TRADITION AND ISOLATION:

THE LITERARY CRITICISM OF EDMUND WILSON

by

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INTRODUCTION

The position of Edmund Wilson is unique among critics on the American literary scene. For over three decades he has been considered one of America's leading critics of literature and is doubtless, as Stanley Edgar Hyman observes, "the most widely known of our critics."[1] In an age when literary criticism has become greatly specialized and has tended to find its audience for the most part in academic circles, Edmund Wilson stands out as the only critic whose reputation is based upon critical acceptance by both the intellectuals and the broad literate reading public. Through the years his writings have been published in the avant-garde literary "little magazines" as well as the mass-circulated popular publications,[2] and unlike other prominent critics of literature, the majority of whom are teachers by profession, Wilson sees his writings as "the record of a journalist"[3] and speaks of himself as belonging to the "serious profession of journalism."[4]

Not only his choice of profession serves to distinguish him from other critics of literature: this chosen field of literary - journalism reflects precisely his conception of the critic's most satisfying relationship to his readers. In assuming the role of critic-journalist Wilson set out to satisfy two imperative needs among twentieth century

Americans who concerned themselves with culture. He wished to give them an "understanding of the most recent literary events in the larger international world -- Joyce, Eliot, Proust, etc. -- which were already out of the range of readers....and to bring home to the 'bourgeois' intellectual world [especially American] the recent developments of Marxism in connection with the Russian Revolution."[5] Both ambitions committed him to a strong sense of critical responsibility, and insist upon a critical role which enlarges the range of that audience's enjoyment, sympathies and sensibilities. With such an aim Wilson saw the function of the critic as mediation between the work of art, in all its possible complexity, and the public. By his wide range of interests and his incisive, helpful interpretation of themes, Wilson has consistently based his work upon the central conviction of the critic as improver of the reader's mind and eye.

If Wilson's philosophy of criticism has served to bring him into closer contact with a larger audience than any other literary critic in America, this unique relationship is also derived from the general relevance and fresh immediacy of his widely human interests. His views on the world of letters have been consistently informed by the forces which have most affected the literary mind in the twentieth century --

the autonomy of the artistic imagination, Marxism, and Freudianism. Yet, unlike the extreme spokesmen of these dogmas, Wilson has been able to use suggestions from all these sources, singly or combined, in a way which does not allow the work under observation to be submerged in the analytical method. These modern artistic, philosophical and psychological assumptions gave him much valuable material for his critical approach, but in his writings they were assimilated into a deeper literary tradition, one more profoundly meaningful to himself than the intellectual premises which from time to time have meant so much to him. This was the tradition of the man of letters: the man who was cultured, well-read, serious; a tradition which in his experience was fundamentally American and derived from nineteenth century New England. Criticism in America from its earliest days had been predominantly concerned with social values. It had developed under the impetus of various individual efforts at creating a genuinely self-reliant American literature, for "from Emerson and Thoreau to Mencken and Brooks, criticism had been the great American lay philosophy . . . It had been a study of literature inherently concerned with ideals of citizenship, and often less a study of literary texts than a search for some imperative moral order."[6]

It is within the context of this tradition that Wilson has produced his critical works. In his conception of the critic as man of letters, the efficacy of literature is not based solely on theories of communication or textual scrutiny, although these might be used as means toward a more comprehensive understanding of the work under examination. Wilson's tradition was rooted in a deeply-felt belief that all intellectual activity "in whatever field it takes place, is an attempt to give meaning to our experience--that is, to make life more practicable; for by understanding things we make it easier to survive and get around them."[7]

Literature as an expression of human experience is a thing of the spirit, but also a concrete reality. It arises from a combination of circumstances--psychological, social, artistic--but it does not end with its own creation; it is of equal value with that offered by other human activities, and with them attempts to impart a sense of order out of the chaos of life. The role of the artist is to always find expression for something which has never yet been expressed, and he must master a new set of phenomena which has never yet been mastered. "With each such victory of the human intellect... we experience a deep satisfaction: we have been cured of some ache of disorder, relieved of some oppressive burden of uncomprehended

events."[8] This affirmative role assigned to art and the artist is an integral aspect of Wilson's tradition: he was brought up and educated in the humane disciplines, and inherited the assumption of the importance of the arts and a natural, close relation to the world of books, ideas and ideals. Inherent in this assumption is the perspective based upon the historical point of view: the sense of a perpetually developing cultural enterprise from one generation to the next; the feeling that all creative artists are bound together in a common fraternity. It is this view which allows for Wilson's phenomenal range of interest.

Edmund Wilson's essays have dealt with everything from literature, music, painting and theatre, to movies, burlesque shows, vaudeville, murder trials, anthropology and religious history, and whatever the subject, "he brings to it the same active intelligence, the same learned interest and the same degree of intellectual seriousness--in short the same personal identity."[9] The critic who in reviews and essays can discuss Sophocles, Pope and Thackeray can, without condescension, write an article on Farfariello (an Italian comedian who was doing impersonations at a Lower East Side burlesque house in New York, 1925), and

discuss him as "a brilliant, a genuinely creative talent."[10] The conviction which makes this feat possible is the assumption that all forms of human expression on all levels of seriousness make essential contributions to man's understanding of himself and the world in which he lives.

This range of interest which, more than any other single quality serves to set Wilson apart from contemporary critics, is a concomitant of the historical perspective which he inherited as part of his family traditions, and later developed under "one of Princeton's greatest teachers, Christian Gauss, who laid the deeper foundations of his intellectual position,"[11] by formulating for his student a non-dogmatic humanism[12] and a "fluidity of mind"[13] which furnished him with, as he has said, "the point of view from which I started off my criticism."[14]

Wilson's point of view, his insight into books and artists and the conditions which produced them is basically that of a social critic. But, if he, like Parrington and other social critics, sees literature as part of history, unlike them, he has not dissolved literature into history. His method has been to find the basic mood and intention of a literary work, and then to connect it with the conditions of the author's life, and with literary tradition and social

history. In critical terms, the method is an attempt to locate the meaning of the text not only in itself, but also in a broader context; a work of literature is seen as a fusion of moral, psychological, social, and aesthetic elements.

In Wilson, the effectiveness of the method owes much to a sensibility which in its broad sympathies succeeds in giving the reader a feeling for the spirit of an author and his work. Thus, while the 'New Critics' have made notable contributions to the study of specific literary areas and problems, Wilson's influence is attributable less to any fixed critical standards than to the ability to write with unadorned truthfulness about important things that are relevant to modern man: and over the years, this capacity--essentially American in Thoreauvian terms--has created a significant form of criticism.[15]

In this regard, his career has certain striking parallels with a number of radical American critics who were nourished by the impulse for reform, and spoke with the same moral fervour--Henry Adams, Lincoln Steffens, John Jay Chapman, Van Wyck Brooks: all of them taking their stand for the earlier American virtues in the face of a dehumanizing industrialism, and the alarming perversion of social ideals, which to them seemed the worst part of the tremendous expansion their country had undergone since the

Civil War. These men were the nineteenth and early twentieth century representatives of that ever-present type of American, who, though "uprooted from the benefits of the rigorous puritan code" still acts under the "shaping power of puritan tradition,"[16] with its emphasis upon personal responsibility for the commonweal based on a strict system of personal ethics.

Whether as teachers, historians, journalists, or editors, these men spoke out to awaken their contemporaries to how much was being lost of their native American heritage; to decry the new vulgarity of manners and morals which seemed to be rapidly displacing the idealism of the past. Henry Adams, in speaking of the particularly outrageous financial coup carried off by the Drew-Fisk-Gould alliance in 1868, gives us some idea of the degree to which the rapacious corruption of the post-Civil War period had defaced the image of an honest, conscience-guided business ethic:

> The worst scandals of the eighteenth century were relatively harmless by the side of this, which smirched executive, judiciary, banks, corporate systems, professions, and people, all the great active forces of society, in one dirty cesspool of vulgar corruption.[17]

The severity of this indictment, which holds all society responsible for these excesses, indicates Adams' sense of loss and reaction to American material expansion and aggrandizement, which was

advancing without any guiding principle of moral conduct.

Van Wyck Brooks, in 1915, saw the 'typical American' as living under the same moral blight: he has grown up "in a sort of orgy of lofty examples, moralized poems, national anthems and baccalaureate sermons." What society had failed to teach him, however, is:

> that life is a legitimate progress towards spiritual or intellectual ends...he has had it embedded in his mind that the getting of a living is not a necessity incidental to some higher and more disinterested end, but that it is the prime and central end. And, as a corollary of this, he has been encouraged to assume that the world is a stamping ground for his every untrained, greedy and aggressive impulse, that, in short, society is fair play for what he can get out of it.[18]

United by a common purpose to defeat those forces which were smothering American culture, these men were also united by their common fate: to some degree each of them was defeated by the environment he opposed which surrounded them, " not with calculated antagonism and directed force, but with weakness and passivity."[19] Before their careers were over, they had become isolated to varying degrees from the developing cultural life of their country, and, resigned to ineffectuality and alienation, some settled into misanthropy, while others embraced chauvinistic views of the most extreme nature. [20]

Edmund Wilson's career is illumined when placed against the background of these precursors. Like them, his criticism has been predicated upon moral and social standards which were conditioned in an older culture. The passing of the conditions which gave rise to these standards has resulted in the growing isolation of the critic and his critical viewpoint. The job he set out to do as a young critic has been largely accomplished: Joyce, Eliot and Yeats are practically idolized in college courses, having moved from avant-garde to the status of classics; and developments following the Russian Revolution have very nearly debased anything of Marxism which would have been profitable for the 'bourgeoisie' to learn. No one has felt this sense of isolation more sharply or poignantly than Wilson himself. After living at the centre of literary and political activities for over thirty years, he has removed himself from "the kind of contemporary conflicts that [he] used to go out to explore,"[21] while his interests and areas of contact with modern America are so reduced as to make him feel that he "is in the eighteenth century--or at any rate not much later than nineteenth. Old fogeyism is confortably closing in."[22]

In the light of these present circumstances, we are able to review and revaluate his critical performance. These demonstrate that those attributes which made Wilson one of America's best critics--the response to subtle historical influences, the keen psychological insight, the broad sympathy for all art forms and cultures--were for him not modern analytical devices, but aspects of an 'old-fashioned' American sensibility which deals with the present in terms of the past. His entire critical career can be seen as an attempt to assimilate modern literary works into a traditionof the American past. He has sought to actively shape that tradition, against which he first rebelled, and to recreate these early republican ideals which were subverted in America's transformation from the nineteenth to the twentieth century.

There is in Wilson's critical writing a strong sense of social pressures, and the effect of these pressures upon the artistic psyche as expressed through creative works has been the persistent theme of most of his essays and reviews. It is through a discussion of the social pressures of his time, and his personal reactions to them, that the work of Edmund Wilson

can be understood in its totality--the traditional and the modern, the intransigent rationalism and the mystique of a past, the breadth of historical perspective and the narrow political isolationism.

CHAPTER I

Wilson's Cultural Tradition and Literary Career

Edmund Wilson was born on May 8, 1895, in Red Bank, New Jersey.[1] Both the maternal and paternal sides of his family had belonged for many generations to the professions--doctors, lawyers, college professors, ministers; his father was a lawyer, fairly prominent in state politics, and in 1908 was appointed Attorney General of New Jersey. His mother was descended from Upper New York settlers, who were part of the first westward migration from New England at the end of the eighteenth century. The family traced its lineage back to the New England Mathers,[2] and according to family legend, had been established by a daughter of one of the Earls of Essex, who had eloped with a gardener and emigrated to the new world.[3]

From his earliest youth, Edmund Wilson lived in an atmosphere that engendered a natural affinity to the world of literature and art. His maternal grandfather, a practising physician at Laurelwood, on the New Jersey coast, had a library which reflected a deep literary interest now rare in a twentieth century science-orientated professional. The foundation of the

library was histories and translations of the classics, but it contained many other books which expressed the taste of their owner: the Finnish epic The Kalevala, books on Russian folklore, Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, Percy's Reliques, the poetry of Scott and Kipling, and Stevenson, Balzac and the eighteenth century novelists.[4] Edmund Wilson recalls that his grandfather's classical interests were such that one of the only extravagances he allowed himself while economizing in order to send his children to school and college had been to buy a second-hand copy of J. A. Symonds' Greek Poets.[5]

Yet the ease and quiet learning reflected in such literary interests was fast becoming a thing of the past. The hurried, aggressive growth of the American economy in the post-Civil War period, united with unsettled social conditions to create a spiritual and cultural vaccum. Much of the trouble lay in the "immense growth of national wealth unaccompanied by a corresponding growth in civic responsibility."[6] In reviewing this period, contemporary historians see it as the turning point in American development, for it was at this stage that

the country took on those features which characterize its emergence as a great industrial and commercial power; irrevocably sacrificed in this development were the moral standards and integrity of a pre-industrial society:

> There was everywhere a breakdown of old moral standards, and to many it seemed that integrity had departed from public life. The idealism of the pre-war years had been burnt out in the flames of the War and Reconstruction. The industrial revolution, the building of the trans-continental railroads, and the exploitation of the new natural resources had called into existence a class of new rich untrained to the responsibilities of their position. Speculation had entered business more largely than ever before and the mania for making something out of nothing permeated American society. The rise of the corporation as an instrument of business involved a diffusion of responsibility so great that the sense of responsibility all but disappeared. Never before and only once since--after World War I--have public morals fallen as low.[7]

This period--the 1870's and 1880's--when the character of American life was being drastically changed, proved extremely unsettling for that generation of young men who had been trained for a career of public service based on high ideals. Upon graduating from private schools, they had been trained to follow their fathers into the learned professions; but they had then had to deal with a world in which this kind of education and the kind of ideals it served no longer really counted for much. "Such people, from the moment they left their schools were subjected

to dizzying temptations, overpowering pressures, insidious diversions of purpose."[8]

Edmund Wilson Sr. had attended Princeton, and these dislocating and disturbing social pressures prevented his making a healthy adjustment to the new America which he met after graduation. While he was a highly successful lawyer, he did not care to amass a fortune, and demonstrated his independence from the affluence around him by maintaining his law office in a flat above a liquor store. By the time he was thirty-five, he was a confirmed hypochondriac, and suffered extended fits of depression. He practised law whenever he had to make money, but most often he spent the time in travelling and seeking cures in rest homes in England and Europe.

The cause of his breakdown was his inability to adjust to the new America--"both banal in a bourgeois way and fantastic with gigantic fortunes,"[9]--which confronted his generation when they left their schools. He had been raised in the patrician tradition of public service and taken great interest in the Republican Party where he saw himself serving the republic as

a dedicated 'servant,' rather than as a 'politician.' But he was unable to cope with the radically altered social and political scene of the Gilded Age, where the aristocratic political ideal was being submerged in the urban party machines and political activities were unabashedly the extensions of economic interests. For a time he served as a committee-man and campaign speaker for the Republican Party, but he would not, in his later years, accept a political post.

His life had not cracked under the strain of supporting extravagant and lavish living standards, but the lack of an objective in life was equally oppressive. His traditional training and education were useless in meeting the exigencies of the age; the ideals in which he had believed were devalued, and he finally reacted by rejecting the world and lapsing into fantasy and silence.

The tragic pattern of his father's career was to exert a strong influence upon Edmund Wilson. He reacted against the infirmities and withdrawal of his parent by pledging to meet head-on those destructive forces which were subverting America: whether in literature or politics he was to take a radical stand

at the centre of discussion and activity. Initially his radicalism was based less upon a consciously accepted doctrine than the result of his having "grown up in modern prosperous America with a slightly outside point of view,"[10] but under the impact of subsequent socio-economic events, it was to develop within a strictly-defined ideological and political framework. These events were to be the unique shaping forces of his own generation -- college, the war, the boom, and the Great Depression.

