

ON THE COMPARISON OF LITERATURES

R. D. Jameson

I

The study of literature has undergone, during the last twenty years, changes as devastating and as revolutionary as the changes which, in the physical and biological sciences, have left the general public trembling with anticipation of still greater destruction to follow. Scholars who have followed the new methods and objectives in the study of literature and who have attempted to establish this study upon a new base now look back upon the foundation to which their discipline held so firmly for almost a century to discover that that foundation was composed of glittering sand. Very few of the principles we have been taught in the schools can still be accepted. With reference to our teachers and masters, we are in a position similar to that occupied in the eighteenth century by the generation which was then in opposition to the classical "rules" of literature. Lessing, attacking Gottsched, wrote, quoting an English predecessor, "His comments are either falsehoods or obvious truths not worth mentioning."

The critical formulations of the general interpreters, the Arnolds, the Wordsworths, the Taines, the Diltheys, and the Brandes can no longer be regarded as having reference to differences of opinion in the description of some external and absolute reality, the corpus of literature, the same for all men in all times but, like the corpus of physical and chemical data, subject to variant interpretations. The statements of these our critical masters are not formulae, existing in space, timeless and eternal, they are, rather, complex gesture, emotional symbols which serve to reduce the fever consequent upon the experience of literature. The statements are not formulations of thought, they are metaphors for feeling; useful in getting at the feeling of the critic, dangerous in interpreting the nature of poetry.

The work of the exegetes, except that it may be of use in illustrating the exegetical mettle, must also be discarded. As we have now come to see that words are symbols and that the meanings of these symbols have diverse factors which interlock in a manner excessively complex, inquiries into what are conventionally referred to as the "real" or "the certain" or the "clear", the "essential" or the "author's" meaning must be treated with considerable circumspection and countered with an inquiry as to which of the factors of meaning the exegete is, at that particular moment and in that particular mood, concerned with anatomising. And we must be on our guard against shifts in mood, for few scholars are as touchy as exegetes and few are as bland in their transition from an enquiry into meaning as intention to an enquiry into the meaning of the same passage regarded as tone. But we should have been warned. If after two hundred years of discussion the critics, men of at least average intelligence and probity, have offered us a half a dozen different meanings of a given passage, each of which is the "real, true and essential" meaning, we might give them the credit of admitting that these are the meanings they really found. We might have accepted meaning as multiform rather than uniform and we might have inquired before we were forced to do so by the demonstrations in Ogden and Richards *Meaning of Meaning* into the cause of this welter of exegetical difference. As in the case of the general interpreters, this welter of difference will be of use to us in offering a rough sketch of the complexities of meaning.

The position of historical accounts of literature, even in those rare cases where the accounts are not involved with the evolutionary postulates and organised under such infectious though dangerous symbols as the "Growth of Literature", is only little more advantageous than the positions discussed above. The chroniclers of literature who confine themselves to demonstrating with a clarity that could pass a court of probate, that document X was composed by author Y and published in the year N by publisher Z, have established facts which only other chroniclers or advocates in probate are likely to destroy. When the chroniclers go further and attempt to demonstrate that the said document X fell into the hands of and was read by Messers A, B, and C, it becomes necessary to inquire the senses in which the term "was read" is to be taken. The chroniclers who attempt to do more than construct a

chronicle—and which of them does not—must be accepted with great reserve, for at this point they make libertine uses of the errors of the general interpreters as well as those of the exegetes. The historians of national literatures who assume, for reasons not yet made clear, that political or even linguistic frontiers are barriers to phantasy must be regarded with even greater reserve.

It should become clear that the student of literature has before him a large and fascinating task: the reformulation of general interpretations in terms that will account for the differences and integrate them; the re-integration of exegeses in the process of charting multiform meanings of complex symbols; and finally, the re-thinking of the history of literature. But as this task cannot be accomplished until a large number of painstaking investigations have been carried out on all the levels of literary activity from linguistics through high criticism, the task is as formidable as it is fascinating.

II

For most readers the experience literature has to do with verbal symbols that stimulate imagination. For writers, literature is more complicated than this but for them too, phantasy—or if you prefer, day-dream, or autistic thinking, or imaginative structure, or feeling—is closely connected with verbal symbols. Although the difference is clear, it is still difficult to make an adequate logical distinction between the kind of phantasy that gets itself involved with words and those other kinds of phantasy that get themselves involved with colour or form or maps or machines or other forms of human activity that have to do, in ways that are still obscure, with the emotions and that form a projection of the personality into the chaos of experience. Nor, despite various brilliant studies that have appeared during the last ten years, is it quite clear to us what are the connections between words and phantasy or the processes whereby written words can stimulate the imagination of the reader and produce in him a state of mind that gives him satisfaction.

