The St. John's

COLLEGIAN

Annapolis, Md. November, 1952

CONTENTS

Editors

Sinclair Gearing Barbara Dvorak

THE WHITE GODDESS—AGAIN

Mr. Klein's lecture, somewhat misleadingly announced as "The Great Mother and the Liberal Arts," was nothing if not an unexpected approach to the Opening Lecture Problem. The "Great Mother" turned out to be the White Goddess from the Robert Graves book, which many of us had heard of, somehow, but few had actually read. (Remember last year when people would ask in the coffee shop if one had read "The White Goddess?") As it happened the lecture was pretty much a paraphrase of the book with a few puckish asides on the author's scholarship ("simply deplorable") and his method ("really outrageous"). The connection with the liberal arts was not immediately apparent, except as Mr. Klein used grammar, rhetoric, and logic to communicate. Actually the lecture was both relevant and important, as is evident if we examine the book a little more closely.

What is "The White Goddess" about? The author claims it a "poetic grammar of myth," but this too is misleading. The book, I think, is a piece of propaganda addressed to poets. As propaganda, it will use a certain kind of rhetoric which would be out of place in an authoritative work; and, in order to reach its special audience, it will be written in a poet's tongue. This message, it would seem, is a valuable one and most of us at St. John's are poets enough to learn from it. On opening "The White Goddess" at random, you face a mad, unstable mixture of myth-material

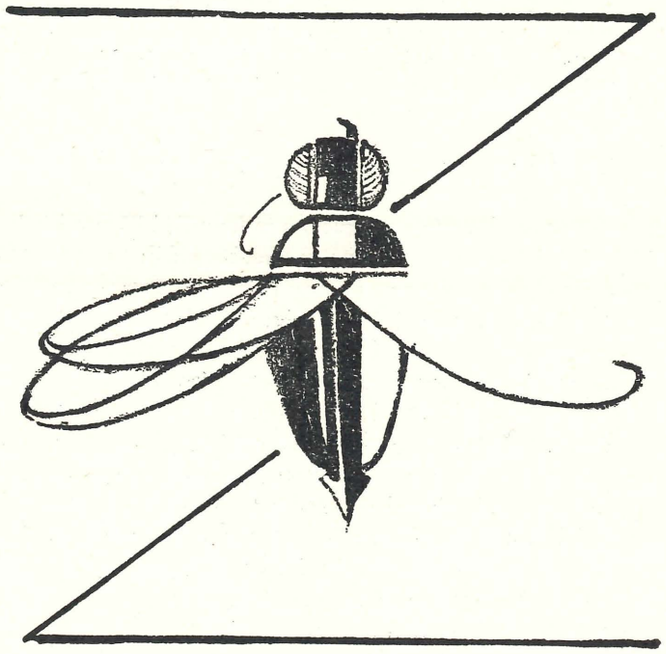
from all possible West-European cultures, and fragments of weird, long-forgotten heresies. Running through this is an insistence that in myth is embodied the Single Poetic Theme, that profound Secret which the true poet is selected to preserve and perpetuate in rhymed riddles. He is bound to the White Goddess, a terrible deity who reveals herself to man in various ways. She is the reknowned three-fold goddess of many names, appearing in all the Western religious traditions except, significantly, the Judaeo-Christian. It is she who comes to the poet at night, making his flesh crawl, his countenance blanch, and his entire body tremble with ecstatic terror.

Like all works of propaganda, this book is essentially a half-truth, a deliberate distortion of fact toward a specific rhetorical end. Poetry is an art, hence a discipline, also a way of life. As an art it is necessarily governed by rules that hold true anytime for any poet. Graves is too good a poet not to know that he must also look to the Sun-God, who is concerned with the ordered formal aspects of art. (Here again, of course, is the matter of inspiration and discipline in poetry, inevitably battered about with dogged perversity in every Van Doren question period. Graves, through his own perversity, points obliquely at resolution.) The war in heaven is the archetypal expression of the problem of the artist; this is to establish, intuitively,—this is no easily worked out formula—a relationship between the two opposing forces that will make creation posible. To the White Goddess he must turn as she is the source of his art. At the same time he must be careful, as the Goddess has, frequently, unmerciful ways with those who come too close to her and cannot help being lured irresistably into the abyss. If he is captured by Apollo, the creative impulse may be burned out of him; he will be capable only of developing a sterile academic formalism.

The latter catastrophe, Graves insists, has actually occurred in the last few generations of poets. He finds himself in a dreary prosaic age when men have forgotten myth and magic, and poets have turned their backs on the muse who is the only source of the poetic vision. As a last representative of the bardic tradition, Graves is reminding all poets everywhere of their responsibility to maintain the Secret and their devotion to the Goddess. To say this, he uses the language of myth and riddle—the poet's tongue—and thus keeps the secret, as his meaning will elude outsiders who are not concerned with these matters, but will reach the poets, who will recognize immediately what he is talking about and should wake up with a guilty start.

