

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to give you a little history. A history of the loss of faith and the search for a new faith. I will recount this history in terms of the medium in which I find it - the medium of literature. Specifically, the medium of Anglo-American literature.

As you know, this year we celebrate the ~~four~~ hundredth anniversary of the birth of an English king who built a new church. This was King Henry VIII of England, whose need for a divorce from a barren ^{Spanish} wife and marriage to a dark-haired ^{English} girl who would give him a successor to the throne forced him to renounce the authority of the Pope in Rome and declare himself head of the Catholic Church of England. The Church was called Catholic because it maintained the doctrines of Rome while denying the ^{supremacy} of the power of Rome. As the years went on, these doctrines changed, but the British monarch maintained leadership of the Church. This still continues.

But in the nineteenth century, the Church of England began to lose its power and its authority. Other religious bodies - the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the ^{the Anabaptists} Quakers - had fiery adherents. And in the middle of the nineteenth century two new forces - the theory of evolution, the doctrine of materialism - shook the foundations of the Church of England. Materialism was firmly enshrined in the teachings of Karl Marx; evolution was the discovery of Charles Darwin. Ancient beliefs - such as the belief in the book of Genesis - began to be doubted. Whether or not human beings had immortal souls - this was debated, and the new science said there was no proof.

This produced, among the most sensitive writers of England, a kind of despair. If you read the novels of Thomas Hardy, or even see the film of his book Tess of the Durbervilles, you are aware of a profound pessimism. God does not seem to exist. The driving force of the universe is Nature herself, who does not particularly care for men and women. Sometimes, as in Tess, Hardy personifies Nature as the ancient gods who came before the Greeks, immoral, cruel, Hardy quotes on his titlepage a line from Shakespeare's King Lear -

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods:
They kill us for their sport...

When Tess, guilty of murder, is eventually executed, Hardy says: "And so the President of the Immortals had finished his sport with Tess." This profound pessimism reaches its apex in a novel called Jude the Obscure, in which hopeless children commit suicide because - as the suicide note they leave behind puts it - "We are too many". The population of the earth is growing. There is not enough to eat. The

industrial system of Great Britain is unjust: there are too many unemployed. Men and women cannot pray to God for a better future, for there is no God.

A little book of poems was produced by A.E. Housman, a professor of Latin and Greek, called A Shropshire Lad. It was immensely popular, and still is. It contains brief lyrics which are profoundly pessimistic. Death comes too easily, and very often one is glad when it comes. Life has little to offer. There is no afterlife.

Clearly the literature of England required something a little more optimistic than the gloom of Housman and Hardy. Jude the Obscure was Hardy's last novel. The public outcry against its nihilism was so loud that Hardy transferred his genius to poetry. Like Housman, he produced highly memorable lyrics which display disbelief in a God and exhibit a chilling cynicism. During the first World War he wrote

"Peace upon earth - we say, we sing it.
And pay a million priests to bring it.
After two thousand years of mass
We've got as far as poison gas".

Of course, that first World War, instigated by the best educated nation in the world, did a great deal to add to the doubt that the new sciences were promoting. But before that war, a new kind of optimism had emerged. ^{Its} ~~the~~ nature is best summed up in the term "Liberal Man". Political liberalism, liberalism of thought, the creation of liberal society - in these proposals optimism lay.

The two major optimists were H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw. Wells was a Londoner, a Cockney; Shaw was an Irishman, a Dubliner. They were sometimes friends, sometimes enemies. Wells had a scientific education: he was one of the new breed who learned from Darwin and above all T.H. Huxley. He ^{believed} ~~believed~~ that science could solve a great many human problems, and of course he was right. Science could drive out sickness and squalor. Science could make work easier and provide more leisure. Politics should become genuinely a science; the state could be reorganised on scientific grounds. Socialism was one of the answers.

