

2. *Hypocrisy*. Does the enlightened don really mean what he says? His style of life does little to suggest it. The Laffer your views, the higher and fatter you live: that is the burden of *The History Man*, the most withering exposure of academic hypocrisy since *The Groves of Academe*.

3. *Righteousness*. A sage cannot afford to be wrong. And our universities—or at least their most vocal and highly publicised elements—were publicly wrong in the 1960s about public events. There can be little appeal in history against that collective hysteria that was once called the New Left. Violence-worship among intellectuals is not a fact to be forgotten or excused. Few among the young, it is true, knew they were being manipulated by middle-aged professionals hell-bent on

promotion. They were easy fodder. But the spectacle is one that ordinary men will not quickly forget or forgive.

Our intelligentsia, to speak bluntly, has a lot of egg on its face. It can choose now to distance its indignation through farce, as in *Jumpers* or *Changing Places*; or blur it with cynicism; or pretend that nothing really happened. But a memory of the 1960s lingers guiltily on. Those who shouted then, all shouted for Dictatorship and the glamour of the gun: the rest failed to shout at all. The moral purity of violence—that was the greatest of all the fictions and falsehoods that academe once took to its heart, and from which it must now find its painful way back to a world of rational debate and tolerant hearts.

“Solzhenitsyn’s Children”

A Year of the “New Philosophers”

Letter from Paris—By FRANÇOIS BONDY



A YEAR OR SO AGO reports suddenly appeared in European newspapers and magazines about a new post-Sartre trend in France, an intellectual and ideological change of climate among those young Frenchmen who had been conspicuous as militants in May 1968. We were told of surprisingly large sales of books written by authors aged about thirty who frequently spoke and debated on radio and television or wrote in *Le Monde* and *Les Nouvelles Littéraires*. Not only did they repudiate Stalinism—that would have raised no eyebrows since *L’Humanité*, the French Communist party newspaper, uses “Stalinist” as a word of abuse (curiously directed at their socialist rivals)—and Leninism (approved by French Maoists among whom had been many of the “new philosophers”), but they repudiated even Marxism itself—and not merely the misinterpreted, misused, latter-day “Vulgar Marxism” but that of Karl Marx himself. André Glucksmann (aged 42), the oldest and most successful author of this group, described Marxism as a “tyrannical concept”, which

presented itself as revolutionary, libertarian, and emancipatory but had become the opposite, not by chance but as a result of its own inner logic. It is what Raymond Aron, under whom André Glucksmann had studied, had called “The Opium of the Intellectuals” twenty-five years earlier—an allusion, of course, to Marx’s definition of religion as “the opium of the people.”

Is there a group, a school, of “new philosophers”? This question, frequently asked a year ago, has again become topical today with the appearance in various translations of André Glucksmann’s most publicised book, *Les Maîtres Penseurs*, and the even more brilliant one by Bernard-Henri Lévy, the “condottiere” of the “new philosophers”, entitled *La Barbarie à visage humain*. The question now is whether this is, and will remain, a specifically French phenomenon. This would be understandable in the light of certain persistent disputes and long-lingering crises among the French left-wing intellectuals, and, after all, there is always something “new” coming out of Paris—a “nouvelle vague” of films (such a long time ago), a “nouveau roman” and now the “nouveau philosophes.” Is this rapid succession of new trends merely a new fashion with an eye to the market place or is it the hectic expression of more profound developments?

IN THE FIRST PLACE the group itself: in a sense these authors all have a similar background. The autobiographical *mélange* includes the entrance

examination for the *École Normale Supérieure*, the influence of lectures by the Marxist Louis Althusser and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan; the prestige of thinkers like Michel Foucault; and the deep impression made by Solzhenitsyn's testimony in the volumes of *The Gulag Archipelago*. The older French Marxists such as Pierre Daix and Claude Lefort have dedicated books to Solzhenitsyn, something for which there is hardly a parallel on the rest of the European Left. Jean-Marie Benoist, a leading member of Claude Lévi-Strauss' seminar, is the only one who has no memories of May 1968; he was French Cultural Attaché in London at the time but his book *Marx est mort*, published in 1970, was the start of this critical anti-Marxist literature.

