

Books

England's Religions of the Young Man

Martin Green

Four books have been published recently which lead one to reflect on the generation of Englishmen born around 1900. This was the first generation of postimperial England, for it seems that imperial England died a crucial death (not its only death, but a true death of the spirit) during the 1914-18 war. These men's fathers were citizens of the British Empire, they themselves were not; and it is now becoming possible to see the political, aesthetic, and psychological terms in which that tremendous change worked itself out. These particular recent books deal with the Prince of Wales, Mosley, the fascist leader, W.H. Auden, and Kenneth Clark: *Edward VIII*, by Frances Donaldson (Lippincott; 477 pp.; \$15.00), *Oswald Mosley*, by Robert Skidelsky (Holt, Rinehart & Winston; 578 pp.; \$15.00), *W.H. Auden: A Tribute*, edited by Stephen Spender (Macmillan; 255 pp.; \$14.95), and *Another Part of the Wood. A Self-Portrait*, by Kenneth Clark (Harper & Row; 288 pp.; \$11.00). And more generally this decade has been the publishing season for that generation's autobiographies (Isherwood is working on his), biographies (Hugh Thomas's fascinating account of John Strachey), and extensive obituaries (Cyril Connolly's, most recently).

The largest root-fact behind the complex of changes seems to be that a whole range of English ideals of manhood perished in the Great War. In the decade before that the culture's images of its young men had become unusually brilliant and full of pathos—see Housman's lads, Conrad's Lord Jim, Kipling's Brushwood Boy—full of anxious love and fearful pride. The hideous slaughter in 1916 of a whole generation of such young men dealt a mortal wound to England's confidence in its leaders. Particularly the boys too young to take part in the war felt that they and their elder brothers, who were killed and wounded there, had been betrayed by their fathers, symbolically speaking. And the emergence of America as much the stronger in 1918, as the new inheritor of the old Anglo-Saxon wealth and power, had a striking effect of the same kind. After 1918, it seems possible to say, England's young men did not wish to grow up into men, in the sense of fathers, husbands, and masters. They wanted to remain young-men forever. (I am talk-

ing, of course, of the most privileged, the most imaginative and sensitive, those most called to some original self-stylization.) We see, for instance, a rise to popularity of the dandy-aesthete figure, most clearly represented here by Lord Clark, but newly influential all over the upper class, as Evelyn Waugh's work demonstrates. We see a rise to importance of the rogue figure, the young man who defies the criteria of maturity and outrages seriousness in the sphere of action, politics, and adventure, most notably exemplified here by Mosley and his followers, but also by Guy Burgess and his circle, and by Randolph Churchill and his. And we see a prevalence of the naïf, the young man whose sensitiveness and responsiveness, whose availability for commitment in general, is so central to his identity that in fact he cannot commit himself to anything in particular. Amongst intellectuals, thirties Marxists like Stephen Spender and John Lehmann best exemplify this.

The most public figure of the naïf temperament was the Prince of Wales, and seen in that character he is very interesting. Frances Donaldson's biography deals with the man, not the figure, which is a pity, because her book is, like her biography of Evelyn Waugh, both sensitive and sensible, both thorough and unpretentious. If anyone wants to get the feel of the old English upper-class mind at its most charming and well bred, he should start reading Frances Donaldson. But unfortunately her subject this time is not interesting.

Of course a biography of the Prince as figure would be best composed of photographs, with a number of press cuttings and oral anecdotes interspersed. Such a book could be of great interest, for its subject cut a figure not merely by being son of the King-Emperor and a young man in 1918. It was that he looked exactly right to attract to him the hopes and dreams and fears and doubts of millions of English for whom the world was polarized between youth and age. The Prince of Wales was youth incarnate; this became perhaps the most striking late in his life, when the main lines of his face and figure were still those of a young man. In some pictures he suddenly looked a ruined young-man, a portrait of Dorian Gray; in others he looked suddenly feeble, a kind of old-man; but he never looked a full-grown man, as his father and grandfather had before him.

And he was of course quite remarkably handsome, graceful, and full of pathos. He was young England, so fair-haired, clean-skinned, straight-backed, quite at home in his various uniforms; but at the same time, he was Pierrot, in his fragility, his transparency, his smallness, in the immobility of his hangdog eyes and

MARTIN GREEN's book, *Children of the Sun*, which will be published next January by Basic Books, follows the life stories of about forty members of the English intelligentsia of the generation he discusses here.

long melancholy mouth. The image of Pierrot was very important in the art and the life of the 1920's. The iconography of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, disseminated by the Diaghilev ballet notably, characterized that generation, and many of their leaders were slim, pale, sleek-haired boy-girls and girl-boys.