There are still more vital and meaningful implications in the book that should be examined. It might seem at first glance that so "irrational" a being as the White Goddess is really outside the liberal arts, which one might think is more the realm of the Sun-God. One might then recall that Socrates, no stranger to myth, on one memorable occasion went down to the Piraeus to offer his prayers to the Goddess.

Let us look at these two beings, without attaching moral values to them, but regarding them both as very real and of immediately vital concern. They are forces which act as a direct influence in our lives and ultimately affect thought and behavior. They represent the archetypal antagonists who are opposite in the sense that they are complements which make up a whole. In their eternal struggle is reflected the struggle within man as he alternates between magic and science, intuition and logic, poetry and dialectic as possible means through which to understand life and expression. When the poet turns away from the White Goddess, as Graves suggests, then he is betraying the Secret and is no longer a true poet. But neither can the liberal artist ignore her: there are some things in the world about and within him for which the Sun-God is simply not responsible. It may well be that, in those rare moments of insight, when you see with a terrible clarity and brilliance an unexpected meaning and significance beneath the surface of things, that the White Goddess is present . . . JIM TAYLOR



The True Muse

She is no demure pastel-gowned ingenue.
She munches grass, and later coughs it up
And gnaws it as a cud, and gnaws and gnaws
Then presently, her dull day accomplished
She bawls to have her swollen udder emptied.
You need to milk her fourteen times a week,
Mornings and afternoons, Sundays, holidays
You squat beside her, squirting stroke after stroke
Dodging at times her shit-stuck burr-barbed tail.

This is that persistent being Audhumbla who
Licked with her tongue the gods into their godhood
Out of the ice that held them impotent
Who also, more than once upon a time
Grotesque, astonished with herself, a joke
At least for dogs and little yapyap dogs
Soared through the evening higher than the moon.

The Invocation

(For a work under construction to be called 'Down by the Riverside')
Of that long crime the hunter First-born did;
Of each man who rose up and ruined his own
Brother, here in the bloody field, of each
Whose hand found eolith, club, axe, straight spear,
Levelled a rifle, closed a switch, or aimed
The fatal words, aloud or secretly;
Of each, the same, who would have laid his life
Down for what nameless stranger? who indeed
Bequeathed his blood, which is the life thereof
Which tracks the orbits of the singing spheres;
Who, lonely, longing for his lonely twin
Carries *To Kill* honed bright
Of all then . . . of
The human heart in conflict with itself:
Hear, Radiant Lady, Stella Maris, Queen
Advocate
Intercessor
Mary
hear . . .

JAMES BALLARD—1952

The Dynasty

Your unforgotten spirit is the guest
of Time, and by him honored everywhere.
No hour I enter but does still attest
your presence having been before me there.
Your presence, now no longer manifest,
speaks in your absence, its true son and heir—
which, of its father's semblance now possessed,
with its power wield's a power in double share.

And Time (old Machiavellian statesman he)
Knowing it is his empire in whose name
kings rule, establishes this dynasty
that rebel though I be I must acclaim;
and thereby keeps me prisoner in this cage,
shaking the bars, and sobbing impotent rage.

A MUSIC IN THE MIND

Making a kind of music in my mind,
the singing words of poems I remember
that in some May were read, still in December
make a renewing music in my mind.
They leave a tenderness within the tongue—
a touchstone and a heritage of taste,
for words that shall be brought to birth; a chaste
effective fertilization for the tongue.

The music and the shape of words alone
would, if one must confess these all, suffice
for joy and wonder . . . yet these still entice
beyond themselves, to where the things are known
to which words cannot reach: those of a kind
that do indeed make music in the mind.

VIRGINIA MERRITT

HAMLET

Two years ago, during the discussions that preceded the production of *THOMAS CRANMER OF CANTERBURY*, the figure of a Christian tragic hero was drawn vividly enough for me to recollect it now in trying to critize Mr. Darkey's provocative analysis of *HAMLET* on last All Hallow's Eve. It was partly our attempt then, and as I understand it Mr. Darkey's more recently, to allow the juxtaposition of 'Christian' and 'tragic hero', keeping the full import of both terms. On the two occasions little or no mention was made of the Christian concept of life after death which seems on the face of it to erase 'tragedy' for the combination when applied to for instance a Christian martyr. Martyrdom arises from certainty and is perfectly in touch with the cosmic scheme of things. Truly, in a Christian world there is no complexity out of which arises the necessity for choice. The martyr's passion, unlike a more typical hero's, is not the motivation for a blind but somehow necessary action, but an act in itself—performed on sure faith if not sure knowledge. It is just this sureness, the immediacy of reward, the feeling that, though terrible, the suffering of the martyr is unequivocally right in the larger scheme, that keeps him from being a tragic figure. The hero as we are familiar with him looms large against the cosmic order, and is surely crushed by its machinations.

If a Christian is to be a tragic hero, he will have to be a man who acts on his own terms rather than heaven's. Can he then be a Christian?

