices which were raised loudly were those of the Communists, who, unlike the more rationalist Marxists of an earlier day, preached a fanatical counter-religion of their own. The celebrated Gallic spirit – secular, detached, humane, sceptical and concerned with the empirical facts and the lives of men on earth – the spirit of Voltaire and Diderot, of Michelet and Taine, of Flaubert and Proust, seemed temporarily in abeyance. Socialism, liberalism, rationalism had won their victories and become absorbed into the texture of normal experience and lost their cutting edge. The wave of metaphysical spiritualism seemed to have engulfed all or at any rate much of what was most gifted and expressive in France, or temporarily obscured from view other tendencies which might have been stirring.

In the US, a similar phenomenon was observable. The writings of W. H. Auden and Reinhold Niebuhr enjoyed a great vogue; it was the saintly life and faith of Albert Schweitzer, not his music, that was mainly responsible for his sudden vast celebrity in

America; novels which dealt with religious subjects, at all levels of artistic skill, seemed assured of wider circulation than those concerned with almost any other topic. Such an indicator of popular taste as *Life* magazine contained a greater proportion of writing on religious and metaphysical topics, supplied now and then by Waugh and Greene, and less directly by the mild humanism of F. S. C. Northrop, than it would have done, say, a decade earlier. An attack on Yale University for alleged deficiencies in its religious instruction assured its author greater fame than the treatment of any social or political topic.

This was naturally added to by the fact that, on the continent of Europe, the parties which held power, in Germany and Italy, for example, and entered into the coalitions which governed France, were avowedly religious, as they could scarcely have been fifteen or twenty years earlier; and this fact, which in certain respects resembled similar political developments during the nineteenth century, differed from them in that the anticlerical opposition in the West did not seem to possess that ancient vehemence which served to throw the issue into such violent relief during the great kulturkampf battles in France, Germany and Italy in the last century.

This growth in the religious outlook did not, as in the past, take the form either of the consolations of religion supplied to a distraught and despairing generation which had found its older values too easily flouted and overthrown by the brutality and moral cynicism of the day, nor yet of some rigorous hierarchical discipline offering a strong and secure asylum for those who found it difficult or impossible to withstand the chaos and fury of the world by their own unaided resources. Although the religious revival might indeed have had one or both of these effects, the form which it took was something relatively new, and owed more to Dostoevsky than to the orthodox doctrinaires of any of the Churches. For what the books and essays and plays and histories of the return to Christianity tended to stress was the seamier side of life, to paint with a realism as grisly and violent as any employed by the 'slice of life' writers of an earlier, more atheistical generation the least attractive aspects of social relationships and individual experience.

In a sense, this attitude was the successor to, and no less sophisticated and 'highbrow' than, the two other great movements

which had dominated modern times – psychoanalysis and Marxism. And like them it conveyed to its followers the impression that it too was cutting through the mere surface of the [xxiv] phenomena to the hideous depths below, which must be faced because they were real, because they existed, and exercised an influence more decisive upon the course of human life than the more superficial phenomena which composed the worlds of science or common sense. And in the very chaos, irrationality and violent malformations and morbid growths which were thus rendered patent to the shrinking eye of the unhappy but fascinated observer, they discovered not the inexorable laws of psychology nor the inevitable laws or social development, nor the material for any other positive science, but the inscrutable workings of God.

In a sense this was the modern theodicy which, by stripping away the rationalisations and other constructions both of the intellect and of the imagination with which human beings had sought to screen themselves from the truth, sought to discredit reason and empirical methods in order to make room for faith as alone being strong enough to discover meaning and purpose in the abounding folly, weakness and vice which any unflinching analysis was bound to reveal in the contemporary scene; to restore faith in God and the spiritual government of the universe by making the light shine out of the darkness; the more inspissated the darkness, the brighter by comparison the saving light without which the darkness could not be judged or described or analysed at all.

It was a sign of the times when so 'progressive' and avant-garde a publication as the *Partisan Review* in New York City, for instance, devoted itself to the examination of its writers' attitude to religion and printed the works of Jaspers. To any observer dispassionately considering the artistic and intellectual scene of 1951 – when Henri Matisse completed his murals in Vence chapel, William Faulkner wrote a novel with a religious motif, Gian-Carlo Menotti wrote an opera (for television) on a religious topic, the newer popular films dealt with biblical subjects and the conversions of former Communists to the Roman Catholic Church became events of daily expectation – it appeared that this mood was not a simple 'escapism' after the disenchantment and failure of energy and morale resulting from the destruction wrought by the war, but sprang from some deeper cause, in this case perhaps the failure of misinterpreted psychologies or a belated reply to Marxism; for the

Marxist movement had during the last twenty years been gradually changing from a characteristically critical, rationalistic Victorian doctrine, appealing to intellectuals – a sophisticated and elaborate theory, full of subtleties, and above all with a severely scientific tone – into the simple, dogmatic, fanatical faith, relying upon endless repetition of simple formulae and the worship of visible symbols of sanctity and power.

