

**ANGRY YOUNG MEN:
A NEW LITERATURE FOR A CHANGING SOCIETY***

By D.L. FARLEY-HILLS

In the last ten years in England a new literature has appeared. In a country that has been largely without a literature – at least in any essential sense of the term – for over 50 years, this is in itself an important enough event. But I would not have offered a lecture on this subject to a Maltese audience if the significance of this new movement was purely literary. For one thing a period of less than ten years is not long enough for anyone to be able to estimate the actual literary achievement so far – though I think already it is considerable. In the theatre especially a recent comment by a well-known critic that ‘not since the 1st Elizabethan flowering has so much relevant energy been at work on our stages’ is no exaggeration. But for another thing the new literature is so bound up with new currents of thought and new attitudes towards society in England that it is impossible to be sufficiently dispassionate about it from a critical point of view. Its basic assumptions are too much part of current controversy for the literary critic to avoid being influenced in his assessment by whether he agrees or not with them – anyone who could remain dispassionate about the ideas the new literature expresses would, in my opinion, put himself out of court as a critic anyway. But it is because the attitudes of this new literature are so bound up with current controversy in England that I thought you might be interested to hear something about them, for I think that there is no doubt that they reflect the view of an important and growing section of society – and because this section consists in the main of people of the younger generation it is likely to be of increasing importance in the future. Moreover this change in traditional British attitudes, which the new literature represents, involves a fundamental change in outlook outwards, a change which is essentially a return to Europe, a belief in our essential Europeanism and a rejection of the stoical virtues that once held the British Empire together. I need hardly remind a Maltese audience that if this attitude does become the dominant one (and even the Government is beginning to show some signs of its influence) then it will probably affect Britain’s relationship with Malta.

* The text of a public lecture delivered in the University Theatre on 29th March 1962.

My approach then is not to be a purely literary one. What I want to do is to explain some of the ideas that inspire the new literature and relate them to changes going on in the structure and outlook of English society. At the same time I want to suggest that there is a relationship between the attitudes this literature reflects and its merits purely as literature. The relationship between a society and its literature is a complex one and I do not want to suggest that this literature is good simply because it concerns itself with current problems. Marxist literature does that without being conspicuously successful. Nevertheless I do believe that the vitality of a nation's art is closely bound up with its vitality as a nation and that a vigorous literature depends on a concern for the society for which it is written, even if that society happens to be a small coterie like that for which Chaucer wrote in 14th Century England and Racine in 17th Century France.

This belief is itself an assumption, sometimes tacit, sometimes expressed, of the new Literature, and perhaps it would be a good idea to start with some account of it. When earlier I said that England had been without a literature for more than 50 years — that is between about 1900 and 1956 (the date of Osbourne's *Look Back in Anger* from which it is convenient to date the advent of the New Writing) — I did not mean that literary works were not being written between these dates. No doubt as I said it many of you were thinking: what about Forster or T.S. Eliot, Yeats, Lawrence, W.H. Auden and so on, and so on? Some of this literature is very good, Yeats, for instance, is almost certainly one of the great poets of the English Language. No, what I meant was that the literature that was written in this period is only English in the sense that is written in English, it is not the literature of a homogeneous society which finds its essential means of expression in its literature. Yeats of course was an Irishman, Eliot is by birth an American, but I do not mean simply that these writers were brought up in and to some extent wrote for a society quite different from English society, for it applies just as much to a writer like E.M. Forster who is English to the tips of his Macmillan moustache. What I mean is that these writers (I exclude Yeats who was one of a vigorous Irish movement) are individuals writing for whichever individual happens to find them congenial, they were not writing for a society so much as for a number of individuals within a society. And because of this few of the writers of this period have much in common in the sense that the *Angry Young Men* can be considered together; each of them had to find his own audience. Even D.H. Lawrence, though, like Forster and Eliot, he was concerned about the problems of the society in which he was brought up, remains an isolated figure in his own period because the audience

which listened to him (the middle class *literati* of the 20's and 30's) were not the people he was talking to. Ironically enough it is only now, 30 years after his death, that he has the audience he was addressing, an audience that has lost faith in the institutional virtues he despised so much.