If it be admitted that there are connections, a comparison of national literatures becomes a comparison of national imaginations. A comparison of English, French, German and American literatures becomes a comparison of how the makers of these literatures have satisfied their temperamental needs and have, as a result of their conflict with the real world, produced, by means

of their imagination, a world that is more adequate. As literary boundaries are not determined by international treaties, a comparison of literatures must take into account the many invasions of one literature into the territory of another and the processes whereby one nation adapts and domesticates the imaginative structures of its neighbors.

The pleasure of literature is a secret pleasure and the needs it satisfies are personal needs. Both are protected by a sentinel line of inhibitions and justified by those ethical irrelevancies by which society protects itself against disruption. This is natural and should be expected. For those who are able in practical life to discharge the energies and emotions which get release when we read a book, books have no meaning. For them books are lies and all authors liars; and, if the rest of the world was not able to discharge those energies through reading, the social order would be in a worse state of disequilibrium than it now is. This is no aplogia for literature. It is both an obvious fact and an overlooked factor in social life. The number of books, magazines and newspapers published in any large nation in the course of a year is literally nameless; and if it could be computed it would appear as one of those numbers which can be manipulated only by professional mathematicians.

The production of books is an industry. The conversion of the pine forest to the sheet of paper; the melting and refinement of the red ore until it becomes a silvery slug of type; the transformation of the author's idea into a row of orderly words and the bringing of all of these together from all parts of the world and the distributing of them require the attention of millions of men and women. These attentions are paid for. There are few households in England, France, America or Germany, no matter how dire their economic necessities, that do not find means at some time of the day or night, to give themselves the pleasure of permitting printed words to pass through consciousness.

These printed words may be stupid, perverse, silly, superficial or in themselves insignificant. The professors of the schools and the serious thinkers who have undertaken to supply us with the higher literature of the contemporary world, may refuse to regard these words as literature at all. No matter how superficial these words may be in themselves, our need of them is not superficial. The experience of the printed word, the visual symbol of

ideas and emotions, appears to be an experience that is more necessary to all ranks of modern society than ever it has been before. The probability is that this necessity will increase. "General education," which had as its first objective the raising of all classes of society to a state of literacy, has been in operation for little more than 40 years. Some of us—whether with joy or with mute terror—are just beginning to understand the scope of that objective and its possible consequences. Ability is the mother of desire. Increased ability to read brings an increased demand for reading matter.

Whether what is read is good or bad, noble or ignoble, literature or trash are questions of small importance to the moment. The fact remains that the western world is producing and consuming printed words in staggering quantities and the first conclusion to be drawn from this fact is that literature brings some kind of satisfaction; that is, it satisfies some kind of a need. This need for having experiences with printed words is a fact of social and individual history as certain as the solar system and more real to most of us than a thunderbolt.

Because this need is both intimate and intransigent, it tends to disguise its nature. We keep in touch with the times and spend our pennies to read about the wedding of the beer baron's daughter or the divorce of the general's lady, facts which have as much and no less importance than the elopement of fair Helen with a pretty shepherd. Phantasy disguises itself as news and a band of men highly trained in their profession pick from the stream of actuality those elements of fact that satisfy this need. When we become self-conscious we divide our reading into two classes: fact and fiction without being able to distinguish carefully the steps whereby fact becomes fiction, that is, satisfies the needs of phantasy, or without being able to control the ways in which fiction gets fixed in our minds and supplies standards of action and satisfies real desires that are still imperfectly understood.

No professional psychologist is needed to point out that these desires are personal and intimate. No great experience with human nature is necessary to explain why we like to describe our reading with large and generous phrases or why we behave like neurotics when awkward critics attempt a particular analysis of the emotions which literature discharges and the mechanisms through which it operates. Were the emotions of literature less intimate and

less important to us we could understand them more easily. It is because they are important to our balance and stability, because through them we get away at increasingly frequent intervals from the discipline of industrialism that we are moved to protect them with so much peevishness. Criticism which began as an attempt to help authors to write more effectively and is now coming to its end as a kind of metaphysic with neither postulates nor method is under suspicion and not without reason. Too frequently critics have muddied the Pierian spring. Although the general reader will tolerate critics as long as they remain pleasantly vague and comforting, he hesitates to admit them into his corners of dream.