In response to Communism of this type, as practised in the Soviet Union, and imposed upon the satellites in a very crude and all too visible fashion, there was bound to spring up a counter-faith of greater complexity, refinement, psychological depth and artistic quality, in response to the freer and more many-sided and sensitive civilisation of the West. Traditional religion provided something far stronger and more genuine – and even more anti-rational – than the ersatz faiths of the 1920s and 1930s. What seemed certain at the moment was a continuing process of slow pulverisation of all intermediate positions – of all the older forms of liberalism, secularism and tolerant humanism – between the upper and the nether millstones of the rival religions which appeal to civilised mankind. The phenomena described were, of course, not necessarily symptomatic of the prevailing views of the majorities of the populations of the Western countries; they represented at most the strongest tendencies of those literary and artistic elites which set the tone in such societies. But it is in this context that the literary and artistic life of the year 1951 should be surveyed.

II

The change of atmosphere from the first three or four decades of the century became peculiarly noticeable when contrasted with such works about the comparatively recent past as R. F. Harrod's biography of Lord Keynes and, even more, N. G. Annan's life of Sir Leslie Stephen, both of which appeared in the course of the year. In both these works a world is revealed whose principal ideals were the pursuit of knowledge, the contemplation of interesting and beautiful things for their own sake, the cultivation of personal relationships, personal sincerity driven to an almost fanatical degree, with, above all, avoidance of anything remotely savouring of the pursuit of worldly success, or of rhetoric, or of betrayal of private to public values in any form. Despite the fact

that Keynes's world was in open rebellion against that of Leslie Stephen, it shared with it its sense of revolt against the accepted institutions of the great Philistine establishment into which they were both born, and both rejected in their various ways the religious and the political orthodoxies of their time for the values of private worlds and the cultivation of artistic and personal ideals. The death of André Gide, who was himself the high priest of a movement in France not dissimilar to this, in which the worship of beauty and of personal relationships and insistence on scrupulous sincerity and candour in both had taken the place of other social and religious values, served to underline the great distance stretching between the universe of that distinguished writer and the modern world into which he had survived. The year, too, saw the death of the essayist Alain, **[xxv]** whose detachment and sceptical pacifism in their turn contrasted oddly with the new preoccupations of the contemporary generation in the major European countries.

In France such recognised and distinguished writers as Georges Duhamel and Jules Romains, as well as authors of the second rank such as Claude Farrère, Pierre Benoît and Paul Morand, continued to write; the works of Colette and Jacques Chardonne, as well as those of Paul Valéry, Valéry Larbaud and André Maurois, appeared in collected editions, but it was not they who set the tone. This was done to a far greater degree by Mauriac, who was the most distinguished representative of Catholic orthodoxy in France; by Jean-Paul Sartre, whose play *Le Diable et le Bon Dieu* enhanced his already dominant reputation as the most ingenious, penetrating and significant writer in France, and perhaps in Western Europe – in the sense that all the most typical tendencies of the time seemed to be, at times perversely and deliberately, but always sharply, focused in his work, and presented to the public with exceptional professional expertise. He was the leader, quite apart from his specific philosophical point of view, of all those who, in contrast with anti-political revolt, writers of an earlier generation, preached the duty of total self-commitment – the necessity of taking up a position, however personal and individual, but nevertheless a position involving responsibility, in relation to the religious, the political, the social and metaphysical tendencies of the times. In this sense, Albert Camus in his new *L'Homme révolté*, although he was perhaps a better writer, clearly followed

Sartre's intellectual leadership. So also Julien Gracq, despite his tendency to surrealism, nevertheless bowed sufficiently to the spirit of the times to make his latest allegory avowedly political. This writer rejected the Goncourt prize awarded to him, as a protest against literary academies and prizes as such, because they made for intellectual bondage and mediocrity, and stifled and corrupted much original enterprise.

