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The Positive Philosophy of Exile in Contemporary Literature: Stefan Themerson and his Fiction

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the phenomenon of the positive philosophy of exile in contemporary literature on the basis of Stefan Themerson's fiction. Themerson's positive attitude to exile and its antecedents--the Stoic ideal of "cosmopolis" and its eighteenth-century transformations--are compared to the views on expatriation expressed by another exiled writer, Witold Gombrowicz, to the moral philosophy of Bertrand Russell, and to the ideology of the twentieth-century avant-garde.

Within émigré literature the works marked by the positive philosophy of exile are treated as a separate form to be distinguished from the works in which exile is only a theme. The positive philosopher of exile bases his optimism on scepticism and the recognition of the arbitrariness of human values. The thesis claims that, although far from being universally true and free from weaknesses, the positive philosophy of exile has a genuine claim to validity as an attempt to contribute to the process of bridging cultural differences without compromising cultural diversity.

RÉSUMÉ

La thèse examine le phénomène de la philosophie positive de l'exil dans la littérature contemporaine à partir des romans de Stefan Themerson. L'attitude positive de Themerson envers l'exil--ainsi que ses antécédents: l'idéal des Stoïques, cosmopolis, avec ses transmutations au XVIIIe siècle--sont juxtaposés avec le point de vue sur l'expatriation d'un autre écrivain exilé, Witold Gombrowicz, ainsi qu'avec la philosophie morale de Bertrand Russell et les idéologies d'avant-garde au XXe siècle.

Les écrits marqués par la philosophie positive de l'exil sont perçus comme étant, distincts, dans la littérature, des oeuvres où l'exil ne sert que de thème. Le philosophe positif de l'exil fonde son optimisme sur un sain scepticisme et sur une conscience de l'arbitraire qui sous-tend toute valeur humaine.

Sans voir la philosophie positive de l'exil une vérité universelle exempte de faiblesses, la thèse tente d'en démontrer les lignes de force, y décelant une vision de la réalité qui bâtit des ponts au dessus des divergences humaines sans pour autant compromettre la nécessaire diversité des cultures.

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PREFACE

The subject of my thesis, the positive philosophy of exile reflected in the works of several twentieth-century writers and artists, has been inspired by the fiction and essays of a London writer--Stefan Themerson. An émigré from Poland, Themerson never indulged in nostalgia, so pervasive in émigré literature, but constantly underlined the advantages of exile in his search for meaning in a world of confusing and arbitrary values. His fiction has not attained a wide popularity, yet he has gained the support of many admirers, among them Bertrand Russell. The avant-garde films which Themerson produced with his wife Franciszka are remembered as an innovative contribution to Polish cinematic art. His books, translated into Polish, Dutch, French, German, and Italian continue to be published and gain admirers.

Yet Themerson is far from being alone in his positive attitude to exile. His apotheosis of expatriation has its antecedents in the Stoic ideal of "cosmopolis" and in the spirit of the eighteenth-century philosophes. It brings to mind the views expressed by Witold Gombrowicz, Bertrand Russell, and by the artists of the twentieth-century avant-garde. All these ideals and views had to be included in the thesis, since my goal was to put Themerson's philosophy of exile into perspective and to prove that it is a valid part

of a rich and potent tradition.

The present dissertation is the first comprehensive attempt at presenting and discussing the fiction of Stefan Themerson. It is also an attempt to contribute to the study of the literature of exile by pointing to a specific body of works in which the positive attitude to expatriation becomes the foundation for a complex world-view. Such a view of exile, although relatively rare, is seen as a contribution to the process of bridging cultural differences inspired by the old Stoic ideal of "cosmopolis." In the twentieth-century, the ideal is still alive and, as my analysis proves, it can be seen in the works of at least several contemporary writers.

My special thanks are due, first of all, to the Department of English at McGill University which made my own "positive" exile in Canada possible. I would like to thank Prof. David Williams for his kindness and support at a time when political circumstances made my return to Poland impossible and Prof. Louis Dudek who encouraged me and helped me in my first difficult years at McGill. My special thanks are due to Prof. Irwin Gopnik for his help and patience in the preparation of this thesis and, last but not least, to Mr. Stefan Themerson who offered me his encouragement and provided me with materials without which this thesis would not have been written.

CHAPTER 1

THE POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY OF EXILE AND ITS PLACE IN ÉMIGRÉ LITERATURE

The goal of the present chapter is to prepare the ground for the discussion of the positive philosophy of exile in the works of Stefan Themerson, Witold Gombrowicz, and Bertrand Russell. I shall look at different forms of and different attitudes to exile and their repercussions in the works written by émigré writers in order to define a positive philosopher of exile--a writer who turns expatriation into a source of positive inspiration--and to determine his place in twentieth-century literature and philosophy. I shall also look at the existing criticism of émigré literature modifying the present classifications in order to accomodate writers who build their world-view on the positive attitude to expatriation.

For someone reading the works written by émigré writers it is not difficult to develop an impression that the nostalgic voices of exile are the prevailing ones. National literatures proudly exhibit the writings of authors who, separated from their homeland, exalt its real and imaginary virtues. Their nostalgia, an undisputed source of many literary masterpieces, has been officially recognized and has even acquired a name: "le mal du pays." Their masterpieces, taught at school and picked for recitation at

the moments of national celebrations, are among the most touching expressions of genuine patriotism. Yet these nostalgic voices of exile, however potent and inspiring, are not the only expression of the phenomenon which, for centuries, has been a part of significant human experience.

Speaking about the experience of exile Czesław Miłosz, in a few words, expressed the ambivalence of feelings surrounding it: "It is a very bitter experience. If the poison doesn't kill you, then you are the stronger."[1] Realizing the restrictions imposed by such a choice I would like to look closer at the writers who have not only been strengthened by their personal knowledge of exile but who have managed to transform their experience into the basis of their individual philosophy. This is not to imply that their attitude to exile is, from its nature, superior to that of the writers crushed by it. Both forms of experience, as I intend to prove, can become an important source of inspiration and can find their expression in literature.

Positive and negative attitudes to exile have been as old as the phenomenon itself, and both are implied by its very definition. The Oxford dictionary defines exile as an "enforced removal from one's native land according to an edict or sentence," but it can also mean "expatriation, prolonged absence from one's native land, endured by compulsion of circumstances or voluntarily undergone for any purpose." As long as exile is primarily taken to mean banishment, it cannot justify the search for any other

positive values than repentance. When it is voluntary, caused by dissatisfaction with the life in one's native land and accompanied by the desire to explore the world beyond the horizon, its advantages may outweigh its sorrows.

Those who have experienced exile would point to the difficulty of comparing different types of expatriation and their subsequent effects on the human psyche. There is an enormous difference between expatriation which is reversible and that which is not. There is a difference between being exiled to cultural peripheries and deciding to leave for one of the cultural centers of the world. One also has to distinguish between those who are forced to leave a country in which they feel at home and those who depart from their homeland voluntarily as they find its shortcomings too restrictive. There is a difference between economic emigration and intellectual migration, between being a survivor who feels he has to propagate the values of his cultural inheritance, and an outcast who feels that he represents nobody but himself. In The Anatomy of Exile, an excellent study on the semantic and historical significance of expatriation, Paul Tabori tries to classify its possible types. He points out that any definition of exile would have to take into account its two aspects: either forced or voluntary separation from one's native country. But in both cases he underlines that an exile remains an exile only as long as he is not trying to integrate into his new society; if he does he becomes an immigrant. The distinction between an exile and an immigrant is an important one. An exile may

consciously or subconsciously refuse to assimilate for several reasons. He may be too involved with the life of his lost country and prefer to take part in activities which would make his return possible. If the dream of return is unrealistic, nostalgic émigrés may nevertheless live in the past clinging to their memories and refuse their present status (25). Yet some exiles may also, as a positive philosopher of exile does, refuse to assimilate as a matter of principle. One may value suspension between one's old and new country to such an extent that one consciously refuses to become an immigrant in order not to lose the advantages of exile. Such an exile prefers to observe and analyse rather than to belong, valuing the advantages of being outside more than assimilation.

Paul Tabori points to the fact that exile has not been invented by humans. Animals have been known to reject these individuals from their species which are visibly different since they do not conform to the desired biological pattern. Tabori emphasizes too, that exile is not a product of civilization; it has been known and used as a form of punishment at all stages of human social development from ostracism in Ancient Greece to banishment of dissidents from the Soviet Union. He also discusses an important tradition of voluntary exile and its positive significance. Christianity sees voluntary exile from the world as a form of flight from sin and the temptations of everyday life which may stop people from being with God and, eventually,

from entering the Kingdom of Heaven (65). In the third century this need for seclusion led to many monastic and ascetic movements. However, on a larger scale, the positive aspects of wandering, leaving one's home country had to wait before they were granted respectability. They were finally recognized in American culture in which a wanderer was an explorer, in which those who refused to stay put were the same ones who created a new country (141).

As much as any other group of exiles, exiled writers can be subdivided into many groups widely differing in either their acceptance of exile, or the degree to which they use it as a material of fiction. One can see among them political exiles, expatriates, as well as internal émigrés. Traditionally, we associate exile with political emigration, expatriates with a voluntary decision to leave one's native country "physically," yet not "in spirit," and internal émigrés with the refusal to become involved in the life of one's country, which often means its official life, even though one is still physically present in it. This classification, however, does not account for possible variations abundantly illustrated by the fate of individuals.

Mary McCarthy in her article "Exiles, Expatriates, and Internal Emigrés" favours the above classification and finds it worthwhile to apply it to the world of literature. The chief attraction of such a distinction is that it accounts for the difference between such writers as Ernest Hemingway and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, one clearly an expatriate, the

other a political exile. Yet the distinction, in spite of its initial usefulness, eventually raises more questions than it answers. The author fails to see that the distinction between exiles "who live for the lost homeland" and hedonistic expatriates who have no politics and who want to escape their native country (706), does not account for all cases. A genuine political exile, even if forced to take residence elsewhere, may indeed never "leave" his country, constantly writing about it, publishing there, and taking a lively and active interest in its problems. Yet these clear-cut cases of political exiles living for their homeland and hedonistic voluntary exiles are not the most perplexing ones. How do we account for such writers as James Joyce, who differs profoundly both from Hemingway and Solzhenitsyn? What do we do with bona fide exiles, like Witold Gombrowicz or Stefan Themerson, who although genuinely preoccupied with their native tradition do not want to live "for the lost homeland" (706), and who evade the distinction between exiles and expatriates?

All these exceptional cases, and they are plentiful, either make any attempt at classifying émigré writers according to their status downright confusing or allow for too many exceptions to the rule. I propose, therefore, to abandon the attempt to regard the political or geographical position of the author as the basis for including his works in the body of the literature of exile, and to concentrate on his attitude towards the fact of expatriation, whether

forced or voluntary, political or hedonistic, visible in his writings. I shall return to the proper definition of the literature of exile further on, only stressing here that since exile, in its various forms and degrees, can become a source of positive as well as destructive influence on the exiled individual, these two attitudes also can be found in the literature of exile, no matter into which group we classify the author.

That exiled poets or writers can become successful in their new homeland, that they can contribute to their culture in a unique way has become an undisputed fact. Terry Eagleton has proved that the greatness of the twentieth-century English novel was possible only because of exiles and émigrés. They have managed to enrich conventional English culture with fresh themes and points of view; they were outside of the very rigid social stratification which acted as a straight-jacket to many indigenous English writers. Eagleton stresses that the only great English writer of the first part of the twentieth century, D. H. Lawrence, was working class, and thus as much outside stratified British society as his émigré fellow writers: Conrad, James, Pound, Yeats, and Joyce. Whether we agree with him or not that an émigré who is experiencing "particular tensions between the remembered and the real, the potential and the actual, integration and dispossession, exile and involvement" (18) has a better chance to become a great writer, we have to accept that in many cases literary responses to exile and to life as an émigré have been

particularly fruitful.

As long as exile is viewed predominantly either as punishment or as an unwanted and tragic outcome of historical processes and political storms, the individuals who voluntarily part from their community are often looked upon with suspicion. A negative attitude towards those who choose emigration is directly proportional to the pervasiveness of the ideal of patriotism and loyalty to one's country. In nineteenth-century Poland poor peasants who chose emigration overseas to escape virtual starvation at home were accused of ingratitude to their fatherland. Their decision was either attributed to the results of their laziness and reluctance to work for their country, or to their stupidity and illiteracy which made them an easy prey of foreign agents (Murdzek 137). Communist regimes, to this day, condemn all refugees as traitors who want to serve capitalism for its material rewards, and they employ all the means available to a totalitarian state to isolate them from their homeland. J. B. Priestley did not hide his feelings of disapproval towards the British writers who chose to leave England in order to enjoy a more comfortable life elsewhere (Tabori 166). Yet not all voluntary exiles have met with condemnation. I have already mentioned that Christianity has offered its own models of positive exiles: monks and hermits who voluntarily withdrew from other people to be closer to God. They have found that living far from the everyday bustle and the temptations of the world they can serve God

better, and their choice is sanctioned by God's blessing.

Christian monks are not the only exiles who command respect and admiration. Many philosophers and religious men before them have chosen the same path for exactly the same reason. In folk tradition the figure of a wise man living in seclusion in order to contemplate, learn from nature, and be closer to God or gods commands respect. Another folk hero of positive exile could be found in the picaresque tradition. I do not refer here to the hero of Spanish picaresque novels who tried to dupe society in order to obtain wealth and an advantageous social position, but to popular English or French versions of shrewd yet noble spirits who traversed the world seeking no commitment, yet preserving their isolation unrestricted by political or social boundaries. Another positive exile, a bohemian artist, also enjoyed a degree of tolerance granted to geniuses. Artistic bohemia was able to live by its own standards only because the artists were outcasts, living on the borderline of respectable society in the realm reserved for the gifted and the insane. Many of these artists were voluntary exiles in the true sense of the word, choosing to live in cultural centers rather than their countries of origin. How important these cultural centers were for them can be illustrated by the case of Robert Musil who considered himself an exile only when he was forced to leave Berlin for his native Austria. And, last but not least, one has to mention that even among those upon whom exile was forced there were some who found that their condition could be a source of

positive inspiration. Wang Yang-Ming, the great neo-Confucian philosopher, managed to turn his exile among barbarians into an important source of inspiration. It was in exile that he formulated his principles of idealism. The truth, he maintained, was not to be sought in the external world but in one's mind and heart since knowledge is identical with action. Man's interior "good knowledge" was in constant danger of being obscured by his desires and by wordly temptations, while the seclusion of exile could become an asset to those who wanted to discover moral perfection.[2]

For Stefan Themerson, a Polish émigré writer whose fiction has provided an inspiration for my thesis, exile has been a rewarding experience. His transformation from a young refugee who arrived in 1938 in Paris, with a few of his avant-garde films as his only recommendation, to a London writer whose novels met with the approval of Bertrand Russell was by no means typical. Although after the invasion of France Themerson joined the Polish forces to fight the Nazis, he has refused to share the lot of other Polish refugees in post-war England. Contrary to the popular feelings among the Polish community in London, for him exile was neither a curse, nor a period of waiting before political changes would make the return to a new Poland possible. It enriched him, not only on a personal scale by providing a different vantage point from which he could evaluate his experience, but also in more universal terms by

becoming the basis for his philosophy. Such a development is not surprising in a man who has witnessed the destruction and extermination brought about by German nationalism, who has always mistrusted excessive passions, and who has always admired the eighteenth-century ironists and their cosmopolitan ideal. Themerson has always been convinced of the value of detachment; the removal from one's native land has, consequently, become an ally in his search for objectivity. Barred from Poland, first by the war and next by the political changes of the post-war era, instead of expressing the sorrows of exile, he has pointed to the advantages of looking at human problems from the universal point of view of a citizen of the world. His concern with the universal perspective has permeated his literary and philosophical interests ever since.

Themerson's response to exile is not without parallels in the history of literature. It can be traced back to the Stoics and their ideal of cosmopolis, the home of all mankind. Their arguments exalting the importance of loyalty to humanity rather than to particular nations have never been forgotten, although they always had to compete with the feelings of loyalty to one's city or country. Plutarch, although far from admiring the Stoics, recalled some of their arguments when he wrote about the advantages of expatriation in his essay "On Exile." Since nature has given us no country, he wrote--"every city at once becomes a native city to the man who has learned to make use of it and has roots which can live and thrive everywhere and take hold

in any region..." (535). For many, he stresses, the evils and limitations of exile are the evils and limitations of their own souls since exile reveals our true value. Plutarch's treatise "On Exile" has, since then, become a classic for all who put humanity above particular nations. In fifteenth-century Italy similar arguments were repeated in what, by then, had become a specific literary genre: the letter of consolation addressed to those who faced banishment. The eighteenth century also adopted the Stoic ideal and Stoic arguments were reiterated in the writings of Voltaire and Diderot. Although the nineteenth-century, as the century of nationalism, witnessed the declining popularity of cosmopolitanism, these ideals have never been altogether abandoned and the same arguments, enriched and transformed, have surfaced again in contemporary literature.

The twentieth century has experienced exile on a scale which surpassed all previous migrations. In the multitude of émigrés, displaced persons, and refugees writing about their experience there were some who have recalled the old arguments of the Stoics. Witold Gombrowicz, a Polish writer who found himself in Argentina at the outbreak of World War II, has been one of them. He found out that his separation from Poland, in spite of its economic hardships, was a blessing. Suddenly he was experiencing the freedom of a youth relieved from the supervision of his overcautious parents. Leaving all his "cultural aunts,"--to use his own expression denoting various maecenases of Polish cultural

life--and the pressure exerted by the national ideals and mythology, he was able to rework his literary material in a way which is unique not only in the Polish literary tradition but also in world literature. The necessity to say no to many Polish national values, to re-examine one's relationship to one's native culture has become the basis for his philosophy. Gombrowicz advises Poles to reject national myths in order to grow, to develop in their own way. He hates all attempts at glorification of the past, and he fights for authenticity of expression however unconventional and shocking it might seem. His fight with the past becomes his fight for the future, unknown, uncertain yet possible only on the ruins of what he sees as lifeless and stifling patterns.

The artists of the twentieth-century avant-garde have also contributed to the concept of exile as a source of positive experience. Their testimony is particularly valid since many of them have proved their devotion to cosmopolitan ideals through personal hardships caused by expatriation. The early manifestoes of Dada and Merz put forward arguments in which their authors, Dadaists and their sympathizer, Kurt Schwitters, professed loyalty to the cosmopolitan muse of art. They stressed their detachment from national values and proclaimed the "internationale of the spirit" as the only republic an avant garde artist can consider himself attached to. Dadaists and their sympathizers demanded the freedom of creation and toleration towards their artistic experiments which were aimed at the

conventional values of the bourgeoisie. They exposed the senselessness of the established order whether it signified artistic conventions or social and political status quo. They wanted to shock their audience from their complacency and to change their lives. In order to do this they lived the lives of exiles, since only a refusal to share the values of the community gave them the right to criticize and the means to shock.

The positive philosophy of exile is not an exclusive property of those who have experienced exile. Some of the philosophers have tested their ideals in theory only; some have failed to prove in their lives what they have preached in their fiction. Bertrand Russell belongs to the former, Denis Diderot to the latter. Yet both, as I will try to show in my thesis, have contributed to the positive philosophy of exile in an important way. For Bertrand Russell, a struggle for detachment has become one of the preconditions of his moral philosophy. He was convinced that mankind would improve, if individuals put themselves in the position of an exile while approaching most passionate issues. Impartiality would strengthen reason and allow arguments to take priority over passions. For those, like himself, who were not exiles in a physical sense, Russell recommended a number of techniques which would facilitate their detachment from national values. He suggested, for instance, that one should always read a newspaper of the party directly opposed to one's own in order to see one's arguments from another point

of view. For Bertrand Russell exile was the lot of all independent intellectuals and they, he felt, were the people best prepared to face our troubled age. Similar views were held by Denis Diderot who, although passionately involved in the life of the eighteenth-century Parisian intellectual élite, and not able to imagine life outside it, was nevertheless convinced of the values of cosmopolitanism. As a man of the Enlightenment Diderot advocated tolerance, objectivity, and detachment as the best aids of reason. His place among the positive philosophers of exile is well assured since the goal of his philosophy was to establish universal values which would transcend the boundaries of his country and his times.

The division into the positive and negative views of exile has been accepted by exiled writers and literary critics alike. Banished authors have either stressed the hardships of expatriation or tried to see its positive features. The pain of parting with the country of which one feels an integral part has been shared by many exiled writers from antiquity until the present time. Ovid's Tristia expresses the feelings of despair which accompanies the poet during his life among barbarians, far from the people and problems with which he felt so much at home. Similar feelings are shared by many contemporary writers. Milan Kundera and Joseph Skvorecky, two well-known Czech writers in exile, although not forced to live among barbarians, often stress the difficulties of communicating with their readers among whom they feel as "a reverted Alice

in Wonderland" (Skvorecky 309). Profoundly touched by the painful experience of Stalinism and totalitarianism they find it difficult to bridge over the different cultural backgrounds and different experiences of their readers. Frequently they complain that having been given a right to speak they have virtually no one to speak to. They are by no means isolated in their dissatisfaction, although one can wonder if their condition is not shared by all great writers, regardless of the fact whether they live in their own country or not. Alexander Solzhenitsyn is yet another writer who has been deeply wounded by not being able to live in his own country, and one can cite even more tragic examples. The fate of Jan Lechoń, a Polish poet forced to emigrate by the war and the post-war communist takeover, who chose death, convinced that life in exile could not be endured, illustrates the ultimate defeat of an exiled poet. Yet in his article on the Czech writers in exile, Joseph Skvorecky himself admits that "exile is hard experience, but it is not all gloom, despair and inevitable suicide" (308).

Having tasted exile himself Skvorecky tries to establish reasons behind positive and negative responses to expatriation. For him the most important difference lies in the direction of exile: to or from the centrum. He distinguishes between the Ovidian and the Conradian type of exile or, in other words, between banishment to the peripheries, or exile to a major cultural center. The second type of exile, Skvorecky maintains, offers a real

chance of a new life and can bring its very real consolations. Yet although one cannot deny the fundamental difference between exile to Ovid's Tomis and to Conrad's England the two writers are not in fact as different in their approach to exile as Skvorecky suggests. His classification is based on the link between the attitude to expatriation and the place of exile. This link, however, may prove misleading. I have already mentioned Ovid's true counterpart, the Chinese philosopher who managed to turn his exile to peripheries into a source of inspiration. In more recent times Witold Gombrowicz proved that cultural peripheries, in his case Argentina, do not have to limit one's creative powers. He argued that peripheries offer more freedom and enable an artist to contribute to universal culture in ways which the center, with its established values and models, cannot. What is more, the fact of being exiled to a cultural center is not a guarantee of success either: Jan Lechoń committed suicide in New York, one of the cultural capitals of the world.

The example of Joseph Conrad raises even more questions. He certainly is a successful exile, yet it could be difficult to present him as Ovid's counterpart. The theme of the tragic significance of exile which found its expression in Ovid's elegies is also present in Conrad's novels, although the latter manages to give it a more universal significance. Conrad's protagonists are often isolated from civilization, from other people, or from their true nature. The theme of loneliness and misunderstanding is

a frequent one in Conrad's universe. In "Amy Foster", Yanko Gooral, a young Polish emigrant to America, shipwrecked on the coast of England, experiences acute loneliness caused by total isolation from his environment. His language, customs, traditions, his values developed among Polish mountaineers make him a laughing stock of English villagers who are not able to notice, let alone appreciate, his virtues. Only Amy Foster, a slightly retarded girl, finds him attractive in spite of his foreign ways. Yet her attraction, although strong enough to lead to marriage, does not mean true understanding and Amy slowly turns away from her husband, terrified of all in him that she cannot understand. Yanko dies abandoned and misunderstood, another example of a Conradian protagonist who has to face life and death on his own. The real difference between Ovid's and Conrad's use of the topos of exile is that while Ovid was progressively more concerned with the hardships of his banishment to Tomis, Conrad was able to universalize the theme of exile into that of isolation and loneliness valid for all humans, regardless of their national cultures. Isolation and loneliness seen as part and parcel of the human condition became the basis of the Conradian philosophy. He has not been called an inspiration for existentialists in vain. Yet for the true counterpart of the Ovidian mode, the positive philosopher of exile, one has to look elsewhere.

Joseph Skvorecky is not the only exiled writer who writes about the condition of exile. Czesław Miłosz also

tried to assess the advantages and disadvantages of life outside his native land. In his Notes on Exile he stresses that one of the greatest advantages of expatriation is that it is capable of freeing an exiled writer from illusions. Since many émigré writers complain of being misunderstood in their new surroundings Miłosz is quick to point out that lack of understanding is not reserved for exiled writers, but it is the lot of any independent intellectual. Although clearly ambivalent in his feelings towards exile, Miłosz admits that it has its positive aspects. It is first of all an important lesson in humility, as the writer realizes that he cannot hope for a degree of understanding which he naively assumed to be possible in his own country. He loses the illusion that literature is able to change the world, and he realizes his own solitude which would be so much more difficult to notice in his own well-known milieu. A writer in exile, Miłosz says, is alone with his own soul, his own dreams, and his own needs which are so much clearer when not deadened by the noise of the everyday life of his own community. This universal perspective which an exiled writer is forced to assume, however painful, is positive because it makes him discover an important aspect of the human condition. In the same essay Miłosz claims that an exiled poet does not necessarily have to lose command of his native language when deprived of everyday contact with it. Contrary to what many writers in exile maintain, he is convinced that through contrast with the foreign speech the poet is able to explore his own language with much more

precision. Miłosz's assertion has to be considered seriously, even if solely on the strength of the beauty and richness of his poetry written in Polish in exile.

Positive aspects of expatriation were also the theme of an essay by another well-known Polish writer in exile, Joseph Wittlin, who has based his conclusions on the conviction that a true artist is always an exile, even if he is living in his native country (141). The loss of one's country gives a writer an excellent opportunity to look at the world from a different angle, Wittlin maintains, giving the example of James Joyce, who was able to find inspiration in the fact of exile from the country which, while he was living in it, was suffocating him. An exiled writer is writing for the future more than for the present; he is less conditioned by contemporary fashions and trends and, consequently, finds it easier to be objective. Exile can be a true test of the writer's worth; it is a test in which only the best win through to universal significance. By having to win recognition for the second time the writer gains a chance to experiment and change, since he does not have to live up to his already established image. All these arguments in favour of expatriation do not mean that Wittlin turns a blind eye to the dangers of exile. He points to potentially harmful feelings of nostalgia which make it impossible for many émigrés to examine their memories critically and to stop glorifying the past. He is not blind to the pain of exile either, yet he is at the same time

firmly convinced of its very real advantages.

Exiled writers were not the only ones to write about the condition of exile. Literary critics have also found the phenomenon of expatriation, its implications on literature and, consequently, on literary criticism, an interesting topic. One of the first essays on the subject was Harry Levin's "Literature and Exile." Analysing different responses to exile, Levin noticed that, surprisingly, many writers stress the value of distancing themselves from their native cultures. A good writer, Levin concluded, has to choose some form of exile from his immediate surroundings in order to reaffirm his intellectual independence. "Such isolation need not mean sheer withdrawal, but that detachment of the one from the many which is the necessary precondition of all original thought" (81). Unfortunately since Levin concentrates mainly on the writers' experience of exile and not on its literary transformations, his interesting essay does not contribute much to the present discussion.

Literary responses to exile have been the focus of Claudio Guillén's essay, "On the Literature of Exile and Counter-Exile," in which he introduces the following classification:

> Broad though the spectrum of these literary responses has been, it can be observed that they range, in the main, from a pole A to a pole B. Pole A is the direct or near-autobiographical conveyance of the actual experiences of exile itself by means of emotions reflecting the experiences of attitudes developed toward them. Pole B is the imaginative presentation of relatively fictional themes, ancient myths or proposed

> ideas and beliefs growing from what are essentially the consequences in the changing writer, or group of writers, of the initial experiences. A certain kind of writer speaks of exile, while another learns from it. In the first case, which is common in poetry and often assumes elegiac modes, exile becomes its own subject matter. In the second, which may lead to narratives and essays, exile is the condition but not the visible cause of an imaginative response often characterised by a tendency toward integration, increasingly broad vistas or universalism. Writings of the former sort can be rightly regarded as examples of the literature of exile. Instances of the latter compose what I shall call the literature of counter-exile, that is to say, of those responses which incorporate the separation from place, class, language or native community, insofar as they triumph over the separation and thus can offer wide dimensions of meaning that transcend the earlier attachment to place or native origin. (271-2)

Guillén proceeds to give examples of the two types of literature. He speaks of Ovid as the representative of the literature of exile, while the various forms of the odyssey are his models for the literature of counter-exile. "I cannot suppose"--Guillén maintains--"that the direct expression of the sorrow, which is the Ovidian mode, is the most important response" (272). In other words, while "literature of exile" is limited to works which are entirely wrapped up in their negative response to expatriation, "literature of counter-exile" notices its positive aspects, and has more chances to become universal and dynamic or, to put it bluntly, better.

One cannot agree that an attitude to exile would necessarily determine the depth of literary responses to it. If one follows Guillén's assumptions, one has to arrive at the conclusion that the elegy is an inferior genre to the essay, or other forms of narrative, just because the former

is an expression of sorrow while the latter demands a more general perspective. What is more, stressing the importance of triumph over exile, Guillén links richness of meaning with a positive attitude to expatriation. "Triumph over the separation" demanded by him as a condition for the literature of counter-exile excludes a priori those writers who may try to express the universal significance of defeat by exile. Yet, a view of man as an eternal exile who is not able to overcome his condition (Conrad's Amy Foster is an excellent example here) can be a source of literary responses which are equally rich in meaning.

I have already mentioned that the terms exile, expatriate, and internal émigré which try to do justice to various shades and degrees of exile are often insufficient when applied to individual writers. The term "the literature of exile" invites similar confusions by not accounting for the distinction between literature on or inspired by exile and literature written by exiles. Yet once we abandon the attempt to take the status of the author as the basis for the definition of the literature of exile, this entangled issue becomes much clearer. Therefore, I shall restrict the term "the literature of exile" to texts which show the preoccupation with exile, no matter what the political status or geographical position of the author. Thus, for instance, the works of such expatriates as Gertrude Stein will be excluded from the study of the literature of exile, while the works of such writers as Bertrand Russell, who although himself was never an exile, or émigré in any sense,

considered detachment from one's community and native culture to be an important and potent concept, can be included in the study.

Furthemore, instead of dividing the literature of exile according to its richness of meaning, I propose to modify Guillén's classification and to divide all literary works in which the state of exile has found its expression on the basis of the way in which the theme of exile has been incorporated in them. My pole A would comprise those literary works in which the expulsion from one's native country is used only as a theme or a motif, whether positive or negative, and not as a starting point towards a more general philosophy. It does not mean, however, that such works would not have any other general significance whatsoever, and therefore they do not have to be inferior to the literature in which a broader concept of exile is developed. Pole B would group those writers who use exile as a starting point for a philosophy in which expatriation is an important concept, again either in its positive or negative aspect. Consequently such works can be further subdivided into the literature which develops a positive or a negative philosophy of exile with a reservation that both are equally capable of providing richness of meaning. Both attitudes to exile are a part of human experience, and both have given inspiration to great literary achievements.

The first group of writers for whom exile has become a theme only has its patron in Ovid and his Tristia: a

collection of poems written in and about exile at a time when, banished by Augustus, the poet was spending his final years in Tomis, on the Black Sea. Deprived of the only life he thought worth living, Ovid described his hardships and pleaded for pardon. Although a personal tone was unusual and uncalled for in Roman elegiac poetry, Ovid could not refrain from writing a very personal diary of his exile. The experience was too strong to find its expression in an impersonal literary form: "Say I live, but in such a manner that I do not wish to live/ and that my woes have not been lightened by so long a time" (III, 7-8). [3] Although convinced that these personal poems were bad, Ovid was not able to write any other kind of poetry in this remote land. Slowly losing hope that he would ever be allowed to return, the poet was describing his present misery and recalling scenes and images of his happy past. Reading these poems one can observe how much exile was replacing all other themes and reflections. The series, which started with a more general tone in which the poet compared himself to Ulysses setting out on a long journey, ended with poems which were totally preoccupied with the misery of exile. In these later poems Ovid was concentrating on winning the support of influential people and was begging for sympathy (Evans 174). Modern scholars do not fully agree with Ovid's own condemnation of Tristia, pointing out that their personal tone makes the poems truly unique (Dickinson 158). They do agree, however, that the poet was broken by exile and was unable to generalize his experience. He remains an excellent example

of a writer for whom exile is a theme which overshadows all others, but which leads to no personal philosophy.

Nevertheless the motifs of exile are disparate. Claudio Guillén points to the motif of an extended journey, an odyssey, as a frequent expression of exile (279). Ovid begins his Tristia comparing his journey to Tomis with the peregrinations of Odysseus; human life on earth has been frequently likened to a long journey. Yet not all journeys are completed; the condition of eternal exile presupposes a never-ending journey with no Ithaca in which to start life anew. Themerson's Peddy Bottom gladly accepts this condition and sets off on his journey from chapter to chapter without regrets. As a true positive philosopher of exile he values his journey more than life in any of the worlds he encounters. Yet, other pilgrims can bitterly complain about their condition and their laments are frequently accompanied by the feeling of homelessness. The theme of lost home, or lost inheritance frequently finds expression in works by exiled writers. It can be found in the laments of the Biblical tribes of Israel as much as in the poems and novels of contemporary writers and poets.

When exile is viewed as a negative state of deprivation of homeland, this homeland often becomes an object of idealization, an Arcadia glorified in memories, and endowed with all virtues found lacking in the new country. As a frequent theme in the literature of exile, a nostalgic backwards look becomes a rich source of inspiration.

Motivated by a very human need of happiness, harmony, and security, the drive to create Utopias is often accompanied by the desire to place them in the lost homeland. This nationalization of Arcadia has been pointed out by Birutė Ciplijauskaitė as an important feature of the twentieth-century poetry of exile, but the phenomenon does not start in our century (295-302). Virgil himself painted his Arcadia with words making direct references to the landscape of his home. Yet such a view of the lost country carries with it a danger of sterility, for if the backwards look is the sole source of inspiration, it can quickly become sentimental and trite. It is worth noting here that positive philosophers of exile strongly oppose such a nostalgic attitude to their homeland, and they try to expose its dangers.

Richard Exner points to some other motifs related to exile. He mentions the theme of arbitrariness of fortune which chooses its victims at random, as well as the theme of "speechless death," a term borrowed from Shakespeare's Richard II and denoting the linguistic problems of writers forced to express themselves in a foreign language. Exner mentions also the motif of Job, who, deprived of all earthly possessions, "skinless and eyeless," has to stand alone in front of God. He also relates exile to the theme of alienation understood as exile from humanity, frequently encountered, for instance, in the novels of Kafka. And, last but not least, he mentions the motif of hope conquering and overcoming the state of exile. Sometimes hope means the end of exile; often it means one's mental acceptance and

positive reinterpretation of exile. Exner quotes Ludwig Marcuse, an expatriate who likes the idea of living on the frontier between Germany and Switzerland for, he maintains, "a border is really a wonderful thing; those living on it would feel they were living nowhere, and where else can you breathe more freely than nowhere?" (294).

Thus exile as a theme does not have to be entirely negative. The consolations of exile and its advantages have been a recurrent theme in literature. Odysseus would have been a lesser hero if it was not for his life as an exile. The Biblical Jewish tribes accepted their exile as a period of purification and atonement for sins, a necessary step to achieve salvation. Dante's and Petrarch's initially emotional response to exile gradually gave way to more stoic acceptance of their fate. Goethe made his Iphigenia speak of the positive influence her exile had on the barbarian tribes of Tauris. Yet it has to be underlined that the theme of exile, whether treated negatively or positively, can often be only a part of a literary work without determining its philosophical significance. Goethe's Iphigenia in Tauris, for instance, is a play about a conflict between two sides of human nature: the spirit of gentleness and the brutal forces of cruelty. With her gentleness, honesty, and goodness Iphigenia is able to break the pattern of violence which for years has reigned in Tauris. Her exile is a mission which she fulfils in spite of its hardships, yet it is not the essence but just one of the aspects of Goethe's

vision. The Divine Comedy is another excellent example here, as are the novels of Alexander Solzhenitsyn or Milan Kundera, wherein the motif of exile, whether approached from a positive or negative side, is just one of the aspects of a complex world view.

Some of the motifs of exile can be found in the works of the positive philosophers of exile. The motif of a never-ending journey is at the core of Stefan Themerson's The Adventures of Peddy Bottom. The motif of homelessness appears in the fiction of both Stefan Themerson and Witold Gombrowicz. For Gombrowicz it is a passport to freedom, a relief from the overpowering influence of his native culture. For Themerson homelessness is a virtue; it not only gives his characters a chance to develop their potential but makes them truly cosmopolitan, ready to realize the universal aspect of any problem they encounter. Yet the presence of these motifs is only one of the manifestations of their positive philosophy of exile, and, as I intend to prove, not the most important part.

Let me now return to pole B, i.e. literary works in which the concept of exile, not necessarily related to the physical state of the author, has been transformed and expanded to form the basis of the author's philosophy. Here, exile no longer means just a forced or voluntary separation from one's native country, but it becomes a metaphor of the human condition. In Biblical terms we are all exiles from Paradise serving our sentence before we return to the Kingdom of God. Our stay on earth is the period of

repentance and a chance to prove our worth. The expulsion from Paradise acquires a general significance; man is a sinner who has to atone for his deeds in order to deserve salvation. Thus Christianity has incorporated the concept of exile into its philosophy, but it has not been the only ideology to do so. Conrad's Yanko, profoundly lonely and isolated from the people among whom he has to live, is not just an unhappy individual. He stands for human isolation over which one cannot prevail. A similar view of man destroyed by his undesirable but painfully real alienation from the world emerges from the novels of Franz Kafka. The Theatre of the Absurd offers other examples of the negative philosophy of exile; a lonely man in an absurd universe faces his destiny. Samuel Beckett, himself a voluntary exile, makes his two vagabonds, suspended in space and time, express the tragedy of human destiny. Vladimir and Estragon from Waiting for Godot struggle for meaning in an absurd universe; they belong to nowhere, yet their detachment is not facilitating their understanding of the world. Exile does not help them in a task that is doomed to failure in a senseless world. Their isolation is total and tragic; frequently suicide is mentioned by Beckett's protagonists as the only sane solution to human problems. The impenetrability of another human being has become Beckett's obsession; isolation, eternal exile has been deemed the only constant component of the world.

