

## INTUITION VERSUS THE INTELLECT

OR IS THERE SUCH A THING AS AN 'INTELLECTUAL'?

So far I have made no attempt to examine the term 'intellectual'. There was no occasion to do so. In the division of people into intellectuals, on the one side, and just nice ordinary decent people on the other, this colloquialism plays its part. Everyone knows what it means, and it means the same thing to everybody. For the purposes of describing and criticising that unhappy division I have accepted it as the approved counter. But now, in this long chapter, I am turning my back upon the popular scene: I shall enquire to what extent the Intellectual may be said to exist, except as an abusive figment of the popular mind.

In France—as is the case with so many other things—the term 'intellectuel' has greater definition and much more intellectual content than it has with us. And it is to an acrimonious battle of wits in the literary world of Paris that I now shall turn: for, as it happens, the term 'intellectual' plays a prominent part in this particular polemic.

Julien Benda's *Trahison des Clercs* is a book which received a great deal of attention in England and America in the Thirties.<sup>1</sup> It is almost a modern classic. Here is a case in which a famous intellectual arraigns other intellectuals for their treachery to the intellect. And indeed, as I see the matter, his denunciation was, and is, fully justified. Benda employed the word 'clerc' (or clerk) however—at least for the title page. We generally find that archaic and Chaucerian word is used in French controversy when one writer is being disparaging about another, as so to speak a reserve epithet.\*

The date of publication of Julien Benda's book is 1928. (I speak of course of the original French edition.) But there was another book published in 1914, which seems to have a great deal to do with it—although it is not referred to by M. Benda. This book was entitled *Les Méfaits des Intellectuels*.<sup>2</sup> This latter is full of a doctrinaire violence: it is in fact an anti-intellectual verbal convulsion, whose author, Edouard Berth, was a disciple of Georges Sorel. And Sorel is a man of considerable importance: he was responsible for one of the most famous French books of the century, *Réflexions sur la Violence*, which was supposed to have inspired fascism, it being the *livre de chevet* of the first fascist, Mussolini.<sup>3</sup>

Berth's principal contemporary target was precisely M. Julien Benda, upon whom he delivers an attack of the most florid and clamorous pug-nacity—and I cannot believe that it reached my ears but not those of



\* As for instance: 'Je conçois la haine que nourrissent pour cet Etat guerrier nos clercs laïques, etc.'—BERTH.

M. Benda. It seems therefore extremely likely that from *Les Méfaits des Intellectuels* came the impulse for the writing of *La Trahison des Clercs*, Clercs being, as I have said, another way of saying intellectuals, by the substitution of *intellectuels* for the former word one arrives at *The Betrayal by the Intellectuals*. That and *The Misdeeds of the Intellectuals* as titles are so very like as to suggest a close parentage. To my mind M. Benda's book is simply an answer to M. Berth's. In spite of the fact that *La Trahison des Clercs* is in another class entirely, the two books can be most usefully studied together.

We will take Benda's first and I will employ throughout the word intellectual rather than clerk — which in English-speaking countries has not retained, as in France it has, something of its original status of scholar. — Benda's book is not directed against the intellectual, as such, at all. He has not — as have his opponents — any quarrel with the intellect, or objection to its free and indiscriminate use for the liquidation of pretentious humbug and the hundred other jobs it alone can perform. It is the false intellectuals only he wishes to castigate: not 'le vrai clerc', of that order of high and incorruptible intelligences to which belonged Malebranche, Goethe, La Bruyère, Renan. (Of this century I noted that he mentioned Proust and Valéry and that I think was all.) It is a novel type of intellectual, which at the time of writing had been there for little more than half a century, at which this great pamphlet is aimed.\*

One of the dominant subjects in *La Trahison des Clercs* is war; it is critical of the bellicose professors and bloodthirsty men of letters who were such a novel feature of the years immediately preceding world war I — and they were by no means absent from the scene in the years ushering in world war II. The intellectual, he argues — meaning by intellectual or 'clerc' just any figure in the history of literature, since that is what any person writing a book is called today — that kind of man has always observed a proper detachment regarding matters of current controversy and to partisan passions of the moment. Remembering that earlier party-struggles turned at least as much upon religious as upon political issues, one is obliged to ask M. Benda whether Pascal's *Lettres Provinciales* were really so blamelessly aloof from the controversial passion as all that: and as for pure politics, whether Voltaire's judgements showed that sublime impartiality that, according to Benda, those of a true 'clerc' should exhibit.