This mood, sometimes earnest and almost hopeful, at other times cynical, preoccupied and engaged in emphasising the hopeless and often revolting aspects of the contemporary human tragedy, was seldom one of desire to withdraw from the scene. The inevitability of involvement was, in France, stressed explicitly or else automatically taken for granted. In this atmosphere, charged with the sense of the importance of social and political reality, the works of Victor Hugo were duly rediscovered and overpraised; the German Romantic philosophers who were themselves preoccupied with political issues, such as Hegel and Fichte, were being studied afresh. The darker living German metaphysicians such as Jaspers and Heidegger, continued to exercise a considerable influence. What was conspicuously lacking in the realm at any rate of belles-lettres was the traditional French 'classical spirit' – lucid, ironical, detached, critical, intellectually firm, free from the clouds of tormented emotion and the mixture of mysticism and metaphysics characteristic of the Germans, and scarcely able to articulate its broken vision by means of that luminous measured prose which had once been the glory of France. Such elegant trifles as those published by Louise de Vilmorin, or the poetry of such writers of genius as Paul Eluard and Jules Supervielle, or such plays, still within the classical French tradition, as those of Jean Anouilh, could scarcely be said to have secured the continuity of French letters. The central current remained dark and turbid. The only great author apparently untouched by it in France was André Malraux, who did not produce an original work in the course of the year to compare with his magnificent masterpiece, *The Psychology of Art*, of two years before.

The situation was somewhat different in England, which retained a greater degree of continuity with its own sane and sober past. Despite the impact made by Graham Green's *The End of the Affair*, which dealt with the themes, now common in the work of

this author, of infidelity, corruption and salvation by faith (the novel curiously resembled the earlier formulas of Ernest Hemingway, save that for Communism the Roman Catholic faith is substituted), there appeared a number of civilised and agreeable novels by Nancy Mitford and Enid Bagnold, Hester Chapman and Julia Strachey, L. P. Hartley and Anthony Powell, a more considerable work by Victor Pritchett, a novel by J. C. Powys in his accustomed strain, as well as one by Ivy Compton-Burnett, who pursued her thin but pure vein of gold, in apparent detachment from the gusts and waves of the contemporary zeitgeist. It was not a time of great imaginative masterpieces. As for poetry, W. H. Auden published his *Nones*, and a poem entitled 'The Chimeras', which gave renewed evidence of his magnificent gifts.

The stream of autobiographies and memoirs continued unabated. The most interesting among these was Stephen Spender's *World within World*, in which, with his accustomed candour, slowly, and without elegance, but with a direct vision of the object (which he possesses almost uniquely in the modern world), he described his youth in the literary and artistic world of the 1930s. It was perhaps the best book yet produced by this distinguished poet and critic, and was widely acclaimed and attacked for much the same reasons as similar confessions, for which Rousseau set the fashion, had been praised and assailed, and invariably survived the attacks of their detractors. Sir Norman Angell published the story of his life, and thereby of a world which now seemed remoter than that of the eighteenth century. Katherine Mansfield's letters to her husband, J. Middleton Murry, saw the light during the year, and also **[xxvi]** wore the air of extreme remoteness. Nicolas Nabokov, the composer, published a delightful book of partly social, partly musical reminiscences, and his cousin, the most brilliant of novelists and poets, Vladimir Nabokov, published an account of his early life in Russia and in England, with a gay, boldly original and sometimes acutely poignant virtuosity, which he alone possesses among modern writers. The correspondence of Paul Claudel and André Suarès was published in France.

Julien Green published the fifth volume of his *Journal*; a remarkable collection of essays on contemporary Italy, by the Catholic writer A C. Jemolo, saw the light; Ezra Pound's *Letters*

proved an extremely arresting commentary on the literary and spiritual issues with which they dealt; by comparison with this the collection of reflections by the ageing American Spanish *penseur* George Santayana appeared a trifle exhausted. Volumes of poetry were published by Walter de la Mare, David Gascoyne, Conrad Aiken, Robert Penn Warren and Robert Lowell. These were distinguished and sometimes beautiful, but made no new summer in the field of English poetry. Nor was the field of imaginative literature made wider by the latest works of the highly competent and readable Alberto Moravia or even by Carlo Levi, or by J. P. Marquand's or Faulkner's new novels, or the latest work of John Dos Passos, who continued along predictable and astonishingly conventional lines. There was greater life and originality in *La cometa* by R. Bacchelli, a still consistently under-estimated Italian novelist.

In Germany nothing of notable interest appeared; apart from the *pièces justificatives* of those who somewhat unconvincingly claimed to preserve their own integrity under the Nazis, and the half-apologetic literature seeking less directly to justify general German behaviour during this period. German literature seemed to have contracted into a thin and scarcely notable trickle. Ernst von Salomon, an old pre-Nazi Fascist writer, produced a new work along his old violent, nihilistic lines, a standpoint which, however exciting its effect in the early 1930s, was not merely a symptom that the hysterical irrationalism of this type was not yet dead in Germany. Hans Carossa produced a slight but charming book. Ernst Curtius published a new volume of critical essays; these were sensitive and civilised, but added little to their author's already deserved reputation as one of the few critics of European stature. Mario Praz published a collection of characteristically brilliant but uneven quality; critical writings appeared in England by Frank Leavis, Percy Newby and Charles Morgan; and there was a collection of occasional pieces by E. M. Forster of charm, beauty and depth, which, because of the dearth of writings from his pen, was a literary event in itself.

