

# INTRODUCTION

'I HOLD, as some have done before me, that the human mind degenerates in America, and that the superiority of the white race, such as it is, is only kept up by intercourse with Europe.' PEACOCK (*Gryll Grange*), 1860.

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'If material life could be made perfect, as (in a very small way) it was perhaps for a moment among the Greeks, would not that of itself be a most admirable achievement? . . . And possibly on that basis of perfected material life, a new art and philosophy would grow unawares, not similar to what we call by those names, but having the same relation to the life beneath which art and philosophy amongst us ought to have had, but never have had. You see, I am content to let the past bury its dead. It does not seem to me that we can impose on America the task of imitating Europe.' SANTAYANA, letter to Pearsall Smith, 1921.

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'America is no place for an artist. A corn-fed hog enjoys a better life than a creative writer.' HENRY MILLER, 1945.

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## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

*Thursday, 28 November.* Nantucket light. In cold, sunny afternoon the bright red lightship bobbing to starboard is the first sign that our ten-day prep-school voyage is coming to an end, we are as happy as the discoverers of Virginia in 1584. 'We found shoal water, where we smelt so sweet and so strong a smell, as if we had been in the midst of some delicate garden abounding with all kind of odoriferous flowers, by which we were assured that the land could not be far distant.' No more dull dormitory life, eight to a cabin, no hurried monotonous meals (without drink, for our ship, *The Highland Governess*, is dry), no more scrambling for chairs, or searching for conversation, no more the pitching and tossing of the battered old bureaucrappy troopship over the endless empty heaving dishwater of the autumn Atlantic. Tomorrow our personalities will be handed back to us. Agitation amongst the young Canadian engineers in my cabin. 'Gee, I can't wait to be sweating over a corpse.'

To bed excited, with lights and lighthouses visible, and in the distance the Long Island beaches. All the voyage an immense euphoria about U.S.A., Baedeker alternating with Baudelaire: prospect of seeing California and far south-west! Europe seems infinitely remote; England

like a week-end cottage which one has abandoned with all the washing-up undone. I understand the New World *motif*. Actuality, the ideal of inhabiting a continuous present.

*Friday.* Up at six to see New York in the darkness—sunrise, the Narrows, the first houses, the ferries, 'l'aurore rose et verte', the Statue of Liberty, skyscrapers in fog, general impression much more European than I had expected. Interminable wait before going ashore during which the passengers all look exactly as they did on the first day—'their sweating selves, but worse'. Off about 12.30, then through customs and in taxi to hotel; my driver asks—and gets—six dollars. Tony and Wystan are there and we go off to lunch at my choice, the *King of the Sea*, exotic and rather bad, but Third Avenue, red and raffish, has a fascinating Continental charm. Auden warns us of the perils of the big city, he seems obsessed with hold-ups, the proper use of the subway system, and jumping to it at the traffic lights; his welcome is like that of the town mouse to the country mouse in the Disney film. I discover only later that his battle with the traffic lights is a kind of personal obsession with the machine age, a challenge to his desire to pass efficiently in the crowd. Hugging our wallets tightly and plunging over the crossings we proceed in short rushes to the Holliday book-shop, an oasis where carefully chosen books are sold like hand-made cushions; here Wystan introduces the two new mice and leaves us, with instructions on how to take the subway back. That evening an elaborate dinner with Peter at Voisin's, much-anticipated on the *Highland Governess*, (disappointing except for avocado pears). The new mice compare notes. Peter says the U.S.A. is a place where only the very rich can be the least different from anyone else, but where the poor are not crushed and stunted (as in England, where the upper class is twice as tall as the lower). Here, he said, the poor are picturesque and often beautiful—the true creators of the American dream—and that there was also a great poetry about the country when one travelled over it. On the other hand it was awful seeing nothing but copies—of buildings, houses, furniture, pictures, and where the originals were in private hands they gave no intimacy. I found the skyscrapers depressing, a huge black ferro-concrete architecture of necessity shutting out the light from the treeless streets

'Whose constant care is not to please  
But to remind of our, and Adam's curse  
And that, to be restored, our sickness must grow worse'.