Then there are the meditations of Lardreau and Jambet, two high-school teachers from Auxerre, in *L'Ange*, and Maurice Clavel's *Ce Juif Socrate*; Glucksmann's and Lévy's books are far more direct politically and are innocent of any religious or lyrical tones—do they all fall into the same category?

I have referred to a "group", not a "school" since the latter can imply solidarity in action, joint appearances in Italy or Mexico, with members assisting and promoting one another and all in concert creating a specific climate of opinion. There is here far less system or coherent content. The message of all of them is not "what we bring" but "what we bring to an end." Some attack rationalism and scientific thinking as potentially totalitarian; others use rationalist arguments against the "tyrannical concept." Occasionally the two overlap.

WHY HAVE these authors created such a sensation? Some critics, including Gilles Deleuze, have written about "a racket by the media" or "marketing", and "anti-communism promoted by the bourgeoisie." The media, however, have merely acted as a multiplication factor; they made no discoveries, invented nothing. *L'Ange*, for instance, this curious book in which there is an odd linkage between the Early Church Fathers and Mao's cultural revolution, has sold some 20,000 copies with no assistance from the reviewers. This fashion can only spring from the interest taken by so many young people in a rediscovered metaphysical longing, in romanticism, in a certain warmth of feeling. All these authors, whatever may be their sometimes questionable background, turned out to be highly gifted polemicists. Left-wing newspapers such as *Le Nouvel Observateur* gave them space to reply to attacks from the traditional Left, and their rough-and-ready counter-arguments were frequently more convincing than their fine theories. They were, of course, attacked as

blasphemers and renegades, but their questions about the mechanics of real power under socialism and the validity of the dissidents' testimony concerning the repressive structures of Communist states as a whole were not answered but were simply written off as inopportune. Even a pamphlet in the paperback series *Idées* attacking the "new philosophers" merely stoked the debate. The young veterans of May 1968 remained coolly unimpressed by the hoary old epithets (i.e. "grist for the mills of reaction"). André Glucksmann had already dealt with this in his earlier book *La Cuisinière et le Mangeur d'hommes*. The theory he developed in that book of a connection between the revolt of May 1968 and Solzhenitsyn's protest has become one of the group's common denominators. It is the fruit of experiences among which may be reckoned the crisis of Stalinism and then of Maoism.

Discussions abroad have overlooked the fact that sundry left-wing political journalists have come forward with similar and frequently more systematic dissents. Among them are Jacques Julliard, Marcel Gaucher, and Marc Paillet. They voiced criticism of the Left's "Common Programme", cast doubt on the advantages of nationalisation and referred—admittedly, in the style of Djilas—to a "new class" of high-ranking officials, the directors of nationalised industries and even of the cultural apparatus, all building up their own empires in the name of the "proletariat." Didn't the class interests of these new potentates merit a Marxist analysis? This has been debated in newspapers and in heated public discussions and may well have played a part in the change of climate which contributed to the narrow defeat of the Left at the polls. In those same months in which senior servants of the State discovered that their Establishment hearts were really with the socialists, i.e. with tomorrow's probable victors, this criticism carried weight because there was no question of conformism or ambition playing any part in it. Anyone who overlooks or underestimates the political effect of the new intellectual polemicists is liable to miss the point. The conclusion in one of the first really well-informed accounts of it (Jean Amery in *Merkur* of November 1977) is disputable: "If France's intellectuals are no longer left-wing intellectuals, I do not see what message to the world could still come out of Paris. . . ." Amery went on to betray the fear that "ex-Left-wing resignation might spill over into neighbouring countries, particularly Germany."

I WILL RETURN later to this forecast. For the moment attention should be turned to the remarkable dual relationship between the young group and the older generation of intellectuals.