In the US, Edmund Wilson, perhaps the most distinguished of all literary critics, published a collected edition of his comments on life and letters in the 1930s and 1940s, and there appeared a collection of essays by Lionel Trilling of striking interest and distinction. William Empson published one of his characteristically

meticulous and original analyses of the language of poetry. In France Jean Paulhan produced an interesting essay on aesthetics. The celebrated novelist Sinclair Lewis died in the course of the year, and brought to memory a genre very different from the fashion of the day; as a writer he had long outlived himself. Eudora Welty and Truman Capote published novels which achieved excellence in a style which had become commoner in America than it was in Europe, in which technical perfection, a remarkable degree of professional skill and a sense of métier (which European writers all too often despise) did something to compensate for the absence of sufficient content to sustain so elaborate a vehicle.

In this respect, the *New Yorker* magazine (whose editor and founder, Harold Ross, a figure of great originality and life, died during the year) had created a new category of imaginative writing – its short stories were better built and better written than similar stories in Europe; they seemed to some to lack inner life, and indeed appeared often not to have quite enough to say; but their emergence as a specific literary genre was a phenomenon worthy of notice in itself, and did much to raise literary standards in all English-speaking countries from the chaos and boneless structure into which the fear of formalism, which developed in the 1930s, had threatened to plunge young English and American writers.

III

The drama was going through a singularly fallow period. Apart from such established figures as Sartre and Cocteau in France, only Christopher Fry produced anything fresh. He seemed very much the Edmond Rostand of our day – light, gay, melodious, elegant, skilful, perhaps trivial. His plays in rhyme seemed neither intended, nor likely to achieve, immortality; they contributed to the trend towards the formally pleasing rather than the profound, the shapeless and the original, as a kind of light foil to set off the preoccupation with religious and metaphysical issues among the more serious. The best of modern actors, Louis Jouvet, died in the course of the year.

Even in the Soviet Union this mood of marking time prevailed. No new novels or poems appeared to excite even the normal extravagant praise of the orthodox party critics. The official head of Russian literature Aleksandr Fadeev, was engaged upon

rewriting his prize-winning novel, *The Young Guard*, in a manner de[xxvii]signed to correct errors and suitably to emphasise the role of the Communist party among wartime partisans; the more eminent V. Kataev was also busy rewriting his older works, now discovered to be inadequate. The themes officially laid down for writers were those of the 'battle for peace', denunciation of warmongering in the West, aggrandisement of the Russian and Soviet past, and epics of industrial and agricultural reconstruction. Creative activity appeared to be quiescent over the wide area of the Soviet Union.

In short, the literature produced in the course of the year, apart from the clear religious trend, lacked well-defined characteristics; the nostalgia and controlled despair and consciously temperate realism, as well as violent escapes into fantasy and pornography, of the immediate post-war years seemed to have ended; good authors were writing well, and inferior authors badly – but each was treading established paths, without any sense of new beginnings; 1951 was not a year likely to be notable in the literary histories of the future.

There were new scholarly editions of Montesquieu and Chateaubriand, of Hölderlin and Goethe, a new edition of the forgotten scientist and mathematician and *penseur* of the eighteenth century, G. C. Lichtenberg; the revision of the definitive edition of the works of Boswell was completed; Winston Churchill published two further volumes of his magnificent memoirs; Rear Admiral S. E. Morison continued his history of the naval war; much solid work was done on the papers and the life of Jefferson; an authoritative account of Palmerston's foreign policies was published by Sir Charles Webster; Austin Lane Poole published his long-awaited volume on English history from the Domesday book to Magna Carta; A. L. Rowse issued the first volume of his imaginative and scholarly survey of the age of Elizabeth; the end of the Austro-Hungarian empire was analysed with much learning by the German historians Hantsch and Muensch; Steven Runciman published the first volume of a history of the crusades; Bishop David Mathew published an elegant study of the age of Charles I, and B. H. G. Wormald a life of Clarendon; Julian Amery continued his life of Joseph Chamberlain; a number of scholarly studies of English literature during the Romantic age saw the light.