There is a line toward the end of the 'Cranmer' play which goes:

When you have lost Him at last you shall come into God,

suggesting that not only is it possible to misconceive man's relation to God, but necessary. In this light Cranmer can become a tragic figure and perhaps Hamlet, too.

Cranmer was a Christian who believed he was acting in accordance with God's will. During the play he is forced to recant his actions in order to remain true to his belief; however, on discovering that he is to be executed anyway he reasserts his original position, going to the flames deserted and alone. From his point of view, he acts, finally, as a man, full of a certain pride in his own intellect and wilful action (which he had previously denied), and meets the fire blindly and desperately—without God. Considering the line quoted above, however, it is only at this moment, when he faces death as a helpless mortal, that he has found God.

Certainly, the only meaningful action in Christian terms is to act in accordance with God's will. The difficulty that arises in a Christian as well as a pagan cosmology is that God's will is not too clearly known. This interpretation of Cranmer gives him a tragic stature, as a Christian caught between the necessity of trying to understand God's will and the truth that any understanding is necessarily a lie.

The crucial tragic irony in 'Cranmer' as in, for instance, Oedipus, is that by means of this terrible conflict cosmic order is achieved. Both men acting on uncertain knowledge to the best of their abilities stand finally as what they are: ungodly creatures. As 'less than God' they could not have acted differently. As a Christian, Cranmer thereby finds God; Oedipus, at last, knows the truth. It is the grim aspect of their learning that we fear.

Everyone agrees to some degree that Hamlet is a tragic hero; but it is difficult to answer his critics, who have called him variously, coward, 'intellectual,' madman, or fool. Mr. Darkey chose to solve the problems by assuming that the play is Christian and by showing that Hamlet himself is a Christian hero.

The definition of the hero which I have sketched so far would force me to outline the play as follows, starting from Hamlet's first soliloquy herein he says, describing Claudius,

—my father's brother, but no more like my father than I to Hercules . . .

The lines are spoken by Hamlet prior to his encounter with his father's ghost, and, therefore, give us some acquaintance with the unhappy prince before the awful burden of the necessity to act falls upon him. This first soliloquy reveals Hamlet's passionate awareness of the crimes of Claudius and concludes with

—break my heart, for I must hold my tongue, . . .

his acute sense that he is restrained from doing anything about the crimes. The hero is caught inextricably in matters of temporal justice, but has enough sense of the supernatural order of things to sublimate personal motivation to God's perfect justice. God tells him he is chosen as the instrument of His will. Hero understands, is elated, and with great effort continues to bypass personal revenge, waiting for God to act through him. God never does, but gives a few hints that He hasn't forgotten. Finally, hero faces death without having acted. Can't stand it. Forgets God. Acts from personal motivation. Effects the revenge. Dies. Somebody left to tell the story and thereby everybody understands that it was God's action at last.

This is certainly not the development of the play as Mr. Darkey outlined it; yet it illustrates again my feeling that in order for *HAMLET* to be a Christian play and in order for Hamlet, the prince, to be a tragic hero at the same time, the plot must image a man who acts as a Christian must act, but who finds that by so doing it it impossible for him to be a Christian.

The Hamlet that Mr. Darkey sees in the play is a man who seethes with personal vengeance, acting with mortal resolution from the beginning, and who fails to grasp the supernatural order of things. His failure to eliminate Claudius during the first four acts is seen not as a Christian virtue, but rather as frustrated, wilful, and therefore unchristian, action. (Polonius turns up behind the curtain, Claudius is found praying, etc.) These frustrations and, ultimately, the frustration of Claudius' attempt to eliminate Hamlet, combine to teach the melancholy prince that wilful action is meaningless in a Christian world.

Having learned what it means to be chosen as the agent of God's will, Hamlet then waits, concerning himself with the minutia, until God announces the time and place for action (by having him mortally wounded), whereupon he promptly and heroically enacts God's justice.

This development of the play tells me that Hamlet learns that in a Christian world tragedy is impossible and that to act meaningfully in this system is to lose all vestige of tragedy.

I would agree with Mr. Darkey in his final remark that a Christian soldier is possible. But it seems to me that a soldier falls far short of the tragic hero.

AL SUGG

TIPPECANOE AND NIXON, TOO

Twenty years and more ago it used to be the fashion to proclaim that there was no real difference between the two major American parties. Many of the educated took pride in their failure to vote and scorned those who did. Franklin Delano Roosevelt showed how shallow this attitude was by the skillful use he made of the party structure and of political passions in fashioning a government that governed.

Coolidge prosperity had dulled the sense of politics in the American people. The Democrats were slowly rallying from the Harding catastrophe and in men like Senator Walsh of Montana and some southern senators had spokesmen who kept alive the Bryan and Wilson tradition. In the North, Al Smith was giving an example of how a man could be both a progressive governor and the idol of the city machines.