*Saturday.* To the Lafayette after strolling round delicious Washington Square which in the morning sun considerably revives me from the gloomy thoughts of the night before, sleepless beside the sizzling radiator. Greenwich Village, which reminds me more and more of

Soho, is still cheap, and apparently not quite spoilt, 'the one place in New York where different income groups are still mixed up, and where the queers and misfits from the Middle West can all find sanctuary'. 'There is an immense cleavage here', says Tony at lunch, 'between the intellectuals and everyone else, who are really quite uninterested in books, though they like to keep up with the best-sellers. Intellectuals thus have to join political movements or attach themselves to causes or become dons for they cannot otherwise survive. They become over-serious, it is a whole-time business, "culture" requires one hundred per cent efficiency at it, everyone becomes extremely bellicose and erudite; publishers work so hard that even they have no time for pleasure, and without pleasures the intellectual becomes uncivilized, a pedantic variation of the business man.'

After lunch to the top of Rockefeller Center. Asked the bald elevator boy on the last lap why we were told to face outwards. He made no reply at first, then broke down into helpless laughter; the only words to come from him were, 'It's all so silly'—mountain sickness, perhaps. The view was the first beautiful thing I had seen in New York, where one can go for weeks without the knowledge of being surrounded by water. If one need never descend below the fortieth floor New York would seem the most beautiful city in the world, its skies and cloudscapes are tremendous, its southern latitude is revealed only in its light (for vegetation and architecture are strictly northern); here one can take in the Hudson, the East river, the mid-town and down-town colonies of skyscrapers, Central Park and the magnificent new bridges and curving arterial highways and watch the evening miracle, the lights going on over all these frowning terraces against a sky of royal-blue velvet only to be paralleled in Lisbon or Palermo. A southern city, with a southern pullulation of life, yet with a northern winter imposing a control; the whole nordic energy and sanity of living crisply enforcing its authority for three of the four seasons on the violet-airy babel of tongues and races; this tension gives New York its unique concentration and makes it the supreme metropolis of the present. Dinner with Auden's friend C. At last the luxury of poverty; stairs, no lift, leaking arm-chairs, a bed-sitting-room with bath-kitchenette curtained off, guests with European teeth (who was it said that Americans have no faces?), a gramophone library, untidy books not preserved in cardboard coffins, an incompetent gas stove—and an exquisite dinner cooked and served by C. Clam-juice mixed with chicken broth, chops with a sauce and lima beans, lederkranz cheese and pumpernickel, dry Californian wine. Argument afterwards about poetry interspersed with selections from Wylan's favourite operas. They are many. Much conversation about the U.S. and W. continues to propound his point of view (see his introduction to *The American Scene*, HORIZON, No. 86). Though very

pro-British (his bedside bible remains a work on the mineralogy of the Lake District compiled by a friend of his father's), he reverts always to the same argument, that a writer needs complete anonymity, he must break away from the European literary 'happy family' with its family love and jokes and jealousies and he must reconsider all the family values. Possibly he could do this in any large impersonal society, but only in America is it so easy for the anonymous immigrant to make money. He is, of course, extremely lonely, but then so is every American; 'you have no idea', he says, 'how lonely even the married are'. I make the inevitable point that surely it is important to live in attractive surroundings, and in New York (where all want to live) only the rich can afford them. Why live an exile in a black slum, looking out on a fire-escape, in a city which is intolerable in winter and summer, when for the same money one might flourish in Regent's Park or on the Ile Saint Louis? But then, I imagine Auden replying, you would at once have the family all about you, and he concentrates on my return journey to Washington Square. Walking back from the subway station at two in the morning I find a second-hand bookstore open all night in West Eighth Street, I go in and buy more Cummings; to purchase early works of Cummings in the small hours, in the heart of

'the little barbarous Greenwich perfumed fake'

and march home with them in the frosty night, while the tugs hoot and central heating plants under the long black street puff away through its many manholes like geysers on the moon, that is to enjoy that anonymous urban civilization that Auden has chosen, and of which Baudelaire dreamed and despaired.