Two lives by Salvador de Madariaga and Waldon Frank, respectively, of the great liberator of Latin America, Simon Bolivar, were published to commemorate his centenary. Newton Arvin published the most distinguished of the many works which appeared to celebrate Herman Melville on the occasion of the centenary of the publication of *Moby-Dick*. The Italian counter-reformation received classical treatment in the hands of R. Quazzi. In Leningrad the distinguished but unfortunate E. Tarlé was compelled by the fiat of his Soviet critics to rewrite his life of Napoleon for the third time, in order to bring it into line with the prevailing dogma on the subject. UNESCO (the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) published an ambitious scheme for the production of a universal history, to be composed by an international committee divided into national subcommittees of historians – the resulting compilation to appear in various formats and successive abbreviations for the use of scholars, universities and schools of the world, in order to secure a uniform objective survey of history and counteract national prejudices.

IV

A number of interesting biographies and memoirs appeared. Beside the biographies of Lord Keynes and Leslie Stephen, there was a life of the humanitarian Labour politician Josiah Wedgwood by his niece, the gifted Veronica Wedgwood; there was a biography of Henry Irving by his grandson, and of David Lloyd George by his old friend and secretary of his cabinet Thomas Jones; the Duke of Windsor and General Omar N. Bradley published their memoirs, and Lord Sysonby, posthumously, his memories of three rulers. New and remarkable letters by Lady Hester Stanhope to a young man in whom she took an interest gave pleasure to a public for whom Arthur Bryant wrote his study of the English social and political scene under the Regency. There was a great outpouring of wartime memoirs, principally apologias for their activities in Hitler's regime by German diplomats; Herbert von Dirksen, E. H. von Weizsäcker, von Blücher and one or two other former minor Nazi officials sought to whitewash themselves and received condign treatment from the ruthless and unsparing pen of L. B. Namier.

An original and pungent set of lectures on American foreign policy by the US diplomat George Kennan made a deep impression: it held a plea for professional diplomacy as against the casual imposition of American ideals on peoples, and in situations, unsuited to them; it spoke in sorrow of the difficulties of democratic control of the process of conducting foreign relations. The diaries of James Forrestal, who had been US Secretary of Defense, contained much acute and controversial writing by a talented and very unusual man. A noble biography of the Swiss historian Jakob Burckhardt was launched by Werner Kaegi, and an interesting study of the young Ludwig Ranke was published by Von Laue. Edgar Lobel of Oxford published an exquisitely edited reconstruction of fragments of a newly discovered ancient Greek play; Sir Kenneth Clark published a beautifully written and justly admired work on the painter Piero della Francesca.

It was clear that the streams of pure scholarship **[xxviii]** were flowing once more. Long-term projects conceived on the grand scale were being launched, and an atmosphere of intellectual security and solid attention to detail prevailed. At the higher academic and intellectual levels there was an atmosphere of tranquillity for the first time since the end of the war.

V

But by far the richest harvest was to be found in the field of music. The greatest event of the year was the staging on 11 September, in Venice, of a new opera by Igor Stravinsky, *The Rake's Progress*, whose libretto was composed in English by the English poet W. H. Auden, assisted by Chester Kallman. It was an occasion of great social brilliance, and attracted the kind of attention which a new opera by Verdi or Wagner used to receive in the nineteenth century. There was a general agreement that the opera was a masterpiece – the music was limpid, elegant and inspired, and possessed that peculiar magical quality which Stravinsky's best works had never lacked. It seemed as if this composer had begun on that phase of austere and luminous creation, compounded of a blend of exquisite, serene and ironical melody and a spontaneous and arresting new kind of counterpoint, which sometimes qualifies the late phases of great artists, when the sensuousness of their middle works is vanishing, and a noble, transcendent, life-giving gaiety takes its place.

The year saw the death in California of Arnold Schoenberg, the founder of the twelve-tone scale – perhaps the most discussed composer of the age. Schoenberg's works, from which an *opus postumum* was performed in the course of the year, never became intelligible to the general public, and his final value awaited the verdict of posterity. But there is no doubt that he transformed the musical consciousness of his time, and, abandoning the late Wagnerian romanticism with which he began in his earlier, central European, phase, he created a new musical language, a new framework within which a whole new art of expression came into being, and commanded the most passionate, and at times fanatical, devotion of his followers, among whom there were several composers of undoubted genius. Whether or not Schoenberg himself was a great composer cannot be decided save by those who recognise no other master. But no critic competent to judge musical works would easily deny that title to Bela Bartók, who was deeply inspired by Schoenberg, or to Alban Berg, the lyrical and dramatic composer whose best opera, *Wozzeck*, was, amid much acclamation by the musical world, programmed both in London and in New York City in the course of the year. Schoenberg had among his disciples, too, the noble and austere composer Anton von Webern, the lively and interesting innovator Ernst Krenek, and many other musicians of varying gifts, temperaments and degrees of originality. Perhaps, like the composers of the Mannheim school of the eighteenth century, he was the cause of greater creative gifts in others than in himself; but his theories and his compositions, his gifts as a teacher, his self-denying devotion to his musical ideal, his very personality (about which there was hot controversy after the semibiographical sketch which, according to some, Thomas Mann had given of him in one of his last novels) created an abiding monument in musical history. With Bartók and Stravinsky he remained one of the greatest composers of the first half of the twentieth century.