Mention has already been made of Raymond Aron, whom the Left grudgingly respect as a major intellectual force. The rediscovery of Boris Souvarine's work on Stalin, unobtainable for decades, created a great stir, as did the research into Leninism of Alain Besançon, the historian. *Arguments*, the critical Marxist review of the 1950s, whose driving force was the sociologist Edgar Morin, was reprinted. Much attention was given to the impious books on China by Simon Leys. Jean-François Revel deserves mention for his *La Tentation totalitaire* with its Voltairean verve. Claude Lefort, formerly editor of the Marxist periodical *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, has also had a significant influence with his new books.

From such veterans the young authors have learnt much that squares with their experiences and their thirst for an intellectual summing-up. Perhaps the influence of Albert Camus has been the greatest on content as on style. In addition, however, there are older-generation authors and thinkers who have been sucked into the wake of the "new philosophers" and have no wish to be left behind in a development which is arousing the young. Philippe Sollers and Julie Kristeva, editors of the magazine *Tel Quel*, who previously extolled Maoism in flowery phrases, have now identified themselves with the group. *Tel Quel*, of course, had earlier published articles by Solzhenitsyn. At a meeting of left-wingers including dissidents from the East which gathered in Venice in autumn 1977 before the "Biennale of Dissent", Louis Althusser took up the whole question, so neglected on the Left, of big government and political repression. He, the communist theorist, had hitherto taught people exactly how to read Marx and properly to understand *Das Kapital*; now for the first time he referred to the "near-impossibility of finding a satisfactory Marxist explanation for a history which, after all, has been made in the name of Marxism. . . ." He detected a yawning gap in Marxism: "We must say openly that there is no Marxist theory of the State." Not only was this said by Althusser in public but it was said for the first time. Nevertheless the "new philosophers" had put their finger precisely on this point before him. It was a striking illustration of the established Left forced to face a problem as a result of new ideological pressures. When the group of "Left-wing anti-communists" held a reception for East European dissidents at the same time as President Giscard d'Estaing was receiving Leonid Brezhnev, Jean-Paul Sartre, who had hitherto ridiculed dissidence as bourgeois gutter-press humbug, turned up; yet the Paris revival of his old play *Nekrasov* went on as if nothing had happened.

THERE IS, THEREFORE, two-way traffic; the older militants, historians and thinkers influence the young authors and, in reverse direction, these authors and their success influence the veterans who have no wish to be left behind but to be where the youth is. In the light of this to-ing and fro-ing the question whether the new Paris essayists should still rank as "Left-wing intellectuals" and therefore have something to tell the world is hardly the most relevant. In an earlier phase of his work Maurice Merleau-Ponty produced a subtle justification for the Moscow Trials (he changed his mind later), and Sartre then was full of anxious concern about the precise distance from, or proximity to, the Communist party that it was correct and authentic to maintain. Now Jean-Marie Benoist and André Glucksmann certainly have something to say, maybe quite a lot, for where contributions to an understanding of our era by the French Left intelligentsia are concerned, the 1950s were surely not a brilliant period. In spite of all their hasty conclusions and questionable arguments, in this respect the "new philosophers" need harbour no feelings of inferiority (to which they are scarcely prone in any case).

COMMITMENT to political and moral solidarity with the Dissidents has changed the climate among French left-wing intellectuals, even that of the Communist party press. *L'Humanité* once raved against Solzhenitsyn; it has not done so for a long time. Leading Communists joined with libertarians in protest demonstrations against the incarceration of the Ukrainian Plyushch in a psychiatric hospital, against the sentences on Shcharansky and Ginsburg. The difference is that the "new philosophers" and some of the Left (the magazine *Esprit*, for example) regard repression in Communist countries as a central subject whereas for the others it is an embarrassment. They have nothing to say against reporting it; it should merely not be "over-emphasised." Now that the taboo has been broken, however, and the old Communist self-censorship is no longer operative, the party thinkers have been forced on to the defensive in face of dissidence so vehemently expressed.