He attended the Hill, a preparatory school in Pennsylvania, from 1909-1912,[11] and then entered Princeton (1912-1916) of which "any number of his forbears, including his father, and several of his uncles were alumni."[12] While at preparatory school he began writing poetry, short stories, essays, and at Princeton he became editor of The Nassau Literary Magazine, the undergraduate publication. In a lighter vein, he collaborated with F. Scott Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald and John Peale Bishop were his classmates and closest friends) in the annual Triangle Club musical show called The Evil Eye. The show was a great success, although the book was received with reservation by the audience and critics. Dean Gauss suspected even then (1915) that Wilson who "looked upon the circus

aspects of undergraduate life with amused tolerance,"[13] had written it with tongue-in-cheek: the villain of the piece, a disreputable perfume salesman was named The Count La Rochefoucauld-Boileau! In academic pursuits Wilson was "a brilliant student of classics, philosophy and modern languages,"[14] and so familiar was he with English literature, including contemporary authors, that he did not elect courses in this field.[15]

The universities were beginning to be conscious of Wells and Shaw and the literature of social reform, but the literary preferences of the class of 1916[16] and of Wilson himself still expressed an unfamiliarity or lack of appreciation for the 'moderns.' Wilson certainly knew the moderns but his taste at this period, stated in a review of Max Beerbohm which he wrote as a freshman, that he did not like writers who "urged the regeneration of mankind through their every work."[17] He preferred "pure art" and the "humane estheticism" of Beerbohm. However, his critical sense was already keen, and of his contemporaries he preferred Yeats above Masefield and judged Robert Frost superior to Vachel Lindsay.[18]

At Princeton Wilson not only received a profound and

extensive knowledge of the classics and modern languages and established friendships which were to be life-long: it was here that he came under the influence of the man who was to teach him what criticism is or ought to be--Professor Christian Gauss. From Gauss, in particular, Wilson learned to appreciate a wide range of literary works and to be alert to the assumptions--social, aesthetic and moral--implicit in literature. He derived from his teacher's humanism the attitude that literature was more than an imaginative record of man's history: primarily it was an allegiance to the great spirits of all time who had attempted, through the power of their imagination, to impose a pattern of meaningful order on human experience. Writers would be judged and rated, Gauss wrote Wilson in 1922, by "the quality and strength of their allegiances"[19] to life: an expression typical of Gauss yet so uncharacteristic of the modern temper, where allegiances at their broadest are normally to a party, or nation, or special-interest group, that to Wilson "he seemed a part of that good eighteenth-century Princeton."[20]

Gauss instilled in Wilson a confidence in the power of the undogmatic imagination. He espoused a non-religious

humanism which asserted the innate dignity of man and insisted upon the meaningfulness of the pattern of human history as reflected in the great literature of the past. It was a sceptical humanism which could be defined in terms of a mental attitude or general sympathies. While its ultimate validity was to be severely tested by subsequent events, it proved a valuable vantage point from which Wilson could view the activities of his contemporaries with a certain detachment: fully sharing the central experiences of his generation yet free from every intellectual commitment save a belief in the importance of remaining loyal to his own sense of truth.

Upon graduation, in 1916, Wilson took a job as reporter on the New York Evening Sun, for less than a year before he joined the army.[21] His choice of career, incongruous with that of his father's and uncles' before him, no doubt indicates the breakdown of the idea of disinterested public service, and the widening gap which separated the two generations. Above all other social events, the catastrophe of World War I awakened the younger generation to new sources of energy; the social world in which they had been raised was forever obliterated, and the cataclysm had exposed to view the false assumptions

of the past. His experience in the European War gave the young writer the necessary perspective for critically appraising his own country, and served as the final blow which destroyed his former sense of social or class loyalties.

Wilson enlisted--"not because he cared much about the war"[22]--but because he cared less for the unsatisfactory way of life in which he had been immersed. His life, after college, seemed both false and dull, and in writing of that time some years later (1932), he saw it as a continuation of superficial collegiate experiences:

> I had hoped to get away from college when I graduated, to find myself in a more varied world where my keel would strike on basic realities and I should go ashore at last; but though I was working for the first time for pay, it seemed to me that my life in New York was college all over again.[23]

The brutalizing experience of war made it impossible for him to resume again his pre-war existence. Like his contemporaries who shared these trials--Dos Passos, Hemingway, E.E. Cummings--Wilson reacted with disgust against the war and the conditions which had fostered it, and pledged to dedicate himself to the world of art and literature:

> I swore to myself that when the War was over I should stand outside society altogether. I should do without the comforts and amenities of the conventional world entirely, and I should devote myself to the great human interests which

transcended standards of living and conventions: Literature, History, the Creation of Beauty, the Discovery of Truth.[24]

In fact, Wilson returned from the war to resume his work as journalist on the staff of Vanity Fair, a magazine which represented an attitude of detachment and irony to people and events. It was an attitude familiar during the boom, but less and less possible as the twenties drew to a close and economic portents foreshadowed the crisis to come. Wilson served on the magazine until 1926, at which time he was managing editor.[25]

In an article written in 1932 Wilson recalled the various approaches to life which he saw as possibilities in the decade which followed the war. It summarized the direction taken by American intellectuals in their attempts to maintain a balance throughout this frenetic period: it also serves as a history of Wilson's own developing attitude sharply critical of the social events of that decade and moving from aloofness and urbanity toward broader sympathies and commitments:

The attitude of the Menckenian gentleman, ironic, beer-loving and "civilized" living principally on the satisfaction of feeling superior to the broker and enjoying the debauchment of American life as a burlesque show or three-ring circus; the attitude of old-American-stock smugness, with its drawing aloof from the rabble in the name of old Uncle Gilead Pilcher

who was Governor of Connecticut or Grandfather Timothy Merrymount who was killed in the Civil War--though the parvenus kept crashing the gate so fast, while the prosperity boom was on, that it was becoming harder and harder to get one's aloofness properly recognized; the liberal attitude that American capitalism was going to show a new wonder to the world by gradually and comfortably socializing itself and that we should just have to respect it in the meantime; the attitude of trying to get a kick out of the sheer size and energy of American enterprises, irrespective of what they were aiming at; the attitude of proudly withdrawing and cultivating a refined sensibility or of losing oneself completely in abstruse intellectual pursuits--scholastic philosophy, symbolic logic or metaphysical physics; the attitude of letting oneself be carried along by the mad hilarity and heartbreak of jazz, living only for the excitement of the evening; the attitude of keeping one's mind and morals impregnably disinfected with the feeble fascism-classicism of humanism.[26]

Wilson had at one time or another been in sympathy with these different attitudes, with the exception of "humanism," yet had come to see them as superficial and essentially as attempts on the part of the intellectuals to reconcile themselves to a world dominated by big business. The economic and social predicament called for measures more drastic, and with this understanding as his motivation, in 1926 Wilson joined the staff of The New Republic, first as editor of the book review section, and later he became associate editor of the magazine.[27]

The New Republic was then an independent liberal magazine, highly critical of the ways of government and business

in general. It gave Wilson the opportunity of reporting political and industrial events, as well as literary matters, and brought him into immediate contact with social problems where he could observe the fate of the individual caught up in the great inexplicable force of the depression. The result of his experiences as a reporter led him to seek for a more fundamental understanding of the social and economic ills which had beset America and the capitalist world. He wrote about stagnant Detroit, the injustice in Scotsboro, bank failures, unemployed coal miners, idle machinery of the textile works. His articles appeared in The New Republic through 1931, and when he brought them together, he called his book The American Jitters.

With the editors of The New Republic, he perceived that a laissez-faire economy was no longer adequate for a modern complex society; unlike them, he was not willing to confine his search for a solution solely to liberalism, which saw capitalism evolving gradually to a saner, more socially responsible system. That benevolent and intelligent capitalism had not only not been capable of restraining and reforming itself--it had not been able to prevent a national economic disaster of proportions which

neither capitalists nor liberals foresaw and which they found themselves unable to explain. The depression scenes "of privation and misery on a scale which sickens the imagination"[28] caused Wilson to see in the economic chaos the breakdown of not simply "the machinery of representative government but the capitalist system itself--and that, even with the best intentions, it may be henceforth impossible for capitalism to guarantee not merely social justice but even security and order."[29]

For Wilson, who was never a member of the Communist Party, the solution for the progressive was to "take Communism away from the Communists, and take it without ambiguities, asserting that [the] ultimate goal is the ownership by the government of the means of production."[30] Recognizing with characteristic thoroughness the need for a basic understanding of the philosophy he was espousing, he undertook a study of Marxism and the Russian Revolution, which occupied him from 1934 until 1940, when the work appeared as To The Finland Station (New York, 1940). In order to satisfy his own insatiable curiosity, he had learnt Russian so he could read the early Russian Utopian Socialists and Lenin, as well as read Marx and Engels in the original German.

His research took him to the Soviet Union for a five-month visit.

At first his enthusiasm for socialist theory was reinforced by actual experience in the Soviet Union. The Russian people, he discovered, were much like Americans, since they too had created for themselves a social system without strict class alignments. Both countries have departed from old systems and "feel a natural sympathy with one another. The Soviet Union stands in relation to the rest of the world today very much as the United States stood for a century after the Revolution."[31] Yet, at the time of this visit, he was witness to the perceptible changes which had overtaken the state. Lenin's aims, Wilson maintained in an essay written in 1941, "were of course humanitarian, democratic and anti-bureaucratic,"[32] but instead of a classless society arising out of feudal Russia, there arose a new controlling and privileged class, and Lenin died "in great perplexity and anguish of mind,"[33] at seeing the revolutionary aims betrayed. Even Stalin's dictatorship in the beginning Wilson saw as a serious attempt "to bring the economy of Soviet Russia up to the level of the capitalist nations, so that socialism might become a reality."[34]

In an essay on Hemingway, originally published in 1941, Wilson explains the influence of Marxism on the intellectuals of the 1930's. This passage is plainly autobiographical:

> The progress of the Communist faith among our writers since the beginning of the depression has followed a peculiar course. That the aims and beliefs of Marx and Lenin should have come through to the minds of intellectuals who had been educated in the bourgeois tradition as great awakeners of conscience, a great light, was quite natural and highly desirable. But the conception of the dynamic Marxist will, the exaltation of the Marxist religion, seized the members of the professional classes like a capricious contagion or hurricane, which shakes one and leaves his neighbour standing, then returns to lay hold of the second after the first has become quiet again. In the moment of seizure each one of them saw a scroll unrolled from the heavens, on which Marx and Lenin and Stalin, the Bolsheviks of 1917, the Soviets of the Five-Year Plan, and the GPU of the Moscow trials were all part of the same great purpose. Later the convert, if he were capable of it, would get over his first phase of snow blindness and learn to see real people and conditions, would study the development of Marxism in terms of nations, periods, personalities, instead of logical deductions from abstract propositions or--as in the case of the more naive or dishonest--of simple incantatory slogans. But for many there was at least a moment when the key to all the mysteries of human nature seemed suddenly to have been placed in their hands, when an infallible guide to thought and behaviour seemed to have been given them in a few easy formulas.[35]

Marxist ideology impressed Wilson as it did his contemporaries. But he was kept "from some of the extravagances of the convert by the strength of his feeling for literary values."[36]

In 1930 and 1931, when his bitterness against the capitalist system was at its height and communist rule seemed the only way out of the economic morass, he could still protest against Marxist dogmatism as applied to literature. Participating in a controversy aroused by Michael Gold's review (from a Marxist point of view) of Thornton Wilder's Cabala, Wilson wrote an unsigned editorial which appeared in The New Republic on November 26, 1930. To the extent that the artist reflects the social values of his class and culture, Wilson agreed with Gold in seeing Wilder (Wilson linked him with Proust) as dealing with "the illnesses of the cultivated people in a capitalist society." Wilder's "pathos and beauty derived from the exotic lands of the imagination . . . a sedative for sick Americans."[37] What Gold had failed to distinguish, however, was the existence of certain groups which cut through the social classes, and these tend to have an independent existence. The writers make a group of their own," united by its "own tradition, its own craft and body of doctrine which has been brought down to the present by practitioners that have come from a variety of classes through a variety of different societies."[38] Wilson's commitment to

literary values was too pronounced to deny the autonomy of art, or to confuse it with propaganda even while he was in sympathy with communist political aims.

A similar ambivalence is present in To The Finland Station, his most ambitious work, and many would agree with Granville Hicks' opinion that it is "one of the finest pieces of intellectual history written in our time."[39] Wilson's skill at "the vivid 'psychographic' portrait that Sainte-Beuve had perfected"[40] and his deftness at summing up and elucidating the contents of a book or theory, are all brought into focus in this historical essay which deals with the development of socialism from Utopians through Marx and Engels, and, finally, to the implementation of Marxism by Lenin in the Russian Revolution.

His greatest interest lay in tracing the steps taken by men seeking to deduce a pattern of movement from past historic events, and thus, impose a specific direction on the future. As in his literary studies, Wilson emphasizes personalities rather than theories, and his discussion of the development of political doctrine is closely woven into the

biographical framework. There is something distinctly 'un-Marxist' in his reliance upon the individual as the shaping force of history. The mechanical approach of Marxism to human history has been assimilated into a tradition of individualism, independence, and self-reliance. Commenting upon Wilson's interpretation of Marxism, one critic pointed out that "there is more of Emerson than Marx in the idea that it is the individual who counts in the last resort, that history is made by men out of their determination . . . and their willingness to sacrifice themselves to ideals."[41] It was precisely this capacity for living according to ideals which made the socialists and communists compelling to the American writer; for in contrast to them the American people,

> a people disposed to idealism, but deprived of their original ideals were making themselves neurotic in the attempt to introduce idealism into the occupations . . . of a precarious economic system the condition for whose success is that they must cut the throats of their neighbours andswindle one another.[42]

By applying a scientific methodology to social organization, Marxists appeared to be on the road toward establishing a society without class privileges based on birth or difference of income; by abolishing economic exploitation

they seemed to inaugurate a new social order. It was this imaginative vision of human society which attracted Wilson; and in the process of writing the history of the visionaries who had maintained this ideal, he removed the oppressive weight of dogma from their beliefs. Marx, long hailed as the founder of 'scientific socialism,' (to differentiate him from the preceding Utopians) is, in Wilson's eyes, a poet of human history; his Das Kapital a morality.[43] Lenin's task assumed almost Promethean dimensions in Wilson's description of his arrival at the Finland Station when the revolution is about to begin:

> Lenin is now to attempt to impose on the events of the present a pattern of actual direction which will determine the history of the future. We must not wonder if later events are not always amenable to this pattern. The point is that western man at this moment can be seen to have made some definite progress in mastering the greeds and the fears, the bewilderments, in which he has lived.[44]

Marxism, and socialist theory in general, arise from a profound criticism of society and, of necessity, contain a strong negative strain. This aspect of theoretical Marxism was subdued in Wilson's discussion; he saw, rather, its positive features--the acute analysis of social forces and the belief in

human progress--as an extension of the ideals of the Enlightenment and the American and French Revolutions, ideals which had shaped the earlier America. It was to them that he had remained loyal, and it was through them that he accepted and modified the more modern, fierce, and strait concepts of Marxism.[45]

The continual assertion, both in his studies of Marxism and in his literary criticism, that civilization rests on the individual's "affirmation of the power of the spirit, in indifference to, if not in defiance of, what might be called the world situation--that is, of the mise en scene, the conditions of life, the amenities,"[46] indicates how deeply the secularized Puritanism of Thoreau and Emerson had penetrated Wilson's thinking and how his absorption in twentieth-century revolutionary ideas had served to reinforce the "early American" core of his character. He had described Christian Gauss as being part of the eighteenth century: he saw himself as an "inheritor of the eighteenth century tradition;"[47] his "special susceptibility to the assertion of moral authority"[48] deriving from his Protestant training.