With great justness he accuses the latter-day intellectual, however, of being engaged in a very different type of work from that which occupied Pascal in exposure of abuses in the *Lettres Provinciales* or that in which our own early pamphleteers so zealously indulged. He accuses them of going over, with all their apparatus of learning and literary magic, to the side of the political power-addict — the man-eater, the firebrand: further of as good as accepting the standards of the philistine. This he does not say in so many words, though the following amounts to that, it would seem to me — 'humilier les valeurs de connaissance devant les valeurs d'action'. The 'values of action' are always philistine values. And Berth's writings are, like his masters,

\* Since that time, and very recently this writer has, I believe, engaged personally in politics. In that, of course, he has not observed his own teaching; but that does not make the teaching less good.

a long panegyric of action — of the sword at the expense, expressly, of the pen, the Tommy-gun contrasted favourably with the typewriter.

The curious obsession of the modern intellectual with the warlike virtues is a subject to which we owe some of the best pages in this book. The veneration for action, and for men of action, is a feature of Twentieth Century thinking. Hemingway is an obvious instance of a writer whose muse is married to Action. But in France and the continent in general some of the men most influential in this century — Nietzsche (for he belongs to the Twentieth), Sorel, Péguy, Maurras, Malraux, have exalted the life of action — and, what is also to be noted, have been followed because they did so. And it has not always been the most masculine or active who have responded to this vitalist gospel.

With all the energy at their disposal a majority of the modern intellectuals have striven to excite to passionate action — not to exhort to reflection or moderation, not applied to the reason, but always to the emotions: they have pointed passionately to the battlefield, the barricade, the place of execution, not to the life of reason, to what is harmonious and beautifully ordered. This is in fact *the betrayal*, specifically indicated by Benda.† Even to have served as a soldier, or to have followed the profession of arms, establishes a special claim, in some mysterious way, to literary honour: from which such men as Vauvenargues, Vigny, Péguy, are seen to benefit.

Benda insisted that this was something entirely new. Victor Hugo, for instance, was by no means a man to disparage action: yet he would not, as Benda says, have preferred Napoleon to, say, Galileo, or Shakespeare, or Erasmus.

Picking up some days ago a book of Léon Bloy's, the somewhat unexpected subject the soul of Napoleon Bonaparte,‡ I found myself attempting to plough through a bubbling mass of the customary inflated metaphor. Neo-catholicism and chauvinism were so indissolubly mixed that it was impossible to distinguish the Cross from the Sword.

Then I turned back to the title-page to discover the date of its publication. 1912 it turned out to be: two years earlier than Berth's *Méfaits*. This pious old war-dog could smell the carnage shortly to begin: so he was building an ornate little shrine to Napoleon — bringing out the battle flags of Austerlitz and the Pyramids. Two years later Berth — his colleague in choleric neo-catholicism — would be composing his attack upon all those apt to interfere with the development of the war-psychosis. Bloy is a different proposition to Berth: he was one of the principal heroes of the catholic renaissance in France. Maritain and Raissa sat at his feet in the early days of their conversion. *La Femme Pauvre* was a considerable book.‡ There is a sort of writing, however, that the French can tolerate which to the English reader is like melted chocolate cream and cotton wool thrust into the mouth at the same time. For my part I can only admit

\* In a volume entitled *Les sentiments de Critias* (Paris, 1917) it appears that Benda concentrates exclusively upon this.

† Cf. p. 195, *Trahison des clercs*. [In the Norton issue of Aldington's trans. (New York, 1969), p. 158.]

‡ *L'Âme de Napoléon.* — Léon Bloy. *Mercur de France* (Paris, 1912. No English trans.).

Bloy to my mind a few pages at a time. When a hundred lines or two of such veriform verbiage as 'aussi inconnaissable que le tissu de combinaisons infimies de la Solidarité universelle' has wound its way into my mind, all cerebration stops, and I am obliged to put the book down. It belongs so much, however, to the same type of thinking (or better of feeling) as Berth's, that it will help to an understanding of the latter to quote two particularly apposite passages here. The first of these can be found on the second page of 'L'Amé de Napoléon'.

Napoleon! We have there the Face of God in the shadows. . . . Napoleon is inexplicable and, without doubt, the most inexplicable of men, because he is, before all and above all, the Prefiguration of Him Who is to come and Who is not any longer perhaps very far away. . . .

After another page or two I put the book down. When I opened it again it was at pp. 96-97, and there I found something about 'this naïf great man of genius . . . sleeping under his "Star"'. But he had dreams; and eventually we find him a sleep-walker like Herr Hitler.

Napoleon was a sublime sleeper, a somnambulant conqueror that the sufferings of others and his own caused to cry out during his sleep—whose cries brought terror to the extremities of the earth. Beside this demigod—whose cries of suffering as he sleeps make the Polynesian quake, make the Hebridean shudder, cause the Mexican peon to catch his breath, and the hearts of the very whales in their polar retreat to miss a beat—the modest divinity to whom he was compared cuts a rather poor figure; being after all on the quiet side (and it has never yet been claimed that when Jesus died the Greeks and Romans in their cities experienced a wave of inexplicable terror).