Existentialism has also made the condition of exile an

important component of its world view. For an existential philosopher we are all exiles, alienated from the universe, imprisoned in our consciousness no matter where we live. Meursault in Camus's novel, The Stranger, lives in an indifferent universe from which he protects himself with his own indifference to the world and its traditional values. He commits himself to nothing and to no one. He cares neither for his personal well-being, nor for the people around him. He is an exile no matter where he is, since his is the separation not so much from his native country but from what we are used to consider basic human values. It is in this void that he has to live his life, re-examine his relationship to the world and reaffirm his exile. Yet precisely at this point his alienation becomes positive. An existential protagonist is able to change the significance of his exile. He chooses exile because it lies at the core of the human condition with its arbitrariness, alienation, and resulting loneliness. Yet he chooses it out of his own free will, realizing its pains but at the same time feeling the joy of freedom in spite of his destiny. Camus is convinced that this sense of freedom which conquers human fate is the only true source of happiness. "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (123), he ends his famous essay, "The Myth of Sisyphus." The concept of exile is both a source of pain--as it is a realization of human alienation--and a source of happiness--as it reflects a process of overcoming fate by acceptance.

No discussion of existentialist values would be complete without a contribution from Jean-Paul Sartre. In his play "The Flies" Sartre's protagonist, Orestes, experiences exile twice, and both instances are comments on the existential meaning of exile. Orestes grew up as a cosmopolitan pilgrim, open to the world and its values, yet uncommitted to any particular ones. At the beginning of the play, he arrives in his native town as a stranger who can safely leave without identyfying himself with the problems of his home. His tutor points out to him all the advantages of homelessness:

> Did I not, from the very first, set you a-reading all the books there are, so as to make clear to you the infinite diversity of men's opinions? And did I not remind you, time and again, how variable are human creeds and customs?...your mind is free from prejudice and superstition, you have no family ties, no religion, and no calling; you are free to turn your hand to anything. But you know better than to commit yourself - and there lies your strength. (I, i, p. 245 no lines given)

Yet Orestes is not satisfied with his life. As long as it is taken to mean a refusal to act, exile is a negative state; it prevents man from using his freedom. "I wander from city to city, a stranger to all others and to myself, and the cities close again behind me like the waters of a pool" (II, I, 277), he remarks bitterly. He complains of weightlessness; and rejects the life without commitment which his tutor is advocating. In the ancient myth which has served as the basis of the play, Orestes has to kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra because such is the will of the

Gods. In Sartre's play he has a choice; he can either emulate the smiling skepticism of his tutor, or accept the challenge of fate, and disobey the God who wants him to leave everything unchanged. The God of Sartre's play lives on human fear, obedience, and the sense of guilt which plagues the city. Orestes not only defies the God, kills his mother and her lover but also assumes full responsibility for his act, refusing to feel guilty, which would leave him at the mercy of Erynies. Having chosen action he again chooses exile, yet this time on his own terms. He leaves the city of his forefathers refusing to become its king. He has reasserted his freedom but is unable and unwilling to teach others to follow him. His compatriots will have to free themselves, to make their own decisions. Orestes's second exile is the exile of a free man, who has chosen it out of his free will, accepting its pains and its responsibilities. "Human life begins on the far side of despair," says Orestes, seeing his strength in the acceptance of the human condition (III, 311).

The writers of existentialism recognized exile as a part of human destiny which could only be conquered by acceptance. This very acceptance of exile could become the beginning of a positive philosophy based on human strength and dignity in an indifferent universe. This is not to say that this acceptance is easy to achieve. As long as an individual denies his condition, covers it with what Sartre would call "bad faith" or false commitments, his exile will

remain negative. It will be negative both as the source of illusions which prevent him from discovering a full meaning of humanity, and as the source of a deceptive philosophy, based on false values, which prevent men from using their freedom. The only valid, positive philosophy of exile within an existential universe becomes possible only on "the other side of despair," when the state of exile is accepted, false values abolished, and man assumes the responsibility to choose his own path.

In his article on the relationship between existentialism and the literature of exile Henri Paucker notices a strong similarity between the premises of the French philosophical movement and the experience of expatriation. Both, he says, start from "a dissolution of ties to the world" only "to plunge back into the world in the form of commitment" (91). Just as an existential protagonist, who has to define for himself the meaning of human exile in order to arrive at his individual code of values, an exiled writer may find himself forced to look at expatriation from a more general perspective, to redefine its meaning, and finally, to incorporate the notion of exile into his philosophy. He does not, however, have to follow existentialist premises. As I have already shown, existential philosophy can be called positive only in the sense of freeing man from his fears and making it easier for him to accept reality. The positive philosophers of exile, whose fiction is the subject of my thesis, have chosen a different direction. They have examined the notion of exile

and have redefined the concepts of commitment, detachment, and freedom. Sharing a strong belief in the advantages of exile which, for them, first of all means the detachment from the particular in favour of the universal, they propose a different view of man and his place in the world.

In the following chapters I will look at the antecedents, premises, and corollaries of the philosophy of exile which can be discerned from the writings of Stefan Themerson, Witold Gombrowicz, Bertrand Russell, and Kurt Schwitters, whom I have selected as a representative of the twentieth-century avant-garde. I have chosen them because their visions of the world based on the advantages of exile are the fullest realization of the pole B of my classification. Their positive philosophy of exile has been a unique contribution to contemporary literature, and it has pointed to the values which, they feel, are our only chance of survival. Positive philosophers of exile indicate that exile, as a search for the essential and the universal, can be seen as a response to nationalism. They stress that the traditional view of the world divided according to what Themerson has called "national overcoats" is both outdated and dangerous. They prove that the concept of exile, already so differently explored in literature, is still capable of rendering new and significant dimensions.

To sum up: the positive philosopher of exile, a counterpart of the nostalgic émigré writer preoccupied with

the problems of his lost homeland, has based his system of values on the conviction that expatriation can act as a positive force in human development. Positive attitudes towards exile are not the exclusive domain of the twentieth-century; they are as old as exile itself. Yet, one has to distinguish the literary works in which expatriation, its hardships or blessings, became just a theme, from the works in which exile generated a more comprehensive response, expressed in a set of values which I have called the philosophy of exile. The twentieth century witnessed the birth of philosophical systems based on the concept of alienation, a negative exile. Yet it has also seen its counterpart which should be examined and recognized: a positive philosophy of exile based on the cosmopolitan ideal.

Notes

[1] Mishkenot Sha'ananim Newsletter 3 (1985): 1 quotes this remark of Czesław Miłosz who took part in a 1985 conference "Literature and Exile" organized by the Jerusalem Guest House.

[2] For further discussion of this subject see Claudio Guillén's, "On the Literature of Exile and Counter-Exile," Books Abroad 50. 2 (1976): 272.

[3] I am using J. R. Dickinson's translation from "The Tristia: Poetry in Exile," in J. W. Binns, ed., Ovid.

CHAPTER 2

THE ANTECEDENTS OF THE POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY OF EXILE: THE COSMOPOLITAN IDEAL AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY RHETORICAL FICTION

As has been mentioned in Chapter 1 the positive attitude to expatriation is closely related to an ideal of cosmopolitanism. Naturally one does not have to be an exile to profess cosmopolitan values. Yet since one has to be a cosmopolite of sorts to claim that life outside one's own country offers more chances of becoming wiser and more mature, a closer look at the history and values of cosmopolitanism is necessary. It is not surprising that the age of the Enlightenment, the period of the greatest popularity of the world-state, has a lot in common with the philosophy of Stefan Themerson.[1] The philosophes professed reason, objectivity, and tolerance, while the eighteenth-century genres of the philosophical tale and of the dialogue were among the finest achievements of the fiction of ideas. In the present chapter I will concentrate on both the history of cosmopolitanism and the fiction of ideas. I will analyse the influence the cosmopolitan ideals had on the eighteenth-century philosophes and the affinities of their philosophical tales with Themerson's rhetorical fiction.

COSMOPOLITANISM

A history of cosmopolitanism is a history of an ideal rather than a history of a concrete political or philosophical system: an ideal which has been subjected to many transformations and which has met with varying degrees of popularity. The popularity of the cosmopolitan ideal is directly proportional to the pervasiveness of nationalism with which it has to compete. The feelings of belonging to a tribe, caste or nation are among the strongest bonds which link people, and consequently, in many ancient and modern societies patriotism has been considered a virtue surpassed only by the love of God. In most cases one can easily explain this insistence on patriotism. History abounds with examples of nations which survived only because strong feelings of national or religious identity stopped them from assimilating or giving up an often apparently hopeless struggle for survival. It is, however, equally easy to see that, when the immediate danger of losing one's national identity has disappeared, a review of patriotic sentiments is necessary. Without it a nation may be tempted to follow the path of self-glorification and consequently patriotism becomes tinted with chauvinism.

Cosmopolitanism is motivated by an ancient dream of humanity integrated, in spite of its differences, in a common vision of man as an inhabitant of Earth. The dream may take on different forms: from metaphysical thoughts of

unity of all beings, through universal philosophical systems, to political doctrines of a world-state. The word "cosmopolis" or world-city was coined by the Cynics, who declared themselves among the first citizens of the world in ancient Greece. Their cosmopolitanism was, however, of a narrow sort. It was a reaction against the pressures of society on the individual who considered all social and political systems worthless and who wanted to be left alone in the company of fellow-philosophers. When Diogenes declared "I am a citizen of the world" he was in fact saying "I am not a citizen of any of your Greek cities" (Dudley 35). A self-sufficient individual in the Cynic universe felt affinity only with other philosophers who valued virtue over the values of the world. This individuated ideal of cosmopolitanism has been drastically changed by the political ideal of world commonwealth established by Alexander of Macedon and has found its representation in the philosophy of the Stoics. The followers of Zeno accepted the Cynic quest for virtue, but they had insisted on the importance of the solidarity of all wise-men regardless of their place on earth. Those who were not wise should be governed by the wise, and thus the whole world was united in the Stoic vision. One of the Stoics, Hierocles, expressed this thought by representing man as a center of several circles. The circles in turn represented: his body, his family, his fellow-citizens, and finally, the whole of mankind. The philosopher insisted that we should try to contract these circles so that eventually we would treat all

men as our brothers. This concern with all mankind is a purely Stoic contribution to cosmopolitanism (Sandbach 34). When the Stoic philosophy reached Rome in the second century B. C. it found fertile ground in an empire which tried to comprise within its borders more and more peoples. There cosmopolitanism acquired a political interpretation, understandable in a state which attempted to rule some sixty million people. The Roman Stoics Cicero, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius strived to convince their fellow-citizens that Rome should become a "cosmopolis" and not a city-state which had conquered the world. This never happened. The ideal of cosmopolitanism was defeated since the interests of Rome proved stronger than the interests of the provinces, but it had not been extinguished. The Stoic ideal has influenced Christianity which, easing the restrictions of reason imposed by the Stoic philosophers, offered salvation to all men who would follow Christ. Cosmopolitanism has fuelled the idea of a universal church, encompassing all mankind under one God. Yet **Respublica Christiana**, although present in medieval debates, never became a reality in a world divided by the schism between western and eastern Christianity, by conflicting attitudes towards the heathen, and finally by the Reformation (cf. Wagar 11-66; Schlereth xvii-xxv; Meinecke 9-22).

The period of the Renaissance witnessed a revival of cosmopolitanism. The geographical discoveries together with the development of trade and technology promoted genuine

interest in other cultures. One of the most influential scholars of the Renaissance, Erasmus, rejected national pride and preached the importance of universal human concord within a world-state in which peace would be the highest goal. In the sixteenth century Michel de Montaigne reitenated the importance of a brotherhood of mankind in spite of religious wars which thrived on the feelings directly opposed to cosmopolitan tolerance. At the beginning of the seventeenth century Francis Bacon attempted a census of all branches of knowledge in order to strengthen the world of science with cosmopolitan humanism. The intellectuals of the seventeenth century founded international scientific societies which encouraged attempts at a formulation of a unifying theory of the universe, and their pursuit was carried on by the Enlightenment.

The Age of the Enlightenement witnessed a spectacular revival of the Stoic ideal of world-state. The eighteenth-century intellectuals called themselves philosophes and cosmopolites; in Diderot's Encyclopédie the two terms became synonyms. The cosmopolites professed allegiance to the seventeenth-century thinkers, but they had not left their ideals unchanged. As Thomas J. Schlereth proves in his The Cosmopolitan Ideal in Enlightenment Thought, they not only managed to assimilate this ideal in its political and philosophical manifestations but enlarged its meaning by "grappling with its further implications in science and economics" (xxv).

The cosmopolitan ideal which the eighteenth-century

philosophes inherited already contained its most essential aspects: ethical concern for all humanity, the demand for religious toleration, the conviction that the state is an artificial creation, followed by the demand for political diversity and deep distrust of patriotic feelings, and finally, the desire to find the natural laws which govern mankind. The goal of the eighteenth century intellectuals, unfortunately to a large extend unfulfilled, was to make this ideal a reality.

The eighteenth-century intellectuals felt a part of the world's "petite troupe de philosophes" (Gay, The Enlightenment 6) who, like Stoic wise men, were responsible for others and tried to persuade them of the importance of their values. The philosophes shared a deep sense of belonging to an international elite, reinforced by a common cultural background provided by the studies of the Ancients and a conviction that their reputation depended on their minds rather than their fortunes. As a group they struggled with powerful enemies: the Church and the State. They struggled for the "freedom from arbitrary power, freedom of speech, freedom of trade, freedom to realize one's talents, freedom of aesthetic response, freedom, in a word, of moral man to make his own way in the world" (Gay, The Enlighten-ment 3).

The eighteenth-century ideal of cosmopolitanism comprised tolerance, objectivity, and universality; the philosophes were in constant search for universal principles

of taste, morality and religion. They aimed at writing for mankind, for the present and for the future, hoping to transcend the boundaries of their country and their times. They formed a clear-cut community, a network of intellectual brotherhoods, learned societies, and chapels of natural religion. They believed in open systems of thought able to accomodate a new, eighteenth-century cosmology in which an open system of the universe replaced the closed cosmologies of the past (Schlereth 28). They felt enriched by the geographical explorations which widened the existing knowledge of the earth, as well as by the discoveries of natural scientists. Their interest in science encouraged their quest for tolerance and objectivity; the principles of scientific research seemed so attractive that the eighteenth-century cosmopolites saw no reason why they should not be applied to all fields of knowledge and human interest, including morality and religion:

> Il n'y a point de secte en géométrie; on ne dit point un euclidien, un archimédien. Quand la vérité est évidente, il est impossible qu'il s'élève des partis et des factions....On ne dit point en Angleterre: "Je suis newtonien, je suis lockien, halleyen"; pourquoi? parce que quiconque a lu ne peut refuser son consentement aux vérités enseignées par ces trois grands hommes. (349)

Thus wrote Voltaire in his Dictionnaire Philosophique, and his insistence that scientific methods of reasoning should be applicable to religion and ethics was widely shared.

However risky such an approach was for their personal safety, the philosophes made an important breakthrough in the mode of speaking about religious and moral questions.

They did not consider religion to be the basis of morality; they believed in individual and social morality according to which individual conduct had to be justified in terms of the universal and social good. Trying to establish the basis of universal and social morality, the philosophes turned to the ideas of David Hume. They accepted his conviction of the existence of the basic human desire to do good to others, deciding, however, that the basis for such a desire was first of all reason, then sentiment or instinct, and finally utility (cf. Schlereth 57-62).

Having decided that there are no absolute moral standards but that human beings are capable of moral action without being motivated by religion, the philosophes proceeded to seek out the basis of universal religious identity. What that aimed at was freeing religion from all fanaticism, superstition, and intolerance in order to get to the core of a universal religion. In his Dictionnaire Philosophique Voltaire says:

> Malheur à un peuple assez imbécile et assez barbare pour penser qu'il y a un Dieu pour sa seul province! c'est un blasphème. Quoi! la lumière du soleil éclaire tous les yeux, et la lumière de Dieu n'éclairerait qu'une petite et chétive nation dans un coin de ce globe!... La Divinité parle au coeur de tous les hommes, et les liens de la charité doivent les unir d'un bout de l'univers à l'autre. (93-4)

Other Enlightenment intellectuals went even further in an attempt to unify all forms of worship under the banner of rationalistic deism. The popularity of Freemasonry, or various cults of "theophilanthropy," was a manifestation of

this need. Cosmopolitan chapels for the new groups of worshippers were built in London and Paris. A reasonable, syncretic universal religion, free from prejudice and fanaticism was the only one the eighteenth-century philosophes were ready to accept (cf. Schlereth 86).

Having abandoned religious values the philosophes considered man to be the sole but sufficient source of their values, and thus they were concerned with all of mankind in its moral, political, or religious diversity. Voltaire and Diderot, for instance, insisted that since no absolute system of values could ever be true, patriotism could not be an exception. Expressing their interest in all of mankind they praised the cosmopolitanism which freed them from the limitations of their nationalities. Baron de Montesquieu expressed the same sentiments saying: " If I know of anything advantageous to my family but not to my country, I should try to forget it. If I knew of anything advantageous to my country which was prejudicial to Europe and to the human race, I should look upon it as a crime" (The Persian Letters 139).

Patriotism was among the issues most frequently discussed in the eighteenth century. Montesquieu maintained that "membership in any national state should be an individual act of choice and not one of racial destiny or political coercion" (Schlereth 105). Voltaire stressed many a time that an individual should be free to live wherever he wants, and pointing out that since one cannot love one's

country if it is too big, just as one cannot love one's family if it is too numerous, love for one's country is an abstract term and therefore suspicious. Those who cry loudly that they love their country most often love themselves, and most probably they love power. Such people, mostly politicians and demagogues, want to use patriotism in order to exploit others:

> Il est triste que souvent, pour être bon patriote, on soit l'ennemi du reste des hommes....Telle est donc la condition humaine, que souhaiter la grandeur de son pays c'est souhaiter du mal à ses voisins. Celui qui voudrait que sa patrie ne fût jamais ni plus grande ni plus petite, ni plus riche ni plus pauvre serait le citoyen de l'univers. (Dictionnaire 308)

The philosophes viewed patriotism with suspicion, sensing the difficulty of combining the love for mankind with the love for one's country. A good, responsible citizen--they maintained--should be a critic of his own nation, aware both of its virtues and its limitations and also aware of his own responsibilities towards the human race. Blind loyalty was not considered to be a virtue, neither was chauvinism. Both were particularly dangerous since they often passed for patriotism. A man claiming that his nation was the best, the most virtuous, was considered ridiculous, to say the least. Mild and wise sentiment for one's country should express itself in loyalty to fellow-citizens, which meant first of all conscientious criticism of what one knew so well: one's own milieu. In such a restricted sense patriotism was acceptable, and although the eighteenth-century philosophes were themselves often guilty

of transgressions of their own principles,[2] such was the message conveyed in their writings.

In eighteenth century thought the nation-state was considered to be a "necessary, intermediate, although artificial, agent of union between the individual and humanity" (Schlereth 106). As long as the government took good care of individuals it was to be supported. But because of its very nature it was considered a necessary evil, which could not avoid restricting individual freedom. Government was the intermediate stage between two basic social entities, the individual and human kind, justifiable only as it promoted true values. In this context loyalty to one's country became a complicated issue and could only be decided in the mind and heart of an individual.

One of the chief philosophical arguments against eighteenth-century cosmopolitanism is related to its eclecticism. Feeling free to borrow from all cultures, philosophical systems, and doctrines, the philosophes also felt free not to worry about all the consequences of their artistic and philosophical standpoints. Yet the eclecticism of the eighteenth-century philosophes does not have to disqualify either cosmopolitanism or the search for basic values common to men. No one can defend eclecticism if it leads to logical inconsistencies, but it can be defended as a position which uses the background of many sources to build a philosophical system, especially if, in accordance with the spirit of the eighteenth century, it remains in the

realm of hypotheses and opinions rather than absolute truths. Although differences between races, nations, classes, sexes, and finally between individuals are there, and there is no use denying them, there are also fundamental similiarities which have to be stressed. By pointing out such similiarities the cosmopolites felt they were contributing to the cause of tolerance, objectivity, and universality, that they were consolidating mankind rather than further dividing it.

With the end of the eighteenth century, cosmopolitanism, although alive in the minds of some individuals, lost its attraction among the intellectual élite. After the 1790's Europe was busy either establishing national identities or fighting them. The nineteenth-century became an important period for the development of the idea of patriotism. The defenders of patriotism claimed that, in its most mature form, it is able to transcend the boundaries of one's country and to embrace all mankind (Meinecke 21). Yet the ideal of patriotism is as vulnerable to deformations as the ideal of cosmopolitanism; since the former can lead to fanaticism or chauvinism and the latter to disdain for all national values, the dangers of both have to be taken into account in any studied attempt to propagate them.

In the twentieth century the ideal of cosmopolitanism has regained some of its former popularity, and as W. Warren Wagar claims, it has its prophets and its practitioners. Wagar, who has devoted a whole study to the hopes and possibilities of a world culture, counts H.G. Wells and

Arnold Toynbee among the former (58). H. G. Wells's theory of a world-state presented in his Anticipations and Modern Utopia prophesized the destruction of nation-states and the emergence of a new man. Soon Wells went even further and began his one-man campaign of "Open Conspiracy," the aim of which was to create a socialist world-state. Although now largely forgotten, the ideas of H. G. Wells provide a transition from the late nineteenth-century rise of nationalism and the revival of a cosmopolitan ideal in the post-war years. The controversial ideal of Arnold Toynbee reflects the old dream of the whole of mankind living in harmony. His vision of history is a vision of the struggle for such a dream, which, although never fully realized, underlines all civilizations. Wagar's practitioners of cosmopolitanism are people who put the ideal into practice by promoting the unity of the world in science, religion, and politics.

Seeing the revival of cosmopolitanism in twentieth-century social and political thought, Wagar states with deep regret that "there are no poets, novelists, symphonists or painters of world integration" (193). That is precisely where he is wrong. The positive philosophers of exile, not only novelists such as Stefan Themerson or Witold Gombrowicz but also poets and painters such as Kurt Schwitters and his Dada friends, have been advocating world integration on many levels. They do not want uniformity of art, but they all consider cosmopolitan values essential for the contemporary

man. They have built their ideal of the positive philosophy of exile on the desire to disregard political and cultural frontiers.

Since the eighteenth century was so important for the development of the ideal of cosmopolitanism, it is not surprising that the ideals of the positive philosophy of exile show a deep-rooted affinity with the ideals of "la petite troupe de philosophes." For Stefan Themerson, the eighteenth century proves to be not only an age of similar ethical principles but also an age of inspiring literary achievements. The affinity between the fiction of Voltaire, Diderot, or Johnson and the writings of Themerson is noticeable, even at first glance, since all are examples of the fiction of ideas. The eighteenth-century genres of the philosophical tale and the dialogue provide an excellent background for the study of Themerson's, both as examples of the fiction of ideas and as a source of ethical values.

RHETORICAL FICTION

The fiction of Stefan Themerson, like the writings of Voltaire, Diderot, Johnson or Swift belongs to the fiction of ideas. With his eighteenth-century predecessors Themerson shares a conviction that literature should exert a moral influence on the reader. His narratives, therefore, belong to the realm of fiction in which such components of the fictional world as plot, characters, and setting are to a greater or lesser degree subordinated to the presentation

and the discussion of these ideas.

In his Anatomy of Criticism Northrop Frye uses the terms **Menippean satire** and **anatomy** to describe fiction which "deals less with people as such than with mental attitudes" (309). It "relies on the free play of intellectual fancy and the kind of humorous observation that produces caricature" (310). In anatomy, which in Frye's theory is one of the four basic genres (the others being the confession, the novel, and the romance), ideas affect the plot and characters. A very similar definition is provided by Sheldon Sacks and David Richter, although their terminology is different. They use the term **rhetorical fiction** or alternatively **apologue**. This terminology follows Sheldon Sacks's division of all fiction into satire, apologue, and represented action. Whereas satires are "works which ridicule particular men, the institutions of men, trails presumed to be in all men, or any combination of the three," apologues are fictional examples "of the truth of a formulable statement or closely related set of such statements"(7-8). "Unlike the writer of satire, the writer of an apologue is called upon to reveal by fictional example his positive beliefs"(21), continues Sacks. The writer of an apologue presents his long-range commitments, his positive philosophical standpoints; Sacks's distinction underlines the main property of this type of fiction, i.e. the necessity of explaining all elements of an apologue in relation to its main "set of statements", in other words its philosophical

message, concerning the world external to the literary creation itself. David Richter accepts Sacks's distinction between rhetorical fiction and represented actions stressing that:

> [t]he distinction between the class of apologues and that of represented actions ... is an absolute one; although represented actions have elements of thought, and although apologues have elements of action and character, in each case these are subordinate to their respective powers. (In apologues, in fact, even the element of "thought" on the part of the personages of the fiction which is simply expressive of character will be subordinate to the "thought" which is the ruling principle of the fiction as a whole). (10-11)

One of the reasons behind the new classification of fiction introduced by twentieth-century critics is the inadequacy of distinctions, now mostly historical, between philosophical tales and novels. The purpose of this classification is to accomodate the endless possibilities and the degrees of combinations of the two genres which came into being as a result of new narrative techniques, yet in which the basic distinction between the fiction of ideas and "represented action" is still preserved. In the eighteenth century, however, the distinctions between the novel and the philosophical tale were much clearer to observe. For the discussion of the fiction of Stefan Themerson, at least three elements of the eighteenth-century philosophical tale are of considerable importance: its "philosophical" content, its characters, and the distance between the reader and the fictional world.

As often happens with definitions, there is quite a

lot of disagreement among critics as to the most essential components of the philosophical tale, even if we limit it to its eighteenth-century version. The most common approach to the genre is to consider it in contrast with the novel. In early French definitions of the "conte" the two genres were distinguished from each other only on the basis of style and composition. The "conte" could exist in both oral and written form, the novel only in written. The plot of the "conte" could be imaginary, the plot of the novel had to be taken from reality (Antkowiak 103-7). There was no mention of either the moral or the philosophical content of the tale; the philosophical tale, as we distinguish it now, was created by its great eighteenth-century masters. Then it became necessary to speak about the Voltarian form of the philosophical tale or about the tales of Denis Diderot, Samuel Johnson, or Jonathan Swift (cf. Guernier 422 36; McGhee). The genre has always been, therefore, quite elusive and much less distinct than for example tragedy, comedy or even satire.

One of the best attempts at defining the eighteenth-century philosophical tale is Yvon Belaval's "Le conte philosophique". Belaval starts by stating that as much as it is formed by the age of the Enlightenement, the philosophical tale is a manifestation of the spirit of the eighteenth century and its elegant conversations of the salon which had to be "brillante et polemique" (308). Brilliancy requires imagination and polemic reasoning; hence

the two became the features of the philosophical tale. The spirit of the eighteenth century is hostile to metaphysical systems; it does not accept the claim that human reason can ever understand such vague concepts as the soul or God, which is why it sees all metaphysical system-building as futile and harmful. What the eighteenth century intellectuals were fighting for is much less ambitious, it is simply "une meilleure harmonie entre les hommes" (310). Thus, according to Belaval, the philosophical tale reflecting the values of the eighteenth-century intellectuals became characterized by its relativism and desire for objectivity. It tried to reflect the potential multiplicity points of view present in elegant conversation; it aimed at teaching through discussion. What it taught, however, was not, as the adjective "philosophical" might misleadingly suggest, any particular philosophical system.

Philosophical tales have never been philosophical treatises nor were they meant to be. One has to bear in mind the distinction between philosophical truth and the truth of fiction. Philosophical truth has usually been characterized as logical, universal and deductive, whereas fictional truth is concrete, individual, and often not provable. One should not expect the philosophical tale to convey philosophical truth; it has all the privileges and limitations of fiction and it should be examined and analysed as such. Belaval points out that the philosophical tale is not theoretical but polemical (316); it does not develop a full-fledged philosophical system but rather illustrates a certain

standpoint accepted by its author. It may be added that although some kind of a philosophical message is always present in the philosophical tale, the author's concern is not to build a system but to assess different attitudes to life and the implications they may have on human existence, even if only to show their inadequacies. The preoccupation with ideas and their assessment determines the relationships between the elements of the fictional world of the philosophical tale. The plot, the characters, and the setting are subordinated to the main idea developed throughout the tale. The plot, sub-plots, and motifs are subordinated to it, providing polemical attitudes explaining or reinforcing the main idea. Some of these motifs appear often enough to became conventionalized as, for instance, the motif of the educational journey or the relationship between a master and a pupil. They reinforce the reader's conviction that the presented world of the philosophical tale exists mainly to illustrate, explain, or deny the main idea, a conviction further reinforced by the often ironic improbabilities of the action.

Characters and their function in the philosophical tale have become one of the most controversial topics in the discussion of the philosophical tale. The bone of contention is the degree of their dependence or independence in relation to the main idea expressed in the tale. Opinions vary from asserting their complete subordination to giving them independence equal to that enjoyed by the characters in

a novel. The former position is a consequence of including the philosophical tale into the fiction of ideas, the latter has found its advocate in Frederick Keener, the author of a recent study on eighteenth-century philosophical tales, The Chain of Becoming. Although agreeing in principle with the existence of a separate type of fiction concerned with ideas, Keener insists that it has to be defined in terms of an equilibrium between the ideas and characters and not in terms of the subordination of the latter (6). The basis of his argument is mainly historical: Keener states that eighteenth-century readers did not have the same literary expectations as modern readers, and to them the characters in the philosophical tale seemed much fuller. What is more the characters were constructed within the scope of eighteenth-century psychology, and their most important task was self-assessment:

> The major tales, like the philosophy of the period, take as a major theme the importance on the part of the main character of attaining freedom from false mental associations--and occasionally more than that: consciousness of the natural processess of his thinking. As in eighteenth-century philosophy, the minds that figure centrally in philosophical tales are not highly particularized: the tales do not present intricate, unique case histories either. But the minds in the tales move in response to recognizable human feelings and typically are fettered by quite familliar preconceptions, and are presented by their authors in such a way as to call particular attention to these psychological matters. (25-6)

Keener emphasizes that self-assessment was not such a simple task. Eighteenth-century thinkers pointed out the dangers of false associations (à la Locke), which were

chiefly responsible for mistakes in both self-assessment and the assessment of the world. According to Keener, the knowledge of oneself, gained in the process of intellectual reasoning, was illustrated in the plot of the philosophical tale. All improbabilities of the plot were thus acceptable since their function was to "bring realities to a reader's consciousness" (10), or in other words, they were a form of allegorical representation of a psychological process going on in the character's mind.

Having emphasized that the characters in the eighteenth-century philosophical tale have an important function and should not be underestimated, Keener tries to prove that they have the same degree of independence as the characters in the novel. In order to justify his position Keener introduces the distinction between the realism of presentation and the realism of self-assessment, which follows the distinction created by Ian Watt in The Rise of the Novel. For Keener the realism of presentation became the domain of the novel, which took pains to create a convincing literary illusion of reality. The philosophical tale, however, concentrated on the realism of assessment, which came to mean both the realism of the assessment of the world and the realism of self-assessment of its protagonist. Reading his argument one develops the impression that dependence on the main idea makes a character in a philosophical tale inferior, rather than simply different from a character in the novel. The writers of eighteenth-

century philosophical tales did not want to write novels precisely because they were more interested in intellectual rather than in social problems. Indeed, even though their readers had different literary expectations, the philosophes did not want them to get too much involved in the "practical" realm of the plot at the expense of the intellectual one. However right Keener is to stress that the characters in the philosophical tale should not be underestimated, that they are quite complex, interesting, and worth examining in detail, one should distinguish them from the characters in the novel, and accept their special status in fiction. It seems both simpler and equally fruitful, as far as the complexity of the characters is concerned, to keep the distinction between the interest in society and social relations as the main preoccupation of the novel and the interest in ideas, whether in the form of their assessment or the assessment of the process of intellectual reasoning, as the main preoccupation of the philosophical tale. Both genres require a different degree of autonomy for the characters, yet as Keener wants it, without sacrificing their complexity.

There is no need to go any further into a polemic against Keener's position. Although his insistence on the importance of characters in the philosophical tale is a valuable contribution to the study of the genre, he is not able to provide sufficient proof of his thesis that the characters in eighteenth-century philosophical tales and in novels have the same degree of independence. Yvone Belaval

has made it clear that the difference between a character in the philosophical tale and a character in the novel is basically that of the individual versus the universal. The characters in the philosophical tale represent the nature of man, carrying both their individual and universal qualities. However, even individual qualities are subordinate to the theses expressed by the philosophical tale. As long as we keep this distinction in mind we can grant these characters a special status in fiction without diminishing, as Keener justly wants, their complexity guaranteed by the richness of the ideas discussed and the intellectual honesty with which they are discussed.

And, finally, the last problem related to the theory of the philosophical tale: the problem of distance between the reader and the fictional world. At one point in his discussion Frederick Keener quotes Samuel Johnson, who complains that the reader of the popular novels of his times can get too involved with the fate of the characters portrayed. Johnson is particularly concerned with an inexperienced reader, who tends to accept too much at face value. He recalls with nostalgia the improbabilities of the character and plot of traditional romances which shielded the reader from the dangers of the identification with the characters (11).

The question of distance in literature is, however, much more complicated than just stopping the reader from identifying with the fictional character. No ambitious

writer would be satisfied if the readers were unable to get anything else from his fiction save for the emotional involvement in the fate of the characters. Yet he would equally not want them to become disinterested, or, what is even more important in the case of the fiction of ideas, refuse involvement with the intellectual content of his narrative. As Wayne C. Booth stresses in The Rhetoric of Fiction, it is not the degree of emotional involvement in the world of the narrative that matters but the axis along which distance is introduced and the function it serves (123).

To begin the discussion of distance in rhetorical fiction one has to recall possible sources of the reader's interest in the narrative. These sources of interest can become the axes along which the distance between the reader and the presented world can be measured. Wayne C.Booth speaks of three fields of a reader's interest: intellectual, qualitative, and practical. The intellectual field is related to our "strong intellectual curiosity about 'the facts,' the true interpretation, the true reasons, the true origins, the true motives, or truth about life itself" (125). This field can be further expanded to include the interest in the "philosophical" truths, in their variety and complexity, and their impact on life, which is the main concern of rhetorical fiction.

The qualitative field is related to our "desire to see any pattern or form completed, or to experience a further development of qualities of any kind" (125). This is a very

general description, but nevertheless useful as it brings into the picture the reader's aesthetic needs, the necessity of satisfying his expectations, but also of surprising him by creating new ones. And, finally, the third field of interest, which Booth calls practical, signifies the reader's interest in the fate of the characters, their success or failure, or their moral change. The axis of the reader's "practical interests" is of particular importance in rhetorical fiction; the authors of the fiction of ideas try to diminish the reader's interest in the "practical" field in order to reinforce his interest in the ideas discussed (125).

Yet it is not enough to state that the authors of rhetorical fiction would like to diminish the reader's involvement in the fate of their characters. The very fact of writing fiction is in itself a guarantee of a certain degree of distance, as the reader is much more inclined to accept in fiction what he would have problems accepting in real life. But this, so to speak, natural distance of fiction is not enough. The author of rhetorical fiction wants to increase this natural distance in order to encourage intellectual involvement in the problems discussed. He can achieve it, for instance, by introducing improbable events or crowding them to a point at which they lose their verisimilitude. By doing this the author wants to reinforce the reader's intellectual interests, and finally, to replace "practical" interests with "intellectual" ones.

Having achieved his goal he may proceed to his most important task, i.e. the manipulation of the process of reasoning and the formation of the intellectual response of the reader through the changes in the plot. By following such a plot the reader is in fact engaging in a discussion with the author, accepting all changes in the fate of the characters as arguments in it, or as reflections upon the problem discussed.

In rhetorical fiction the sense of distance developed between the reader and his "practical" interests should, ideally, be kept at a level in which the reader is able to examine his own process of thinking, his own intellectual shortcuts which might have kept him from realizing certain dangers in his own intellectual development. The author who values objectivity may, for instance, want the reader not only to accept his values but to realize himself how easy it is to arrive at unjust conclusions. Showing the reader's partiality of judgment may become the only reason for the changes in the plot or for the use of other literary effects which, in turn, become permanent features of the genre. As part of rhetorical fiction, the philosophical tale is not trying to present a convincing world or to explore the reader's practical interests. It is trying to make the reader reason with its characters, evaluate facts, listen to the presented evidence. It is trying to arouse the reader to rational action by proving the premises of its philosophical message, by letting arguments speak for themselves. The manipulation of distance between the reader and his

"practical" interests in the narrative becomes one of the most interesting rhetorical strategies used by the writers both of the eighteenth- and twentieth-century fiction of ideas.

Before we pass on to the discussion of individual eighteenth-century works, a few comments are necessary on the other genre which reflects the spirit of the Enlightenment: the dialogue. In her Diderot and the Art of Dialogue, Carol Sherman states that the age of Enlightenment was polemical and argumentative; even such works as the Encyclopédie were dialogic, not in the generic sense but as a dialogue with the past. The dialogue as a genre not only offered the possibilities of showing the truth but also a way of arriving at it. Its form also made room for continuity; one could easily imagine new standpoints emerging as human knowledge progressed. To make the dialogue as realistic as possible the eighteenth century took pains to make the interlocutors of these recorded conversations known to the readers; they often bore the names of contemporary philosophers or prominent public figures (12-22).

The dialogue was a popular genre of antiquity and survived through the Middle Ages, although in a slightly changed form. Scholastic philosophy demanded that after an exchange of ideas between the interlocutors of the dialogue, the master judged the arguments used and pronounced his final verdict. For medieval minds there was no place for

ambiguity or many points of view and it was only with the abolition of scholastic reasoning that the genre was ready to accomodate several standpoints. For, in the eighteenth century, the author of the dialogue gave up his position as an intermediary between the reader and the world of fiction. The reader was left on his own, and was encouraged to weigh opinions and to pass his own judgments.

There may be many reasons for the popularity of the dialogue in the eighteenth century. Carol Sherman points to several possible ones. She claims that the dialogue is always extremely popular in periods of radical social change. Moreover, in the eighteenth century the dialogue was a standard part of the educational process; it was taught at school as an ideal form of expression at a time when the art of conversation was treated very seriously. To mark the change from the Middle Ages, the eighteenth-century dialogue allowed its interlocutors to be much more active and to present alternative points of view on the problem discussed (22-4). Let us now turn to the eighteenth-century rhetorical fiction to see what in its "philosophy," in its treatment of characters, and in its manipulation of distance between the reader and the fictional world has been preserved in Themerson's twentieth-century narratives.

If any philosophical system could be summarized at all, the eighteenth-century philosophy should be summarized as a quest for reason. The philosophes did not claim that reason could explain everything, but they were convinced that what was inaccessible to reason was chimerical and therefore

could not be rationally discussed. Confronted with metaphysical questions man should be modest and admit his ignorance rather than produce hypothetical answers and claim that they are true. Such an attitude to the world had definite consequences. The philosophes refused to accept any philosophical system which claimed it had explained the world, and condemned system-making altogether. They refused to be convinced by an act of faith; they wanted to question accepted authorities, most of all the Church, and demanded tolerance towards views which did not conform with the accepted standards. Since, after Locke, they accepted that man was born ready to be formed by his environment, they put the education of society as their most essential task. Their highest goal was to establish the principles of right living, and reason was to aid man in reaching it. The philosophes had a genuine passion for humanity and decency; more than anything they hated fanaticism and stupidity, which, they were sure, were the source of much of the world's evil. Their ideals, together with the ideal of cosmopolitanism on which I have already written at length, found their expression in the "philosophical" content of their literary output. These ideals had also determined the shape of their fiction. The two eighteenth-century genres of the philosophical tale and of the dialogue are excellent examples of this interaction between ideas and literary forms of expression (Gay, The Party of Humanity 7).