Roosevelt succeeded Al Smith as governor of New York in 1928. For the next four years he built on Al Smith's progressive record as governor, gathered about him the nucleus of the brain trust, and through Jim Farley, an Elk and a Catholic, developed a tremendous following among professionals all over the country.

When the depression struck and Herbert Hoover lived futilely in the White House, Roosevelt was ready. He came to Washington in 1933 supported by the hungry professionals and the enthusiastic progressives. His leadership combined the drive of both groups. With abundant patronage to keep the professionals loyal, he was able to move on the unfinished business of Teddy Roosevelt and Wilson. The Wagner Act put the labor unions beyond the reach of union-busters, the Reciprocal Trade Act began undoing the Smout-Hawley Tariff, the Securities and Exchange Act, the Holding Company Act, and many others were applauded for cleaning up the mess that "normalcy" had made. More important still, the CCC, W.P.A., HOLC, Social Security, and other acts established the principle that the Federal government had a responsibility for the economic health of the country. The "Hundred Days" of 1933 set the pattern that is now firmly established. The people wanted what Roosevelt was doing. They began to understand better the function of government as the agent of the people.
This year's election is the proof of Roosevelt's success in reviving the art of politics among the American people.

This result outweighs what is to my mind the disastrous nature of the political choice of the people. Party defeat is not irreparable. What is everlastingly important is that the party of Roosevelt has found in Adlai Stevenson a new leader with the intellect and eloquence of Woodrow Wilson. He will, moveover, lead a party purged of its shameful corruptionists and crypto-Republicans. The historic mission of the party (I write this eloquent phrase on purpose) has been to be the imagination, the weapon of the earthy majority of the people. It has always existed to shatter Bourbon complacency. For this reason, incidentally, the theme song "Don't Let 'Em Take It Away" was contradictory. Many people may have felt that the Republicans have more experience in the protection of vested interests.

The Democrats anticipate the certainty of control of the Congress in 1954, the probability of The Presidency in 1956. The program set forth in Governor Stevenson's campaign speeches gives us confidence that when this return to power comes we will be prepared to use it well.

The liberal-artist, especially if he is a first voter, may be discouraged by the discovery that practical politics is conducted by the passions of the Agora rather than the reason of the Academy. His discouragement will be increased as he observes the new power that radio and television give to the voice of the demagogue. A Cleon or an Alcibiades, after all, had to fight Nicias face to face in the assembly. They had no cloak of congressional immunity or protective coloration of soap opera mentality. Nevertheless the history of American politics shows that demagogy has never yet turned the people for long from their deepest purposes. The success of Stevenson in reaching the minds of millions of the people is an omen of hope.

It should not be surprising that "nous" is less respected in the Agora than in the Academy. Socrates knew this but it did not keep him from the Agora; it brought him back into it every day. We must expect assaults on the Academy—from McCarthy and from all the modern sophists. Yet, if we follow Socrates into the Agora, it is to drink our hemlock—ultimately—in triumph.

JOHN KIEFFER

TORMENT

Thinking back on the experience of seeing TORMENT, a RAM presentation of a few weeks ago, I was struck by a singular difference between my reaction to that film and my reaction to almost any other. And that was that I seemed to be without any feeling about it one way or another. I call that peculiar because in almost every other instance that I can recall I have been left with something. Usually, I suppose, it is a definite opinion, probably one of rejection; but at least the rejection results from a formulated opinion, which, in turn, follows upon some thought about the picture: more or less as the film warrants. Some pictures are great or nearly great—or at least memorable for some particular reason, and so I have some residual thought or feeling left about it after having seen it, however long ago. In the case of mediocre pictures I find that I am still sufficiently enchanted by the mere mechanical fact of movies to glean something from the experience; and as often as not perhaps, see a new relationship between elements of life that are already seen as interrelated. And even otherwise bad films like The Quiet Man, leave an impression for the striking fidelity of color and the few compositions that occur that stand head and shoulders above the run of the mill product. Or possibly, as in the case of a musical, the conception in terms of sheer size and tenacious adherence to the tenets of bad taste have a stunning and humorous aspect that leaves material for anecdotes or clever disparagement.

The experience of TORMENT was like none of these. I didn't think much about the picture after seeing it, I recalled no clearly defined after-taste, and I referred to it little or not at all in conversations about sin and evil and the themes the picture touched upon. However, it finally came about (perhaps because I was approached to write this) I was forced to face this vacuum and try to understand it.

* * *

I think the reason for the lack of thought about TORMENT is that it stated a position and a view so clearly and powerfully, and the view was somehow so distasteful, that I "chose" not to think about it, chose without being particularly aware of choosing.
The story purported to be a study of evil; the horror wrought in the lives of the innocent and the not-so-innocent by an embodied evil—the Tormentor. But if it were merely this: that unexpected evil can change the course of our lives or destroy them, that evil is terrible and perhaps inescapable—then I doubt that I would have so fled thought about it. I think the picture was either saying or implying something more; and that something more is that in the face of evil we are helpless.