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Long past diary-keeping now, I am slave of telephone and engagement book. Europe is a dream, and Auden's anonymity equally remote. We are plunged in New York literary life and try to analyse the swirl and eddy of that vigorous, intricate, cordial group of groupings. America is not Europe, in neither its places nor its people nor its values, and it is only by making the most desperate adjustment that a true European writer can remain himself here. Thus in the United States literature is fighting a losing battle against the Book Business which we can hardly comprehend. The crucial factor is the high cost of book-production which renders the printing of small editions (under 10,000) uneconomic; the tendency is therefore to go all out for the best seller and, with a constant eye on Hollywood, to spend immense sums on publicity to bring about one of these jack-pots. But even without Hollywood there are large sums to be made from book-of-the-month clubs, cheap pulp editions, serial rights, and so the result of this pressure is a transformation of the literary scene into mass-production. The

American public are cajoled into reading the book of the month, and only the book of the month, and for that month only. Last year's book is as unfashionable as last year's car. The standard of living among publishers is also ridiculously high; huge offices among skyscrapers employ armies of bright and competitive young men. I know of one whose lawyers forbade him to start a business of his own as his capital was but a hundred thousand dollars. The hunt for young authors who, while maintaining a prestige value (with a role for Ingrid Bergman), may yet somehow win the coveted jack-pot, is feverish and incessant. Last year's authors (most of the names that have just reached England) are pushed aside and this year's—the novelist Jean Stafford, her poet husband Robert Lowell or the dark horse, Truman Capote—are invariably mentioned. They may be quite unread, but their names, like a new issue on the market, are constantly on the lips of those in the know.<sup>1</sup> 'Get Capote'—at this minute the words are resounding on many a sixtieth floor, and 'get him' of course means make him and break him, smother him with laurels and then vent on him the obscure hatred which is inherent in the notion of another's superiority. 'In Ngoio, a province of the ancient kingdom of the Congo,' Frazer relates, 'the rule obtains that the chief who assumes the cap of sovereignty is always killed on the night after his coronation.' But in civilized Ngoio the throne is generally vacant. America is the one country (greatly to its credit) where an author can still make a fortune for life from one book, it is also the country where everyone is obsessed with the idea, where publishers live like stockbrokers, and where authors, like film-stars, are condemned to meditate from minute to minute last year's income tax, next week's publicity. It is all part of the American tragedy—that, in the one country left where necessities are cheap, where a room and food and wine and clothes and cigarettes and travel are within everyone's reach, to be poor is still disgraceful. The American way of life is one of the most effective the world has known, but about the end of life Americans are more in the dark than any people since the Gauls of Tacitus. What is the American way? It may be summed up as a creed which is partly the effect of climate, partly of vitamins and calories, partly of pioneer experiences, partly of the inherited memory of what was bad in Europe. The American way assumes a world without God, yet a world in which happiness is obtainable, but obtainable only through a constant exertion of the will towards a practical goal and of the mind towards solution of present problems. Riches and success are the outward signs that this goal is being attained, that the human organism is making full use of its energy

<sup>1</sup>For this reason we have tried to avoid literary prize-givings in this number and to present a cross-section of a living ant-heap, not a case of mounted butterflies fast-fading and wrongly named.