I have already mentioned that the form of the

eighteenth-century philosophical tale is very much determined by each of its great masters, yet Voltaire's contribution to the genre was unsurpassed. It was Voltaire who first made it a vehicle for moral and philosophical issues. He wrote his "contes" in a light and witty style, and borrowing the plot from the novel of adventure, he narrated the biography of his protagonist with all his travels and most improbable adventures. The setting of these adventures was exotic, but at the same time very schematic; it had enough local colour to suggest that the action took place in a distant location but not enough to encourage the reader's doubts as to its universal meaning (cf. Gay, The Enlightenment 198).

The most representative of all Voltaire's tales, Candide, is not only an excellent example of Voltaire's sense of the genre, but is an important statement of his values. The story of Candide's peregrinations, his constant discussions with two philosophers, Pangloss and Martin, on the meaning of life point to the inadequacies of theoretical systems which are unable to form solutions to human problems. Ironically smiling at the naïvéte of his protagonist, Voltaire takes the side of life versus abstract philosophy, which he accuses of inadequacies and falsehoods committed for the sake of abstract "truth." Candide goes a long way from a youth eager to take everything at face value to a mature adult whose scepticism towards theoretical divagations and desire to change the world on a scale which is feasible for the individual earns our respect. It is

significant that his realization also brings him the respect of the narrator, who finally stops treating him with irony and literally allows him to have the last word. The ultimate value of Candide is that it does not offer us a philosophical system; it assesses some of them in hope that the reader accepts the critical examination of ideas to be a value in itself.

This deep eighteenth-century distrust of systems is clearly visible in the works of other philosophes. Denis Diderot, the master of another eighteenth-century genre, the dialogue, is an excellent example here. True to the spirit of the Enlightenment Diderot does not create a philosophical system of his own; he is foremost a writer trying to establish his own principles which would guide him through life. He is a moralist who claims that virtue makes a man happy and therefore should be practised. He would like all men to be moral, but since his ideas of what morality is are often not in accordance with conventional views on the subject, he proceeds to explain his ethics. Diderot distinguishes between social conventions, which are often mistaken for morality, and true virtue, which often has nothing to do with it. In his essays and dialogues he points out with ardour that morals change not only from country to country but even within the same country from epoch to epoch. These changes prove that morals are not absolute values, and an awareness of this fact should result in tolerance and a better understanding of human nature (eg.

"Bougainville Supplement" 132). Yet Diderot does not advocate ignoring the conventions; he is a social man and understands that a man has to live in society, but he has to challenge and change moral values if he considers them harmful. Deep down Diderot is an optimist, he believes that man is essentially good and that getting rid of superstitions and rigid patterns of thinking would be beneficial for all humanity. Lester G.Crocker in his book on Diderot, The Embattled Philosopher, summarizes this conviction best by saying that "[t]he truest philosopher is not necessarily the builder of systems, but the seeker for truth, who is ready to see it wherever it lies, ready to lose himself in its complexity, instead of simplifying and reducing it to a pattern" (414).

There is a considerable affinity between the philosophical ideals of the Enlightenment and the philosophical premises developed in the writings of Stefan Themerson. To begin with he can be called a follower of both the Stoics and the eighteenth-century **philosophes**, because the ultimate goal of his philosophy is to establish the basis for right conduct. Furthermore, he takes knowledge and reason to be the two essential components of his ethics:

> My private inner-morality is my own personal business, it has nothing to do with you. In my outer-morality you have as much concernment as I. Personal, inner, good intentions are no longer an exceptional virtue. Private, inner, bad intentions are no longer a sin. Modern sin is between people. Today ignorance is sin. Good intentions do not excuse us, wicked intentions do not condemn us, the new Evolutionary Comb sweeps them aside, under the sofa of our private consciousness. There is no evolutionary power left in them. They are

> irrelevant. What has become relevant is a sort of democratized, Machiavellian wisdom, refashioned into a new ethics, according to which not only the Prince but we all are to be possessed of the knowledge of facts. This, assuming that we react, "morally," (and we do), will make our reactions be the reactions to our knowledge of not what people and things "are" but of what they do, what the food does to the consumer, what the deathtraps produced by the motor-car manufacturers do to the driver, what one country's surplus balance of payments does to another country's deficit. (Logic, Labels, and Flesh 197-8).

Themerson is not concerned with individual right conduct; like his Stoic and eighteenth-century predecessors he thinks in terms of mankind. Acknowledging that the twentieth-century has made an enormous contribution to the enlargement of knowledge, he notices, nevertheless, that the minds of contemporary men are as much polluted with false myths, beliefs, and systems of classification which are not only useless but harmful, as they were in the past. Themerson wants us to think over our traditional ethical values, re-examine them, re-define if necessary and reject or accept according to the results of our examination. "The atomic, multinational, technologically (if not politically) centralized computerized age needs a new definition of the neighbour whom one is supposed to love, and a new definition of love" (196).

Logic, Labels, and Flesh, and especially one of its chapters entitled "What is wrong with thinking in terms of classes?" is Themerson's fullest statement of his philosophical assumptions. Demonstrating that, although necessary as a step in the process of thinking, classification has to be recognized as an abstraction and

not confused with an absolute idea à la Plato. The process of classification is based on the process of simplification, yet in order not to commit errors in judgment this simplification has to be realized and corrected whenever possible. "One must employ great caution in thinking in terms of classes"--Themerson underlines--"because thinking in terms of classes does not fit empirical material" (105).

The same reservations apply to the building of philosophical or logical systems. As long as they are treated as a necessary step in reasoning they are useful, yet they have to be constantly verified and updated, and should never become an end in themselves:

> To kick away the empirical ladder after having climbed up to the heavenly plank of pure logic, makes too beautiful a picture to be true. Perhaps the ladder is part of the scaffolding that supports the plank? Perhaps to climb down, after having found what was looked for, is vital for both the plank above and the bit of terrestrial rock on which the ladder stands? Perhaps the constant movement up and down the ladder is necessary for <u>all</u> human understanding? (21-22)

Themerson insists on the importance of an "empirical ladder" for purely ethical reasons; in the age which witnessed Auschwitz and Hiroshima we should reconsider the practical implications of our thinking lest we contribute to improvements in the design of gas chambers or atomic bombs. One constantly has to remind oneself of the complexity of our problems in order to avoid oversimplified solutions. As much as life teaches Candide that "to cultivate our garden" is the aim of aims, the "empirical ladder" teaches us to re-

examine our systems. Themerson agrees with eighteenth-century thinkers that complexity, although confusing, should be chosen over neat patterns.

For a rational philosopher religion is the ultimate metaphysical system. His attitude towards religious beliefs is, therefore, a yard-stick of his attitudes towards any system which is founded on an act of faith. For the eighteenth-century intellectuals religion was an excellent example of a metaphysical system which brought nothing but harm. Voltaire's hatred of religion is well known; he considered it to be a collection of superstitions and falsehoods invented in order to cheat and exploit. With great persistence he collected evidence of its inconsistencies and its crimes. His inability to see any values in religious feelings and his hatred of the Jews, whom he considered responsible for many Christian dogmas, blinded him to the fact that with such an attitude he was not contributing to the ideal of tolerance and objectivity. Diderot's position, although also negative towards religion, is much closer to the eighteenth-century ideals.

Not unlike Voltaire, Diderot was convinced that true morality had nothing in common with religion; he did not accept the view that men were not brutal savages only because of their religious convictions. Yet, as his dialogues demonstrate, he was true to his own principles of tolerance and gave an opposing view a chance to defend itself. In one of his dialogues, "Conversation of a Philosopher with the Maréchale de--," the author engages in

a conversation with a pious lady who is truly surprised that a man who calls himself an atheist can nevertheless be moral. The philosopher explains that these religious beliefs which help people to be better are not harmful; they only become harmful when the faithful dictate their way of life to others. Finally, his delicate, but consistent reasoning convinces his companion, who has to accept his arguments, but is nevertheless given a chance to defend her own point of view. This way of disputing, with a careful analysis of the opposing points of view and with the critical assessment of one's own arguments, is an important feature of Diderot's writings. The reader is trusted with his own judgment, having all the evidence presented by the narrator. The role of the narrator is reduced to the purveyor of evidence, earning the reader's trust by his solid and well-defined presentation of the characters and ideas. Since several different points of view receive a sympathetic portrayal, the complexity of the issue discussed becomes self-evident. Ambivalence helps to acknowledge the possibility of partial truths and the complexity of possible answers.

Themerson does not consider religion to be his chief opponent; it is no longer such an influential political force in the twentieth century. For him the difference between a rational and a metaphysical system can be reduced to the difference between knowing and believing:

> I can <u>know</u> (either because I was taught so, or learnt it by experience) that if I turn on a switch the bulb will give light; and I can <u>believe</u> that if I turn on a

> switch the bulb will give light. If I know, and then it happens that the bulb doesn't give light, I shall call an electrician. If I believed, I should go down on my knees, or put my hat on, or touch the floor with my forehead, and pray forgiveness from the bulb (or the switch) for the sins with which I must have offended the whole or a part of the electric circuit, even if I didn't know when I committed them. ("Factor T" 41-42)

If we let ourselves be influenced by beliefs, and Themerson does not limit beliefs to religious faith but understands them in a wider context as any unproven values, we open ourselves up to prejudice and fanaticism, making it impossible to analyse, evaluate and draw rational conclusions. As much as the eighteenth-century philosophes Themerson would like to see people re-examine their morality and base it on a sound, rational basis:

> The term modern ethics makes sense only if you think about it as a combination of knowledge and reason. Beliefs have nothing to do with it. Whenever events occur which we consider wicked, one can always find at their roots the sin of ignorance and bad logic. The ignorance of facts, and a logic which ignores that there is no logical reason for thinking that my comfort or yours should be worth more than his or hers. (Logic, Labels, and Flesh 198)

The declaration of the complexity of issues discussed places on the author the responsibility of accurate presentation of opposing points of view. In the eighteenth century we witnessed two attitudes towards the problem of opposing systems of values. Although both Voltaire and Diderot shared the conviction that religion is wrong in explaining the world, Voltaire was guilty of the sin of oversimplification, whereas Diderot was able at least to grant it a means to defend itself, however feebly. Even the

choice of genres employed for the presentation of their views was significant. Voltaire wrote fiery and witty denunciations whereas Diderot chose the dialogue to express his views on religion. In the presentation of his principles Themerson tends to follow in Voltaire's footsteps. His only dialogue, Special Branch, is not similar to Diderot's dialogues in which several viewpoints were fully presented. In Special Branch the first-person narrator persuades his interlocutor, a detective who came to investigate his moral make-up and who is not an opponent but a curious partner, to accept his principles. The narrator is leading the detective towards the right answers to his questions, but he is not fighting his views. In other words Themerson does not give the other side of the discussed issues a chance to surface. For instance, logic and mathematics based on symbol manipulation, which he denounces on pragmatic grounds, have genuine claims to validity which are completely overshadowed by Themerson's disdain for their abstract systems. Themerson does not want to notice that some of these systems push human thinking and cognition over limits which would not be overstepped otherwise. Althqugh they may not be verifiable today, only the future may show if some of them are not going to change the way of thinking in tomorrow's world. Religion is treated more fairly; Cardinal Polatdo points to its deep knowledge of human nature and to its moral values. Themerson himself grants it the concern with the essential and a positive influence on art, to which I will devote a

separate chapter. Yet as unfair as it would be to disqualify Voltaire's philosophy only because of his attitude towards religion, it would be as unfair to denounce Themerson's philosophy merely on the basis of his biased treatment of symbolic logic.

Themerson's narratives contain many examples proving his desire for objectivity. He often includes letters written by his characters which provide different points of view in his fiction. He goes as far as to introduce a Martian boy-scout who visits Earth and illuminates the discussion with his extra-terrestrial point of view. Themerson is also aware of the complexity of the language in which we express our thoughts and of consequences caused by the ambiguity of natural language expressions. With all these means at his disposal, he places himself in the position of a teacher who does not represent any system of thoughts, but who is committed to the values of objectivity, tolerance, and the preference of knowledge over beliefs, and who wants to explore the world with his reader. These values lead him to the rejection of absolute systems, demanding that they should be re-considered over and over again in order to remain valid. Themerson is not an authoritarian teacher but a guide. Even though he is convinced that his values are positive, Themerson realizes only too well that the reader has to reach self-realization on his own. Here again, as I will show below, he has predecessors in the eighteenth century.

In the eighteenth century one of the consequences of

the negative attitude towards absolute values and philosophical systems was the re-evaluation of the role of the teacher. In Candide the mentors are simply wrong, which does not pose any problems; Candide is left alone to arrive at his truth. What happens, however, when the teacher represents positive values? True to his principles he cannot simply impose them on his pupil. To examine such an instance in detail let us turn to one of the masterpieces of the English philosophical tale: Samuel Johnson's Rasselas. Written in 1759 Rasselas remains an exquisite tale of the growing self-realization of the main character, and although very far from the psychological novel, the psychological and intellectual relationship between the protagonist and his companion-teacher serves as an indication of the problems such a relationship may create.

Rasselas has been dubbed an illustration of "the vanity of human wishes" as this is one of the main themes of the tale. But equally important is the recognition of the false dreams and ideas about himself that Rasselas harbours, and his gradual realization of the values of the world. Rasselas, one of the princes of Abyssinia, is living in the Happy Valley, an isolated world of earthly comforts provided for the numerous children of the monarch. Having all his desires fulfilled, Rasselas is still unhappy, feeling that "[m]an has surely some latent sense for which this place affords no gratification, or he has some desires distinct from sense which must be satisfied before he can be

happy" (6). One of the sages in the Happy Valley, Imlac, understands the desires of the young prince and tells him his own story of the search for happiness. He not only describes the world to Rasselas but tells him how to interpret it, as in the instance when the young prince cannot understand the ill feelings men have towards each other: "Pride, said Imlac, is seldom delicate, it will please itself with very mean advantages; and envy feels not its own happiness, but when it may be compared with the misery of others" (23).

Several pages later Imlac gives the young prince his opinion on the role of the poet, who has to place himself above time and space, who has to

> rise to general and transcendental truths, which will always be the same.... He must write as the interpreter of nature, and the legislator of mankind, and consider himself as presiding over the thoughts and manners of future generations; as a being superior to time and place. (27)

In short he must be the conscience of mankind and its ideal teacher. However, in the course of the tale the capabilities of the teacher diminish considerably, and although the ideal is never denounced, the reality proves to be much less ambitious.

Any writer of rhetorical fiction has to face the problems of how much he can teach his readers. In Rasselas Johnson brings his protagonist to the point at which, after having gone through his own experiences, he is ready to renounce false hopes and to accept reality as it is. This is

not an easy process, and Rasselas enjoys this unfaltering knowledge of himself and the ways of the world after a lot of searching and a lot of disappointment caused both by reason and by imagination. Finally, after experiencing a lot of bitterness towards his mentor--Imlac--Rasselass comes to conclusions which are similar to the ones Imlac was suggesting all along, but this time they are his own. Johnson's position is clear: a teacher can only direct the learning process, as Imlac indeed does many a time. He can help in formulating conclusions and in providing experience, but his student has to come to his own understanding of the world. By the same token the writer can only direct the reader's reasoning, hoping that he will arrive at similar conclusions. There is no point then in making statements, the only way is to show the rules of good thinking. The reader has to be an intellectual partner not a pupil.

The importance of self-realization and the conviction that the world is much more complicated than somebody else's truths or indeed our own truths about it, is also an important subject of Themerson's fiction. In his only dialogue, Special Branch, Themerson is interested in conveying that the very process of examining one's premises may help the reader to get to know several sides of the "truth." Peddy Bottom, the picaresque hero of Themerson's tale, is a champion of intellectual independence. The worlds he visits try to convince him of their values; yet he rejects all of them and chooses constant wandering and searching over the short-lived peace of mind guaranteed by

the different system-makers he encounters. Yet Peddy Bottom is, in a sense, privileged, since he sees that the systems he encounters are either intellectually or morally wrong. The narrator of Tom Harris has a much more difficult task. He has to learn not to accept opinions as the basis of his search, even if they happen to be right. Opinions cannot be proved, and that is why, although they may be examined, they should not be confused with facts. The narrator twice abandons his narrative only because he considers himself too authoritarian in his attempt to understand Tom Harris, the truth about whom he tries to discover. Appropriately the narrator concludes that there is no sense in classifying people, since they will always escape our labels. Tom manages to defy all attempts at classification. He not only changes professions dramatically, from a waiter in a Chinese restaurant to a professor at Genoa University and a philosopher of science, but he proves that by refusing to be locked in one system of values an individual gains his intellectual freedom.

Themerson would certainly feel at home in the company of the philosophes. Yet one has to remember that he is not a philosopher sensu stricto but a writer and a moralist, who, as much as his eighteeth-century predecessors, chose rhetorical fiction as his mode of expression. This choice determines the structure of his narratives, the function of his characters, and their dependence on the main idea. It also illuminates the significance of his playful games with

distance between the reader and the presented world which are responsible for the charm of Themerson's fiction.

The place and position of characters in the fiction of ideas deserves a detailed discussion. The plot of Voltaire's Candide was already highly improbable; the characters travelled all over the world and had an multitude of adventures merely to prove a point in the author's argument. The abundance itself made these adventures improbable, and immediately made the reader aware that their purpose was not to provide excitement to the story but to make a number of statements on the validity of philosophical systems. As a result, true to Voltaire's philosophy of constant re-evaluation of what we consider the truth of the moment, both the protagonist and the reader were left to wonder if any system could ever explain the human condition.

Voltaire is not the only writer of rhetorical fiction who subordinates his characters to the dominant idea of the narrative. The same lot was shared by the characters in Diderot's dialogues, and in Johnson's Rasselas. Even a quick look at Themerson's fiction proves that his characters are in a similar position. They often come from the realm of the improbable and the grotesque; Bayamus is a mutant with three legs, Peddy Bottom is only partly human, while the termite characters in Professor Mmaa's Lecture are comical versions of human philosophers and politicians. The characters and the events which constitute the plot are there to contribute to the intellectual discussion which is taking place in the narrative. Themerson uses old, well-proven literary devices

demonstrating over and over again that in all kinds of rhetorical fiction it is the argument that matters, and the presented world is here to serve it.

To illustrate this subordination of the presented world to the dominant ideas let us examine characterization in The Adventures of Peddy Bottom. The story itself can be summarized as a discussion on the values of the contemporary world. Each chapter which Peddy enters is a new world with its peculiar rules and strange creatures inhabiting it. They can only be understood in relation to the external world and its diverse problems, ranging from political tyranny to formal linguistic experiments which Themerson fears take the place of philosophy in the contemporary world. The Shopkeeper, who is ready to mould Peddy's head to fit an approved collection of hats, or King Penguin, who introduces himself as a philosopher, but who is only able to conduct pointless discussions on such obvious truths as "two plus two equals four," are excellent examples of such characters. Yet even more complex characters, as Peddy Bottom himself, are subordinated to the discussion on values. Peddy is encountering other characters as if he were encountering arguments in a discussion. Confronted with them he has a choice of accepting or rejecting them. He, in turn, is free to suggest his own arguments and to try to convince both his opponents and the reader, which he does. The Camel from Chapter I, a poet and a university teacher who lectures in electricity but dreams of poetry, realizes that being true

to one's dream is more important than material rewards; through his own example Peddy Bottom is also trying to convince the reader that emotional detachment from moral values, objective analysis of them and persistency in following the approved ones are values in themselves.

The importance of detachment is one of the distinctive features of rhetorical fiction distinguishing it from propaganda, which tries to win the reader for its cause, leaving no room for doubts. In his philosophical tales Voltaire makes use of irony and the grotesque to create and sustain the distance between the reader and the presented world, as well as between the narrator and the story he is telling. Irony serves as an indication of changes in the attitude of the narrator towards his protagonist. Candide escapes it only on the last page, when finally, he rejects his mentors' teachings and chooses his own path of life. The use of the grotesque eliminates any unwanted feelings of sympathy the reader might otherwise feel for the characters. The mere number of misfortunes cited on one page renders them highly unsuitable for such an emotional response. The grotesque makes the emotions described in the course of the plot abstract, more universal, and thus more fit for a philosophical argument. At the same time it makes the emotional detachment from the fate of characters so much more natural.

Denis Diderot's Jacques the Fatalist further illustrates the importance of distance in eighteenth century fiction. The author underlines several times how his

narrative differs from popular stories and novels of the time. He is not spinning stories for stories' sake. He is concerned with the truth, if not with that which has happened, since he is free to invent the characters and events, at least with that of the nature of the problem he wants to discuss. Telling a story only to invent more and more incidents is not what he wants, and the reader who would like it has to turn elsewhere. But the reader who is interested in the problems Diderot touches upon is not disappointed. His story may be interrupted many times, but the problems discussed are not. The author delights in his interruptions, they keep the distance between the reader and the presented world, encouraging greater objectivity in the reader.

How important is this distance for Diderot? To show how, it should be enough to recall the story of Mme de La Pommeraye, told to Jacques and his master by the landlady of the inn where they were staying for a few days. Mme de La Pommeraye was wronged by her lover and decided to avenge herself by making him marry a whore. The narrator steps in and tries to show the reader that the interpretation of the story is not as straightforward as it might seem at first sight:

> You work yourself into a frenzy at the name of Mme de La Pommeraye, and you cry: "Ah! that horrible woman, that hypocrite, that miscreant!" Let's have no exclamations, no wrath, no partiality; let's just reason this thing out. Every day blacker deeds are perpetrated without any talent.... Have you reflected somewhat upon the sacrifices Mme de La Pommeraye had

> made to the marquis? ....A man can stab another for a mere gesture, for a contradiction, and yet it's not permitted to a virtuous woman, lost, dishonored, and betrayed, to throw the traitor into a courtesan's arms? Ah, my reader, you are very flighty in your praise and very severe in your blame' (149-50)

The "practical" interests of the reader are suspended and he is asked to examine his process of thinking, the attitudes which might have prevented him from examining all sides of the problem. The passage is obviously ironic, but Diderot is not really concerned with Madame de La Pommeraye. It is not important what we think of her and her conduct; what really matters is the process of passing judgment. An objective and reasonable approach to the facts provided by the story is what Diderot wants from his readers. He is always ready to admit that the truth is too complicated to be on one side, that our moral values are often simple lip service paid to conventions. He warns the reader against harsh judgments, points to the arguments of the other side, and advocates objectivity, tolerance, and reason.

The distance between the reader and the presented world is equally essential in the narratives of Stefan Themerson. It is achieved through the use of irony and humour; it is reinforced by the position of the characters, and what is more, its importance is explicitly underlined in the narrative. In Tom Harris the narrator engages in the following conversation about one of the characters:

> 'What is so peculiar about her?' I asked.
> 'Well...' he said. 'She is... It is an experience to meet her.' Thoughtfully, he refilled our glasses. And then, with a boyish twinkle in his eyes, as if he

> intended to make some sort of amusing psychological, or sociological, or semantic experiment on me, he said:
> 'She won a beauty contest in a seaside resort. You see?'
> 'Yes, I see..." I said slowly.
> 'No, you don't see.' He snapped his fingers. Obviously he was starting a sort of cat-and-mouse game with me. 'She was a vicar's daughter,' he said. 'Does that help you to build a picture in your mind?'
> 'Yes, in a way,' I said. 'The fusion of those two elements produces some sort of image.'
> He was pleased with my answer. It allowed him to display a wry, scornful smile:
> 'I bet it's all wrong,' he said. (117-118)

This is a similar game to that which Diderot played in Jacques the Fatalist. Here the author is playing "a sort of cat-and-mouse game" with the reader in order to demonstrate the importance of his position. His opinion of the woman who is the subject of the conversation varies with every new fact, yet with every new fact he is as far from the truth as at the begining of the conversation. The narrator is, however, aware of his problem and he would like his readers to develop the same awareness. This self-examination of one's impressions and opinions which he advocates is a first step towards objectivity and tolerance. This is not the only instance in which the "practical" interests of the reader are suspended. Tom Harris, for instance, cares much less for actual happenings than he cares for his ideas. The immediate reality, the loss of his job, imprisonment, and divorce, have relatively little impact on him; his ideas, his fight for intellectual freedom, for freedom from the labels under which other people classify him are the real issues. He is fighting for "what is important" and not for "what is necessary," which is underlined by the conclusion of his

reconstructed diary:

> If you die of hunger, you die because you haven't had enough of what's necessary, and not because you haven't had enough of what's important. But what do you die of, please tell me, when you die because you haven't had enough of what is of importance? (291)

By creating a distance between the reader and this "what is necessary," Themerson hopes to diminish the distance between the reader and that "what is important." To achieve this feeling of distance the reader must be intellectually alert and ready to go along with Themerson's intellectual games. As with any rhetorical fiction which wants to arouse rational responses, the reader's involvement should be reserved for issues and not for the fate of characters. The narrator of Tom Harris is clear about that. That is what he says of his friend, Mrs. Holcman, who escaped the Holocaust and often told him about her experience:

> Her stories seldom contained anything that she hadn't experienced herself; they were always about events from her own life or the life of people she knew, yet she would tell them in such a quiet and almost impersonal sort of voice, and with such cool compassion, even towards herself, which is one of the rarest things on earth, that it fascinated me. (37)

The discussion of Themerson's relationship to the eighteenth-century ideals would not be complete without mentioning what he did not accept in it. In his introduction to Professor Mmaa's Lecture Bertrand Russell compared Themerson's novel to Gulliver's Travels, and indeed the grotesque visions of the two novels seem at first sight to

have a lot in common. Professor Mmaa's Lecture can be summarized as a look at humans from a termite vantage point. Human conflicts, problems, and hopes reflected through the senses of insects seem as distorted as human problems when seen through the eyes of Brobdingnags. Yet this resemblance may be quite misleading. So far I have been discussing the parallels between eighteenth-century ideals and Themerson's philosophy, looking for the antecedents of his positive attitude to exile both in the ideal of cosmopolitanism and in the ideas of the French philosophes. Yet, as any other literary epoch, the eighteenth century cannot be described only in terms of its ideals. There is, obviously, another side to its reason, tolerance, and objectivity.

Swift's vision of the world is representative of this other side of the eighteenth century. His goal is to acquire the awareness of evil which is our only way of avoiding "the sublime and refined point of felicity, called the possession of being well deceived; the serene peaceful state, of being a fool among knaves" ("A Tale of a Tub" 121). Swift's masterpiece has been analysed in many ways. Gulliver has been likened to a marionette and to Hamlet; he was named a total fool, an object of satire, as well as its executor (see Tuveson). Yet Gulliver is, foremost, an exile. He starts from being a wilful adventurer who always returns to the loving arms of his family and beloved country only to renounce them at the end as filthy, and to remain an exile in the country which was once his home. It would be difficult to call him a philosopher of exile, since he is

not too quick in perceiving and understanding his condition, but we cannot help noticing that the awareness of evil does not make him happy. Deep down Swift is much closer to the view of exile as alienation, no matter how much more he values the truth over deception. Alienation seems to be the inherent condition of man, and the only escape from it is deception. Exile means the loneliness of a wise man, preferred over the happiness of a crowd, but still a tragic consequence of wisdom. In Swift one can see much less comfort in the sense of belonging to the intellectual élite, than that so clearly visible in Diderot or Voltaire. Not only is Swift much more pessimistic than his contemporaries, but he also makes his protagonist much less capable of reason, much less able to realize his own limitations, unable to be objective and look at himself from a distance. If Gulliver is indeed Everyman, than no matter how boldly we profess reason, tolerance, and objectivity, his conclusion is that the most we can do is to acquire the awareness of evil, at the cost of alienation. If one wants to see in him a forerunner of a philosophy of exile, his would be the foundation of Existentialism and alienation.

Since the discussion of eighteenth-century philosophy and eighteenth-century genres has been in the first place prompted by the desire to look at the sources of positive exile in Themerson's fiction, it seems legitimate to ask what was the attitude to exile of the Enlightenment thinkers and in what sense, if any, we can apply this term to the

philosophes. The best example of a positive philosopher of exile would certainly be Voltaire. A true exile, forced to live outside of France for many years, he not only called himself but indeed was a citizen of the world. It is no coincidence that Candide travels all over the globe to find his garden on the shores of Propolis. To be a citizen of the world one has to free oneself from local problems, the restrictions of one's society, and to be able to look at life as a universal value, however distorted by social conventions. "Exile" in this sense is for Voltaire, as it will become for Themerson and Russell, the necessary condition of objectivity.

Diderot is a much more difficult case to prove. In a physical sense, no one would probably be less suited for exile. The author of Jacques the Fatalist could not live outside Paris, leaving it only once for a long stretch of time, when coaxed by Catherine the Great, he accepted her invitation to visit Russia. It was a miserable time for him. Life outside Paris seemed strange and dull; he could not do without his friends, his milieu. His aversion to travel was so strong that even his youthful dreams of visiting Italy never materialized.

And yet, there is enough in Diderot's writings to justify the discussion of exile, especially taken in its wider sense of a refusal to belong to the prevailing school of thinking and an attempt to create one's own standards. Diderot was constantly opposing his own society: in writing for the Encyclopédie, in his views on morality and religion.

He cheerfully accepted this "exile" and was proud of it. As a true member of the philosophes he wanted to be the avant-garde of his society, not its parrot. Popular themes or thoughts never attracted Diderot, and notwithstanding the dangers, he was ready to defend his philosophy against two powerful enemies, the king and the Jesuits.

In Rameau's Nephew there is a passage in which Diderot writes about a philosopher's need to be independent, even at the price of being an outcast. The dialogue between a rogue and a philosopher comes to an end. The rogue has just proven that the society consists of a number of individuals who serve their superiors, that we are all somebody's dupes, that no one is free from servitude and dependence. The philosopher answers: "But there is one human being who is exempted from the pantomime. That is the philosopher who has nothing and asks for nothing" (84). This attitude of the philosopher is not without sacrifices: he has to do without, but as the author says "I'll stake my life it is better than to crawl, eat dirt and prostitute yourself" (85).

Rameau's Nephew is a fascinating study of the evils of society; it is the work of a philosopher who is also aware of the fact that one has to live in society, and the only thing one can do is to admit its evils. Only such an attitude can bring hope of progress. Rameau is a rogue; he prides himself that he has no conscience; he is ready to cheat, praise, be a fool, but he is also ready to admit all that. He does not make a virtue out of sin. And the

philosopher admits: "[t]here was in all he said much that one thinks to oneself, and acts on, but that one never says. This was in fact the chief difference between my man and the rest of us. He admitted his vices, which are also ours: he was no hypocrite" (74).

We may thus conclude that Diderot's "exile" is philosophical; it means keeping a distance from society which enables one to guard one's independence of thought. Such an exile facilitates a reasonable and tolerant approach to reality. It also frees the philosopher from the necessity of adapting one's thoughts to the expectations of his contemporaries. However, neither Diderot nor Voltaire with their cosmopolitan ideals were in conflict with their times. As Peter Gay proved so convincingly the **philosophes** were very much at home in their world (The Party of Humanity 118-32). Voltaire continued to be a major influence on French intellectual life wherever he lived. Diderot always felt that he was a part of the intellectual élite of Paris. The cosmopolitan ideal which the **philosophes** formulated was at the same time the ideal of the Enlightenment. In being cosmopolitan they were a part of an élite, influencing their times, changing the world with their writings. They were fortunate to be a part of a group convinced of its values. That is why they never think of themselves as exiles but as citizens of the world; the latter term suits them better since they never had to come to terms with the feelings of being outside their élitist group. It is only in the writings of the twentieth-century philosophers of exile that

the two feelings would have to be reconciled. The following chapters will attempt to show how it was done.

To sum up: the positive philosophy of exile shows deep-rooted affinity with the ideal of cosmopolitanism, inherited from the Stoics and further developed in the eighteenth century. Stefan Themerson shares not only the eighteenth-century ideal of cosmopolitanism but also its preference of rhetorical fiction, which allows the author to subordinate the characters and the plot to the central idea discussed in a literary work. Rhetorical fiction, based on the reader's interest in what Wayne C. Booth has called the intellectual field, was well suited for the fight for rationality and impartiality--the values particularly dear to the philosophes. The analysis of individual tales shows that the eighteenth-century values are still valid for Themerson, and that the literary realizations of these values have left a strong mark still visible in twentieth-century descendants of philosophical tales.

Notes

[1] Following T. J. Schlereth and Peter Gay I use the word *philosophe* as a synonym for an eighteenth-century intellectual. The term has been widely used in the Age of Enlightenment.

[2] Voltaire's hatred of the Jews or Hume's suspicion that "the negroes, and in general all the other species of men ... [were] naturally inferior to the whites" are good examples of such transgressions (Hume, "Of National Characters" 532).

CHAPTER 3

STEFAN THEMERSON AND THE POLISH TRADITION

The goal of the present chapter is to provide background for the discussion of Themerson's fiction and its position within Polish culture. I will therefore discuss the romantic and the positivist traditions which have shaped Polish consciousness and their impact on the literary life of inter-war Warsaw. I will also concentrate on Themerson's émigré experience, his participation in the life of the London Poles, and the reasons for his withdrawal from émigré life.

Neither cosmopolitanism nor eighteenth-century rationalism found many followers in Poland, whose national identity has been, to a large extend, shaped by patriotism and romantic idealism. Themerson's positive philosophy of exile with its eighteenth-century sources can be, therefore, seen as a mutiny against the romantic side of Poland, and as such has to be examined in the context of the two conflicting modes of thinking which have shaped Polish culture. Yet it is at the same time much more than just an attempt to support the rational forces. Themerson searches for and finds a way out of this conflict by universalizing it into a struggle between reason and faith, present in many cultural traditions. Yet, however universal his approach becomes, the discussions between the supporters of Romanticism and Positivism in inter-war Poland and in the émigré Polish communi-

ty in London are echoed in Themerson's films, books for children, essays, and narratives, all pointing to the way in which the Polish cultural tradition contributed to Themerson's attitude to exile.

One of the reasons behind the popularity of the romantic ideal was a political defeat of the reforms initiated by the Enlightenment which tried hard to save Poland from the impending loss of independence. Although already marked by heavy political troubles (the first partition took place in 1772), eighteenth-century Poland witnessed some important reforms. Influenced by the writings of Diderot, Voltaire, d'Alembert, and Rousseau, the few Enlightened men gathered around the court of king Stanisław August Poniatowski were responsible for the founding of the Commission for National Education which completely transformed Polish schools, modernizing their curricula and pedagogical methods. However, the ideals of the Enlightenment, its belief in reason, knowledge, and tolerance came too late to bring the desired progress; the reforms were greeted with anger and fear by the neighbouring powers, and Poland was subjected to the second partition in 1793. After this defeat Polish intellectuals turned to Romanticism, which was to dominate the nation's consciousness for long years to come (cf. Miłosz, History 283-321).

The romantic tradition has had an enormous influence on Polish culture. In a sense, all that happened after

Romanticism in Polish literature has been interpreted either as its continuation or its negation, and the two trends recur in Polish thought with persistent regularity. The romantic revival which began as a struggle against the classical rules of good taste quickly became an expression of the political desires of the country deprived of its independence. The eighteenth-century quest for reason gave way to the conviction that only emotional truths mattered and that faith could conquer the world. Polish Romanticism became strongly influenced by both religious metaphysics and folklore. The poems of the greatest romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz, urged youths to free themselves from the restraints of reason, for feelings meant much more to him than cold calculations. The supporters of the romantic tradition pointed out that it was the romantic spirit which, denying the chilling political reality, was responsible for the survival of Poland's national identity. Its opponents made it responsible for subsequent unsuccessful uprisings against the partitioning powers, as well as for the deaths and persecutions which followed suit (cf. Weiss 266-73; Kulczycka-Saloni 543-659; Sławiński 333-34). Polish Romantics were convinced that progress was possible only through pain and martyrdom, and that the Polish nation was fulfilling its messianic role, redeeming through its tragic history the sins of other nations. As nowhere else, romantic poets became the true prophets and spiritual leaders of the nation; they were geniuses able to voice the dreams and desires of their people. Admired and venerated, they became

the apotheosis of Polish culture. For years to come any sign of criticism towards Mickiewicz or Slowacki was considered sacrilegious, and the enthusiasm for Romanticism tended to be extremely tyrannical in spirit. In Witold Gombrowicz's famous novel, Ferdydurke, when during a lesson of Polish a pupil questions the greatness of romantic poets a terrified teacher asks him to reconsider his opinion, pleading: "I have a wife and a young child" (46). With other critics of the romantic legacy Gombrowicz believed that emotional blackmail was representative of a pro-romantic bias in Polish thought.

Individualism, so characteristic of European Romanticism, in Poland was understood as the influence of an exceptional individual over a nation. Romantic poets had to take over spiritual leadership in the country for which they were to live and create, since the partitioned fatherland suffered from oppression, their individuality was subordinated to the Polish cause. Fuelled by faith and enthusiasm, they did not dwell on the political reasons of the partitions which, for over a century, erased Poland from the map of Europe, but they saw their country as an innocent victim of bloodthirsty Europe. The suffering fatherland was compared to the suffering Christ. In 1832, in Paris, the exiled Mickiewicz wrote: "But the Pole saith to the French and the English: 'If ye, children of Freedom, follow not after me, then will God cast off your race, and will raise up defenders of Freedom from the stones," ("The Books of the

Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrims" 177) and he was not isolated in his conviction.

Polish Romanticism was responsible for the formation of one more important concept which was to influence the national consciousness--that of emigration. The repressions imposed on the nation after the unsuccessful insurrection of 1830 drove its participants out of Poland, first to Germany, then to France. For some two decades, Paris was the center of Polish cultural and political life. These people, officers, soldiers, and intellectuals, were known as the Great Emigration. They considered it their duty to fight for the freedom of their fatherland, and they spent their time and energy debating the causes of the defeat and planning future battles for independence. The Great Emigration set an ideal of the émigré: a great patriot nostalgic for his lost homeland, devoting to it all his energy and thoughts, and waiting for the time to serve it. The Great Emigration had indeed a very strong influence on Polish society; the poems of émigré poets were smuggled back into the country and were read by all and sundry. The exiled romantic poets remained true leaders of the nation, true representatives of the Polish cause in Europe. They considered exile to be a personal tragedy in spite of which they continued to live and write for the fatherland. Their ideals, with their virtues and shortcomings, were fundamental in shaping the views and dreams of the nation.

Themerson was certainly not the first to oppose the Polish romantic tradition. The first rebellion against the

romantic spirit took place already in the late nineteenth century, during the period of Polish Positivism. Positivism was a social and literary movement which took its inspiration and a part of its ideology from the philosophy of Auguste Comte, and from the English utilitarians Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill. The Positivists were also strongly influenced by the Darwinian theory of evolution, which convinced them that organic growth is far superior to dramatic change. The movement sprung up as a strong reaction of the Polish intellectuals of the time to the defeat of the 1863 uprising, which instead of bringing a much longed for independence again cost Poland dearly. Not unlike Comte, who while admiring many of the ideals of the French Revolution wanted to reconcile them with social order and progress, the Polish Positivists wanted to reconcile the desire for immediate freedom with slow but steady progress at all levels of Polish society. Although they never accepted Comte's desire to free men from religious "illusions," they translated it into a postulate of hard work which would, in turn, reform society, thus freeing it from its secular, romantic illusions. Through "organic work" and "work at the foundations," they sought to strengthen the economic basis of the country, restore the values and ideals which would make an independent Poland of the future stronger and more just for all her citizens. They were moralists, full of optimism and very much opposed to the romantic mentality. Writing passionate articles, novels, and

short-stories to promote their ideals, the Positivists fought for them against the believers in the romantic tradition (Milosz, History 283-86).

