THE END OF A DREAM?

It is presumptuous to end something so durably flimsy as a dream, and it is critically presumptuous, perhaps, for an Englishman to suggest that Americans have abandoned their dream. R.W.B. Lewis and F.I. Carpenter, in their studies of the dream, have admitted that in the nineteenth century there were voices of irony and despair in the debate on the dream, as well as the more strident and characteristic voice of hope. Perhaps also three books by Nelson Algren, Jack Kerouac and James Gould Cozzens (*Never Come Morning, On The Road, By Love Possessed*), fit into my pattern without at all being representative. The fact remains, however, that these three writers examine the dream in the three stages of man, and offer, ultimately, only death, disillusionment or duplicity as alternatives for living. Henry James set the end of innocence at a certain awkward age, and then, immediately afterwards produced his middleaged Lambert Strether, an innocent abroad. His literary heiress set the age of innocence in a social, not a personal milieu; but J.D. Salinger's Catcher in the Rye repeats once more the predicament and solution of Huck Finn, who cannot quite face the prospect of being « civilised ». The difference is (it is crucial, too) that Huck still has the territory to « light out for », and the pastoral idyll still means something. The lustre of the dream remains in urban surroundings, however, clinging tenaciously to its bearers, so that when the dream is examined with radical attention — as Graham Greene examines it in *The Quiet American* — such total commitment strikes one as unAmerican. The child, the adolescent or the female have been the traditional vessels of innocence in European literature, but in the American tradition, age or sex is less important than just being American. James's characters grow up with him from Christopher Newman to Lambert Strether, and through death, defeat or despair, the hope, the glow of the innocent, spiritually triumphant, persists. Not even Freud has shaken the general feeling however that Rousseau was right, and adolescence has seemed the right point for the artist to take in examining inno-

cence and its relation to the world. Ihab B Hassan comments (in *American Quarterly*, Fall 1958) on a long line of adolescents in American literature from Daisy Miller (and Hawthorne's Pearl preceded her!) to the hero of Salinger:

> Obviously, then, the cult of adolescence is not an accident of our time. Quite to the contrary, its history reverts to some of the most basic impulses in American experience. Behind it lies what we used to call the American Dream, the vision of youth, hope and the open road. It is, of course, a vision that has given the American novel its distinctive force and has left on the American character an indelible impression.

Mr Hassan's past tenses are very suggestive. That is to say, so long as, in the nineteenth century there was a *debate* between opposing voices, the dream was a motivating factor and its reality or not irrelevant; but if the voices of hope disappear, if the affirmation is lacking or constantly qualified, how long can the dream survive? The vision of youth, hope and the open road is an ironic basis to Mr Algren's *Never Come Morning*. Like Huck Finn, Bruno Biceps, the hero, is a young underprivileged boy, called, in twentieth century jargon: a juvenile delinquent. He has no father, and, unlike Huck, the pastoral setting of the Mississippi is not available: he lives in North West Side Chicago. The book itself is introduced by Richard Wright, dedicated to Sartre, and epigraphed from Whitman: thus whilst attacking respectability, it lays claim to literary respectability. It is not a « Beat » generation book, but it is a « Howl » — the howl of a sixteen years' old boy who finds literate comfort in womb images beneath the elevated railway; a boy with an ailing Polish mother (who ironically traces his corruption to their removal from the stabilities of the old world to the stabilities of the New World). He is, therefore, part of a national minority, a roman catholic, in process of second-generation integration. Religion is consequently offered as part of their life, and in the characters of Steffi and Biblebacks, as some sort of solution; but to a tough guy like Bruno Biceps and the jungle world in which he finds himself, it is either unattainable or irrelevant. He is interested in proving his manhood, and fulfilling his ambitions — to

be either « a big-league hurler » or the « contender for the heavy-weight championship of the world ». He balances these ambitions, which are portrayed as dreams, with the needs of living: « His life was a ceaseless series of lusts: for tobacco so good he could eat it like meat; for meat, for coffee, for bread, for sleep, for whisky, for women, for dice games and ball games and personal triumphs in public places ». In Algren's descriptions the actual needs of living move smoothly back into the realm of dreams, the secret life of Bruno Biceps, and opposing this realm are the dreams of privacy (not publicity), a steady girl, a steady job, and a clean, well-lighted place that is his own. For Bruno is a post-Hemingway hoodlum and, therefore, too sensitive beneath the facade of the brute to accept the merely animal, the purely casual. He recognises — and this is part of his innocence and the dream — that it is these stabilities which make a man a man, or if he lives in a jungle, a wolf. And life in North West Side Chicago is a jungle where police, prostitutes pimps and hoodlums all hunt and are hunted in the search for a living. Immediate pleasure and preservation are the only things that can matter to an individual: tomorrow will take care of itself.