To translate the Pierrot-figure into English upper-class terms, even on a small scale, was a stroke of genius at that moment of history, and the grace of his performance persuades one that, in his own terms, the Prince knew what he was doing. But on the larger scale he did not. It is not possible to be interested in any of his ideas, and even within the sphere of the public figure, his grand gesture—Giving Up the Throne for the Woman He Loved—was in an old-fashioned style.

But in the 1920's the Prince was perfectly in style. He was universally known to be in trouble with his father, who was the most public figure of conservative manliness in the country, anti-intellectual and anti-aesthetic, a sportsman and hobbyist and country squire, a stern disciplinarian and conformist in every detail of dress and etiquette. The Prince, meanwhile, was informal, a prominent figure in nightclubs, doing the Charleston; and a public sympathizer with the unemployed miners of South Wales. Everywhere he seemed to be in pursuit of happiness, in defiance of the old watchdogs of law and order.

Some of this Frances Donaldson now reveals to have been myth. The King was not so stern a disciplinarian, the Prince was not so generous in his sympathies. But it remains true, as she says, that the former was on the side of everything old, the latter on the side of everything new. And of course, with those appreciating the "figure," the mythical detail counts for more than the factual. And it was not only the newspaper readers who saw the Prince as a figure of youth. The men of power did so too; it was the Prime Minister and the Archbishop of Canterbury, the country's father-figures, who decided in 1936 that Edward VIII was not fit to be king; while his supporters were Winston Churchill and Lord Beaverbrook, the newspaper magnate, the Fascists and the Communists. Churchill and Beaverbrook had always been leaders of the young generation, in the character of bachelor uncles, who disagreed in principle with the father-figures.

The second most public figure of youth was T.E. Lawrence, Lawrence of Arabia, who returned to England in 1918 as Prince of Mecca, and was photographed everywhere in flowing robes, looking slender, blond, long-haired, adolescent-sensitive. He was everywhere contrasted with Earl Haig and Lord Kitchener, the traditional soldier-types, who had poured out England's blood on the Somme; who had sacrificed a generation of young men and gained nothing, while Lawrence had invented a new warfare and destroyed an empire single-handed—so it seemed. Lawrence was a figure both Churchill and the Fascists tried to use in their political schemes.

Another such young man was Oliver Baldwin, the son of the Conservative Prime Minister. He was in passionate and public rebellion, from 1918 on, against his father, his father's generation, and the country's institutions. He entered Parliament as a Socialist, fell under the influence of Mosley, and became one of the founder-members of the latter's New Party in 1931. But he had neither the achievements of T.E. Lawrence nor the style of the Prince, and was a "figure" in a much more ineffectual sense. He demands mention mostly because it was so striking that within the families of both King and Prime Minister the son was known to be in rebellion against the father. Robert Skidelsky, in his biography of Mosley, dismisses Baldwin as "spoilt, unstable, homosexual, and naive." But it was a syndrome of traits, here condemned and dismissed, which was diagnostically important.

Skidelsky's book is the most substantial of the four reviewed here, and will be valuable to any student of the period, because the facts about Mosley have been hard to come by. The biographer is enthusiastic about his subject, moreover, and gives the reader an idea to contend with. I thought myself that he overemphasized all the mitigating features of Mosley's fascism; dismissed the anti-Semitism, the endorsement of violence, above all the endorsement of Hitler and Mussolini, in order to expound the Keynesian economics and the Tory idealism. But, for intellectual purposes, that bias was of course the best possible one, if bias there had to be.

Mosley was born in 1896 into a family of wealthy country squires, and brought up by an adoring mother and grandfather. His father was a hard-riding, hard-drinking rogue, who early rebelled against all family and social responsibilities. It is perhaps worth noting that Rolleston, the family home, employed thirty gardeners, and that Mosley, his father, and his grandfather were all keen boxers and took part in matches staged in the ballroom there. Mosley described Rolleston as a classless society, but of course meant that the social hierarchy was so completely accepted there that no one felt it.