The first communication of the picture's mood and theme was in the opening sequence, the episode of the little boy who was late for class. Anxious over possible apprehension by the truant officer he scurries through the big, sterile halls of the building, like a frightened mouse. He looks furtively about the building and the immense halls—the world—for his antagonist, the truant officer. And when he sees him—or is seen and hailed by him—he runs and hides, trying to escape, not by a feat of moral or physical strength—he has neither—but by pathetically futile ingenuity, futile because eventually he is caught, and led by the ear to whatever terrible fate.

The film seems to be saying, by analogy, that here is man's condition. Helpless before his tormentor, unable to elude him, almost destined to defeat. The first sequence, then, is one of helplessness.

With this prologue, the film moves on to the classroom of the protagonists. The boys are typically boys, that is to say ineffectual rebels against a figure of oppression, and somehow unaware of the anatomy of the oppressor. Except, of course for Vergren, who has no formulated hostility—nor even unformulated: it later becomes clear that he is sorry for his tormentor. And when finally the sequence moves into the introduction of the tormentor and his torments, the mood of helplessness in the face of remorseless persecution is intensified. And when the tormentor's hostility is focused upon Vergren, we see Vergren's hopeless inability to cope with the oppression.

Birdie, the almost unpalatably lovable old codger who is the friend of the boys and is about to retire, talks to the Tormentor and finally breaks out into cold and impotent fury. He sees the profession to which he has given his life being perverted into an instrument of torture, and is helpless to do anything about it but rail—and here a hint of the denoument is given, the tormentor protests that he has been ill, that he is doing his best despite it.

In an almost immediately subsequent sequence we are moved into the tobacconist, and the girl is introduced. And there is something eery in her slavishly preparing and lighting a cigar for the man before whom she is so manifestly cringing. She too is helpless, and her helplessness comes to a climaxing din of futility and frustration as the story unfolds and she is seen to cower at the very thought of her tormentor. She is completely unable to escape him, and even in his absence helpless to forget—present or absent he is always there and hours away from him are hours of conscious escape from the inescapable presence.

And in the midst of Vergren's love affair with her, when his most masculine traits and tendencies are to the fore, he is not only unable to do anything about his own torment, but is helpless to do anything about hers. And after he has, with frightened resoluteness, denounced her, and in some measure comes to grips with his fear, it is too late—he returns to her flat and she is dead, consumed by her fearful helplessness.

The death of the girl is the beginning of the denoument, and occasion to introduce the other characters and have their helplessness contribute to the grotesquerie that has been delineated. The Headmaster at school is helpless; he must adhere to the forms, and, even knowing the monster for what he is, must yet expel the boy. The boy's father is helpless in the face of the catastrophe. He is a stern and resolute man; but his sternness and resolution are devices to conceal helplessness from himself and his family. To be less than stern, to be approachable and conciliatory in this crisis would be to relinquish his adjustment to helplessness, and that is something he cannot do. And when somehow he contrives to do it, the inclination is too late, the boy has left, and he is again helpless. The mother is almost a characature of helplessness. Incapable of prevailing upon her child not to leave home, unable to approach her husband to stop the boy, she flutters like a moth trapped between a window and an insecticide.

In every scene of the film, even in his physical absence, the presence of the tormentor is hideously and oppressively felt. All are, in varying degrees of directness, effected by him. Most cower; the wisest and most courageous would follow in his wake and try to undo his evil—evils which they were helpless but to aid in perpetration; and yet it is significant that the film has them *follow* and undo, not prevent.

The film having built to this climax; the pathetic death of the girl, the nightmare of the boy, the crushing of the father, the wastedness of the mother, the scarring of the students, having reached this point of nervous carnage the camera turns to the Tormentor and he is shown for the pathetic and broken figure that he is. He is closer to the horror than any, he is moved more violently than the others by it, he is tormented the most; for him there is no readjustment, no healing of the wounds; no concern of others; he is alone . . . alone with his evil. He is the most helpless of all—helplessness is presented as being the essence of evil.