The education of society became one of the most important goals of the movement. Like Comte, Polish Positivists believed that progress was only possible in a society which was well educated, which was able to profit from scientific achievements, and which was not afraid of the new. They wanted a new generation of Poles to be brought up in the belief that hard work, science, and technology could help mankind. Village schools had became a priority; stress was placed upon science, upon trade, and upon the knowledge of agriculture. The literary protagonists of Polish positivist novels do not resemble the protagonists of romantic literature: the widow of a soldier who died in the uprising organizes a village school, where she teaches peasant children to read and write; young engineers come back home to work on family land, introducing new technology and new methods, teaching peasants how to implement their knowledge and experience. When, finally, the political changes after World War I made the existence of an independent Poland possible the two traditions began their battle for the resurrected nation. Both had fervent admirers and bitter opponents, and the awareness of the struggle of the two traditions, both during the twenty years of independence and on the banks of the Thames, sheds light on Themerson's philosophy.

INTER-WAR POLAND

Themerson is more than reluctant to talk about his personal life and family background, convinced that all his ideas have been expressed in his books and that they are all that matter. His anti-label stance, visible so clearly in his fiction, especially in Tom Harris, is perhaps best summarised in the following fragment from "The Finishing School or Who from Whom?"

> "Meet another philosopher," said Edith at Bertie's birthday party. So they agglamourated aground (sic) me, bright twitching integrogation (sic) marks in their eyes: "Where from? Where from? From where?," meaning: the womb of which Alma Mater feeds you with her milch juice for teaching young beasts what you have learned from old lizards, meaning: whom have you unsaddled, O unknown reptile...."From Erewhon," I said...."From Nowhere," I explained; and thought: if I deserved to carry the name of philosopher, which place to have come from would be more appropriate than a place which is independent of any longitude, or latitude, or altitude, or creditude...(38).

One has to respect the author's desire to come from nowhere, and to eschew labels. Yet, labels aside, it might be important for the readers curious of his Polish background to note that he comes from the Polish intelligentsia. Clearly autobiographical fragments of his fiction also suggest the links with the fully assimilated Jewish tradition (Bayamus 20-22) which made him close to the rationalism of the eighteenth-century. Reconstructed from the scattered pieces of information available to me, his

Polish background takes the following shape.

The two traditions, romantic and positivist, influenced Themerson's philosophy of life from his early childhood onwards, although in very different ways. Themerson was born in Plock in 1910, eight years before the longed for independence became possible. His father, Mieczyslaw Themerson, was one of those intellectuals who lived on the borderline between the two Polish traditions. A doctor dedicated to positivist ideals, fearless when the good of his patients was at stake, Mieczyslaw Themerson was a great patriot who would spend an evening reciting romantic poetry to Chopin's "Funeral March." Themerson wrote about his father with love: "emotionally--sentimentally romantic; morally--classically principled; and most impractical in everyday life" ("Mieczyslaw Themerson" 2). As a doctor, Mieczyslaw Themerson was well aware of the poverty and the appalling living conditions of the Polish lower classes, doing as much as he could to fight its effects. Singularly, his son's early books for children, written in Warsaw before World War II, reflect the same spirit of concern with social justice, and a desire to change the depressing conditions which formed the reality of Polish villages and towns. Mieczyslaw Themerson also showed an active interest in literature, and wrote several novels and plays. He was a colourful but unhappy figure, always at war with bureaucracy, and with his more down-to-earth colleagues. Stefan Themerson calls his father a Don Quixote, a noble figure but somehow lost in a world much more materialistic

than his ideals.

True to his sympathy for the positivist tradition Themerson studied physics and architecture in Warsaw, but soon he found out that his interest in film, literature, and experimental art surpassed his interest in science. Nevertheless, both his books for children, written in pre-war Warsaw, and his films, made in collaboration with his wife Franciszka,[1] show how important the positivist legacy was for him, and how far he departed from the romantic ideal of the artist and his role in the society. The romantic artist had a mission to fulfil, for he was a spiritual leader of the nation, its prophet, and its moral teacher. Themerson's notion of what the role of an artist should be is much closer to the utilitarian view of art in which the positivists believed. As I have already mentioned, his books for children had a precise social function to fulfil; they were to teach young readers how to become better citizens of their country, how to improve it, how to learn from experience, and how to depend on reason (see Stachniak "Stefana Themersona twórczość dla dzieci"). Never again is Themerson so openly positivist as in his books for children, but the spirit of his art has never departed too far from this desire to improve the world. Yet, he does not want to lead the nation as the romantic artists had wanted. His ambition centers on how to show his readers or film audience new ways of looking at the world around them, how to break set patterns of thought, how to make them reconsider their

opinions. Whereas for the Romantics art was emotional and prophetic, for Themerson it is rational and moral, and yet, at the same time, able to point to new dimensions of our understanding of the world.

Although both he and his wife were still very young at the time, they were regarded to be among the best and the most radical film-makers in Warsaw's cinematographic avant-garde. As for many young artists, for the Themersons the cinema was the final stage of interests in photography and photomontage. Light, movement, and the literary content of films were a perfect opportunity to blend together the most essential aspects of artistic expression. Not belonging to any artistic organization or group, they fought for the right of the individual to search for new forms, new ways of looking at art.

One of the most interesting films made by Stefan and Franciszka Themerson was their film realization of Europa (Europe)--a poem by Anatol Stern, the founder of Polish Futurism. Although the film, sharing the fate of many Polish works of art, was destroyed during World War II, there is enough information about it to give us a taste of what it was like. The authors reconstructed the script, gathered carefully the remaining photograms, press reviews, existing descriptions, and in 1962 published a little book Europa, an English translation of Stern's poem illustrated with what was left of the film. One of the quoted critics, Stefania Zahorska, the leading film critic of pre-war Poland, wrote about Europa:[2]

> The film of folly sequence--though these are not altogether sequences--not only because these stills represent but a fraction, but because the superimpositions and cross-cuttings constitute a kind of anti-sequence, comparable to that of the poem--without being a literal interpretation of it. Stern noticed "the images derived from the poem, but they brought in also a series of their own metaphors, purely filmic... Above all in the Themersons' film reigned protest--angry and desperate, against the conversion of human masses into cannon fodder or soulless automatons...."
>
> This film poem...bears a fresh approach--things are new because they are seen from an unexpected visual-motional point of view, the formulae of interpretation are new. Even the commonplace verbal symbols become fresh, corporeal, palpable thanks to the dynamism that visualizes them, through the plasticity and tangibility of vision. (27-8)

Anatol Stern's poem Europa is a vision of Europe gone mad, racing to its own destruction:

> Abecedary of slaughter
> of dirt lice fires
> and mercy
> united states
> and argentine brazil chile
> states at war
> phenomena and noumena
> eternity and nothingness--
> two fattened boxers
> who will always win! (4)

The structure of the poem suggested the sharp, changing images of an old world. It was full of angry and aggressive scenes which, transported to the screen, gave a vision of Europe devouring, consuming regardless of the world around, regardless of the misery of others, of wars, of the destruction of previously cherished values. Both the film and the book point to several issues. First of all they show Themerson's interest in Polish Futurism. Then, they show

Themerson's concern with universal human problems: individual freedom, the fear of mindless destruction and tyranny. The search for a way out of these problems becomes for Themerson a search for a new form, a break with the old, traditional way of thinking and looking at the world around us. Art, as it is clear from this film, becomes for Themerson the means of changing human perceptions of old problems, getting out of old stereotypes and looking for solutions.

Experiments in art interested Themerson from the beginnings of his artistic career. His relationship with Dada and the European artistic avant-garde will be discussed at length in a separate chapter, here I would only like to point out his interest in Polish Futurism (cf. Zaworska 98; Głowiński 136; Balcerzan 120-41; Rudzińska "Artysta" 432-43; Rudzińska Między awangardą 107-20). In inter-war Warsaw, Futurism meant a big protest against just about everything. In 1920 its manifesto leaflet TAK [yes] was an outcry against a fool's paradise in poetry, against metaphysics, and against the "old" civilization, as well as an enthusiastic apotheosis of technology. The manifesto utterly dismissed "rome- tolstoy criticism hats india| bavaria and cracow" (Stern, "Poezja zbuntowana" 53), where "india and bavaria" meant exotic motifs in art, "hats" represented critics' heads, and "cracow" was linked with the Polish historical tradition. The choice of miniscule is also significant. Futurists decided that "art is science"; emotions were henceforth to be replaced by intellect. Their slogans

also called for glass houses and painted pavements, in other words for architecture better-suited to a new epoch (cf. Stern, "Poezja zbuntowana" 52-8).

A year later, in 1921, they were declaring that work determined the value of man, that art should be created for people, for human masses, and that technology was art, as much as sculpture or architecture. Although most of the slogans sounded extremely radical at the time, Futurism had its influence as an attempt to create a new understanding of the world. Polish Futurists truly believed that a new world of scientific discoveries and technology should be reflected in art and should find a worthy representative in a new man. The new man, however, had to free himself from stiffening tradition, from romantic complexes, and bravely face a new era.

Polish Futurism was never as powerful and never went as far as its Italian or Russian counterparts. Stern's poem was an attempt to participate and respond to all that was happening in Europe. Stern was deeply influenced by the artistic experiments of Tzara and Breton; but he never went as far as Marinetti; he never glorified war or called for fascism. Stern was warning Europe against its vices, its mad race towards destruction, and Themerson repeated his warning both in his pre-war film and post-war book. Themerson is all for experiment in art, for a new man, for the reason and technology which were so important in futurist manifestoes, but, like Stern, he had never accepted Marinetti's fascina-

tion with war and destruction, preferring Dada's rebellion to European Futurism.

Themerson's interest in Polish Futurism, devoid of the tendency to glorify fascism, was also visible in his early books for children. In one of his poems Nasi ojcowie pracu-ją [Our Fathers Work] the real hero is a construction worker, who is a builder of the future. There is also in it a dream of glass houses, of new cities of the future which will eliminate the poor, dark and damp houses of the present. Hard work, social justice, and technology were important for Themerson at that time. He told the children stories of brave little boys who succeeded because they learned, stopped expecting miracles, and took the future into their own hands. His futurist ideals obviously join hands with the ideas of Polish Positivism.

Stefan Themerson did not limit himself to film-making in pre-war Warsaw. He often spoke and wrote on the role of the avant-garde, and tried to facilitate the production and distribution of avant-garde films by others. He was the initiator of the Film Authors Cooperative (SAF) and the editor and publisher of the cooperative's periodical f.a., with its trilingual subtitle "film artystyczny, film artistique, the artistic film." Themerson was an enthusiastic supporter of experiments in film-making, always expressing his belief in the importance of breaking the old habits of thinking. In one of the articles published in f.a. Themerson proclaimed:

> praise for untidiness, slovenliness with premeditation, controlled disorganization searched out consciously. More! Constructed untidiness. Breaking normalized masks, rummaging in the intestinal tangles of film running through the projector, discovering the inherent truths about the spectacle-creating apparatus. (qtd. in Zagrodzki 39) 3

The last film made by the Themersons in Poland (completed in 1937) was a ten minute "irrational humoresque" Przygoda Człowieka Poczciwego [The Adventure of an Honest Man].[4] This film is especially interesting as a comment on Themerson's philosophy of life, as well as on his views on art. What later on will dominate his literary output is now visible in the narrative layer of the film. Themerson commented on the film extensively. The subject of The Adventure of an Honest Man was suggested by a well known Polish film critic Jerzy Toeplitz during his interview with Themerson. Summing up their discussion Toeplitz said: "Two weeks on Parnassus, grant us, oh Lord!" (Zagrodzki, 40). The sentence inspired Themerson to the extent of making a film about "two weeks on Parnassus." Themerson's own comment on the film is worth quoting in full:

> In THERE WON'T BE A HOLE IN HEAVEN the decent man does not philosophise on the subject of civilization. He simply desires a two week holiday on Parnassus. Not in Zakopane or in Szczawnica but on Parnassus...In order to get there he must perform an act which will appear to be irrational to those rationalists who think they are always right (from this the subtitle of the film: an irrational humoresque.) He must break out of his environment. He must leave his everyday desk and...go backwards. With a wardrobe and a mirror...into the woods. And fly away. Up onto the roof. For a while. To see the world from a different angle. The authors of the film also tried going backwards all their lives, yet advancing; which fact I prefer to racing forward at full speed and only going back--to symbolism, to

> romanticism, to the naive 20th-century realism of the Central European bourgeoisie. Walking backwards has always and everywhere its opponents. The most unpleasant opponent for the decent man was a certain mean-spirited, faint hearted, jealous tyrant who ruled in a comically proud, yet tragically absolute way. His absolute control was upheld within the narrow minds of those who believed that the only faith possible is theirs, that the only possible world is one as they see it through the narrow gaps left in their doctrine, that their viewpoint is the Official Order of Things, and that this Order will fall apart and cause a Hole in Heaven if the decent man were allowed to go on his backward journey, unassisted by any travel bureau, into the woods, up onto the roof. The film was to show that they are comic, that they are narrow, that they make mountains out of molehills, that there certainly won't be a Hole in Heaven. But then that was 25 years ago... (Zagrodzki 40-41).

The film has been accused of being a "nihilistic joke in Dada style" (Armatys), but it is much more than a joke. Its concern with personal freedom, the necessity to break out of one's environment, to look at reality from different angles will return in Themerson's later works and will always be one of his most important messages. The escape from a crowd, the possibility of preserving the freshness of one's viewpoints is what makes emigration such a positive notion in Themerson's philosophy of life. Jo Comino states that "the film doesn't direct its sense of absurdity at a specific target but more generally against the idea, represented by the crowd, that there is a fixed order of things (Progress) and that it's wrong to step out of line" (198). Keeping out of line is what Themerson likes best.

The times between the two world wars were full of ardent discussions on the meaning of artistic experiments, discussions initiated by Karol Irzykowski's "struggle for

content" and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz's theory of "pure form". Themerson was on the side of art which reflected the conflicts of the times, which was not avoiding moral and philosophical issues, and in which new forms suggested new views, new approaches to the essential problems of the twentieth century. Themerson was also extremely dedicated to the idea that Polish art should be original and creative, and that it should actively participate in the developments of European art. He was against being "just another consumer who tries to persuade himself, as well as others, that reflection is the same as creativity" (qtd. in Zagrodzki 33).[5]

I have mentioned several times that Themerson's positive philosophy of exile is in a sense a mutiny against the Polish romantic tradition. It would be, however, false to assume that Themerson is the only one after the period of Polish Positivism to oppose this tradition. Inter-war Polish literature and thought was the creation of many rebellious spirits, often extremely critical towards Romanticism. Themerson finds himself in the distinguished company of such writers and philosophers as Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, Leon Chwistek, or Witold Gombrowicz. Young Themerson, an experimental film-maker interested primarily in the new artistic possibilities offered by new media, could easily have identified with the ideals expressed by the intellectuals and writers gathered around a well known Warsaw literary periodical Wiadomości Literackie [Literary News]. It was not a literary group in any sense, but the readers and

contributors to this periodical shared certain ideals perhaps best summarized in a manifesto published in 1924 in the first issue of Wiadomości Literackie:

> Our periodical wants first of all to inform. As much as it is possible it would like to re-establish a long broken contact with the art and culture of Europe. We want to participate in an effort to demolish the wall separating us from the centers of contemporary civilization.
>
> Our periodical does not represent any aesthetic schpol. It does not fight for this or that doctrine. It does not defend and it does not want any dogmas limiting the freedom of creation. That is why it proclaims deep respect for all honest work in the name of art. But, at the same time, it promises persistence and ruthlessness in fighting all kinds of backwardness, lies, hypocrisy, and counterfeit, both artistic and social. (qtd. in Kowalczykowa 173)

The founders and contributors of Wiadomości Literackie:

> were the supporters of such intellectual liberalism which concerns itself with the process of artistic creation, science, and human thought; they were the partisans of unlimited freedom of expression, hostile towards all rigorous philosophical, political, and religious doctrines. They treated intellectual life as a fascinating game. (Kowalczykowa 177, translation mine)

One of the proofs of the intellectual honesty of the periodical is its issue devoted entirely to post-revolutionary Soviet literature and its literary criticism. At that time hardly anybody was willing to look objectively at Soviet art, especially since, both historically and ideologically, Poland and its eastern neighbour were extremely hostile towards each other. Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski, Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy, to name but a few, were the most famous and outspoken contributors to Wiadomości Literackie.

The first two were famous poets, the third a critic, a translator, a ruthless opponent of all hypocrisy, and the author of one of the most controversial essays of this time: "Women's Hell"--a comment on the wall of hypocrisy and discrimination built around women in contemporary society.

In the twentieth century, after gaining its long desired independence, Poland began a long process of reconstruction and regeneration. There were, of course, as many theories of how to improve Polish society as there had been of how to achieve independence, but on the whole positivistic attitudes became much more valued than before. A society with very practical goals needed hard work, science, and technology. The intellectuals of the time felt they could influence society much more once it had become independent, and many of them fought for their vision of art, culture, and morals. Many of these rebels were very colourful figures who greatly influenced Polish literature. At least two of them, Leon Chwistek and Witold Gombrowicz are pertinent to the discussion of Stefan Themerson.

Leon Chwistek was one of the most versatile men of the times. A logician, philosopher, writer, painter, and art critic, he came in the early 1920's with his first, very controversial philosophical theory. It was presented in a book Wielość rzeczywistości [The Plural Reality] written in 1916-22. As the title suggests, its main concern was the concept so often used in the theories of his times: reality. In short, his idea was that one cannot speak about one

reality. One has to deal with several realities, depending on one's point of view. Chwistek distinguished between the physical reality (as perceived by exact sciences), natural reality (everyday perceptions), reality of images (visions), and the reality of sensations (psychological reality). Together they enabled men to experience the external world on many levels. The theory had practical consequences for its author: it made him profess tolerance. Since none of the realities was absolute, one had to accept the point of view of others, who in their understanding of reality could also be right (Brodie xiii).

The most interesting part of Chwistek's theory concerned art. Since there were so many realities to be explored, claimed Chwistek, copying nature was the worst way of creating. It meant nothing more than the constant repetition of only one way of presenting the external world. If an artist devoted himself mainly to experiments with form, he would be able to express his own vision of reality in a work of art. "Form and only form can deliver a modern artist from copying nature" (Estreicher 139). By the same token, each work of art deserved to be judged according to its own internal rules. Chwistek was almost the only one in the Poland of the 1920's to say openly that primitive art was interesting, since it was a record of a different way of perceiving the external world. He opposed a popular view of the time, which denied primitivism any artistic values whatsoever. What is more, Chwistek believed that a work of art should be judged according to the consequence with which

it recorded its own vision of the world. This awareness of a plural reality made Chwistek ready for new forms, experiments, in short for the future, which could bring changes to our perception of the world. The theory itself was very controversial, and Chwistek was in trouble trying to defend it from a philosophical point of view. However, his desire to end the rule of absolute values, of norms in art, seemed extremely attractive to other young artists who found Chwistek's theory to be a source of inspiration.

The most mature work of Leon Chwistek is his Granice nauki translated into English by Helen Ch. Brodie as The Limits of Science. Here Chwistek explains his concept of **sane reason**, which will later on find its way to Themerson's essays as **mens sana**. Objecting to any doctrine which employs the notion of "absolutes": absolute truth, absolute goodness etc., Chwistek states that philosophical doctrines are to be verified by applying reason to experience. Such doctrines will never be absolute, but will remain approximations of truths, modified by experience if necessary. Trying to define reason, Chwistek makes a distinction between what he calls **sound reason** and common sense.

"Common sense" is just another metaphysical system, maintains Chwistek, "whose principles cannot be precisely formulated but which works quite successfully through the operation of habits. It is well known that the popular view of the world is always associated with escapism and is a synonym of banality and mediocrity" (24). Sound reason is

free from banality; it enables us to "attain truths which are not subject to intellectual revolution" (25). In other words, through sound reason one will eventually be able to establish truths common to various interpretations of reality. Here Chwistek is not very definite, and his theory was successfully challenged as lacking in precision. However, his understanding of sound reason as verification through experience has led him to objectivity and tolerance, as well as the necessity of constant verification of one's theories, the ideals which appealed so much to Themerson.

Chwistek is pointing to one more danger, apart from man's tendency towards metaphysics and towards creating absolutes: everyday language. According to Chwistek, the imperfections of a natural language are often a barrier between the philosopher's way of thinking and the truth. Because of that, language has to be used with caution and always mistrusted. Language reflects common sense more than sound reason and that is why--Chwistek maintains-- it should be used carefully. The same idea, the same warning against the power of language over our minds, appears in Themerson's fiction and essays. Themerson is sure that we let ourselves be seduced by words, by nicely formulated phrases without always fully realizing their implications. When properly analysed, many common sense phrases conceal shallow opinions, stereotypes, and prejudices. Being critical towards rhetoric can save us from many pitfalls, Themerson maintains, and can also sharpen our awareness of the world's complexity.

Chwistek's insistence on reason was not too popular during his times. As he himself noted in his introduction to The Limits of Science:

> We are living in a period of unparalleled growth of anti-rationalism. Exact thinking based upon the principle of consistency is the sacrificial goat to which all the disasters of our times have been imputed....Exact thinking is blamed for drying up the sources of the sacred enthusiasm and for causing the emotional exhaustion of our epoch. (1)

Chwistek sounds very bitter, and he has good reasons. His own life had been a long battle for reason in a society which, deep down, valued emotional enthusiasm much more than exact thinking. In a history of philosophy he was ready to accept only the contributions of Hume, Comte, Mach, and Marx. Positivism was for him the apotheosis of sound reason. His values made it hard for him to find his place in a still predominantly pro-romantic society and to convince others.

Themerson is one of the few who find Chwistek worthwhile. He borrows Chwistek's concept of sound reason, which in Themerson's essays becomes **mens sana**. It is the ultimate test of philosophy, its link with reality, which should never be broken if we want to escape bare formalism. **Mens sana** saves Themerson's protagonists from what one of his characters called "thinking about thinking about thinking" (Logic, Labels, and Flesh 16). It brings them down to earth, makes them face concrete problems rather than escape into abstract theories. Themerson shares Chwistek's view of the importance of tolerance and rationalism and the

need to replace all absolute truths with hypotheses. They are both anti-romantics, looking for inspiration into the neglected realm of Polish Positivism, stressing the dangers of intolerance and rigid doctrines.

I have already mentioned that Chwistek was not only a philosopher but also an artist. He was quite a good painter, known for creating his own school of painting called strefizm [zonism]. Zonism is yet another excellent example of Chwistek's ambition to reconcile many views of reality. He divided his pictures into several separate zones, which allowed him to combine otherwise incompatible colours and shapes. He was also an author of two unpublished novels: Kardynal Poniflet [Cardinal Poniflet] and Palace Boga [God's Palaces]. The comparison of the novels of Chwistek and Themerson could have been extremely interesting; unfortunately, both of Chwistek's novels were lost during World War II, and only a few fragments were ever recovered. In 1968 Ludwik Bohdan Grzeniewski published these preserved fragments of Chwistek's Palace Boga, filling the gaps with reminiscences of the few people who listened to the whole novel when it was read by the author. These fragments give us only a glimpse of what the novel was like, and can form the basis for only a very general comparison. The protagonist of the novel, Cardinal Poniflet, is a very strong personality who tries to understand the world around him in all its philosophical and physical complexity. The novel was the Cardinal's spiritual autobiography, his metamorphosis from a proud aristocrat into a humble beggar

who frees himself from the temptations of the world. The novel consisted of seven visions, seven deadly sins, in which the Cardinal went through consuming passions in order to free himself from temptations. His moral and physical downfall was followed by his final victory over sin, and the victory of "God's palaces", which in Chwistek's novel symbolized the force of love on earth (Grzeniewski 31).

The novel was clearly preoccupied with social justice and also with the possibilities of redemption. Hunger and sin kill morality; the victory of God's love is possible only through Poniflet's martyrdom. Leaving his palaces he enters the humble dwellings of beggars and prostitutes and there, in pain, frees himself from his passions. This is how the novel looks now, reconstructed from the preserved fragments. It is consistent with Chwistek's insistence on experience, which should always be used to verify abstract theories. The final victory of love shows that there are many ways of experiencing the same feeling, and that all of them are valuable. Chwistek did not believe in the idea of progress understood as one aim/towards which the whole of humanity was moving. There are many goals--he said--and many ways of achieving them, and we should free ourselves from our narrow concepts to perceive them. As he wrote in Pa-

<u>Iace Boga</u>: "God lives everywhere." If we accept this, we have to learn as much as we can, and everything should be worth learning. For Chwistek, God can be found only in the plurality of experience. That is why Cardinal Poniflet wins.

Chwistek's philosophical development ended with his acceptance of Soviet style communism. He died in the Soviet Union, enthusiastically supporting the new order of the victorious masses, and painting victorious Soviet tanks. He was not a very influential figure in Polish literature, but a representative of a trend which, always present, tried to fight for objectivity and reason against emotional romanticism. Even if his social compassion led him, in the end, into the negation of objectivity and reason done in the name of social justice, one has to acknowledge his contribution to rationalism, as does Themerson.

Interwar Poland had other rebels who tried to fight against overpowering Romanticism. Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy) wrote sarcastically about Polish messianism, an idea so much cherished since the romantic period, and according to which its tragic history had made Poland a Christ of other nations, sacrificing itself in order to redeem the sins of the world. Witkacy asked with sarcasm: Why should we elevate our inability to defend our freedom to the idea of messianism, rather than coldly analyse our sins and mistakes? (297). He was not the only one to be asking the same question. There was Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy whose humorous poems and sharply critical essays conveyed the same message, trying to shake his countrymen's conscience and make them more rational and more self-critical. Yet, by far the fullest analysis of the impact the romantic tradition had on Polish society was given by Witold Gombrowicz. What makes him even more

interesting for our discussion is that he finds exile to be an excellent way out of the romantic trap, almost a necessary step, whether physical or only spiritual, towards maturity. This conviction makes Gombrowicz another writer of the positive philosophy of exile.

Gombrowicz's literary career had only started a few years before World War II with the publication of Ferdydurke in 1937, and his most productive years were spent in Argentina, where he travelled on the eve of World War II. Gombrowicz left for Buenos Aires, invited by a Polish shipping company to sail on the maiden voyage of a Polish ocean liner: Chrobry. This voyage started his spiritual as well as physical exile. Gombrowicz's novels and his Dziennik [Journal] give us a detailed record of both his exile and his philosophy of exile, formed also through his observation of the Polish émigré community in Argentina. Although Gombrowicz's views on exile were developed already in Argentina, and they did not directly belong to inter-war Polish literature, I would like to present them here as a complement to my discussion of this period in Polish culture. Everything that Gombrowicz wrote in Argentina had sprung directly from his Polish years and indirectly commented on the atmosphere of pre-war literary Warsaw.

Gombrowicz is against a typical image of the writer-in-exile, which, in accordance with the romantic tradition, meant a nostalgic individual driven from his beloved country by the cruel forces of history. Artists who complain that

they cannot write outside their homeland are poor artists, says Gombrowicz. They probably have nothing to say in the first place, and have only become writers thanks to the protection of Polish literary institutions which, he was sure, favoured mediocrity. To the nostalgic writer-in-exile, Gombrowicz points out that all great artists are essentially alone, wherever they are, and if they are any good, their loneliness, pain, fears or despair becomes the core of their art. If anything, exile should act as stimulus to the great. First of all, a great artist who finds himself outside his homeland gains distance, spiritual freedom, and perspective, so much harder to achieve when he is bound by the here and the now. Those who find themselves at a loss without their own country, milieu, party, or ideology have only lived on isolated fragments of the external world. One should see one's culture only as a fragment of universal culture, as a mosaic piece which gains meaning only as a part of the whole (Dziennik 78).

Looking at the Polish mosaic piece from this point of view, Gombrowicz becomes painfully aware of its limitations and dangers. He calls Polish culture seductive--it seduces an individual so that he would give himself up for a group, at the altar of romantic tradition and patriotism. In doing so, this culture handicaps an individual, cuts him off from what he could have been. "This emotional patriotism... brought about most awful harm, heavily biased the whole of our politics and what is worse, of our culture" (Dziennik 136). Polish patriotism is excessive--says Gombrowicz (144·

45)--in order to fulfil its demands, an individual has to suppress so much in himself that he denies half of his nature. This suppressed half has to be brought to life, and bringing it out should become the goal of Polish literature. The romantic tradition which led the country during the nation's fight for independence, has stifled its more rational, less heroic past. The legacy of this tradition, even in independent Poland, is that many great artists are virtually handicapped and are not able to let the other half of themselves speak out. This grave loss of potential greatness should become our first concern--continues Gombrowicz--as it deprived us for years of self-criticism, objectivity, and a full analysis of ourselves. He wants to force the Poles to look at the universe and cope with it, rather than live in their false worlds. They have to mature, look at themselves, break this neatness of their infantile world, and thus come closer to the difficult maturity already achieved by other nations (232).

The Polish tradition--asserts Gombrowicz--wants an individual to give himself up for a group. In the long conflict of the individual versus society Gombrowicz stands on the side of the individual. He is so much interested in the relationship between individuals, that gradually, ideas become a mere pretext to observe the people who formulate them. Ideas, maintains Gombrowicz, should never be allowed to develop on their own, in abstract. Another human being should always be their final verification. That is why

Gombrowicz is so angry with all these tendencies in Polish culture which try to limit the individual, bind him and destroy his independence. In one of his novels, Trans-Atlantic, a group of exiles form a clandestine terrorist society, the purpose of which is to keep its members paralysed by pain and fear. The members of the society do succeed in their goal: no one is able to do anything constructive, but no one is able to leave the group either. A vicious circle is completed, and the result is slavery which, as Gombrowicz stresses, is a possible outcome of the subordination demanded from an individual by a group.

In such a world, exile, in a spiritual or a physical sense, becomes a chance, provided it is not wasted through nostalgic looking at the past and clinging to old attitudes. These old attitudes are one of the reasons of Gombrowicz's estrangement from the Polish émigré community, which, however, always manages to fuel his sense of rebellion. Gombrowicz's role as a writer can be compared to that of a medieval fool, also an exile in the world of courtly flattery and intrigues, an exile who is allowed to say more than others, but who has bought his freedom at the price of isolation.

Before I return to Stefan Themerson I would like to make a few comments on the sources of Gombrowicz's positive philosophy of exile. Even a cursory comparison of the positive philosophy of exile professed by Themerson and Gombrowicz shows many similarities. For both writers it springs from the opposition to the romantic tradition, its

messianism and extreme reliance on emotions. Both are very much against excessive patriotism, standing for the individual against the group. They dislike nostalgia with its far from realistic visions of the lost fatherland, and they prefer constructive criticism which points to the essential values of their native culture, but without its stereotypes and myths. There are also, however, substantial differences, as I intend to show in the following chapter, which will be devoted to the analysis of Themerson's fiction. These differences spring from the different sources the two writers refer to as the core of their philosophy. For Themerson it was the Enlightenment and Polish Positivism with their reliance on knowledge and reason; for Gombrowicz it was the Polish Baroque with its elaborate and striking linguistic forms, its uninhibited interests, simple pleasures, and a certain complacent honesty which allowed baroque writers to write about their imperfections without shame. For Gombrowicz baroque literature was ready to accept man as he was, with his every-day, very unheroic behaviour. The Polish Baroque was not a very intellectual period in Polish history, marked by Sarmatism--a specific mixture of conceit and ignorance which constituted the popular philosophy of the gentry, and which was to become the laughing stock of the future. Gombrowicz's attraction to the Baroque is not, however, related to Sarmatism. What he is attracted to is the acceptance of man with all his imperfections, without forcing him to assume heroic poses. It is an

idea *à rebours*, born from the reaction to the romantic tradition, but also marked with the distrust towards reason and progress. The Baroque was for Gombrowicz a wonderful source of parody. Both the Enlightenment and Positivism were too serious, too conceited in Gombrowicz's eyes. As a self-crowned fool Gombrowicz needed a grotesque costume, and that is why the Baroque proved so stimulating.

THE EXILE COMMUNITY IN LONDON

The Nazi threat made the Themersons flee, first to France in 1938 and then to England. When World War II broke out they were in Paris, and Stefan joined the Polish Forces in France. He collaborated with *Wiadomości Literackie*, by then published in Polish in Paris, and edited a magazine for children *Moja Gazetka* [My newspaper], a supplement to *Dziennik Polski* [Polish daily]. After the capitulation of France, Themerson worked in the Polish Red Cross in Paris and Voiron where he wrote *Professor Mmaa's Lecture*. In 1942 he went to England via Spain and Portugal and rejoined the Polish Forces in Scotland. Shortly afterwards he began to collaborate with the Film Unit of the Ministry of Information and Documentation of the Polish Government in London. That is where he made his last two films: *The Eye and the Ear* and *Calling Mr. Smith*.

The Eye and the Ear was an attempt to join music and image together to form an expressive unit of its own; the sounds were represented by geometrical shapes; the audio and the visual sides of art were blended to create the third

level of artistic expression. Calling Mr. Smith was easy to classify as anti-Nazi propaganda aimed at those who still believed that Nazi Germany was a civilized power. In very suggestive scenes the Themersons showed that the Nazi architecture equaled concentration camps, their music war marches, that "yes, they are artists but ... of murder." In front of our eyes the Nazi boots crushed masterpieces of Wyspiański and Chopin, and the film ended with the dramatic call "the restoration of culture is not possible without you, Mr. Smith. Europe is calling you, Mr. Smith. You, who say it is impossible that the Germans could be so cruel."

The greatest force of the film was in its novel techniques. In History of Polish Film it was described as follows:

> The main ingredient in Calling Mr. Smith was actual photography and film footage shot as war documents. Series of photographs were combined with appropriate fragments of film and appeared on the screen accompanied by flashes of coloured lights. The objective of the authors--the indictment of the Nazis for the extermination of culture was presented by means of the amorphous method of narration; the abstracted assemblages, the fragmented newsclips showing the atrocities of war, and the interplay of surface and colour areas. Musical illustration was provided with fragments of pieces from Chopin, Bach, and Szymanowski which were dramatically contrasted with the infamous hymn of Hitler's legions--the Horst Wessel Lied. (qtd. in Zagrodzki 411 6

The film was yet another proof of Themerson's desire to use artistic experiments in order to voice an opinion, persuade, show the truth behind stereotypes. It also was the proof of his deep concern with the problems of human freedom and

dignity, so much threatened by the war and murderous ideologies.

After finishing their last film at the Film Unit, Stefan and Franciszka's artistic ways separated. She concentrated on painting and theatrical scenography; he turned to writing and publishing. His novels and philosophical tales were published by his own publishing house, Gaberbocchus Press, which the Themersons started in 1948 in London. During the 31 years of its existence (in 1978 it was sold to a Dutch editor, De Harmonie Publishers), Gaberbocchus published many books reflecting the versatile and international interests of its owner and creator. The list of Gaberbocchus authors and designers contains the names of artists which shared at least certain of Themerson's principles: Jankiel Adler, Guillaume Apollinaire, Alfred Jarry, Bertrand Russell, Kurt Schwitters, Anatol Stern, and Mieczysław Szczuka. In the years 1957-59 Gaberbocchus had become more than just a publishing house, it was a center in which one could listen to lectures on art and science, or watch film shows. It was there, for instance, that Themerson gave a talk on his friend, Kurt Schwitters, which later on was expanded to become a book Kurt Schwitters in England.

Since Themerson always wanted to cross the boundaries between cultures, to address an international audience, and to avoid the label of being an émigré writer, he wrote and published his books in English. Never addressing a particular national group, trying to deal with universal and

international issues, Themerson did not find the switch to another language difficult. The British literary tradition was very close to his mode of writing, which preferred understatement, nonsense, and the grotesque. Being an outsider in both cultures, Polish and British, was an advantage in his system of values, as it placed him at a distance and made objectivity so much easier.

His decision to turn to more universal problems rather than to be involved with the here and the now of the Polish reality, and even more so with the Polish émigré community in London, brought about various consequences. It did not, however, stop the post-war communist government from banning his books. The cultural policy of the communist regime silenced not only all political writers, but even those whose moral values, sympathies or even life-stories did not correspond to accepted standards. Since Themerson had been a soldier in the Polish Forces in France, since he was living in London and showed no desire to return to communist Poland, it was enough to exclude him from any participation in Polish post-war cultural life. When after Stalin's death the grip of the regime relaxed for a while, The Adventures of Peddy Bottom, the most "political" of his books, ridiculing the absurdities of totalitarian states, was published in Poland as Przygody Pędrka Wyrzutka in 1957. It was a time when the Poles could finally read many masterpieces previously considered by the regime to be reactionary or downright subversive. Themerson's book was published in

the distinguished company of Gombrowicz's Ferdydurke, and hundreds of other titles previously considered to be the relics of the reactionary bourgeois past. Later, Themerson continued publishing in Poland, while at the same time he was withdrawing from the London émigré community.

To understand this process one has to look at the history of post-war Polish emigration. London, which became its center, gradually drew Poles from war-ridden France; it became the headquarters of the Polish government in exile. Naturally, the immigrants who set the tone of the London emigration were people related to the pre-war Polish establishment, with its variety of political concepts, interests, and sympathies. Yet, as Czaykowski and Sulik point in their Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii [Poles in Great Britain], this community came close to representing the whole nation in exile, with its government, organization and class structure (543). The London exile community was constantly enriched by Polish soldiers, refugees, liberated concentration-camp prisoners, and finally by those who fled from the post-war communist regime. Looking up to the ideals of the Great Emigration, they tried to preserve Polish culture abroad, living for Poland and her future independence. A historian, Jerzy Zubrzycki writes:

> In Great Britain assimilation is very rare and slow, since economic immigration has always been small there. The majority of immigrants from the very first were struggling for the ideal of national independence and included an increasing number of professionals who wanted to preserve the Polish culture which they considered threatened by Germany and Russia. They formed a large number of diverse and mutually

> supplementary associations for that very purpose....By preserving the cultural values and patterns brought by Polish exiles to this country, Polish associations attempt to recreate and perpetuate the social controls which operated in the pre-war milieu. (120)

Zubrzycki's definition of assimilation, understood as full integration into a new community to the point of losing all feelings of a different cultural background, has been rightly disputed as too restrictive (eg. Czaykowski and Sulik 554-57). Yet, he is right in pointing towards the tendency of the Polish community in London to treat Great Britain as only a stop on the way to free Poland, as a temporary stage in the life of a nation. This attitude influenced the decisions of the Polish government in exile, which tried to organize the Polish community in view of a future return to Poland, controlling émigré organizations, influencing the political views of émigrés. An émigré had to locate his position in the triangle: the Polish nation, the Polish Government in London, the Polish Government in Warsaw. The last two choices were mutually exclusive as both governments considered themselves to be the only representatives of the nation. The émigré community had to go through tough times. Immigrants had problems with a new language, new social conventions; they had to deal with financial problems, loneliness, fear for the loved ones in Poland, and last, but not least, the gradual shift of British sympathies from their cause to that of the Warsaw government. Finally, the Polish government in London was no longer recognized, and with the Yalta agreement all the hopes of returning to

the pre-war "status quo" in Europe or indeed to a democratic government in Poland were shattered.

