

Strong Smells and Polite Society

By Adrian Stokes

THESE ARE those who feel the essence of an object to be the smell: but for the æsthetic mood, the smell may be no more than a vulgar or improper fraction. I shall argue that persecution, hate and, indeed, the hate of him who smells it, are epitomised by an evil odour. Goats and sheep stink: rather than by their horns they rebut many of us in this way. On the positive side also a person's smell seems absolute: you may not eat him or her, but you possess the object by smell, probably the inside as well as outside. We do not eat at all if we have no mind to, but our noses are never shut on physical substance that comes to us as smell. We swallow smell whole, as it were, and in so doing we may become enveloped or possessed.

In saying so, naturally I take advantage of Dr. FitzHerbert's establishment of the association of milk and the nursing situation with the mother's smell, particularly from her armpit. Contrariwise, I suggest it to be feasible that the infant's use of projective identification is sometimes conducted through the medium of the object's smell or imagined smell which offers, perhaps with the help of a smell made by the infant himself, an absolute-seeming grip. A wider projectiveness characterises the ejection of strong-smelling fæces, sometimes in phantasy a good substance, sometimes bad, sometimes a present or an act of creation, sometimes an attack. But the theory of reaction-formation, it seems, does not concern itself with phantasies of bad smells, bad fæces, as well as good, from the beginning, in spite of the naming of a subsequent phase as anal-sadistic. It stands to reason

that every positive attribute of original objects must also have a negative side. Much repression goes to work later in regard to positive attitudes to fæces: surely this will have been helped by the earlier feeling of persecution from a bad aspect of smell, that is, from persecutory phantasies with an olfactory attribute; from the strength, in fact, of our own hate. I presume that revulsion and persecution by smells, and aggression through smells, must have been present from very early days.

It is not generally observed that the smell of Madeira cake can be identical with the smell of cold roast chicken. We are little interested in the composite nature of smells, their parts and correspondences. We tend to think of each olfactory experience as unrelated, although our noses, deprived of much practice, preserve the capability for considerable analysis. Consequently, for this reason alone, there is no art of smell, since art depends upon an additive or balancing process between parts. To see or to hear is to observe details, dovetailing, whereas the sub-divisions of an odour are vapid. In contrast with the quality of perfected seeing, the apprehension of a body's odour suggests the enveloping impress of a part-object. We use the same verb, transitively or intransitively as the only change, whether we refer to ourselves as smelling or to our smelling of objects. Hearing, sight, touch were the conspicuous senses for learning to attribute to others, as to ourselves, independent or self-sufficing being. We shut our eyes to drink in deeply a profitable smell; we are blotting out the world of whole objects in favour of a world of permeation that blurs differences between ourselves and it.

THAT WAS the context for my turning to this subject some years ago.

There will be many reasons, other than impermanence, why taste and smell lack *direct* satisfaction in art. The one of possible interest here

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may lie with the æsthetic stress on whole objects, with the repudiation of those sense-organs originally tied to part-object discrimination in a manner never sufficiently to be overthrown for æsthetic purposes. . . . I shall suggest that in art the mother must be re-created through the forms of the integrated ego-figure to which she already belongs as introjected objects. In the relationship to this æsthetic figure, and similarly in the earliest signs of our mature relations to the mother, tactile and kinæsthetic perceptions are, in my opinion, uppermost. Unlike taste and smell they afford sensations which can be enjoyed through vision, at a distance, as are the so-called tactile values in a painting.¹

I instanced at that time the defiant repudiation of smell expressed by some Bohemian habits, and the meaninglessness of a statue soused with perfume. To argue that a scented statue would be "too life-like" for the purposes of art emphasises once again that odour spells contact rather than the contemplation from a certain distance of a self-sufficient object with which, nevertheless, we may have the proclivity to identify ourselves.