It is part of Bruno's vision that he cannot quite accept this: like Maisie, he knows all but still retains some moral judgement. Having had intercourse with Steffi he shares her with the gang as is the custom, but he alternates shame and nausea with pride at the thought of this betrayal and resolves the situation in violence, murdering a Greek who has joined the queue! After a prison sentence for an earlier crime (the police at this point cannot pin the murder of the Greek on him) he becomes the pimp and chucker-out for the Polack cat-house where Steffi now « works » — thus using his pugilistic powers in an ironic context. Steffi still loves him; she cheats for him at cards and again he leaves her to face the consequences. She is persuaded to trap him in return. His first official fight has been fixed and she is to get him drunk the preceding night and thus spoil his chances. She is jolted out of this plan by the sudden realisation that Bruno still loves her: he still dreams of marriage and the securities of life in those terms: « under his pretense of toughness he was still that soft ». The match takes place, but it is with a

negro, and the audience have determined that, fair or foul, it shall be a white man's evening. So Bruno's public triumph is soured by the ugliness of racial hatred, and having won the match on these terms he is arrested for the murder of the Greek. Yet, as he is preparing to leave for trial and presumably execution, Algren twists the reader's sympathy for the underdog; for Bruno's thoughts are not of his own predicament but on the plight of an old Mexican who is being beaten up in the next bout. As the bell sounds announcing the old man's release from the ring, Bruno leaves knowing that he will never make twenty-one anyhow. There is no Mrs Wix for Bruno Biceps: only death as an end of innocence.

The characters in Kerouac's *On The Road*, Salvatore Paradise and Dean Moriarty, are not adolescents, though they often behave like them. They represent the literary arrival of the « sordid hipsters of America, a new beat generation », and Moriarty is Representative Man — the jailkid with « the tremendous energy of a new kind of American saint ». The Beat generation has been dismissed as ephemeral, called literary spivs and compared with the Angry Young Men: whatever their *literary* value, their presence and values are interesting, for presence and values attack the same kind of respectability as Algren aimed at in the sad tale of Bruno Biceps. These are yesterday's teenagers however, who reached the age of if not the condition of maturity at the end of the war and found their only certainty — the only thing to be proud of — was to be beat. The term is vague, as is most of the jargon of the movement. Beats seek to find something to believe in, to let them live at peace with themselves and the world; for them, to find ones self is to find God. This is by no means new: it is a characteristic tenet of nineteenth century transcendentalists or of Whitman; only what the nineteenth century expressed in metaphor, these writers live in fact. They write, as Gertrude Stein would say « sensationally », and as such they are open to criticism. They often sound like an affectation of literary Bohemianism; nevertheless, with the creed of Do Everything and the trinity of Poet, Hoodlum and Junkie, the movement opens up new vistas on the road of the American Dream. Or rather it restates them, but in terms of savage denial. The novel, as its title suggests, is picaresque,

unified by the changing relationship between Sal Paradise, the narrator, and Dean Moriarty, the Beat Man, a kind of twentieth century Bronson Alcott. Each section, excluding the last, is an excursion on the road of the American Dream, in quest of a father (with all the implications T. S. Eliot has endowed *that* quest with) and the Heaven of sensation, when the moment comes that you think « that everything was about to arrive — the moment when you know all and everything is decided forever ». Progress is effected first by the change of geographical excursion; secondly by the changing relationship of Sal Paradise to Dean, and thirdly by the sense of time passing. Thus at the beginning, Moriarty, the mad Ahab, is a « young Gene Autry — trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed, with a real Oklahoma accent — a side-burned hero of the snowy West », but at the end of the novel he is involved in the complexities of living and abandoned — a small, pathetic figure shivering in a moth-eaten overcoat on a cold New York evening, drained of enthusiasms by the people who have « used » him throughout the book as a stimulus. The age of these people is as important as in both Algren and Cozzens: they are at the precise point of growing old (i.e. middleaged), when, according to the world of the square, a man should have married and settled down with a family. Moriarty has been married three times, divorced twice, is living with his second wife, and, here and there, has four children, but there is no sense of settling down.