The shock of the Yalta agreement left émigré society bitterly disappointed, divided into groups differing in the degree of acceptance of the new situation. Some decided to return to the new Poland, dreading the lives of exiles and seeing that the Polish nation was not on the Thames, whereas others were determined to start their new lives elsewhere, but most of them continued to live in suspense, hanging around Polish émigré organizations, working for the Polish radio, publishing émigré newspapers, trying to help maintain a free Polish culture and literature. The biographies of these people show a lot of bitter disappointments and failures (cf. Danilewicz-Zielińska 126, 237-49). Writers found it difficult to publish in Polish, but even if they managed to do so, their books and poems were limited in their ability to reach Polish readers. This was not only one of the results of new political barriers but also of the widening gap between the reality behind the Iron Curtain and the reality of emigration. Polish writers in exile not only often felt as isolated strangers in the countries they decided to live in, but they had gradually less and less in common with their own country, which they had left. Writing for émigré readers, however interested and willing to read, was a very inadequate substitute. More and more émigré writers, unable to universalize their experience, sank into a petty world of émigré quarrels and local problems. Only

those who managed to break away from the émigré community and to foster links with other cultures had a lasting influence on Polish literary life and made a name for themselves in their new countries.

A look at this émigré literature shows that the majority of books by émigré writers are memoirs (cf. Danilewicz-Zielińska 182-92). They speak of the fight with the Nazis; they recall nostalgic pictures of the past, the horrors of the war. A lot of this desire to write was naturally caused by the urge to document the human side of the tragic experience of World War II--there is a corresponding trend in all post-war literatures--but unfortunately, for many, the past had become the only source of inspiration. From the writers of single novels, the results of their war experience, only a few names survived the test of time and became a part of Polish literature. Significantly, they all, sooner or later, found their way back to Poland, either because of their international renown, as was the case with Witold Gombrowicz and Czesław Miłosz, or thanks to their faithful admirers who took advantage of a few temporary relaxations of the Polish editorial policy and managed to publish their works. Thus such names as Teodor Parnicki, Melchior Wańkowicz, Zofia Kossak, and Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska were never fully absent from Polish literature. Sadly enough, often the author's death was the only possibility of rehabilitation in the eyes of Warsaw. Emigré writers understood very well the distinction between the Polish people and the communist

regime, and considered contact with the Polish reading public superior to the possible acceptance or rejection by a small émigré community.

Yet, the question of whether an émigré writer had the right to publish his books in communist Poland caused many a bitter quarrel in London. At first it was decided that no one had the right to publish in Warsaw, and every writer who agreed to have his books published in his homeland was considered a traitor. The supporters of this decision pointed out that by allowing their names to be present in Polish official publications, such writers supported the regime and all it represented. Those who did not abide by this rule were subjected to a lot of pressure from the émigré community, resulting in harsh and unjust reviews of their writings and in personal attacks. Zofia Kozarynowa's review of Themerson's fiction can serve as an excellent example of such biased criticism. This is how she describes his Bayamus, a complex, grotesque tale on the problems of art, language, and artistic expression:

> In Bayamus nonsense surpasses itself in the pseudo-scientific analysis of simple phenomena and objects as well as in accepting degeneration as natural. It often borders upon pornography, and what is more it defies good taste and the sense of dignity by smuggling unjust information about incidents of a social nature, which were allegedly supposed to have happened in Poland, and which are not fit to be generalized in a literary work of art... (510-11).

The above criticism was published in a two volume, impressive study of the Polish émigré literature, the only

comprehensive study of this type, a work of many writers, critics, and historians. The "incidents of a social nature which were allegedly supposed to have happened in Poland" are anti-semitic incidents mentioned by the narrator in Rayamus. Unfortunately, no matter how much Mrs. Kozarynowa would like to hide it, Polish history is not free from anti-semitism, and Themerson was juntified in discussing it. Running away from the truth is much more harmful than dealing with it openly, however unpleasant it might be. Unfortunately, Mrs. Kozarynowa is not alone in an attempt to glorify her homeland through the denial of truth. It is also most regrettable that her prejudice and misunderstanding of more avant-garde forms of literary expression prevented Zofia Kozarynowa from presenting Stefan Themerson in a way he deserves. Such opinions as hers do a lot of harm to émigré criticism, proving once again how harmful a break with living, ever-changing culture might be, and how easily prejudice and naive patriotism can reduce criticism to unjust and unfounded accusations. Not only those who published in Poland were suspect. Harsh accusations awaited those who somehow managed to leave the communist block after the war. They were, first of all, accused of collaboration with the regime, and émigré organizations even went as far as to demand official explanations and self-criticism. Fortunately this practice had many opponents and was quickly abandoned.

Czesław Miłosz, Marek Hłasko, Stanisław Mrożek to name

but a few, had to go through a painful series of accusations and recriminations in which only the greatest managed to win the acceptance or at least tolerance of the Polish émigré community. Miłosz and Gombrowicz openly refused to grant the power of judgment to other immigrants, and were often extremely sharp in their opinions on the émigré community. One of the worst effects such an atmosphere produced was prejudice in artistic judgments, since literary works of art were often perceived in conjunction with the author's political views. Unfortunately, the artistic criteria do not necessarily correspond with political views, and émigré society seemed to forget that both critics and artists have the right to arrive at their own judgments, as much as they have the right not to belong to any political party if they so wish.

That such a conviction was not accepted as a matter of fact in émigré society can be clearly seen in Miłosz's case. His decision to leave Poland was followed by a stream of the usual accusations, made worse by Miłosz's sharp defence published in the émigré press. As a result of this bitter discussion, in 1951 the Polish émigré monthly Kultura [Culture] found it necessary to close the case by printing a declaration signed by a group of London émigré writers and intellectuals who reminded all and sundry that "a new emigrant has the right to form his own opinions, concerning all problems including émigré activities and to choose his own way according to his conscience" (qtd. in Danilewicz-Zielińska 195, translation mine). It closed the discussion

on Miłosz, but at the same time showed once again that the conflict between the old romantic ideal of emigration, in which an individual was totally subordinated to the cause, and its opponents is alive and very vivid. Czesław Miłosz, Witold Gombrowicz, Marek Hłasko, and Stefan Themerson chose their own paths in exile, stressing their right as individuals to express their own opinions, to search for their own understanding of the world.

Stefan Themerson did not turn away from Polish émigré life at once. He worked in the Film Unit of the Polish Government in London, where he made several films. He published fragments of his books in an émigré periodical Nowa Polska [New Poland], which was created as an antidote to Wiadomości Literackie [Literary News], considered too radical by British and Polish official circles. Nowa Polska was brought to life in 1942 by the distinguished Polish poet Antoni Słonimski. Apart from Themerson's essays and poems, it published Julian Tuwim's masterpiece Kwiaty Polskie [Polish Flowers] and his famous essay My Żydzi polscy [We, Polish Jews], the war-time poems of such well-known Polish poets as Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska and Antoni Słonimski, and essays by Ksawery Pruszyński. The periodical was not liked by the more radical wing of émigré society, since it supported General Sikorski's policy advocating agreement with the Soviet Union.

While still writing for Nowa Polska Themerson did not discuss present-day political issues, but tried to present

his own more general concerns. These articles present a very clear picture of what, for their author, were the most dangerous Polish faults. First of all Themerson disliked the tendency, prevalent in Polish history, to value military heroes over men of knowledge, no matter how many historical reasons there were for such a preference. Every nation--Themerson wrote--has a certain number of geniuses, but this should not be a cause of national pride. A nation can only be proud if these geniuses are given opportunities to develop. According to Themerson the Polish record here was not very positive. There were times in its history when Poland was a very tolerant nation. Poles can be proud of Copernicus, because they did not burn him at the time when Giordano Bruno was burnt in Rome. But Maria Skłodowska-Curie had to study in Paris, and many others had to leave Poland to find better opportunities for their talents ("Z encyklopedii wieczorów rodzinnych" [From an Encyclopaedia of Family Evenings] 157).

In another short essay Themerson said that in order to survive and to achieve something, one has to be guided by reason, intelligence, lack of prejudice, knowledge, and not by faith ("Z encyklopedii wieczorów rodzinnych" 159). Only when a nation abandons a romantic way of thinking, can it hope to achieve something really positive. As did the Polish Positivists before him, he pointed out that hard work could be more important for a nation than spectacular political triumphs: "I think that one school textbook, one theatre play, the echo of one étude of Chopin, one year of

university diplomas helped Warsaw and Poland more than all her political triumphs all together" ("Z encyklopedii wieczorów rodzinnych" 168). He declared himself on the side of truth, not absolute but relative, always open to investigation and change when necessary. He wanted to fight for clarity and precision of our thoughts, to fight against such abstract yet extremely demanding ideas like "honour" or "love of one's country" which let us us justify all means ("Z encyklopedii wieczorów rodzinnych" 180).

Themerson's interest in the universal aspects of the conflict between the two Polish traditions quickly placed him outside the mainstream of émigré writing. Few people were less-suited for the role of a nostalgic writer in exile, limited in his subject-matter to the Polish cause, dependent on local sympathies and antipathies, bound by obligations to politics. Themerson never belonged to any artistic or political group, always remaining independent in his pursuit of ethical values. He wrote and published in English, and the Polish conflict appeared in his writings as an instance of a universal struggle between the forces of knowledge and beliefs.

Yet, as I have already mentioned in the preceding chapter, Themerson places certain restraints on reason. Disappointed by formal logic, which, against the expectations of many twentieth-century thinkers, referred only to the rules of thinking and not to its content, he cautions against abstract thinking as much as against faith.

While Romanticism, equally disappointed with what it called reason, turned to emotions, feelings, and instincts, Themerson found a way out of his dilemma by occupying the middle ground between the two extremes. He turned to mens sana with its direct relation to reality and to basic decency rather than to lofty ideals. Themerson refuses to go where philosophy loses its touch with reality, preferring to keep to simple principles of decency as his "aim of aims." In other words, he gives up PHILOSOPHY and turns to the task of formulating his philosophy of life. The formulation of its principles leads him to his positivist optimism, "based on a philosophy not polluted by beliefs, a logic not defoliated to bare formalism, and an acute awareness of the existence of facts under the symbolism of labels" (Logic, Labels, and Flesh 203). All these principles become a part of his positive philosophy of exile.

To sum up: Themerson has always rebelled against the romantic tradition, which, he felt, was responsible for the emphasis put on emotions rather than impartiality and reason. He was not the only Pole to do so. His views on the Romantic heritage are close to the ideas expressed by Leon Chwistek, Witold Gombrowicz, and the Polish Futurists. From this group of rebels it was Themerson and Gombrowicz who were to share the lot of exiles; significantly both writers expressed positive attitudes towards exile which became the beginnings of their respective world-visions. Although

motivated by different values, as Themerson sought his inspiration in the period of the Enlightenment and Positivism, whereas Gombrowicz turned to the Baroque, both writers managed to transform their national experience into their cosmopolitan philosophies.

Notes

1 Franciszka Themerson, neé Weinks, is an accomplished painter, illustrator, theatre designer, and film maker. She was the co-author of all Themerson's films, and an illustrator of his books. As a designer she made theatre designs for Jarry's Ubu Roi staged by Michael Meschke's theatre company in Stockholm in 1964. With her settings, and music by Krzysztof Penderecki, the play was performed in Colombia, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, etc. Her next success was theatre design for Brecht's Threepenny Opera (1966) which toured Mexico and the U. S. A.

2 This quotation comes from a review by Stefania Zahorska "Polski film--dobry!" [Polish film--good!], translated from a pre-war Polish periodical Literary News 52 (1932), and appeared in Stern's Europa as a part of the documentation of the lost film by Stefan and Franciszka Themerson Europa.

3 Zagrodzki quotes f.a., film artystyczny, film artistique, the artistic film, No. 2 (March-Apr. 1937): 47.

4 Przygoda Człowieka Poczciwego has been translated as "The Adventure of a Good Citizen" in all essays included in the Łódź Museum Catalogue Stefan i Franciszka Themerson. Poszukiwania Wizualne. Visual Researches. Yet as it has been pointed out to me by Prof. André Michalski this translation

removes the possibility of any association of the title with the famous Wizerunek własny żywota człowieka poczciwego [A Faithful Image of an Honest Man] (1558), by Mikołaj Rej. In his long work in verse Rej introduces the figure of a young nobleman who searches for the just way of life and finds it in a good wife and quiet life on his country estate. Since Themerson's honest man, contrary to Rej's protagonist, finds his happiness in art and the mutiny against accepted ways of life, the association is worth preserving in the translation.

5 Zagrodzki quotes Stefan Themerson's, "Dialog tendencyjny," [Tendentious dialogue] Wiadomości Literackie 17 (1933): 16.

6 Jerzy Zagrodzki quotes S. Ozimek, Film polski na obczyźnie. Historia filmu polskiego [Polish Film in Exile. The History of Polish Film] (Warszawa: 1974), 49.

CHAPTER 4

THE POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY OF EXILE IN THE FICTION OF STEFAN THEMERSON, WITOLD GOMBROWICZ, AND IN THE ESSAYS OF BERTRAND RUSSELL

I have frequently called Themerson a positive philosopher of exile; my position, however, requires both justification and explanations. Neither Themerson, Gombrowicz nor Bertrand Russell have declared themselves as positive philosophers of expatriation. However they all share this positive attitude to change which allows them to welcome expatriation as a blessing. A positive attitude to exile is a starting point for their moral and intellectual principles, and it can be observed on many levels in their fiction and essays. The goal of the present chapter is to extract from Themerson's narratives these characteristics which have their source in his positive attitude to exile, and to compare them to the system of values unfolded in the fiction of Witold Gombrowicz, another twentieth-century writer who turned estrangement from his native country into an advantage. Since Themerson's world-view is indebted to the moral philosophy developed by Bertrand Russell, an attempt will be made to compare their respective attitudes to man and to his role in society--one of the most important aspects of the philosophy of exile.

One can think of several positive aspects of exile.

First of all it allows exiles to look back at their native country and its culture from a new perspective. This advantage was mentioned by the three writers: Themerson, Gombrowicz, and Russell who are all convinced that the detachment from one's own culture is a necessary step towards objectivity and tolerance. Secondly, exile may foster greater objectivity and readiness to understand the country where one has chosen to live. Again, a different perspective helps enormously in observing another society and in judging its values. Yet, for a true positive philosopher of exile, expatriation becomes more than just a vantage point. It is gradually transformed into the basis for his views and principles; it stimulates, sharpens his perception, offers a frame of comparison and suggests a way out of many previously insoluble problems. This universal value of life outside one's native culture is an underlying feature of the philosophy of exile visible, as I intend to show, in the works of Themerson, Gombrowicz, and Russell. Their writings prove that in the twentieth century the negative view of man as an alienated individual has its counterpart in the philosophy of a cosmopolitan writer who contributes to the dream of an integrated humanity.

Since Themerson's positive philosophy of exile is not an explicit philosophical system but a set of guidelines which, the author hopes, may prove capable of helping an individual in his search for values, its reconstruction has to be based on the analysis of Themerson's fiction. I have

already mentioned that his narratives belong to the genre of rhetorical fiction in which both characters and action are subordinated to the presentation and analysis of the main idea. As much as the discussion of Candide or other eighteenth-century tales was the discussion of their message, so the reader of Themerson's tales is justified in looking beyond their presented world for the values they discuss.

Exile treated as an acceptable and valuable alternative for an individual who feels at odds with the world he lives in was already visible in Themerson's pre-war film The Adventure of an Honest Man. Its protagonist discovered that going backwards, which isolated him from the majority of his countrymen, was the beginning of a new way of looking at the world. Through an act of defiance an ordinary individual was transformed into an artist who experienced his "two weeks on the Parnassus," and there was no doubt that he would not return to the world he had left. But this pre-war film was just a hint at an idea which became the central theme of Themerson's post-war books, written in the exile which suited him so well.

Before I pass on to the discussion of individual works a few comments on Themerson's versatile literary output seem necessary. Although in my thesis I am concentrating mainly on his fiction and essays, one has to remember that Themerson is also a poet and the author of an opera: Sir Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio which was performed by Teatr

Wybrzeże in 1981 in Sopot, Poland. In pre-war Poland Themerson was known as a writer of educational and amusing books for children (see bibliography). His volume of poetry, Dno Nieba [The Depths of the Heavens], written in Polish before and during the war, was published in 1949 in London and it contains Themerson's impressions from pre-war Paris, seen as a city free from the overpowering history which troubled his countrymen, and his thoughts inspired by the war in which he fought. Themerson only began publishing his narratives in post-war London, yet some of them had been written during the war. Professor Mmaa's Lecture, for instance, was written in 1942-43, but published only in 1953. Bayamus written in 1944 had to wait until 1949 for its first edition. Fragments of Cardinal Pölätüo, written in Polish, appeared already in 1945 in Nowa Polska, but the completed English version was published only in 1961. Then came The Adventures of Peddy Bottom and Wooff, Wooff or Who Killed Richard Wagner?, both published in 1951. In 1956 Themerson published his essay Factor I, while in 1958 appeared his book on Kurt Schwitters--Kurt Schwitters in England. Tom Harris, considered by John Hall to be Themerson's masterpiece, was published in 1967. A year later appeared Themerson's book on Apollinaire--Apollinaire's Lyrical Ideograms. In the 70's Themerson wrote his important collection of essays Logic, Labels and Flesh (published in 1974), his only dialogue Special Branch (1972), and his short story General Piesc (1976).

While discussing Themerson's literary output I do not

follow chronology. Instead I group his narratives according to the central issues they discuss and pass briefly over those which do not contribute anything new to the discussion of the positive philosophy of exile. I start my discussion with The Adventures of Peddy Bottom since it contains Themerson's most general approach to exile and its significance for an individual. Other narratives concentrate on particular aspects of the philosophy of exile: Professor Mmaa's Lecture together with Wooff Wooff or Who Killed Richard Wagner? look at the impact isolation and the rejection of society have on an individual who chooses exile, trying to point to the redeeming features of the possible personal failures. Bayamus examines the role language plays in Themerson's philosophy of exile, while Tom Harris concentrates on the possibilities of enriching one's potential for impartiality through expatriation. General Piesc, preoccupied with two Polish traditions and their impact on an individual, formed the basis for my comparison of Themerson's attitudes with Witold Gombrowicz's positive philosophy of expatration. Cardinal Pölätho, which I consider to be Themerson's masterpiece, is by far his fullest discussion on art as a form of exile, and is therefore, discussed separately in my last chapter on the twentieth-century avant-garde. Themerson's views expressed in his essays are used to illustrate and to clarify his fiction throughout my work.

In The Adventures of Peddy Bottom, the most general

but at the same time the most direct of Themerson's declarations pro exile, the value of expatriation is presented under a guise of detachment, not so much from society, but from the confusion resulting from a multitude of ideologies attempting to explain the world. This little book, which recalls children's stories, is Themerson's declaration of the importance of placing oneself in the position of an outsider who never feels and never wants to feel a part of any ideology. Peddy Bottom is a picaresque hero, an isolated individual in a hostile society which, as Richard Bjornson maintains, is a characteristic situation in picaresque fiction (4). Yet he is also the protagonist of a twentieth-century philosophical tale who wanders through ideologies rather than countries. In Themerson's tale the worlds Peddy visits are determined by their characteristic modes of thinking and the relationship of the protagonist to these modes of thinking replaces picaresque interests in the relationship between an individual and society. Although Themerson will discuss the relationship of an individual to society at length in his other narratives, in this tale Peddy's exile is still only an intellectually motivated decision not to follow any of the ideologies he encounters on his journey.

The Adventures of Peddy Bottom can be summarized as a quest for identity in which exile is a valuable ally. Hoping to find an answer to his question: "who am I?" Peddy Bottom, visits a number of worlds only to discover that his question has a different answer in all of them. For a

political tyrant he is a stubborn citizen who has to be groomed according to his regulations, for an art critic he is a nobody whose opinions on art are insignificant, for a formal philosopher he is an interesting partner as long as he appears to be a follower. On his way, Peddy discovers not only that no one is able to answer his question, but that a prolonged stay in any of the worlds ends with an attempt to subordinate him and to stop his quest for self identity. In order to be free Peddy has to leave all the worlds he is visiting; this conclusion is shared by another character, the Camel, who leaves his well-payed university job in order to wander with Peddy and to write his beloved poems.

The chapters of the book are separate, peculiar, and highly metaphorical worlds which leave no doubt in the reader's mind that the real issues of the tale are centered on the problem of identity:

> 'But what am I?' asked Peddy Bottom.
> 'You are Peddy Bottom. You are The-whole-world minus The-whole-world-without-you. That's what you are!' said the Camel. 'Didn't you know that?'
> 'Yes, I did,' said Peddy Bottom. 'But all the men I met on my way think there is something doggy about me, and all the dogs think there is something human about me,...and all the cats think there is something fishy about me, and one of them wanted to eat me, and I was very annoyed, and I would like to know who I am, Sir!' (11)

At the outset of the tale Peddy addresses his question to the Camel, the wisest creature in the Chapter. He is, however, quick to find out that he does not fit generally accepted standards. This first lesson teaches Peddy that

classification is not the answer to his problems:

> 'You are what you've done!' said the Camel. 'Have you done anything?'
> 'Nothing,' said Peddy Bottom.
> 'Then you are Nothing,' said the Camel.
> 'Well....' said Peddy Bottom, who disliked the idea of being Nothing, 'once upon a time I wrote a very short poem....'
> 'Was it successful?!'
> 'I don't know....' said Peddy Bottom.
> 'You should know!' said the Camel. 'Because if it proved successful, men will say that you are a man, dogs will say that you are a dog, fishes will say that you are a fish, and cats will say that you are a cat. But if it did not prove successful, men will say that you are a dog, dogs will say that you are a fish, fishes will say that you are a cat, and cats will say that you are a camel!' (11-12)

At first Peddy is not happy with being so difficult to classify. The Camel, who will eventually choose exile himself, is trying to tell him that the answer cannot be supplied by others. Like Voltaire's Candide, Peddy has to realize that ready-made systems do not work, and that being somebody's disciple or believer will only give one the illusion of a complete answer to existential problems. Peddy is definitely not ready to sign up. He is wary of simple solutions and he wants to preserve his independence. In Chapter the Second he finds himself in a town reminiscent of Stalinist rule, where everybody must identify himself with a triangular hat. In this world round heads are moulded to fit hats, and the Shopkeeper is eager to reshape Peddy's head to make it uniform. When Peddy refuses he is forced to leave the city. To his remark that he wanted to leave it in the first place the Shopkeeper replies: "You wanted to be <u>free</u> to go, and now you are <u>forced</u> to go! Ha! Ha! Ha!" He

laughed heartily in Peddy Bottom's face" (26).

In a similar manner Peddy refuses to accept other one-sided answers, learning at the same time how disappointing it is to ask those who are limited by rigid ideologies. King Penguin, for instance, is such a disappointment. He is Themerson's "bare formalist" who, although described by other characters as being able to explain everything in detail, only engages in pointless discussions on linguistic details in order to avoid real problems. He has lost touch with the world outside his formalisms showing no desire to verify his abstract system. Since "the empirical ladder" Themerson insisted upon in his essays has been rejected, the result is a barren discussion for discussion's sake. Peddy has to learn that closed systems of reasoning provide meager results, and that the only way out is to observe the world and draw one's own conclusions. After a series of such disappointing encounters, Peddy Bottom no longer asks who he is, but, refusing to be caught in any of the worlds, continues his journey accompanied by the Camel, now a partner in his journey and not a teacher anymore.

The attraction Themerson feels towards exile, in both its physical and philosophical sense, is underlined by a careful manipulation of distance in his fiction. The distance between the reader and the presented world is also encouraged in The Adventures of Peddy Bottom. The grotesque features of the protagonist, his partly human and partly animal shape reminiscent of medieval grotesque figures,

serves as a reminder that the "practical interests" of the reader should be suspended. Emotional response towards the fate of characters is also discouraged. Themerson achieves it by relying on one of the fundamental rules of nonsense which calls for immediate introduction of nonsensical associations any time emotions appear, in order to render them powerless. When Edward Lear cried in his famous poem, he immediately purchased "pancakes and lotion" to counterbalance the flow of emotions. Unhappy Captain Metapherein who tells Peddy his sad story has to submit to the same rule:

> 'The lion and the lioness heard it [the story of his unhappy life] twenty-seven times and couldn't bear it any more, and ran away weeping....The trees that were growing here made a bet that they could stand up to a thousand times, and after nine hundred and ninety-nine they couldn't bear it any more and ran away, leaving a deep hole behind them.'
> 'I don't see any hole, Sir,' said Peddy Bottom.
> 'Certainly you don't see it,' said Captain Metapherein. 'The hole heard the story of my life one thousand and forty-seven times and couldn't bear it any more, and ran away.' (39)

The poor Captain quickly becomes more nonsensical than unhappy. It turns out that the solution of his problem is much closer than he has ever expected. His wife, whom he feared lost, is close by. Peddy manages to bring them together, because he has the necessary distance from the self-destructive fears of the two characters. Peddy's desire to preserve his distance from the problems he encounters helps him many a time, and it is always perceived by the narrator as a positive feature.

Within Themerson's set of values distance can also become an important component of art. In Chapter the Fifth Peddy meets an art critic, Monna Antimagatta, who strongly believes that emotions are the core of art:

> 'She sings so beautifully when she is unhappy! My theory is that one needs a toothache, and altogether to be unhappy, to be able to create a great work of art.'
> 'I'm sorry,' said Peddy Bottom, 'but I don't believe that's true.' (81-2)

Here, Peddy feels very strongly that personal, emotional involvement does not always have to be the essence of art. As much as his views on exile, his views on art are dictated by his fear of romanticism. I will discuss Stefan Themerson's views on art in a separate chapter; now it should be enough to stress that with other twentieth-century avant-garde artists he shares the conviction that distance and universalism can become as essential for art as it is for the process of reasoning.

When The Adventures of Peddy Bottom ends, its protagonist is reconciled with his position of an exile and is ready to continue his metaphorical journey. Peddy has gone through seven chapters encountering different follies and menaces of the contemporary world. His inquisitive mind helped him to guard his distance and his independence; now he is free to work on his own philosophy of life. Peddy has not only proved the importance of detachment, but he has also managed to expose the absurdities of several popular ideologies which tried to win his support. He has consistently refused to assimilate in any of the worlds he

encountered, and at the end of the tale, this refusal proved to be his victory. Like Voltaire in Candide Themerson leaves his protagonist and his readers without a philosophical system which would help them understand the world, but with certain fundamental guidelines which may become the basis for a more independent attitude to the world. The twentieth-century Candide is proving that the eighteenth-century ideals of rationalism and objectivity are still valid even though the world has changed. With his apotheosis of exile Themerson is siding with the old values of the philosophes, illustrating their universal importance through twentieth-century props.

Yet The Adventures of Peddy Bottom is neither a detailed study of the consequences of exile nor of a philosophy based on detachment. In the whole gallery of Themerson's characters Peddy is privileged; he can leave his worlds as he pleases. Yet Themerson never forgets that an individual is a part of society, which is ruled by principles often far removed from the values springing from cosmopolitanism. In such a society, the objective vantage point may prove to be an ideal impossible to realize. Bombarded by "truths," doctrines, ideologies, an individual finds out that his freedom is relative and his positive philosophy of exile does not exempt him from the problems of his society. So Themerson tests his protagonists by demanding how well they would defend their values under pressure. Their often hopeless struggles to retain their

integrity become their contribution to humanity and their proof that a positive philosopher of exile is not a dweller in an ivory tower, but a man who has to fight for his values. The struggle of a termite professor becomes the fullest testimony of the frustrations and the dangers a quest for reason and detachment can bring about. True to his eighteenth-century sympathies Themerson chooses irony and humour to help him illustrate his point. That is why he prefers to observe termites from a human point of view, and humans from the point of view of a termite.

Professor Mmaa's Lecture is a study of society at a time of crisis. Themerson invites his reader to observe the life in a termitary and to judge, from his human perspective, the actions of its inhabitants. The story begins at a moment when Prof. Mmaa, one of the best termite scientists, is starting his cycle of lectures on homo. Termites have made man the object of their studies, and their knowledge about the human world, together with their prejudices and their errors, are reflected in Prof. Mmaa's lectures. This, however, is not the whole story. The termitary has its own problems as its very existence is threatened by an imminent invasion of ants. Termites have political problems, they face social unrest, and they are getting ready for war. Their politicians cannot agree on how the termitary should be governed; their scientists cannot agree on the significance and interpretation of their findings on homo. Yet, in all that confusion, they are interesting to watch, for, as Prof. Mmaa puts it, "if anyone

expresses an opinion on a subject which we happen to know better than he, his very mistakes become a source of information not on the subject itself but on him who talks about it" (3).

It is not very hard to notice that the termites are endowed with human features, and that their problems are human problems shown from a different point of view. Termite scientists, political leaders, and philosophers are caricatures of human scientists, political leaders, and philosophers, and satire becomes the ultimate outcome of the whole masquerade. Viewed from a human perspective termites are small, insignificant insects who proudly speak of their knowledge and their search for truth. But as much as Lilliputian society was a reflection of the world of humans, termite society is but an invitation to examine ourselves from an unusual point of view. The reader of Professor Mmaa's Lecture is conveniently placed in a world distant from the one he observes. His position as an outsider who is discovering the rules of the termite world, grants him a better chance to be objective. Consequently, the author is inviting the reader to use the same principle of observation while reflecting on human problems.

The world inside the termitary is far from being a peaceful one. The termite society is divided into conflicting political fractions. Some termites believe in the iron-fisted policy towards social unrest, others want to use social discontent to gain power. Unscrupulous leaders

and would-be saviours seduce termites with their revolutionary fervour. Demagogy is the order of the day since termite politicians find out that feelings are so much easier to appeal to than reason. No one is looking for a rational solution to the problems; only power counts and any way of preserving or gaining it is considered good and acceptable.

Politicians are not the only ones who have problems. Termite scientists, who try to examine and explain the world around them, often find themselves at a loss. Their data is insufficient; their hypotheses, therefore, are often wrong. There might be nothing wrong with trying different explanations as long as they are treated as hypotheses. Yet while Prof. Mmaa is trying hard to keep down to earth with his speculations on <u>homo</u>, his learned colleagues, Prof. Sisigmunt Durch-Freud and Prof. Soul, are much less cautious. They make the mistake of believing in their hypotheses and trying to fit their empirical data to their theories. And, to illustrate this tendency, the amused reader is presented with an impressive attempt at explaining the mythical significance of four button holes and their link with the four corners of <u>homo</u> houses and rooms.

Prof. Mmaa, a sensitive and rational termite, slowly realizes that the reliance on emotions and prejudices which he observes around himself is not the result of ignorance but the result of deeply rooted selfishness, hatred, and stupidity which are so much harder to fight than the lack of knowledge:

> It's that sort of nonsense that I hate, you understand? The spiteful nonsense, the nonsense by which we are governed. I hate that nonsense-mountain which surrounds me and grows higher with every minute. I hate that mountain of prejudice, stupidity, cunning and selfishness, that mountain of impotence and poltroonery in the face of the least phosphorence. I hate that mountain which I cannot pierce down even with the narrowest of tunnels, but which I would like to blow up with my hatred. (218; Ch.10)

Mmaa is forced to get involved in the political issues of the termitary because his life becomes directly affected by them. His beloved university, the seat of objectivity and knowledge, has become the scene of violent political discussions. His own wet-nurse has been arrested for subversive thoughts and Mmaa cannot help noticing that the genuine needs of the majority of termites are ruthlessly used by politicians to procure power.

Surrounded by prejudice, stupidity, cunning, and selfishness Mmaa feels compelled to get involved in the problems of his world. Yet hatred of injustice proves to be a destructive adviser. Mmaa decides to kill the termite leader, Big Bug. The murder does not take place because Mmaa, helped by the news of an ant invasion, realizes the futility of such an act. By abandoning his plan he does not, however, escape punishment. Arrested and sentenced to exile outside the life-preserving termitary, unable to feed himself, he is dying to an accompaniment of drilling noises. The humans are preparing to blow up the termitary.

Prof. Mmaa is a positive exile caught in the web of social and political relations over which he has no control.

He is not, like Peddy Bottom was, allowed to leave the world he dislikes. He has to live in society even though he disapproves of its values. There is no escape from the hatred and stupidity. As Mmaa, sentenced to the upper reaches of the termitary, awaits death, humans are drilling holes to blow it up. This other world the professor was so eager to explore is not only bringing ultimate destruction to his world but it is, in itself, involved in a state of war. Hatred and stupidity rule the world and the best a philosopher of exile can hope for is to be granted, even if only for a while, a place outside conflicts where he can formulate his rules of rational thinking. Yet, Themerson points out, one should not think of this place outside conflicts as a privilege granted to the few. Themerson's heroes have to fight for a greater share of objectivity and rationality, and their fight is seen as a rare but essential form of involvement in the world's problems. Only thanks to the people who, against all odds, manage to introduce a universal perspective into the analysis of forces which separate people, does humanity have something that joins it together.

Not only philosophy has to be involved with social praxis to retain its validity, but art and science have to do the same. One of Prof. Mmaa's most promising students, Nonobody, constructed a pianola--an instrument capable of creating beautiful sequences of smells which made termites move in a particular way, even against their wish.

Politicians immediately notice that the relation between smells and termite physical reactions to them can be used as a sophisticated weapon control system. This teaches a termite student that both art and science can be used in a different way than it was intended by artists and scientists. A creation, innocent in itself, can be used for purposes which are contrary to what its creator believes in. The relationship between an individual and society is extremely complex, and few of our actions have no further socio-political implications. This places heavy responsibility on the individual and creates the need for criteria which would serve as guidelines. By stressing the importance of detachment from one's native culture, Themerson is stressing that the values of loyalty to one's country no longer prove sufficient. Instead he is proposing that we should reconsider the old cosmopolitan ideal based on the importance of a relationship between the individual and humanity. When loyalty towards all of mankind replaces the loyalty to a part of it, the individual will be compelled to re-examine his values from a universal perspective. Judging from Professor Mmaa's Lecture, Themerson does not see it as a simple process, but he is convinced that it is necessary if the destruction of the termitary is not to be a premonition of the fate of our planet.

Professor Mmaa's Lecture can be read as a dystopia which shows what happens when society lets itself be governed by feelings and beliefs. In his introduction to the

book Bertrand Russell recommended it as a useful gospel for those who believed, like himself, that the world contained too many people believing in too many things, and that the ultimate wisdom might be contained in the precept that the less we believe the less harm we should do. That is why Themerson is not formulating his positive philosophy of exile as another doctrine, but treats it as a starting point towards perfecting human awareness of themselves and the world. He prefers to conduct an investigation into the meaning of popular assertions, into the principles of thinking, and reasons behind actions. Exile becomes a consequence of his philosophy and his artistic credo. Themerson is sure that by standing by he is able to contribute to the well-being of society better than he would by assimilating.[6] Motivated by his respect for the individual, he wants to serve as a go-between, an interpreter of various positions and points of view. As an exile, not fully belonging to any culture, he wants to expose those phenomena which threaten mankind. This is the ultimate aim of positive exile. Themerson's exiles do not contemplate their uniqueness: they interpret, show the dangers of oversimplifications, warn. They do not always succeed in achieving personal happiness, but even the ultimate failure, death, does not make exile less positive. By propagating scepticism, positive exiles participate in the life of society, precisely by refusing to go along with it, and they have a point stressing how important their role

is.

In Wooff Wooff or Who Killed Richard Wagner? Themerson takes a similar position and elaborates it even further. In this short narrative Themerson states that the duty of an individual is not to side with the majority, but to protect his right to be different. Since Themerson is convinced that an exile is more likely to develop a relatively more rational and objective point of view, a defence of the individual becomes the defence of a philosophy of exile. "In a society governed by a minority, Democracy meant the defence of the rights of the majority. But in a society governed by the majority Democracy is Democracy only if it means the defence of the rights of the minority" (45-6). This defence of the minority equals the defence of the diversity of opinions and points of view which give testimony to the complexity of the world.

The task of defending the complexity of the world against oversimplifications is given to Lampadephor Metaphrastes. He is an unusual interpreter who interprets the popular assertions about the world, showing his clients how these assertions look from a different angle. He does it because he is convinced that the world "is more complicated than the truths about it" (42), and it needs people who try to look beyond clichés. Lampadephor Metaphrastes describes himself as:

> one who refuses to accept dogmatic assertions at their face value, or any claims to knowledge not proved to my own reason; one who adopts a critical attitude in any sphere of knowledge, and prefers to suspend judgment;

> one who doubts or denies the validity of any judgement, and the competence of reason, outside the field of human experience; one of the school of Greek philosophy, founded by Pyrrho of Elis, holding the doctrine that no real, certain knowledge of things is possible, even of the so-called facts of experience, and that universal mental doubt, undisturbed and calm, should be the attitude of all philosophers. (49-50)

One of the first consequences of scepticism manifests itself in the mistrust towards social consensus, especially when it concerns art:

> if you say that one loaf of bread is more important than a volume of Shakespeare, I agree. But if you say two loaves are, I'll ask: for how many gullets? Because the existence of the second loaf in your larder, and of an antimacassar on your armchair, and of a pink lampshade on your staircase, is less important than the existence of the most shabby and hermetic volume of verse. (47)

Themerson is convinced that the individual has to be given the freedom of development and of self-expression, even if no one is ready to pay for his "volume of poetry." He is for the diversity of opinions, since they can contribute to a thorough analysis, and warns against the dangers of taking a social consensus for a yard-stick against which somebody's vision of the world is measured. Yet this right to remain the minority has to be constantly defended against the majority of society and can never be taken for granted. What is more, there is no guarantee that being that minority is necessarily right. Themerson's characters are lost in a world of conflicting values which try to win them to their side. Their philosophy of exile helps them find their way amidst all that chaos, but it does not guarantee success.

Themerson realizes that his defence of the minority may

be a hopeless task and that the philosophy based on the advantages of detachment can prove impossible to practise in a world governed by the majority. No matter how sensitive, objective, and tolerant an individual is, he can be easily crushed by the power of the state or by public opinion. In Wooff Wooff or Who Killed Richard Wagner? both the narrator and his friend Lampadephor are condemned to death, helpless in the world governed by opinions, Gallup polls, and demagogy. Accused of murder they have no means of protecting themselves; true to the rules of their world their defence is based entirely on unfounded public sympathy which easily changes into equally unfounded antipathy. Before the execution they are offered a chance to live, if only they agree to take part in a military medical experiment. True to their principles they refuse to support actions with which they do not agree, and they choose death as their ultimate exile. They are not the only characters in Themerson's fiction to make such a choice. A termite professor was forced to follow the same path, proving that the fight for reason can be not only frustrating but also dangerous.