We all know the scientific romances with which Wells first made his name - The Time Machine, The Invisible Man, The War of the Worlds, many others. They are all based on the possibilities, and even the impossibilities, of science. The time traveller builds a kind of bicycle on which he rides into the distant future. The invisible man creates a very plausible chemical which makes the human organs translucent. Wells is always prepared to present in detail the scientific bases of his imaginings. In The War of the Worlds the inhabitants of the planet Mars invade the earth with a

terrifyingly advanced technology. They are defeated not by man's endeavours but by their inability to resist the microscopic bodies - bacilli, spirochaetes - to which man has become immune. This is highly plausible. X

It would be too simplistic to say that these scientific romances of H.G. Wells are wholeheartedly optimistic. They are not. The Time Machine presents a distant future in which the capitalists and the proletariat have changed into two biological types. The historical has become the genetic. The proletariat has become a race of cannibalistic troglodytes, called the Morlocks. The capitalists have grown effete, soft, lifeless, and they - the Eloi - are the unresisting food of the Morlocks. The time traveller moves forward on his machine to the very end of the world, with a cold sun, sluggish tides, the disappearance of intelligent life. He shudders and makes his way back to the comfortable nineteenth century.

The hero of The Invisible Man wishes to use his discovery for purely criminal ends. The reader is glad to see the disappearance of his genius with his life. The War of the Worlds warns us against being too cocksure of our scientific advances. There may be other races on distant planets with far greater attainments than our own.

Nevertheless, despite the grim warnings, Wells remains generally convinced that the world can get better. The scientific socialist state, more and better education, intelligent leadership - these are the answers to human problems. Strangely enough, it was after the devastation of the First World War - for which Wells had invented both the tank and the fighting aircraft as early as 1900 - that the true optimism began to emerge. In the nineteen-thirties ^{Wells} ~~Shaw~~ wrote a book called The Shape of Things to Come, which was eventually made into a film which some of you must have seen. It is a book which presents a long-term rather than an immediate optimism. Writing in 1934, Wells saw that a war would break out with Nazi Germany about 1940, and that ~~the~~ casus belli would be the Polish Corridor. He was not far out. He makes this war last until about 1976, with the total breakdown of civilisation. This total breakdown is perhaps necessary to convince man of his folly and to facilitate the rebuilding of the world from scratch. The book and the film end happily with man rocketing to the moon and with the assertion that the entire conquest of nature is in sight. But the Wellsian optimism disappeared in World War II. He believed that homo sapiens was finished and that a new race must take over. Almost his last words were "You fools! You darned fools!"

George Bernard Shaw was, like Wells, a self-made intellectual. He wrote brilliant plays not solely for entertainment but for instruction. Like Voltaire, of whom he considered himself to be an avatar, he believed that reason was the solution to all problems. His characters usually end up accepting the primacy of the rational. But, like Wells again, he had a fantasising or utopian streak in him - or rather two, both of them borrowed. He borrowed from Henri Bergson the doctrine of the elan vital, the Life Force which was committed to understanding itself through its most complex creation- humanity. From Friedrich Nietzsche he took the notion of the Uebermensch. This in English had been translated as the Overman, but it was Shaw who created and popularised the term Superman. In a comedy Man and Superman there is a long interlude, very rarely played on the stage, in which the necessity for the Superman to emerge is debated by Mozart's Don Giovanni, Dona Ana, the Commendatore, and the Devil himself. The Devil is, as in Goethe's Faust, der Geist der immer verneint - the spirit that always denies - while Don Giovanni, cynical about the achievements of mankind, expatiates on the necessity for a higher form of humanity - the Superman. But it is woman, rather than man, who recognises this need, since she must be the vessel of it. At the end of this scene Dona Ana cries out through the abysses of Hell: "A father for the Superman!"