There is the expression: "It stinks to high heaven," meaning first, I think, that the essence of stink is the quality of boundlessness, boundless badness. Why to heaven? Perhaps because dog dirt in the street not only fills our universe but invades a traditional paradise that possesses no home-made stinks; the emitting substances have been changed for golden pavements. It follows that there is no marriage nor giving in marriage, more plainly, no contact between bodies who can see each other and perform celestial oratorio: they may not smell or be smelled. For, smell implies animal contact as we say; unlike touch, it suggests, from first breath to our last, this contact only, or else incorporation. We may profess ourselves to be notably adult, dissecting the smells of sweat, milk, fæces, and perfume scientifically, remarking their correspondences and chemical affinities: with none need we show pleasure or disgust. There is pleasure, however, in this power, considerable pleasure, in the lack of immediate involvement. Usually we have little chance to show detachment in a plain manner, but here is the opportunity for treating of a primary bounty and of an ultimate object of disgust with reserve yet without using many abstract terms. Scientific poignancy, more dramatic than is usual, results from the surviving nature of smell as an enveloping experience.

OF COURSE, IT WOULD BE HATEFUL if things did not smell: they would not be real. The sense of actuality will always be supported by this evocation of our original objects. Please do not mistake me there. An unparalleled sense of

renewal, as of nostalgia, can be latent in a chance smell. But, in the process of integration, we have learned that what is unspeakably good of this kind may swiftly pass into what is equally bad, just as parts of the milk are changed by digestion into fæces: and I am afraid that when we, at any rate, speak of smell, smell *tout court*, we imply a bad smell. I think we thereby express renunciation of the tyranny of a part-object, a tyranny that derives from the quality of obsession and from the alarming propensity of the good object to change into the bad. Since it remains so primitive there is no security in olfactory experience alone; we prefer in many contexts to enshrine the good object differently so that the issue of smell be not paramount at all times. We are helped in this by the fact that if we are long surrounded by strong smell, we cease very largely to notice it. Decay is more poignant to us when our noses become suddenly aware. All organic substances "go bad," reek. "To go bad" means in common parlance "to stink." Of course signs of decay may be visual, but such an impression would not by itself have a parallel with enveloping influence, tantamount at first impact to an oral influence, upon the observer. Should you want to know whether the butter is rancid, you will raise it gradually nearer to your nose. But even a smell from a distance may be no less close a contact: to phantasy, strength spells closeness. Smell enlarges hugely the confines of orality and often isolates the badness of a taste. We may suspect that the taste of fæces behind the smell would not be as bad as that smell. There is a sense in which any strong smell touches us closely, too closely; be it good or bad, our feelings, I believe, are very often, and markedly, ambivalent for this reason. The world has become too small, perhaps suffocating.

On the other hand the varied scents in the vast countryside are reassuring. Even so, the gloved lady bountiful in her rose garden is not a valid symbol of bliss. Those who dote on banks and beds of flowers, hideous as a rule visually, are unlikely to have much love of art. For the many intellectual states of envelopment, religious, political, philosophical, social, æsthetic, to which we are prone, I can think of no olfactory accompaniments as indispensable. (The needed scent of Schiller's apples is most exceptional.) Part of the virtue of incense, of joss sticks, of all forms or pretences of sacrifice, is that the smoke, the vapour, ascends to envelop the god as well as ourselves. Without such visual union the emanation of incense would be as vulgar as the whiffs of scented cinema on a wet night. (We may have in mind a visual enactment when visiting a still redolent Catholic church after a service.)

¹ *Greek Culture and the Ego* (1938).