Bloy's hero was a highly successful little Corsican gangster, whose fate and that of his lieutenants would have been much the same as that of Hitler and his ministers and Gauleiters, had Napoleon's enemies been better organised and had the English been Twentieth Century men, toughened by Twentieth Century anti-humanitarian propaganda, instead of Eighteenth Century men, softened by humanist philosophy.

This worship of the Man on horseback, the Man of Destiny, of the Man of blood, can be studied in Bloy as well as in Treitschke and Nietzsche, though I have never heard of anyone doing so, since he is a professional of the most convulsive piety.

Aggressive Frenchmen—Sorel, Barrès, Maurras,<sup>5</sup> Péguy—were, as much as the Prussian professors who usually get all the blame, pepping up the French for the slaughter.

Let my first quotation from Edouard Berth's 'Misdeeds of the Intellectuals' be read while Bloy's paeans to Napoleon are still ringing in our ears.

From our humanitarian dream we were awakened, after 1905. We are patriots: since Tangiers, the preparation for a war with Germany has given renewed force to the French soul and as is natural has revived the religious spirit—war, this grandiose, sublime, and terrible reality, imposing an heroically pessimistic conception of life, a conception which it is impossible to reconcile with the insipid optimism of Eighteenth Century thought.

One may observe the ideological consequences of the reintroduction

of that great fact, war, into the contemporary consciousness. The bourgeoisie, in a national sense, reforms its ranks. Will it proceed to the restoration of the monarchy—thus confirming the dilemma of Sembat's book: namely, *Faites un roi, sinon faites de la paix*. Make your choice: either a King—or Peace!"

That is Berth in 1914. His words had a quite different ring eleven years later, in 1925. But let me quote from something he wrote at this later date.

That we are witnessing the *ruin of the modern world*—ruin which the 'great war' (1914-18) will have helped not a little to precipitate and to consummate—about this there can be no doubt in the mind of any well-informed person.<sup>†</sup>

So the excitable little child—going bang! bang! bang! with his toy pistol in 1913-14—has learnt his lesson. And the noisy little German children, a hundred thousand marks worth a penny or two, had momentarily learnt their lesson as well.

To speak of Berth is to speak of Sorel; and indeed the best way to discuss 'Les Méfaits des Intellectuels'—which is Sorel and a great deal of soda-water, plus neo-catholicism—is simply to substitute for the Sorelian arguments of which it is full, the master himself. The meaning attached by Berth to the word 'intellectual' is precisely that which we find—expressed with more vigour—in various works of Sorel's.

Of all the apostles of dangerous living, pure action, 'heroism', blood and iron, Georges Sorel was the worst—the most shrewd and irresponsible. If not at his instigation it was under his inflammatory influence that Berth, in 1913-14, attacked everything and everyone capable of bringing a little moderation into the over-heated atmosphere. The same repressive propaganda, on the German side of the Rhine, proceeded from the harsher pens of pangermanist professors.

Sorel's masterpiece of incitement to violence was not, however, directed to inflaming chauvinism but to providing for the maximum of class-hatred. But there is no reason to suppose that he was a good socialist. Indeed, it was a matter of complete indifference to him which class got charged with hatred first: bourgeoisie or proletariat, it was all one. The bourgeoisie were all right, provided they loathed the proletariat so much that it increased the natural dislike of the poor class for the rich class. There was a beautiful detachment about Sorel. And Berth expressed himself as well pleased with the French bourgeoisie—they were getting splendidly warlike—though this was for another purpose than that envisaged by his master.

Sorel insists that 'the people' must retain their proletarian attributes. About this he is adamant. He shows extreme displeasure at Condorcet's mental habits,<sup>‡</sup> where that Eighteenth Century worthy is found proposing to cure the people of their superstitions, so that the helpless Many may

<sup>5</sup> 'Méfaits des Intellectuels', p. 275.

<sup>†</sup> Les Illusions du progrès' (p. 60). Georges Sorel.

<sup>‡</sup> Les Illusions du progrès' (p. 60). Georges Sorel. [The Illusions of Progress, trans. John &

cease to be the eternal dupes of their masters: so that a workman would be able to defend himself against political salesmanship, ballyhoo or charlatanry, or cure himself of prejudices and superstitions, 'by the use simply of his reason'. Sorel is rather like those lovers of the picturesque who resent the idea of hygiene and pedagogy, automobiles and telephones being introduced among those divine bug-ridden, half-idiot, backward populations—laden with junk-jewellery, and operatically costumed.