* * *

In delineating the character and characteristics of the Tormentor, the picture makes it clear that he too is a frightened personality. And it does this long before the final breakdown on the stairs in the deceased girl's apartment house. The Tormentor is shown as being strikingly insecure. This, at least is the reading I give to such idiosyncrasies as the overly-neat desk, on which even a book that is needed for immediate use (the one in which he notes attendance and demerits) is kept inside the desk, his pens kept neatly in their slots. He demands, on a stifling summer day, that the windows be closed, so that he can have the feeling of containment and its concommitant security. When he walks down the street it is with a measured and even pace; he places his cane precisely before him, never casually . . . always precisely. And though it is midsummer and high noon he wears his high celluloid collar close to his chin and he is safely buttoned into his overcoat, his hands are wrapped in gloves and his head covered. His most immediate environment (his clothing) is close around him and he is snug and secure. Any such excessive need for snugness or security evidences, I think, profound insecurity. Only twice does he appear not so rigidly enswathed in clothing. The first time is in the girl's flat when he is drinking and tormenting her with his reminiscenses about his past, wallowing in his sick memories of his hurts and his frustrations and his dubious triumphs (as with the cat). Here he doesn't need the clothing, because his security is implicit in his total mastery of the girl who, though in terror and revulsion, is unable to leave. The other occasion is when he is detained in the police station; and here the whole façade is stripped away, there is no containment, no security, no control, he is a convulsive mass of fear and apprehension . . . there is no pretending now. And when finally he is being released, he is unable to look at the faces around him, despite their evident sympathy and professional noncommitalness. He is ashamed at the vision of his insides that they have had, and he is ashamed of the reminder it was to him. The next day he appears at the Headmaster's office to make his accusations against the boy and he is as smug and unctuous as ever; the façade has been regained. We recall that when he was being threatened or questioned, he pleads that he is not understood, that he was sick and still is, and that he is not to be blamed for the evil he wreaks. The evil of this man seems to have been born of the evils he was helpless against, and that at the root of his evil—the very essence of it—is helplessness.

* * *

It seems to me that TORMENT makes three major points. The first that the evil one—the Tormentor—is one possessed. Vergren, the only one who really survives in any satisfactory sense does not hate the tormentor as do his schoolmates. He feels pity for the man, and at worst—and this later—an unfeeling removal. But not hate. He thinks the man is sick and he is genuinely sorry. This is an important point for the film. It states the thesis that even the most evil do not choose to be so but are possessed by evil and in the end suffer the most. It is important because it trys to bridge the gap between a Christian view of evil and the part that the will plays in evilness, and the mechanistic view of evil and the notion that evil—or even good—are not a matter of choice but circumstances, external and internal, that are determined and therefore beyond moral judgment. It says, as will be pointed out below, that faith saves Vergren, but it is not a lack of faith that condemns the Tormentor. There is much to be said about the success or failure with which it accomplishes this conciliation.

The second point I think the film makes is that faith is the critical quantity in the boy Vergren's salvation. It is faith that finally reclaims him from his bog of despair and emptiness. He awakens in the morning, having fallen into a cathartic sleep, probably hungry (it seems that hunger usually follows a particularly acute attack of weltschmertz), gratefully he reaches for the banknote left by the headmaster and walks out into a clear and sunny day, and hopefully surveys the rooftops of his city—life and reality await him, he is back home, home from the world.

Whether it be faith in God or faith only in the intuited goodness of life, God or no God, to see something else in the world, something that makes life worthwhile despite the Torment, is to have faith, because it is not, insofar as I know, demonstrable. I think the picture says that there is that other thing.

The picture's third major point, as I see it, is that a certain naïveté is essential to survival. Sandman, the boy's close friend, who shook his fist by calling the Tormentor a swine when he graduated, does not I think, survive. He is cynical and defiant. But to be cynical is to believe in the evil of people. He says early in the picture something to the effect that men are beastly and there are no virtuous women. He lives in a world of mistrust and hate and suspicion; he sells life, and consequently himself, short—and if that is survival, it is little more than just that.

In contrast to him is Vergren who believes in the virtuousness of women, in the felicity of marriage, and who is so naive as not to hate his tormentor but to me merely confused by the evil. And when finally he does lash out and hit him, it is not for the outrages committed against himself, but because of the misery that he inflicted on the girl in which she lived and died. He doesn't understand evil, he trusts people. To be trustful of people and to see the good in them is to deny them as evil. It makes possible a brush with death the evening of one day and the walking out into the clear light of a new and hopeful day the next.

And so having been prevailed upon to think about it and having belabored the reader with my musings I find that, though it is true that the notion of helplessness in the face of evil is repugnant, and that this *is* said in the film, more is being said. And that is that the evil is the very essence of helplessness, and so is even more helpless than

LAWRENCE SANDEK

OPUS I

I have just returned from a polity meeting, at which two motions were passed in what I am told is a democratic fashion. It cannot be denied that in the true democratic tradition "ayes" and hands were counted, recorded, and assigned some significance. But I should like to question the validity of such a procedure, considered in itself, with regard to ascertaining the "will" of the people. I do not here condemn the action of the polity as a group; for, personally I am in accord with the view expressed by the motion. (I speak now of the "reaffirmation" motion.) My real quarrel is with what might have been, and I think was, a misuse of the democratic system as a mode of operation.

I understand the assumptions behind a democratically constituted polity (if not generally, at least in the case of St. John's) to be the following:

1. That the political aspect of the people here is essentially a rational one. That is, that where there is a community problem the solution is to be found in a group dialectic, in which the two sides of the issue are presented, and their merits discussed with respect to the community.
2. That this dialectic can and will result in a leveling out of differences through persuasion, and not only that from this will rise an expression of the will of the group, but further, that this will can make the best possible choice.