The professional view of literature as presented in our schools has become increasingly insular. We have treated national literatures as though they were created in a vacuum. In a badly heated Roman hotel, Dostoevsky spelled out the pages of Dickens. Ibsen discoursed on Hebbel in a Münchner beer garden. Flaubert, broad beamed in white pantaloons, discussed naturalism with Turgenief. Voltaire, smarting with his humiliation at the hands of the Rohans, discovered English political liberty in England and brought it back to France. The young Milton, just down from the university, read Italian epics in Italy. Whether or not Chaucer had dinner with Boccaccio, he studied the *Decameron* with passionate interest. These facts are too important to be passed over with a phrase. If regarded as critical moments in the development of imagination, they are pregnant with meaning for all of us. They should give us a silhouette of national imagination and an understanding of the turns of genius.

The comparison of national literatures is, or should be, a charting of national imaginations and a navigation among national dreams. Only in this way may literary criticism become a criticism of life, not in the mean or academic sense of drawing the balance or looking steady to see the whole; but in a more athletic sense. National phantasy courses ahead of the individual raising horizons of action and dream that set for the poet or patron, maker or reader his function in that unstable equilibrium of matter, action and emotion that constitute the world as a whole.

Only a myopic science, short sighted to blindness will refuse to recognise the reality of the word as a verbal symbol of a mental process. In imaginative

literature, and in much that is presented as literature of fact, the mental process is that of phantasy. If phantasy be treated, as some have attempted to treat it, as a symptom of mental disease, the interpreter of literature becomes a physician of the soul, administering a therapeutic which, though it will not purge us of our dreams, may help us to harness them to a more dynamic conception of their and our place in the universe. If however, literary phantasy is assayed more soberly as a kind of mentation that drains off those reservoirs of energy that fail to find adequate filtration through a highly disciplined social complex, the study of that phantasy and the apprehension of those symbols becomes the calculus of a world of meaning.

The processes of the human skull may be considered as real as the skull itself. The gestures of the thigh-bone—whether aggressive in battle or lascivious in the dance—are of as great importance as the articulations of the bone which made those gestures possible. If with these processes and gestures, the pots, the pans, the machines and the cloud capped buildings, all constructed by small movements of the fingers, controlled by the precision of the eye, if these be considered to have value, reality and meaning in the interpretation of our own world and the multiform worlds which preceded us, so too, must the highly coordinated gesture of lung, throat, tongue, and lips, producing words to relieve feelings and induce that strange experience we call the experience of literature, be invested with reality and importance.

The study of literature is not merely anthropology, sociology, psychology, history or aesthetics—whatever that science may have become in recent years—it is an exercise which gives to its participants, in making use of all these methods, a more complete picture than any of them of the relations between man, the most complex of anthropoids, and the abounding universe that surrounds him.

III

If taken in the sense of these references, a comparison of the literatures of England, France, Germany and America must become an experiment in the assessing of tentative values which will break with one of the great academic traditions. The professors of this tradition, when they have not contented themselves with emotional expressions of pleasure or distaste or with individual

judgments of great and small, have clothed their feelings in terms which appeared to be scientific because they took their terminology from their contemporaries, the scientists. A comparison of literatures, which is very different from emotionalising about them, must make use of postulates of analysis which are only now in the process of formation. It must follow many false trails in the hope of discovering one of the true ones. In its constructive activities, it must be content with fine analyses which it must recognise as being in no sense final.

The comparatist is beset on all sides by logical traps and emotional oppositions which are the more dangerous because they appear to be self-evident truths. For reasons mentioned above, the pleasures of poetry are popularly thought to be invested with sanctions which protect them from observation. We are apt to forget that the analysis of lovely emotions is not the vivisection of living bodies. The discovery of new meanings in the symbols which embody these emotions give to the emotions a new liveliness.

The comparatist must overcome two particular kinds of opposition: the first, that genius can never be understood and that therefore any attempt to understand the productions of the literary geniuses is futile; and the second, that literature, being of the nature of emotion is not reasonable and therefore not a proper subject for reasonable contemplation. Although both of these restrictions appear to have their roots in human processes which lie beyond the scope of this paper, both are clearly confusions of values.