There were a good many other musical events of interest and of value. There were two new works by Arthur Honegger, and a work entitled *Winter Campfire* – not heard in the West – by the still prodigiously creative Sergey Prokofiev; a dignified 'morality' opera entitled *The Pilgrim's Progress* by the ageing British composer Ralph Vaughan Williams; and, by him also, a cantata, *Sons of Light*. Benjamin Britten, still the most talented composer of opera in

Britain, conducted a performance of his *Billy Budd*, adapted by E. M. Forster from the story by Herman Melville. Like all the works of this musician, it overflowed with musical gifts, was at once original and echoing with eclectic reminiscences, and possessed exceptional skill in construction. Oddly enough, the Italian composer Shedins, apparently unaware of Britten's plans, also wrote a *Billy Budd* a year or so before; and this story was, during 1951, adapted for the stage in two versions: in these matters the zeitgeist seemed to operate with an almost pedantic promptness.

The Italian-American composer Gian Carlo Menotti produced an opera written for television, entitled *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, a fantasy on the journey of the Magi. An opera entitled *Incognita* by the celebrated musical historian and composer Egon Wellesz was produced at Oxford, and astonished its listeners by the fact that it was not atonal, as had been expected. The Spanish composer Roberto Gerhard wrote a gay work entitled *The Duenna*; and the German composers were again singularly prolific. Werner Egk, Carl Orff, Hermann Reutter and Karl Amadeus Hartmann poured forth works with a copiousness worthy of Hindemith himself. A somewhat more interesting composer also continued to produce work of remarkable lucidity and elegance – the German-Russian composer Boris Blacher, of whom much was expected. In the US new works were written by Roy Harris and the very gifted Lukas Foss.

Beyond the 'iron curtain', besides Prokofiev, there appeared twenty-four preludes and fugues for the piano by Dmitry Shostakovich. The unfortunate composer was once more called to order for incurable formalism and an unlucky inability to escape Western influences. **[xxix]**

The ancient war horses of the regime, Dmitry Kabalevsky and Herman Zhukovsky, produced routine works – the latter not without sharp political criticism. Czechoslovak music, which seemed promising both before and after the war, had been subtly flattened out by the new regime, and the spate of such works as *Hands Off Korea*, a *Cantata for Gottwald* and so forth were credibly reported to possess no musical merit. Somewhat exotic works, performed in Paris, by the Russian émigré composers Ivan Wyschnegradsky and Maria Scriabin (daughter of the celebrated

composer Alexander Scriabin and presumably a relation of V. M. Molotov)[1] left both the critics and public totally perplexed.

Interesting books on music were published: a posthumous volume by Schoenberg; authoritative studies of Schubert; and a collection of critical essays by Virgil Thomson, who, after the death of the gifted English composer and writer Constant Lambert, stood out as one of the most arresting contemporary critics of music in the Western world.

The greatest loss in the world of musical interpretation was the death of Artur Schnabel, one of the greatest musicians, and the foremost player of Beethoven, of his day. As teacher and player he possessed a moral and intellectual authority in the musical world which was equalled perhaps only by that of Pablo Casals.

The number of musical festivals in Europe and America was once again evidence of the fact that music, or at any rate the performance of it, was enjoying a flowering unlike that of any other art. Not only the great festivals of Edinburgh, Salzburg, Perpignan and Aix-en-Provence, but at least a dozen others both in Europe and America, were occasions for a great volume of music both old and new, performed with a quality which was steadily rising. A work entitled *Polyphonie X* by Pierre Boulez evoked protests from the audience at the Donaueschingen festival – a rare occasion on which a musical audience was not sufficiently cowed by what appeared to it cacophony to give open expression to the violence of its sentiments. There was a festival in Tiberias of Israeli music. Behind the 'iron curtain' an opera composed by Paul Dessau, with libretto by Bert Brecht, was given in Berlin. This work, however, was condemned as insufficiently conformist.

Arturo Toscanini conducted a series of incomparable concerts in New York City. Toscanini's style appears to have risen in his deep old age towards a luminous and transcendental ideal, and while the unique combination of absolute discipline, ceaseless electric tension, noble breadth and depth, and an almost superhuman freedom from self-indulgence had, if anything, reached an even higher level, the Italianisms – the fiery Italian rhetoric, the tendency towards the operatic – had altogether fused away.

[1] [Molotov was born Scriabin, but was not related to the composer.]