and faculties; a whispering of wives, expert at farewell (three is the lucky number), indicates that the proper stages on the journey are being reached, and handsome, healthy, indifferent children are present to carry on when the wage-earner passes over; any moments of disquieting leisure are rendered innocuous by extraverted social activities with colleagues of similar status and their families, or sent flying by alcohol. The esteem of society is enormously important and can only be held by a decent, kindly and acquisitive way of living. Courage, humour, hard work and the affectionate co-operation of uncles and cousins make endurable the darker side: sickness, insolvency, hangovers, death and Mother. Seldom has a more harmless or profitable philosophy of life been evolved, a more resolute opponent of art, remorse and introspection, or one further removed from the futile European speculation about the Soul or the Past, the moping about sin and death, the clinging to moribund methods, ideals, relationships, the pangs of ennui. If one but were permitted to take human beings at their own valuation, the American way would seem the most desirable solution to our predicament, for it offers a full life built round the notions of freedom, independence, hard-work and the family; the personality without a thought stoically working itself out through action. But the end? What is old age in America? After sixty, where do old people vanish? Why are the bustling battalions of unwanted Moms so elegantly pathetic? And the rich who have pocketed their winnings, why are they so glum? And what is this way, in reality, but forty years' drudgery in an office while the divorced wives play bridge together and the children drift apart; what is the getting of money but a constant source of ulcers and anxiety, till apoplexy or heart-failure clamp down? And why does alcohol, which should oil the wheels of intercourse, so flood and clog them that there is a drunk in each so respectable family; and why the immense rush to psychiatry, the high rate of madness and suicide? Why, after midnight, do so many Americans fight or weep? Grown-up while still a child, middle-aged at thirty, a boy only among his cronies of the golf course or the lunch club, confined or cremated at about sixty-three, the American business male with his forceful, friendly, unlined face carries within him a dust-bowl of despair which renders him far more endearing and closer to Europe than his dutiful efforts to conceal it. Action, often violent and destructive, not contemplation, is his remedy, but his awareness of the tragic human predicament goes very deep.

This leads us on to one of the finest traits in American character. At a time when the American way, backed by American resources, has made the country into the greatest power the world has known, there has never been more doubting and questioning of the purpose of the American process; the higher up one goes the more searching becomes

this self-criticism, the deeper the thirst for a valid mystique of humanity. Those who rule America, who formulate its foreign policy and form its opinion, are enormously conscious of their responsibility and of the total inadequacy of the crude material philosophy of life in which they grew up. The bloody-minded, the smug, the imperialist, the fascist, are in a minority. Seldom, in fact, has an unwilling world been forced to tolerate, through its own folly, a more unwilling master.

The New York scene reveals many traces of this unrest. Insecurity reigns. Almost everyone hates his job. Psychiatrists of all schools are as common as monks in the Thebaid. 'Who is your analyst?' will disarm any interviewer; books on how to be happy, how to attain peace of mind, how to win friends and influence people, how to breathe, how to achieve a cheap sentimental humanism at other people's expense, how to become a Chinaman like Lin Yutang and make a lot of money, how to be a Bahá'i or breed chickens (*The Ego and I*) all sell in millions. Religious houses of retreat merge imperceptibly into disintoxication clinics and private mental homes for the victims of traffic lights and nervous breakdowns. 'Alcoholics Anonymous' slink like house detectives around the literary cocktail parties. A most interesting phenomenon is the state of mind apparent in *Time*, *Life*, *The New Yorker*, and similar magazines. Thus *Life*, with its enormous circulation, comes out with excellently written leading articles on the dearth of tragedy in American literature or the meaning of suffering, and a closer acquaintance reveals them to be staffed by some of the most interesting and sensitive minds in that insensitive city.

It is easy to make fun of these three papers, but in fact they are not funny. Although they have very large circulations indeed, they only just miss being completely honourable and serious journals, in fact 'highbrow'. Hence the particular nemesis, ordeal by shiny paper, of those who manage them; they work very hard, and deliver *almost* the best work of which they are capable. But the gap is never quite closed between the public and the high-brow writer, because the American organism is not quite healthy. I mention this at some length because it indicates how very nearly New York has achieved the ideal of a humanist society, where the best of which an artist is capable is desired by the greatest number. Thurber's drawings, Hersey's *Hiroshima*, the essays of Edmund Wilson or Mary MacCarthy, *Time's* anonymous reviews, show that occasionally the gap is closed; when it is closed permanently the dream of Santayana will be near fulfilment.