AN ENORMOUS psychological contrast between the biological functions, eating and evacuation, comes to mind: the one is literally the means of necessary incorporation, the other of the projection of un-needed by-products. Some would argue that since many forms of decay are poisonous or unhealthy, it is natural that the smells associated with them should be considered noxious. This awareness hugely reinforces, no doubt, but will not have initiated, phantasies of persecution by strong-smelling substances, phantasies that have been similarly and far more explicitly standardised by a training in cleanliness. What interests us now is the peg from which realisation of dirtiness depends. My contention has been that a persecutory, no less than a positive, attitude to all smells exists from near the start, and that, in so far as some of the positive attitudes—we are very conscious that much erotic interest persists strongly (as Dr. FitzHerbert in particular has shown³)—are suppressed, this process will be helped by the fact that the negative attitudes are not suppressed, though they may be organised, re-directed, by the amplifications of early training and by the cultural repudiation of decaying substances. I shall argue on the cultural side that the habits of our own polite society in regard to cleanliness demonstrate their connection with the earliest forms of badness and persecution, more clearly than do the habits in this respect of some primitive societies for whom there has been less repression of positive attitudes to bodily smells.

Both good and bad smells, then, are referred to the infant's phantasies concerning the good and bad breasts. I imagine that in the course of infant training or any need for cleanliness, *fæces* tend to become the very representative of a strong, negative smell; that the pinching out and ejection of *fæces* and the squeezing out of urine likewise become, whatever positive factors remain, representatives of negative projection. It may well be that a link between the first form of projection and of defæcation is reinforced thus. Though in the processes of defence we have needed ceaselessly to incorporate the bad object and to project the good as part of the endless projection-introjection series, it is obvious that the primary programme will have been to incorporate the good object and to expel the bad, originally (according to Melanie Klein), the destroying power within the organism of the death instinct. Projection, of course, implies an object on whom it is made. We do not mind our own smells and products. They become

immensely bad only when subject, or potentially subject, to the observation of another on whom I consider that they have been projected.

REMARK THE WORDS: stink, smell, stench, taint, rank, stoa; also, musty, fusty, nasty, putrid. These are explosive sounds in the first syllables or monosyllables, that suggest somewhat a projection of substance from a narrow passage, perhaps equated with the narrow passage of the nose where stink receives acknowledgment. I find it significant that in the index of Roget's *Thesaurus*, from which I have taken these words, sub-references for "stink" are "to dislike" and "hate." Thus, for "hate" Roget gives the phrase, "to stink in the nostrils."

I see no cause for surprise that the delineation of what remains bad should not in art initiate as ample connections as its counterpart. There is no art of the merely repulsive. Why should there be? Once more, art is not concerned immediately with part-objects: in our society, I repeat, smell as a rule means bad smell; strong smell, at least, as in the title of my paper, connotes bad smell. I find significance in the fact that we call an almost total absence of smell, "wholesome."

I HOPE I am not being misleading by my emphasis upon projection. More widely considered, smell has the primitive character of a mode of recognition, of incorporation, that dogs us. The day, the vegetation, the time of day, have compound smells. We are sometimes jostled, as it were, by smells, reoriented to objects that pass swiftly from view. On a railway journey, for instance, the smell of the carriage and of what it contains, the smell of the engine-smoke and smells outside that we pass, interfere with each other. My impression is that this restless and involuntary discernment is felt as a form of appetite or of surfeit; that all these smells are judged in relation to possible food smells as well as, of course, in relation to bad smells and scents. Due to their smell, we have to take on many objects to which we might otherwise be indifferent. Such closeness and repeated incorporation suggests once again the tyranny of part-objects, a tie that blurs the separateness from the object and consequently our own wholeness or self-sufficing. I have mentioned in regard to bad smells the psyche's primary projection. I think the sense of smell ties us no less to the more primitive modes of introjection; and that since we are forced continually to enlarge such introjection, the attack of the sudden bad smell finds us defenceless: it envelops us.

I have argued in the past that some envelopment in this sense issues from the work of art,

³Dr. J. FitzHerbert, "Scent and the Sexual Object," in *The British Journal of Medical Psychology* (Vol. xxxii).

yet I have just pointed out that art allows no direct opportunity for smell. In one aspect, then, art, in common to some degree with other states of intellectual envelopment, serves as a substitute for smell, providing a sublimation of primitive contact since, by an intimacy reminiscent of smell, art presents us with what are pre-eminently whole objects. Aesthetic form frees us from the jostling of objects, yet brings us very close to them.