Shaw, after that destructive war of 1914-18, wrote not one play but five - a pentateuch - about the necessity for human beings to live longer in order to gain wisdom. Shaw himself lived to 95, through not smoking or drinking and, he alleged, through vegetarianism (ignorant of the fact that his doctors were quietly injecting him with liver extract). This was a long life but not long enough. Men and women are just learning about life when it is time to leave it. The elan vital might work on unsuspecting individuals to turn them into a new race of long-livers, men and women who would live centuries and thus learn to rule the world rationally. In time the whole of humanity would become long-lived though still mortal. It is, says Shaw, life itself that is important. Life is a creative ^{power} ~~force~~, learning to understand itself, and man himself is only one of the devices of this superhuman force. This is a kind of optimism. It is enshrined in the play sequence Back to Methuselah.

It is probable that optimism depends on a good digestion. We leave pessimism to the dyspeptic. The eupeptic energy of Shaw seems to many of us now to be not quite adult. Neither Shaw nor Wells had a clear perception of evil. When things went wrong, it was because of a failure of reason. We may date this heresy, if we may call it

a heresy, back to the British monk Pelagius, whom Saint Augustine condemned for his unwillingness to believe in original sin. Man, according to Pelagius, did not need God's grace to attain a higher morality. Man could achieve perfection through his own efforts. This is the pure cream of the doctrine of liberalism, contained also in socialism. It is pure Wellman^{ism}, pure Shavianism.

To some writers who came into their own after the First World War this kind of liberalism was highly suspect. Science had made that war the most terrible of all time. Education had failed to make ^{humanity} less self-destructive. Men and women had best forget their cerebral capacities: they did no good. It was better for them to find salvation in their animal instincts. This is rather a crude way of approaching the two novelists who best exemplify the notion of Natural Man - D.H. Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway. "Be a good animal" is a cry we hear in the novels Lawrence wrote before the Great War stated. It is modified by the time we come to Lady Chatterley's Lover, which finds human ~~salvation~~ in heterosexual tenderness. Through^{out} Lawrence's literary career - a brief one: he died of tuberculosis at 44 - there is a constant cry: Distrust reason. Trust instinct. Trust, above all, the sexual instinct.

Lawrence's diatribes against reason are sometimes vaguely comic. The seat of human reality was not in the brain but in the solar plexus. He would not accept that the earth went around the sun because - tapping that solar plexus - "I do not feel it here." Of course, in a sense he was right. A good phenomenalist sees the sun rise and set. Believe what you can see. But Lawrence also believed what he couldn't see. He claimed to know what it was like to be a bird or a flower or even a bat. He had the poetic right to push his imagination to the limit, but he probably had no right to impose his imaginative visions on other people. In one of the later novels, The Plumed Serpent, he goes so far as to remake the Republic of Mexico in his own imaginative image. Christianity is driven out, because it is too much a religion of the brain and heart, not sufficiently a religion of the loins. Christianity goes, and the whole country returns to the ancient Aztec gods. Quetzcoatl, the plumed serpent, replaces gentle Jesus. British authors, even when they are anarchic like Lawrence, cannot resist dreaming of utopias. The first utopia was English - that of Thomas More, which invented the word. The last cacotopia is English - that of George Orwell. I'll come to that later.

The elevation of the animal instinct is also found in Ernest Hemingway, but it is the animal instinct not of homo sexualis but of

homo venator - man the hunter. The eye and finger must be quick with the trigger of the gun. Muscles must be strong to engage the marlin and other big fish of the sea. There is in Hemingway's heroes a total or near-total lack of cerebrality. As with Lawrence, the instincts are more important than the brain. The ideal human situation - so far as the male animal is concerned - is to be found in the corrida. In the bullring man faces bull and confronts el momento de verdad - the moment of truth. Virtues spring out of life-and-death encounters. Grace under pressure - that was the big Hemingway slogan. Probably more important than his ideas of ideal human behaviour - which are pretty close to the ethics and courtesies of the animal kingdom - is the prose style that Hemingway developed.