But just as it is important that classes should remain as they are, so should nations. And it is not only the proletariat or bourgeoisie which should be pumped full of hatred: he has plenty of venom left for the nations as a whole. It is obviously a good thing for the nations to preserve their hatreds and rivalries intact, and that still more of such combustible matter should be artificially generated. They should be full of 'race', and full of fight. He sees life as a kind of bear-pit or place where spirited cocks tear and scratch each other to pieces. — Like his master, Nietzsche, he is, in the last analysis, romantically Darwinian.\* — Human society is red in tooth and claw. They are part of the murderous zoo of nature.

Berth announces in his *Méfaits des Intellectuels* that he has become a royalist: and Sorel latterly had, one feels, from time to time to remind himself that he was supposed to be left of centre. But it would be very bad marxism, he explains† to treat the bourgeoisie with anything but admiration: even veneration. In devouring the bourgeoisie, as it is your marxian destiny to do (he tells the proletariat), you must accord them god-like honours. Did not the 'Communist Manifesto' declare that the bourgeoisie had been responsible for marvels beside which the Pyramids, Roman aqueducts, or gothic cathedrals were child's play? The bourgeois are people worthy of the highest honor.

Before, approximately, the year 1847, historians, philosophers and moralists were in the habit of demonstrating that Europe was in a bad way because of the inadequacies for centuries past, of governments in the hands of the rich classes. It had been a record of crimes and follies. The new society, they taught, which was in process of being born must correct all that, basing itself upon the humanities and the precepts of the classic sages and fathers of the Church. Then came Marx and Engels. From that moment the above view became out of date. Thenceforth history has been taught quite differently.

Far from there being anything wrong with the behaviour of the rulers of Europe, the reigning bourgeoisie, they were perfect miracle-workers. Of course they had to be devoured, just as they had devoured the feudal ruling class who preceded them. That was the law of nature, killing and devouring (the only unfortunate thing being that there would be nothing left afterwards to devour the proletariat). But 'the revolutionary workers must find their inspiration in the works of bourgeois economy, in order to realise similar marvels themselves'. This is why practically all socialism to-day is a tough capitalist-socialism.

\* Just as all the Russian writers were said to 'come out of the Cloak of Gogol', so this strange Gallic liter of intellectual fire-eaters derive from Nietzsche, whose influence in France, in the first decade of the century, was enormous.

† *La Ruine du Monde Antique* ([Paris, 1925; 2nd ed.] p. xxiv), Georges Sorel.

From this it can be seen that a disciple of Sorel's would not find it very difficult to get a little absent-minded about the proletariat and to feel quite warmly towards the bourgeoisie. Even he might okay a king: which was what Berth did. All the wars, usuries, tortures, inhumanity, oppressions of the rich classes and rulers of the immediate past, far from being crimes (as the humanitarians and rationalists had taught) were perfectly normal form for a healthy and vigorous society. But we may really now let Berth take up the tale and offer us his definition of the term *intellectual*.

Berth's book breathes war from the first page to the last. One of his definitions of an 'intellectual' would be 'a man who does not love war'. In justifying his adherence to monarchism his main argument is that kings love war. In fact, they are war. Thus:

'The State, of which Maurras's monarchy would in effect be the reinstatement, is of the following kind . . . a State that is non-intellectual; a State, I mean to say, restored to its essential functions and true nature, which is to be *War incarnate*.' This kind of State would cease to be 'the prey of Intellectuals' and 'the instrument of their rule . . . the modern democratic State.'

A State is, in other words, a society organised for war. What is natural for all States is to be bracing themselves to spring upon another State. But the Intellectual is always attempting to defeat the ends of nature: is in his essence *anti-natural*. Because he knows it is natural to engage in war, he of course proposes a society that would never go to war, and would subsist in an unnatural state of peace. — So the first thing to remember about the Intellectual is that he abhors the natural, and attempts to replace it by something ideal and artificial. The State-form that is typical of him is democracy — the most artificial theory of the State extant.

Berth's neo-catholicism is so deafeningly noisy (like that of Bloy) that any not of his opinion are bludgeoned with his minatory diatribes. Religion, for this foolish dervish, is merely an excuse to roar. He is a neo and more royalist than the royalists and the uproar of his devotions fills the Parisian firmament. He is nothing if not traditionalist. True aristocracy, he tells us, has nothing intellectual about it: 'it is warlike and heroic — traditional, historic. It rests upon carnal realities: upon the blood, upon *physical heredity, upon race*'. — We are in an atmosphere of Hitlerite Blut und Boden; but at the same time ferociously catholic, royalist, and still a little marxist. It is, in fine, a curious piece of French political baroque.