TO SPEAK OF ART is by no means directly to the point. Nevertheless, I will mention, as have many others, a pinching out of good *faeces* as it appears in painting. The use of paint upon canvas or board often suggests the power of producing a good mess, apparently odourless. I am thinking of a characteristic profusion in pictorial art, a brio that nevertheless creates order. I don't know whether I am right to describe these acts as sublimations since the tie with the cruder impulse is so palpable. The smell attribute of *faeces* is, however, entirely suppressed in the finished work. But it has appeared as the good smell it once was, in the guise of the smell that the artist enjoyed at the time of his work, the odour of turpentine and of other mediums. I call them good smells since I have noticed that by most painters they are greatly relished. Pictorial profusion contrasts with verbal effusions for which, it seems, there has been, at an early stage, a bad *faeces* connection. We sometimes hate an outpouring of words as such. Reading between the lines of a professional reviewer, we may often discern an involuntary equation of ceaseless words, his own and his victims', with excrement. Also people's thoughts have a heavy, lugubrious aspect; it can be judged from the faces of the customers in the department of a bookshop that sells educational matter; the teacher's own stuff must be absorbed into the system and later expelled with copious ink in an exam. There are, of course, usually, several pleasurable elements, but these are not my concern.

I have said that the aspect of the bad smell I have in mind suggests early negative projections: whether we like it or not, they must be reincorporated upon the incidence of the hated smell. If we examine our feelings at this moment, under the influence of the mere mention of nauseous stinks launched upon our gathering, we find that this is likely to be so. What you or I happen to see is often no blame to us; we shoulder responsibility for the bad smell; it has found us out, come home to roost; it is an attack. The atmosphere is heavy, loathsome, and until we get used to it, we are disconcerted. Though blame be put elsewhere, we see others, and fear that they see ourselves, as tainted.

THE MODERN cliché to express hate, namely, to hate someone's guts, appears to be tautological. We tend already to dislike everyone's guts. The point of this expression is the bringing together of a specific hate and the dirty inside of the body. The expression means: I think of such-and-such person in terms of their guts only, which are of course aggressive and hateful. I see him as a drain, that is to say, I hate him. He stinks, and the stinking is unfathomable, irredeemable: it goes on and on, ends only in death and after utter dissolution. My hate, then, ceases only after his death, after I have killed him, when the bad thing in him ceases to be. But why do I hate him so? He has done this and that, his character is of such kind. But surely my hating him contributes to the volume of his capacity for stinking. It is my hate that stinks in him, and I have put into him my own capacity to stink as an addition to his own. He stinks doubly.

In most of us there exists the propensity to adequate hatefulness with what stinks, especially if we are taken unawares, I have said. The wafting into a gathering, I have reminded you, of a sudden and strong bad smell may be a cause to all of acute embarrassment. So far as there can be no pretence to disregard it, the appropriate expression will be one of severity combined with a disclaiming look. We are reminded of what is hateful in ourselves and others, of powers permeating occasions that disown them. The lid lies off and the rotten rots the good as the stale decomposing and rancid processes in the garbage bin act upon what was once good food. Love integrates, hate decomposes. They have the same prime objects or part-objects, the human body and its products. The conjunction, before all else, qualifies the human situation.

SOME CONTACT with the products of another's body, whatever the disgust, can be the means of a degree of intimacy, a contact much desired in the case of our original objects and extended, at any rate in some part, to later object-choice. Public houses are crude *crèches*. The talk that is called "smut" or "dirt" covers all subjects that are sexual. I think we need a new term to indicate the many catharses of aggressiveness-cum-eroticism for which the term "sadism" seems too loaded. My impression is that the talking of "smut" is sometimes an aggression modified into a warm and even affectionate coarseness by the erotic component. Apart from the concealment, the separation of these drives is an urgent demand of our polite society for the intercourse appropriate to the majority of occasions. This may seem puzzling, because our polite society enshrines an ideal of adult

behaviour wherein extremes are not split-off and kept apart.