The memory of what had befallen his father's generation and the fate that had overtaken his own were also persistent forces which determined Wilson's orientation toward the world. The earlier generation, he wrote in an essay on John Jay Chapman, had had to contend with a society which did not recognize them, with the result that the "rate of failure and insanity and suicide in some of the college 'classes' of the eighties was appalling."[49] Of his father's close friends at college, only a single one survived beyond the age of thirty; the best of them were driven to insanity and suicide.[50] His own generation, too, had suffered serious failures and disturbances and seemed to be sharing the same fate. Wilson himself suffered a breakdown in 1929.[51] The spectacle of failure obsessed him. The liberating cultural aspirations of the American writer in the 1920's seemed to have met with defeat;[52] the glorious political hopes of the 1930's were ending in worse demoralization than the earlier decade: demoralization and war. In 1956, when he surveyed the careers of his contemporaries the record was also disheartening: "Too many of my friends are insane or dead or Roman Catholic converts--and some of

these among the most gifted; two have committed suicide."[53]

In the early 1940's the character and interests of Wilson seemed to undergo a remarkable change, marked by a growing bitterness and isolation. His estrangement from the cultural life in America was aggravated by his opposition to America's entry into World War II (as his father had opposed U.S. participation in World War I). The reason for such a position (among American writers only the aged Charles Beard was an isolationist) is hard to discern: perhaps he remembered the last war and could not bring himself to participate in what appeared its re-enactment. He seems to have considered British imperialism as great a menace to civilization as fascism, and resigned from The New Republic in 1941, when its owner changed the editorial policy from isolationism to intervention.[54] At a time when other writers were directly involved in the defence of western civilization, and the entire nation wholeheartedly supported the government's efforts to defeat the enemies, Wilson had no political ties, no magazine which he could consider his organ: at the very peak of his reputation he was homeless.

He looked forward to the cessation of hostilities with the hope that the "creative instincts" of the men coming out of the services would repeat the artistic upsurge of 1919.[55] For a time he hoped to actively direct this expected new literature and sought means for founding a new literary magazine because, as he wrote Christian Gauss, "the old publications of this kind are mostly dead or decayed and there will probably be at the end of this war a new period of literary activity, as there was at the end of the last one, which a new magazine could help promote."[56] His plans did not materialize and in 1941 he became the literary critic of The New Yorker.

Although he did write forty-four reviews in the course of a year, it was apparent that he did not feel The New Yorker his personal vehicle of expression as he had once considered The New Republic. He wrote Gauss unenthusiastically: "I doubt whether anything of great interest comes from my taking this New Yorker job, but I'll make some money, which I need the worst way."[57] But after 1944 his contributions to the magazine decreased considerably, and he turned his attention to general socio-cultural matters which he reported for The

New Yorker. Wilson's reactions to ruined Europe in the spring and summer of 1945 resulted in Europe Without Baedeker (New York, 1947). It demonstrated his ability as an accomplished journalist with a sensitivity for particulars of place and time. His political opinions were displayed in forthright criticism of British and American policy in Greece; but he was at his best in his remarks on Greek customs, Minoan culture, blitzed London and similar matters which interested him. The book also expressed a surprisingly bitter Anglophobia and an astonishing intolerance towards Europe as a whole.

In 1947 he took another trip, this time to New Mexico, to witness and describe the Shalako religious festival of the Zuni Indians,[58] and in 1949 he produced an account of life and literature in Haiti.[59] "Simple curiosity,"[60] Wilson says, was the main impulse for these excursions; yet his emphasis on religious beliefs and practices in these studies was indicative of an interest in myth, ritual and symbol, and the influence of these on the ideas and habits of people. This interest arose from his own experience with Marxism. What

had appeared as scientific and rational, he came to see as embodying certain mythic qualities. And he was impressed by the persistence and force of these "human projections on account of what they have meant--for social cohesion, for dynamic purpose, for moral discipline or contemplative ecstacy--to those who have believed themactuality."[61]

In 1954 appeared the essay "On First Reading Genesis,"[62] in which he announced that he had been studying Hebrew and had read the first books of the Old Testament in that language. It was a brilliant discussion on the structure of the language in relation to the character of the Hebrews and their historic circumstances. Later he visited Israel to trace the story of the Dead Sea Scrolls, and mastering an incredible quantity of technical scholarly detail, succeeded in writing a lucid history of the scrolls which reads as an exciting story of adventurous discovery.[63] His interest in the Jews, and particularly the Scrolls, seemed, on the surface, but an extension of his previous examinations of peoples and their religions. But this excursion into the Old Testament was one of the paths Wilson was taking back into his own origins: what really concerned him was the deep affinity he discerned between the Jews and the

American Puritans from whom he himself derived. In an essay "The Jews,"[64] which appeared in 1956 he traced the Puritan sense of mission and moral authority to their identification with the Hebrews, and concluded that "the Puritanism of New England was a kind of new Judaism, a Judaism transposed into Anglo-Saxon terms."[65]

Wilson's preoccupation with the American past continues to inform his writing. The majority of his essays of the past decade are biographical studies of important Americans of the nineteenth century--Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and a growing number of Civil War personalities.[66] Of ten literary reviews he contributed to The New Yorker, from November 1957, to December 1960, seven deal with literary and historical figures of the Civil War period.

Apologies to the Iroquois (New York, 1959) continued this probing into the past. Its main intent was to speak out against the plight of the modern American Indians whose reserves are being decimated by heedless government agencies, and to describe their nationalist aspirations. As in the earlier studies, this too explained the religion and religious ritual of

the Iroquois tribes, tracing the influences of Christianity as derived from missionaries. But the study of the modern American Indian was unmistakably related to his central preoccupation with the national past. Wilson met and admired the present-day national Iroquois leaders who, faced with the extinction of their indigenous culture, are pursuing a desperate, naive course of action in order to retain the remnants of their culture which have survived into the twentieth century. Some of their proposed counter-measures seem childlike in this age of realpolitic; for example, autonomy for their reserve lands from both United States of America and Canada, and participation in the United Nations as a separate national and territorial entity. Wilson's attitude toward this movement was neither condescending nor cynical. He saw it as an unequal, and probably futile struggle, but took a certain relish in describing the intransigence of the leaders who had managed to retain a connection with their past while facing overwhelming modern social and economic pressures which are inexorably breaking down this distinctive way of life.

Looking back over these diverse and seemingly

unrelated writings of the past fifteen years, one is impressed with the enormous range of interest which Wilson has been able to encompass. They are the products of a mind which has never lost its curiosity, and a professional journalist's inveterate desire to illuminate little-known areas of human experiences. But a distinctly personal impulse also motivates this activity. Most of the essays are non-literary, and are attempts by Wilson to define his relation to the national past, to trace the enduring early American spirit as it persisted throughout American history.

To the reader who comes upon the elegiac, wistfully self-conscious passages in "The Author at Sixty,"[67] after acquaintance with Edmund Wilson's tough-minded, often aggressive criticism, it would appear that they are painful signs of old age. However, in the most recent collection of Wilson's non-literary articles, written during the 1930's,[68] the reader is confronted with a similar mood evoked by the same setting. In 1933 there appeared an essay called "The Old Stone House"[69]-- the original homestead of Wilson's ancestors in Talcotville, N.Y.-- which is today Wilson's home,

and in which he wrote his reflections at sixty. The earlier essay is as significant as the recent one, for while "The Author at Sixty" states Wilson's present position after a lifetime of literary and political activities, "The Old Stone House" was written at the time when all it represented was being forsaken by the author for his crowded life in the city. The two essays mark the beginning and the end of a narrative, the body of which is represented by the career of Wilson himself.

We are told the history of the house, the town, the family; and in the tone, the language, there is little question that the house represented an ideal for Wilson. With its tradition and dignity, its roots in the past, it represented and embodied the spirit of former inhabitants and their world. "They were very impressive people, the survivors of a sovereign race who had owned their own pastures and fields and governed their own communities."[70] What is attractive is the inner strength of these people, their simple tastes and humane decency.

But as America went, so went the members of his

family. Wilson reads, in the desertion of his family homestead, a parable on the way in which Americans betrayed their own heritage. The family broke up under the pressures of what his "great-grandfather Baker would have called the 'money power' "-- and ironically, though naturally enough, the children and grandchildren of this staunch Yankee had come to identify themselves with latter-day capitalism. And in the cities where they went, they became importers, engineers, lobbyists; the sovereignty that was once their distinguishing feature has been lost.

The force of early America as symbolized by the ancestral home is powerful enough to exert itself as a dream. A recurrent dream of Wilson's is pure idyllic fantasy-- wonderful rivers and streams, high-spread trees, pale round stones: "We sit naked in the sun and air . . . and I know that this is the place for which I have always longed, the place of wilderness and freedom, to find which is the height of what one may hope for — the place of unalloyed delight."[71] It is no surprise that Wilson is conscious of the fact that the real setting of his dream is in the environs of Talcotville. Yet Wilson chose to leave that environment behind. He was realistic enough to see that the

modern New York farmer was not the true counterpart of his noble predecessors. Electricity and service stations had intervened; and he retained the memory of rural America as lonely, poor, and provincial.

But in leaving the early America he did not detach himself from the new, as so many of his fellow writers were doing during the '20's and '30's. His career as reviewer and journalist was, in a sense, a dedication to the task of sifting, before the world, the good from the bad, the first-rate from the second-rate, in matters literary and political. It was almost with a sense of mission that he undertook his work, and the mission was no less than the formation of a modern American ethos that would retain the best of the traditional past. Nowhere is this aspect of Wilson better summarized that in his own introductory note on John Jay Chapman:

> By the nineties, the heroic individualism of Emerson had been pretty well driven underground by the individualism of Big Business, and the artists and literary men had been feeling themselves freer abroad. John Jay Chapman was an exception to this. He denounced the emigration and stood his ground in the United States. His career was a curious one. He was a moralist, a literary critic, a poet, and a political reformer; and his character was passionate, erratic, intransigent, and self-willed. There is in him something of a more limited Tolstoy and something of the traditional American crank.[72]

Today, with his painfully honest reflections at hand, we can see how Wilson found his own dilemma reflected in Chapman's career. He carried his intransigence into society, trying to vanquish, with a knowledge of history, social commitment, and modern political technique, those pressures which had destroyed his father. But his sense of history appeared to fail him because irrevocably committed to the past; and at the age of sixty, he found it congenial to retire from the alarms of the twentieth century into the cool stone structure of the early American tradition which had always contained him.

Here, he feels himself part of that older, cruder, simpler America that has somehow managed to survive there in an isolated pocket. And while he has no use for the automobile, the radio, television or the movies, and in looking through Life magazine feels that he does not belong to the country depicted there[73] -- perhaps he is not as isolated as he feels. By the breadth of his vision and the directness of his critical performance, by his sense of social responsibility and amazing range of his interests, he is the traditional man of letters believing fervently in the supremacy of things of the spirit.

He is in the mainstream of our culture-- at the centre of things--because his work stands as an affirmation of the values of reason and culture.

CHAPTER II

The Cost of Aestheticism: Literature and Social Responsibility

On leaving university for a career as critic-journalist, Edmund Wilson undertook to introduce the works of modern poets and novelists to his generation. As early as 1924 he began writing the articles on modern literature which later, enlarged and unified by a common theme, appeared as his first volume of critical essays, Axel's Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930 (New York, 1931). We may consider Wilson's career as a mature critic beginning with the first of these essays.

In his dedication of Axel's Castle to Christian Gauss, Wilson stated his conception of what literary criticism "ought to be--a history of man's ideas and imaginings in the setting of the conditions which have shaped them."[1] This statement is significant, for it shows that Wilson's literary criticism, from the beginning, has been concerned with the dual aspects of art: the autonomy of the artist's imaginative creation; and the moral, economic, social, and psychological environment in which it was brought forth.

Axel's Castle views the works of literary innovators--Yeats, Eliot, Proust, Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Valery--both as artistic entities in conflict with the dominant naturalism, and as reflections of the writer's personal conflict with changing social values. We are given, in remarkably lifelike psychological vignettes, insights into the personalities of the authors and poets as they were driven inward, as they began to feel themselves alienated from society; how, "in consequence, Yeats retired to his visionary systems and seances, Eliot to his Elizabethan rhythms and his Caroline sermons, Proust to his cork-lined chamber and the savouring of his emotions and sensations in years gone by."[2]

The thesis of Axel's Castle, as Edward Fiess points out,[3] was suggested to Wilson by Whitehead's Science in the Modern World, (Cambridge, 1926). Whitehead's book was based upon eight lectures delivered in 1925, of which the one entitled "The Romantic Reaction"[4] was most pertinent to Wilson's purpose. In discussing the relationship of seventeenth and eighteenth century science to the Romantic movement, Whitehead saw the "literature of the nineteenth century, especially its English poetic literature, [as] a witness

to the discord between the aesthetic intuitions of mankind and the mechanism of science,"[5] and further that "the literary Romantic movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century refused to be confined within the materialistic concepts of the orthodox scientific theory"[6] . . . and was "a conscious reaction against the whole tone of the eighteenth century."[7] The eighteenth century scientists and philosophers had seen the universe as a mechanism and, consequently, man was considered as something introduced into the universe and somehow unrelated organically to it. Wordsworth, however, perceived that nature is an organism which includes all phenomena including man. The Romantic poet, in maintaining that there was no real division between human feelings and inanimate objects-- that they are interdependent and develop together-- brought "a new insight into nature: he is describing things as they really are; and a revolution in the imagery of poetry is in reality a revolution in metaphysics."[8]

Wilson saw that Whitehead's historical analysis could be extended with equal aptness to interpret the development of Symbolism as a literary mode, and as an imaginative method of

interpreting reality. According to Wilson, the Romantic movement was followed by a reaction against its "sentimentality and looseness"[9] in the direction of objectivity and the severity of Classicism again, seen most clearly in the French group of Parnassian poets writing in the 1850's-- Gautier, Lecomte de Lisle, Héredia. Simultaneous with this literary reaction, science had again come to the foreground, this time dominated by biology rather than physics. From an intellectual atmosphere strongly influenced by Darwinism and the biological sciences, literary Naturalism eventually resulted, and the "plays of Ibsen and the novels of Flaubert are the masterpieces of this second period of modern Classicism as Racine and Swift are of the first."[10] But the objective point of view of Naturalism began to limit the poet's imagination, which became no longer adequate to convey what he felt. A further change in literary sensibility then made itself known, again with pronounced Romantic overtones, strongly biased in favour of the subjective and non-scientific. "And this second reaction at the end of the century, this counterpart to the Romantic reaction of the end of the century before, was known in France as Symbolism."[11]

Wilson cautions the reader of literary history against accepting the impression that these movements and counter-movements necessarily follow one another in a punctual and well-generalled fashion--"as if the eighteenth century reason had been cleanly put to rout by nineteenth century Romanticism, which then proceeded to hold the field till it was laid by the heels by Naturalism."[12] Literary history is not that neat and well-defined and Wilson points out its complexity by introducing the fact that the Romantic writers in the United States-- Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, in the middle of the nineteenth century, were already developing toward Symbolism, and that literary movements react against each other not in simple terms of collision and rebound, but by the more subtle interactions of fusion and synthesis. Thus, the chief literary characteristics of the modern writers represented a further development of Symbolism and of its fusion or conflict with Naturalism. Symbolism, Wilson defined as "an attempt by carefully studied means — a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors — to communicate unique personal feelings."[13]

Wilson is excellent in his role as 'introductory' critic,

and the essays on Joyce and Proust which explain the method and techniques of composition of Ulysses and Remembrance of Things Past, elucidate these complex works of art without reducing their complexity or artfulness. Less satisfactory are the essays on Yeats and Eliot, where the evolution of Yeats' ideas and Eliot's significant debts to French Symbolism are discussed at length, but we are given no critical evaluation of their poetry or the sources of its power.