The New Literature on the other hand is essentially the expression of an attitude shared by a large section of British society. It shares a mood that has arisen from non-literary factors. It is no coincidence that many of its best works are also best-sellers. This is why too that, although this common outlook is shared, there is in no sense a new school of writing in the sense that the 'symbolists' or the Bloomsbury group, say, were a 'school' – the New Literary Movement is in fact not a literary movement at all so much as a facet of a new outlook in Society. It is social rather than literary. As far as its writers do share a common outlook in literature, that outlook can I think be traced in a large measure to the influence of one man, the critic F.R. Leavis. To explain his views on the function of literature and its relation to society is largely to explain the underlying literary assumptions of the whole group. As a matter of fact, hardly any of the new writers concern themselves much with the theory of their art and this is part of their general dislike of intellectualism that I shall talk about later. Literature is about life: why should the writer therefore be concerned with the niceties of artistic technique when there are so many more important problems to consider? This is their general attitude. But their practice does imply certain purely literary assumptions and I think that there is no better way of explaining these than by saying something of the man who had more than anyone else prepared the way for the new literary climate, F.R. Leavis.

Dr. Leavis, is a Cambridge don and has confined himself mostly – though not entirely – throughout his career – he is now in his sixties – to the writing of literary criticism. In the twenties and thirties he was a lone prophet vigorously attacking the dilettantism and sectarianism of the literature of the period. His main theme has been and still is that literature is a key activity in society for maintaining standards of personal integrity and at the same time exposing all that is flabby and hypocritical in society itself. Generally speaking he believes that Literature is a means of guaranteeing the integrity of society by its assertion of the fundamental values of that society. This is how he himself expresses it in his lecture to students of the L.S.E. called *Literature and Society*.

(Literature) stresses, not economic and material determinants, but intellectual and spiritual, so implying a different conception from the Marxist of the relation between the present of Society and the past, and

a different conception of society. It assumes that, enormously, as material conditions count, there is a certain measure of spiritual autonomy in human affairs, and that human intelligence, choice and will do really and effectively operate, expressing an inherent human nature. There is a human nature... of which an understanding is of primary importance to students of society and politics (he is addressing, remember, students of economics). And here is the first way that presents itself of indicating the kind of importance literature... should be recognised to have for such students: the study of it is, or should be, an intimate study of the complexities, potentialities and essential conditions of human nature.'

This 'spiritual autonomy' is of course centred on the individual and Leavis goes on to say:

'While you are in intimate touch with literature no amount of dialectic or of materialistic interpretation, will obscure for long the truth that human life lives only in individuals: I might have said the truth that it is only in individuals that society lives.'

Now this double assumption, that literature has a social function and that its social function stems from its concern with the individual is the assumption — I do not think I exaggerate — on which the whole of the New Writing is based. Over and over again these new writers are concerned to vindicate the importance of the individual; on the other hand the individual is always seen as part of the society that produced him — unlike the individualism of the Romantic movement, represented for instance in an attenuated form in a play like T.S. Eliot's *Cocktail Party*, where the individual is shown working out his problems detached (almost disembodied) from the Society in which these problems find their true relevance (it is no coincidence that Eliot's heroine, in the *Cocktail Party* asserts her individuality in the extreme and abnormal experience of physical martyrdom and that two other characters assert theirs via a withdrawal into the esoteric confines of a psychiatrist's consulting room).

With F.R. Leavis, literature functions as a social conscience. By stressing the importance of the individual in society it reminds society what are its most important values. Quite often with Leavis — and also quite often in the new literature — this stressing of individual values takes the negative form of attacks on those aspects of British society which tend to aid conformism and 'herd' thinking. Leavis' *bête noirs* are such respectable British institutions as the Press (*Times* and *Observer* as well as *Sunday Pictorial* and *News of the World*), the B.B.C. and above all what you might call the 'gentlemanly' approach to both literature and life —

that is the feeling engendered by writers like Lord David Cecil or by the ethics of the Public School System, that one must never commit oneself to anything – an attitude not unlike that of the famous saying ‘as for living, we can leave that to our servants.’ It is the same dislike of dilettantism, of this attitude of self-conferred ‘superiority’ which inspires the current attacks on accepted institutions in the literature of the *Angry Young Men*, an attitude in fact which got them that title. These then are the major themes in Leavis’ writing, which are also the two major themes of the new writing: that literature has a serious and essential function in society and that a sick literature is a symptom of a sick society, and that the essential values of society (and therefore it would follow in literature) are values based on the integrity of the individual, and by integrity is meant not just a passive conformity but, on the contrary, a lively concern to act in accordance with one’s own inner convictions.