If it is true that genius will always escape analysis—a kind of prophecy unworthy the scientific citizens of a scientific community—it will still be true that the nature and behavior of genius present spectacles which are worthy of our attention. Whether poets, to take only one kind of literary genius, be the leaders of mankind as our romantic masters once thought they were, witness the Olympianism of Goethe, Wordsworth, Hugo, or whether they offer consolations for our despair, intimate avenues for our escape, drain the muddle of emotion and release sober reason for the tasks which it has to perform, poets still would be worthy of observation. We are under no necessity of presenting a formula nor need we attempt to compress greatness into an equation. The statement that genius must always escape analysis is, whether

or not it be true, an irrelevance which has been twisted to mean that genius is unworthy of observation. It is an exclamation rather than a judgment; a perversion due to fear rather than a statement of a difficulty.

The second restriction, that literature being of the nature of emotion is not the proper subject for reasonable contemplation, is a similar confusion. Although little progress has yet been made in the study of those verbal symbols which are connected with the experience of literature, various slight advances are discernable. The simple recognition, for example, that words stimulate emotions at the same time that they symbolise ideas; that they are gestures having their being in time rather than in space; that the meanings they convey are complex; and that the modulation of these complex meanings is, in some way, closely associated with the release of feelings, are steps which may take us a considerable distance. The researches of those men who have concerned themselves with abnormal psychology—Freud and Jung are perhaps the best known—have helped to show us how the meanings of a symbol may spread and involve other meanings. Anthropologists by the study of savage and illiterate communities are coming to a better understanding than they have hitherto had of the uses of ritual, gesture and symbol in everyday communication and in the maintainance of the physical and mental forces of the social complex in a condition of dynamic equilibrium. An examination of popular tales having variants in all parts of the world, suggests that human phantasy whether savage, literate or illiterate is closely associated with human emotion and that the structure of phantasy and its relations to other forms of human activity may be approached by a comparison of literatures.

A perception of this structure need not destroy it. The energy of the imagination is, in a very real sense, a vital energy. It is, in some way, connected with the energy of nerve centres. It is stimulated or depressed by chemical secretions. It is a refraction of the stresses set up by the constant shifting of equilibrium in the social complex. It expresses itself in dances, in moulded stone, and in those cries and murmurs of exaltation and despair which we call literature. Human imagination replies to necessities so vital that we may examine its structures in England, France, Germany and America without fear that our examination will destroy it.

Other difficulties must be admitted into the list of those already presented. The most serious of these is the logical confusion involved in the term "literatures" with reference to England, France, Germany and America. Europe, it may be urged, has a literature but no literatures. The culture of Europe is singularly one, a uniform culture descending in a great tradition from the Graeco-Roman achievements of pre-Christian antiquity to our own day with various minor currents and eddies in the various areas it has covered. The languages of Western Europe when compared with the languages of the Orient or the languages of Africa constitute two large families of dialects: the Germanic and the Latin. The speaker of a dialect in either of these families can make himself reasonably familiar with any of the other dialects in the space of a few weeks and our educational system is so arranged that we are all urged to make ourselves somewhat familiar with at least one dialect in a family not our own and to do this at an early age. Each of the linguistic areas of Europe has been in intimate communication with one or more of the others more often than it has been separated from them and this has continued since the linguistic areas were in the process of formation. We have good reason to believe that from the earliest times poems and tales have been indifferent to linguistic barriers and have wandered from one area to another.

The linguistic differences in European areas are superficial and are not correlated with race. The "races" of modern Europe and even more definitely of America are anthropological mongrels. Defoe suffered the pillory for explaining to his countrymen the probable ancestry of the "True-Born Englishman." The names "England", "France" and "Germany"—at one time less different than they are now—refer to tribes that occupied the special areas these nations now hold. The physical differentia of race, the sizes of skulls, the heights of bodies and the like have not yet been shown to have any clear connection with temperamental differentia. Any superficial reading of history must demonstrate that citizens of two different nations living in the same historical period have more in common with each other than citizens of the same nation living at different historical periods. An Englishman and Frenchman living in the Sixteenth Century understood each other better than an Englishman of the Nineteenth Century understood his forebearers of the Fifteenth.