One is constantly reminded, however, that while enthusiastic in his desire to introduce sympathetically the work of modern writers to his contemporaries, Wilson is equally concerned with the personality of the writer. Of particular interest is the manner in which literary style and method express the weaknesses and distortions of the writer's personality as it was shaped by life. In fact the main shortcomings of the book stem from his predominant concern with the artist and the artist's adjustment to life. Aesthetic criticism was present, but felt as secondary in Wilson's scheme to non-literary, moral criteria. The technical means, the craftsmanship, and the unique forms which are inherent in a work of art are often dealt

with cursorily or, as in the essay on Yeats, almost entirely neglected. The personal failure of the writers' response to life and the resultant forms of an isolated, neurotic art are repeatedly noted with disapproval and, in fact, often serve as literary criticism. D.S. Savage has referred to this tension between social and artistic values in Axel's Castle, stating that "throughout the book there runs, beneath the overtone of respectful admiration, a curious, hesitant undertone of disapproval."[14]

Delmore Schwartz, commenting on Axel's Castle, feels that only the subject matter of literature interests Wilson; the discussion of form and aesthetic values finds him "impatient and hurried."[15] The structure, the formal pattern of a novel or poem, are merely obstacles which, much the same as wrapping paper on a gift, must be undone and disposed of before the contents, the subject matter, can be fully examined. And the subject matter "always turns out to be an intimate life."[16] Partially justified, these remarks are certainly discounted by the acute analysis of the architecture of Proust's novels, and by Wilson's insight in relating Joyce's world to that of Whitehead

and Einstein, which is "always changing as it is perceived by different observers and by them at different times."[17] For it is not the vague "intimate life" (with its suggestion that the value of art resides only in its ability to reveal the labyrinthine mind of the artist) which Wilson is attempting to arrive at in his individual studies. Rather, through the life of the artist--seen as creator of literature, not merely as neurotic human being-- he wants to understand the sources of modern art, the artists' contacts with reality; and in turn, how these contacts condition the artistic sensibility.

Thus Wilson's judgement of the artists under discussion is based on two distinguishable, but often interdependent, criteria: the personal-moral and the literary. This duality is made explicit in the final chapter of the book entitled "Axel and Rimbaud."[18] Axel is the hero of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's long dramatic prose-poem published in 1890, in which the ideal of renunciation of the outside world in favour of the experience of the imagination alone was set down most uncompromisingly. Axel's castle is the ivory tower in its most extreme insularity. His philosophy of life would exclude all experience, preferring

the unrealized and potential to the fulfilled and enacted. Experience is, in fact, vulgar: "Live?" Axel says, "our servants will do that for us." Axel is the archetype of the Symbolist's hero-- figuring both as subject, and in a real sense, as model for the poet's relationship to life. And Wilson finds that the heroes of these contemporary writers, who are the successors of the Symbolists, in general share Axel's view of life, and beyond that "the authors themselves seem almost to have patterned their lives on the mythology of the earlier generation."[19] The result has been a considerable body literature mainly preoccupied with inner states of mind, treated with candor and heightened sensitivity; yet as regards the real world outside the imagination, a literature that is largely passive, resigned, and solitary.

Axel's attitude points one way for the creative artist to confront life. There is another way-- that of Rimbaud. While the other Symbolist poets, alienated from their nineteenth-century world and disillusioned with its ways, chose nonetheless to remain within it, Rimbaud had rejected European society and literature altogether. He chose for himself a life of pure action

in a primitive civilization. Wilson finds this solution superior to the compromises which the other Symbolists made, since it avoids the crippling psychic effects of alienation. Rimbaud's career, in fact, "transcends" art. With its violent energy, its desire to escape from humiliating compromise, it represents "the human spirit, strained to its most resolute sincerity and in possession of its highest faculties,"[20] striving to transmute reality through action. On the other hand, the masterpieces of that literature which Rimbaud himself had helped to found and later abandoned "are oppressed by a sullenness, a lethargy, a sense of energies ingrown and sometimes festering."[21] Wilson admits, however, that in the end Rimbaud's way is illusory and equally untenable: modern man cannot escape to primitive lands because he bears his modernity in his own consciousness.

In comparing Rimbaud's <u>life</u> with the Symbolists' <u>art</u> is Wilson saying, then, that they represent irreconcilable opposites?-- that the problem of literature and life, imagination and reality, is resolved in a choice which must exclude one or the other? This implication is contained in the concluding

chapter of Axel's Castle:

> The question begins to press us again as to whether it is possible to make a practical success of human society, and whether, if we continue to fail, a few masterpieces, however profound or noble, will be able to make life worth living even for the few people in a position to enjoy them.[22]

The primacy of social values is asserted with the warning that perhaps the time has come for the artist to relinquish pure art as an end in itself in order to turn his attention to the more pressing social needs. This tendency to identify social-moral and aesthetic criteria leads naturally to a conception of literature as a guide to life. And it was specifically their failure to serve as 'guides' to life which caused Wilson's disappointment in the great modern writers: their works did not offer positive social values commensurate with their cultural contribution:

> I believe therefore that the time is at hand when these writers, who have largely dominated the literary world of the decade 1920 - 30, though we shall continue to admire them as masters, will no longer serve us as guides. Axel's world of the private imagination in isolation from the life of society seems to have been exploited and explored as far as for the present is possible.[23]

Shaped by the modern Symbolists, literature, like modern scientific theory, has been working "toward a totally new conception of reality:"[24]

> Our conceptions of objective and subjective have unquestionably been based on false dualism; our materialisms and idealisms alike have been derived from mistaken conceptions of what the researches of science implied — Classicism and Romanticism, Naturalism and Symbolism are, in reality, therefore false alternatives. And so we may see Naturalism and Symbolism combine to provide us with a vision of human life and its universe, richer, more subtle, more complex and more complete than any that man has yet known.[25]

The future of art lies in its eventual harmony with science. This way, Wilson states, they can draw from each other techniques and values which have hitherto been denied them. "And who can say," Wilson asks, that as both science and art continue to extend man's idea of reality now, as they look more and more deeply into experience and achieve a wider and wider range, "and as they come to apply themselves more and more directly and expertly to the needs of human life they may not arrive at a way of thinking, a technique of dealing with other perceptions, which will make art and science one?"[26]

Within this perspective, the modern writers, for all their failings, are finally judged less as decadents than as vital innovators. Though they have been preoccupied with introspection sometimes approaching insanity and have developed the cult of personality to the exclusion of social commitments, Wilson

recognizes that "they have given us works of literature, which, for intensity, brilliance and boldness as well as for an architectural genius, an intellectual mastery of their materials . . . are probably comparable to the work of any time."[27] And, Wilson concludes, through their art-- independent of personalities-- they have succeeded in bringing about a revolutionary change in literature, analogous to that which took place in science and philosophy at the beginning of the twentieth century: "they have broken out of the old mechanistic routine, they have disintegrated the old materialism, and they have revealed to the imagination a new flexibility and freedom."[28] Though he is aware that as people they embodied aspects of our civilization that were dying, their contribution is indeed vital: waking "us to the hope and exaltation of the untried, unsuspected possibilities of human thought and art."[29]

I have attempted to suggest that Axel's Castle, Wilson's first volume of literary criticism, contains much that is actually extra-literary, and this fact is central to the understanding of Wilson's method. It is eclectic, socially and morally oriented, rather than strictly aesthetic. Written during the 1920's, when

a great number of Wilson's contemporaries had deserted America for the older and denser culture of Europe, it is, in an immediate sense, an attempt to demonstrate the consequences of such willful detachment: to speak out for the social responsibility of the artist and art.

Wilson's essay on Yeats serves to illustrate his critical method, demonstrating the interplay of literary and moral criteria. Yeats, [30] whose early poetry relies completely upon the fairyland world of Irish mythology for its images, had come, according to Wilson, to see that fairyland as a symbol of the imagination itself. For the young poet, the world of the imagination is somehow incompatible with the actual world, yet Yeats was aware that only an artificial dichotomy separates the imagination from reality-- one is never completely independent of the other. He saw that for "the mortal who has lived among the fairies, who has lost the sense of human laws in their world, the consequences may be terrible— for he has preferred something else to reality— he has escaped the responsibilities of human life and he must fail of its satisfactions."[31]

There is in Yeats' early works a fascination with the

imagination as qualitatively antithetical to life which is typical of the Pre-Raphaelites [32] and fin de siecle aesthetes, who wanted "to stand apart from the common life and live only in the imagination."[33] Unlike them, however, Wilson sees in Yeats' writing "a consciousness of danger and temptations inescapably involved in such a life"[34] and a realization that the consequence of cultivating the imagination and the enjoyment of aesthetic sensation as an end in itself is to be "thrown fatally out of key with reality."[35]

Wilson traces Yeats' development toward his mature style--the less frequent use of symbols, the greater austerity and severity of imagery, the growing concern with the events of his own life--as a parallel to the lines of development in Yeats' own career, when more and more he assumed the position of public figure in politics and in the theatre. In this latter period, Yeats' work "can even challenge comparison with Dante"[36] in glorifying poetically the events of his life and the public affairs of his country; and "his words, no matter how prosaic, are always somehow luminous and noble, as if pale pebbles smoothed by the sea were to take on some mysterious value and

become more precious than jewels or gold."[37]

Yet, in spite of praise for the poetic achievement, the note of reproach for Yeats' personal philosophy permeates the essay. Yeats' flaw, according to Wilson, was in his "rejecting the methods of modern science"[38] which resulted in a detachment from the actual world of industry, politics, and science, and from the general enlightened thought of his time. Instead, since "his mind is so comprehensive and so active that he has felt the need of constructing a system,"[39] he resorted to the obsolete science of astrology and esoteric magic. Wilson then explains in great detail The Vision, as embodying Yeats' formal philosophic position, and concludes with a comparison between Yeats' world-view and that of his contemporary and compatriot George Bernard Shaw. The basis of the comparison is not their respective artistic merits; Shaw is used, rather, to demonstrate that another, more fruitful, relationship to reality was available to Yeats, one which could have been, it seems to Wilson, of greater consequence for man and artist:

> Shaw and Yeats, both coming as young men to London from eighteenth-century Dublin, followed diametrically opposite

courses. Shaw shouldered the whole unwieldy load of contemporary sociology, politics, economics, biology, medicine and journalism, while Yeats, convinced that the world of science and politics was somehow fatal to the poet's vision, as resolutely turned away. Shaw accepted the scientific technique and set himself to master the problems of an industrial democratic society, while Yeats rejected the methods of Naturalism and applied himself to the introspective plumbing of the mysteries of the individual mind.[40]

There can be little doubt that Wilson's sympathies are on the side of participation and engagement. Yeats is a great poet, but his life and personality ("so haughty, so imperterbably astride his high horse"[41]) are not approved of: they are seen, somehow, as noble failures; they serve as object lessons to illustrate the consequences of disregarding the common world of real men and events, failing to recognize them as the source from which imaginative power must be continually replenished. Ending his essay on this note, Wilson seems to hint, while not stating explicitly, that possibly the poetry might have been superior had Yeats not indulged in sterile, "introspective plumbing." Yeats' tower was prefigured in Axel's Castle: the artistic sensibility has retreated into a world of its own making, rather than face the challenge of the modern world.

In the essay "T.S. Eliot"[42] the disparity between the socially minded critic and aesthetic or 'comparative' critic is underscored.

> The old nineteenth century criticism of Ruskin, Renan, Taine, Sainte-Beuve, was closely allied to history and novel writing, and was also the vehicle for all sorts of ideas about the purpose and destiny of human life in general. The criticism of our own day examines literature, art, ideas and specimens of human society in the past with a detached scientific interest, or a detached aesthetic appreciation which seems in either case to lead nowhere.[43]

Criticism, as well as literature, must not be 'detached' from life, since it ought to 'lead somewhere.' Particularly, it ought to lead to something beyond itself, beyond technical theories and impressionistic reflections, to a comment on man and society, to consist, as we have seen, of "a history of man's ideas and imaginings in the setting of the conditions which shaped them"

When Wilson examines Proust[44] this method is manifest in his relating the novelist's intention to the milieu in which he worked, and which formed his attitude toward life-- to the general moral and intellectual environment of his time. Analyzing the content and form of Proust's vast and complex novel, and comparing its values to the actual world in which

Proust moved, enables Wilson to arrive at conclusions only partially suggested by the work itself. The disintegration of a social and moral order, which Proust pictures, is a significant fact apart from its providing subject matter for a novel. The objective historic fact is of importance to understanding, secondary only to the imaginative use of it. "If we feel an element of decadence in his work," Wilson writes, "it may be primarily due to the decay of the society in which he lived . . . We are always feeling with Proust as if we were reading about the end of something."[45] Indeed, Proust's dramatic strength may be due specifically to the fact that he is writing at the close of an era, and sums up the whole situation. Wilson can regret the immaturity, "the spoiled child in Proust . . . who never felt the necessity of relating his art and ideas to the general problems of human society,"[46] yet still recognize him as one of the great minds of our time, who recreated the world of the novel as an art form by employing the new relativistic theory of time.

So with the other authors discussed in Axel's Castle -- Joyce, Valery and Stein-- all great artists, all bringing immense

revitalizing energy to art; yet as people, they retreated from society, and eschewed social responsibility. In consequence they then produce an art, often so incomprehensible that it no longer can fulfill the function of literature. For literature, as Wilson declared in a review written during the period of composing Axel's Castle, arises from

> the anomalies of reality, its discord, its chaos, its pain and it attempts to impose on that chaos some order, to find some resolution for that discord, to render that pain acceptable—to strike some permanent mark of the mind on the mysterious flux of experience which escapes beneath our hand.[47]

This function requires a sensitivity on the part of the author both for the unique and special individual experience, and for the general and social nature of things. The modern writers who had chosen either Axel's or Rimbaud's way had abdicated this role, and great as was their work, it could not serve as a touchstone of values and standards for modern man. They represented the end of a great movement, and not the beginning of something new in literature and life.

CHAPTER III

The Context of History: Marxism and Literary Values

Edmund Wilson's first volume of critical essays appeared at the end of the decade which saw American culture almost universally scorned and derided by her own intellectuals. It was the decade of the expatriates who sought on the Left Bank what seemed to elude them in Chicago or New York-- and the bohemians who, unable to afford an ocean— crossing established their version of the Left Bank in New York and Chicago. Gertrude Stein characterized them in her remark to Ernest Hemingway, "You are all a lost generation," and Hemingway chose the phrase as an epigraph for his first novel, The Sun Also Rises,[1] an imaginative account of a group which represented the lost generation's spiritual and cultural exile.

In 1922, Van Wyck Brooks surveyed the American literary scene and stated with deep conviction the problem facing the young writer or poet of talent who desired to establish a career in the arts:

> What immediately strikes one as one surveys the history of our literature during the last half century, is the singular impotence

of its creative spirit . . . One can count on one's two hands the American writers who are able to carry on the development and unfolding of their individualities year in, year out, as every competent man of affairs carries on his business. What fate overtakes the rest? Shall I begin to run over some of those names, familiar to us all, names that have signified so much promise and are lost in what Gautier calls 'the limbo where moan (in the company of babes) still-born vocations, abortive attempts, larvae of ideas that have won neither wings nor shapes?' Shall I mention the writers — but they are countless! — who have lapsed into silence, or have involved themselves in barren eccentricities, or have been turned into machines? The poets who, at the very outset of their careers, find themselves extinguished like so many candles? The novelists who have been unable to grow up, and remain withered boys of seventeen? The critics who find themselves overtaken in mid-career by a hardening of the spiritual arteries? Our writers all but universally lack the power of growth, the endurance that enables one to continue to produce personal work after the freshness of youth has gone. Weeds and wild flowers! Weeds without beauty or fragrance, and wild flowers that cannot survive the heat of day.[2]

A cultural wasteland of these proportions, inhospitable to art, could only inspire the need for escape, and indeed, as Malcolm Cowley has said, the one idea held in common by this generation of writers was "the idea of salvation by exile."[3] Escape from the arid realities of American, escape into art as a way of life, was the popularly accepted mode of coping with an unreceptive, hostile environment.