On the other hand, the manners of society assuredly reveal an awareness of ambivalence. In the view of society, sublimatory interests, or else a wealth of indirectness, should transform public aggressive-erotic displays. As a result, there is brought closer to view a primary situation whose compulsions can never be altogether distributed. I refer to representations of the good and bad breast. The integrated ego, says Melanie Klein, is supported by belief in a beneficent object, a source of health and well-being. Particularly in early development the belief has entailed splitting, the keeping of the good apart from the bad. As you will have seen, the character of the original bad object appears to me to illumine our present hatred of bad odours on polite occasions. In spite of the coagulation and the integration, achieved after the depressive position has been worked through successfully, the phantasy persists that something or other is illimitably, unutterably, bad in connection with the body, though the conscious mind repudiate any such thought. If, in addition to the power of aggression at all ages, we study the Kleinian account of the early mechanisms—such as the envy of the good, such as the greedy desire to scoop out the mother's inside through the power of hate as well as of envy, emotions that quickly convert the good into the bad since the object becomes invested with our own aggression conceived as illimitable—there can be no surprise that many phantasies concerning the inside of the body should be dominated by those of disgust and horror. It is well known that the sight of blood, where it causes feelings of nausea or of faintness, is associated with unconscious aggressive phantasies. There exists the tendency, moreover, to project bad objects of whatever kind into other people, where they become representative of their insides. I shall try later to indicate that this conception of the inside on the part of our society is not only a reflection of splitting mechanisms but of an attempt to modify the primary split between the good and the bad, to steer the middle course (as it were) from which both can be constantly viewed, though not approached.

I HAVE TAKEN bad smell as an object of greater horror, in the case of the inside, than an unpleasant tactile sensation. Yet equal or more horror can be excited by the feel of things, and even by the sight of their shape, without the conjunction of smell. Indeed smell is, as we say, human, and/or animal in connotation. However bad, it has that jot of goodness in comparison with some experiences of horror;

and in spite of what has been said we still want people to have "guts," the stiffening with aggression indispensable for courage. The ghosts in Odysseus' Hades were strengthened by the smell of blood. Bad dreams, I believe, distribute no smell, and that reminder of the inorganic may well summarise an ultimate stoniness in the transactions of a nightmare.

But the other point about smell is that it carries. It comes without any activity on our part. It invades. And so, at first sight we may feel that if faeces and corpses, other people's faeces, were odourless, we would have far less horror of them and, perhaps in the case of faeces, no horror at all; they would then be tantamount to mud. But is this correct? Spittle may be more or less odourless yet the gob of others is repulsive if we are forced to handle it. It does not, however, handle us, as does smell by its power to invade and carry. I find myself at a loss to draw up a table in the right order of repudiated substances from the body. Where does one make the entry for blood or for vomit? Is this a regurgitation of the milk in a bad aspect, or of a half-way stage in the conversion into faeces? Perhaps the deeper meaning of the two possibilities are much the same. It seems that whereas the fresh mother's milk, and perhaps the semen, are mostly good, all other substances projected from the body are extremely suspect, and one and all are impolite.

Whenever possible the blame is put on smell, due to the invading, interrupting quality of a scent, that serves to epitomise the element of attack. Of course at the moment of violent hunger, of starvation, all squeamishness goes by the board, perhaps to return more strongly later: we would have eaten the food of the hyena, vulture, or owl. I wonder whether the infant's hunger is not often of this kind.

DISGUST from smells varies enormously, as do the smells, from culture to culture. It would be hazardous to make any sense-experience the invariable representative of the bad object.