Meanwhile the heaven, the dream, has been defined in terms of sensation. The « one and noble function of the time » is to *move*: and in doing so they break every law of the road. Thus the cops who seek to prevent nobility, are Victorian; arbiters of respectability who refuse to accept the requirements of minority beatitude. For Paradise and Moriarty, the road is life, and the soul is wrapped up in a fast car, a coast to reach, and a woman at the end of the road. Their God is the pianist Shearing (a blind God), listened to under the influence of « tea ». There comes a point when, obviously, even the great American continent has been geographically and sensationally exhausted, when all roads have been taken; when the question must be asked: Which road? : « holyboy road, madman road, rainbow road, guppy road, any road. It's anywhere road for anybody any-

how ». They take the road to Heaven and ironically Heaven lies *outside* America; it is in Mexico. It is in the Mexican visit that the latent primitivism (earlier Sal wishes he were a negro to get more kicks out of life) lends a fullness to the pastoralism. In Mexico the road is good, as good as an American road, and everyone on it « goes » (i.e. drives as madly as Dean who does 1180 miles in seventeen hours on one occasion) and the police never interfere, merely look bored. Here the women are obliging and wonderful, and « tea » grows in the garden. And here, ironically, Dean abandons Sal Paradise with a fever:

> When I got better I realised what a rat he was but then I had to understand the impossible complexity of his life how he had to leave me there sick to get on with his wives and his woes.

For these people the real world is simply pretense, and only chaos is true; their real world becomes a composite of inversions:

> We hit all the dull bars in the French Quarter with Old Bull and went back home at midnight. That night Marylou took everything in the books: she took tea, goofballs, benny, liquor, and even asked Old Bull for a shot of M, which of course he didn't give her; he did give her a martini. She was so saturated with elements of all kinds she came to a standstill and stood goofy on the porch with me. It was a wonderful porch Bull had. It ran clear around the house; by moonlight with the willows it looked like an old Southern mansion that had seen better days. In the house Jane sat reading the want ads in the living room; Bull was in the bathroom taking his fix, clutching his old black necktie in his teeth for a tourniquet and jabbing with the needle into his woesome arm with the thousand holes; Ed Dunkel was sprawled out with Galatea in the massive master bed that Old Bull and Jane never used; Dean was rolling tea; and Marylou and I imitated the Southern aristocracy.
>
> « Why, Miss Lou, you look lovely and most fetching tonight ».
>
> « Why, thank you, Crawford, I sure do appreciate the nice things you do say ».

With amazing economy, no words wasted, Kerouac has portrayed in this reminiscence of the Old South, the romantic dream that has turned into a nightmare.

The transition to the world of Arthur Winner in Cozzens' *By Love Possessed*, is apparently an abrupt one, and the two worlds

would seem to have little in common, but the title of the novel, with its verb «possessed» indicates an obsessive quality, and the action of the novel demonstrates that even the most genteel world conceals or contains behind its elegant facade, the same impulsive crimes and emotions as North West Side Chicago. It is another Peyton Place: a large novel full of people and action, containing the stock American components — Negro, Roman Catholic, Irish immigrant, and White Anglo-Saxon Protestant; and again it is an immensely literate novel, epigraphed from Shakespeare and full of literary echoes and allusions. It is the story of a twentieth century Lambert Strether: for against the panorama of loves, in all the diversity of «Love», the central moral crisis is Arthur Winner's, and it is his innocence that is exploited, denied and re-affirmed in new terms. Winner is exactly 54 years old, and the action of the novel covers exactly two days and one hour of his life; he is a lawyer which adds point to the situation as well as widening the circle of those he will meet who are possessed by love. During the first two days, roughly, we are shown Winner as a kind and wise man, honoured and respected, an examplar of gracious living — the kind of living associated with even the remnants of wealth and power, intense moral scruples, and membership of Christ Church Episcopalian. A man out of Mr Eliot's early poetry, perhaps, who in the end discovers that all this, in fact, depends upon a crime committed by someone also regarded as honest and wise; and can only continue if he assists at the crime not merely passively by not denouncing it, but actively by aiding it. The novel has two major motifs: the hidden heart and love both intertwined: for Love is surprisingly the noble instinct and the concealed animal within us. In showing us the possible exploitations or reconciliations of love, Cozzens prepares us for the hidden man — or what man is really like as opposed to what he is socially held to be:

> If all hearts were open, all desires known; and if no secrets were hid — each of us, I think, might do well to consider just where that would leave him personally, whether he'd still be quite so well regarded as he may be now.