This prose style was something new - simple, direct, muscular. Hemingway had learned it from two sources - the style book of the Kansas City Star, for which he had been a reporter, and the American emigree Gertrude Stein. She was living in post-war Paris, that paradise of literary experimentation, and they met. Gertrude Stein's most notorious piece of writing is a brief sentence - "A rose is a rose is a rose". This was meant as a corrective to nineteenth-century rhetoric - if you wish, it was a slap in the face of D'Annunzio. A rose was not a multiphyllous floral glory. It was what it was. The rhetoric of the past had to be discarded; so did the hypocrisy and evasiveness associated with the pre-war era. Hemingway learned to make his prose style totally unrhetorical. It followed the Kansas City Star style-book in describing what was there, not what ought to be there. It destroyed the prose of the past. It was wholly fitting to describe the workings of the male muscles and the sharpness of the hunter's eye. It became highly influential. It became a little too easy to write. But it was a great innovation.

In neither Hemingway nor Lawrence is there any awareness of original sin. If man does wrong, it is because he is not being true to his muscles or his solar plexus. Obey your animal instincts - eat what you kill, for instance; don't kill for the sake of killing - and you won't go far wrong. The universe of Lawrence could contain the ancient gods and goddesses - Venus and Priapus - but it had no room for the Judaeo-Christian God. Hemingway was aware that there was nothing beyond the world of the instincts. He mocked the Paternoster: "Our nada which is in nada nada be thy nada..." Natural Man, like Liberal Man, had to reject traditional religion.

While Hemingway was learning to write in Paris - keeping himself by giving boxing lessons - James Joyce, who had learned to write in Trieste and Zurich, was completing his masterpiece Ulysses. This

has been regarded as one of the products of Parisian avant-gardism, but it is better to look at it as the last great work of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was a book totally about the Dublin of 1904, but it could not have been written anywhere but in Trieste. Its hero Leopold Bloom is partially based on Ettore Schmidt, who had been Joyce's pupil in English, and whom Joyce pushed into publication under the pseudonym of Italo Svevo. The point I want to make about this gigantic novel is that it belonged neither to the category of Liberal Man nor that of Natural Man. It exemplifies another category - that of Imperfect Man. This sounds very much like a return to Christianity.

James Joyce, of course, had been brought up in the most rigorous form of institutional Christianity. Educated by Jesuits, he very nearly became a Jesuit priest himself, but he rejected a spiritual faith for a secular one. He regarded art as a religion; the artist's function was sacerdotal. Nobody, except ^{perhaps} his fellow-countryman Oscar Wilde, ever took the creation of literature so seriously. The style and structure of Ulysses are probably more important than the content. Unlike Hemingway, Joyce did not create a new way of writing so much as a parodic pastiche of all the old ways of writing. He rejected the past by mocking it. But his book belongs to the past in that ^{it} evokes Rabelais, Laurence Sterne, even Dante. It is a book about a half-Jew and a renegade Catholic living in a very Catholic city, though the last word is given to a very imperfect female character whose beliefs and superstitions are the full rich cream ~~with~~ of Catholic orthodoxy.

If Lawrence saw redemption in sex and Hemingway fulfilment in animal action, Joyce sees redemption only in the family, which is almost a Dickensian tenet. Leopold Bloom is looking for a son, and Stephen Dedalus is looking for a father. Molly, Bloom's wife, is looking for a son, a lover, and a messiah. Man is a very imperfect creature, and his two best creations are the family and the city - in other words, the micro-community and the macro-community. Ulysses is a humane novel, but hardly a humanistic one. It does not expect great things of humanity. It rejects the possibility of total human satisfaction. Unlike Hemingway and Lawrence, Joyce sees a kind of salvation in good humour and a lot of good will. We must laugh in order not to weep. We must take what the day sends.