Leavis’ model in his propagation of these ideas is D.H. Lawrence and Lawrence – though he is no more acknowledged generally as such than Leavis – is the other chief source of inspiration for the New Literature. Lawrence as a novelist has all those qualities Leavis most admires – a passionate concern for the individual and a dislike of conformism, Lawrence’s stories are nearly always based on an individualistic belief in life (which is conceived of in anti-intellectual terms, that is, as a respect for the emotions over the intellect). Moreover Lawrence’s writing has a deadly earnestness, a belief in the prophetic function of literature, that was strongly opposed to the current dilettantism or esoteric experimenting of his contemporaries. At the same time Lawrence is not a propagandist – he expresses his attitudes in purely concrete terms by depicting contemporary society as he finds it, so that the attitudes are not directly stated but embodied in the stories. To Lawrence – as Eliot has said of an earlier poet – thought is an experience, and it is the experience of his thought that he is primarily concerned to convey. This concreteness, this dislike of any propaganda element and the belief that art should embody its ideas by leaving them implied in the ‘picture’ of the world it reflects, again is an important feature of the New Writing and a constant assumption in Leavis. The New Literature is therefore largely one which adopts a ‘realistic’ convention – though there are notable exceptions to this.

I have spent some time talking about Leavis and Lawrence because they have provided the intellectual climate out of which not only the new literature, but the new literature’s audience has sprung. The fact, however, that this new literature is not primarily intellectual – in the sense that it did not arise from a deliberate attempt to think out an alternative to what had gone before – means that non-literary factors have played a

big part in deciding its nature. As I said earlier, D.H. Lawrence in his own lifetime had no audience and it is the new social change in British society caused by non-literary happenings that are partly responsible for the fact that he has an audience now. In other words Lawrence (and Leavis come to that) are partly the cause of the new literature but at the same time they are listened to now because new social conditions have produced an audience for them. Lawrence for instance was a working class boy who had the courage to reject the middle class culture which was the only one that could provide him with an audience. Nowadays the same working class has provided an educated audience of its own so that Lawrence's successors like Wesker and Sillitoe can write with many of Lawrence's assumptions and attitudes and find an intelligent audience in sympathy with them. This is a result not of a literary change but of the changes in society like those, for instance, which are enabling more and more working class boys to receive a university training. Lawrence's career, therefore, is to some extent simply the first result of a social process that is only now gathering sufficient momentum to give rise to the new literature.

What is this New Writing then and when did it first come to the attention of the public at large? I do not want to inundate you with dates and names but perhaps a few at this point would help fix the limits of this writing. As I said, the kind of writing I am referring to first came to the public's notice with the performance of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, in 1956 and it was this play that no doubt inspired the catch phrase of *Angry Young Men* because its hero (sometimes barely distinguished from its author) was a young man who did little in the play except express his anger and contempt for almost everything he mentioned. Other works published about the same time, John Wain's novel *Hurry on Down* (slightly earlier) and Kingsley Amis' *Lucky Jim* had similar characteristics. Their heroes were young men whose education (as the hero of *Hurry on Down* expresses it) had removed them from the class they were born in but had not prepared them for any other. They were therefore articulate, because, intelligent and educated, but frustrated and angry because they found society largely inimicable. Many of the authors themselves were in a not dissimilar position and it was therefore not difficult to identify, say, Jimmy Porter of *Look Back in Anger* with Osborne himself or a representative figure like Colin Wilson, a young intellectual who had somehow missed out in the Welfare State Educational System. This early 'angry' stage, which was largely a negative expression of resentment and which I think produced nothing of outstanding merit, quickly gave way to a whole spate of new writing centred above all on the theatre. The first sudden outburst had clearly found a *rapport* with an audience that felt perhaps something

of the same sense of being an outsider to the class system (Colin Wilson had tacitly identified himself as such in a book on various authors and philosophers called *The Outsider*). But this 'negative' phase quickly gave way to something more constructive in writers like Sillitoe and Arnold Wesker whose themes were the same – the conflict between society and individual liberty – but were now expressed primarily not by lashing out at Authority but by an attempt to represent and define (by implication) what was meant by individual liberty. Osbourne it is true had anticipated this in *Look Back in Anger* where an attempt is made to suggest a positive alternative to the Authority that Jimmy Porter is attacking, though it is done clumsily and is overridden by the predominant note of protest.