Wilson found it impossible to follow the solution chosen by the majority of his fellow writers and friends (in particular,

his good friends Scott Fitzgerald and John Bishop spent several years of the 1920's in Europe). He elected to remain in America. And, certainly, more than temporal coincidence accounts for the specific tone and outlook of his critical essays of this decade when they appeared in Axel's Castle: they were intentionally addressed to his contemporaries. As we have seen, his examination of the modern European writers concluded in the firm belief that the 'religion of Art,' of the philosophy of 'art for art's sake,' while capable of accommodating great aesthetic insights, was entirely inadequate as a system of ethics or a code of behavior. Adherents of this aesthetic—ethical ideal would, he pointed out, eventually suffer the crippling effects of creating art in a vacuum: the perversion of sound artistic impulses. Of necessity, imaginative work produced under these circumstances would become ultra-personal statement and essentially dehumanized art. Professor Kaufman recognized that Axel's Castle was written "around the thesis that one must maintain one's involvement in life in order to be a fruitful artist, or an intellectual of integrity;"[4] that its strain of reproach was directed as much against his own contemporaries as against the subjects of the essays. Wilson's position directly contradicted

the highly vocal contemporary idea which maintained that few fruitful, sustaining contacts between modern artist and general public were possible in America.

This minority outlook was not based upon the common obscurantist complaint that modern art was degenerate, or that modern artists were perversely cultivating only the 'seamy' side of life.[5] On the contrary, Wilson upbraided his contemporaries for being insufficiently radical. Primarily, they had confused certain particular, temporary social phenomena with permanent, traditionally American characteristics. In disparaging the life of the artist as it existed in capitalistic America, they had blindly negated all the positive, enriching traditions and cultural resources of their native country. The corrupting social and economic organization of America, rather than the great tradition itself, should be the immediate subject of censure and the object of change.

The idea of an improved social order as an objective for 'engaged' literature led naturally to assigning a role to art and the artist. In essence, the conviction that art serves a function was expressed in the criticism as aesthetic and ethical imperatives: it enabled Wilson to relate the spirit of a work to the social background

in which it was produced; it allowed him to attribute certain literary weaknesses to the moral climate of the period, rather than personal deficiencies of an individual author. This emphasis was already manifest in his criticism anticipating even the essays which made up Axel's Castle. Reviewing F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel The Beautiful and the Damned in 1922, Wilson described the hero and the heroine of the "giddy book" as "creatures without method or purpose; they give themselves up to wild debaucheries and do not, from beginning to end, perform a single serious act."[6] While these strictures might be construed as disapproval of the nihilistic attitude of the younger generation (Fitzgerald was the laureate of this 'flaming youth' period), Wilson's sympathies are, in fact, with these characters and their plight. Acts of defiance against accepted moral and social convention were the only means many of them could find for defending their integrity. It is the social system which stands indicted for making the gestures of revolt and irresponsibility necessary and even defensible. According to Wilson, the implications of the book were that "in such a civilization as this, the sanest and most honourable course is

to escape from organized society and live for the excitement of the moment."[7] Although regrettable, this attitude of escapism was to be expected from the young writers: "we must remember that they have had to grow up in, that they have had to derive their chief stimulus from the wars, the society and commerce of the Age of Confusion itself."[8]

Axel's Castle appeared at the inception of the Great Depression, which dramatically followed the 'Age of Confusion.' The social catastrophe brought into sharp focus the disruptive forces of capitalist economic development, and in his capacity as reporter, Wilson saw these effects first-hand in terms of human misery. The result was to alter his social criticism from liberal persuasion in the direction of pronounced radical ideology. His book, The American Jitters (1932), was a bitter expose not only of the economic injustices, but of the lack of ideals, moral standards, and ethical values in depression-plagued America. In the final chapter, "The Case of the Author,"[9] Wilson explains that though he was himself of bourgeois origin, and hence hoped for a liberal solution, he had despaired of its coming and turned to Russia, centering his hopes on what appeared

to be a great new movement of creative thought and culture, expressing the ideal of a classless society. The book contained only few references to the literary profession, but these showed that the new political orientation had intensified his idea of the role of art. He admonished writers:

> and artists to be careful how they play the game of the capitalists. It is bad for their theory and their art to try to adapt themselves to a system which is the enemy of theory and art. Their true solidarity lies with those elements who will remodel society by the power of imagination and thought--by acting on life to make something new.[10]

Yet even at this point of greatest enthusiasm for the general Marxist view, he was still independent enough to point out the dangers of relegating art to the status of an instrument for social change. Marxist criticism, at its worst, he wrote in 1933, is in

> the position of trying to gauge the value of works of art on the basis of their literal conformity to a body of fixed moral dogma. The question is, does the work of art contribute toward a certain social end? The question is a proper one; but does not mean that everybody who asks it is fitted to give an answer.[11]

This passage indicated an ambivalence at the root of Wilson's socio-literary philosophy--a tension between complete political acceptance, and serious intellectual hesitation. While he objected to evaluating a work of art on the basis of 'its literal

conformity to a body of fixed moral dogma,' he objected mainly to the literalness with which that conformity was analyzed, and to the dogmatism with which the morality was set forth. As Edward Fiess points out, it was the Marxist view of literature, but with a difference.[12]

Wilson's definitive statement on Marxism and literature is contained in the essay of that name in his second book of literary criticism, The Triple Thinkers.[13] Written after his visit to Russia, and the subsequent disillusionment with the Russian experiment, he was able to clarify the confusion between art and politics without the strong influence of emotional involvement. The essay begins with a discussion of the role assigned to literature in Marx's system of dialectical materialism, pointing out the remarkable degree of flexibility present in Marx and Engels' concepts. Activities such as religion, philosophy, literature, and art which form a 'superstructure' are not wholly explicable in terms of economics. These activities were undeniably shaped by the

> social configuration below them, but each was working to get away from its roots in the social classes and to constitute a professional group, with its own discipline and its own standards of value, which cut across class lines.[14]

Marxism, a political philosophy, is fundamentally a form "of actual social engineering,"[15] and as such, "can tell us nothing whatever about the goodness or badness of a work of art."[16] "What Marxism can do, however, is throw a good deal of light on the origins and social significance of art." Here is Wilson's amplification of this crucial point:

> The study of literature in its relation to society is as old as Herder--and even Vico. Coleridge had flashes of insight into the connection between literary and social phenomena, as when he saw the Greek state in the Greek sentence and the individualism of the English in the short separate statements of Chaucer's Prologue. But the great bourgeois master of this kind of criticism was Taine, with his race and moment and milieu; yet Taine, for all his scientific professions, responded artistically to literary art . . . Marx and Engels further deepened this study of literature in relation to its social background by demonstrating for the first time inescapably the importance of economic systems. But if Marx and Engels and Lenin and Trotsky are worth listening to on the subject of books, it is not merely because they created Marxism, but also because they were capable of literary appreciation.[17]

Marxism, Wilson realized, is simultaneously a world conception and a theory of political action, and the majority of radical critics have used these interchangeably to their mutual detriment. Marxist literary theory is invaluable in studying developments, motivations, and relationships within human society. The pitfall of the Marxist critic, however, is his

attempt to project works of art into the class struggle as weapons of political action. "All Marxist literary critics lean toward the future," one writer has said, "all consider that one of the functions of literature at the present moment is, so to speak, to bare the bones of the present and invest them with the fleshof the future."[18] During the 1930's this tendency gave rise to 'proletarian' literature and 'social realism,' designs to mould literary works according to predetermined political specifications. These doctrines were ridiculed by Wilson as attempts to legislate masterpieces into being "which always indicates sterility on the part of those who engage in it, and which always actually works, if it has any effect at all, to legislate good literature out of existence and to discourage the production of any more."[19] Wilson's rejoinder to the advocates of 'proletarian' literature best indicates the consistency of moral concern which permeates his own historical method:

> Nor does it matter necessarily in a work of art whether the characters are shown engaged in a conflict which illustrates the larger conflicts of society or in one which from that point of view is trivial. In art--it is quite obvious in music, but it is also true in literature--a sort of law of moral interchangeability prevails; we may transpose the actions and

sentiments that move us into terms of whatever we do and are ourselves. Real genius of moral insight is a motor that will start any engine.[20]

On one of the most controversial issues debated throughout the 1930's by Marxist critics--literature as a weapon in the class struggle--that is, the question of its immediate utility for social change, Wilson showed that in "the greatest works of art, some of those which have the longest carry-over value, it is difficult to see that any important part of this value is due to their direct functioning as weapons."[21] His examples were the works of Shakespeare and Dante, formed within historical and social circumstances, and even reflecting current political sympathies, but hardly consciously created instruments of social change: "If these works be spoken of as weapons at all, they are weapons in the more general struggle of modern European man emerging from the Middle Ages and striving to understand his world and himself--a function for which 'weapon' is hardly the right word."[22] Carrying the matter further, Wilson asserted that writers in periods of revolution and social upheaval would have great difficulty in producing lasting literature at all. Their concern for immediate effect would result in a "short-range literature

[which] preaches, and pamphleteers;"[23] their political motives and objectives would probably render them incapable of imaginatively summing up wide areas and long periods of human experience, or to extract from them general laws which inform great works of art.

The positive element in Marxism, Wilson concluded, is not its literary applicability, but its social vision and its apparent ability to translate a program into action. Perhaps in this respect Marxism deals with issues greater than literature, and Wilson suggests again, in 1938, what he intimated in Axel's Castle, seven years earlier, that "the human imagination has already come to conceive the possibility of re-creating human society,"[24] and, possibly, this attempted re-creation is more important than the production of literature, for "we must not be unaware of the first efforts of the human spirit to transcent literature itself."[25] Why the re-creation of human society necessarily excludes literature is not made clear; it seems an artificial contradiction, one which re-echoes the earlier comparison between Rimbaud's life and Symbolist literature. According to George Snell, the socio-historical-minded critic

is "forced by the logic of his position to allow literature a secondary place in the hierarchy of human strivings:"[26] the historical critic's position normally leads to juxtaposing life and literature. Wilson's difficulties, perhaps, arise out of his own inability to reconcile his beliefs in the mechanistic, Marxist analysis of history, and especially with its vision of a classless society, while, at the same time, strenuously denying the monopolistic claim of that materialistic approach to art and literature.

This problem of assigning values has been persistent in Wilson's writings from the beginning: in involving himself with Marxism he merely restated an existing problem. For Wilson's "debt to Marxism . . . is slighter than it might appear; it consists mainly in the general historical emphasis he gives his work."[27] Undoubtedly, Marxism crystallized his political and social dissatisfactions into a more uniform creed. But we have seen that even prior to the advent of the depression, Wilson was already firmly radical in his social views, which he owed, as he has said, to having been brought up in America with a "slightly outside point of view."[28] It can be seen, however, that

these early judgements operated against the general moral laxity of America, rather than any specific social or economic ills. For a time, Marxism focussed his attention sharply upon the more immediate political scene, offering, it appeared, the necessary 'social engineering' whereby man could at last perfect his world.

The fact that Wilson did not succumb to the cruder forms of ideological criticism owes much to his common sense and independence of mind, which permitted him to assimilate those aspects of Marxism which he found acceptable, while rejecting the rest. This presupposes a kind of conviction about life and literature which Wilson refers to in defending Taine against the accusation of being a 'mechanist': "the truth was that Taine loved literature for its own sake."[29] The same love made it possible for Wilson to retain critical balance in the face of strong pressures from his own political position which might too easily subvert literature to extra-literary, narrow ends.

Marxism supplied him with a method of investigating the social origins of a writer which, in turn, often illuminated the attitude of the author in the work. Wilson used this

sociological insight judiciously, because it enlarged the range of understanding of a work of art: he did not transfer value judgements about forms of society to the literary works produced by those kinds of society. For all his interest in the origin of art, and the social determinants of the artistic personality, these were never confused with critical evaluation. He remained faithful to the belief that criteria of literary excellence derive from the nature of literature itself.

The range and effectiveness of his historical method is clearly seen in the essay "Flaubert's Politics,"[30] where the desired end is not the critical evaluation of a literary work, but a reassessment of the ideas behind the work. Wilson's concentration on social relationships rather than on artistic principles allows him to see Flaubert, who has "figured for decades as the great glorifier and practitioner of literary art at the expense of human affairs,"[31] and usually associated with the Symbolists, actually in basic sympathy with the historians Michelet, Renan and Taine, and to the historical critic Sainte-Beuve. Though Flaubert deplored Taine and Sainte-Beuve's preoccupation with social aspects of literature at the expense of other values, he

was himself seriously concerned (Wilson shows by selections from Flaubert's letters) with the "large questions of human destiny [and] sees humanity in social terms and historical perspective."[32] The concern is especially evident in the novels with nineteenth-century settings, Madame Bovary and L'Education Sentimentale.

It is not true, Wilson states, that Flaubert disclaimed any moral intention. On aesthetic grounds he did refrain from intruding into the action of his novels or commenting on their progress. But the fictional universe he created reflected a definite moral commitment which was inextricably bound to his ambivalent class position. The core of Flaubert's moral system, Wilson suggests, was his critical attitude toward the bourgeoisie, his own social class. This attitude, never overtly stated, nevertheless pervades the novels, giving us their 'point of view.' Thus, Madame Bovary, a great dramatic character, also comes to represent a type of middle-class individual who cannot endure the crass materiality of her class. She is a romantic person who yearns for a more glamorous life, and always pictures herself in some setting other than her actual one, striving to realize her own true nature. She, however, cannot exclude reality, and is

finally destroyed by the forces she had been trying to ignore. The ironic—tragic end of the novel underscores the futility of such nostalgia: the young daughter of Madame Bovary, left an orphan by Emma's suicide and the death of her father, is sent to work in a cotton mill.

The socio-economic evaluation of the novel, Wilson comments, might have found approval among the socialists of Flaubert's time: "While the romantic individualist deludes himself with dreams to evade bourgeois society, and only succeeds in destroying himself, he lets humanity fall a victim to the industrial—commercial processes, which, unimpeded by his dreaming, go on."[33]

Wilson does not deduce any normative judgement on the novel from his social sympathies. His method is essentially descriptive; it adds another dimension to the novel, allowing the reader to see it in its social context, to realize the author's point of view in relation to social circumstances.

Flaubert's distaste for his own class is evident also in L'Education Sentimentale, where the middle class characters generally reveal a "shoddiness and lack of principle,"[34]

opportunism, and moral instability. They plant within the reader's mind

> The suspicion that our middle class society of business men, bankers and manufacturers, and people who live on or deal in investments, so far from being redeemed by its culture, has ended by cheapening and invalidating culture: politics, science and art--not only these but the ordinary human relations: love, friendship and loyalty to cause--till the whole civilization has seemed to dwindle.[35]

In contrast to the corruption of human values personified by the middle class, Wilson points out Flaubert's sympathetic treatment of characters drawn from the dispossessed and peasantry. In them, he felt, resided the sense of loyalty and integrity which had disappeared from his own class.

Yet for all his dissatisfactions, Flaubert was of the middle class. He witnessed with alarm the Revolution of 1848 which threatened his class.[36] Not able to conceive of any non-bourgeois remedy to a world with which he found fault, he became more misanthropic, reflecting, Wilson feels, in his later works a profound "impression of general human imbecility and ignorance."[37] Unable to dissociate himself from class ties, yet equally unable to approve of their way, Flaubert is forced to transfer his hatred from the bourgeoisie to humanity itself.