Where Berth tells us what Democracy — his bugbear — really is, it sounds like a lowbrow credo in reverse. Democracy is 'profoundly intellectual: it is anti-traditional, anti-physical, . . . anti-realist, idealist: it will only recognise *des esprits purs*, a detachment from all historic and natural links, floating above time and space, in the contemplation of *des idées claires* — ideas clear and distinct'.† And needless to say, adds Berth, people of this kind have nothing to do with the people, who are much nearer to a good old carnal King: with a dozen fat mistresses, adoring war and fond of *la chasse* (when he can't be killing men he kills as many animals as

\* *Les Méfaits des Intellectuels*. — Edouard Berth.

† *Méfaits*, etc. (p. 43).

possible), and, in fine, doing all the things the People would like to do if they had the opportunity. No beastly *intellectualism* about your King, or Noble, or Priest, as there is about the modern democratic ruler—the Intellectual!

So let us note, before proceeding, that the Intellectual, in addition to being anti-natural, is anti-traditional, anti-physical (which is included no doubt in being anti-natural), anti-realist: is anti-historic (no respect for time), and, in conclusion, unsympathetic to the ordinary hearty specimen of humanity, who is of course too near to nature to suit him.

The key-word which releases the full flood of Berth's wrath, however, is the word *reason*. For it is the function of the Intellectual to reason, he deals in the *rational*—unlike Berth who relies entirely upon his intuitive equipment, and regards the Reason as the arch spoil-sport and the principle that stands in opposition to nature.

Complications arise, notwithstanding, for Berth. Maurras is for him a master only second to Sorel. Yet, alas, Maurras loves to exalt Reason, to defend the Intelligence; he has for romanticism in general, and intuitionist philosophers in particular a profound contempt. One knows what he thinks of Bergson!

Now Bergson is a god of Berth's as well as Maurras. You can easily conceive therefore how extremely awkward this is for Berth. But he surmounts it by showing that Bergson's 'intuition' is really identical with classic Reason (a very different matter, he tells us, to plain Reason) without any difficulty. As to the damaging fact that Maurras is always defending the Intellect—and indeed it is glaringly obvious that this eminent royalist is an arch-intellectual—that is solved in a similar manner. 'The rationalism of Maurras is a classical rationalism, that is to say realism: it is in complete opposition to democratic rationalism, which is idealism.' Maurras, like Proudhon, or like Sorel, has attacked idealism as it exists today. The *idea* has become impregnated with 'anarchic sentiment'.

But he has so little difficulty in overcoming little inconsistencies that that order for a very good reason. He advertises the superb doctrine of contempt for logic. The *pensée maîtresse* of Proudhon—the revered ancestor of Sorel—was decisive for him. It had provided him as it were with a *carte blanche*\* to commit himself to any statement some passing emotion had suggested, without having to stop to consider whether it contradicted some statement he had made the day before. For the 'master idea' of Proudhon's was that consistency was made for slaves. Berth took the fullest advantage of this.

If you add the fact that the famous 'idée claire' of Descartes was one of Sorel's particular *bêtes noires*—and consequently one of Berth's—you

\* The reference is to Proudhon's attitude to antinomies, which caused the head-on collision of opposite theories of property.

can imagine the facility with which the latter disposes of any antinomy—and the chaos that reigns in the pages of the *Méfais*!

With the name of Descartes—and with the introduction of this new counter, logic—we get nearer to the clarification I was seeking when I undertook the writing of this chapter. Sorel—with his customary clarity—exounds his intuitional principles. 'In our day,' he writes, 'the belief that everything is susceptible of a perfectly clear explanation is not by any means less strong than it was in the time of Descartes. If one takes it into one's head to protest against this illusion of rationalism, immediately one finds oneself regarded as an enemy of democracy.' Sorel insists, and his disciple Berth after him, that democracy and rationalism must be bracketed, since one is merely the political expression of the other.

'The great question today is to teach men to reason well,' he points out. 'From that proceeds the extraordinary importance attached to logic.'—But the objective of the criticism undertaken by Sorel (and so of that of Berth) is not philosophic, but ideologic. Sorel obviously is not interested philosophically in the contrasting minds of Descartes and Pascal. It is to the successful and self-assured society to which the teaching of Descartes would lead—and did in fact lead—that he objected. In such a society there would be no scope for all that *heroism* which was his stock in trade and which you could not have without a great deal of 'the tragic'. A sultry and catastrophic landscape was to Sorel's liking, for it was such conditions that were propitious for his genius. Looking backward, the Eighteenth Century greatly disgusted him: the Age of Reason, with its attempt to eliminate everything from life which produces misery and violence, and so tragedy (which in its turn produces heroism, of which there must be a professor named Sorel).