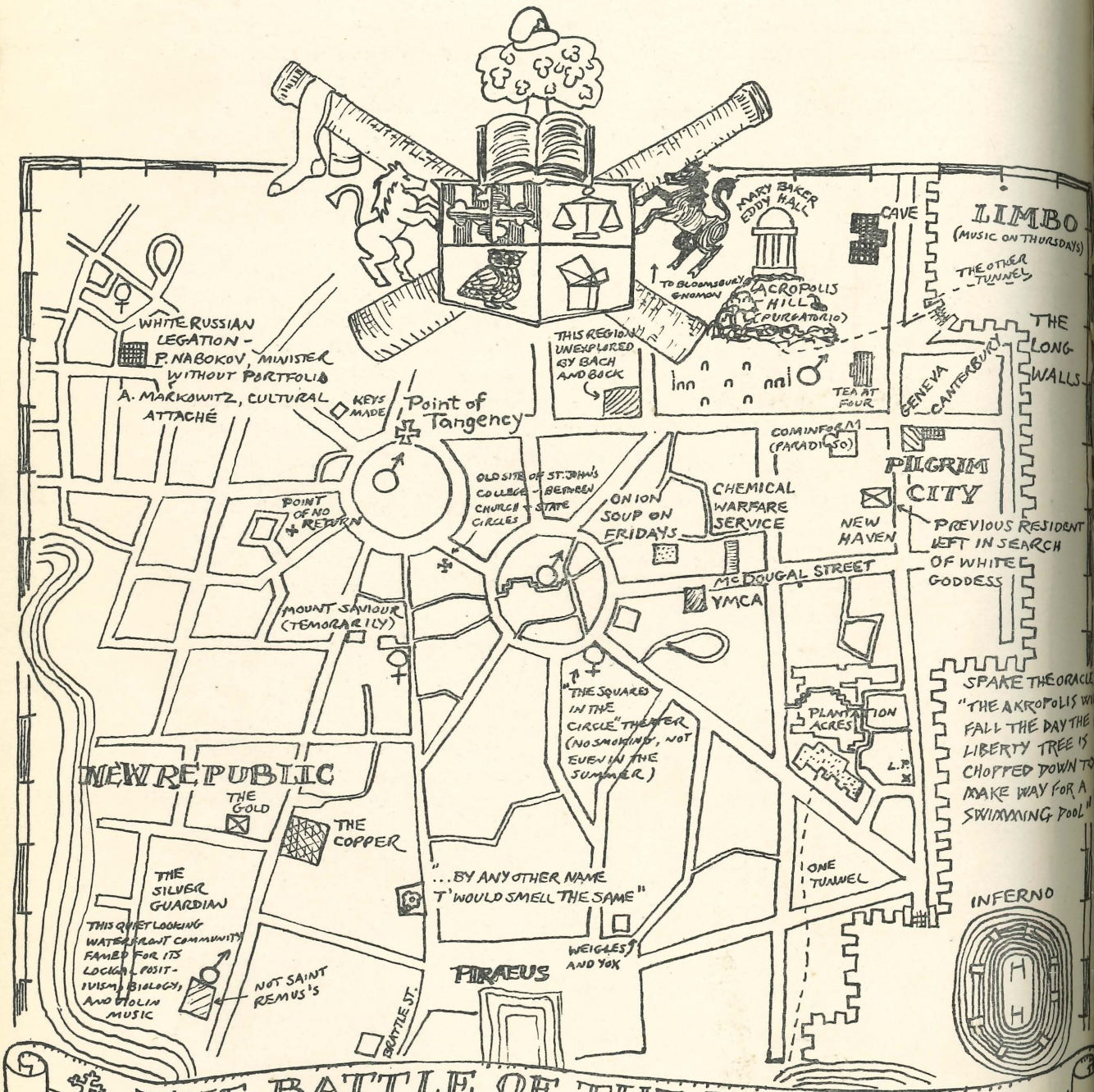
A necessary corollary to this second is, I think, the understanding that there is no disgrace, or indication of a lack of personal integrity or ability in being persuaded of the fallacies and shortcomings of one's view. I think the inference is not unjustified that few people leave a polity meeting having been persuaded of their mistake, not from any lack in the opposing argument, but from a notion that to admit "defeat" is somehow shameful, or at least a sign of weakness. But if this mistaken understanding constitues a part of the political make-up of enough individuals, this group dialectics loses any meaning outside of becoming an instrument for waving convictions. If two people holding opposing views come together for the sake of a dialectic, and part with precisely those same views, the dialectic has failed in purpose, no matter how pleasant it may have been. For certainly the purpose of dialectic is something more than simply an airing of one's view-point, and that purpose is persuasion. Neither participant will claim to *know,* yet each has accepted one conviction over the other. Clearly something is amiss. Both cannot be correct. Either both will be wrong, in which case this will be demonstrated in the course of a successful dialectic, or each has in his thesis an element of truth, in which case the dialectic will point out what they are. In any case reason cannot be responsible for both attitudes, but there must be in one or both a prejudice working, which prevents him from seeing the fallacy of his argument. This group dialectic, of which I speak, and which I think is an essential part of the successful working of the student government here, is purposed to break down this prejudice, and in so doing make a synthesis of ideas possible. But in the situation described above no such synthesis takes place, and such is, I believe, the case with discussions I have witnessed in the great hall and in the gym last night.

