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THE POET, THE PEOPLE, AND THE HEMISPHERE¹

Lloyd Mallan

THERE IS something strange in the world today, a new force glorifying death, sanctifying treachery and destruction. There is a maggot in the round apple of the earth, gnawing madly, moving swiftly for its heart. Why does the maggot grow fat and strengthen when its food is the blood of men, their dreams, their very brains? Why does this weird new force exist?

I need not elaborate on the decadence of Nazism, nor on the anti-cultural aspects of its primitive philosophy, for this has been done many times before. The great question today is, rather: How may we crush it? This is quite a simple question in itself, but it involves many methods, many implications. Not the least of these methods is the cultural one; it is, in fact, the most important one, for in the end it will provide the key to the salvation of mankind, of civilization. I intend to speak only about some of the implications under this one method, in the field I am most familiar with: literature.

I believe that literature brings people together because it mirrors human dignity. All great literature of the past has, in one way or another, done this; all great literature of the future must, of necessity, follow the same pattern.

Man's struggle against the evil forces about him has always been a noble theme of classical literature. Today, the evil forces are not

¹ [Editor's Note] This article, by permission of author and publishers, is here reprinted from *Argentina Libre*, issues of June 19 and June 26. *Argentina Libre*, published in Buenos Aires and edited by Alfredo de la Guardia, is well liked by Argentinan liberals and intellectuals for its consistent democratic and anti-Nazi stand. The work of Lloyd Mallan, Joseph Grucci, C. V. Wicker, and the editors of *Fantasy*—all of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—in bringing United States authors to the attention of Latin America and, better still, in translating and publishing Latin American authors in magazines in the United States, is to be highly commended and gratefully applauded.

merely the specialized ones that surround a single man or group of men in a particular place; they are forces that affect men everywhere. Nazism is unquestionably an enemy to culture, thus to literature, and, by nature, the reverse must also be true. The character of Hitlerism is rigidly national; the character of literature is international.

Throughout the continents of America today there is a vigorous peoples' art, and this is not only a healthy thing, but a happy one as well, for it makes possible the genuine unity of our hemisphere; it makes possible a real pro-human unity, against which Nazism and Fascism will be helpless.

Literature takes various forms, various expressions, and this is partially due to geographical location, partially to economic conditions. Here, in North America, we have no gypsies, hence we have no Garcia Lorca; but we do have a Jesse Stuart, who has lived all his life among the mountain people of Kentucky, and whose wildly beautiful short stories reflect the speech and the elementary existence of these "hill-billies." The stories of Jesse Stuart are filled with a tender humor, with a deep understanding of nature; his people and the land they live upon are one, just as Andalusia and Garcia Lorca are the same thing. But in Jesse Stuart the laughter is hearty and of the earth—it is the laughter of wholesome love, without the neurosis of the cities; while in Garcia Lorca the laughter is forever tragic—the gypsies of Andalusia live hard lives, and they do not have the advantages of Stuart's mountain people; they do not farm their own land, they depend on others for their food, they are eternally pursued by the Civil Guard, by cruel tradition, by the bitter ironies of love or fate. Yet, on the other hand, Antonito el Camborio in all his tragic simplicity may be found, dressed in different clothes, in the steel mills of Homestead, Pennsylvania, where the Civil Guard changes name to the Coal and Iron Police; and there in Homestead, too, Preciosa may not run from the green wind nor from San Cristobalon of the heavenly tongue, but the black smoke tries to catch her with gritty fingers, and tongues not quite so heavenly whisper in her ear as she tries to flee, but cannot. And just as certainly I have met the mountain people of Jesse Stuart in the saffron fields of Tarrazona de la Mancha.

A glance at our North American best-seller lists of the past several years will show how closely related are the aspirations, problems, and thoughts of our two continents. Our recent best-selling books include

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Grapes of Wrath, a novel inspired by the dispossessed farmers of the Southwest; *Christ in Concrete*, a study of Italian laborers in the United States; *Native Son*, which presents the social problem of the oppressed Negro; *Now in November*, the farmer of the Middle West struggling against man and nature to be able to live; *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter*, about the people in a small Southern town who fight the violent prejudices there against the "poor-white" and Negro, who cry out for human understanding and sympathy; *Look Homeward, Angel*, *Of Time and the River*, *You Can't Go Home Again*, the great trilogy of Thomas Wolfe, showing in epic manner the progressively changing point of view of a North American boyhood, young manhood, and finally, manhood itself, and the beginnings of maturity. There are many others, too numerous to go on mentioning. /

Similarly, in Latin America we find a literature traditionally rooted in folklore, in the struggles of the people against their oppressors, and in the poetry of nature. At random, there comes to my mind the wonderful social ballads of the Afro-Cuban, Nicolas Guillen; "Espana en el corazon" and the many other works of the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda; the strong social prose-poems of Pablo de Rokha; the fine novels, so beautifully cadenced and impassioned that they might easily be broken up into verse, of Eduardo Mallea of the Argentine; the work of Jorge Icaza of Ecuador, who champions and portrays the sufferings of the Indians and half-breeds, in much the same manner as our own John Steinbeck paints the lonely ranch hands and disinherited of the Salinas River Valley in California. Here, too, there are many others, too many to mention, from Mexico, Costa Rica, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, Brazil, and on through the twenty Latin republics.