IV

The difficulty is real. Either the term "literatures" is inaccurate, or this conception of the unity of European culture contains a hidden trap, or both are incomplete. Certainly the term "literatures" as currently employed, suggests that there are greater differences between German and English or German and French than actually exist. A unilingual person is apt to conclude that the differences between German and English literatures are as great as differences which appear to exist between the German and the English languages. How erroneous this view is may appear if these pages are read to their conclusion. Not only will the directions of the three European and the one American literature under consideration seem to have been but slightly influenced by linguistic differences; but the very languages in which these literatures are expressed will be seen to have been themselves the products of national need.

Yet in answer it may be urged that if we examine the unity of European culture more closely, that unity will be seen to have undergone transformations. The romanticism which characterised the closing years of the Eighteenth and the opening years of the Nineteenth Centuries did not arise simultaneously in England, France, Germany and America. It can be shown to have had its beginnings in England. It was transformed in France and after further transformations blossomed in Germany whence it returned again to England and France in the French "school" and the English "group". Nor are the French "school" and the English "group", if regarded as instruments through which imagination manifested itself and got itself accepted, without meaning in their various operations on the national spirit.

Throughout the Sixteenth Century the imagination of northern Europe was being greatly changed by ideas and phantasies brought in from Italy or through Italy from Greece and Rome. During this century Englishmen, Frenchmen and Germans behaved differently. The imagination of each group attempted to describe a different kind of universe. Luther's God, Calvin's God and the God of Hooker as He emerges through the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*; Rabelais' universe of ideas symbolised by grotesque men and Montaigne's universe of queer men when contrasted with Spenserian

Platonism and Shakespearian conflicts present forms of behavior which are apprehended as national at the same time that they represent particular responses to the driving force of a single great idea. Whether the compositions of these men are an attempt to grasp a reality that manifests itself only partially to human vision; or whether they are attempts to make the world these writers inhabited more relevant to their needs; or whether they were attempts of individuals to insulate themselves against the shocks of the very rapid changes that were occurring in the noosphere, they are not only great phantasies but national phantasies.

This kind of difference in uniformity appears even during the ages when the literary traditions were in the process of formation. Before the Tenth Century, that is, before the groups who inhabited the areas that were to become England and Germany had moulded their languages, *Beowulf* and *Siegfried*, the *Heliand* and *Caedmon* appear as members of the same family. In France, at this time, the dominance of Latin appears to have annihilated whatever there may have been of individual achievement. During the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries when the French imagination began to function effectively, the English language had disappeared. Yet even then, *Geoffrey of Monmouth* and *Chrestien de Troye*, though both served the same family and each handled somewhat the same material, illustrate characteristic differences and these differences were emphasized when *Wolfram of Eschenbach* treated these same themes some fifty years later. If contemporaneity be ignored for the moment, the Christian epic of France and the pagan epic of the Teutons present differences which appear to be national. In the England of the Fourteenth Century, *Chaucer* and *Gower* present us with those modulations of English temperament which *Langland*, the sturdy Anglo-Saxon plowman, would have nothing to do with. The German *Volslied*, the English ballad, and the French compliments of the sophisticated *Machault*, a wreath of flowers to a lady, carry the national streams in clear and full tide.

V

Though it always escapes us, there appears to be a quality of national character in the literary productions of each nation. From *Chrestien de*

Troye to André Gide, the French have been concerned with problems of behaviour. Though the world pays homage to the intellectual ability of the French, an homage which the French are glad to pay to themselves, and although the Frenchman has been well described as a thoughtful man, it is equally true that the Frenchman dreams of action. His literature becomes most brilliant when it concerns itself with an observation of manners and an analysis of the reasons for those manners, the rightness that underlies them and the implications of further actions that are implied in them. In his tragedies and his novels the Frenchman loves to ask: "If you were confronted with this situation what would you do? What would you say? Why would you do it or say it?" Zola's naturalism was an overcompensation for this tendency which failed to compensate because it failed to understand itself. Hugo's *Légende des Siècles* is at its best a series of situations (See Vol. II) requiring action drawn from what Hugo thought was history and Hugo's imaginative resolutions of these situations. When Jean de Meung and Guillaume de Lorris produced the *Roman de la Rose* in the mid-Thirteenth Century, they produced a model of behaviour and a handbook of conversation which for three hundred years remained the standard of all Europe. Rabelais and Montaigne studied their contemporaries in the clear-obscure light they derived from antiquity; Corneille and Racine in the light they derived from Descartes. The better novelists of the Eighteenth Century are still unsurpassed in their ability to use gesture as a symbol for mood. Voltaire's histories and satires are spectacles of human behaviour enriched by historical perspective and realistic description.