That is not to say that there is not a revulsion in common to whatever may be considered unclean or poisonous. Stale corpses are probably the nearest to an object of consensus. We do know that no one is, or has been, without the fear of contamination, of persecution. The feeling of persecution may be identified with any substance, but there can be no doubt that the most likely are organic. A chemical bad smell—generally the *strongest*—is not also the *worst* if we can convince ourselves that it does not arise from any well-known organic substance. It becomes less of an attack upon us, but only less,

since some equation is inevitable with the nearest physiological smell; we need to remind ourselves that the source is different. This too goes to show that the centre for attributed impurity is the body. Theologians have never doubted it. Where we will differ from them is in awareness that, at root, the body represents the highest good also. A strong separation of the good and the bad is the supreme fallacy, their bringing together our greatest achievement. Long separation of their simple and immediate contexts has been witness to the untutorable compulsiveness of even the finest minds.

In regard to sweat especially, I would remark that the surviving erotic attitude may be reinforced by the love that delights in comprehending not only succulence but also something of the bad and of one's own aggression towards it, thereby repeating, perhaps, an aspect of the victory that was won in favour of fusion and of whole objects at the time of the depressive position. I wish I understood more of the *nuances* contained in the expression, "strong meat." I believe that the full understanding of a myriad of such simple phrases would clarify our terms and establish psychoanalysis in the popular mind. As well as scientific probity the aid of poetic sensibility is needed.

I WOULD CONTRAST with the better implication of "strong meat" a trace of the primary envy in those people—Jonathan Swift may have been an example—of unsatisfactory sexual development, whose delight is to ease the torture of the attraction to the beloved, to the good and far too ineffable body, in discovering as well as imagining that it also contains bad smells. Such a sufferer is tortured by the goodness of this good thing; he is in fact glad to turn it into a bad thing. "Smut" seems often thus inspired. Envy is envious of the good—thereby hideously idealised—and would destroy it. The desire to humiliate often has the same origin. It is an attitude that can be expressed concretely by calling it a desire to conceive of the object as a vile smell whose attack justifies the counter-aggression. For those, however, who can enjoy themselves, there are few more subtle pleasures than to find in badness a greater goodness. The excellence of "high" pheasant, a "strong meat," and of other delicacies that have begun to rot, attest, bear witness as well to remnants of early attitudes to good faces and to the breakdown products of the milk that suckled the infant.

THE FARMER, THE COUNTRYMAN, acquires a tolerance of the cycle that ends in decay (and fertility). His attitude to nature suggests the hypothesis that in the calmer moments of infancy, a similar integration of bodily states, whether the infant's own or the mother's, were

momentarily referred to the self-same object without distress.

However that may be, here surely lies our own first delight in the country: in such moments we all partake of the soil, we are fellow-countrymen of a strong local speech, another reminder of "strong meat," and fellow-countrymen of Shakespeare; whereas the discrimination of urban and any modern cultured life makes wider splits between the good and bad in the form of cleanliness and dirt. The old-fashioned farmer was thought to feel awkward on introduction to the drawing-room. He became conscious of his dirty nails. He felt coarse, and so he was. The infantile, young, balance between good and bad to which I have just referred, is lost, maybe despised as bad form, in cultured society. Both good and bad are observed in a manner more urgent by the conventions of the drawing-room. The split that appears to be made, though sometimes alarming, is modified by behaviour that takes a position, as it were, within the chasm, seeks to fill it with a wealth of expostulation. Polite behaviour is the art of unceasing expostulation. It follows that the extreme terms themselves, the very good and the very bad, are equally neglected by the approved forms of conventional attitudes in favour of a neutral ground. But the ghosts of the very good and very bad are near at hand, more nearly admitted than they are by the manners of the farm. The countryman's sanity, his mask, his ego-figure built up with the clay of infantile balance, have been discarded in favour of a balance more hardly come by, since it is founded upon the awareness of conflict in which the possibilities of a larger ego-integration have existed. These contrasting attitudes that I have isolated are, of course, usually mingled. Our own peasants, if such there be, are often very conventional in some adoption of a polite model. The paganism to which I have alluded is to-day more easily encountered in novels than in life. And so the farmhouse parlour is likely to show appalling taste, with no reminder of ego-structure in regard to a resolution of conflict. The décor is benteel, a degradation of polite standards, without the support of any art. It is pointed out to us by a watercolour or two of mountains, sunsets, perhaps unsullied blossoms, and little girls holding posies.