Joyce's other masterpiece, Finnegans Wake, seems, in its quiet way, to reaffirm not merely Christian values but Catholic ones. It is a dream story. It all takes place in the single night's sleep of a very ordinary man - Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, who keeps a pub just outside Dublin. This sleep, which permits a single seamless dream,

also permits Earwicker to descend to archetypal Jungian depths and become all mankind. All human history is rehearsed by himself, his wife, his daughter, and his twin sons. Joyce again is telling us that everything happens in the family. He borrows from Giambattista Vico the cyclical doctrine of history, so that all history is infinitely repeatable, nothing is ever new. If the book has a moral, it is to the effect that we cannot avoid sin. We may regret it, we may suffer for it, but sin is woven into our nature. Sin, or the capacity to sin, is, however, necessary. O felix culpa, since sin brought us a redeemer. The most heinous sin, according to Irish morality, is the sexual one, but Joyce plays on the double meaning of erection. The penile erection, fruit of libido, denotes creative energy. Without it there would be nothing of man's most masterful creation, which is the city. The Finnegan of the title is a giant, a builder, a bricklayer, and the world is full of churches, castles, towers - his erections.

The Joycean philosophy, if we may call it that, is expounded with rollicking Irish humour. Sin is dealt with very light-heartedly. Imperfection may be accepted with no great conviction of guilt. The novel-form was waiting for some great exemplar of guilt, and it found it in Franz Kafka.

I move out of the world of English letters to confront this remarkable Czech who wrote in German. I first read him during the war, but before reading him I read the English novelists whom he had influenced - writers like William Sansom and Rex Warner. I think it was in 1940 that Rex Warner's remarkable novel The Aerodrome appeared. This was Kafkaesque in that it was allegorical. Warner presents an ordinary English village, a very model of human imperfection. Here there is fornication, incest, theft, calumny, violence. A man earns free beer by biting off the heads of live rats. The squalor and sin are intense. But, just outside the village, a huge aerodrome is being erected. This is dedicated to the doctrine of human perfectibility. The steely discipline of the aerodrome, the technical power which it embodies, threatens to destroy the old way of life, bulldoze the village into nothing. Man is to be made perfect. The novel has a happy ending. The air marshal is assassinated, the project fails, the village goes its old way. We accept our sinfulness.

The spirit of this novel is very English. It lacks the Kafkaesque gloom, the menace of Central Europe. But it has learned from Kafka that fantasy is an acceptable way of presenting the human dilemma. We all know the fantasies of Metamorphosis - in which a young man wakes in the morning to find himself transformed into a huge insect - and of Das Schloss and Der Prozess, in which mysterious anonymous

authorities control the lives of the innocent and make them feel guilty. Joseph K. , the protagonist of The Trial, has to defend himself against the charge of a crime he has not committed. When, at the end of the book, he is courteously stabbed to death, he and the reader feel no great sense of outrage. He is guilty simply because he is human. Who is the judge? God? The coming fascist state? The victim's father? Too many have seen in Kafka, who died before the horrors of the Nazi state, the Soviet state, the German holocaust and the Stalinist programs, a purely political message. The Freudian message of Oedipal guilt is nearer the truth. The real truth is probably theological. We're dealing in Kafka with allegories of original sin.

There was, even without the influence of Kafka, a movement in the literature of Great Britain towards the recovery of a discarded theology. In 1934, Aldous Huxley answered the utopianism of H.G. Wells with a dystopian or cacotopian novel called Brave New World. In his previous novels, Aldous Huxley had presented a hedonistic world in which nobody was happy. The theme of Brave New World is the imposition of happiness on humanity through the new technologies which Huxley, grandson of a great~~er~~ scientist and younger brother of a very distinguished one, knew a great deal about. The fantastic world he presents exists in the year A.F. 632. A.F. stands for After Ford. God has been replaced by Henry Ford, the pioneer of mass production, whose example has taught the new utopia how to produce human beings in factories. All births are in vitro; mother is a dirty word. By conditioning the embryos, it is possible to produce a hieratic society in which everybody is happy with his imposed social position. At the top are the Alphas, who perform the higher tasks of government; at the bottom are the Epsilons, who are near moronic and content with the most menial tasks. Because of unbreakable Pavlovian conditioning, everybody is totally happy. There is no possibility of disaffection or revolt. The hedonistic state has come into existence.