We see how the historical method permits Wilson to analyze the artist's relationship to his social world, and to understand the ideas in the work of art as influenced by the nature of that relationship. Thus, the historical findings are transferred to the fictional world of the novel, not in the form of literary value judgements, but as valid means of illuminating the special approach and attitude of the artist to his material. Wilson draws no conclusions about the quality of Flaubert's novels from these social criteria. But he has supplied invaluable knowledge which enlarges the reader's grasp of the author's conscious or unconscious intentions. Without this knowledge, it is doubtless possible to read literature and form judgements. Yet in Wilson's hands the historical method, by shedding light on the social situation in which the author lives and out of which the work arose, offers an additional frame of reference which serves to broaden our total awareness of literature.

CHAPTER IV

The Context of Biography: Psychology and Literary Creation

The critic whose interests reside in the nature of literary art, its origins and shaping elements, is almost inevitably led to a consideration of psychology: the discussion of the state of mind out of which literary creation arises. Psychology enters literary criticism in two ways: in "the investigation of the act of creation, and in the psychological study of particular authors to show the relation between their attitudes and states of mind and the special qualities of their work."[1] Most of Edmund Wilson's literary criticism, including those essays written at the height of his Marxist-sociological attachment, were tempered with interpretations more strictly psychological than historical. As we have seen, his study on Flaubert never omits the crucial function of the individual sensibility when he traces the presence of social or political phenomena in literature. It is the mind of the artist which selects the pertinent material and censors other experiences when art is created. The world of experience figures in art only after it has been transmuted by the imagination. It follows, therefore, that knowledge about the psychology of the writer can furnish suggestions

about the composition of a specific work as well as a general account of literary creation.

At first glance, there would appear to be a discrepancy in an historical critic's concern with the psychology and emotional patterns of writers. "Yet in Wilson's view these are reflections of the outward circumstances forming the personality. As such, they have a validity in the 'historical' sense."[2] Similarly, they indicate the state of health of the social fabric out of which the literary work is produced. The attitudes and compulsions that recur in the work of a writer are significant to the historical critic, Wilson tells us, since they "are embedded in the community and the historical moment, and they may indicate its ideals and its diseases as the cell shows the condition of the tissue."[3] Psychological readings do not necessarily contradict historical interpretations, but rather provide another relevant method for perceiving a different set of relationships affecting artistic creation.

Wilson does not accept psychoanalytic techniques uncritically. The discoveries of Freud, as applied to the examination of literature, have contributed a certain exactness and suggestiveness. But this method is less novel or radical a departure from the past than one might believe: it appears to Wilson as

an extension of something which had already got well started before, which had figured even in Johnson's Lives of the Poets, and of which the great exponent had been Sainte-Beuve: the interpretation of works of literature in the light of personalities behind them.[4]

Using Freud's study of Leonardo da Vinci as an example, Wilson notes that most Freudian interpretations attempt to reduce the author's work to a case history, and have little critical interest. The dangers of this method are that it puts the emphasis on clinical rather than literary considerations:

The method has led to bad results where the critic has built a Freudian mechanism out of very slender evidence, and then given us merely a romance based on the supposed working of this mechanism instead of a genuine study of the writer's life and work.[5]

"Psychoanalysis, like Marxism, is another of the ideological extensions of the critic's own perception,"[6] but singly or combined, these bodies of knowledge do not preclude the critical function. No matter how thoroughly a work of literature is examined from the historical or biographical points of view, the problem of relative artistic value still remains. The critic must still be able to tell good from bad literature, to estimate a work on the basis of its formal structure and its intrinsic aesthetic quality. Otherwise, the result is not literary criticism at all, "but merely social or political history as reflected in

literary texts, or psychological case histories from past eras."[7]

The essays published in The Wound and the Bow[8] illustrate Wilson's critical method when the psychological element is dominant. His predilection for the human implications of literary art, for finding its origins in human desires and frustrations, has been a constant feature since his earliest writing. To the whole pattern of influence and causation, with which he sought to understand how literature becomes what it is, have been added aspects of Freudian theory which further help to reveal the artist's underlying motives and purposes. It is an approach which is undogmatic and represents a "common-sense mixture of psychology and sociology . . . to demonstrate the conditions which explain the special nature of a writer's work."[9]

The Wound and the Bow contains seven literary studies, five of which discuss individual authors: Dickens, Kipling, Casanova, Edith Wharton and Hemingway. Of the remaining two essays, one is an investigation into the meaning of Joyce's Finnegan's Wake, while the other interprets Sophocles' Philoctetes in terms of the condition of the artist in society, and the nature of art. The essays are related by their common concern with the psychological and social pressures affecting the writer, and the

unique sources of the individual artist's creativity.

The unifying theme of the book is perhaps best indicated by the implications of the title Wilson selected for it. The wound and the bow, symbols for the inseparable weakness and strength of the artist, refers to the myth of Philoctetes, the outline of which is as follows:

Apollo had given Heracles a bow which never missed its mark. Heracles, on his death, bequeathed his bow to Philoctetes, who thus armed, set off for Troy with Agamemnon and Menelaus. On the way, they stopped at an island to sacrifice to the local deity, and Philoctetes was bitten in the foot by a snake. The infection festered and began to suppurate with so horrible a smell that his companions could not bear to have him near them. They removed him to a neighbouring island, and sailed away to Troy without him.

Philoctetes remained there for ten years, and the mysterious wound never healed. Meanwhile, after the death of Achilles and Ajax, the Greeks were hard pressed at Troy, and a soothsayer revealed to them that eventual victory required the presence of Philoctetes and his bow.[10] Philoctetes is

brought to Troy, where his wound was healed; later, he kills Paris in single combat and becomes a hero of the taking of Troy.[11]

That is the bare synopsis of the myth. Wilson, however, is primarily interested in the changes it underwent at the hands of Sophocles in his play Philoctetes. In order to persuade Philoctetes to journey to Troy in aid of his beleaguered countrymen, Sophocles has sent the cunning Odysseus, accompanied by Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles. Odysseus realized that Philoctetes would reject him, since he was one of those responsible for deserting him on the island; and even now, Odysseus is only interested in gaining possession of the formidable bow without thought for the suffering of Philoctetes. Neoptolemus, however, has great sympathy for the diseased, abandoned warrior, and although he feigns the role of innocence assigned him by Odysseus in order to lure Philoctetes to Troy, he cannot bear to deceive Philoctetes when he witnesses his torment. The young man takes a stand against Odysseus, and finally, through a demonstration of his sympathy and with the help of Heracles, persuades Philoctetes to withhold his justifiable wrath against the Greeks and journey to Troy to save the people

who had forsaken him. The wound is finally cured when Philoctetes has been able "to forget his grievance and to devote his divine gifts to the service of his own people."[12]

Wilson views the myth, especially the Sophoclean dramatization, as symbolically representative of the artist's relation to his society, or more generally, "as a parable of human character."[13] The creative artist suffers from some peculiar, crippling, wound which cuts him off from the world of normal human relationships. The result is a forced, or more frequently, a self-imposed exile——an exaggerated estrangement and alienation from society. At the same time, the ordinary man has to respect the artist's gifts, and, in fact, realizes that heneeds them. Some practical men (like Odysseus) imagine that they can somehow benefit from the art without regard for the suffering artist, which is to say, "enjoy" art on a superficial level without accepting the more disturbing insights suggested by the work. This attempt (in which art figures merely as entertainment) serves only to estrange the artist further, making him suspicious of the value of intercourse with common humanity: and he is justified in refusing to submit to those who would exploit his

imaginative powers. But, somehow, the suspicion must be allayed and a reconciliation attempted. There is a mutual need involved: artistic endeavours are essential to civilization, and appreciative sympathy can end the artist's sense of exile. How is this reconciliation to come about? Wilson sees it dependent upon individual sensibility and humaneness:

> Only by the intervention of one who is guileless enough and human enough to treat him, the artist not as a monster, nor yet as a mere magical property which is wanted for accomplishing some end, but simply as another man, whose sufferings elicit his sympathy and whose courage and pride he admires.[14]

The implications of Wilson's mythic interpretation are suggestive but ambiguous. If the myth is an allegorical statement about the artist and his isolation from society, then it is certainly meaningful. Artistic gifts are mysterious; they do tend to set the gifted-one apart; and man does recognize the beneficial nature of those gifts. But Wilson's use of Philoctetes assumes evidence of a further relationship: the causal connection between the psychic illness of the artist and his powers. This suggests that the source of artistic power is the crippling and agonizing wound; that art proceeds from abnormality or madness.

Lionel Trilling cautions that the essay which gives Wilson's book its title and cohering principle, "Philoctetes:

The Wound and the Bow,"[15] "does not explicitly say the roots of power are sacrificial and that the source of genius is unhappy."[16] It is clear, according to the myth, that Philoctetes already has his powerful bow (which is given him by Heracles) before he suffers the wound, and the wound is in no way connected with the power of the bow. Wilson, recounting the legend, is careful to avoid a cause-effect relationship: "The Victim of a malodorous disease which renders him abhorrent to society and periodically degrades him and makes him helpless is also the master of a super-human art."[17] Great art then, does not arise out of the disease; the abnormality and art simply coincide in the same individual.

The Philoctetes legend in itself does not seem to go beyond this. It does not connect the wound with the bow or infer that "the wound is the price of the bow, or that without the wound the bow may not be possessed or drawn."[18] Yet, in considering not only the final essay, but the general underlying motif of The Wound and the Bow, one can hardly avoid the conclusion that Wilson used the myth to symbolize a correlation between psychological disorder and literary endowment.[19] Professor

Trilling, following his cautionary remarks, nonetheless feels that the intention and force of the book derives from this fact: "the several studies do seem to say that the effectiveness in the arts does depend on sickness."[20]

Trilling himself provides an excellent counter-statement to this notion that the artist is neurotic, sick, maladjusted, in his essay "Art and Neurosis."[21] He points out that writers are more available to psychoanalytic explanation than other men because they are more articulate about themselves; but if we are to use the abundant material about them which they provide in their writings to prove that their art derives from mental illness, we must make the same assumption about all other kinds of intellectual activity. Since it is a basic assumption of psychoanalysis "that the acts of <u>every</u> person are influenced by the forces of the unconscious,"[22] then investigation according to psychological principles probably showsthat the strains and disproportions of scientists, lawyers or bankers occur at the same rate, and are of a similar kind to those of writers. There is, then, no special category of neurosis or anxiety for writers.

> If this is so, [Trilling proceeds] and if we still want to relate the writer's power to his neurosis, we must be willing to relate all intellectual power to neurosis . . . If we make the neurosis-power equivalent at all, we must make it in every field of endeavour. Logician, economist, botanist, physicist, theologian--no profession may be so respectable or so remote or so rational as to be exempt from the psychological interpretation.[23]

And Wilson's controlled use of psychology for literary analysis indicates that he would agree with Trilling's conclusion: "But with neurosis accounting for so much, it cannot be made exclusively to account for one man's literary power."[24]

Although the final essay of The Wound and the Bow suggests a general theory on the nature and origins of art, in actuality we find that it is not fully developed there or in the preceding essays. Instead, Wilson pursues the manner in which psychological (and social) pressures exert themselves upon the writer's conscious and unconscious mind, providing both motivation and themes for his work. His basic conern is with the psychology of the artist, rather than with the psychology of art. He does not deal with the mysterious process which transmutes chaotic and disordered experience into the emotionally and aesthetically satisfying patterns of art. He investigates the crucial, wounding experience which shaped the writer's vision, and which

appears to give a unique quality to his writing.

Wilson's psychological method generally proceeds in this fashion: starting with the biography of a writer, he considers the critical events of the writer's life (often revealed in letters and other personal documents), and after examining the conflicts, frustrations, and traumatic experiences, draws conclusions from them about the writer's psychology, finally applying these conclusions to the individual works. Social facts too, are freely related to the psychological elements: "in studies of a writer's feeling about his class, the effect on him of early economic struggles, the kinds of friction which social conventions made for him."[25]

One of Wilson's most effective critical essays, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges"[26] best illustrates this method. He suggests that in the childhood of Charles Dickens, in the family history of debt and debtors' prison, lies the famed novelist's wound. The social criticism found in Dickens' novels has its basis in the psychological suffering he endured as a child. While his family lived in jail, young Charles had to pawn his school books for food, and later was taken out of school and employed in a bootblacking

factory where his job consisted of filling bottles with shoe polish in a front window, where he could attract the passers-by. Both the work and the family situation were deeply humiliating to the sensitive boy, and he began to have nervous fits and acute spasms of pain. "This experience" Wilson states, "produced in Charles Dickens a trauma from which he suffered all his life."[27] In answer to those critics who charged Dickens with excessive self-pity in connection with these hardships of his childhood, Wilson draws attention to the psychological effects of social dislocation, and the feeling of abandonment and despair upon the mind of a twelve-year old:

> One must realize that during those months he was in a state of complete despair. For the adult in desperate straits, it is almost possible to imagine, if not to contrive, some wayout; for the child, from whom love and freedom have inexplicably been taken away, no relief or release can be projected. Dickens' seizures in his blacking-bottle days were obviously neurotic symptoms.[28]

To support his own conclusion, Wilson provides material from Dickens himself. The novelist had first revealed the story of his early childhood to his friend and biographer, Forster. Here, Dickens recounts the 'wounding' experience of his childhood:

> No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these everyday associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart . . . My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children;even that I am a man; and wander back desolately to that time of my life.[29]

These circumstances of Dickens' life, and his conscious feeling toward them, are, Wilson continues, "worth knowing and bearing in mind, because they help us to understand what Dickens was trying to say."[30] Specifically, by understanding certain relevant biographical details, we can "identify the attitudes with which Dickens' origins and his early experiences had caused him to meet mankind."[31]

Having discerned a crucial source of Dickens' attitude to life and contemporary society, Wilson then proceeds to demonstrate how the attitude permeates the world of Dickens' novels. He points out the novelist's recurrent use of debtors' prison as a setting for his novels; he discusses Dickens' frequent treatment of young boys, usually deserted or orphaned, as manifestations of Dickens' own attempt to control and order his past; and he gives

special emphasis to the many examples of innocently wronged people (who usually languish in debtors' prison) that appear in the novels, thus again illustrating Dickens' obsession for recreating imaginatively his childhood; and how the mature novelist sought compensation for his early despair by guiding the plot structures of novels dealing with children to more personally satisfying denouements. These persistent themes and plots are related further to Dickens' unconscious self-identification with anti-social elements:

> For the man of spirit whose childhood has been crushed by the cruelty of organized society, one of two attitudes is natural; that of the criminal or that of the rebel. Charles Dickens, in imagination, was to play the roles of both, and to continue up to his death to put into them all that was most passionate in his feeling.[32]

Dickens' characters often embody aspects of these dominant tendencies, for he was deeply involved in their motivation. The contradictory nature of Dickens' view, based on a conflict between desire for respectability and rebellion, influenced the very nature of the novels. Wilson notes that

> this dualism runs all through Dickens. There has always to be a good and a bad of everything: each of the books has its counterbalancing values, and pairs of characters sometimes counterbalance each other from the cast of different books. There has to be a good manufacturer, Mr. Rouncewell, and a bad manufacturer, Mr. Bounderby; a bad

old Jew, Fagin, and a good old Jew, Riah; an affable lawyer who is really unscrupulous, Vholes, and a kindly lawyer who pretends to be unfeeling, Jaggers.[33]

Finally, in Wilson's analysis of the character of John Jasper in the last, unfinished novel, Edwin Drood, the disparate elements that have warred within Dickens since childhood are united in a revealing way, when Jasper appears as a projection of the dual personality of the author himself: responsible Christian gentleman sharing the same soul and body of a murderer.

