

The Still Point

Barbara Newberry

TO SEE HIM was to be impressed by his striking features and almost paradoxical appearance. He was a tall, gaunt, rather lean man, but his haggard look yielded to an aura of eternal might. When standing, he seemed to be precariously balanced on a pair of stilts, but his gait was sure and not ungraceful. A slender neck rose above broad, bony shoulders that supported a long head covered with a maze of shaggy, black hair. A shock of this maze was always combed neatly to one side of his high, slanting forehead. His sunken cheeks and protruding cheek bones were emphasized by a long, narrow nose. He had a firm, delicate mouth that seldom smiled and bright, gray eyes that contrasted with a cadaverous pallor. A quick glance might produce an image of grotesquery, clumsiness, weakness, but just a few moment's attention would reveal a man of comeliness, agility, strength, and above all, deep contentment.

Perhaps he lived too much. He dwelt in each moment and sucked the essence from all that he encountered. No obscure detail or subtle feeling escaped his acuity. No vast, incomprehensible problem was not unraveled to satisfaction by the power and persistence of his reason. Harmony prevailed in his soul. There was no need for him to drown a despicable identity in the cause or to fabricate a meaning for existence—a meaning that does not really alter the absurdity of existence. He found comfort in accepting the hopelessness of the human condition. He reaped happiness from a capacity to love himself and all the world with understanding and from a tendency to live for the sake of living. That which many seek but seldom find—peace of mind—he had realized.

He was sitting in the library. Here he was want to read, to think, to lose himself in a flow of spirituality. Music was playing. As its intricate complexities rose and subsided, digressed and lingered, pounded and splattered upon his ears, he rose and walked the floor incessantly. The bombastic majesty of the piece was becoming evident. A pleasant feeling crept into the pit of his stomach, and his hands grew cold. It was impossible for him to think now; he knew only feelings, inexpressible except by actions. The music swelled and gained in intensity. Even so, an intoxication began to permeate his entire being, and his elation soared to ineffable heights. As the music reached its magnificent climax, he realized the culmination of his happiness, the limits of joy. In one unique, emotional moment was the climax of his life. But utter frustration, complete dejection was the aftermath. Pure ecstasy had turned to extreme pain—the pain that results from realizing the saturation point of happiness. He turned to thoughts of death with the belief that nothing more could be gained from life and accepted calmly the most absurd of all absurdities.