Let me turn now to another aspect of Themerson's positive philosophy of exile, one related to language and the mechanisms of its usage. Bayamus, which Bertrand Russell praised for being nearly as mad as the world, shows that one of the first warning signs that accompanies human irrational reactions is an emotional approach to language. For Themerson the war offered ample proofs that when emotions

take over language becomes an excellent tool of propaganda and demagogy. Emotionally charged words by-pass reason and appeal directly to the heart. The philosopher of exile, helped by the distance from both the society he lives in and its language, immediately notices the signs of danger and tries to make others aware of what he sees. That is what Themerson set out to do in Bayamus:

> I didn't approach the task as an English writer would. It was different. I didn't try to 'relish' the language. I didn't allow myself to be influenced by any style, or to resort to any tradition. On the contrary. I wanted to shake the language free of all associations and parochial subtleties, and it was precisely because English was not my mother tongue that it was easier for me to do that. Because all this took place at the time when the kernels of words had lost all touch with reality, and the emotional aureolas hovering around them had begun to exist in their right and had gained the magical power of acting on our nervous systems. A few syllables were sufficient to force us to buy a tube of toothpaste or to cut each other's throats. I rebelled against those surlinguistic aureolas. (Hall x)

Themerson's positive attitude to exile, his linguistic and cultural detachment from the society he lives in, once again prove to be an ally in his fight. Bayamus was written in order to exemplify this necessity of detachment from the language in which we formulate our thoughts.

The story of Bayamus, a three-legged mutant who potentially has the ability to introduce genetic changes to humanity is merely a pretext for suggesting the necessity of looking at the language from the point of view of an outsider. Themerson sees language as a means of observing the mental processes it discloses. As such, it is both fascinating and dangerous. The narrator of Bayamus would

agree with Bertrand Russell who has warned that:

> Language...though a useful and even indispensable tool, is a dangerous one, since it begins by suggesting a definiteness, discreteness, and quasi-permanence in objects which physics seems to show that they do not possess. The philosopher, therefore, is faced with the difficult task of using language to undo the false beliefs that it suggests. ("The Uses of Language" 135)

In the story the tendency to manipulate others by means of language becomes one of the most dangerous of human traits. Such manipulation becomes possible mainly because we allow ourselves to be seduced by linguistic or mental associations rather than try to express the nature of the world which surrounds us. "[W]e all lose the meaning of words we use," says the narrator in Bayamus, "we become quite satisfied with verbal formulae; afraid of reality, we don't use anything but stereotyped expressions; we like to eat catchwords and we like to sleep with clichés" (48). As a result we live in a falsified world where true understanding, tolerance, and the acceptance of reality is made impossible. The world is busy dividing itself into communities which, in turn, are being busy imposing on individuals intricate networks of mental associations and emotional obligations. We can either accept these associations at face value or examine them in order to determine their origin. The first way is trouble-free; the second requires analysis and it may reveal unpleasant surprises.

The narrator of Bayamus suggests a method of achieving

greater awareness of the reality hidden behind emotionally charged words. He calls it Semantic Poetry. It is at first introduced as a humorous concept, according to which words should be treated with utmost caution: "instead of allowing them to evoke the clichés stored in your mind, you may try to find the true reality to which every word points, and that is what I call Semantic Poetry" (67). This linguistic awareness is illustrated in the book through elaborate descriptions of interiors and long Semantic Poetry translations of poems. One of them is a Polish popular song about an uhlan trampled by his comrades in the heat of battle. The original song carries with it a load of patriotic emotions and, in spite of its literal meaning, gives a joyfull feeling of the triumph of patriotism over death. Its Semantic Poetry translation confronts the reader with the reality of the lyrics, putting patriotic emotions in perspective, forcing reflection rather than an emotional response. Here is a literal translation of the song into English:

How nice it is when during a little war -bis-
The uhlan falls from his horse -bis-
His comrades don't regret him -bis-
They even trample him -bis-

And here is its Semantic Poetry translation:

How n i c e it is in that jolly good open
conflict
between nations

How pretty it is in that jolly smart active
international hostility

carried on by force of arms

When a light-cavalry soldier
armed with a weapon of offence
& defence
consisting of a pointed iron head
fixed to a shaft 9
or 10 feet in length
used for thrusting
& parrying

passes through space from the level of the spine of his horse
to the level of the earth

From the level of the spine of his horse
to the level of the earth

His partners
participators in that open
conflict
between nations
companions
associates sharing the same condition of this active
international hostility
carried on by force of arms
undergoing the same experiences as he does

do not feel any grief
sorrow
sympathy for him

do not regard him with desire to help
relieve
spare

They even tread upon him
so as to crush him
with the modified forms
of the toe-nails
of their horses... (80).

At this point Semantic Poetry is a half-humorous game, but it becomes much more serious at the bottle party where the 'ring master' explains that it can be used to clarify our ways of thinking:

you may hear that a man, after he had got 164 dollars

out of a Jew, delivered him to the Gestapo, and you exclaim with astonishment: "How can a Christian do it?!" You are surprized because you have in your mind only the deductive definition of the word "Christian," your full exclamation being: "How can a person who professes the religion and doctrines taught by Jesus Christ and His Church, and who adheres to the code of conduct enjoyed by them--do it?" You can't solve that problem and you are puzzled by it. But try and get a slightly more inductive definition in your exclamation; would it not run somewhat as follows:

HOW CAN ONE

who was baptised after he was born
one who was told to be good because, if he wasn't, a Jew would come and take him away in his sack;

one who was told he couldn't have two-pence to buy ice-cream because there was rent to be paid to that rich Jew, father of...

one who was told: he had to free Christianity from those to whom even God's Love had closed the entrance to Heaven-

--do it? (97)

With the right questions which probe the significance of words and expressions one can achieve a greater awareness of the complexity of the world. Themerson is not discovering anything new by stressing the value of being rational and analytical. Yet he is right to point out that the capability for rational thought is a property common to all people and can, therefore, become the basis for human unity. Faith cannot promote unity because it demands certainty that our beliefs are true. Scepticism will accomodate plurality and can, therefore, become the basis for "cosmopolis." Since Themerson sees national loyalty as one of the sources of abused emotions, he is advocating the state of exile from

one's native culture and, consequently, from one's native language. This thought was well expressed by one of the characters in Bayamus:

> I know 46 languages....And I assure you I prefer to read Russian literature in English translation, English literature in French, French in Spanish, Spanish in German....When I read a translation I feel an author cannot cheat me so easily. He cannot delude me with the sonorities of his words and with all the associations each of his words carries in the original. In the translation I can see the 'couleur locale' from the outside, not as one who is himself participating in it, not as one born in the same parish as the author, but as a man of the world. (94)

Themerson does not blame language for the evils of the world. He feels that it merely reflects the mechanisms of human reasoning, and offers not only excellent examples, but also an early warning signal against the mistakes of thinking which lead us astray. Yet although the positive philosophy of exile is an advantage, it is not a guarantee of rationality. The narrator of Bayamus learns about it at the bottle party. The 'ring master' proves to him that his notion of reality was based on his ignorance. The victim of a medical experiment, he is not the master of his senses; therefore, his perceptions can be as misleading as emotions. With all his detachment from language he is vulnerable and confused. Rationality and detachment help avoid many mistakes, but they cannot be considered the panacea for the world's problems. Yet, Themerson concludes, even these limitations make the rational way a more promising one.

Since one of Themerson's most cherished principles is to avoid system-building, his positive philosophy of exile

is not a system, but to use his own expression, it is a part of his personal set of "co-ordinates" which helps him assess his experience. Every person has his own set of "co-ordinates" which represent his experience, beliefs, opinions, knowledge, in other words, his world-view. There are also sets of "co-ordinates" which are social, representing the values of a particular community, society, party or ideology. Themerson prefers co-ordinating to classifying because: "[i]n order to classify, we abstract properties, and shut our eyes to the fact that it is we who do so, and that a property changes its significance and its character when we disjoint it by disjoining it from other properties" (Logic, Labels and Flesh 56). The set of co-ordinates, however, has always a clearly defined point of origin "[t]hus making it at once clear which of the many realities is being revealed, the reality of the einsteinian space-traveller or that of a newtonian physicist, the reality of the barmaid or that of a prophet who reveals his God" (60). Exile becomes a natural consequence of thinking in terms of co-ordinates. It not only enriches the number of axes but also makes one aware of the multitude of other, both cultural and individual, sets of co-ordinates. A philosopher of exile is striving to enrich his awareness of the complexity of the world, and not to offer universal rules which would try to explain it:

> We strive to communicate by trying to explain and understand the tapestry of each other's world, and this cannot be achieved by putting each other into the

> predicating cages of a classification system. On the other hand, rich in diversity, we have enough in common to be able to approach each other without surrendering the subtleties and nuances. To surrender them may be absolutely vital to any philosophy of mathematics. But not-surrendering-them is absolutely vital to the philosophy of philosophy. To try to find the universal, simple laws that underlie the variety of the jungle--is one thing. To try to do so by defoliating the jungle--is another. (Logic, Labels and Flesh 44-45)

Tom Harris is devoted to the problem of how hard it is not to defoliate the jungle.

Tom Harris touches on one more aspect related to the positive philosophy of exile, the possibility of objectivity and detachment in human relations. It is unlike any other of Themerson's narratives; Themerson departs from nonsense and the grotesque. Its characters are fully human and are presented in a realistic milieu. Its protagonist, Tom Harris, by birth belongs to the British lower class and becomes an exile in his own society long before leaving England. The plot of Tom Harris is built around the mysterious death of Sir Francis, with the protagonist as one of the suspects. Sir Francis was involved in the staging of a theatrical production which was to start revolutionary social changes through altering human attitudes to physical appearances. The old lord believed that literature and art made people associate certain physical features with moral attributes. These stereotypes, according to Sir Francis, were responsible for many human problems and he wanted to change them. Convinced that to start a social upheaval it should be enough to show people how shallow their associations were, he decided to stage Hamlet in a way which

would defy popular associations between morality and appearance. Thus Hamlet was played by a short, ugly man; Ophelia was modelled after a mentally ill girl, whom the actress visited in hospital; whereas Rosencrantz and Guildernstein were handsome and honest looking. The production turned out to be a complete failure. Neither the actors nor the audience accepted the point of the performance. One of the reasons of the defeat was that Sir Francis's theory became more and more abstract. What had started as an idea, shared and discussed with others, quickly lost touch with the outside world. The culmination of this detachment from life came when Sir Francis started inventing stories of the imaginary progress of his revolution. He related them to Lady Celia, his onetime partner, now paralized and unconscious after a stroke. No one was sure whether Lady Celia could hear or understand him, yet Sir Francis kept coming with more and more stories. Lady Celia's nurse listened to these falsehoods with growing indignation, and she was the only one to declare that it was all "rubbish."

While the story of Sir Francis's obsession is being revealed, the reader slowly learns more and more about the true object of the author's attention, Tom Harris. A lower class boy, treated as stupid from early childhood and trained to accept his place at the lowest level of British society, he is slowly freeing himself from the restrictions placed on him by others. He is, in turn, a waiter at a

Chinese restaurant, a hair-dresser, The Man with The Monkey--a vagabond spending his time in London pubs, a husband of an aristocratic wife, and "il professore" Harris at Genoa university. All these identities reveal something new about Tom, yet all stress his fundamental desire to avoid being classified and his passionate defence of the freedom to develop.

Tom's attempts at freeing himself from the limitations placed on him by others are closely observed by the first-person narrator, who literally follows Tom around. In order to discover the truth about his character, the narrator has to free himself from his own projection of truth which can be as limiting as the social restrictions placed upon a "dumb," lower-class boy. When these projections take over, the narrative is abandoned and is resumed once again, from the beginning. The reader is witnessing three attempts at reconstructing Tom's diary, and only the third one is carried through to the very end. The narrator summarizes his task as follows:

> Perhaps to put words together in some sort of way is not precisely what I set up to do here. Perhaps what I really think is that I have discovered (well, re-discovered) a fact. A fact about human beings. Perhaps what I am trying to do here is to demonstrate it. It may well be that instead of writing so much for so long, one could have squeezed the essence of it into one epigram...? Brown tried to do it for me when he was fighting with words to express the idea that there is no sense in classifying a person as something or other, and giving up all hope, or fear, as the case might be, that "peoplewise", as he said, everything is possible. And this is precisely what I mean. An epigram, however, even as crisp and brilliant as any of La Rochefoucauld's will still be merely an opinion. And I am not interested in opinions. Even in my own. What I'm

interested in is the truth. (149)

To discover that truth about Tom, the narrator visits him in Italy, where by now his protagonist is an assistant lecturer at Genoa University. We learn that in the course of years Tom has married and divorced Pamela, an aristocratic woman who could not understand either him or the world around her, chiefly because of her preset notions about the world and a tendency to generalize all conclusions:

> And that, I think, was why she couldn't feel properly about war and about colonial people and about the depression, because all the boys of her family had passed through those schools for leaders where they undernourish them, freeze them stiff in winter, and don't allow them to be alone for a moment, and flog them on Saturdays, so whenever she heard of some people being cold or hungry, yes she disapproved of it, but she did it so half-heartedly, because at the same time she knew that her father and her cousins when they were boys had also been hungry and cold, and it had done them good. (178)

People like Pamela--says Themerson -are brought up to have an array of labels ready for classifying people according to their origin, education, and wealth. They also have labels for ideas, accepting or rejecting them without much consideration just because they are fashionable or not. In Themerson's "set of co-ordinates" this is an extremely dangerous attitude. It is responsible, first of all, for perpetuating old myths, prejudices, and divisions which are accepted, unquestioned, by new generations of closed minds. Themerson realizes, however, that it is not enough to expose these limitations. Pamela does not change and does not feel the need to do so. Tom is forced to fight for his identity,

because his life is unbearable in a society which disregards his needs. Pamela is a dutiful member of her class and only a very strong experience could upset her balance. Tom Harris has no revolutionary ambitions; he wants to save himself from the labels with which others could limit his development. He contributes to the development of society through fighting for his integrity, and then by sharing his observations with others. Tom does not attempt to change the world by preaching.

Meanwhile, broken by the complete failure of his revolution Sir Francis dies, and Tom is suspected of killing him. He is eventually cleared of this allegation and receives a cheque for fifty pounds, which Sir Francis included in his will. This check becomes the beginning of a very important relationship in his life. On an impulse Tom gave the money to Giuseppe, a penniless Italian engineer who was trying to convince British industrialists to help him start his revolutionary project concerning electronics. Moved by Tom's generosity Giuseppe promised to contact him if his project succeeded. It did, and thanks to Giuseppe's financial help Tom was able to leave England, move to Italy, and start a new life free from the restrictions of British society.

Both Tom and Giuseppe are Themerson's positive exiles; what Italy does for Tom, England does for Giuseppe. In Italy Tom can start afresh; he is not limited by the social classifications of his fellow countrymen; no one is able to

label him easily. As a foreigner, he is not easy to classify, and he is free to choose his own way of life. Going even further in his escape from his native culture Tom marries a Chinese girl who is ready to accept him as he is, without classifying him according to British or even European values. Being an outsider proves an advantage in Tom's research. Even though he has no conventional education in his discipline, Tom finds out that he is able to contribute to it in an original way. His fresh point of view allows him to approach his problems without the restrictions imposed by a conventional education. He is not only able to be creative, but by breaking away from his class and his country, he is able to determine the course of his own life.

Similarly, Giuseppe finds out that England is a much better place for him to be than his native Italy. Outside his country he is able to deal with people without prejudice; not able to see them as a part of a social structure he sees them as individuals. This ability to see individuals apart from their social milieu becomes a source of his success. That is why he tells his new secretary, Mrs. Holcman:

> In my business I deal with all sorts of people and I don't wish to have a secretary who has been indoctrinated into seeing the world as something where everybody has his superiors and his inferiors classified according to some peculiar system of values ....Be outside. Be different. Cultivate your foreign accent, dress simply but with foreign elegance. (42)

From the outside one can see more since one can pay

attention to the essentials rather than to the externals; success becomes much more possible and greater objectivity is easier to achieve. Themerson makes it clear that although Tom--who is British--is happier outside England, Giuseppe--who is Italian--is able to find in England the milieu which stimulates him and which gives him much better opportunities. For the same reason, even before leaving England, Tom likes his Chinese friends, who are not able to classify him and who themselves escape his classifications. Themerson admits that such a detachment towards one's native values is not easy; that is why he considers exile to be an ally. Expatriation forces an individual to suspend and re-think his values; it does not guarantee a success but it makes it more likely. Themerson's protagonist succeeds in his quest for opportunities, becoming the classic example of a positive exile, happy because expatriation has given him the opportunity to become himself.

The rules of thinking which have the power of rendering life easier may seem very simple, but as Themerson is very well aware, their realization generally proves impossible. People have a tendency to look for clear-cut explanations and to disregard the complexity of issues. They rely on metaphysics and faith, and no amount of talking can persuade them that they could be wrong. It is this certainty in the matters which cannot be verified beyond doubt that is particularly dangerous. Dom Antonio, a priest in Tom Harris, claims unbelievers are worse than animals. He would prefer

the two young lovers--sceptical of all values--to be fascists rather than have no faith whatsoever. Faith as an absolute value is the basis of his philosophy. The narrator does not have too much sympathy for Dom Antonio's ideals preferring the young with their lack of beliefs. They have one important quality; they are suspicious of ideologies, and in Themerson's world such a quality is the beginning of salvation. All positive characters in Themerson's fiction fight for independence from faith, and exile becomes an ally in their fight.

Tom Harris makes one more important point. It asserts the right of an individual to choose the society he wants to live in. To execute this right may not be simple, as Tom himself was to realize, but it may be the best way of retaining the complex vision of the world. Themerson is sure that in Italy Tom can contribute more to the well-being of humanity than he ever could in his native country. Exile becomes an imperative if an individual has no other means of protecting himself from social and cultural pressures. The global perspective from which a philosopher of exile views the set of co-ordinates of his fellow-men is worth so much, because it is a source of objectivity and tolerance.

THEMERSON AND GOMBROWICZ

Since the global perspective of a positive philosopher of exile is so important for Themerson, it should be interesting to examine how this perspective influences his attitude to the Polish tradition. One of the first

manifestations of a look back at the values which constitute the cultural set of co-ordinates developed by one's native society is satire. Since national stereotypes, national vices, and national values look much clearer when viewed from a wider, international perspective, the force which the author sees as a major factor preventing his compatriots from freeing themselves from their provincialism becomes the first target of criticism. For the two Polish émigré writers, Themerson and Gombrowicz, the force in question was the Polish romantic tradition. Both Themerson and Gombrowicz settled their accounts with Poland and her romantic heritage in their fiction. Gombrowicz did it in Trans-Atlantic, a spiritual journal of his first years in Argentina, Themerson in General Piesc, the most Polish of his narratives.

Speaking about the atmosphere of inter-war Poland I have mentioned that Witold Gombrowicz was one of the rebels against the romantic tradition. He was also one of very few Polish writers who have openly praised emigration and considered it a necessary step in the development of the individual. As it was in Themerson's case, the positive attitude to expatriation became a starting point for Gombrowicz's philosophy, of which Trans-Atlantic is the fullest fictional presentation. Gombrowicz started writing Trans-Atlantic in 1947 after spending eight years in exile. In A Kind of Testament he summarizes its plot as follows:

In an archaic prose, as though it were set in the

> distant past, I tell how, just before the war, I landed in the Argentine, how war broke out when I was there. I, Gombrowicz, make the acquaintance of a puto (a queer) who is in love with a young Pole, and circumstances make me arbiter of the situation: I can throw the young man into the queer's arms or make him stay with his father, a very honourable, dignified and old-fashioned Polish major. To throw him into the puto's arms is to deliver him up to vice, to set him on roads which lead nowhere, into the troubled waters of the abnormal, of limitless liberty, of an uncontrollable future. To wrench him away from the queer and make him return to his father is to keep him within the confines of the honest Polish tradition. What should I choose? Fidelity to the past...or the freedom to create oneself as one will? Shut him into his atavistic form...or open the cage, let him fly away and do what he likes! Let him create himself! In the novel the dilemma leads up to a general burst of laughter, which sweeps away the dilemma. (106-7)

Gombrowicz himself declared that Trans-Atlantic is a Pan Tadeusz in reverse. This remark immediately refers the reader to the Polish romantic tradition. Pan Tadeusz, an epic masterpiece written in exile by a great romantic poet, embodies not only the Polish romantic tradition but also the spirit of the Great Emigration. In his nostalgic dream of the past Mickiewicz is introducing his representatives of the young generation, two young lovers: Zosia and Tadeusz. The young, unlike Gombrowicz's young Pole, Ignac, are not in conflict with the Polish patriotic tradition, and they will gladly take over the old ideals. Mickiewicz presents his young heroes as they turn to the old ways with new force, avoiding the temptations of the world and its cosmopolitanism. There is improvement in the young; they will not copy the faults of the old generation, but they will never question the old ideals either. Unlike the romantic epic, Gombrowicz's Trans-Atlantic is not just a

battle with the faults of the old tradition, but with the tradition itself.

One of the chief conflicts in Gombrowicz's novel is that between Father and Son (which in Gombrowicz's narrative acquires a universal meaning emphasized by capital letters) and, respectively, Fatherland and Sonland. The first is already formed; it represents tradition and national ideals. The Fatherland of the Father, Major Kobrzycki, is honourable, noble, but also old-fashioned and set in its ways. When the old Major realizes that his son is in danger of being seduced by the puto, and that the traditional values have lost their appeal for the young, he decides to kill Ignac in order to kill "l'impuissance qu'il veut à présent détruire en détruisant son Fils, car seul cet atroce Filicide lui permettra de tuer en lui le Petit Vieux vide, de se muer en Vieillard sanglant, lourd, un Vieillard digne d'inspirer à tous une sainte Terreur" (158).[1] This honourable Fatherland is ready to kill the Sonland, rather than let it go, and the conflict between the young and the old becomes potentially tragic. But the young are not only restricted by the old ideals. The nation binds the individuals with other ties: honour which makes Polish diplomats pretend that their country is strong and invincible at the moment when in fact they know about the tragic defeat of the Polish army, and megalomania which makes their countrymen play games of constant bragging. There is also a curious combination of hatred and dependency

joining the three business partners Baron, Ciumkala, and Pyzdral, who continue old quarrels about a mill somewhere in Poland, and who try to avenge themselves in the new world by bringing one another to ruin. There is, finally, a secret terrorist society which binds its members together in absolute dependency, by pain and fear, serving no other purpose, but that of subjugation of an individual to a group. No wonder that the narrator wants to get rid of all these ties: "Le Fils, le Fils! Et crève le Père! Le Fils sans le Père. Le Fils sauvage, le Fils désenchaîné! Ah oui, ça c'est lumineux, ça oui, je m'y retrouve..." (134).

This Father-Son opposition is seminal in Gombrowicz's novel. The idea of deserting the Father and supporting the Son is first verbalized by González, the puto. The narrator tries to fight this suggestion, fearing this final break which may bring very uncertain results. But the puto tempts:

> -Tu n'as pas envie de devenir quelque chose d'Autre, de Nouveau? Tu n'imagines pas d'autre vocation pour vos Garçons que de répéter inlassablement les rengaines des Pères? Allons! libérons les Garçons de la cage paternelle, qu'ils se jettent à corps perdu dans les plaines sauvages, qu'ils dardent un regard sur l'Inconnu' (107)

The Son is weak; his liberation may prove positive but may very well be totally disastrous. Yet Gombrowicz, true to his credo, maintains that art should present problems not solve them. Although one will never know the result of this liberation before it is achieved one has to fight for it because the result of subordination to the Father is already well known. If not liberated the Son will perish with the

old-fashioned values. Old forms will continue their reign: fossilized, repetitive, and restrictive. The new will not be born without the destruction and rejection of the old. The old ways have not produced many lasting values. Even Major Kobrzycki, the most positive of the whole gallery of characters, is only able to defend his old-fashioned dignity through murder. In this world González--the puto--voices Gombrowicz's dream of exile: positive in the act of rebellion itself, although at the same time, potentially dangerous. Gombrowicz is not a naive optimist, indiscriminately praising youth at the expense of old age. Yet he is for change and development which, although risky and difficult, are the only way to self-realization. His looking back becomes the cry for liberation of the Son, in the name of future possibilities.

The end of Gombrowicz's novel, the outburst of laughter, has become the source of critical disputes over its final interpretation. As Gombrowicz said himself in his summary of Trans-Atlantic, he is supporting the Son, yet in the novel "laughter sweeps away the dilemma." The critics find this final scene confusing. Their positions differ considerably. Ewa Thompson claims that the narrator of Trans-Atlantic is not able to choose between the two sides (85), and only Gombrowicz's comments expressed elsewhere clarify the position of the narrator. Wit Tarnawski suggests that Gombrowicz was not at all sure whether he wanted to follow the Son, and that the triangle of González, Ignac,

Major Kobrzycki serves the purpose of satirizing pompous patriotism, by warning against the dangers of seduction by the western world (cf. 38-46). Yet another critic, Konstanty Jeleński, is convinced that the choice between Father and Son is made within the novel. He claims that the narrator and the _puto_ form a pair of animators, frequently met in Gombrowicz's novels, and both of them express the author's point of view. In other words the temptations of the _puto_ are a legitimate expression of Gombrowicz's attitude towards Fatherland. Jeleński suggests that the final scene discretely covers this decision, in order to make the "sacrilegious" choice more palatable to the already antagonistic readers (31).

I agree with Jeleński's claim that the choice is made within the novel. Gombrowicz is consistent in his views, and in spite of doubts about the future of the Son, it is clear that he favours him in the conflict. The final decision has finally boiled down to a question of who will kill whom, and it is the killing itself that the narrator tries to escape from not the choice of sides. After all, the narrator declares explicitly: "O, le Fils, le Fils, le Fils! Et crève le Père!...Que le destin s'accomplisse! Que le Fils assasine le Père!" (209). It is only after this declaration that the outburst of laughter, parallel to the final scene of _Pan Tadeusz_ breaks the flow of events. This laughter does not cover the decision, for which the reader is already prepared, it only stops the killing. The final scene is a parody of the merry laughter of Mickiewicz's poem; it

reminds us of the fool's costume which Gombrowicz puts on in order not to sound like another prophet. He does not want just to satirize the old but to free his Pole from its tyranny, give him a chance, and liberate him through laughter. Laughter stops the killing of the Father on the pages of the novel, yet the murder through which the Father is rendered harmless remains a logical consequence of the plot. The suspension of the murder in Trans-Atlantic stresses Gombrowicz's interest in the future of the Son, and not in the settling of accounts with the old generation.

By taking the side of an immature Polish youth Gombrowicz refuses to be carried away, not only by the feelings of nostalgia but also by the feelings of revengeful criticism. His goal can be formulated as the desire to free himself from Poland, which for Gombrowicz, means achieving a state comparable to that of Locke's 'tabula rasa' in terms of national consciousness. This freedom is more important than trying to show his countrymen their vices. In this way exile becomes a way out of a vicious circle of repetition. It is interesting to notice how the meaning of "exile" has widened for Gombrowicz. At the time of writing his first novel, Ferdydurke, it meant freeing himself from Poland. The young artist was sure that only smaller nations had such a suffocating effect on an individual. At that time he was still convinced that an Englishman or a Frenchman was free from the problems experienced by small nations. Only after writing Ferdydurke did Gombrowicz realize that the problem

was much more universal than he had thought. It was then that he decided that "the revision of European Form could only be undertaken from an extra-European position, from where it is slacker and less perfect" (A Kind of Testament 57).

The vision of exile as it appears on the pages of Trans-Atlantic is a part of Gombrowicz's philosophy. It is positive, as it weakens the ties with the nation, or in other words, the Father who, left behind, gives the Son a chance to develop on his own. A new society, with its new Form, and consequently, new stereotypes which eventually will have to be re-examined, renders one's national stereotypes more relative and thus less dangerous. Gombrowicz shows that Polish romantic stereotypes and Polish patriotism based on the glorification of Fatherland look ridiculous when isolated from their milieu, and what is even more important, he shows that new surroundings give an individual a chance to absorb and express new ideas. González, the auto from Trans-Atlantic, is able to voice what the narrator had felt long before, but what he was not able to verbalize even for himself. So although for Gombrowicz exile is nothing more than an opportunity, in his world a possibility of development is already, in itself, a positive value.

Another source of Gombrowicz's positive attitude towards exile is his concept of Form. Always capitalized, Form is a force which is responsible for shaping men. On the one hand an individual is constantly created and determined

through his or her relations with other individuals and groups. On the other, as Gombrowicz himself stresses in A Kind of Testament:

> the deformation produced between men is not the only deformation, if only because man, in his deepest essence, possesses something which I would call 'the Formal Imperative'. Something which is, it seems to me, indispensable to any organic creation. For instance, take our innate need to complete incomplete Form: every Form that has been started requires a complement. When I say A, something compels me to say B, and so on. This need to develop, to complete, because of a certain logic inherent in Form, plays an important part in my work. (69)

In Ferdydurke Form became synonymous with "fitting someone with a mug" or "fitting someone with a fanny" (cf. Thompson 76-7). These two expressions which, by now, have become a part of the Polish language denote two types of relationships among people. Fitting someone with a fanny or backside means to make someone feel insignificant and immature. Fitting someone with a mug denotes forcing someone to assume a pose, a face which is not a true part of his nature. Both actions force other people to deny their innermost self. In Gombrowicz's later novels Form becomes much more complicated, producing a web of intricate and obscure relationships between the individual and his surroundings. Gombrowicz's protagonists are caught in this web, trying to discern some pattern of overpowering Form.

There is no way out of the web. The only thing one can do to render Form less harmful is to isolate an individual from his milieu, from his culture, which is a powerful part

of Form. When man is left to himself he may be, to a greater degree, capable of being more independent and true to himself. "Perhaps my highest moral aim is to weaken all the structures of premeditated morality and other interhuman dependencies so that our immediate and most moral reflexes can say a word of their own" (80), says Gombrowicz in A Kind of Testament. Although exile cannot guarantee that these moral reflexes will indeed surface, it certainly makes such a process easier. When nothing more is within reach, even this possibility should be seriously taken into account.

Trans-Atlantic could be interpreted as a settling of accounts with Poland and her overpowering culture, but such an interpretation would result in oversimplifications. As I have already mentioned, for a positive philosopher of exile a critical, objective look back at his native culture is important only as a means of attaining freedom from social and cultural pressures. Once achieved, although its degree can be disputed, this freedom leads to new problems. For Gombrowicz an attempt to free himself from Poland and later on from Europe led him towards a new view of the world and man's position in it. Thus the process of self-acceptance, made easier through weakening the ties with one's native country, has to continue in order to determine the position a philosopher of exile will assume within "cosmopolis."

Just as Trans-Atlantic could be called the most "Polish" of Gombrowicz's novels, General Piesc is Themerson's fullest comment on Polish culture. As in all

Themerson's narratives the characters in this story are subordinated to the main idea: the discussion of the impact cultural traditions have on an individual whose development they condition. The story of General Piesc or the Case of the Forgotten Mission begins at the moment when an old émigré Polish general wins the Pools. The General declares that the money will finally let him realize the mission he has secretly cherished for twenty five years. He buys a white mackintosh, takes a gun with a solitary bullet in it and sets out to fulfil his mission. The problem begins when suddenly, to his terror, he cannot remember what the mission was. At this moment the narrative is abandoned for a series of letters which tell the rest of the story. These are: a letter from the General's illegitimate daughter, Princess Zuppa, to her father; a letter from the General's girl-friend and a companion of his last moments, Miss Prentice, to Princess Zuppa; and several short letters from other characters with the final Memo: "Close the file and forget the whole thing" (54). From these letters the reader learns how the General slowly accepts life without a mission, basing it on decency and love. It is love which makes him fire his solitary bullet to protect his young lover.

There are four important characters in the story: Princess Zuppa, Cardinal Polatdo, the General's black son--the ruthless ruler of a totalitarian state; and Miss Prentice, all of whom contribute to the discussion of the

central problem. Cardinal Pölätdo is well known to Themerson's readers. He is the protagonist of The Life of Cardinal Pölätdo, a humorous biography of Apollinaire's imaginary father. This slightly grotesque character is a philosopher of pölätdomism, a doctrine of absolute syncretism which tries to synthetize the world's knowledge and Christian religion into a whole. In General Piesc the old Cardinal takes the side of positivism. This is what he says about the Polish national hero, Tadeusz Kościuszko:

> 'The Poles are curious children'...'They boost the legend in which he is depicted as a snub-nosed hero who armed glebae adscripti peasants with scythes, their blade on end on the old wooden pole. But they play down the fact that he was a good engineer, studied the art of constructing dikes in the Netherlands and build fortifications in Saratoga and West Point. They boost his fights for national freedoms but play down his Universal Manifesto which gave some freedom of movement to Polish serfs ..., and his Last Will in which,--later on, in America,--he empowered his friend Jefferson to use all the wealth he was leaving in the United States to buy the freedom of American negro slaves.... Did God put two souls into his breasts also, I wonder...?' (28-9)

Learning that the General's name--Piesc--means a fist, (in German: ein Faust) the Cardinal remarks:

> People have wrong ideas about Faustuses. All Faustuses are rather unpleasant characters. They give the impression that they have some sort of lesson to teach, a message to reveal, a mission to perform, and what they really are up to is Power, Gold, Meat, and Sex. (25)

Here the Cardinal is expressing concerns similar to those Themerson expressed in his essays. The romantic side of the Polish soul carries in itself the seeds of danger; it is

capable of convincing people that they have a mission to fulfil, a mission which justifies all means. The Cardinal strongly suspects that the General's mission was a child of his romantic soul; he fears that Piesc might end like his son, a Bukumula tyrant who is ready to murder anyone standing on his way to power. Considering himself to be a saviour, whose mission is so important that it justifies all means, the General's son represents the most dangerous side of romantic idealism. Princess Zuppa, the General's down-to-earth daughter, the daughter of his other soul, expresses the same fears saying: "...we don't want any saviours any more. All saviours disrupt normal evolutionary processes, which anyway will go their own way" (32), and later, adding:

> you are old enough to know that all ideas, all ideologies, all missions, all Aims corrupt good manners and that nothing, absolutely nothing is more important, more real, than the common, unspoiled, Decency of Means....don't sacrifice yourself for the future generations. They are already here. I, I am the future generation. And my life depends not on the loftiness of your aims but on the Decency of your Means. (33)

The references to the myth of Faust, an old man ready to give up his soul for his dream, do not end with the German translation of the General's name. The modern Faust is also fighting for his soul, which he was so eager to forswear, although his battle is not with the devil. His war is waged between his two souls; the romantic one responsible for his idealistic thinking, for his patriotism, and for his now forgotten mission and the positivist one standing for the unassuming virtues of the decency of means. Princess

Zuppa's letter tips the scales in favour of the positivist soul and the General becomes a happier man. At the same time he meets a young palmist girl, Miss Prentice.

Miss Prentice, the modern Margaret, becomes the salvation for this elderly Faust. She is British and young and the fact that the two could still fall in love, although separated by age and nationality, is a source of hope in Themerson's world. Miss Prentice herself stresses the importance of communication across national boundaries at least twice. Explaining her feelings for the General she states:

> "There were, of course, vast stretches of his world which were incomprehensible to me, and big extents of my world which were incomprehensible to him, but we were taking each other as we were, not trying to squeeze the other into our own framework, and those incomprehensible patches, whether Polish or English, seemed to be of no importance, and only those that we could understand felt real. (39)

Later on she declares passionately that she hates all that differentiates one nation from another (42-3). Miss Prentice, young and thus innocent of the past which has the power to divide, expresses Themerson's cosmopolitan convictions: men should concentrate on what makes them similar rather than on what makes them different. Pursuing the aim of simple decency rather than national ideals is both safer and more effective.

General Piesc is not only Themerson's declaration on the side of positivism but also on the side of positive exile. The General, who for so long has lived in the past, manages to overcome his cultural tradition and to reach out

to others. Miss Prentice sees in him a kind man who is ready to look for what people have in common, in spite of their different national experiences. Just before his death the General and his lover visit a pub where one of the musicians sings "Lily Marleen." The General is so stirred by tragic memories of the war that he insists that the musician should sing the Polish national anthem to counterbalance the connotations the song evokes in him. Yet Miss Prentice makes him see how inappropriate this would be and how little it would solve. The General agrees that, however right he is in his indignation, the memories of the war should not stop him from seeing that there is a difference between the associations this song has in Polish and in British culture. What for the Poles was a Nazi killing song, sang when innocent victims were led to slaughter, for the British was a song picked up from the defeated German troops, a song associated with victory over Nazism. Such a reflection demands a lot of tolerance, objectivity, and a desire to look beyond one's most painful associations. Although difficult, it is necessary so that prejudice and emotions do not make us blind to what is important.

In the story, the conflict between the rational and the romantic sides of the human psyche, although not solved, is partially relieved by the decency and the kindness Themerson's characters show towards each other. Thanks to this decency and kindness they are not forced to confront their positions but to reconcile them. Even the General's

mission is not given up but forgotten. The General is portrayed as a sympathetic character saved by his decency. Paradoxically, his salvation lies in the fact of forgetting his mission. Without it the General is able to see the world around him, fall in love, overcome his national complexes, and heal old wounds. With his mission, he becomes a dangerous, obsessed old man, living for an abstract ideal.

The story of General Piesc proves that Poland and its cultural limitations do not trouble Themerson in the same way as they trouble Gombrowicz. Although Themerson notices the dangers springing from the romantic tradition, they do not force him into passionate attacks. He sees these limitations as a manifestation of much more universal problems: totalitarianism and blind faith which let people sacrifice decency for abstract ideals. Exile gives Themerson a universal perspective which is as important as the realization of national limitations. The General's children, the children of his two souls, are not Polish; they are the evidence that men are much more similar to one another than they might have thought. National stereotypes are not only useless but harmful, since Themerson, like Miss Prentice in the story, sees a chance for human survival in men's similarities rather than differences. Exile becomes an advantage in this fight; it provides scope for comparison, gives a sense of perspective, cools emotions. The values of world-state, translated into personal relations, gain priority over national values. The Stoic ideal of love for all mankind becomes love between two individuals who

overcome their differences to understand each other. Thus the ideal loses its abstract quality, becomes personal and even more worthy of respect.

The more universal nature of the problems that trouble Themerson is further enhanced by his choice of English as an artistic medium. In a writer such a choice often is a source of speculation on the more general issue of the perspective from which he or she views reality. In Themerson's case one must, however, keep in mind that he has not given up writing in Polish altogether, as Joseph Conrad did before him. Themerson's narratives were often written partly in English and partly in Polish, and later re-written rather than translated into the other language. Although Tom Harris has been translated into Polish by Ewa Krasińska, Themerson's other books have both their Polish and English versions. Certainly the decision to publish in English was an important one for Themerson; it gave him a chance to address a different audience than the one émigré writers generally reach. It meant the decision to comment on the problems of universal nature and not on the issues that troubled émigré society; it meant the acceptance of a universal perpective and the desire to make his Polish experience contribute to world culture.