In justifying his systematic use of biography and psychology in the literary study of Dickens, Wilson has said that "It is necessary to see him as a man in order to appreciate him as an artist."[34] What Wilson has attempted to demonstrate is that an understanding of the complex and often neurotic motivations behind artistic expression can help us approach closer to the underlying dynamic of the work. And if we can recognize the motivation of a writer, we are perhaps better equipped to evaluate the degree of success with which he has objectified that motivating impulse into art. In the case of Dickens, the psychological method has allowed us to see the common source of contradicting strains in Dickens: the popular

Victorian humorist and the bitter social critic. It enables us to account for the obsessively recurrent themes of the novels and the polar juxtaposition of characters; and, finally, justifies our seeing him not as a benign caricaturist with inexplicable morbid flaws, but as "Dostoevsky's master"[35] and "the greatest dramatic writer that the English had had since Shakespeare."[36]

The remaining essays of The Wound and the Bow, while less extensive than the Dickens' study, also explore the psychological-sociological tension involved in artistic creation, examining works as inseparable aspects of their author's personality development. Thus, in "The Kipling that Nobody Read,"[37] Wilson outlines relevant biographical details about Kipling which again resulted in a crippling experience, a wound, for the mature writer. As a child, he had been sent by his parents to live with a woman relative who treated him brutally: She "was a religious domestic tyrant in the worst English tradition of Dickens and Samuel Butler."[38] As a result of this experience, and later exposure to the sadism of a second-rate public school, he was conditioned toward "fundamental submissiveness to

authority."[39]

Thus, the insufferable acceptance of authoritarianism on the part of the later Kipling is considered by Wilson almost a conscious choice the author made between a sympathetic understanding of the underdog (Kipling was born in India into a non-military family) and a fascination with the false moral assumptions implied in the "White man's burden." This choice had a serious effect upon his writing, for

> Kipling has committed one of the most serious sins against his calling which are possible for an imaginative writer. He has resisted his own sense of life and discarded his own moral intelligence in favour of the point of view of a dominant political party. To imperialism he has sacrificed the living world of his own earlier artistic creations and of the heterogeneous human beings for whom they were offered as symbols. Here the constraint of making the correct pro-imperialist point is squeezing out all kind of interest which is proper to a work of fiction.[40]

Kipling's fundamental attitude to life is first revealed and then Wilson reviews individual novels and short stories demonstrating how the attitude conditions their subject matter and point of view.

"Uncomfortable Casanova"[41] displays a man of far greater complexity than the commonly portrayed lascivious play-boy of the eighteenth century. Wilson is intrigued by the

strange quality of Casanova's life: it appears amusing but cheap, "and yet we end up by being genuinely impressed by him."[42] Casanova's career is dramatic and exciting "because his highly developed intelligence, his genius as an actor on the stage of life, are always poised on the brink of a pit where taste, morals, the social order, the order of the world of the intellect, may all be lost in the slime."[43]

Casanova's anxiety is attributed to consciousness of his own low birth--his "heritage of moral squalor"[44]--from which he could never escape, and which plagued him all his life. He always aimed at acting the role (he was descended from Venetian actors) of a rich and powerful noble. Although he does not seem to have desired social position or financial security as ends in themselves, his self-dramatizing was usually conceived in terms of these values. "It was the cheap side of him, the lackey in him, which did not look beyond the habit of his masters."[45] Wilson concludes his essay by comparing Casanova to his contemporary, Rousseau. Rousseau too had been a "vagabond, a thief, a hanger-on of the great, had suffered as a battered-about apprentice and a servant in rich men's houses."[46] Yet Rousseau's

personal experience had given rise to a revolutionary social philosophy, which he developed at the price of exile and ostracism. Unlike Casanova, he "had been led to a general truth by his individual case and, in spite of his ignominious adventures, had the courage and dignity of one who knew it."[47] Casanova, fatally addicted to role-playing and emulating his 'superiors,' never managed sufficient strength of character to establish his personal identity, to stand outside conventional society and criticize its ways.

In "Justice to Edith Wharton,"[48] Wilson re-examines the earlier work of the novelist--from 1905 to 1917--which, he feels, has been undervalued because of the declining quality of her later books. In this period Edith Wharton emerges "as an historian of the American society of her time."[49] She was born into a social world of the New York merchant class, which was without many intellectual interests, and thought it particularly unladylike for a young woman to write (a book of verse which she had written and had printed secretly was discovered and destroyed by her parents). Her husband suffered from some mental disease, and she herself had a nervous breakdown after

her marriage, and in fact, Wilson points out, her first serious fiction was written for therapeutic value during the period of her nervous breakdown, at the suggestion of her psychologist.[50]

Edith Wharton's tragic heroes and heroines reflect her own conflict with her social group:

> they are passionate or imaginative spirits, hungry for emotional and intellectual experience, who find themselves locked into a closed system, and either destroy themselves by beating their head against their prison or suffer living death in resigning themselves to it."[51]

Wilson's consideration of Hemingway[52] diverges from the method of the other essay, and does not attempt to trace the writer's themes from sources of personal experience. Instead, he discusses Hemingway's profound moral preoccupation with courage and despair. Wilson recognizes that, in spite of Hemingway's persistent use of physical contests, violence, and brutality, "his heroes are almost always defeated physically, nervously, practically: their victories are moral ones."[53] To those who accuse Hemingway of indifference to society, Wilson shows, on the contrary, that "his whole work is a criticism of society: he has responded to every pressure of the moral atmosphere of the time, as it is felt at the roots of human relations,

with a sensitivity almost unrivalled."[54] Hemingway's fiction is seen as expressing the terrors of modern man faced with the realization that he no longer comprehends or controls his world. The author's suggested antidote to the threatening sense of chaos, "is almost entirely moral:"[55] man can only vindicate his being by adherence to a strict code of personal dignity. In a cosmos where victory appears unattainable, the manner in which inevitable defeat is met becomes the final measure of man. With this essay, Wilson has inverted his normal procedure: Hemingway's major themes are not related to his life or traced to a wounding experience; Hemingway and his successive works are seen as reflecting the modern temper as accurately as barometric devices (hence the essay's title).

"The Dream of H. C. Earwicker"[56] demonstrates the lucidity with which Wilson can "translate" even the most complex works of literature. James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake remains one of the most challenging works of twentieth century fiction, and Wilson's essay is a remarkable contribution to the general reader's understanding of it. Written in 1939, not long after the publication of the novel, the essay is not a 'key', but an acute

analysis of its structure, plot, and meaning.

Unlike the procedure in the earlier essays, Wilson's chapter on Finnegan's Wake does not consider the author's life. Wilson offers essentially a study of the novel and its protagonist Earwicker resembling those in which he has examined the personalities of writers. Psychology provides essential insights unavailable to any other discipline, for, as Wilson suggests, the book "attempts to render the dream fantasies and the half-unconscious sensations experienced by a single person in the course of night's sleep."[57] Wilson analyzes the character of the fictional Earwicker and his family relations with the same attention he previously gave the novelists. He sets down, first, certain important facts which provide realistic foundations for the dreamer's fantasies; then, points to the structural ideas which shape the novel, deriving from the eighteenth century philosopher Giambattista Vico's cyclical theory of history; andfinally, in a more psychological vein, suggests that during the night H. C. Earwicker's suppressed sexual attraction to his son, his marital conflicts and social insecurity are dredged up from the unconscious and with the hero becoming dimly aware of them, a state of resolution is

achieved.

The organization of The Wound and the Bow is determined by the fact that it is a collection of previously published articles. Consequently, the assembled essays are not of equal scope and, indeed, as has been mentioned, some veer from the unifying theme. But together, they offer a many-sided view into the nature of the artist's power. They do not merely substantiate a particular theory: their value lies more in Wilson's intelligent reading of texts and close attention to the specific details of the individual writer's development.

It is significant that the "unifying" essay, "Philoctetes: The Wound and the Bow," appears last in this volume, when we might have expected it as an introduction. Its position in the book would indicate that Wilson was not interested in forcing the individual articles to a strict uniformity with the meaning of the myth. He is amply aware of the mystery of aesthetic experience--the unpredictable nature and origin of the creative imagination. However, the legend of Philoctetes is relevant to the position of the artist in society--especially to the modern condition of alienation and isolation. Employing it as a suggestive

guide, Wilson has produced a body of essays which exhibit that remarkable sympathy for the uniqueness of the creative process that he has said is a prerequisite for our understanding of an artist and his works.

CONCLUSION

This study of Edmund Wilson's literary criticism has attempted to describe his method as it developed under the impetus of modern historical events and ideologies. To a greater degree than most contemporary literary critics, Wilson has been concerned with the crucial political and social issues of our time: he edited a radical political journal, reported current socio-economic problems, and studied profoundly the most disburbing event of modern history--the Russian Revolution. These interests are strongly felt in his critical writings. From the beginning, his has been "a study of literature in its relation to civilization that sacrificed nothing to closeness of observation, yet kept its sights trained on the whole human situation."[1] The permanent value of literature resides in its ability "to give a meaning to our experience--that is, to make life more practicable; for by understanding things we make it easier to survive and get around among them."[2] Literature and experience are interdependent to the extent that experience gives rise to

literature, while literature makes a unique kind of statement about experience that enlarges our knowledge of it. This statement is not necessarily factual or objectively scientific. Rather, by its imaginative ordering of disconnected events into an harmonious whole, does literature represent a "victory of the human intellect."[3]

In maintaining the interdependence of literature and life which sees them as inseparably linked, yet not identical, Wilson is "heir to the historical method of the Nineteenth Century French critics of the line of Sainte-Beuve, Taine and Renan."[4] He shares with them the naturalistic conception which sees imaginative literature as fundamentally (albeit indirectly) reflecting the actual social or psychological environment in which it was written. To their general approach he added elements from the two most influential theories in the twentieth century--Marxism and Freudianism. Judiciously used, these have provided him with means for pursuing the study of literature against the background and conditions that produced it, enabling him to deduce, more systematically than was hitherto possible,

general theories about the individual writer's psychological and social condition. Yet, as Alfred Kazin indicates, Wilson was never dominated by the dogmatisms of either Marx or Freud; he was able to "exploit every auxiliary field of knowledge and become the partisan of none."[5]

Wilson avoided doctrinaire zeal which narrows the range of appreciation, because he was able to assimilate the effective insights of these modern theories into a more profound sense of disinterested literary taste and sensibility. His ideas of literature were based upon a tradition which preceded the vogue for purely sociological or psychological interpretations, which, in fact, saw literary Freudianism as a descendent of Samuel Johnson's method, and Marx's historical interpretations preceded by the eighteenth century philosopher Vico, who "explained Homer in terms both of historical period and geographical origin."[6] His catholic literary taste owes much to the cultural milieu of his early family life, where the world of mind and books was valued above the world of material things; to the fact that his family was inclined to the liberal professions rather than to the life of business. At a time when America had entered into the

period of its greatest industrial and commercial expansion, offering unlimited scope for financial gain, they had chosen to remain professors, lawyers, and ministers, loyal to an earlier code of social and civic responsibility.

In a similar sense, Wilson's teacher, Christian Gauss, represented an 'old-fashioned' humanism whose main principle was the enlargement of sensibility and a hospitality for all forms of literary expression. From him, Wilson gained his awareness of the relationship between life and literature, and more specifically, as he has told us, the very idea of what his literary criticism was to be--the study of man's imaginative expression and the conditions which have shaped them. For Wilson, then, the function of the literary critic was to impress upon the reader the full value of a work by examining not only the text, or even a group of such texts, but the whole pattern of psychological and sociological forces, of which the given work is the centre. He saw this treatment of literature not merely as a contribution to history, but as a contribution to aesthetic understanding and appreciation: whatever serves to enlarge our grasp of the totality

of a work, and enables us to understand the author's purpose or unconscious motivation, has value as criticism.

I have suggested that there persists throughout Wilson's criticism a duality which gives to his writing a dimension and texture not attributable to literary method alone. This may be characterized as his moral concern which is not so much imposed upon his literary judgements, as rather it informs them. Wilson's moral scheme, like his cultural resources, has its roots in pre-industrialized America, and is consistent with the ideal of a homogeneous and simple way of life: the tradition of pioneering, mutual social concern, disinterested service to the Republic. Wilson feels that these ideals which marked early America, were irrevocably damaged by the Civil War, and the period of demoralization which followed. High social and cultural values were too often displaced by the values of the stock market and corporation. Wilson's ideal was encouraged by his family's remoteness from the materialistic trends in American life. Of his family he has written:

> My father's and uncles' generation were obviously alienated by their old-fashioned education from the world of the great American money-making period; . . . they were indifferent to money-making beyond a fairly modest standard of prosperity . . .

> My family have never really departed very far from the old American life of the countryside and the provincial cities with its simpler tastes and habits, and have never really been broken in to the life of machinery and enormous profits.[7]

This was written in 1932. Seven years later, asking himself why he had written a memoir of his childhood--"when there was obviously so much else to think about"[8]--Wilson realized that he had been prompted by a desire to complete the earlier picture, for he had learned "a number of things which [he] did not know, or did not understand, then."[9] What he had learned about the fortunes of his family makes a striking parallel to his characteristic treatment of artists in relation to their society. While his father and uncles had attempted to remain aloof from the predominant current of their age, they were not unaffected by it. They had had to come to terms with reality, in spite of an aversion to its ways:

> One had either to overwork, as my uncle did, in order to keep up with the new standard of living; or if, as my father did, one refused to keep up beyond a certain point and went on acting on a set of principles at a tangent from the accepted ones, to incur a certain isolation.[10]

Wilson's career as a journalist-critic was based on the belief that he could help revitalize the lost values of the American past, as represented by his own family heritage, without

sacrificing anything to the scramble after an illusory standard of living or the withering effects of alienation. The route he chose committed him to active participation in a struggle against the encroachment of business values in American life. In a great number of editorials written for The New Republic, in his books of reporting, as well as his books of criticism, he took his stand against economic exploitation of man by man; against the abasement of cultural life in a society propelled by the profit motive; against the submergence of traditional idealism. It was exactly his attempt to re-establish traditional American virtues which formulated his approach to Marxism. He accepted the ethos of communism without its philosophic mystique of dialectical materialism or its authoritarian political framework. What was most attractive about Marxism were those tenets which recalled the founding principles of the American Republic. The quality of American utopianism can be detected in Wilson's statement about the impulse which inspired the great Marxists: they had in common

> the desire to get rid of class privilege based on birth and on difference of income; the will to establish a society in which the superior development of some is not paid for by the exploitation, that is, by the deliberate degradation of others--

a society which will be homogeneous and cooperative as our commercial society is not, and directed, to the best of their ability, by the conscious creative minds of its members.[11]

Norman Podhoretz remarks that Wilson's social idealism indicates

how deeply the secularized Puritanism of Thoreau and Emerson had penetrated his thinking, and how little his absorption in twentieth-century revolutionary ideas had been able to touch the 'early American' core of his character--how, indeed, they had only served to reinforce it.[12]

More immediately, it was from his family that Wilson arrived at a scale of values with which he confronted modern life. In a moving reminiscence of childhood, he has recalled that moment when he perceived his affinity with a world different from the one that was everywhere around him. During a visit to the palatial mansion of a railroad robber-baron of the time, when he played with the son of the family, and observed the boy's supercilious treatment of the household servants, it suddenly struck him that there were other kinds of people in the world who did not think and behave like his own family. It was then that he began to be aware of his allegiances:

I remember to have asserted to myself the superior virtue and value of certain things which had reached me through my grandparents--of the spirit that studies and understands

against the spirit that acquires and consumes; of the instinct to give life to other beings against the lethal concentration on power; of the impulse that acts to minimize the social differences between human beings, instead of trying to keep them up and make them wider; and of the kind of ambition that attempts to build on this thought and creative instinct and fellowship rather than on authority.[13]

To have remained loyal to such a creed is inevitably to invite isolation from a good deal of modern life. And this is the position in which Wilson finds himself today. Believing fervently in a tradition which was already besieged when he was a young man, he has continued to champion it for over four decades, and to embody it in all his works. The price of such isolation has been self-doubt and questioning of purpose. In recent years, Wilson has been forced to ask himself whether he is stranded or, perhaps, an exceptional case: "When, for example, I look through Life magazine, I feel that I do not belong to the country depicted there, that I do not even live in that country . . . Am I, then, in a pocket of the past?"[14] To the rhetorical question Wilson has furnished his own answer: "I do not necessarily believe it. I may find myself here at the centre of things--since the centre can only be in one's head--and my feelings and thoughts may be shared by many."[15]

For the reader of Wilson's criticism, the rejoinder is, of course, true. We know that the past cannot actually be relived. Yet, for the literary mind, much of the past is indispensibly necessary for the life of the present. That is, the achievements and standards of the past are those by which we inform and guide our own criteria of excellence and in relation to which we evaluate the intellectual attainments of our own age. Our heritage becomes the repository of vital traditions and experiences that make more meaningful our modern situation and task. It was Wilson's literary and social heritage which provided him with his unique critical quality. Working from a deeply felt tradition, he imparted to his writing what was best in the American experience: a pragmatic common-sense approach to life and letters; an independence of judgement regardless of common opinion; a firm commitment to social and human welfare; and a belief in the primacy of the individual above institutions or systems of any kind. To the task of literary criticism he brought a range of sympathy and sense of balance, a love of literature and a mind concerned with whatever is human, which have produced one of the superlative modern commentaries on literature.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1 Edgar Stanley Hyman, The Armed Vision (New York, 1948), p. 19.