The year also saw the passing of three celebrated conductors. The Dutchman Willem Mengelberg was once a singularly dynamic and vigorous figure in the world of music, but his collaboration with the German invaders of his country had plunged him into a disgrace from which he never completely recovered. Fritz Busch, with his brother Adolf Busch, belonged to a musically gifted German family; after raising the performances of the Dresden opera to a great height, he then performed the same services for the Glyndebourne festivals in Britain; without attaining to genius, he was a conductor of very great distinction. The third conductor to die in the course of the year was Sergey Koussevitzky, who conducted with all the charm and *douceur de vivre* of the Russia of the *ancien régime*. He made the Boston orchestra one of the best bodies of musicians in the world. Without attaining to the heights of a Toscanini or an Otto Klemperer, he conducted gracefully and delightfully, and with unparalleled pleasure to himself and his audiences. Nicholas Medtner, who died in March, belonged to this culture too. He was a Russian composer and pianist of singular sincerity and charm, whose gifts were less recognised than they deserved, and who was perhaps the last representative of the great Russian school of composition to which Nicolas Rimsky-Korsakov and Sergey Rachmaninoff still belonged, and from which Stravinsky and Sergey Prokofiev represented a bold and successful rebellion. During his last years he attracted the interest of an Indian potentate who subsidised his concerts and founded a Medtner society to record his works.

While no specific, powerful new trend was discernible in musical composition, the variety, life and sheer quantity of composition was at this moment so great as to justify belief that there was beginning a musical renaissance, even if only of an Alexandrian and derivative, rather than a wholly original, kind. The US, with its 702 symphony orchestras, was in a unique position to commission and perform the works of the young composers.

VI

In the other arts there was relatively little to report. The Italian school of films, which two or three years earlier presented the most creative experiment at that moment in progress in the world, was worthily represented by the film *Miracle in Milan* (produced by Vittorio de Sica), which, like the earlier films of this school, was

filled with progressive liberal humanism – a kind of artistic reflection of the liberal socialism of the Italian non-Communist left-wing intelligentsia.

Apart from a sensitive, and almost over-tragic, Swedish film based on Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, nothing appeared worthy of exceptional note, although **[xxx]** a great standard of technical excellence now seemed assured in the major countries of the West, particularly in British documentary films. Perhaps the best of such films were the Swiss film *Four in a Jeep* and Jean Renoir's poetical *River*; the American *Death of a Salesman* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* translated the precise qualities of these plays efficiently and not altogether unmemorably into the medium of the screen. But the popular films of the year, responding to the religious trends, were such vast and tasteless shows as *David and Bathsheba*, *Samson and Delilah*, *Quo Vadis* and *Fabiola*, which precisely corresponded to the vast, harmless, religious novels and literary standards of the type of *The Robe* or *The Big Fisherman* or Francis Cardinal Spellman's *The Foundling*, deeply enjoyed by vast numbers of readers in the US and Europe.

VII

The greatest show of the year was the Festival of Britain, in which an attempt was made to paint a national autobiography. The pavilions on the South Bank of the Thames river were built in what was for Britain a daring and elegant modernity; the use also of a decorative 'skylon' – a stylised lozenge pointing upward from the centre of the exhibition – was a worthy tribute to the uselessness and beauty of objects made for their own sakes. There were distinguished sculptures by Henry Moore and others to decorate the exhibition. The progress of the sciences and the crafts was recorded with some skill; there was an exhibition of sculpture in a portion of Battersea Park, and a number of minor musical festivals as well as that of Edinburgh celebrated the occasion. Ships carried microcosms of the exhibition to the coastal cities of the British Isles. But the most imaginative portion of the affair was the Pleasure Gardens in Battersea Park in London, which John Piper and Osbert Lancaster designed, and which provided a charming, ironical and delightfully witty evocation of the mid-Victorian period, when the original Great Exhibition, of which this marked the centenary, first came into being. The gloom of British

post-war depression was genuinely lightened by the dash and style and brilliant colour of the gay pastiche here provided with such gusto, and a half-sentimental, half-ironical nostalgia. The performances in the two theatres of the Pleasure Gardens carried on this quality of sophisticated satire. The number of visitors was great; and with the celebration of the second millenary of Paris, which caused that city to make an elegant display of its own unique and unsurpassable qualities, formed two bright centres in an otherwise somewhat sombre day.

VIII

It was a thin year in the visual arts. Expressionism and surrealism seemed enfeebled, and abstract painting and sculpture of various types appeared to dominate the field in a peaceful but not striking fashion. The greatest living painters were growing older, though not less productive, and genius seemed tardy among the young. Matisse completed the Vence chapel; Georges Rouault and Georges Braque were painting, but did not exhibit. The greatest of all, Pablo Picasso, still appeared to be in the state of marvellous gaiety and youthfulness, in which he had decorated clay and porcelain dishes, illustrated the *Natural History* of Buffon, painted satyrs on the rocks of the Riviera, and was obviously still launched upon a sea of delights and fantasies which sprang from his own unique vitality and perpetually self-renewing genius.