I have already mentioned most of the characteristics of the literature of the *Angry Young Men* in discussing the movement's two major prophets. It is a literature primarily that exalts individualism and as a corollary regards external authority as inimical to the individual – this as I shall illustrate later is expressed in terms of the 'life' of individuality against the 'dead hand' of institutionalism. From this follows the frequent attacks on the chief institutions of authority and influence in Britain, the Church of England, Public Schools, the B.B.C., the Conservative Party (this literature is mostly either left-wing or anarchist), the Press, the concept of Empire and national sovereignty with their tacit assumption of English Superiority, and the Monarchy. These institutions have been neatly summed up by the apologists of the new outlook as the 'Establishment'. Then secondly the new literature is committed, that is, it believes that writers ought to have strong convictions about *society* in order to be good writers. Thirdly it is essentially a literature of the new working class and lower middle class intellectual, (i.e. the non-Establishment intelligenzia), its writers even if they are not (as they usually are) members of these groups like to identify themselves with the standards of this social grouping. Most of their plays and novels are given a working class setting (it has been called sometimes the literature of the kitchen sink as opposed to the middle class literature of the Drawing Room). Fourthly the movement is anti-intellectual in a profound sense. It is generally suspicious of the intellect and exalts feeling (hence the hitherto un-British emphasis on rhetoric and violence). Its anti-intellectualism affects its attitude towards artistic technique, which is generally (but not always) conservative in being primarily 'realistic' and in generally being unconcerned with aesthetic problems – to the new school of dramatists the term 'a well-made play' is used in a derisory sense, there is a general dislike of abstract organisation or over-neat construction.

Of these four characteristics the most significant and the most product-

ive of good literature so far has been the stress on the importance of the individual against the Social pressures of conformity. The dominant attitude is summed up neatly by Stuart Holroyd writing in *Declaration* published in 1957 – which is a kind of manifesto for the early phase of the new writing. Holroyd writes:

‘One of the great mistakes of this century has been our persistent seeking freedom on the political level. *Freedom is an inner condition*. It cannot be imposed from above, and it cannot exist in the community if it does not exist in the individual.’

Here Holroyd is expressing an antithesis which is fundamental to much of the new writing, an antithesis between social organisation on the one hand and personal freedom on the other. Politics, simply because it implies the delegation of personal responsibility, is an unavoidable, but nonetheless considerable, restriction of individual liberty and this applies equally well to all forms of social organisation. The writer’s job is to defend the freedom of the individual to be himself (to foster the ‘inner condition’). Osbourne puts the same case more colourfully (and characteristically with negative emphasis) also in *Declaration* when he says the job of the writer is to make nasty smells against Authority in defence of individualism:

‘The place for a writer is his piggery – it’s the place for me. He can make all the dung and smells there he likes.’

The same point is made by Alan Sillitoe in a recent essay defining what he considers the writer’s function at the present moment:

‘(People) need... a literature that will not only allow them to see themselves as they are but one which will give them the feeling of individual dignity...’

It is a theme constantly expressed in the plays and novels – either negatively by eulogising rebellion or positively by defining the nature of individual liberty. We see it in a play like Arnold Wesker’s *The Kitchen* (his best to date I think) which uses a hotel kitchen as a symbol of an industrial society trying to mould man to it (where men are thought of as producing units) and so denies the inner freedom which expresses itself in spontaneity and individuality. Or in John Arden’s superb play *Live Like Pigs* where a gypsy family is hounded out of a council estate by working class ‘conformists’ because their desire to ‘be themselves’ conflicts with the accepted behaviour of the society they find themselves in. The same theme is expressed with profundity in Alan Sillitoe’s story *The*

Lonliness of the Long Distance Runner, which is in my opinion the finest single achievement of the new writers to date and which, because it is typical in its theme and unique in its quality, is worth some special attention. I am not in the least being ironical about the new writing in general when I cite this short work – less than 50 pages in all – as the finest achievement of these writers to date. It is always silly to regard length in a work of literature as a pre-requisite of excellence and this story is literature of a very high order indeed. The theme of the story is, as I say, the conflict between the 'inner' virtues, pertaining to personal integrity and the 'external' virtues required by society in its day-to-day functioning. Alan Sillitoe makes no bones about where his sympathies lie (and in this he is typical of the whole group of writers) though this does not prevent his presenting the antithesis between the two concepts in a subtle and surprising way.

The story is told in the first person by a borstal boy named Smith who is serving a sentence for robbery. The Governor of the institution is an enlightened man and encourages the boy to take an interest in long-distance running, for which he has shown considerable ability. Smith is allowed out of prison in the early mornings to practise his running, and this he tells us he enjoys for its own sake. The Governor, however, sees the running as part of the process of rehabilitation which he is trying to achieve.