But, somewhere in Mexico, a boy has been born in the old discredited way, with a father and a mother. He is brought to London, still the capital of an empire, but an empire maintained without guns or poison gas. He sees the utopia and marvels. The only book he has is the complete plays of Shakespeare. "O brave new world!" he cries, using Miranda's words in The Tempest. But he feels emotions which have been long outlawed - love, jealousy, hate. He tells the World Controller: "I want skin, I want disease, I want unhappiness." In other words, he wants human imperfection. Finally he hangs himself.

Huxley was still alive when George Orwell published his much more terrifying dystopian novel Nineteen Eighty-Four. Here there is no

universal happiness; only universal fear. Orwell had always accused Huxley of a certain naivete, of believing that government existed for the benefit of the governed. Orwell is realistic while Huxley is fantastic. The totalitarian state which Orwell presents is not a caricature of either Nazi Germany or Communist Russia, much less of Fascist Italy. It is a thoroughly British concept, with a political system called IngSoc - English Socialism - embodied in a ruling party which permits no opposition and ruled by a mythical personage named Big Brother. What many readers of the book have failed to see is that Airstrip One, as Britain is now called, is in the hands of intellectuals from Oxford - not Cambridge. Cambridge is an Aristotelian university; Oxford is Platonic. The philosophical idealists of Oxford have created a metaphysic we may term Collective Solipsism. Reality exists only in the collective mind of the ruling party. The population is divided into the proletariat or Proles, 85 %, the Outer Party, 10%, the Inner Party, 5%. What the Proles believe or think does not matter - they are inert, brainless. The Party must accept Big Brother's concept of reality, even at the risk of having to stomach blatant contradiction. Reconciliation of opposed ideas is effected through the technique of doublethink. 2 plus 2 equals 5, if the party says so, even when it is evident that 2 plus 2 equals 4. The stars can be light-years away; they can also be a few miles over our heads. Nature is in the total control of the Party; so is that fragment of humanity that counts. Orwell has a rebel, just as Huxley has, but this rebel is not given the opportunity to hang himself. His rebellion must be crushed through voluntary techniques of conformity; he must be absorbed into the Party; he must learn to love Big Brother.

Both Orwell and Huxley owe a great deal to the Russian novel We, written during the Stalinist era by Zamyatin. What Huxley took from it was the image of total conformity; what Orwell learned was the great truth of the twentieth century - that only power is important, and power is best manifested in cruelty, torture, brain-washing and liquidation. In other words, evil exists; evil is the fuel of the engine of power. But Orwell never uses the word "evil". He was a secular writer with no interest in theology. Evil as a theological entity was very slow in entering English literature. It was there in Dante, but you will not find it in Chaucer. Britain remained a Pelagian society. This may have something to do with ^{the} mild and gentle climate, especially in the south-east, from where most English literature emanates.

segue la parte in italiano inviata ieri

la conversione del narratore agnostico. Se Graham Greene si serve del Cattolicesimo per giustificare il sensazionalismo del Male, Evelyn Waugh se ne serve a scopi puramente ^{romantici} ~~romantici~~.

Nella trilogia sulla Seconda Guerra Mondiale, Sword of Honour, Waugh ~~mette~~ collega direttamente la moralità cattolica alla guerra nella quale il suo eroe, Guy Crouchback, membro di una famiglia cattolica proprietaria terriera, moderatamente facoltosa, serve in qualità di ufficiale di fanteria. La guerra appare una guerra giusta agli occhi di Crouchback dopo l'alleanza tra ~~la~~ Germania e ~~la~~ Russia sovietica - il nemico è lo stato moderno totalitario, quantunque l'Italia, paese cattolico, venga esclusa dalla categoria. Quando l'Unione Sovietica ^{passa ad allearsi con la} ~~diventa alleata~~ democrazia, l'adesione di Crouchback all'impegno bellico è grandemente diminuita. Alla Conferenza di Yalta gli alleati presiedono allo "sbandamento della Cristianità". La tibia del materialismo sovietico comincia a erodere le anime perfino degli intellettuali britannici timorati di Dio. Il giusto, un uomo inevitabilmente cattolico, deve ritirarsi dal mondo e come Candido, coltivare il suo giardino. Il cattolicesimo di Waugh venne meno solo quando l'applicazione del Concilio Vaticano II volgarizzò la liturgia. Era un cattolicesimo ^{il suo} che patì sempre l'affronto ~~di essere di essere altro~~ ^{il} ~~il~~ religione dei camerieri di Soho e dei lavoratori manuali irlandesi. Il cattolicesimo avrebbe dovuto, doveva, essere aristocratico.