He was an expert swordsman as well as boxer, much enjoyed military college, and during World War I served first in the Royal Flying Corps and then in the trenches. The war was his great experience, and he invoked it constantly in his politics. His fascism was a kind of soldiers' socialism, and he claimed always to represent "the War generation." Thus, writing in *The Sunday Express* about 1930, he described modern man as "a hard, realistic type, hammered into existence on the anvil of great ordeal.... For this age is dynamic, and the pre-war age was static...." And in his autobiography he described his feelings on Armistice Day, 1918: "Smooth, smug people, who had never fought or suffered, seemed to the eyes of youth—at that moment age-old with sadness, weariness and bitterness—to be eating, drinking, laughing on the

graves of our companions. I stood aside from the delirious throng; silent and alone, ravaged by memory. Driving purpose had begun; there must be no more war. I dedicated myself to politics." As Skidelsky shows, Mosley's frequent changes of party (which did much to discredit him politically) derived not from flightiness so much as from his belief in his having a transparty constituency, the war-generation, a group defined by a new temperament rather than a policy.

He entered Parliament in 1918, and was soon known as its most brilliant young member. He was first a Conservative, then an Independent, then a Liberal, then a Socialist, then founded his New Party, and then the British Union of Fascists, all within ten years. He was a brilliant speaker, debater, and election-winner, a very hard worker, and a man of ideas. Skidelsky demonstrates how often Mosley's solutions to the problems of the day were more practicable and promising, from every point of view, than those actually adopted.

He was also a figure in the intellectual and artistic life of that generation, a friend of the Sitwells and Cecil Beaton and Oliver Messel, as well as of more political intellectuals like John Strachey and Harold Nicolson. His second wife was Diana Mitford, sister of Nancy and Jessica, and friend of Evelyn Waugh. Though Mosley was more the rogue, there was a touch of the dandy-aesthete about him. Skidelsky entitles one chapter "The Dandy of the Revolution," and quotes an article about him in 1927, which says Mosley was the one Member of Parliament who had made an art of himself. He was a very handsome and elegant man, whose manner was extremely polished. He apparently modeled himself on Ferdinand Lassalle, the brilliant dandy who long challenged Marx for the leadership of the German Socialist movement.

When Mosley founded the British Union of Fascists he lost most of those intellectual followers whose names rose to honor later. Instead of John Strachey and Harold Nicolson, he had William Joyce, the Englishman executed after the war for broadcasting propaganda to England. The party as a whole gave only a caricatured expression to those temperamental tendencies I have called "the rogue." But it was a recognizable expression; the emphasis on athletics and fighting and uniforms, the military comradeship, the contempt for squeamish liberalism and ineffectual intellectualism, the rough practical jokes, the worship of young male heroes, the nostalgia for a primitive past, all this is recognizably a young-man's politics, and what the intellectuals of the time were looking for, though too unattractively presented.

In many ways the appeal of communism and its affiliated groups during the 1930's was very similar, though allied to ideological elements quite the reverse of fascism. It was the appeal of fresh-faced young comrades marching together to smash the bastions of privilege, the banks and barracks of the old men. It was what young Englishmen wanted. But it was of course the left-wing version that captured the young

intellectuals like Auden. Mosley alienated the intellectuals of his own generation, as he had alienated the men of power of his father's. But in both cases we can feel that, though mostly his fault, it was partly theirs. During the 1920's *most* of the brilliant politicians were kept out of power; and during the 1930's *much* of the left-wing fervor was inauthentic. Mosley was a wasted leader; he answered to a need, and he was wasted partly because those who should have been his followers and counselors failed him.

Kenneth Clark is rather less obviously related to these themes than the other three, being essentially a man of moderate temperament and prudent style. But he has of course been one of the period's most committed aesthetes. That he could combine that so impeccably with an Establishment career is a sign of how much England changed during his lifespan—a sign of the times almost as remarkable as the careers of the other men.

Clark was born to rich and philistine parents, and grew up shy and lonely, finding refuge in art from noisier and more "normal" children. Like so many of his generation, he was unhappy at school, but found himself in the congenial atmosphere of Oxford. Maurice Bowra was an important influence on him there, as he was on other aesthetes like Cyril Connolly, Anthony Powell, Evelyn Waugh, and John Betjeman. And after Oxford he went out to work with Bernard Berenson at Settignano. This was again a typical pattern; Cyril Connolly worked as secretary to Logan Pearsall-Smith, Berenson's brother-in-law, and Waugh was nearly hired as secretary to Scott-Moncrieff, the translator of Proust. These men—and others—acted as bachelor uncles to the dandy-aesthetes, just as Churchill and Beaverbrook did to the rogues, and encouraged them in their rebellion against the staid lifestyles of the fathers.