But these anxiety-forming predicaments (*Time's* stomach is a common trouble) are for those who live in New York and have to earn their living. To the visiting non-competitive European all is unending delight. The shops, the bars, the women, the faces in the street, the excellent and innumerable restaurants, the glitter of '21, the old-world

lethargy of the Lafayette, the hazy views of the East River or Central Park over tea in some apartment at the magic hour when the concrete icebergs suddenly flare up; the impressionist pictures in one house, the exotic trees or bamboo furniture in another, the chink of 'old-fashioned' with their little glass pestles, the divine glories—Egyptian, Etruscan, French—of the Metropolitan Museum, the felicitous contemporary assertion of the Museum of Modern Art, the snow, the sea-breezes, the late suppers with the Partisans, the reelings-home down the black steam-spitting canyons, the Christmas trees lit up beside the liquorice ribbons of cars on Park Avenue, the Gotham Book Mart, the shabby cosiness of the Village, all go to form an unforgettable picture of what a city ought to be: that is, continuously insolent and alive, a place where one can buy a book or meet a friend at any hour of the day or night, where every language is spoken and xenophobia almost unknown, where every purse and appetite is catered for, where every street and every quarter and the people who inhabit them are fulfilling their function, not slipping back into apathy, indifference, decay. If Paris is the setting for romance, New York is the perfect city in which to get over one, to get over anything. Here the lost *douceur de vivre* is forgotten and the intoxication of living takes its place.

What is this intoxication? Firstly, health. The American diet is energy producing. Health is not just the absence of disease but a positive physical sensation. The European, his voice dropping a tone every day, finds himself growing stouter, balder, more extraverted and aggressive, conscious of a place in what is still, despite lip-service, a noisily masculine society. Then there is the sensation of belonging to a great nation in its present prosperous period of triumph. But in addition to 'feeling good' the Americans are actively generous and kind and it is this profusion of civilities which ravishes the visitor. American hosts are not only thoughtful; it is almost dangerous to express a wish before them, to such unobtrusive lengths will they go to fulfil it. American hostesses bring their ingrained perfectionism into daily living. It is a society more formal, more painstaking, more glamorous and more charitable than our poor old bitter, battered, pennywise European equivalent—one may pine inevitably for a whiff of honest English malice, outspokenness and bad manners but one should not be proud of such nostalgias for we have largely forgotten the degree to which leisure, money, goodwill and taste can still make life agreeable. One thing only seems to me impossible in New York—to write well. Not because the whirl and pleasurable bustle of the gregarious life built around writing is so irresistible, not because it is almost impossible to find a quiet room near a tree, or to stay in of an evening, not because intelligent conversation with a kindred spirit is hard to come by (it is not), but because this glowing, blooming, stimulating material perfection over-excites the

mind, causing it to precipitate into wit and conversation those ideas which might set into literature. Wit and wisecrack, not art, are the thorny flowers on this rocky island, this concrete Capri; they form the subject for which our proud new bass is given. 'Yah,' one may say instead of 'yes', but when 'fabulous', 'for Chris' sakes', 'it stinks', 'way off the beam' and 'Bourbon over ice' roar off our lips, when one notices with distaste the Europeanism of others—it's time for flight, for dripping plane-trees, the grizzling circle of hypercritical friends, the fecund London inertia where nothing stirs but the soul.

What are the alternatives? One may stay on and coarsen—many English writers do—into shapely executives or Park Avenue brandy philosophers, one can fight like Auden for privacy and isolation, or grow bitter and fitzrovia in the 'Village atmosphere' or one can try elsewhere. Cape Cod or Connecticut have their devotees, but these havens are the rewards of success, not its incubators. Boston, last stronghold of a leisured class, offers a select enlightenment of which a contemporary Englishman is just downright unworthy. Washington has immense charm, the streets of Georgetown with their ilexes and magnolias and little white boxes are like corners of Chelsea or Exeter, but a political nexus offers few resources to the artist who is outside the administration, and the lovely surroundings (the shores of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries form the most insidiously appealing of all American landscapes to the home-sick European), are not places in which he can hope to earn a living.