So he was not at all concerned with questions as to whether as Descartes believed the individual mind is competent to gauge the validity of its deliverances: or whether, on the other hand, we are, with Pascal, content to avail ourselves of what is there, responsive to our techniques, without 'useless definition'—unreally existing as we do between two mysterious infinities.<sup>18</sup> No: his partisanship (and so that of Berth) in favour of the mysticism of Pascal, as against the rationalism of Descartes, was not because Sorel himself was a mystic. Anything but. His mind was not only extremely rational, he was described as being—privately and socially—a relisher, in a cynical spirit, of the drollier aspects of human controversy. Mysticism and its enigmatic and shadowy regions were more propitious for crimes of violence—that was all. People were more open to take the tragic plunge

<sup>18</sup> 'Les illusions du progrès' (p. 50). [Eng. trans., p. 22.]

\* Elle suppose donc que l'on sait quelle est la chose qu'on entend par ces mots: mouvement, nombre, espace; et, sans s'arrêter à les définir inutilement, elle en pénètre la nature et en découvre les merveilleuses propriétés. . . .

La principale comprend les deux infinities qui se rencontrent dans toutes, l'une de grandeur, l'autre de petitesse'. *Pensées*.—Pascal.

required of them in such a mental atmosphere, than in the bland and sunlit world of Eighteenth Century thought.

Returning to Berth the 'socratic Greeks' share that gentleman's scorn with the men of the Eighteenth Century. *Intellectualism* is inseparable, as he sees it, from the notion of *intelligibility*: both made a great point of an intelligible universe. To want things clear-cut and consistent is to be an *intellectual*: so far we stand with Sorel. (The criticism of the 'socratic infatuation with knowledge', was a Nietzschean theme.)

Berth's rampant neo-catholicism, however, is directing him when he tells us that 'Christianity' has, in place of the clarity and dull serenity of hellenic culture, 'substituted the *clair-obscur* of vast cathedrals: the enormous and half-lighted vessel' (for one of the cathedrals has become a majestic ship) seems to point its prow into the infinite, borne upon a tempestuous sea and guided in the night by the solitary *étoile du Berger*.

In M. Berth we see Faustian Man at his most floridly Faustian. He exults in the 'abysses' which have opened for our profounder vision as Christians, delights in the huge sable shadows cast by the doctrine of original sin, and in the grandiose pessimism which imposes on us the sensations of the most unrelieved tragedy. With that he will scornfully contrast the pitiable optimism of Classic Man, or Eighteenth Century positivism, or Doubting Descartes, that positivist before his time; or lastly such despicable contemporaries as Julien Benda. (Everything with him exists as a superlative. All he approves of is grandiose, staggering, superb, or formidable: no one is merely 'wrong-headed' or uninteresting, but *despicable*.) He never ceases to marvel how *anyone*, with such superb misery and so much glorious tragedy to be gloated over on all hands, should be found to give a thought to so second-rate a thing as *happiness*!

I began by outlining the argument of 'La Trahison des Clercs': and now I have given some idea of what Berth and his master Sorel stood for (attempting to transmit, as I went along, a little of the empty clatter of the former). The type of criticism levelled at Julien Benda in 'Les Méfaits des Intellectuels' is easy to guess.

Actually the treatment of Benda is on the 'tough' side. He is referred to by Berth as 'our fakir lost in the contemplation of his intellectual navel', as a 'gutless monster', a 'cissy' or *femelle*, a 'metaphysical Jew', a 'cur' (roquet), the 'quintessence and the fin du fin of modern intellectualisme'. — He is treated, in fine, as the arch exponent of all that Berth and those of his way of thinking detest: the champion of the 'idée claire', as one opposed to the intuitional and the mystical, apostle of the pacific as opposed to the pugnacious — of optimism as opposed to pessimism.

My reason for selecting these particular controversialists will I think be obvious. On both sides 'intellectual' (or 'clerc') is not used in a complimentary sense: for both knew the power of the written word, and neither likes to see it employed against the principles he professes. For

myself, Benda seems to have the better case. On the other hand Berth and Sorel have a precise meaning for this term when they make use of it (which is no doubt why Benda preferred the word 'clerc', for his rejoinder). When these literary bravos hurl it at somebody, they signify a person who attaches an undue importance to the deliverances of the *intellect* — and so may appropriately be designated as an *intellectual*. I am not at all suggesting that this charge can be dismissed as an empty one. Quite the contrary: it seems to me that people are much too intellectual quite frequently. But when these criticisms are used in the interests of violence and emotional excess, that is a different question.