With this training, Clark went on to become Director of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and then of the National Gallery, to become a peer and a television star, all in the smoothly charming style in which this autobiography is written. Take, for instance, this graceful tribute to the homosexuals he has known. "May I...record the remarkable sympathy and kindness that a confirmed heterosexual has always received from those of another persuasion." Nearly all the boys and men who shared his interests were of that other persuasion, he says, and indeed the high incidence of homosexuality in this generation cannot be ignored. It was not only to be found among the dandy-aesthetes; we have noted it in Oliver Baldwin, and amongst many of Mosley's friends, such as Harold Nicolson; while the most notorious rogue of recent political history was the homosexual Guy Burgess. I take it that this is another sign of the reluctance of this generation to grow up, of their recoil from full-grown manhood, their attachment to a kind of group narcissism.

This was particularly notable in that circle round Auden who started out in the 1930's as left-wing radicals. They defined themselves as new men, and with an emphasis on the "men" as well as the "new." They rebelled contemptuously against their predecessors' aestheticism; they substituted an iconography of tractors and pylons and strikes and tanks for the iconography of the *Commedia dell'Arte*; they spoke with the manly purposefulness of comrades. And yet, it seems now clear, they were of the same generation and the same temperament as the dandies they displaced. Perhaps the ideal type of their movement was more the naïf than the dandy, but Auden himself, and Isherwood, were always only faux-naïfs. Theirs was a rebellion of style, but not of temperament, as their subsequent development made plain. As we read now of the outrageous way Auden performed that "committed" style, we can hardly understand (or credit) his being taken seriously. Betjeman, in this volume, recalls his first meetings with the serious young Auden, and his shame at his own frivolity; but the reader of the anecdotes is bound to feel Betjeman was either fooled at the time or is fooling himself as he looks back. Auden was playing a game. He was incapable of seriousness about such matters, and grasped at politics as another field for the performance of brilliant style.

This handsome volume of "tributes" concentrates on the late Auden. (The book should, incidentally, be read only a bit at a time, for most of the contributions are, naturally enough, pretty sentimental.) In those years the poet preached very decorous and conservative and responsible values, though he allowed his anarchic and "naughty" impulses full expression in private life. It was still recognizably the same temperament, but instead of being expressed with youthful panache, it was controlled by a quite Edwardian decorum.

So that what one confronts, time and again, is this entity, temperament, as something that united all the members of that generation, and which could express

itself equally well in both left-wing and right-wing ideologies, in both dandy-aestheticism and political activism. Thus one of Auden's friends, Brian Howard, was in the twenties a dandy-aesthete, from whom Waugh drew his two characters, Ambrose Silk and Anthony Blanche. In the thirties Brian Howard became a leading reviewer for *The New Statesman*, a prominent anti-Nazi and socialist, a figure in the Left Book Club. But he was still an outrageous and aggressive pansy. Another friend of Auden's—and of John Strachey's and Harold Nicolson's—was the even more outrageous Communist, Guy Burgess. And it was in reaction against figures like Brian Howard and Guy Burgess that George Orwell and F.R. Leavis, the prophets of ideological manliness in that period, defined themselves. Their feeling that they were isolated in their own times, and must single-handedly defend old values, derived from this temperament all round them. It was their life work to manifest an alternative temperament in intellectual terms, rooted in the old traditions of English manliness.

Orwell and Leavis refused to define themselves by party affiliation or political formula. They were culture critics, naming what they liked and what they disliked in terms of "voice," "persona," "maturity," "decency," and "seriousness." The study of these four books (and the other documents of this generation of Englishmen) suggests that culture is often the best way to approach problems that seem variously political, aesthetic, or sociological; culture in the older sense of cult, as when we say that the Prince of Wales was the object of a cult. It seems that the apparatus of English culture provided various means for a cult of the young-man figure, which powerfully persuaded individuals to fix their own and other people's identities in those terms. That was the imaginative *religion* of England then, to which Orwell and Leavis opposed another. Their religion won its adherents in the succeeding generation. Much of English life can best be understood as proceeding from those religions.

Beyond Containment: U.S. Foreign Policy in Transition edited by Robert W. Tucker and William Watts

(Potomac Associates; 212 pp.; \$3.50)

Bruce M. Russett

This is a collection of "best articles" from the first three years of *Foreign Policy*, a new and already influential journal begun in 1971. It is prefaced by a rather substantial essay by the editors.

While such a collection may now seem to have passed its peak of interest, its central focus—how to devise, in the wake of past disasters, a new foreign policy for the United States—certainly is not passé. The

urgency of that task is reflected in the trenchant remarks of many critics of past policy—among them George Kennan, Leslie Gelb, and John Kenneth Galbraith—in this volume. In examining the policy-making ap-