Witold Gombrowicz, on the other hand, even though consumed by the desire to adopt the European, and later world perspective, could not entirely divorce himself from his Polish bias. One of the reasons for such an attitude is

certainly his more emotional preoccupation with Polishness, his desire to destroy its myths, and his wish to shock, inclinations absent in the more detached and ironic Themerson. Whereas Gombrowicz has to fight for liberation from his cultural limitations, Themerson enjoys it all along and only comments on its advantages. It comes as no surprize, therefore, that throughout his exile Gombrowicz continued writing in Polish.

Gombrowicz's decision to write in Polish cannot be viewed separately from his fundamental and often bitter struggle with his Polishness. There are parts of Gombrowicz's Journal, clearly addressed to Poles, which can count on reaching both the addressees in Poland and in Polish émigré communities, because they are written in Polish. The decision to write in Polish has also proved useful for his fights with the Polish cultural tradition, so frequently led by the bellicose writer, and suited his desire to educate his "immature" countrymen. Gombrowicz reached his positive philosophy of exile after much anguish, and often as a rebellion against his tradition rather than as a peaceful stage of his spiritual evolution, and the language reflects his state perfectly. His use of the Polish language is a constant spoof of both the Polish romantic idiom and the Polish tradition, untranslatable and of minor importance in the French or English versions of his books or plays. Gombrowicz, we may conclude, achieved his positive philosophy of exile in spite of his Polishness, in a mortal struggle with its impact, and was often delighted by the

alleged "viciousness" of his ideas, which were often perceived as such by his compatriots. He had to shock, and the only group he could shock with his divorce from Polishness were his fellow-Poles, so the language suited his needs. What has emerged out of this struggle with the Pole in himself, what is left when all the strife is forgotten, reaches universal significance and becomes meaningful since it transcends national boundaries. This most precious part of Gombrowicz's literary achievements is what his foreign reader gets, yet the record of his fights is made available to his compatriots, who can use it in the reckonings with their cultural heritage.

The discussion of the different choices of linguistic medium made by Gombrowicz and Themerson cannot ignore other aspects of such a potent decision as a choice of language, the writer's tool. Gombrowicz was living in Argentina, and has never shown in any way that his command of foreign languages is sufficient to match his highly original command of Polish. As his readers and critics confirm, he is more than a stylist, he is a modificator of his native tongue, drawing from its historical idiosyncracies and its uniqueness, which he was able to enrich so well. Not every writer is able to reach such a mastery of a foreign tongue, and the importance of his decision to stick with his best tool has to be viewed in relation to his linguistic abilities. A similar reluctance to give up a good and proven medium can be seen in the case of other émigré writers:

Czesław Miłosz, Milan Kundera, or Joseph Skvorecky. Thus, while taking into account the writer's intentions, one cannot forget that often the change of language, no matter how desirable, (Gombrowicz did want to be translated and read outside Poland) may be simply impossible.

In contrast to Themerson's calm, Gombrowicz is full of indignation for the forces which blackmail individuals into submission. He aspires to be a warrior not an observer; he fights for his freedom rather than notes his country's limitations. The differences between Gombrowicz's and Themerson's attitudes towards Polish society, spring from their different perceptions of the force of the Polish cultural tradition. For Gombrowicz it is a strong and powerful force which has to be fought with great pain, whereas for Themerson this force is much less dangerous and consequently easier to diffuse with arguments. The force which in Gombrowicz's fiction has to be murdered can become a forgotten mission in Themerson's story. So, while in search for the authentic values which could counterbalance the romantic tradition, Gombrowicz turns to the Baroque, Themerson seeks his inspiration in the Enlightment and Polish Positivism. These different sources of inspiration are not only characteristic of the different views the two writers had of their homeland, but they also shed light on the differences in their emotional attitudes to the fact of exile.

At first sight, the Baroque seems to be a somewhat unusual reference point in the discussion of Polish culture.

It immediately brings to mind the Sarmatian myth which had such a strong influence on the mentality of the Polish gentry of the seventeenth century. The myth was that the ancient Sarmatian tribe, once living on the banks of the Vistula, were the forefathers of the Polish gentry. This conviction resulted in the glorification of the Sarmatian mentality which had nothing to learn from abroad as it embodied all Polish virtues. No wonder that the results of this faith were mostly pitiful; yet it is not the Sarmatian myth that Gombrowicz wants to recall. He is fascinated by the self-contented spirit of the Baroque, which was not aspiring for heroism. The Baroque man, Gombrowicz felt, was yet free to admit his faults; it was only later that he was forced to assume heroic poses. The Baroque sense of humour and its penchant for grotesque effects also appealed to him. As his source and point of reference to the Polish Baroque spirit Gombrowicz chose the Memoirs of Jan Chryzostom Pasek, a Polish nobleman who recorded his life in a private diary.

Unlike Romanticism with its clearly defined ideals, the Baroque was tormented by doubts, conflicts, contrasts, and extremes (cf. Święcicka 25 ; Miłosz History of Polish Literature 111-45; Angyal 290-7). It was a time of creation, and as Gombrowicz maintains, it was the only time when the Polish consciousness had a true chance to develop. He is not sure of the outcome of this development, but he is sure that, if in order to find their authentic selves the Poles could only return once again to the Baroque, their country

would not have become the romantic tyrant he considers her to be. Only the Baroque could bring back the spirit of self-acceptance which would be able to replace heroic idealizations of the national character. Wanting robust laughter rather than tears of nostalgia, on the pages of Trans-Atlantic, Gombrowicz shows his compatriots the Sarmatian Pole who can counterbalance the influence exerted by a heroic romantic hero. Mockingly, the author is telling the reader: this is your true soul which you have disregarded for centuries, admit it and you will become a better man. With all its faults, Gombrowicz maintains, the Baroque was first of all authentic. As such it strengthened an individual for his struggle with Form and became an invaluable source of inspiration.

Gombrowicz is himself full of extremes; he confesses that he thinks in contrasts and, consequently, his attitude to Poland is also drastic and full of tensions. Feeling that he has to destroy the Poland within himself in order to be free, the author of Trans-Atlantic cannot accept the cool detachment of the Enlightenment which appealed so much to Themerson. He prefers his mask of a fool, which allows him to attack, mock, and tease--all in order to make his points as emotional as possible. It is not by chance that the emotional conflicts in his novels, are often resolved through murder. (Trans-Atlantic is the only exception here, as the murder is stopped at the last moment by an outburst of laughter.) Yet it is interesting to note that Gombrowicz, the artist, contradicts Gombrowicz, the essayist. Discussing

Themerson's attitude to the Polish romantic tradition I have analysed Gombrowicz's position expressed in his Dziennik [Journal]. I have established that he is taking the side of an individual against a group, advocating impartiality and detachment from the values of his native culture. As François Bondy noticed in his essay, the extreme solutions in Gombrowicz's fiction were replaced by the call for objectivity and tolerance on the pages of Gombrowicz's Dziennik [Journal]. As an esayist Gombrowicz is much closer to Themerson's position than his fiction would suggest (27).

To finish my discussion of the positive philosophy of exile visible in Gombrowicz's Trans-Atlantic I would like to stress that he was consistent in applying it in his other works. Gombrowicz is not only contented with being an exile, but he insist on the importance of retaining his status of an outsider. This position is clearly visible in his attitude to Argentina. Since the country where he lived for twenty years was never even referred to in his novels or plays, we might assume that Argentina seemingly has not left any trace in his fiction. Yet, his Argentine essays, Wędrówki po Argentynie [Travels in Argentina], explain this apparent resistance to his new country. The greatest value of Argentina is her remoteness, her physical and cultural distance from Europe. It was the only place where Gombrowicz could free himself from Polish and European biases and complexes. He cherished this society which was yet free from overpowering patriotism, from a past which was capable of

destroying the future. In his essays Gombrowicz is warning Argentine society against imitating Europe, and is always comparing it with his European past. An exile like himself---maintains Gombrowicz--is privileged; by being forced to compare the two countries he knows well he is less conditioned by any of them. These favourable circumstances can become the basis of art free of imitation and more aware of the universal context of human problems. These short essays stress the Argentine view of Poland and the Polish view of Argentina as the most valuable experiences of Gombrowicz's twenty years of exile. A positive philosopher of exile is never trying to assimilate, to become a member of the new society; he wants to preserve his distance from the new country, seeing in it the source of his literary and human strength.

Themerson is wary of emotions, both in life and fiction. His struggle for objectivity and reason demands different strategies than Gombrowicz's baroque tensions. True to his credo, Themerson is looking for a place outside conflicts, a place from which an objective point of view is easier to achieve and easier to guard. These differences should not, however, overshadow fundamental parallels between the two writers. The positive philosophy of exile, although achieved for different reasons and in different ways, made them come to similar conclusions. Both writers develop a conviction that basic decency (Themerson) or morality (Gombrowicz) should be the core of art. Exile becomes for them a means of freeing an individual from the

tyranny of Form (Gombrowicz) or Labels (Themerson) which determine our way of thinking. Both writers admit that looking at reality from a different angle becomes a value in itself, as it begins the process of freeing one's mind from the way of thinking established by others. An exile is left with his own thoughts; he has to re-examine his values and the values of his nation, and this is, for both authors, the first step towards salvation.

THEMERSON AND RUSSELL

One of the precepts of the positive philosophy of exile is its insistence on the importance of human unity in its diversity. Both Themerson and Gombrowicz professed readiness to detach themselves from their native cultures for the sake of the international muse of art. Yet it would be hard to discuss this readiness without mentioning Bertrand Russell, undoubtably one of the most vocal champions for world state in our century. "I am speaking on this occasion not as a Briton, not as a European, not as a member of a Western democracy, but as a human being, a member of the species Man, whose continued existence is in doubt" (729), Russell begins his essay "Man's Peril," ending it with a passionate plea for peace: "I appeal as a human being to human beings: remember your humanity, and forget the rest" (732). This is not the only instance when he admits the necessity of abandoning national ideals if mankind is to survive. Going

further than both Themerson and Gombrowicz, he explicitly formulates the principles on which the world-state is to be built (eg. "The Reconciliation of Individuality and Citizenship" 446-453; "World Government" 700-703), stressing the necessity of cosmopolitanism, which plays such a fundamental role in the positive philosophy of exile. What is more, Russell is convinced that world-state can only be based on rationality, impartiality, scepticism, and resulting tolerance which can be greatly aided by a careful examination of one's own and other cultures. All this together with the conviction that an individual has the right to choose the society he wants to live in, make his notion of detachment a value in itself, detachment bearing a close resemblance to the notion of exile as seen by Themerson and Gombrowicz.

For Stefan Themerson Russell has always been an example of a great philosopher and a great man (Themerson, The Chair of Decency 10-12). While still a student in Warsaw, Themerson studied Russell's concept of the relativity of truth, and he highly admired his scepticism and empiricism. This admiration was enhanced when the two men met and became friends.[2] Russell liked Themerson's philosophical fiction and his experiments in film and typography. To complete the analysis of Themerson's positive philosophy of exile it is, therefore, necessary to compare it with Russell's ethics.

When Leon Chwistek complained that he had the misfortune to live "in a period of unparalleled growth of anti-rationalism" he certainly did not take into account the

contribution and influence Bertrand Russell had on twentieth-century philosophy. When A. J. Ayer was paying his tribute to the great philosopher, he wrote that thanks to Russell " the present century has seen a return to the older and sounder empiricist tradition, and its development in a more rigorous form" (167). Russell's scepticism, his desire to find reasons for accepted beliefs, whether in mathematics, social sciences, or common sense have gained him ardent admirers and bitter foes. While his admirers stress his passionate quest for reason and truth, his opponents point to inconsistencies in his opinions, and his overestimation of the power of rationality.

Bertrand Russell has not only changed the course of British philosophy, but he has also influenced fundamental social, political, and ethical issues of our times. In his long life he has written on such varied topics as sexual conduct, euthanasia, free trade, and the achievement of happiness, to mention but a few. Yet all these writings, however diverse in scope, are governed by a common spirit of empiricism, scepticism, and impersonal self-enlargement whose aim is to eliminate the anthropocentric bias of human thinking. In "An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish," modifying the Stoic ideal even further than the eighteenth-century cosmopolites, Russell points out that it is no longer enough to aspire for the citizenship of "cosmopolis." One has to fight the egoistic conceit which makes men think of themselves as masters of creation:

> The only way I know of dealing with this general human conceit is to remind ourselves that man is a brief episode in the life of a small planet in a little corner of the universe, and that, for aught we know, other parts of the cosmos may contain beings as superior to ourselves as we are to jelly-fish. (96)

The principles of Russell's moral philosophy have been presented in his two major works: "The Elements of Ethics" and "Human Society in Ethics and Politics." In addition to these major works Russell wrote many essays and gave many talks, the purpose of which was to popularize his moral values. To summarize them one has to begin from stating that for Bertrand Russell the notions of good or bad are beyond the realm of reason, which can only occupy itself with the choice of means through which moral aims can be achieved. The ends themselves belong to the realm of emotions. One can believe that certain actions are good or bad as he himself believes in the good life: "inspired by love and guided by knowledge" ("What I Believe" 372). Yet one cannot defend this belief on rational grounds. Although Russell would have liked very much to base his moral philosophy on something more stable and trustworthy than feelings, he is convinced that it is not possible. This conviction brings him to the conclusion that objectivity and tolerance are no longer just virtues but imperatives, and detachment becomes the most important ingredient of wisdom and the only guarantee of sanity.

Impartiality and tolerance become even more important when considered in the context of the sources of human

beliefs. In his 1943 essay, "An Outline of Intellectual Rubbish", Russell notices: "we believe, first and foremost, what makes us feel that we are fine fellows" (80). He concludes that this feeling of superiority is a source of national pride and homocentric philosophies. The feeling that our own country surpasses all others makes us feel more important, but precisely because of this, such feelings have to be deeply mistrusted. As a remedy Russell advises "to become aware of opinions held in social circles different from your own. When I was young I lived much outside my own country.... I found this very profitable in diminishing the intensity of insular prejudice" (95). Unbiased consideration given to the arguments of our opponents is one of the principles of Russell's moral philosophy. He also stresses the importance of recognizing that when the truth cannot be unequivocally determined men have a tendency to substitute faith for reason, which is the first step towards fanaticism. Authority is another great enemy of reason. When the "truth" cannot be proved, it is often forced upon others by the power of authority. Governments and religious institutions are especially dangerous here, since they have enough power to execute their wishes.

What impact has this impartiality on the position of the individual in society? It has to be stressed that Russell does not make the individual the sole judge of his own moral standards: "if the definition of right conduct is to make a wide appeal, the ends must be such as large sections of mankind desire" ("What I believe" 375), since

"we need rather a social than an individual conception of welfare" (381). Yet since the individual has the right to develop his potential, society should provide a proper environment for such development. Admitting that the individual is a part of society, Russell accepts that: "the good life must be lived in a good society, and it is not fully possible otherwise" (383). If a society is not good, an individual should do everything to improve it, always remembering that his loyalty is to all of mankind and not to part of it.

John Lewis, a Marxist critic of Russell, says: "Russell sees society only as exerting a regrettable if necessary limitation on our freedom and therefore hampering the free development of personality" (79). Lewis maintains that Russell sees the individual as alienated from society. It is true that the individual is a supreme value in Russell's world yet, in view of his own credo one cannot claim that he is necessarily alienated. In "What I believe" Russell says that bad society, based on wrong principles, has a negative influence on the individual. Yet, he is stressing at the same time that the individual can only fully exist in good society and so, he or she should do everything to improve it. Nowhere is he advocating the aristocratic aloofness of the well-off who can afford to live in their ivory towers. Russell departs from the premises that the individual should be given all possible freedom, since happy individuals are the basis for the happiness of the whole society. When

viewed from the point of view of any philosophy which assumes that one has to subordinate the individual to a group, his moral ideals will always be rejected. Yet, to claim that he does not see any positive relationships between the individual and society is to disregard his credo.

Russell is convinced that the individual should be free to choose his milieu, as only he is able to knów what kind of society is likely to help him develop. Consequently, he condemns nationalism, treating it as the collective emotional blackmail of individuals by society. The philosopher believes that a look at society from the point of view of its individuals is more likely to protect them from unfair social pressures. Defending these rights of choice he is pointing out that hermits are not likely to be very numerous, and that with their different perspective, they can be useful to society. In other words, Russell is fully supportive of the right of the individual to leave his country, if that is what he wishes. He is advocating cosmopolitanism of the Stoic kind, as love of mankind in opposition to love of particular sections of humanity.

In order to think independently, a man must free himself from conventional thinking, from believing in things or the grounds that they are generally accepted. "If a man seriously desires to live the best life that is open to him, he must learn to be critical of the tribal customs and tribal beliefs that are generally accepted among his neighbours" (358), writes Russell in "Individual and Social

Ethics." Society should allow enough freedom to individuals so that they can follow their convictions. "A good society is a means to a good life for those who compose it" (361). Russell is clear in his convictions: society should not be thought of as a supreme value, it can only become good if it allows its individuals to flourish.

Does it all mean that Russell is a positive philosopher of exile? Yes, but only if exile is understood as a theoretical stance and not a physical state. It would be impossible to claim that he was or even considered himself to be an émigré. A man who declared in his autobiography "I am passionately English" (2: 18) does not bring to mind the image of an exile. He was not only far from leaving his own country, but he was also passionately involved in shaping its intellectual and political life. Yet, at the same time, he is passionate in proclaiming his solidarity with mankind, and in his struggle for the international perspective in the discussions of philosophical, political, and economic issues he demands psychological exile from the interests of one group of people, whether a nation, a party, or an interest group. In the context of Russell's ethics, exile can therefore be discussed as a metaphor for impartiality and detachment, the two virtues he advocated so vehemently in his writings.

Themerson's protagonists would fit well in Russell's world. They strive to be governed by reason; they expose prejudice, faith, and false logic. They advocate tolerance

and impartiality in the form of a cosmopolitan credo which becomes an apotheosis of exile. In the conflict between the individual and the majority of society Themerson, like Russell, is on the side of the individual making his own choices, even if they are contrary to the opinions held by the majority. Of course, the individual is not free to do all he wants. Both writers fully accept the principles of moral decency based, as Russell puts it, on love and knowledge. Yet they both stress, with emphasis, that if the individual sees that by following the majority the principle of good life might be violated, his duty is on the side of love and knowledge.

Russell's moral philosophy has been criticized on the ground that, in spite of his claim of objectivity and detachment, he was in fact torn between his passionate and subjective mysticism and his logic (Booth, Modern Dogma 45). The source of this dualism is Russell's conviction that the moral values he so passionately believes in cannot be rationally proved. Wayne C. Booth claims that precisely this reason caused his often too emotional defence of his moral values (85). Yet, as Russell himself stresses many a time, he is ready to change his beliefs if new facts or discoveries prove them wrong ("What I Believe" 369). He reiterates his readiness to change his mind, and this welcoming of new arguments is incorporated into his moral principles. At the same time, since his moral principles cannot be proved in an unquestionable way, Russell is very much aware that he cannot escape preaching his values and

hoping to convince others of their validity. One can object to this necessity of preaching. One can try to prove, as Wayne C. Booth does, that this lack of objective premises makes Russell's reasoning often vulnerable to criticism, but one has to notice that Russell is honest in pointing to it himself. It also has to be aknowledged that without accepting certain axiomatic values, such undisputable proofs of moral ideals as Russell would have liked to find are still beyond our reach.

John Maynard Keynes, the famous English economist, remembering the intellectual climate of Cambridge before World War I, wrote about Russell: "Bertie in particular sustained a pair of opinions ludicrously incompatible. He held that in fact human affairs were carried on after a most irrational fashion, but that the remedy was quite simple and easy, since all we had to do was to carry them on rationally" (102). Although later in his life, helped by age and experience, Russell devoted more and more time to the discussion of the psychological obstacles which prevented people from being rational, this criticism captures another problem inherent in his moral philosophy: its utopian ring. Impartiality and detachment are distinctly the values which would promote rationality, but what if people are not able to develop them? Where is the place for strong passions which can make people do good as well as evil; what to do with the instinct of self-preservation? Is impartiality a realistic goal? How many people are ready to take the burden

of uncertainty and doubt, and still hold to their moral principles? Russell does not provide answers to these questions. He is resigned to expressing his opinions and prescribing a way of life which demands from people not only rationality, but also scepticism:

> I think nobody should be certain of anything. If you are certain, you are certainly wrong, because nothing deserves certainty, and so one ought always to hold all one's beliefs with a certain element of doubt and one ought to be able to act vigorously in spite of the doubt. (Bertrand Russell Speaks His Mind 17)

Russell's moral philosophy is a witty and fascinating presentation of values which, if ever realized, would make life easier and more enjoyable. Its utopian quality does not diminish either its appeal or desirability; Russell will always have admirers who will agree with him wholeheartedly, but the rest of humanity will continue living in the way contrary to his principles.

Similar objections have to be raised towards Themerson's philosophy of exile. However deplorable tribal loyalties might become, they belong to our world and refuse to disappear even when proven wrong. Themerson's principles become useless when confronted with war, totalitarianism, or simple brutal force. This much Themerson's protagonists have proven themselves, and they do not claim to have solutions to the problems of the world. Themerson is much more optimistic in his essays than in his fiction. While Logic, Labels, and Flesh openly professes positivist optimism (203), Themerson's protagonists are more cautious. Peddy

Bottom's objections meet with hostile indifference in a totalitarian state. The termite professor meets his death; death is also the fate of the narrator and the protagonist of Wooff, Wooff or Who Killed Richard Wagner?. In Themerson's fiction the source of optimism lies in the fact that there are people who are ready to follow the path of rationalism and impartiality, but not in the fact that they have managed to change anybody. They denounce lofty ideals and settle for simple decency of means and for kindness, trying to build their lives on the recognition of basic similiarities that join people into one big family, as the Stoics wanted it. Themerson's positive philosophy of exile is not a philosophical system in a formal sense, but a world-view based on the conviction that exile acts as a favourable factor in human development. He grants it the power to open up people otherwise ready to live unquestioningly within the values of their society. As much as Russell's ethics would improve the world if its principles were widely practised, Themerson's philosophy of exile would be beneficial to mankind. But it will have to resign itself to the appeal it has for a few since, as much as in the eighteenth century, in our world "cosmopolis" still remains only a dream.

To sum up: Themerson's positive philosophy of exile is based on the conviction that expatriation acts as a positive influence, since it removes an individual from his native

milieu giving him a chance of unique development based on cosmopolitan values. Although the direction of this development cannot be determined (here Themerson agrees with Gombrowicz), it is much more capable of promoting rationality and impartiality (the values Themerson shares with Bertrand Russell) than national loyalties are. Although very much aware of the difficulties in propagating his principles in a world of confusing and ever-changing values, Themerson keeps his cautious optimism, which determines the tone of his philosophy of exile.

Notes

[1] Gombrowicz's Trans-Atlantic has not yet been translated into English. Konstanty Jeleński's and Geneviève Serreau's translation into French is not simply the only one available, but also excellent in rendering deliberately baroque and archaic prose.

[2] Themerson's friendship with Bertrand Russell resulted in the publication of Russell's books by Gaberbocchus-r Themerson's publishing house. Here is what Russell himself says about these publications in his Autobiography:

> The making of my Good Citizen's Alphabet entertained me greatly. It was published at their Gaberbocchus (which, I am told, is Polish for Jabberwocky) Press by my friends the Themersons with exceedingly clever and beautifully executed illustrations by Franciszka Themerson which heighten all the points that I most wanted made. (2: 35).

Note: Russell is mistaken. Gaberbocchus is Latin for Jabberwocky.

CHAPTER 5

THE POSITIVE PHILOSOPHY OF EXILE AND THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY AVANT-GARDE

Art was always of utmost importance for Themerson. He considered it to be, together with science and religion, an indispensable tool of exploring the world and its significance. With religion, art shares its search for the most essential aspects of life and its meaning, with science a penchant for observation and a desire to record it. Yet, as Themerson maintains, art has not only provided man with instruments of observation, but also with the means of putting the results of his observations into perspective: it has the potential to shape our awareness of the world, to change our attitudes, our ways of thinking. My last chapter will be devoted, entirely, to the discussion of Themerson's views on art and its relationship to his philosophy of positive exile. The basis for my discussion will be Themerson's Cardinal Pölätüo and his book on Kurt Schwitters, both containing many comments on the function of art. I intend to prove that Themerson's views on art are close to the views expressed by the twentieth-century avant-garde and that they complement his positive philosophy of exile contained in his fiction.

Themerson's fullest comment on both the nature and function of art is, by far, contained in his fictional

biography of Cardinal Pölätdo, Guillaume Apollinaire's imaginary father. The protagonist of this unusual narrative, a philosopher of pölätdomism, which can be described as his own way of reconciling religion and science, was born somewhere on the way to Rome, where his pious mother wanted to deliver the baby. The Cardinal himself does not even remember the name of the place where he was born, nor does he ever mention his nationality. He is a-national, a member of a universal church, a firm believer in the values of universality and cosmopolitanism. His cosmopolitanism, however, is not identical with Themerson's positive philosophy of exile. Pölätdo is a member of the Church, fully belonging to it and definitely not an exile in any sense. He does not try to learn and examine different ways of looking at the world; his way is already determined by his religious persuasion. If he learns anything new, it is to incorporate it into his own way of understanding the world. For the Cardinal, universalism means that everything can be incorporated into his system, and not that everything is worthy of examining and assessing, as Themerson would have it.

Although indifferent to places and their national affiliations, Pölätdo is quite proud of the year in which he was born. 1922, as his biographer notes, was the year when the Church finally, although without much publicity, accepted that the Earth turns around the Sun. The fact is particularly significant for the protagonist since he is convinced that "science would develop not to the detriment

of Lord Jesus but to His Glory" (13). By declaring this, the Cardinal refuses to fight with science and scientific facts and puts all his efforts into incorporating them into his philosophy. He claims that by providing objective information science enriches our knowledge of the world which, for him, means enriching our knowledge of God and his ways of revealing himself.

As a philosopher the Cardinal distinguishes between two basic categories of knowledge: direct knowledge of God which comes from revelation, and indirect knowledge which, using all available tools of science, tries "to explain, if not now then in the future, us, OURSELVES" (27). Yet, as the Cardinal is quick to point out, the two categories are not contradictory: "in the case of our direct knowledge of the existence of God,... indirect knowledge by no means stated that there is no God; merely that it gives us no evidence of His existence" (30). Having accepted that the two approaches are not contradictory, the Cardinal sets out to explore indirect knowledge as, according to his premises, it shows the fashion after which God reveals himself to men or, in other words, it provides the means of approaching indirect reality.

To complete the philosophical picture of the Cardinal's world one has to mention that it also holds a place for art, but the protagonist is not as convinced about its harmlessness as he is in the case of science. Art, or more precisely poetry, represented by the Cardinal's illegitimate

son--Apollinaire--is considered extremely dangerous for religion as it also tries to approach "direct knowledge," yet without turning to God. Having fathered a poet, the Prince of the Church is terrified by his son's potential capability of dealing with direct reality (the realm of God) without God. He accuses poetry of meddling with the human soul without divine inspiration, of reaching to the essence of life through secular means. Once we reject a "religious interpretation of life--he maintains--there is no means of verifying our understanding of the world. We are left with the confusion created by poetry, which tries to convince us of its truth by "lulling our senses with rhythm and rhyme," and in this manner making us believe in its premises:

> Poetry... is a most repulsive profession; in which physiological and psychological tricks are craftily and fraudulently used to make us swallow and absorb such concepts as, if served prosaically, AU NATUREL, would not be considered good enough by even the most stupid of human intellects. (150-51)

The Cardinal accuses poetry of associating goodness with beauty and thus turning beauty into the sole justification of its conceptual content. Philosophy, removed from the traps evoked by beauty cannot be as dangerous, Pólatão maintains. The philosopher has to defend his concepts and ideas; he has to appeal to reason and not, as the poet often does, to the emotions of his readers. In the Cardinal's world only art is able to threaten religion, and only poetry is able to cause so much hatred in the otherwise docile Cardinal.

Seeing no danger in science, Palatão is also able to deal with philosophy, which sooner or later--as he is convinced--will disappoint its followers by leaving out from its pursuits the realm of the soul. The dangers of poetry, and later on also of psychoanalysis, which through its interest in dreams and symbols also tries to deal with the human soul without accepting the existence of God, prompt him to formulate his own philosophy, which is to strengthen religion and let it protect itself from its adversaries. Yet putting down his thoughts on paper, the Cardinal arrives at a troubling question: why, with all its force and integrity, has religion failed to change human nature? This question is left without an answer, yet the very fact of asking it echoes Themerson's own problems in accepting religious doctrines.

In Themerson's positive philosophy of exile there is no place for religion, which apart from being a metaphysical and therefore unacceptable system, would immediately make him a part of a community of the faithful and deprive him of his cherished status of an exile. Yet, at the same time he sees it in a wider context as a human attempt at understanding the world. Themerson honours religion for its interest in the essential problems of human life. Its preocrupation with the very essence of life, its universalism, and cosmcpolitanism which make it accept all people as worthy of salvation are positive features on Themerson's scale of values. Yet, Themerson cannot approve of the fact that religious doctrines do not, on the whole,

accept human diversity in the understanding of the world, preferring to demand from the faithful total endorsement of their dogmas as the only way of arriving at the understanding of the Cardinal's "Direct Reality." Could this be the reason for its lack of effectiveness?--Themerson asks.

There is also another problem, related to the necessity of acceptance of religious doctrines. Religion tries to subordinate our reasoning to its own vision of the world. The Cardinal himself, although in many ways a very unusual representative of the Church, is not free from this sin. He would like to use the existing gaps in indirect knowledge to assert the dogmas of his religion. The discussion which took place between Ayer (who appears in the book as a twelve-year old boy) and Pōlātāo is particularly revealing of the Cardinal's limitations. True to the logical positivism he represents, Ayer is only ready to accept what can be fully verified. Trying to convince him of the existence of the soul, which as a true logical positivist Ayer considers non-verifiable and thus not fit for discussion, the Cardinal tricks him into praying. Frustrated, Ayer knocks out the Cardinal's tooth, proving that the gap between logical positivism and religious mysticism cannot be peacefully bridged. It should be noted, however, that although Themerson is not in favour of mysticism, he is not altogether convinced of the usefulness of restricting knowledge to what logical positivists

consider verifiable sentences, fearing that such a limitation renders man helpless and unable to form any opinion of the world. At least the Cardinal does not avoid essential problems, but tries to approach them; he does not escape into the realm of abstract, verifiable, but at the same time, extremely limited truth. His religious faith has also other merits. It protects him from oversimplified attempts at explaining the human soul. Themerson is referring here to psychoanalysis, especially in its popular version which, without the depth and complexity of religion, tries to present ready explanations for emotional and mental problems. A humorous comment on psychoanalysis is provided by the case of Father Douglas who, influenced by Freud's theory, left the religious order to become a fashionable psychoanalyst. He replaced the Christian doctrine of sin and redemption with the theory in which all feelings could be traced back to sexual impulses and thus easily disposed of. Themerson finds such an explanation of the complexity of the human mind amusing, if not downright dangerous. It is too one sided, he maintains, to be helpful in providing the basis of our understanding of the world.

Part II of Cardinal Pölätdo starts with a scene in which grave doubts as to possible restrictions of his philosophy introduce essential changes to Pölätdo's neatly ordered world. The Cardinal wonders if the language in which we formulate our thoughts does not impose limits on the thoughts themselves: "In what kind of language can man reveal himself, if there are things in his person, if there

are things in his existence, that cannot be put into words?" he asks (82). He is also troubled by the thought that perhaps different mediums of expression would bring us closer to the understanding of the world and ourselves. If it is indeed so then his own philosophy, formulated in words, must also be limited. Frightened by this possibility the Cardinal resigns himself to the necessity of accepting art as an essential component of our understanding of the world. He begins to understand that art may be able to provide access to these regions of the human soul which would otherwise be inaccessible or accessible only in one, narrow way. And that is why the Cardinal becomes a poet. His poetry, however, is nothing but pure form and it does not defy his earlier objections to the manipulative use of language. Yet his admission that art, even if restricted to its abstract form, is a necessary component of our vision of the world, becomes in itself its most beautiful apotheosis. The Cardinal, who has commissioned a painter to make a mosaic picture on the chapel floor, recalls his experience in the following way:

> 'What do you want me to do?' the painter asked. 'I want you to make an abstract picture,' I said. 'What do you want me to abstract?' was his question, and I saw it was good. 'I want you to abstract this,' I said, and I recited:
>
> 'Filiae Jerusalem dicite dilecto meo,
> quia prae amore morior.'
>
> 'What do you want me to abstract it from?' was his next question, and I saw it was very good. 'From the universe,' I answered. Upon which he set to work.

> The floor of my chapel is white. And the whiteness of it is divided by two vertical black lines and four horizontal black lines, and it possesses in itself a large yellow square and a small blue rectangle. I like it: I like it because nothing in it represents anything, because nothing in it is a symbol of anything; it is what it is and nevertheless, whenever I look at it, whenever I walk upon it, it sings: 'I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that ye tell him, that I am sick of love.' (154-55)

Polatho's main objection has been that poetry tends to use the beauty of rhythm and rhyme as a means of selling its concepts. This, in his view was not an honest way of using art. However, he himself is not rejecting the idea of employing abstract art as a means of preaching his religious beliefs. The difference is very delicate indeed, and it can be boiled down to the difference between telling and showing. While abstract art shows us another world, poetry--in the Cardinal's understanding of it--tells us how to interpret the one we live in. The Cardinal likes his mosaic floor because it does not represent anything, being in itself a fragment of reality. It can be compared to a laboratory where one may test new ways of expressing meaning, a different angle of looking at the world. The Cardinal admits that abstract art gives us a new domain of experience which would not be accessible otherwise, and it is able to complement religion. Like the Cardinal's mosaic floor, it has the power to make us look in a different way at beauty, love, and goodness, without linking them to images and symbols.

Themerson's own view of art and its function bears a lot

of similarities to the Cardinal's. In his book Apollinaire's Lyrical Ideograms Themerson writes:

> A cat can scratch us, a 'cat' cannot. A cat's melodious mate is waiting for him somewhere on the roof under the moon, a 'cat's' mate is in the Rhyming Dictionary. Both, the beast and the word, affect our behaviour. And, though we know that we cannot slice a loaf of bread with the word 'knife', or thrust a word 'bayonet' into the belly of a foeman, the words trigger off our feelings, and our feelings direct our actions as often as our reasoning powers do. It is through the emotional impact of signs that wine becomes Blood, bread becomes Flesh, and a land becomes Holy and crying out for crusaders to deliver it from the hands of the Infidel. Often, it is quite immaterial what, if anything, is in the package. It is the sign on top of it that is capable of arousing such emotions that people will rush to shops at the sight of a trade-mark, or run amok at the sound of a trumpet. (14)

The problem lies in the question of where and when to resist the emotional impact of signs, and where to accept it as part and parcel of art. In the same book Themerson states that the two extremes can be illustrated, on the one hand, by the scientist who does not mix signs with things, and on the other the mystic or the possessed who identifies signs with things. Art, however, occupies the ground in between (15). For Themerson objectivity and emotional distance towards the world, so desirable in the scientist, is still a much more attractive alternative than the mystical identification of symbols with what they represent. Such identification allows no objectivity, no relativity, and no doubt, which for Themerson constitute the basis of moral and intellectual health. Yet, the Cardinal's objection towards poetry and Themerson's objection to the emotional impact of signs correspond only to one side of Themerson the artist.

And there are at least two sides which fight for the right of expression in his fiction. One is that of the moralist who does not hesitate to preach his values, hoping to influence his readers through communicating his ethical principles. The other, of the avant-garde artist, is equally eager to engage in the fight for the new world, yet his struggle is not done through preaching. He is fighting for new expression in art, for experiments with form which would open up new possibilities of vision, new angles of perception. Both sides are committed to the same values, yet while the former does not reject straightforward moralizing, the latter hopes that new, avant-garde ways of expression will be enough to pave the way for new values.

For Cardinal Pölätão Apollinaire represents the most dangerous kind of poetry, the kind which comes closest to the mystical union of signs and things; for Themerson he is, first of all, a member of the avant-garde who, by experiments with the visual side of poetry, makes readers aware of the complexity of relationships between signs and what they represent. These differences in opinion probably can be explained by the fact that the Cardinal has never read any of Apollinaire's poems. He condemns him a priori, without giving the poet a chance to defend himself. The Cardinal's attitude is a consequence of his religious beliefs; his premises do not permit him to be objective. While Themerson would like to judge art, any work of art, on its individual merits, the Cardiral condemns poetry as a

whole, disregarding individual achievements. Apollinaire's case is particularly interesting as Themerson considers him to be extremely consistent in both ways of expression: his traditional poetry and his visual experiments (Apollinaire's 32). Potentially he should have been able to convince the Cardinal, that is if Pōlātāo ever ventured beyond his dogmatic premises.

Let us turn now to the function of art, which plays a prominent role in the Cardinal's philosophy. Returning to his basic concept of two realities, Indirect Reality consisting of what we are able to observe through our senses and Direct Reality or the revealed reality of the soul, Pōlātāo devises a method of saving the souls of logical positivists who, he is convinced, rely too much on Indirect Reality, refusing to accept the existence of the soul. The Cardinal comes to the conclusion that abstract art can become the means of achieving his purpose. He firmly believes that in order to be a good Roman Catholic one has to achieve a balance between two realities: direct and indirect. That is how he arrives at the concept of his Equation in which neither the reality of the soul nor of the flesh should be overemphasized. Yet, since his logical positivists have already upset the balance by stressing the importance of Indirect Reality to an alarming extent:

> the first task of the missionary going to Logical Positivists is to treat them intensely with Abstract Painting, so that they experience the direct Reality which is necessary for understanding the Equation, which is necessary for understanding Persons, which is necessary for understanding the Nature of Things,

> which they must do before the claims of the Church Catholic are brought to their notice by the missionary so that they may die in communion with the See of Rome... (123).

Art, especially abstract art, reduces our perception of Indirect Reality, but gives us insight to the Direct Reality, the reality of the soul. Here, Themerson is letting his own thoughts on the function of art influence his amusing Cardinal. Themerson believes that art is endowed with an ability to get to the core of human experience. It is thus able to supplement philosophy and science which have to limit themselves in their pursuits. If they do not do it, they risk finding themselves pronouncing hypotheses which cannot be verified. Yet if they limit themselves too much, they risk leaving us with nothing. As the Cardinal puts it:

> we must be on our guard not only against those who, like Eddington and Jeans, expand the universe of science into what she is not, but also against those, who, like Russell, so contract it to its roots that they arrive at the question: "Can a Law of Nature change?", and there remains in their hands nothing, no pen, no pencil,, no broomstick, with which they could write: "No." (91)

Art, not bound by the rules of logic and by facts which have to be observed and verified, is a world in itself, and as such it can offer conditions to broaden our experience. An artist--as Themerson once once put it--is a bioseismograph, a sensitive instrument recording for us the changes in human society, , showing its dangers, its desires, and fears (Kurt Schwitters 16).