This is said in praise of Noah Tuttle, about whom Winner preserves

an innocence comparable to Strether's belief in the « virtuous attachment » of *The Ambassadors*. Winner's innocence extends from an early childhood pastoral idyll, presented through the symbol of the Ponemah oak with its associations of childhood and its permanence through time from the Indians to present day civilisation:

> Those children had been real; as, in their time, the Indians, possibly passing by, had been. The innocence of that stage of life was real; for innocence's essence was a rapturous unknowing, a bliss of doubtfree ignorance. The folly of being wise, those children had never yet committed.

And Winner has never committed the folly of being wise about his father-in-law Noah Tuttle. When the New York lawyer makes Tuttle angry he explains it to himself plausibly in terms of Noah's testiness at having his authority questioned, and by an out-of-town lawyer, and a Jew; and even that Jew lawyer from New York is prepared to be deceived by the social splendor though he offers Winner evidence to merit suspicion. Yet why should Winner suspect Tuttle? The novel opens with an example of Noah Tuttle's moral scruples in rejecting the Sutphin case because it would involve not exactly illegality but sharp practise, and throughout the novel sober judges testify to Tuttle's uprightness: he is a man of « complete probity, of absolute integrity ».

At the beginning of Part II, the Ponemah oak is struck with lightening and as Winner weaves his way through the social and legal difficulties of his life there runs, to the end of the novel, his preoccupation with the saving of the oak. It can we learn be saved or preserved but at great expense, and *if* under treatment it leafs out fairly strong next spring then it can be permanently restored. Winner is willing to « venture » the money. When soon afterwards his world and his innocence are shattered by the revelation that both exist upon a crime committed by Noah Tuttle (the father of his first wife, Hope), like Strether learning the truth, he has to decide what repairs can be made and at what expense. Here the hidden man and the love motif culminate, for it appears that his partner Julius Penrose has not only known of this for the last thirteen years (and has been waiting for the old man to recover himself from the false position which a quixotic crime those many years ago put him

into) but has also known of Arthur Winner's affair with Marjorie Penrose. Just as the silence was appreciated in the case of love, so in the case of law Winner has to be silent and ashamed. Throughout the book Winner has been tested not only on his kindness and wiseness, but also on his honesty: in the legal attitudes he takes, the advice he gives, the people he has to deal with (in one short sequence he has to deal with Marjorie Penrose on Roman Catholicism, Fred Dealey on the upstart Brophy as a judge, and Elmer Abbott the frail end of the great Orcutt dynasty) — he has demonstrated his capacity for wisdom in understanding under great personal stress, the callousness of Reggie Shaw after Helen Detweiler's suicide, for example; and the previous evening he has been offered a favor — a bribe? — by Brophy, and offered it in the visit of a young country lawyer whose honesty is painfully apparent. As he emerges from all these tests, and assumes the but rarely worn ceremonial costume of an Episcopalian sunday morning, he is ready for the final decision: to preserve the status quo at the expense of his innocence — to keep, as at the end of *The Golden Bowl*, the silence of duplicity.

I make no claim for the literary value of these books. One can learn often more from a bad book as from a good one. What is interesting here is that three novels publishing contemporaneously, in different ways, have between them examined the American dream of innocence, youth and hope and the future ahead, in terms of the three stages of man. One assumes that an old man, the fourth and last stage, will have little intensive interest in the future, and hopes fixed on another world. For the rest, death, disillusionment and duplicity are the alternatives; but — and this is the frightening thing — the lustre of the dream persists in a kind of nostalgic tenderness towards heroes betrayed by life. Have the Americans sold their birthright for a mess of nostalgia? or have they abandoned the dream? And if they have what now is the Matter of America? When Hemingway wrote of that other lost generation, in a book that demonstrated little hope in the lives of people, his title at least promised another day: *The Sun Also Rises*. Mr Algren offers no such hope: his novel bears the uncompromising title: *Never Come Morning*.

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