I should like to make this clear. Were it simply the old cartesian quarrel that was in question, I should go over to the side of the Sorelians: not because I should object to the prospect of a habit of universal doubt — not because Descartes supplied a ready-made rational equipment for the enlightened layman — no harm in that: but because I should agree with Pascal and with Newton that the human reason is a toy of very limited availability.\* But, as I have already pointed out, Sorel is a political polemist and is not interested in the matter from that standpoint at all (and as for Berth, a *pensée* of Pascal is merely a convenient brick to throw at an opponent). The use Sorel and his satellites make of their anti-cartesian technique I regard as dangerous and childishly irresponsible: whereas Benda used his rationalism to humane, sensible, and social ends.

Insensibly I have been led into discussing things, however, which seem to require more than a footnote, if my own position is to be understood. So let me resort to an image, and so describe my general reaction to the central problems emerging from the polemics of these people. Those of the intuitionist persuasion, as much as exponents of the 'idée claire', commit one to this. For they attach their usually frivolous arguments to fundamentals: and I am afraid that one cannot arrive at an intelligent judgement upon their use of the world 'intellectual' (which is our ultimate purpose in this chapter) if you ignore the values involved in their credentials, which refer us to the great sources of our thinking, as modern men.

Making use then of an image (not elaborated — not to be leant on too heavily or it would collapse) it might be said we are performing our several parts in an intricate play, of doubtful merit, upon a stage the lofty and cavernous wings of which lead immediately into the darkest night. We know if we move into them there awaits us a precipice we should not see, but suddenly there would be nothing solid there under our feet — a chasm limitless in depth, literally with *nothing* at the bottom of it. How do we know there

\* The above, needless to say, is no more than a hasty pointer. For all speculations or surmise, or exercise of the imagination, to be under an interdict (on the ground that nothing can be known, so why guess?) would be rather a bleak and lifeless situation. When one reads Mr. Ayers (Language, Truth, and Logic [London, 1936]) one admires Mr. Ayers' logical toughness: but the positivism of Descartes comes to look a quite lively affair by contrast, for all his rule of rigorous incredulity, by comparison with this homely, impassible, intellectual detective-sergeant.

Again, if one immemorial myth obtained a monopoly, and it was accepted that if you were to dream, or to indulge in fictions, it must always be that dream and that fiction, all others being tabu: then the imagination must experience an inevitable revolt.

is nothing—that it is a fall that can never end? That is one of the things we know. Such, in physical terms, is our situation.

Who we can be, incredible cast of ratiocinatory animals that we are, how we got upon this narrow, infinitely precipitous peak (if that is it)—why we play the piece we do—to all such questions there is no rational or even imaginable answer.

But that we should not make ourselves passably comfortable, or 'happy', while we are here, for this brief performance, I can never see, nor why we should be hysterical, or glory in our lot. Comedy perhaps is a better genre for such a situation than tragedy; and because we are tragic beings, whatever way you look at it, is it a consistency imposed on us to drench this stage with our blood and with our tears? Since we are all condemned to death, à bref délai, is that a reason for brutally and murderously attacking one another—does that make it any better?

By dint of careful analysis of this group of books the word 'intellectual' has acquired at least a distinct meaning for us. The 'intellectual', as seen I think by Sorel or Berth, is the man of theory, who deals in abstractions rather than in concrete and smoking-hot realities; who applies a rational rather than an emotional standard of value to everything; who would bend and distort nature until it conform to his ideal. He is theorist, rationalist, and idealist.

In politics he is the 'planner', in religion the ascetic, or puritan or purist, in art the 'abstractist' (the purist there also). Accordingly the jansenist, calvinist, or puritan would seem to belong to the same intellectual type as the cubist or constructivist; or the latter to that of jacobin or 'Babouviste' or any whole-hogging contemporary 'planner'.

As to his name, the intellectual derives that, as we have seen, from his display of an inordinate belief in, and reliance upon, the human intellect. Sorel bestows upon him a genealogy which would indicate Descartes as the first of his line in the modern age: the cartesian, with their reliance upon the human reason, their contempt for the romantic, the mystical, and intuitional, were the first 'intellectuals'. Sorel would say—those monsters who have gained control of the modern world.

The term 'intellectual' can be provided with a clear—and even useful—significance of this kind, I believe. But the above formula narrows it down too much, excluding several types of men who would qualify in a classification such as I should draw up, for instance. Something rigorous, hard, and cold in the way of thinking; the rational rather than the emotional approach—without limiting it historically in any way—would be the first steps in identification.

It would never be a term the definition of which could be pushed too far. There are so many kinds of intellectual. In thinking of those writers I have been closest to—Eliot, Joyce, and Pound—all would answer to that description; very fastidious minds, each in his department very rigorous, each accommodated with a private critic, as it were, in attendance upon his creative faculty, who would make composition a stern labour. They are

people who would be immediately identified as 'intellectuals', of course in Anglo-saxon countries. Yet there is no classification of the genus that would include them but exclude Rupert Brooke or Hardy, say.