2 A bibliography of Edmund Wilson's writings from 1910 to 1944 edited by Arthur Mizener appears in The Princeton University Library Chronicle, V (1944). His writings since that date have not been recorded in a checklist.

3 Edmund Wilson, "Thoughts on Being Bibliographed," The Princeton University Library Chronicle, V (1944), 55.

4 Wilson, "Thoughts on Being Bibliographed," p. 55.

5 Wilson, "Thoughts on Being Bibliographed," p. 57.

6 Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds, rev. ed., (New York, 1942) p. 400.

7 Edmund Wilson, "Historical Interpretation of Literature," The Intent of the Critic, ed. Donald A. Stauffer (Princeton, 1941), p. 59. Originally delivered as a lecture at Princeton University, Oct. 23, 1940.

8 Wilson, "The Historical Interpretation of Literature," p. 61.

9 Norman Podhoretz, "Edmund Wilson, The Last Patrician--I," The Reporter, Dec. 25, 1958, p. 27.

10 Edmund Wilson, The American Earthquake (New York, 1958), p. 38.

11 R. J. Kaufmann, "The Critic as Custodian of Sanity: Edmund Wilson," Critical Quarterly, I (1959), 91.

12 Wilson violently rejected the neo-humanism of Paul Elmer More and Irving Babbit and contributed to the famous controversy of the 1930's with his essay "Notes on Babbit and More," in The Critique of Humanism, A Symposium, ed. C. Hartley Grattan (New York, 1930). This essay is reprinted in The Shores of Light (New York, 1952), pp. 451-467.

13 Thus Wilson characterized his teacher in a tribute to Gauss, which he later elaborated and placed as the prologue to The Shores of Light, pp. 3-26.

14 Wilson, The Shores of Light, p. 3.

15 Kaufmann, p. 86.

16 Kaufmann, p. 88.

17 Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams (Boston, 1918), p. 271.

18 Van Wyck Brooks, "America's Coming-of-Age," (New York, 1915). Reprinted in Three Essays on America (New York, 1934), p. 24.

19 Jacques Barzun, "Introduction," The Selected Writings of John Jay Chapman (New York, 1957), x.

20 Lincoln Steffens, after World War I, became an admirer of dictatorship; Chapman a virulent racist and anti-Semite.

21 Edmund Wilson, A Piece of My Mind (New York, 1958), p. 211.

22 Wilson, A Piece of My Mind, p. 211.

CHAPTER I

[1] Fred B. Millett, Contemporary American Authors (New York, 1940), p. 649.

[2] Wilson, The American Jitters (New York, 1932), p. 305.

[3] Wilson, The American Earthquake (New York, 1958), p. 500.

[4] Wilson, Note-Books of Night (San Francisco, 1942), p. 95.

[5] Wilson, Note-Books, p. 97.

[6] Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America (New York, 1927), p. 179.

[7] Samuel Eliot Morison and Henry Steele Commager, The Growth of the American Republic (New York, 1950) II, 74.

[8] Wilson, A Piece of My Mind, p. 213.

[9] Wilson, A Piece of My Mind, p. 213.

[10] Wilson, The American Jitters, p. 305.

[11] Millett, p. 649.

[12] Christian Gauss, "Edmund Wilson, The Campus and The Nassau 'Lit'," The Princeton University Library Chronicle, V (1944), 41.

[13] Gauss, P.U.L.C., p. 44.

[14] Gauss, P.U.L.C., p. 45.

[15] Gauss, P.U.L.C., p. 45.

[16] Gauss, P.U.L.C., p. 48.

17 Wilson, "Max Beerbohm, A Christmas Garland," The Nassau Literary Magazine, LXVIII (1913), 346.

18 Gauss, P.U.L.C., p.46.

19 Christian Gauss, "Correspondence with Edmund Wilson," The Papers of Christian Gauss, ed. Katherine Gauss Jackson and Hiram Haydn (New York, 1957), p.234.

20 Wilson, The Shores of Light, p.5.

21 Millett, p.649.

22 Wilson, The American Jitters, p.306.

23 Wilson, The American Jitters, p.306.

24 Wilson, The American Jitters, p.307.

25 Millett, p.649.

26 Wilson, The Shores of Light, p.493.

27 Millett, p.649.

28 Wilson, The Shores of Light, p.522.

29 Wilson, The Shores of Light, p.522

30 Wilson, The Shores of Light, p.532.

31 Edmund Wilson, Red, Black, Blond & Olive (New York, 1956), p.165.

32 Wilson, The Shores of Light, p.739.

33 Wilson, The Shores of Light, p.739.

34 Wilson, The Shores of Light, p.729.

35 Wilson, "Hemingway: Gauge of Morale," The Wound and the Bow, rev. ed. (London, 1952), p.206. Subsequent references will be to this edition.

[36] Granville Hicks, "The Intransigence of Edmund Wilson," Antioch Review, VI (1946), 554.

[37] Wilson, The Shores of Light, p.503.

[38] Wilson, The Shores of Light, p.501.

[39] Hicks, p.555.

[40] Walter Jackson Bate, Prefaces to Criticism (New York, 1959), p.217.

[41] Podhoretz,I, p.25.

[42] Wilson, The Shores of Light, p.503.

[43] Wilson, To The Finland Station (New York, 1940), p.289.

[44] Wilson, To The Finland Station, p.468.

[45] Wilson, Red, Black, Blond and Olive, p.498.

[46] Wilson, Red, Black, Blond and Olive, p.496.

[47] Wilson, Red, Black, Blond and Olive, p.498.

[48] Wilson, Red, Black, Blond and Olive, p.496.

[49] Wilson, "John Jay Chapman," The Triple Thinkers (London, 1939), p.189.

[50] Wilson, A Piece of My Mind, p.208.

[51] Gauss, The Papers, p.252.

[52] Wilson, Classics and Commercials (New York, 1950), p.118.

[53] Wilson, A Piece of My Mind, p.229.

[54] Hicks, p.558.

[55] Wilson, Classics and Commercials, p.120.

[56] Gauss, The Papers, p. 335.

[57] Gauss, The Papers, p. 338.

[58] Wilson, "Zuni," Red, Black, Blond and Olive, pp. 3-70.

[59] Wilson, "Haiti," Red, Black, Blond and Olive, pp. 71-148.

[60] Wilson, Red, Black, Blond and Olive, p. 495.

[61] Wilson, Red, Black, Blond and Olive, p. 498.

[62] Wilson, Red, Black, Blond and Olive, pp. 387-426.

[63] Wilson, The Scrolls from The Dead Sea (New York, 1956).

[64] Wilson, A Piece of My Mind, pp. 83-104.

[65] Wilson, A Piece of My Mind, p. 88.

[66] As holder of the Abbott Lawrence Lowell Professorship of English at Harvard University from July 1959 to June 1960, Wilson gave a course on "The Literature of the American Civil War." I am informed in a letter from the Secretary of The Harvard University Corporation that the course "dealt with the writings--novels, poetry, memoirs, diaries and speeches--of persons involved in the war or intimately connected with it, from Harriet Beecher Stowe to Justice Holmes."

[67] Wilson, A Piece of My Mind, pp. 203-232.

[68] Wilson, The American Earthquake (New York, 1958).

[69] Wilson, The American Earthquake, pp. 496-510.

[70] Wilson, The American Earthquake, p. 507.

[71] Wilson, The American Earthquake, p. 505.

72 Edmund Wilson, The Shock of Recognition (New York, 1943), p.595.

73 Wilson, A Piece of My Mind, p.232.

CHAPTER II

[1] Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle. (New York, 1931), frontpiece.

[2] E. K. Brown, "The Method of Edmund Wilson," University of Toronto Quarterly, XI (1941), 105.

[3] Edward Fiess, "Edmund Wilson: Art and Ideas," Antioch Review, I (1941), 358.

[4] Alfred North Whitehead, Science and the Modern World (Cambridge, 1926), pp. 93-118.

[5] Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, p. 108.

[6] Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, p. 109.

[7] Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, p. 101.

[8] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p. 5.

[9] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p. 7.

[10] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p. 8.

[11] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p. 10.

[12] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p. 10.

[13] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p. 21.

[14] D. S. Savage, The Personal Principle: Studies in Modern Poetry (London, 1944), p. 42.

[15] Delmore Schwartz, "The Writing of Edmund Wilson," Accent, II (1942), 179.

[16] Schwartz, p. 179.

[17] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.221.

[18] Wilson, Axel's Castle, pp.257-298.

[19] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.266.

[20] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.283.

[21] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.283.

[22] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.293.

[23] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.292.

[24] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.297.

[25] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.294.

[26] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.297.

[27] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.297.

[28] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.298.

[29] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.298.

[30] Wilson, "W.B. Yeats," Axel's Castle, pp.26-63.

[31] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.30.

[32] Wilson points out the influence of Yeats' father, a Pre-Raphaelite painter, who had given him Rossetti to read.

[33] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.32.

[34] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.33.

[35] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.34.

[36] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.37.

[37] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.36.

[38] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.47.

[39] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.47.

[40] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.59.

[41] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.61.

[42] Wilson, Axel's Castle, pp.93-131.

[43] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.122.

[44] Wilson, "Marcel Proust," Axel's Castle, pp.132-190.

[45] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.189.

[46] Wilson, Axel's Castle, p.188.

[47] Wilson, The Shores of Light, p.271.

CHAPTER III

1 The incident is recorded in Malcolm Cowley's Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920's, rev. ed. (New York, 1951), p. 3.

2 Van Wyck Brooks, "The Literary Life," Civilization in the United States, An Inquiry by Thirty Americans, ed., Harold E. Stearns, . (New York, 1922), pp. 179-181.

3 Cowley, Exile's Return, p. 74.

4 Kauffmann, p. 93.

5 A leading neo-humanist of the day, Paul Elmer More, summed up Dos Passos' Manhattan Transfer as "an explosion in a cesspool." See Wilson, The Triple Thinkers (London, 1939), p. 13.

6 Wilson, The Shores of Light, p. 34.

7 Wilson, The Shores of Light, p. 34.

8 Wilson, The Shores of Light, p. 34.

9 Wilson, The American Jitters, pp. 297-313.

10 Wilson, The American Jitters, p. 311.

11 See Fiess, p. 362.

12 Fiess, p. 362.

13 London, 1939.

14 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p. 266.

15 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p. 289.

16 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.277.

17 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.277.

18 Ernest H. Templin, "The Social Approach to Literature," University of California Publications in Modern Philology, XXVIII (1944), 18.

19 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.281.

20 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.278.

21 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.283.

22 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.283.

23 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.284.

24 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.289.

25 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.289.

26 George Snell, "Edmund Wilson: The Historical Critic," Rocky Mountain Review, VIII (1944), 40.

27 F. W. Dupee, "Edmund Wilson's Criticism," Partisan Review, IV (1938), 50.

28 Wilson, The American Jitters, p.305.

29 Wilson, "The Historical Interpretation of Literature," p.47.

30 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, pp.100-121.

31 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.100.

32 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.100.

33 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.107.

34 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.110.

35 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.113.

36 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.108.

37 Wilson, The Triple Thinkers, p.120.

CHAPTER IV

[1] David Daiches, Critical Approaches to Literature (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1956), p.340.

[2] Snell, p.42.

[3] Wilson, "Historical Interpretation of Literature," p.56.

[4] Wilson, "Historical Interpretation of Literature," p.54.

[5] Wilson, "Historical Interpretation of Literature," p.55.

[6] Frederick J. Hoffman, Freudianism and the Literary Mind (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1945), p.101.

[7] Wilson, "Historical Interpretation of Literature," p.57.

[8] New York, 1941.

[9] Daiches, p.346.

[10] The myth has been told in a variety of ways. Some versions say that only the magic arrows of Heracles were required for victory; others, that Philoctetes' presence too was needed, since only he could draw the mighty bow. Wilson appears to have selected the version that will serve his own interpretation.

[11] Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, pp.247-8.

[12] Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.264.

[13] Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.263.

14 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.264.

15 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, pp.244-264.

16 Lionel Trilling, "Art and Neurosis," The Liberal Imagination (New York, 1950), p.164.

17 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.263.

18 Trilling, p.165.

19 Delmore Schwartz takes issue with Wilson's use of the Philoctetes myth. He feels that Philoctetes offers a number of other interpretations quite different from the one Wilson gives it; that many other classical stories, from Pegasus and Orpheus to Oedipus also express aspects of the creative situation. Wilson's choice was perhaps determined by his concern with the special social relationship which exists between society at large and the creative artist. In this special sense, Philoctetes has broader symbolic application than the other myths. See Schwartz, p.185.

20 Trilling, p.165.

21 Trilling, pp.159-178.

22 Trilling, p.168.

23 Trilling, p.169.

24 Trilling, p.171.

25 Daiches, p.346.

26 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, pp.1-93.

27 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.5.

28 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.5.

29 See The Wound and the Bow, p.6.

30 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.8.

31 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.13.

32 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.13.

33 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.57.

34 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.8.

35 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.1.

36 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.3.

37 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, pp.94-161.

38 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.96.

39 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.108.

40 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.133.

41 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, pp.162-173.

42 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.162.

43 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.163.

44 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.163.

45 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.170.

46 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.171.

47 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.172.

48 Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, pp.174-190.

[49] Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.174.

[50] Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.175.

[51] Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.177.

[52] Wilson, "Hemingway: Gauge of Morale," The Wound and the Bow, pp.191-217.

[53] Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.215.

[54] Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.215.

[55] Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.215.

[56] Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, pp.218-243.

[57] Wilson, The Wound and the Bow, p.218.

CONCLUSION

[1] Alfred Kazin, On Native Grounds, rev. ed., (New York, 1958) p. 345.

[2] Wilson, "The Historical Interpretation of Literature," p. 59.

[3] Wilson, "The Historical Interpretation of Literature," p. 61.

[4] Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Introduction: Criticism in America," Literary Opinion in America (New York, rev. ed. 1951), p. 26.

[5] Kazin, p. 345.

[6] Wilson, "The Historical Interpretation of Literature," p. 45.

[7] Wilson, The American Jitters, p. 305.

[8] Wilson, Note-Books, p. 109.

[9] Wilson, Note-Books, p. 109.

[10] Wilson, Note-Books, p. 110.

[11] Wilson, The Shores of Light, p. 742.

[12] Podhoretz (II), p. 33.

[13] Wilson, Note-Books, p. 112.

[14] Wilson, A Piece of My Mind, p. 232.

[15] Wilson, A Piece of My Mind, p. 232.

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