Concerning that meeting, I must confess to a genuine dissatisfaction, to say the least, with its general tone. I saw the motion of closure of the "reaffirmation" motion as nothing other than an inadvertent slip, which a few people spontaneously considered to be a formal motion, and which the speaker himself apparently agreed to as an afterthought. As I said, the system of operation of the polity is such that thesis and antithesis need be presented, followed by discussion designed to convince or dissuade, on rational grounds, the opposing factions. Aside from the well-made objection that the antithesis was not clearly put forth, the process of persuasion was not given sufficient time to work its effect. It is highly probable that there were many people there who were not yet convinced by one or the other side—who had arguments of their own not yet heard—who, given a fair amount of time, might have voted otherwise. This, I think, is the fault with most polity activity. Namely, an attitude expressed by, "This is what I think, now let me see how many people agree with me." Instead of presenting view-points to be tested in the crucible dialectic, we are prone to voice them for the sake of discovering their quantitative worth. The probability of their revision, the necessity of which human foible seems to dictate, becomes a remote one. But while the will of a group is expressed by a number, embodied in that numerical expression must be a thoughtful choice on the part of the individuals; and this presupposes an awareness of both sides of an issue, and of the consequences of each.

The subject of ridicule as a political instrument deserves some consideration. Ridicule, while perhaps being one of the most effective attacks, is, nonetheless, intolerable, in a society where honesty, if nothing else, is supposed to be a virtue. For ridicule is a form of dishonesty, in that it is designed to cloud the pertinent and serious problems of a motion such as this one. Fortunately the attempt to laugh the problem into oblivion failed. However, that the attempt was made is indication that it may be used again.

The inferences of what I have said may now be drawn. Clearly, if the group dialectic and its subsequent synthesis of ideas is not possible, the democratic form is only a front for a kind of anarchy, in which those who happen to have the numerical advantage rule, and the result of the meeting does in no way express the will of the group; the likelihood of best possible choices being made is in the hands of chance; we should be in a far better position being ruled by such a benevolent despot as is available. On the other hand, if the group dialectic can obtain in our polity activity, we should be most unwise to discard self-government since, aside from its instructional value, it has an intrinsic worth, namely a condition of greater freedom, and an awareness of our own abilities. The question for us to answer then, is whether such a dialectic process (of which thoughtful and objective choice is a necessary part) is probable where political action is the issue. The honest answer to this question, whatever it may be, should be a comment not only on our political activity, but on our academic training as well.

CHARLES LERNER


LIMBO
(MUSIC ON THURSDAYS)
THE OTHER TUNNEL
CAVE
MARY BAKER EDDY HALL
TO BLOOMSBURY
GNOMON
ACROPOLIS HILL
(PURGATORIO)
THE LONG WALLS
GENEVA
CANTERBURY
TEA AT FOUR
WHITE RUSSIAN LEGATION -
P. NABOKOV, MINISTER
WITHOUT PORTFOLIO
A. MARKOWITZ, CULTURAL
ATTACHÉ
KEYS MADE
Point of Tangency
THIS REGION UNEXPLORED BY BACH AND BACK
COMIN FOR M
(PARADISO)
PILGRIM CITY
NEW HAVEN
PREVIOUS RESIDENT LEFT IN SEARCH OF WHITE GODDESS
OLD SITE OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE - BEFORE CHURCH + STATE CIRCLES
ONION SOUP ON FRIDAYS
CHEMICAL WARFARE SERVICE
POINT OF NO RETURN
MOUNT SAVIOUR (TEMORARILY)
McDOUGAL STREET
YMCA
"THE SQUARES IN THE CIRCLE" THEATER (NO SMOKING, NOT EVEN IN THE SUMMER)
SPAKE THE ORACLE "THE AKROPOLIS WI FALL THE DAY THE LIBERTY TREE IS CHOPPED DOWN TO MAKE WAY FOR A SWIMMING POOL."
PLANTATION ACRES
L.P.
NEW REPUBLIC
THE GOLD
THE COPPER
THE SILVER GUARDIAN
THIS QUIET LOOKING WATERFRONT COMMUNITY FAMED FOR ITS LOGICAL POSITIVISM, BIOLOGY, AND VIOLIN MUSIC
NOT SAINT REMUS'S
"...BY ANY OTHER NAME T'WOULD SMELL THE SAME"
ONE TUNNEL
INFERNO
WEIGLES AND YOX
PIRAEUS
BRATTLE ST.
THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS
PREPARED BY NEW SCHOOL OF GEO-POLI-META-PHILOSOPHO-LUNICAL RESEARCH
(THE EIGHTH, NINTH, TENTH, ELEVENTH AND TWELFTH LIBERAL ARTS)