These three contemporaries of mine would answer to some, but by no means to all, of Sorel's requirements. Eliot, for instance, would be justifiably indignant should he hear Descartes described as his intellectual progenitor. Joyce was hardly a democrat. Pound is nearer to the intuitionists than to the rationalists.

For none of these three writers of remarkable genius—to signalise yet another complexity—was war a question that ever particularly exercised their minds, I believe I am right in saying.—No great christian teacher since Tertullian has regarded it as amiss for a christian to bear arms, in a just cause.\* But what war that was ever fought was an 'unjust' war, except of course that waged by the enemy?

Speaking of course with some diffidence, I should imagine that Eliot's view would be that of the great doctors of the Church: whereas Pound has lived too long with the *trouvères* to regard war as anything but a romantic institution. As to Joyce, he took no interest in such matters, one way or the other. I never discussed those problems with him, but if I had I know what would have happened. He would have searched in his memory for what Aristotle has said on the subject, and we should have ended as far away from the contemporary scene as Archimedes, or the Trojan Horse.

It is a curious fact, but there is no great English writer for whom war was a subject of major interest, as it was with Tolstoy. Much less is there one who was sufficiently possessed of it to have made of it a master work, as was 'War and Peace'. And if there had been such a man, he would have been of the Doughty or Col. Lawrence type, and the work would not have been undertaken to denounce war, but to glorify it.—Then, of course, the English did not overrun half the world for nothing.†

The subtitle of this chapter reads: 'Is there such a thing as an Intellectual? So let me, in concluding, summarise my answer to that question.—If you, for the purpose of belittling him, affix the term 'intellectual' (or more familiarly 'highbrow') to any man of conspicuous intelligence, or whose standards notoriously are not those of the market-place, then there is such a thing only in your stupid mind, or on your foolish lips. But there is another and more serious sense, in which such a term may be admitted, and even serve a useful purpose.

The definition of 'intellectual' would be no easy task, as this chapter has proved. Julien Benda—deliberately ignoring all who did not fit in—would have defined it as a learned man prostituting his high function and inciting others to violence. His polemical opposites would say (scowling at Benda)

\* Suarez apparently saw clearly that war was hopelessly unchristian (*De Caritate, Disputatio, xiii*) [Selections from *Three Works of Francisco Suarez*, S.J. The Classics of International Law, No. 20 (London, 1944), pp. 799-865] but he reasoned that war does not in itself involve hatred: 'punishment of a crime is quite consistent with goodwill towards the criminal'. Consequently you may, as a soldier, plunge your bayonet into the heart of an enemy, while still loving him as a christian should.

† The only English writer I can think of who, under other circumstances, might quite well have written a 'War and Peace' was the greatest of all, namely William Shakespeare.

that it denoted a democrat in an Ivory Tower, preaching peace and plenty — in contrast to war and want. All I need say, as my final word on this subject, is that few intellectuals are to be found who are prepared to oppose the Zeitgeist. The latter is committed to courses which, if pursued to their logical ends, will wipe out all that the human intellect has contrived, distinguishing us from cattle and pigs, and still more from bees and centipedes.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Julien Benda, *La Trahison des clercs* (Paris, 1927); trans. R. Aldington, *The Great Betrayal* (London, 1928). Lewis cites the original publication date wrongly in the next paragraph.

<sup>2</sup> Edouard Berth, *Les Méfaits des intellectuels* (Paris, 1914). No English translation.

<sup>3</sup> Georges Sorel, *Reflexions sur la violence* (Paris, 1908); trans. T. E. Hulme, *Reflections on Violence* (London, 1912). *Livre de chevet*: pillow book.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Bloy, *La Femme pauvre* (Paris, 1897); trans. I. J. Collins, *The Woman Who Was Poor* (New York, 1939). "Raissa" is the wife and collaborator of Jacques Maritain, the Catholic philosopher.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Maurras (1868-1952), poet, essayist, journalist, politically an extreme monarchist, was editor of the ultra right-wing weekly *L'Action française*.

<sup>6</sup> The passage Lewis quotes is not in fact from the *Pensées* but from *De l'Esprit géométrique et de l'art de persuader*, from which source Lewis's errors of transcription have been corrected. In the translation by G. F. Pullen it runs as follows:

She [i.e. geometry] therefore assumes that the inquirer knows what is signified by such words as movement, number, space, and without pausing for superfluous definitions she penetrates into their nature, and discovers their marvellous attributes. . . .

The chief of these is a twofold infinity, comprising those two infinities which find in all created things a point of contact: the infinitely great and the infinitely small.

(From "Reflections on Geometry and the Art of Persuading," in *The Essential Pascal* [New American Library, 1966], p. 306.)