Let us try California. The night plane circles round La Guardia, leaves behind the icy water of the Sound and that sinister Stonehenge of economic man, the Rockefeller Center, to disappear over the Middle West. Vast rectangles of light occasionally indicate Chicago or some other well-planned city till at six in the morning we ground in the snow of Omaha. As it grows light the snow-fields over the whole agricultural region of the Middle West grow more intricate, the Great Plains give way to the Bad Lands, poison ivy to poison oak, the sinuosities of the Platte rivers to the High Plains, the mountains of Wyoming, the Continental Divide. All semblance of European structure vanishes; Salt Lake appears as a radiant lunar landscape in the wan sunshine, the Great Salt Lake desert glistening beyond it, fading into other deserts, last, into the formidable Carson Sink. It is hard to picture the immense desolation of the West in winter, the wilderness of snow over fifteen hundred miles of plateau and mountain, till suddenly, unfrozen, among the pine woods of the Rockies a blue alpine lake appears, Lake Tahoe, and beyond a great glowing explosion of orange sky, woods without snow, green hills with no trace of winter, the darker patches of citrus orchard, the line of irrigation canals, the Sacramento Valley—California and the enormous pale Pacific.

San Francisco is a city of charming people, hideous buildings, mostly erected after the earthquake in the style of 1910, with a large Chinatown in which everything is fake—except the Chinese—with a tricky humid climate (though sunny in winter), and a maddening indecision in the vegetation—which can never decide if it belongs to the North or the South and achieves a Bournemouth compromise. The site is fantastically beautiful, the orange bridge, the seven hills, the white houses, the waterside suburbs across the Golden Gate give it a lovely strangeness, the sunset view from the 'Top of the Mark' is unique—but the buildings lack all dignity and flavour. Yet San Francisco and its surroundings, Marin County, Berkeley, Sausalito with its three climates, San Mateo where lemon and birch tree grow together, probably represent the most attractive all-the-year-round alternative to Europe which the world can provide. If I were an escapist, that is, rather more determined to escape, I would fly from the showy death-beds of the countries I love and settle in Central California. There Europe is twice as far as from New York which itself is so remote that it becomes a kind of Europe, a delicious object of the annual holiday, yet the temperate European climate and way of life still prevail. A hundred miles to the south is some of the loveliest country I have ever seen, the Monterey peninsula and the redwood hills of Big Sur. At Monterey the Pacific for once imitates the Mediterranean, the vast cold treacherous sail-less ocean flows in sunny, sandy coves round the pine and cypress woods of the peninsula, the enormous sea-lions bark all night off the shore. South of Carmel the wild Santa Lucia mountains with their forests of evergreen oak and holly roll southwards for two hundred miles of green Dorset downs, five thousand feet high. Here the Pacific roars at the foot of inky cliffs, pouring in immense black strands of weed, whose roots bob like human heads, while out to sea the whales, drifting south in pairs, spout lazily by. On one of these cliffs surrounded by editions of Rimbaud lives Henry Miller with his wife and child. His house is a romantic shack, built by the convicts while making the road, for which he pays six dollars rent a month. A mile or so further is a hot open-air sulphur bath. Once a week the groceries come out from Carmel. There is some fog in winter, but generally it is sunny. The sea is there, the mountains and a bathing pool in the redwood forest. Here is one writer who has solved the problem of how to live happily in America without hacking, writing unstintingly of himself and the Cosmos, decently impervious to this remote grandiose wilderness of mountain and sea.