In the US attacks were launched upon an alleged propensity on the part of American museums for ‘left-wing’ art – a paradoxical development, inasmuch as such cultural ‘Bolshevism’ is, of all forms of art, the most abhorred and persecuted in Communist countries.

IX

In the sciences there was no spectacular advance although much progress was noted in mathematics. In medicine – notably in the field of antibiotics – scarcely a day passed but the hope of new drugs to cure ancient diseases was expressed both in general and in specialised publications.

New types of atomic weapons, particularly light missiles, suitable for use against troops in the field rather than cities and

great installations, were reported to have been perfected in the US, and to have transformed the art of war.

X

In philosophy the great chasm which still yawned between the empiricists and logicians of the English-speaking and Scandinavian countries, and the metaphysicians and quasi-religious thinkers and philosophical scholars of the German and Latin countries, continued to divide the two philosophical worlds as sharply as ever.

The more rigid forms of positivism were still melting, both in Britain and in the US, into a far more imaginative and sensitive, if not less empirical, instrument – and this appeared to be largely the effect of the oral doctrines of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, who died in Cambridge, England, in the course of the year, leaving disciples devoted to his memory and his methods to a degree of which no other philosopher of the day could boast. Wittgenstein had begun as a logician and the follower of Bertrand Russell, but at the height of his philosophical development altered his views, and practised a technique whereby more light was **[xxxi]** thrown upon some of the most tormenting problems of modern philosophy than the older and more mechanical methods had succeeded in doing. This new and more flexible method required qualities of imagination and insight, and even a kind of poetical genius, which Wittgenstein himself possessed to a degree not shared by even his most gifted disciples. His teaching was the most fruitful contribution to the abstract thought of the day made by any single human being. His influence, powerful enough already, seemed likely to spread further, as a result of the vigorous proselytising activities of his disciples. Otherwise, though much competent technical work was published by positivists and their allies, nothing of exceptional importance emerged.

In France Gaston Bachelard wrote imaginatively in his own unique manner about the philosophy of science; Wahl continued his metaphysical reflections, influenced by both Kierkegaard and Jaspers. The metaphysical works of the German Romantics received renewed attention. A philosophical congress held in the capital of Peru merely served to underline the distance which separates such philosophical analysts as A. J. Ayer of London – perhaps the most lucid exponent of modern positivism – from

such French metaphysicians as Gabriel Marcel, between whom there was scarcely any common ground for philosophical discussion, only some possibility of meeting in terms of social or political concepts which did not form the main interests of either of these thinkers.

In the Soviet Union the formal logicians, who in the guise of applied mathematicians had hitherto escaped the purges which had decimated other departments of knowledge, were finally, after two decades, attacked in their little enclave, together with the mathematicians proper. The practitioners of these abstract disciplines, which because of the relative lack of interference by the Communist party had, in the realms of both pure mathematics and mathematical logic, accomplished distinguished work in the past few decades, were informed that such formalism was highly prejudicial to the orthodoxies of Marxist doctrine. They were further informed that mere lip-service to the Marxist dialectic, and the conventional compliments to Stalin, would no longer be sufficient; they must transform their outlook radically, and bring their studies into line with the rest of the Soviet ideology. It was too early to tell whether or not this rang the final knell on the only independent abstract studies still pursued in the Soviet Union.

In chemistry a vigorous Marxist polemic against Western theories of valency was launched by the adherents of more materialist models. It was difficult to tell how far this was due to party pressure, to anxiety to conform to the party's demands on the part of the scientists, and how far to genuine addiction to the material models of the nineteenth century on the part of Russian chemists who, brought up in the tradition, were relatively insulated from Western influences.

XI

The year ended inconclusively, with the issues of foreign policy dominating over the struggle between the political parties in the US; with the Far East still in flames, the Middle East in a condition of mounting upheaval; with fear of general war on the whole abated, but the general outlook, particularly in view of Britain's semi-bankrupt economic position, far from bright. The news of the death of Henri Pétain, of Fritz Thyssen, who had supported Hitler, and of former Crown Prince Wilhelm von Hohenzollern ('Little Willie') served to comfort those who looked back upon the

past as to a brighter and securer day with the reflection that the confusions and moral delinquencies and great blunders of that time seemed to itself no less dark and fatal than the present to its inhabitants.

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Posted in Isaiah Berlin Online 12 January 2019