The Governor in fact is using Smith's interest in running as a means to mould his character and make him a 'useful' member of society when he leaves prison. Smith understanding this resents it because he sees it as a form of deception and at the same time as an attack on his personal liberty. When the annual sports day comes and Smith is expected to run for his institution he devises a plan to thwart the Governor's intention. The Governor expects him to win his race and so do credit to his system of rehabilitation. Smith, knowing he *can* win, deliberately stops when within sight of the winning tape just to show he has not conformed to the pattern defined for him by the Governor. This is how he himself is made to express it:

'but I'm not going to win because the only way I'd see I came in first would be if winning meant that I was going to escape the coppers after doing the biggest bank job of my life, but winning means the exact opposite, no matter how they try to kill or kid me, means running right into their white-gloved wall-barred hands and grinning mugs and staying there for the rest of my natural life of stonebreaking anyway, but stonebreaking in the way I want to do it and not in the way they tell me.'

To Smith the Governor is trying to corrupt his personal integrity, his honesty. This is how he puts it:

'Because another thing people like the Governor will never understand is that I *am* honest, that I'll never be anything else but honest, and that I'll always be honest. Sounds funny. But it's true because I know what honest means according to me and he only knows what it means according to him, I think my honesty is the only sort in the world and he thinks his is the only sort in the world as well. That's why this dirty great walled-up and fenced-up manor house in the middle of nowhere has been used to coop-up blokes like me.'

But it is not simply a question of a clash of two different points of view. Sillitoe's art is not a dispassionate art of assessment. It is made quite clear in the story that the Prison Governor stands for the kind of superficial attitude towards life that places external behaviour before honesty, and to Smith (and to Sillitoe, as becomes quite clear later) the difference between external virtues and internal ones is the difference between death and life. Let me quote Smith again:

'... we're both cunning, but I'm more cunning and I'll win in the end even if I die in gaol at 82, because I'll have more fun and fire out of my life than he'll ever get out of his. He's read a thousand books I suppose, and for all I know he might even have written a few, but I know for a dead cert, as sure as I'm sitting here, that what I'm scribbling down is worth a million to what he could ever scribble down... I know when he talks to me and I look into his army mug that I'm alive and he's dead. He's as dead as a doornail. If he ran ten yards he'd drop dead... At the moment it's dead blokes like him as have the whip-hand over blokes like me, and I'm almost dead sure it'll always be like that, but even so... I'd rather be like I am - always on the run and breaking into shops for a packet of fags and a jar of jam - than have the whip-hand over somebody else and be dead from the toe nails up. Maybe as soon as you get the whip-hand over somebody you go dead.'

This is of course the underlying theme of the story and it poses the central problem of the New Writing: how can one reconcile individuality with authority?

If Sillitoe were simply implying in this story that authority as such was a bad thing we would be right to dismiss the story's implications as irresponsible. After all most of us surely benefit from having our thieves safely under lock and key. But Sillitoe is not just saying this. He is presenting us with the appalling and very real dilemma that to impose order

on human beings from outside – however convenient it is for society that this should be done – is to treat them as something less than human and so at the same time degrade ourselves. It is a dilemma of course which we in England – as a major colonial power – have had to face in an especially acute form. The dilemma Mr. Nyerere stated in his speech heralding in Tanganyika's independence when he said no country can be said to be entirely free so long as it has authority over other nations. At least this is the thinking behind much of the new writing and it accounts for the general desire of the new writers (and perhaps a majority of young intellectuals) to recognise our European rather than our Imperial heritage. To a writer like Sillitoe the connection with Europe involves 'internal' values – a recognition of what we really are as a nation – whereas the connection with the Empire involves 'external' values, as identity of interest rather than an identity of culture.

Strangely enough this European influence has not extended into European influence on the artistic technique these writers employ. This is partly accounted for by the deliberately un-intellectual approach of the group and brings me to the second major characteristic of the writing – the conservatism in artistic matters. It is important not to exaggerate this conservatism: in the theatre especially there have been many attempts to innovate and get away from the hide-bound conventions of Drawing Room Comedy.