THE TRUE ARTIST is never genteel, though the servant and interpreter of urban culture. He borrows something from the countryman's out-of-door attitudes, applies them to the admitted conflicts of polite society. But art itself is not supremely a polite activity, nor is a strong enthusiasm for it altogether "good form." "Good form," of course, is a revealing

metaphor for a shapely coalescence in the presentation to other people of one's own psyche.

As the farmer handles his fields, surgeons and doctors handle the decay and dirt of the body itself, yet they must treat their patients as gentlemen and ladies. This need, tiresome though it can be, often fits well with their own needs, stronger in them than in many others, to re-possess the integrating vetoes of polite convention.

THE MOTHER'S INSIDE was once our home. When relish for life flourishes, a horror of bad smells and of the inside decline. Even at the social function, if love predominates, we would not have people be without their organs, were that possible. Nature, the countryside, the sea, obtain much of the comfort they bestow from the mother's inside with which, in their terms, we can feel at one. In regard to detail, however, the internal organs are little less strange than the id: the only workable substitute for horror of them is not only pity but scientific curiosity or interest. No wonder the origins of science, of Greek philosophy, are largely medical and physiological. Whereas the functions of the internal organs can be loved—we speak of “the breath of life”—no one falls in love with a lung. It is, of course, unseen; but were we endowed with X-ray eyes, I doubt whether they would add greatly to our erotic interests. As it is, we who are not surgeons experience the inside of other people's bodies neither in terms of vision, touch or taste, but only in terms of smell and (to a small extent) of sound.

I HAVE ALREADY referred to the neglect by our polite society of the very good or the very bad in favour of some neutral ground, and I have described the intrusion of a bad smell on a social gathering. Some tremendous social gaffe, of course, the “letting of the cat out of the bag,” is equated with that intrusion, and so is, to a lesser extent, much social inadequacy, causing nervousness on those occasions or stimulating social ambition. Perhaps if you don't keep up with the Joneses, you will be viewed as lumps upon their rubbish heap; perhaps your sole function will be visualised as that of a more or less efficient drain. What at the moment will be stressed by the “clean lines” of a craft, that is to say, of a boat about which we are likely to learn in the weekly society papers? Possibly the lines appear lean, and hence clean, because in a context of a solid floating on the sea, fatness can be equated with our waste-products deposited shapelessly in, or upon, water.

POLITE CONVENTION expresses through its vetoes a continuous awareness of a degradation easily

assumed, an awareness that nothing, nothing physical, is good all the time. Even of delicious food we can become entirely sick: we could be drowned, scalded, or smothered by a sufficient quantity. Everything organic goes bad. Pretence and denial implicit in some forms of refinement are considered altogether vulgar, since it is a reminder in the very negation of that which it would deny. The use of perfume, on the other hand, for an inappropriate occasion, is likely to possess the vulgarity of confession more than of concealment. The proof that “correct” behaviour, for all the many vetoes (a vetoing rather than a denial of the good and the bad) is not the product of splitting only, may be found in the accompanying sobriety amid much that is debonair. Correctitude is by no means idealistic, and ugly people, well-groomed, are more likely to be “correct” than the beautiful whose beauty feeds their omnipotence. Clean, undemonstrative ugliness is perfectly “correct”: it provides, in fact, the backbone of good breeding. The bad is regularised, perhaps formalised, certainly made odourless. The drab clothes of the men, pressed and of expensive material, are a guarantee that nothing exotic, over-refined, idealised, is afoot. It has not long been so, of course, and what is sometimes called “high” society is rather more romantic. But always, I suspect, true elegance must not seem altogether to deny the possibilities of decay. We will remember that in more flamboyant ages there was always present the correction of flamboyance by palpable disfiguration and body-smells and by the general lack of sanitation. The courtiers at Versailles were wont to relieve themselves on the ante-room tapestries. The male adoption of drab attire, on the other hand, seems to have accompanied the dissemination of the water-closet; but a “loud brown” in suit or shoe has been considered the acme of vulgarity.