^{che faccio parte degli} Io ~~non~~ ^{scrittore} ~~scrittore~~ cattolici britannici nati nella fede e non semplicemente convertiti. Tendo a guardare un po' dall'alto ~~al basso~~ Greene, Waugh e altri cattolici convertiti; i quali, a loro volta, disprezzavano chi non ~~aveva~~ ^{aveva} ~~abbracciato la verità~~ ^{abbracciato la verità} del cattolicesimo ~~non~~ ^{non} con chiara coscienza adulta. Il ~~subito~~ punto debole di questa gente di lettere convertita sembra a me essere un tale interesse per la dottrina cattolica che molti di loro si rifiutano, come fanno invece molti cattolici di culla o cattolici storici, di darla per scontata. Io non credo che la letteratura sia di necessità migliorata dal reggersi sulla fede. La ~~letteratura~~

un sistema etico accettato e che quel sistema si riassume nell'essere non tanto cattolico quanto generalmente cristiano-giudaico. I maggiori romanziari degli Stati Uniti, come il ~~maestro~~ grande narratore ^{dell'Italia scomparsa} ~~di recente~~ Alberto Moravia, sono ebrei - Bellow, Mailer, Roth. Forse la opposizione religiosa del nostro tempo si polarizza tra Islam e Cristianità Giudaica. Volendo, possiamo ~~stare~~ allargare il campo e parlare di fondamentalismo islamico e liberalismo secolare che si guardano di sottocchio con grande inquietudine. Le fedi fondamentaliste secolari - comunismo e fascismo - hanno fatto il loro tempo. Se l'opposizione tra figli del Profeta e la genia di Abramo, Gesù, Rousseau, Voltaire e altre voci della tolleranza umana sia un tema letterario adeguato, questo resta da vedere. Il mio collega Salman Rushdie ha mostrato al mondo, grazie alla fatwah del fu Ayatollah Khomeini, che c'è pericolo fare della critica all'Islam oggetto-soggetto di narrativa. E tuttavia è quello che cerco di fare io in questo momento nel romanzo che cerco di scrivere. E' uno dei temi maggiori del nostro tempo.

Intanto, ~~presento~~ questo mese presento al grande pubblico italiano un romanzo che in inglese si chiama Any Old Iron, il grido dei compratori ambulanti che vanno ^{o andavano} per le strade con il loro carrettino per acquistare vecchie pentole, molle per il fuoco, attizzatoi stufetti e altri artefatti ferrosi. Il mio ferro, nella fattispecie, si rimanda a un oggetto di acciaio temprato - la spada, o lama, Excalibur, impugnata da re Arturo a difesa della ^{cristianità romana} ~~cristianità romana~~ contro l'invasore anglo-sassone della britannia ^{romana} ~~romana~~ celtica. Ritrovata a Montecassino nel mio romanzo e' trasferita dai nazisti alla Germania dell'est, depredata dall'invasore sovietico e messa in vetrina all'Ermitage di Leningrado-Pietroburgo. Nuovamente rubata da un giovane gallesse, a nome della liberazione del Galles, finisce con l'essere gettata come oggetto inutile nel lago di un mitico nord. Non viviamo piu' nell'eta' delle Excalibur. Il mio narratore e' un giovane ebreo. Nella storia non figura nessun cattolico. Fuori del Medio Oriente non ci sono cose per cui ~~completamente. E' una storia di tipo di macchina che~~
~~potrebbe degli altri che si~~