The two great left-wing parties of France today are entangled in reciprocal polemics and in self-criticism. The "new philosophers'" arguments have become common ground, which may detract from their power and continuing impact. The problems with which French society is now wrestling demand precise social and economic analysis rather than robust confessions of faith and argumentation. The old cult of "autonomy",

with the ruined watch-factory LIP as its model for a commitment to cooperative societies, seems a somewhat marginal pursuit.

IN ITALY the effect of the “new philosophers” has been astonishing. They have polarised and to some extent reinvigorated the debate on the Left. In Germany, *Alternative* (a West Berlin Marxist periodical) has long been to the fore in the conveyance of new French ideas and two of its numbers are worth noting. No. 16 of October 1977 is entitled “*The Intellectuals and Power*” with sub-title “*Minds Exorcised of Marxism—the so-called ‘New Philosophers’ in France.*” It carried four articles representing the views of the group—by André Glucksmann, Jean-Paul Dollé (one of the most important of the group), Michel Guérin, and Bernard-Henri Lévy—and a German commentary by Professor Oskar Negt putting forward tactical arguments such as the following:

“In the Federal Republic’s tense social situation the new philosophers can only reinforce legitimisation, confirming the anti-Marxist prejudice prevalent in the country.”

This, however, as Negt adds, is no adequate rebuttal of what they have to say. They have, he says, separated two things of importance to the Marxist dialectic, partiality and truth and so put their finger on “one of orthodoxy’s sore points.” Negt then goes on to confirm rather than refute the “new philosophers” by saying:

“For all the erudition that they have sometimes displayed, the Marxists have not said much that is relevant to the important problems of the West European transitional period.”

This is tantamount to admitting that the “new philosophers” have indeed given an impulse to thought and that, to parry the attack, the older Marxists have had to go further than ever before in the process of open-minded self-criticism. Negt is convinced that Karl Marx himself can be brought to the rescue, saying that the argument concerns only “formal differences in the fulfilment of programmes set out by Marx himself.” The scholastics once similarly based themselves on Aristotle—“he himself has said it.” *Ipsa dixit*, old conviction confronting new heresy.

No. 119 of *Alternative* for April 1978 carries the title “*Crisis of Marxism*”—without a question-mark. An editorial introduction attempts to hold a line between old theory and new theoretical departures. Clearly when someone like Louis Althusser gives vent to criticism hitherto only expressed in “uncivilised” form by the “new philosophers”, it acquires a new sanctity. The most notable testimony is that of Karl-Heinz Roth, concerning, as he reports, “The profound

hatred of the New Left which has grown up among many comrades” and this “on the basis of years of experience.” Nicos Poulantzas is the only representative of Orthodox Marxism, which tirelessly associates “authoritarian state control” solely with the “bourgeois world.”

In the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, a leading forum of left-wing opinion among German newspapers, Gerhard Zwerenz has recently taken up the cudgels with a polemical fire worthy of the French and, to judge from readers’ letters, to much protest and even disgust. Zwerenz, the well-known novelist, turns on those who had neglected the French, and had not given a close reading to what they had written. The German Marxists have neither the strength nor the determination for critical self-analysis, he says; they are united only in a defence consisting of accusations against heretics.

“We have our ideal fixed in the forefront of our minds. . . . We know everything, and we can explain it in a way no one can understand.”