AND so, in a very constricted and often spiritless form that works well, average conventional behaviour keeps before us a dulled image of the good and the bad, the one muddled by the other. If the bad can be held in strict restraint, so can the good. There is much that is far too good for our polite society; ideas, for instance, penetrating thought, and (very often) wit. I speak, of course, of the *mise-en-scène*, not of the methods through which those who play there delight to rearrange it.

In every society, then, there exist conventions for balance, a coupling of the good with the bad, a figure of ego-integration to whose moulding all social gatherings contribute. In this ethos the mere conception at least of enveloping odour circulates, together with the graces and elegance that shall suitably abound.

POETRY

Quoting Shakespeare—in German

On the Splendours and Miseries of Translation (I)

IN ACT II, Scene 2, of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Enobarbus attempts at once to extol and to explain the essence of Cleopatra, the secret both of her sensuous and of her spiritual beauty, with the following lines:

*Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety*

I did not live in England for long without having had this quotation strike me from all sides. It was "a familiar saying," perhaps the most familiar saying of all, whenever the subject turned on the brilliancy and power of women, on female beauty and wisdom.

What I must try to explain is why the quotation would be completely unknown to someone coming from Germany, even though, once heard, it made an immediate and lasting impression. Consider the passage in the celebrated Schlegel-Tieck translation. There it runs:

*Nicht kann sie Alter
Hinwelken, täglicher Genuss nicht stumpfen
Die immer neue Reizung*

A single reading or hearing of the words is enough to show clearly why this, unlike so many other Shakespearean lines, has failed to become proverbial in German. The initial negative, that "*Nicht*," gives it a clumsy and disjointed rhythm, whereas in the original it is the word "Age," the subject both in the grammatical and the poetic sense, which not only gives the English a precise and majestic emphasis, but at the same time places the poetic idea to the very forefront.

If one looks closer still, one will surely also find that in this context it is almost contrary to the sense to translate "custom" by "*täglicher Genuss*" (daily enjoyment). More important still, the expression "*infinite variety*" does not even correspond to "*immer neue Reizung*" (con-

tinually fresh charm), quite apart from whether the German offers a proper poetic equivalent.

Consider another example. This is an instance of the reverse, namely where the translation is, I believe, happier than the original. At any rate, the German has become proverbial.

One autumn some years ago I was walking over the Yorkshire Moors with an English friend. I was suddenly struck with sadness at the sight of the bare, windswept northern heathland, and I quoted to him those lines from *As You Like It* which are spoken by the melancholy nobleman Jacques in the Forest of Arden.

*Und so von Stund' zu Stunde reifen wir,
Und so von Stund' zu Stunde faulen wir.*

"Very beautiful," said my friend. "From whom is it? Goethe? Schiller?"

Now my companion knew his Shakespeare as well as any. Why were these particular lines completely unknown to him? It struck me that in England, with a few exceptions, those Shakespeare passages which have become an overwhelmingly powerful and effective part of English vocabulary and usage are utterly different from those which—thanks to our incomparable good fortune in having the classical Tieck and Schlegel rendering—have become quotations and "household words" in Germany. My young English friend was unfamiliar with the lines from *As You Like It* and took them for a quotation from Goethe or Schiller. (What higher compliment could be paid to the Schlegel-Tieck translation?) I myself in similar fashion have met in English books, lectures, newspaper articles and conversations with countless sayings and expressions that struck me either by their beauty or truth (usually both); on closer acquaintance I found them to be Shakespeare quotations which were completely new to me (despite an exposure to the Bard