

In the no man's land

"THE aim of this volume is to present a collection of separate positions; to reveal a pattern taking shape in our thought and literature. This blurb is cozy and misleading." The attitudes offered here are set dead against the prevailing trends in our thought and literature—one may add, in our life. Furthermore, they are bitterly opposed to each other. *Declaration** points up the animosities which breed between the different wings of our creative intellectual minority. More important, it is an implicit witness to the deep rifts and hostilities which have opened up within our culture itself.

In a previous issue Raymond Williams, writing on *Working Class Culture*, spoke of culture as the clearing of channels of communication so as to permit "a full response of the human spirit to a life continually unfolding in all its concrete richness and variety." What we are faced with today is a situation in which culture is in open hostility to "the concrete richness and variety" of the experience of our community, particularly since the War. This withdrawal of culture from experience—as Kenneth Tynan remarks in his essay *Theatre And Living*—is an act which is uncivilised in the precise sense of that word. It reflects a general failure of nerve, a deep-seated social disintegration. Naturally, the creative artist is never wholly united with his society: it is right that he should never be dragooned in this way. But there are healthy and unhealthy degrees of alienation. As Lionel Trilling remarks in his essay on *The Situation of The American Intellectual At The Present Time* (in *A Gathering Of Fugitives*) "when you speak of your relation with your country and your culture, you are responding to a tone and a style in your compatriots, to their tempo of movement, the inflection of their voices, the look on their faces. You trust or you do not trust." The contributors to *Declaration* do not trust.

To understand the accumulated rage and frustration of young intellectuals today—and they are symptomatic of attitudes prevalent among the less articulate—one must dig into the frozen matrix of our culture itself, into that forbidden territory where society, literature, politics and art interweave. It seems that we need new ways of looking at, new ways of speaking together about the deep, immobilising contradictions of our culture. They appear in every facet of the society; in our political and economic institutions of course: more significantly, in our ways of feeling and response, in the manners and postures of our moral life. They are beyond the language of politics—at least the language of the political pamphlet and the hustings.

The apathy of our political life, the narrowness of our economic theories—these are themselves merely the signs and symbols of a deeper decay, which has eaten into our emotional fibre, and which is breaking down the inner resistance and vitality of our community. We have to learn to evaluate—as political facts in some broader sense—a tone, a style, a tempo, a mode of address, as well as the intentions and assumptions which these things mask. And here I believe we are at the heart of the matter. For surely there has never been a greater cleavage between the tone of our society, its manner and forms, and the gross realities. What happens to a society, rigidly class bound, which uses continually the language of equality? What happens to an oligarchy which conceals itself behind the rhetoric of the popular democracy? What happens when larger numbers are trained each year for responsibility and participation, but where the sources of power and decision grow every day more remote? All our energies are expended in creating and consuming a culture whose sole purpose is to cover up the realities of our social life.

In the most courageous essay in this book, Lindsay Anderson says that "we are still between Arnold's two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born." We live in the no-man's-land of welfare capitalism, the Compromise State, where the old gods reign and the old images command assent, as it were, by default.

The outstanding exception to the generalised disgust which characterises *Declaration* is the contribution by John Wain—*Along The Tightrope*. This is surprising because Wain's novel, *Hurry On Down*, was, potentially, a novel of moral exposure. There, the picaresque hero, Charles Lumley, tries to live as if he had overcome the barriers of class, finds that he cannot defeat them simply because they still exist. His "adjustment to life," of which Wain speaks in this essay, was essentially an adjustment to "the world's artificial system." The novel, however, lacked the moral confrontation which should have followed this discovery. But if we are to take his essay as evidence, Wain has now established a working truce with this situation. Things are seen, after all, not to change as fast as they appear to; and what begins as "the rejection of wholesome thinking and block attitudes"—admirable for its realism—ends as an ethic of moral quietism. The grim fact—a moral and political fact which we are obliged to account for—is that the hero who practices upon the world with the weapons of a conspicuous amorality, may find himself, not at the bottom, but at the top. Moral relativism can itself become a moral system. The hero may be without judgment—he is merely the creature of the artist: but at some point, the artist himself

must judge. Not to do so is itself a moral attitude, and what we have in this curiously post-Movement essay, is a kind of failure of moral imagination.

The other contributors group themselves, roughly, into two: the spiritualists and the humanists. Of the spiritualists Colin Wilson leads and his henchmen, Bill Hopkins and Stuart Holroyd follow. There is little to be said now, about Colin Wilson's "critical books." Even the Sunday reviewers, who rushed into the streets, telescopes in hand, at the appearance of *The Outsider*, and beheld a messiah, have since recanted. What concerns us here are Colin Wilson's attitude to contemporary problems, the general cut of his sails as he drifts into these choppy seas. They are set, one finds, at an angle of intolerable, vaunting pride: pride, even in the religious language which he is fond of using. The horde of historical and fictional personages whom he has drummed together and sent off in search of a thesis are merely the projections of his own consuming personality. They are the thousand faces of Colin Wilson. They have no real or imaginative substance apart from him. In this subjective world, there is no room for the awareness of human suffering. The sum of the human condition is merely to provide a challenge to the "elect" to "produce a higher kind of man." The history of the human race is a backdrop, a rationale for his existence. To what will this "new man" subscribe? What image of behaviour moves him? We are not told: there is none. Though the whole incantation is conducted in a dim religious light—of faith, or more humbly of belief, there is not a whisper. The Church is there, ambiguously secularised and ineffective, except as an "organisation to support the Outsider." In the Wilson escatology, God is the real outsider. "Man cannot know certainty—not unless he becomes God." But Wilson speaks already with the calm and certainty of the chosen. There is indeed a kind of divinity here and we must draw our own dismal conclusions.

Into this spiritual wasteland, the creatures of his imagination follow: Bill Hopkins hesitantly, because he is intelligent, Stuart Holroyd with a brash, jolly naivety. "I suspect that all *great* psychological concepts . . . reflect the psychology of their originators. And for that reason . . . I have no hesitation in nominating the Will to Freedom as man's fundamental drive." Mr. Holroyd has, as a matter of fact, no hesitations at all. Where Colin Wilson is vague and generalised in his distaste for humane values, Holroyd is openly contemptuous. As a result, the political attitudes of this group receive their most concrete political formulation here. "The

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