As the French dream about action so the Germans dream about God and the mystery of a universe whose strange forces and mysterious impulses must be made concrete. Walther von der Vogelwiede sat upon a stone, crossed his legs, cupped his chin in his hand and thought it all over in the Thirteenth Century. At the same time, or a little earlier, Parzifal, who was to become the best knight in the world, wandered, during his period of waiting, through adventures which neither he nor his creator could understand except in terms of a universe that was strange and mysterious. His attempt was to ask the proper questions of the proper persons at the proper place. If he could only find the question and the persons and the place, the world would

become real again. When, seeing the red blood on the white snow he is reminded of his mistress whom he had strangely forgotten, we know that he could not have been reminded without his predecessors the French troubadours; nor could Parzifal himself have come into being without the French polite novelists and the English romantic historians; but though all this be granted, it must also be granted that the poem of Parzifal could have been produced in its magnificent entirety by none but a German. If this is true of Wolfram of Eschenbach it is also true of the later mystics, of the novel *Simplizissimus* which was a modernization of Parzifal; it was true of Luther whose too frequent asseveration that God was a firm castle betrays his sense that God works in mysterious ways. This sense of mystery, this determination to apprehend it through the imagination and give it concrete form in words is shared by Klopstock, Herder, Schiller, Goethe, Nietzsche. Each is puzzled by a mystery. Their poems are figments of their agitation.

When England was not German it became French. The English literary imagination is less preoccupied in its manner of expression than either the French or German. The Englishman's dreams, though they have an inner connection, appear to have a wider scope. The Englishman dreams of things he can handle, a landscape through which he can ride; he is somewhat agitated about the ethics of behavior; more frequently than the Frenchman or the German he can contemplate his universe with a pleasant humour for he is more aware of his and its limitations than they are.

Even the productions of the Anglo-French show a split in feeling and an uncertainty of tone which in the Fourteenth Century manifested itself in the poetry of Chaucer and Gower as opposed to that of Langland. The former were in the manner of France and the latter was in the manner of our Germanic heritage; yet in all three, there is a common quality of imagination, a common preoccupation with landscape, a joy in things which, though sophisticated in both instances, separates them from their non-English contemporaries. Through the storms of the Classical Renaissance, the confusions of the civil wars and the gropings of the new citizens of the Eighteenth Century towards a manner and a matter which will give them satisfaction, these preoccupations remain. Spenser's mystic Platonism did not distract his attention from the details of the cave of Morpheus nor did Milton's blindness cut

him off from the light and joy of growing things. And when poetry went indoors for a few years with Pope, it did not lose its pleasure in the small bibelots and the fat bottomed cupids of Lucinda's bed room. Even in the attempt to think poetically about ethics rather than practically about action—an attempt which when made consciously has always been something of a burden to Englishmen—English authors (Young at the time of Pope; Wordsworth, half a century later) found sermons in streams and books in running brooks. Whatever ethical intentions the English poets may have had and whether or not they wore the robes of Nature's priest or the motley of a clown, the passages in poetry which are most English are the streams, the fields, the running brooks; the things. They describe a universe that one can see and smell and feel and handle. Beowulf's joy when he finds a good blade in his hand has echoed through English poetry for more than a thousand years. Tennyson's preoccupation with the breaking of the waves on the shore and the sensations that sound aroused, caused him to confuse these sensations with thoughts. He was unable to utter the thoughts that arose within him, because they were not thoughts but feelings. It is perhaps not surprising that the English philosophers of the Eighteenth Century should have erected sensation into a structure that their followers mistook for metaphysic.

The pleasures of sensation, though they stimulate the imaginations of the poets, are not sufficient for the English novelists. The author of *Beowulf* lays what appears to be undue stress on the fact that his heroes know how to behave properly in the presence of kings and that his kings know how to behave in the presence of heroes. Soon this English preoccupation with correct action will need to be distinguished from the French preoccupation with imagined action. Yet, without an appreciation of the imaginative significance of this distress about correct behavior, the English novel, from Richardson through Austen to Mrs. Woolf will lose large lumps of meaning. This apparant duality in English phantasy may be no more than the expression of a single dominant character. If the Englishman is a man of action in a world of things, it may be that he dreams best about the things through which he acts; and, acting by impulse he dreams of acting on principle.