If the writings of these young Frenchmen have the same effect on the German ideological battle as did the French *philosophes* of the 18th century—and they also frequently did so by brilliant polemics—in other words if they can impose a more vivid comprehensible vocabulary, that alone would be a welcome outcome. Anyone who has looked at the numerous orthodox Marxist paperbacks distributed in vast quantities by reputable German publishers is struck by the frightening self-assurance of their language, by the formalised dismissal of anything “disturbing”, presupposing a dogmatic atmosphere of mutual reinforcement, pre-empting the more individual processes of criticism and insight. Any reader who has no stomach for such theological unanimity, in which so much is taken as self-evident and so much else as unarguable, will anticipate the arrival of the “new philosophers” with pleasure. They will be criticised, evaluated, even refuted; their lack of system, their often mindless romanticism and their many quick-triggered conclusions will be pointed out; but it will not be done in that “Language of Tyranny”, analysis of which is one of the “new philosophers’” achievements. The fact that much of Marxist writing, which thinks of itself as radical, has become at once a thing of conservative psychic comfort and also a means of intimidating and of inhibiting thought is now recognised both by the independent thinkers of the young intellectuals and by their mentors who are now faced with more awkward questions. Even if the “new philosophers” have done nothing else—and perhaps in fact they *have* done nothing else—this is reason enough to welcome them.

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BOOKS & WRITERS

A Dog Engulfed by Sand (I)

Abstraction & Irony—By MALCOLM BRADBURY

ONE OBLIQUE WAY into thinking about what is happening in the contemporary English novel, which is not distinct from the novel as it is evolving in other countries, is to think about the relationship between fiction and painting, especially with regard to the treatment of the human figure and the growth of abstraction—lines of development which have tended to be common ground in the modern evolution both of art and the more serious kind of novel.

There are many ways of reflecting on the matter, but one of them is to look at the question from the standpoint of the practising novelist, which, besides being a critic, I am. And like many writers now, I find myself much concerned with the question of how to create and pose a human figure in a world that can no longer be regarded as comfortably “realistic.”¹ Painters, and filmmakers, and television writers and directors have that problem: the serious modern camera or canvas frequently insists on it. But writers have it

¹ An obvious case in point is, of course, Samuel Beckett, especially in more recent pieces like “Ping.” But of course Beckett has increasingly used the framed arch of the theatre, and its axes of light and darkness, posed room and posed agent, to explore the issues. There are other novelists much obsessed with the question of the relation of agent to landscape, from Nicholas Mosley to J. G. Ballard, though perhaps none in England with the extraordinary precision of Peter Handke in Germany. But there are many signs of the preoccupation; one might quote Emma Tennant in an interview, reflecting on the need for a contemporary unrealism and commenting on the influence of South American and Eastern European writers on her fiction:

“They describe states of political instability, economic recession and general powerlessness in a way which seemed to me a more interesting way of looking at contemporary reality than the old English naturalistic pudding.”

too, within the particular limits, resources and options of their own medium. I would like to give some thought to it, because it seems to me one of those “essentialist” questions that generate stylistic development and change, because, in short, my own preoccupation seems a good deal more than a personal one.

But let me start with the familiar, the repeated, and the common sense reservation: writing and painting are really not the same sorts of activity at all. Painters paint, with paint, or draw, or sketch, or nowadays do many other things, with buckets, and bricks, and bicycle-pumps, but they work in an eminently visual medium, their main instruments of expression and analysis being colour and form. They make what we may call, in the most kindly sense, unspeakable objects. Their artefacts can normally be taken in as a unity (and anyone who has ever seen a reviewer with a Martini at an opening will know how quickly this immediate, instantaneous response can be formed); their codes can be very considerably self-made. What they do is not inherently referential, though they may seek to make it so, may have to make it so.

Writers are not in that situation. Writers write, and their material, their instrument of expression and analysis, is words; words are universal currency. They are serial, have structural logics or grammars, are referential, communal, and extremely difficult to privatise, though writers may seek to make them so, may have to make them so. Because language is serial, writing works in sequences, more like a film than a painting; and it is assimilated in sequences (hence critics reading novels need an awful lot of Martinis, and in my experience seem frequently to have had them).

There is a classic analogy between poetry and painting—*ut pictura poesis*—but, as Lessing insisted, distinguishing between the spatial and the temporal arts, it is false. It becomes proportionately *more* false when the objects in the comparison are a painting and a novel. For if