So the seeds for a profound unity of the peoples of America exist, and it is left to us to fertilize them. One important way this may be done is through a large-scale interchange of our literatures. I believe that especially the writers and intellectuals should cooperate in every way possible to bring this about. There is much work to be done; much more to be undone—we in the United States have not been without blame; we have not been named "Colossus of the North" for nothing; our whole conception of Latin America, until recently, has been that of a nice juicy continent to exploit for raw materials, for fruits, for chemicals. Our relationships, the North with the South and the South with the North, have never included the peoples. But now,

today, this must begin; our people must meet and know each other; and together our people must struggle against a common enemy, for our people, *all* people, have a common interest.

In the United States there is beginning a spontaneous awakening consciousness of things Spanish among the intellectuals. They are widening their scope, learning at last that there is a whole important literature and art to the South of us, a literature and art of extreme sensitivity and beauty. The literary magazines of my country, both experimental and established, have been publishing an increasing number of translations of the works of Latin American and Spanish writers, mainly poets thus far. *Poetry Magazine* has devoted an entire issue to Latin Americans; *Esquire* has published many pieces on the Spanish Civil War, and translations of Garcia Lorca; the *Southern Review*, best of our literary quarterlies, has devoted its complete poetry section (some fifteen pages) in the Winter, 1940-41, issue to Garcia Lorca also, and the editors express a deep willingness to publish other translations; *Fantasy*, *The New Mexico Quarterly Review*, *Twice a Year*, *Diogenes*, are among the most important of our experimental magazines regularly printing translations; *Kenyon Review*, one of our foremost critical magazines, runs in each issue a survey of Mexican art, literature, music, and theatre.

I think, as I have already suggested, that large-scale distribution of each other's literature on our respective continents in our respective languages is of the utmost importance. Our magazines and yours should publish writers from either the North or the South *together* in every issue; our bookpublishers and yours should interchange their lists. (By literature here I mean all kinds, not merely the serious and experimental.) In this way we will soon enough realize that all of us are *people*, not only gauchos and tango dancers or Al Capones and egotistical exploiters of the "dollar." Our literatures will combine the best that each has to offer, and as our ties grow stronger with the years, we may well have a Hemisphere Literature, a Hemisphere Culture, surpassing any yet known to man. Forgive me if I seem to day-dream a little now, but all this is very possible; your short story and novel could learn from ours, and our biography and poetry have much to learn from yours. And there is so little discrimination in Latin America against the Negro, the Chinese, against racial and color minorities in general, since much of your wonderful poetry and literature is rooted

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in the folkways of these people, you will help, also, to destroy such discrimination here, where there is entirely too much of it. (The philosophy of Nazism is able to survive, in large part, because it is able to spread discriminatory hates among the people; because it is able to have the Jews, the Catholics, the Negroes, and other "non-Aryans" persecuted for mythical crimes; because it is able in this way to shatter the peoples' unity.)

* * *

The real enemies of the people are not of the people themselves; but they are the ones who depend on the creative power, on the strength of the people to keep them alive. And ironically, to go on living as parasites, they must do everything possible to curtail the creative processes of the people. In other words, their major occupation is, of necessity, to keep the people separated, to keep them hating among themselves, so that they will be blinded to the true reasons for poverty, suffering, and to their own value. The more educated the people become, the more violently do these enemies try to blind them. Then the day arrives when the enemies, in terror, realize that the people understand; on that day the enemy begins to strike with physical force. This was so in Loyalist Spain; in the France of the Popular Front; it is yet true of the struggles of the Chinese. It is the reason for a Hitler in the world.

And this brings us to an interesting contradiction: although Nazism and Fascism are essentially nationalistic in character, their interests are international; in Holland, Belgium, France, the enemies of those peoples were born Dutchmen, Belgians, Frenchmen. These were the men who would profit individually by a Nazi victory, the men who saw that the people were becoming too unified, too strong, who saw also that trickery would no longer split the people, and that sheer force was necessary.

Yet these men who recognize no mother-country, whose loyalty is only to themselves and their class, whose sole interest is in keeping what they have at every cost, are the very men who forever cry, "Viva la patria!" For, the louder they cry this, the more noble they make themselves seem to many of the people, and the easier it is for them to hide the real issues involved.

By the very nature of their interests, these enemies have to be men in high places. They should be carefully watched for, since in most

instances they have the respect that seems to go with wealth. *They are the brains behind all Fifth Columns.*

I should like to quote Herr Hitler himself, from *Mein Kampf*, on the Americas, and on his allies here: "Latin America—we shall create a new Germany there. We have a right to this continent. . . . Do you think that's so difficult? I think we [the Nazis] are capable of it. We shall not land troops like William the Conqueror and gain Brazil by the strength of arms. *Our weapons are not visible ones* [italics are the author's]. . . . We shall soon have storm troopers in America. . . ." And again, in a letter to Otto Strasser, May 21, 1930, Hitler says: "The Nordic race has a right to rule the world. We must make this right the guiding star of our foreign policy."

But just as Herr Hitler has his invisible weapons of attack in all countries, so do we have our invisible weapons of defense. Our weapons are love, understanding, and sympathy; just as his are the traitors who manipulate hates (new and traditional), fear, suspicion, and treachery. And our basic task, I feel, is not so much fighting Hitler on the battlefield—which I deeply hope we may be able to avoid—as it is to struggle against the spreading of his dark philosophy of ignorance.

We must say to him strongly, "We are a united *people* in this Western Hemisphere; we are a living and breathing people; we do not want your system of death, so don't you roll those mad eyes of yours in this direction! And if he *knows* that the North and the South of this Hemisphere are one, if he *knows* that he can get no foothold here, that we know the faces of his allies here (though many of them pretend to be against him), that *all the people* stand with folded arms along every inch of every coast of our two continents, he will not even try; for Herr Hitler may be a madman, but he is no fool, and he is not the sort to commit suicide at any time.