Hollywood, Los Angeles are too well described in this issue. On the whole those who have loved the Mediterranean will not be reconciled here and those who really care for books can never settle down to the

impermanent world of the cinema. Those who do not love the cinema have no business to come. There are exceptional cases of intellectual adaptation of which Huxley's is the most remarkable. The Californian climate and food creates giants but not genius, but Huxley has filled out into a kind of Apollonian majesty; he radiates both intelligence and serene goodness, and is the best possible testimony to the simple life he leads and the faith he believes in, the only English writer, I think, entirely to have benefited by his transplantation and whom one feels exquisitely refreshed by meeting. Huxley and Isherwood incidentally join hands with Auden in that all three believe (somewhat masochistically) that the peculiar horrors of America—its brashness, music at meals, and racial hysteria—by being emphasized there to a degree not found in other countries, force the onlooker into a rejection of the world which might otherwise come too late. As Auden puts it, 'the anonymous countryside littered with heterogeneous *dreck* and the synonymous cities besotted with electric signs . . . without which, perhaps, the analyst and the immigrant alike would never understand by contrast the nature of the Good Place nor desire it with sufficient desperation to stand a chance of arriving'.

Miller, in his *Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, writes with more desperation: 'In the ten thousand miles I have travelled I have come across two cities which have each of them a little section worth a second look—I mean Charleston and New Orleans. As for the other cities, towns and villages through which I passed I hope never to see them again. Everything that was of beauty, significance or promise has been destroyed or buried in the avalanche of false progress. We have degenerated; we have degraded the life which we sought to establish on this continent. . . Nowhere have I encountered such a dull, monotonous fabric of life as here in America. Here boredom reaches its peak.'

Well, maybe it does, perhaps Americans have destroyed their romantic wilderness on a grander scale than our own rodent attrition at the beauties of our countryside—but I feel a change is coming. As Europe becomes more helpless the Americans are compelled to become far-seeing and responsible, as Rome was forced by the long decline of Greece to produce an Augustus, a Vergil. *Our impotence liberates their potentialities*. Something important is about to happen, as if the wonderful *jeunesse* of America were suddenly to retain their idealism and vitality and courage and imagination into adult life, and become the wise and good who make use of them; the old dollar values are silently crumbling, and the self-criticism, experimental curiosity, sensibility and warmth which are so well represented, I feel, in this number, are on their way in. For Americans change very fast. 'Do they?' 'Very fast and all at once,' he said, 'and nothing ever changes them back.'

PART I  
THE PROBLEM DEFINED  
PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS  
AN AMERICAN

*WILLIAM PHILLIPS*

W. H. AUDEN recently remarked in a piece on Henry James (*HORIZON*, No. 86) that though the lot of the writer in the United States is a hard one, the possibilities of individual genius are all the greater. For while the young writer has generally been handicapped by the lack of a supporting tradition, our primary figures, like Poe, Melville, and James, have actually profited by the freedom from traditional shackles. Coming from a person like Auden, the only writer of stature, so far as I can recall, who has reversed the literary migration to Europe, this observation on American literary life is extremely relevant. But the trouble with Auden's approach (which, I suspect, stems partly from the fact that Auden himself, having already absorbed his tradition, is now more concerned with breaking new ground), is that it tends to slur over the enormous destruction and warping of talent in the struggle for literary survival. The price of genius has been the wasting of talent; and even if one chose to pay this price, the results are by no means guaranteed, especially since in recent times what goes by the name of genius has been steadily deteriorating. Hence the real question facing us is how long a culture can continue to exist on the basis of its exceptions.

To present another foreign view, I should like to quote a remark made in conversation by a German writer, a woman who for years was forced to keep one step ahead of the Nazis and is now living in this country. What she said was that it was much easier for a writer to starve in the United States, the richest nation in the world, than anywhere in Western Europe. Now while her statement is literally untrue, it does illuminate in a negative way our literary life. Literally, precisely the opposite is true: that is, it is almost impossible for a writer to starve here, since easy money is perpetually dangled before anyone with any