Themerson once remarked that the name "Pōlātōo" was

prompted by his desire to use the ö, ä, and ü keys on his brand-new typewriter. This explanation surely belongs to the genre of literary gossip, yet it also suggests that one has to look beyond the ö, ä, and ü for the significance of the Cardinal's name. The most direct association which comes to mind is with the Greek philosopher Plato, whose name appears in Themerson's oeuvre several times. Yet the Cardinal shares with his famous predecessor more than just a variation of his name. Like Plato, the Cardinal is concerned with science, truth, and knowledge, and the analogy is further enhanced by his use of a learned debate as a means of expressing his ideas. Both philosophers are idealists trying to fit the world of the senses to preconceived notions of what it should be. Both oppose poetry; the Cardinal tries to kill Apollinaire, whom he had fathered, for his meddling with the affairs of the soul without God, whereas Plato excludes the poet from his Republic on the ground that he falsifies reality and delivers statements twice-removed from the truth of Ideas. And, finally, in spite of all their grave reservations towards poetry, they become fathers to many a poetic endeavour.

There is no doubt that Themerson, who values rationality, **mens sana**, and flexibility of mind, considers Plato dangerous. In Special Branch, a dialogue in Plato's style on the meaning of intelligence and morality, he equates Platonic preconceived ideals with white plastic balloons which had to be pierced, "one balloon after

another, to make room for new notions, which would fit the picture of the world as we go through it..." (57). Yet he is very much aware that getting rid of preconceived ideas is a painful process which can become too difficult for many people. That is why -planning the ideal education for the Ultra-intelligent machine--the narrator insists: "Don't let her [the machine] read Plato first?" (59).

In Cardinal Pölätöo, the grotesque follower of Platonic convictions that our world is but a shadow of the Idea has his own preconceived notions about what the world should be and is forcing facts to suit his ideals. Yet his attempts, treated by the author with indulgent irony, are both hilarious and formidable. The reader slowly realizes that this stern follower of idealism is indeed an Everyman, trying desperately to synthesize the growing body of facts and knowledge which flood him incessantly. He also gains the reader's sympathy when, contrary to his initial reluctance, he expands his world to include abstract art. This transformation is completed in the Cardinal's further appearances in Themerson's narratives. In General Piesc, for instance, the Cardinal openly expresses his hatred towards ideals which allow for the sacrifice of "the decency of means." Yet in the Cardinal's biography the ironic references to Plato are still obvious, further underlining Themerson's distrust of idealism.

Cardinal Pölätöo, however, is not only Themerson's comment on the importance of art and its relationship with science and religion. It is an interesting narrative

experiment in its own right, reminiscent of avant-garde collages, so characteristic of Dada and Merz. From the first page on, the reader notices immediately that the author is weaving together various forms of fiction. The narrative starts as a biography, or at least that is how it is introduced by the narrator. Yet it quickly changes into a philosophical treatise and a collection of anecdotes narrating the Cardinal's encounters with various scientists and philosophers, then becomes a collection of letters both private, exchanged between the narrator and the Cardinal, and public (a letter to the Times which is an essay in the traditional sense of the genre). At the end we are also presented with a supplement containing a dictionary of freudian symbols. As much as Schwitters in his collages wanted to play off material against material, Themerson is playing off one type of narrative against another.

One of the aims of the avant-garde collages was to shake the audience out of their ways of thinking. The personality of the artist was no longer as important as in other artistic schools; he was only the master of ceremony, provoking the audience and letting them take over many of his functions. Themerson is true to this avant-garde principle. The narrator in his book hides behind facts, letters, and Pólátdo's own philosophy. He explains nothing, giving the reader a chance to try to link the presented fragments together. In a way Themerson is reconstructing the process which takes place every day in human life; man is

compelled to absorb different elements of the world: facts, ideas, opinions and to build his system of values out of these fragments. What is the value of this system, Themerson asks, if all we construct it with are fragments? How far and with what results are we able to accomodate new discoveries, new directions in science, and art? In his struggle for the meaning of his philosophy the Cardinal becomes a twentieth-century Everyman, with all the limitations of a confused mind, trying to preserve his integrity in a changing world.

The narrative structure is not the only element based on the collage of fragments. The characters are also rather fragmentary. Apart from the Cardinal himself who, having lived through centuries, had accumulated the characteristics of many epochs and who had built his philosophical system out of fragments, there is a whole gallery of characters who have their equivalents in real life. These are philosophers, scientists, artists, politicians: ranging from Bertrand Russell to Charles Maurras. Their function in the narrative can be compared to that of everyday objects incorporated into avant-garde collages. All these characters appear in the book in order to present their scientific or philosophical standpoints. What emerges out of this collage is not an organic composition, but a collection of pieces each bringing into the composition a fragment of its own world. The result is an amusing literary collage, the ultimate purpose of which is to make the reader see the relationships among the fragments in a different light.

Another bonus of such a narrative method is its

apparent humour. The book is extremely amusing in its philosophical divagations, first of all because of unexpected juxtapositions (as for example the fight between young Ayer and the Cardinal) but also because of their more general significance. In one of the scenes, for instance, the Cardinal indulges in a long discussion with Bertrand Russell on the subject of ethical values and their relation to religious doctrines. The humorous character of the scene can only be fully perceived when one adds that the conversation takes place on a mbuntain top and that the two philosophers are peeing while discussing their issues. Using humour to undermine the seriousness of the conversation, Themerson questions the significance of its conclusion. He also pokes fun at symbolism and the significance traditionally given to imagery--for even the Cardinal, so eager to interpret the symbols of his visions, has to admit that this one is rather embarrassing. Humour reinforces the conclusion at which the reader arrives after following the Cardinal's peregrinations: all the systems presented in the book should be questioned and the achievement of an organic unity between science and religion, so much sought for by the Cardinal, is impossible, a conviction further reinforced by the narrative structure. The charm of the book lies precisely in its refusal to become too serious and grant its divagations too much importance. Like Dada artists, deep down, Themerson is laughing at human attempts to clarify all inconsistencies and to build the ultimate philosophical

system in spite of the futility of such a task. In Cardinal Pölätdo Themerson successfully avoids the temptation of being a preacher, preferring to satirize and to laugh.

Themerson's views on art expressed in Cardinal Pölätdo gain in clarity when compared to Malcolm Le Grice's comment on the function of abstraction: "Abstraction--says Le Grice speaking of the first abstract films by avant-garde artists--does not 'free' art from relatability to 'life', it merely alters the regions of experience which can be dealt with and the kinds of relationships which are possible" (15). Because it enriches our experience, because it provides us with a different angle of vision, art is seen by Themerson as closely related to his concept of positive exile, a sojourn in a foreign country which attracts us with the inherent possibilities offered by new surroundings, which provides us with a possibility to explore different points of view.

Such a view of art and its functions is closely related to what Urszula Czartoryska in her essay on Themerson called "the translatability of codes," having in mind the artist's interest in an idea of expressing the same message in different codes (17). This is one of the reasons why Themerson experimented with different artistic mediums: film, photography, poetry, prose, philosophical essays, and even an opera. By multiplying the ways of approaching his most essential problems he wanted to determine to what extent socially imposed rules alter the way we perceive the world around us. Rejecting abstract values as too rigid and

closed, Themerson is nevertheless convinced of the advantages provided by various attempts at approaching them. He does not conceal that this is a difficult process, yet even failures are extremely revealing, if properly judged. On the level of narration this conviction has been most fully manifested in Tom Harris. Part II of the novel consists entirely of three attempts at reconstructing the "truth" about Tom. Two attempts are abandoned as too subjective, revealing the difficulty the narrator has in freeing his characters from his own presence. It is only the third attempt that gets finished, yet the reader is free to speculate how "truthful" it really is. For Themerson exile--seen as the necessity of functioning in a different social code and the necessity of expressing oneself in a different linguistic code--serves the same function as his literary and artistic experiments. That is what made avant-garde art so attractive for him.

The twentieth century has come to accept that the artist's imagination is the only limitation to the material or subject matter of art. From now on the artist's interest could shift towards the manipulation of the components and materials used in the process of creation. One of the sources of this manipulation is chance. Themerson sees the attraction of chance and sees it as one of the unlimited sources of experiment in art. In his The Urge to Create Visions we read:

Let me now praise slovenliness. The slovenliness that

> shakes us out of the groove and rambles on close to chaos. Let us praise the hazard and slovenliness that spills all things at random, and thus gives the chance of seeing the hidden or neglected truth to those who want to see it. (14)

Chance can reveal what has been hidden under stereotypes, under rules accepted by a majority. Certainly it cannot do it by itself, yet it can stimulate a quick mind, offer a different solution, suggest a different angle of vision. For Themerson this exploration of different angles--one of the most important principles of his positive philosophy of exile-- becomes a metaphor of relative freedom from conventions. The exploration of different points of view expands our horizons, reveals hidden aspects of reality. Themerson expressed this view in his own experiments with typography, and through his active participation in avant-garde film experiments in pre-war Poland.

Not only has chance become an ally in the shaping of a new epoch, but also it has gained a place in Themerson's positive philosophy of exile. It is looked upon as a force which pushes people out of their niches in life, out of their cultures, and as such it is never cursed in Themerson's fiction, as it often is in other émigré literature. On the contrary, chance may turn out to be a positive force, in life as much as in art, if one is ready to learn from its configurations. In Themerson's world only those who refuse to adapt to new circumstances never learn anything; for the rest there is hope offered by chance and its potential for stimulating our minds.

Speaking of his friend, an émigré Parisian artist whose artistic experiments with slides painted on film fascinated him, Themerson says:

> His background was certainly religious. He used theological terms and religious imagery. I was very far from that sort of thing. One might think that would be a reason to differ. On the contrary. It was for that very reason that we understood each other. What a mean thing to point out the differences between God's love and a scientific law if both equally made us understand that there are cosmopolitan things that apply equally to poor man and to rich man, to man in China and to man in Peru, and that there are other things which will always remain parochial, even if they happen to be Great Republics or Powerful Empires. There exists a scale of values where a white plaster-of-Paris Madonna (or St. Louis) sides with Einstein's blackboard (or Lindbergh's aeroplane) at one end, and all the narrow vanities and impatient comforts of fame, pride, power and prejudice, find themselves at the other. I wonder whether this reshuffling of the Slides of Values is not the foundation of Pol-Dive's vitraumagic humour. (The Urge to Create Visions 29)

Themerson sees a clear link between art and cosmopolitanism. He stresses the value of cosmopolitanism versus parochial interests: the former signifies essential problems of human existence common to all men regardless of their nationality, the latter stand for temporary interests which perhaps serve one community but disregard the rest of the world. True art is cosmopolitan, says Themerson, since it serves humanity and not particular nations. Art is a no-nation land, where artists should soar above their nationalities in order to express what is common to all men. Themerson's view echoes the eighteenth-century ideal of cosmopolitanism with its stress on the universality of essential human experience. Themerson's conviction also suggests an explanation as to

why he is so wary of the emotional impact of art. This is not to say that emotions should be absent from artistic experience, far from it, since it is both dedication and emotional engagement that make art so appealing. Themerson is only warring against emotions harnessed into the service of national feelings which may so easily disregard humanity as a whole.

Speaking of Themerson's interest in Dada typographic experiments I have quoted a fragment from his book on Apollinaire's lyrical ideograms in which he comments on the nature of signs. This preoccupation with signs, as well as frequently repeated reservations towards symbols (cf. Cardinal Pölätto) reveal their new meaning when considered in the context of the theory of the avant-garde. In his essay on Dada typographic designs Arthur Cohen writes:

> Every viewer of Dada manifestation is struck by the obligation its visual language enforces to compel the eye to see differently, to record linguistic ideograms rather than words, to absorb rhythms of type rather than the familiar linearity of lead which characterized traditional typography, to take note of oddities and directives which force the eye to settle upon the miniscule in a sea of throbbing majuscules, to discover meanings sequestered in hidden places, slogans printed upside-down or obliquely, or in circles--language being its tail. (73)

According to Cohen, the most important function of these experiments is defamiliarization. By making the eye perceive the oddities of a new typeset, the mind notices unfamiliar connotations of the words, and is encouraged to reflect on their significance. Yet, as Themerson writes in his book on

Apollinaire, there is also another important aspect of these experiments. They break a traditional relationship between poetry and its imagery, making the reader perceive an image first and then fill it with concepts suggested by the text. Writing about Apollinaire Themerson is particularly impressed by the artist's ability to replace some of the sound qualities of his poetry by visual qualities, thus making the reader look at these poems from a different point of view. Apollinaire was able to preserve all the lyricism of his traditional poetry in his calligrams. A new point of view did not destroy anything; it merely added to the richness of his poetry, reinforced its message. For such a purpose Themerson is eager to accept experiments in art.

Remembering his own avant-garde films, made in pre-war Warsaw, Themerson stressed that the most precious features of these times were:

> le zèle. L'ardeur. Le besoin d'explorer les nouvelles possibilités--dans le cinéma par exemple--le besoin de créer des visions, une certaine confiance qu'on peut changer le monde pour le mieux, qu'un nouvel ordre--ou désordre--un art, qu'une logique nouvelle, une science nouvelle, ou de nouvelles nécessités economiques, imposeront l'état pacifique de justice.. C'est bien bizarre que les oeuvres d'art créées dans cette disposition d'ésprit, cette manière de penser, ont aujourd'hui une valeur purement esthétique...Ou bien...commerciale? (qtd. in Czartoryska 23) 1

For Themerson the function of art is always closely related to social praxis. He is against experiments for experiment's sake, rejects "thinking about thinking about thinking" and always demands that a theory be trought down to earth in order to be verified. He is a moralist fighting

institutionalized thinking, and not unlike other avant-garde artists, trying to prepare his readers for the revision of the familiar. His positive philosophy of exile is one of the manifestations of this approach. National cultures, when followed slavishly, become Themerson's examples of cultural stereotypes, accepted at face value through the very process of upbringing. No matter how valuable some of the elements of these cultures may be, and Themerson is never denying that they might be extremely valuable, he wants his readers to consciously re-examine these values from the universal point of view. A divorce from one's own culture is not a means of separation from social praxis. On the contrary, its aim is to return to this praxis from a cosmopolitan point of view.

Themerson's stress on the cosmopolitan quality of art, the importance of chance in shaping the artistic creation, and his stress on the relationship with social praxis relate him to both Dada and Merz, in spite of the differences between the Dadaist revolt against bourgeois values and Schwitters's one-man movement. Although they never formed a uniform group, the Dadaists shared the desire to liberate men from what they called social and cultural slavery, provoke them to an extent at which they would also become Dadaists, even if only for a brief moment (Foster and Kuenzli 4). Yet the movement which grew from revolt, and which preached the destruction of old values was far from being uniform. In his 1920 article on Merz, Kurt Schwitters

distinguished between two kinds of Dada: one under the leadership of Huelsenbeck "oriented towards politics and against art and against culture," and another, under Tzara, which declared that "everyone makes his art in his own way" (59). The Zurich artists grew tired of anarchism and destruction and started looking for values which would replace the order they wanted to destroy. Some found it in politics, some, like Hans Arp or Tristan Tzara found it in artistic experiments and abstract art. It was Berlin Dada that took over the political aspirations of the Dada revolt and carried them further. What in the first Dada demonstrations were general statements against national ideals, war, and traditional morality, in Berlin Dada manifestoes turned into a protest against German militarism, government propaganda, and national socialism.

Dada, the movement which was born in Zurich on the eve of World War I out of disillusionment with nationalism and growing militarism, after the war spread to other centers: Berlin, Paris, Cologne, Geneva, and New York. The movement was never consistent and one can venture an opinion that escaping definitions and classifications was the Dadaists' favourite pastime. Michael Sanouillet, in his attempt to define the Dadaists, stresses "they avoided being cornered into giving a final precise and all-inclusive definition of their private and public objectives, of their aesthetic theories" (25). Rather than trying to classify and define Dadaists in their variety, it seems much more fruitful, to determine their attitude to the act of critical revolt,

which they all had in common. Stephen C. Foster in his essay "Dada Criticism" distinguishes among positive, negative, and neutral position towards criticism professed by different Dada artists (30) concluding:

> Thus Dada took a variety of forms in a variety of places. Some of the Dadaists most sympathetic to Futurism and anarchism saw the deterioration of the world as the promise of a more natural (asocial) state of affairs, a point of view close to what I will characterize as anti-criticism. Others, of a more mystical persuasion, saw the situation as the ashes from which a new world would naturally regenerate itself. Still others, with a kind of latent social inclination, saw the situation as the ruins from which a new world would be constructively rebuilt, the position boasting, if any Dadaist position did, solutions to the troubles of the world. (35)

What Themerson finds attractive in Dada revolt is its cosmopolitanism, its play with chance, and its desire to relate art to social praxis. Dada was founded by war refugees and exiles: German, Rumanian, and French who found haven in neutral Switzerland. It was born out of fear and contempt of nationalism and cosmopolitanism was to be its first principle. The universal and cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Dada movement was perhaps best captured by Richard Huelsenbeck in his 1936 essay entitled "Dada lives," where the artist recalled: "our art had to be international, for we believed in an Internationale of the Spirit and not in different national concepts" (77). Chance was the essence of many Dada games and experiments, of which Tzara's recipe for a Dadaist poem is perhaps the most famous:

Take a newspaper. Take a pair of scissors. Choose an

> article as long as you are planning to make your poem. Cut out the article. Then cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them in a bag. Shake it gently. Then take out the pieces one after the other. Copy conscientiously in the order in which they left the bag. (qtd. in Zurbrugg 227-28) 2

Chance was thought of as an excellent means of breaking dogmatic literary conventions, signifying the freedom from conventions. It was, however, also responsible for a lot of misunderstanding and absurdity best visible in famous simultaneous poems read at Dada evenings. This chance poetry, composed of randomly chosen texts in different languages was supposed to free a listener from his literary expectations and restore the freedom of his own associations. Chance was seen as a blow to "means-ends rationality" of the bourgeois (Bürger 65) or, in other words, the apotheosis of freedom. The last feature of the Dada movement that appealed to Themerson, the desire to end the isolation of art from social praxis, was a characteristic feature not only of Dada but of the whole of the avant garde movement.

In his most recent study on the avant-garde Peter Bürger opposes the identification of the avant-garde with modernism, on which earlier studies of the avant-garde were based (eg. Poggioli, Greenberg). While modernism, as he maintains, was a socially irrelevant attack on traditional artistic techniques attempted within the institution of autonomous art, the avant-garde rejected this autonomy and wanted to return to social praxis. The autonomy of art, in Bürger's theory, is considered as a category of bourgeois

society:

> It permits the description of art's detachment from the context of practical life as a historical development--that among the members of those classes which, at least at times, are free from the pressures of the need for survival, a sensuousness could evolve that was not part of any means ends relationships. (46)

Detached from the praxis of art, bourgeois art became more and more an institution for its own sake, and the European avant-garde could be seen as a negative reaction towards the status of art in bourgeois society:

> the historical avant-garde movements negate those determinations that are essential in autonomous art: the disjunction of art and the praxis of life, individual production, and individual reception as distinct from the former. The avant garde intends the abolition of autonomous art by which it means that art is to be integrated into the praxis of life. (53 4)

Since the avant-garde wanted primarily to reintegrate art and social praxis, the goal of the avant-garde artist was an active attack on the institution of art and not a withdrawal from society. The avant-garde artist had to be active, he often chose the form of manifestoes to declare his position, he rejected the importance of individual creation and denied his audience the importance of individual reception. The work of art produced within this framework did not aim at its organic unity but rather was a collection of aesthetic fragments open to supplementary responses. That is why the avant-garde put such an emphasis on montage and collage. The dominant principle of avant

garde art is to shock the recipient out of his set notions, to force him to re-examine his values.

Kurt Schwitters's Merz was another variety of Dada revolt. His Merz was to become a unique movement based on the adjustment of different materials of art. The creations of Merz were collages made of a variety of materials: cloth, cardboard, iron, plaster, newspapers, old pieces of furniture or machinery which the artist glued and nailed together into his elaborate, abstract compositions. In his 1920 manifesto, Merz, Schwitters wrote: "Art is a primordial concept, exalted as the godhead, inexplicable as life, indefinable and without purpose" (59). That is also where he declared his interest in in "playing off material against material" (59), in order to attain inner harmony in his compositions. He is, in fact, a representative of art for art's sake, abstract, and as devoid of social and political significance as possible. As Werner Schmalenbach writes in his comprehensive study on Schwitters, the artist was interested in reconciling differences and antitheses rather than posing questions (106). He created art out of the rubbish other people discard; he was interested in the effects his juxtapositions would have on the outcome of his creation and not in what kind of feelings or ideas they might provoke. He insisted on being considered independently of Dada and indeed his desire to preserve the autonomy of art was, in its essence, an anti-Dada stance.

Schwitters's relationship to Dada requires further discussion. In spite of his protests, he was often called a

Dadaist. Schwitters's concept of art springs from the same roots as "the internationale of the spirit," looking for what joined men rather than for what separated them into various groups. And, last but not least, he was also able to integrate Dada into his Merz in the same way as he integrated everything else. His Hanover friend, Kate Trauman Steinitz, wrote about him:

> Within the pulse of Schwitters's art there is a uniquely integrative quality. He was reluctant to draw an arbitrary line between life and art. Thus the accidents of life or any unexpected turn of events became sustenance for him; he made use of anything he came across. For Schwitters, relatively speaking, there was no such thing as the right or the wrong material, or a good or bad experience; he found methods of ecompassing within his art whatever he encountered in life. He felt, so it would appear, that art could be pervasive and inclusive--a window onto life. (xxvi)

This quality of Schwitters was a source of some serious criticism. Rex D. Last calls him "the childish figure of the movement, playing with cosmic fire, unaware of the dangerous forces he was meddling with" (31). He accuses Schwitters of insulating himself from reality, of being immersed in the private world of his abstract art which he built indiscriminately from the left-overs of civilization. According to Last, Schwitters

> was not seeking to take an object or word out of its cliché-ridden existence in order to set it in a new, meaningful context, but simply in order to liberate it from all contextual considerations, to remove it from reality into a world of private references and associations. (47)

Stefan Themerson would certainly not agree with Last's

opinion. He sees in Merz much more than art for art's sake. This conclusion is contained in Themerson's book on Schwitters's last years spent in exile, written precisely to document "the simplicity of a non-dogmatic human being, and the undisguised warmth of his rebellious yet constructive life" (Kurt Schwitters 9, emphasis added).[3]

Themerson maintains that the essence of Schwitters's art is heresy, a special kind of heresy, which is capable of bringing together the unexpected in order to form a new entity:

> To us, today, it may perhaps seem that the act of putting two innocent words together, the act of saying:
> **"Blue is the colour of thy yellow hair,"**
> is an innocent aesthetic affair--that the act of putting together two or three innocent objects, such as a railway ticket, and a flower, and a bit of wood--is an innocent aesthetic affair. Well, it is not so at all. Tickets belong to railway companies; flowers to gardeners; bits of wood to timber merchants. If you mix these things together you are making havoc of the classification system on which the regime is established, you are carrying people's minds away from the customary modes of thought, and people's customary modes of thought are the very foundation of Order, whether it is the Old Order or the New Order, and, therefore, if you meddle with the customary modes of thought then, whether you are Galileo or Giordano Bruno with their funny ideas about motion, or Einstein with his funny ideas about space and time, or Russell with his funny ideas about syllogisms ..., or Dadaists or Merzists with their funny ideas about introducing "symmetries and rhythms instead of principles"--you are, whether you want it or not, in the very bowels of political changes. (14)

Schwitters's collages are not just pretty pictures but, as Themerson writes, they give "a new value to odd and overlooked, downtrodden bits of reality--be they bits of wire or bits of words--by putting them together into some

specific kind of relationship and creating thus a new entity...". (15). Schwitters's art is important not as a museum piece or a pretty object, but as a guide to cosmopolitan values which would form the basis for a new meaning of humanity. For Themerson Schwitters is a fellow philosopher of exile, working to promote similar values in his own unique way. He also happens to be a true émigré. In 1937, at a reception proudly displaying newly painted portraits of Hitler and other Nazi leaders, Schwitters asked: "Shall we hang them, or shall we stand them against the wall?" (Kurt Schwitters in Exile 70). He had to leave Germany immediately. Schwitters left for Norway, and three years later managed to escape the clutches of the Gestapo once again when the Nazi troops invaded Norway. Schwitters found haven in England where he lived until his death in 1948, troubled by ill health and financial problems. Themerson, who writes about these final years, stresses that amidst all this confusion Schwitters stuck to his cosmopolitan values:

> The trouble with Schwitters was that he didn't like to be classified according to the set of rules against which he revolted. You can perhaps be an Italian futurist, or a Russian futurist; a French cubist, or a Belgian Congo cubist; a German expressionist, or a Japanese expressionist; but you cannot possibly be an Italian, or French, or German dadaist. You are either a dadaist or a German, &c. &c. You cannot be both. And if you are being refused a job in a factory, you want to be refused because you are a dadaist, or a merzist, and not because you are a German, or something else similarly irrelevant, irrelevant if you are Dada, if you belong to the Internationale of the Spirit. (27)

Yet it became increasingly difficult to live by

cosmopolitanism in a Europe torn by World War II. Schwitters found his ultimate haven in his Merz. Understanding the necessity to defend life, freedom, and human dignity Schwitters transcended the war and the fight against Adolf Hitler's murderous ideology. Schwitters's positive exile was realized neither in England, nor even in his beloved Norway. He found it in his Merz, since art was for him the realm of the essential and the international.

Themerson is not the only one to consider Schwitters's art in a wider context than just aesthetics. Foster considers Schwitters to be one of the constructive Dadaists, for whom "the role of art became one of prescribing, however vaguely, a new order" (36). This new order, the positive outcome of negation, is also Schwitters's chief attraction for Themerson. In spite of the declarations in "Merz" "that art is without purpose" Schwitters suggests a way out of the present limitations of art and culture. Let us look closer at his concept of Merz to justify this opinion.

Themerson maintains that for Schwitters Merz was an expression of new art. It was his response to the impossibility of explaining the world in the terms outlined by the nineteenth century, and by nineteenth-century ways of thinking. It was a term which covered all his artistic experiments: from his collages to phonetic poetry. And it is precisely his phonetic poetry which offers clues which lead us to the constructive values of Merz. In his fascinating

article on Merz Friedhelm Lach writes:

> Every sensible interpreter feels that the general idea of Merz is the constant happening of creativity. It is essential for this proclaimed creative practice to stimulate, awaken, and deautomatize the public and to incite its activity. (39)

The essence of Merz is that everything can become the material of its performance, that everything can release the creativity and productivity which exist in all of us. Schwitters used to his purpose any discarded object which had struck his fancy and blended it into his Merz collages, as well as he used fragmentary sentences, words, syllables as the material for his phonetic poems. The purpose of Merz poetry evenings, as much as the purpose of Merz collages, was to sensitize the audience, to liberate it from everything which hindered creativity. And as Lach emphasizes, for Schwitters: "creativity is power. It changes the world, not by political means, but by provocation, identification, obsessionalization, and invention. Creativity is perceived as such a power that it transforms the whole world" (45).

Schwitters is not withdrawing from life as Last accuses. He is withdrawing from the vision of art as propaganda, the tool of a ideology. The author of Merz wanted art to be above ideologies, in order to get to the essence of humanity, the thought best expressed by Schwitters himself in his "Proletarian Art Manifesto":

> There is no such thing as art relating to a particular class of human beings, and, if there were, it would

have no relation to life.

> To those who aspire to create proletarian art we put the question: "What is proletarian art?"...An artist is neither a proletarian nor a bourgeois, and his work belongs neither to the proletariat nor to the bourgeoisie, but to everyone. Art is a spiritual function of man, the purpose of which is to redeem him from the chaos of life and its tragedy. Art is free in its choice of means but is bound by its own laws and by them alone, and once a work of art is created it far transcends the class distinction between proletarian and bourgeois...
>
> The sole object of art is, by its own means, to arouse men's creative powers; its target is the mature human being, not the proletarian or the bourgeois. (qtd. in Kurt Schwitters in Exile 23)

A valuable source of Schwitters's further comments on his understanding of the function of art is Pin and the Story of Pin, Schwitters's last attempt to formulate his position on the necessity to create a new vision of art, to juxtapose the creativity of Merz to the physical destruction brought about by the war. The book, written together with Hausmann, a former member of Berlin Dada and a close friend of Schwitters, was not only to be a tribute to Dada but was also to be their own comment on the post-war world which, they felt, needed the Dada spirit more than ever. The book did not find a publisher in post-war London, and both Hausmann and Schwitters were too poor, and too sick to fight for its publication. In her introduction to Pin, published for the first time by Themerson's **Gaberboccus Press** in 1962, Jasia Reichardt recalled that, originally, Pin was to be a magazine of poetry which was to "fill the gap between the work of literary academism and that of the socially conscious experiment" (1). Hausmann was always extremely

interested in experiments with sound, movement, and their visual equivalents. Yet, especially right after the war, he felt that avant-garde artists had to create new forms of art "which would be in no way associated with either resistance and war, or those scientific discoveries which threatened peace" (5).

In one of his letters to Hausmann Schwitters declared in the same spirit: "Creative capacities are sunk deep in the time of war... Old stuff cannot lead further. The world needs new tendencies in poetry and painting. The spirit must conquer bombs and rockets, then mankind will survive" (7). Schwitters maintains that an artist should be ahead of his epoch, should always fight where the rest of mankind has not yet arrived. An artist is a bioseismograph of his times, feeling for others, opening their eyes and their minds. To do that he cannot be limited by nationality, political loyalties, or artistic conventions. It is significant how much Schwitters's demands upon the avant-garde artist and his audience correspond to the values of Themerson's philosophy of positive exile. Schwitters's new vision of art is only possible when old values are re-examined, when old relationships become severed, when a work of art is able to turn the audience into spiritual "exiles" ready to transform the newly created void into a source of fresh values.

The avant-garde movements have been criticized on the grounds that their demonstrations and provocations proved self-destructive. They either bored and confused or, what

was much more, made the recipients of avant-garde art even more attached to their old values. In his theory of the avant-garde Peter Bürger notices that an act of provocation often served as an incentive to formulate so far undefined convictions. He concludes that the integration of art and praxis so desired by the avant-garde is impossible. The avant-garde had failed to integrate art and social praxis, he maintains, although even in its failure its impact on modern art was enormous. Bürger does not give convincing reasons either for this failure, or for the suggested impossibility of success in the future. Jochen Schultze-Sasse suggests in his introduction to Bürger's book that the chief reason of Bürger's pessimism is his Marxist-based view of the development of society independent of human subjectivity (xlii).

The impossibility of integrating art and life, determined by the social status of art, caused most of the frustrations of the avant-garde artists. Constant escape from assimilation into the mainstream of art brought about a nagging need for the new, the shocking, the provocative. The avant-garde artist tried to preserve the distance between himself and his art, which his theoretical standpoint demanded, noticing, with growing despair, that all his protests were neatly assimilated and became museum pieces. Defeated, the avant-garde became a part of conventional culture, yet it can nevertheless claim considerable success in the impact it had on the development of art. It enlarged and enriched the means of artistic expression and introduced

fresh perspectives into it. These successes, however feeble when compared to the avant-garde goals, became its passport to the future.

The avant-garde artist pursuing essential values from the cosmopolitan, universal point of view has a lot in common with Themerson's positive exile. Art in the same way as exile may, at least potentially, become the catalyst allowing the artist to experiment with his world. By physically uprooting an individual, exile forces him to adapt, re-examine his own values, reject some of them, reinforce others. Art does not need physical exile to achieve the same effect. An avant-garde artist does not have to become an émigré since his artistic experiments demand from him an estrangement from the cultural standards of his community without leaving his native country. In his fiction Themerson defends this freedom and the right to it; defends it against national loyalties, order, utilitarianism. Writing about Kurt Schwitters, Rex W. Last states that the British passport granted to him on the day before he died "was certainly a document of little relevance to him; perhaps extracts from it might have found their way into one of his poems, or pieces of it into a picture" (61). He could be right but Schwitters's attitude does not signify contempt for Britain. It means that as a merzist he is a foreigner to all rational concepts--an exile who found that his world-view has to be painfully constructed from the totality of his experience and that the essence of his humanity can be

only realized through art.

To sum up: Themerson's positive philosophy of exile has its continuation in his views on art and its social functions. He is convinced of the importance of the cosmopolitanism of art, its reliance on chance, and its relation to social praxis--features which make him close to the position assumed by the twentieth-century avant-garde. Although the degree of influence of the avant-garde on the institution of art in contemporary society can be disputed, the impact of the avant-garde is still felt. In the same manner Themerson's philosophy, based on the positive view of detachment, aspires to affect the lives of the readers. Even if doomed to failure, it is still capable of exerting some influence and of documenting the richness of human experience.

Notes

1 The quotation comes from "Poésie Interrompue," an interview with Stefan Themerson by G. G. Lemarie, France-Culture, 3 Dec. 1978.

2 Tristan Tzara, Lampisteries précédées des sept manifestes dada (Paris: Pauvert, 1963), p. 64.

3 The two artists met in London where, after two dramatic escapes from the Gestapo, Schwitters spent the final years of his life. They became friends and Themerson wrote a book on Schwitters, documenting the last years of exile of the founder of Merz.

CONCLUSION

In the study of the literature of exile the writers who build their philosophy on the concept of a positive attitude towards expatriation are still rare. Their vision competes with the view of an émigré as an alienated individual living among people whose language, culture, and customs he does not share and who, in turn, cannot comprehend him. Such a perspective, visible in nostalgic émigré writers has been most fully represented by the theme of the individual's alienation in a hostile or indifferent world. Yet although a positive attitude towards exile cannot be universally recommended, it has genuine claims to validity and is capable of contributing to the understanding of exile, and perhaps to drawing some good from an experience which can be potentially very difficult, if not tragic. In a world in which exile becomes a common fate of more and more people, such a view is a welcome break. It brings hope that the experience of so many can enrich humanity and contribute to its unification.

The role that exile plays in the process of freeing an individual from the pressure exerted by a group and making him aware of the needs of humanity is hardly uniform even among positive philosophers of exile. Themerson's positive philosophy of exile was a means of enriching his own "set of co-ordinates," a means of enchancing the awareness of the relativity and the arbitrariness of human notions and ideas, and of resurrecting cosmopolitan values.

Witold Gombrowicz initially developed his philosophy of exile as a reaction to the power exerted by the Polish cultural tradition which hampered his artistic development. Yet, in time, it developed into an elaborate world-view based on his concept of Form which determined not only human relations but also human development. Form, Gombrowicz concluded, has to be weakened if an individual is to develop, and it can be weakened through exile. Going even further, Gombrowicz arrived at the conclusion that instinctual morality cannot be revealed otherwise but through some sort of exile and alienation. Bertrand Russell included the notion of positive exile, which he called impartiality and detachment, into his rational moral philosophy of which, as much as love and knowledge, it became an integral part. Kurt Schwitters provided an example of an artist who lives in the land of art, an exile from other worlds which are limited when compared to this meta-land of international, universal art valid for all human beings regardless of their national, political, or social affiliations.

A positive attitude to exile, capable of generating complex literary and artistic responses, can be thus seen as a form of struggle for human unity which transcended cultural differences. Although far from formulating a comprehensive theory of world integration the writers sharing the positive philosophy of exile subscribe to the Stoic ideal of "cosmopolis," founded on the desire to build

a world-state on the basis of the empathy for the members of an extended human family. The analysis of the fiction of both Stefan Themerson and Witold Gombrowicz, of the moral philosophy of Bertrand Russell, and of the ideology of the twentieth-century artistic avant-garde reveals their cosmopolitan roots and their interest in fundamental human values which have the capacity of withstanding cultural modifications. The philosophers of exile for whom exile is transformed from a physical phenomenon to a philosophical standpoint try to contribute to the task of unification by pointing to the necessity of conserving the variety of the world, and simultaneously, to the values which transcend nationalities and cultures.

In the fight for unification which does not compromise diversity, exile is seen as a chance of weakening the bonds between an individual and his native cultural tradition; it is an ally in the fight for universality because it introduces a universal perspective into the analysis of individual experience. Thus, as Themerson's protagonists proved many a time, it can be positive even if it fails to bring personal satisfaction. Within the philosophy of exile expatriation can therefore be treated as the catalyst revealing, and thus helping to realize, the hidden aspects of human experience. Alienation, a frequent companion of exile, is seen in a positive light too, as an enrichment of sensitivity and a source of help for the quest of impartiality, both seen as fundamental attitudes helping to bridge cultural differences.

Yet objectivity, which was so often summoned by Themerson, Gombrowicz, and Russell, is also the chief source of problems the positive philosophy of exile encounters. Ideally, it should be an absolute value, but there is no place for absolute values in their philosophy. The writers do not pretend that impartiality is possible in a world in which the individual is constantly conditioned by such potent forces as society, culture, or politics. Full objectivity is not possible yet various degrees of impartiality are. Therefore an individual is justified in his search for a way which is capable of helping him in attaining a higher degree of impartiality than the one he enjoys. Each philosopher of positive exile considers expatriation to be one of the allies in attaining this higher degree of awareness of the compexity of issues, which is a step towards a higher degree of objectivity.

In Gombrowicz's world the individual is entangled in an intricate web of Form, cultural dependencies, and personal limitations. Even if some of these become eliminated or weakened, for instance through exile, others take their place and the struggle begins anew. This impossibility to attain freedom and authenticity does not make exile less positive. Gombrowicz fights for his higher degree of freedom from Form by taking on its other facet, by putting on the mask of a jester in a confused universe. Themerson and Russell choose another method. They admit the impossibility of impartiality and the arbitrariness of values, yet they

insist on the necessity of pursuing them nevertheless. Nothing can be gained by standing still, they maintain, and they point out that human strenght and dignity can be found anew in the process of struggle. Russell--being a philosopher as well as a writer--states his position explicitly, demanding from his readers both doubt and persistency in pursuing values they are fully aware are arbitrary. Themerson--being a writer-- states his principles through his fictional worlds. His protagonists face death and indifference; their struggles are failures when measured against ideals, but victories when measured against the degree of awareness they achieve.

One may venture an opinion that to admit that one's most cherished values are arbitrary is in itself a considerable achievement on the side of unattainable objectivity. To notice and stress that alienation and exile help in attaining the awareness of relativity, that the loosening of national bonds should be looked upon as a rewarding experience in spite of pain and frustrations involved, is a step forward in the direction of world unification.

The aim of the present thesis was to distinguish and to describe a distinct form of the literature of exile in which a positive attitude to expatriation is the basis for a complex world view. Contemporary literature cannot help being marked with an awareness of its multicultural roots if only because of the political changes which have made exile and emigration such a frequent phenomenon in the twentieth

century. Those roots, so clearly visible in the cases of border-line writers, like Themerson or Gombrowicz, enrich our literary heritage with new values and ideas. The study of those writers and their attitudes to expatriation, and the list of names worthy of careful analysis and consideration can be multiplied, is therefore extremely important for our understanding of the human condition. I can only hope that my thesis will contribute to our awareness of multicultural writers and their unique position in the study of the body of international literature, no matter in which country it happens to be written.

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