America presents a special case in which all of these characters are merged and confused. Until recently literature has been alien to the American cultural complex. There were too many things to be done, the actual conditions of living were too arduous to permit any except very practical kinds of phantasy. Franklin's *Autobiography* which might have been given the sub-title, "How I became a successful man and practical tips on how you may follow my example" is here significant. However, the significance of this and the host of other autobiographies written on the same formula, is less in the answers it proposes to the central question of how to become successful, than in the quality of phantasy it manifests: a phantasy which is concerned with the possibilities of action in a real world (English); with the mysterious impulses of a universe that is dominated by God (German); and with the theoretical problem of action in the manner of the French. Cooper's stories of flight from or pursuit of hordes of savages who appear and disappear as mysteriously as the characters in a German mediaeval poem; Brete Harte's romantic heroes of the west whose hairy, manly bosoms disguise but do not destroy the instincts of a gentleman and Poe's interest in the technique of writing may be considered complex expressions of European characters transported to a new soil. But other characters were brought out by the rose tints of Rousseauism which inspired American men of letters: Whitman and his praise—or should one say love?—of the common man and his confusions between halitosis and the perfumes of Araby; Hawthorne, speculating on the relations between moral law and American lawlessness, and Emerson's British bewilderment before German metaphysics are characters that permit the further analysis of national imagination.

VI

Thus far, I have attempted to propose, though tentatively and with reservation, qualities of imagination that appear to be characteristic of the French, the German and the English peoples and to suggest that these qualities became confused in the literature of the United States. Obviously none of these qualities is pure. If we regard the history of literature as the history of imagination, we can observe that at any moment in the history of European imagination, the literature of any nation has been more or less

influenced by the literatures of the others, or, as in the case of the Classical Renaissance, has been influenced by other or earlier literatures. In each of the greater literary periods, the characteristic literary preoccupations, that is, the phantasies of one or more nations have impinged upon the characteristic literary phantasies of one or more of the others in such a way as to produce significant changes in the manipulation of subject matter, literary genre, tone, or direction. National imaginations have passed through so many conflicts, distractions and temptations that at any given moment we must expect to find them in adulterous flagrante delicto, in the embrace of this or that strange fiction.

The problem of the Classical Renaissance is characteristic. The differences between Chaucer and Langland, mentioned above as differences between the French and the English phantasies may, for the moment, be pushed further and set tentatively as differences between what was to become the new Classical Renaissance when men began to clothe their dreams with a different substance; began to speak more softly and to arrange their ideas in a more logical form. The outer world became filled with things and men rather than with the allegorical projection of emotions and impulses. In this new world tendencies in the French character that had been only partially liberated through the *Roman de la Rose* were given a new scope. It is no accident that the Neo-Classical movement in Europe is derived from French Neo-Classicism.

The effects of these new ideas in England and Germany are no less real; but they are very different. Between Brant's satirical *Narrenschiff* and Grimmelshausen's mystico-satirical *Simplizissimus* the Germans were taken up with bitter controversies about the nature of God in a changed and changing world. Whereas the French Calvin attempted to create a reasonable commonwealth in which the possibilities of action were foreseen, the German Luther was perplexed by a mysterious God who should have been, but obviously was not, reasonable. In the Seventeenth and the early Eighteenth Centuries, France, having adapted herself more rapidly to these new possibilities of action, came into Germany. She was introduced by Opitz, febrily wooed by Gottsched and was shattered into glistening fragments by Bodmer and Breitingen. But though shattered and broken, the light from French

Neo-Classicism will illuminate many a German poem from the mid-Eighteenth to the early Nineteenth Centuries.

England, a nation with its own sources of action and secret springs of desire which become immediately translated into achievement, is a country notoriously impatient of discipline imposed from without. The large development of new traditions was less important than the particular achievements of individuals. Spenser adorned a mediaeval imagination with classical jewels. Shakespeare's apparent interest in the forms of tragedy (literary form in this instance might be considered as a "neat way of doing the job") complements, but does not explain his fresh humour and his green fields. The early, Italianate-Latin phase of the Renaissance was never naturalised in England. Although Ascham exulted that many Englishmen now wrote better Latin than Cicero, English Latinity was acquired rather than native. Although this impulse fomented new tendencies and stimulated English imagination as it has never been stimulated before or since, these tendencies were not integrated in a great achievement of the imagination until Milton produced his Anglo classical epic — significantly after the ferments of the civil wars.