The use of song in Arden's *Live Like Pigs* (showing the influence of Bertolt Brecht), and in Bernard Kops' *Hamlet of Stepney Green*, the experimental structure of Osbourne's *Entertainer* and above all the influence of the French playwright Ionesco on the plays of Simpson and Pinter make it quite clear that this artistic conservatism is only relative. It is true I think though that there is very little aesthetic experimenting for its own sake. Simpson for instance is inspired by Ionesco because Ionesco's style of zany logic exactly conveys Simpson's contempt for 'intellectualising'. Here for instance is how the author in Simpson's *A Resounding Tinkle* addresses the audience:

'How close we're getting to the original tonight is anybody's guess.. Because I know hardly a word of Portuguese and of course Portuguese is precisely the language, unfortunately in which the play – or most of it – came to me. I was pretty much in the dark I can tell you, until I got to work with a dictionary... I think what you'd all better do is to visualise if you can a regimental sergeant major on a kitchen chair in the middle of a bare stage with his back to you. He has a megaphone through which quite suddenly he'll begin reciting 'Jabberwackey' over and over again for three hours at top speed. I want that image to be

clear in your minds, and I want you to hold it there throughout this programme tonight... There is no desire, no intention on my part, or on the part of any of us on this side of the footlights to impose upon you any ready-made idea of our own as to what this play ought to turn out to be.'

Ionesco's influence too can be put down in great part to his constant concern with the central thought of the new writing – the problem of conformity. Even Simpson's rather exotic nonsense techniques then can be related to the *ideas* of the group rather than to wish to experiment for its own sake. Even so Simpson is an exception in his departure from realism and the novels of the group especially are almost entirely conceived in realistic terms.

The anti-intellectualism, of which the aesthetic conservatism is a part, is something much more fundamental than a dislike of literary experimentation. It stems from the insistence on the primacy of feeling in art. This attitude is foreshadowed in D.H. Lawrence. To Lawrence the mind ought to be simply a tool of the emotions and he tended to equate the emotions with life and the intellect and the will with death (as for instance in *Women in Love*). These ideas, though never stated in the abstract, are found in the new writing complementing the antithesis between 'inner' and 'external' virtues. The inner virtues are primarily virtues of feeling, the external virtues, virtues of the intellect. It is because the Prison Governor cannot *feel* that he's dead and it is because the borstal boy Smith *can* feel that he is presented as more 'moral' (because he is more 'alive') than the Governor. Of course this attitude has a long history in literature but it is also in these writers a specific against reaction the nervous intellectualism of the 30's poets like Auden, MacNiece and of course T.S. Eliot.

It is this eulogy of spontaneity and feeling – a dislike of understatement and priggishness which is perhaps the most novel thing about the new writing generally. It makes a clean break with the literature that had gone before it and indeed you have to go back to the first Elizabethan age to find a comparable lack of inhibition. I cannot help feeling this is all to the good. The literature of the 30's had got itself bogged down in an almost obsessional belief that literature must be 'difficult'. Eliot's comment in the *Four Quartets* is typical:

'So here I am
Trying to learn to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words

For the thing one no longer has to say...'

To find at last that the shackles are off and that a profusion of new writing has far from depressed the quality of the best writing but has actually improved it is a refreshing experience. And it has meant that the gap between good art and public taste has been significantly narrowed. Sillitoe and Wesker are not only very good writers they are best sellers as well. But this shaking off of literary inhibitions may be even more important if it is itself simply a part of a new determination of society to prefer enthusiasm to conformity. As a nation we have the reputation of being aloof and inscrutable. I cannot help feeling that it will be all to the good if the new literature proves that we are human too.

The well known English lack of spontaneity of course has been a feature more of the middle class – especially those trained to govern – than of the English working class and it is perhaps the working class origins of much of this writing that has given it a vitality that had been so conspicuously lacking in the literature of the last fifty years. This working class connection is the last point I want to make. It has been important not because the working class provide better subjects for literature compared to the middle class, but because the realistic use of working class language has tapped a speech which is nearer poetry than middle class language simply because it has not become attenuated by the complex intellectual needs of a middle class technological society. The result is a racy, colourful, yet down-to-earth means of expression capable of a wide range of effects from plain common sense to poetry.

What then is the significance of this New Literature? We must remember that it has had to date only a very short life – not yet ten years – and its achievements, though already remarkable are still partly a matter of promise only. Already it has developed from the rather negative phase with which it opened and is now demonstrating a more constructive attitude to the problems it poses – the term *Angry Young Men* is in fact now something of a misnomer, but as catchphrases exist because they are catchy, it is useful to retain the term. But even more important than its achievements are the indications that it is part of a changing of attitudes in Britain – a change which in its dislike of hypocrisy and pomposity, and above all in the zest for life it expresses, is to some extent a break with the traditions of the immediate past – as such I for one find it a change for the better.