



HENRY GIFFORD

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Charles Henry Gifford 1913–2003

HENRY GIFFORD proved himself a scholar-critic possessed of far-reaching sympathies, of precise discernment, of humane learning, and of wisdom. His death at the age of ninety brought home what a true piety is, in contemplation of his supple stamina and of his own discriminating piety towards the literary geniuses whose presences he owned: Tolstoy and Seferis, Pasternak and Samuel Johnson, Dante and T. S. Eliot.

With an excellent manner and with excellent manners, Henry Gifford was unfailingly (that is, successfully, uncondescendingly) courteous. This, as teacher for thirty years at the University of Bristol, as reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*, as essayist for *Grand Street*, and as general editor (for Cambridge University Press) of the Cambridge Studies in Russian Literature. Yet he was courteous in a form that was not only generous but stringent. Generous, as proffering unstintingly all the learning that he had accrued (and all that he had thought and felt, and had thought about feeling). Stringent, as knowing that there is no substitute for knowledge, and—unignorably—no substitute for an intimate knowledge of the languages themselves if you are claiming to illuminate the literature itself. Though he was himself a great respecter of translation, and an authority on its principles and practice, he never abandoned his scepticism as to the granting in Comparative Literature of higher degrees that did not spend at least some of their time coming down to earth, to rest firmly upon a grounded mastery. He was a leader in bringing a sense not only of responsibility but also of particular responsibilities to a field of literary study that—like all other studies—is always in danger of settling for some easy way out: comparing some works of literature, or (aggrandising itself) Comparative Literature. Easy ways can take many

forms when it comes to pronouncements on the literature of the wide world: the grand tour, the slavish compilation as against the masterly composing of differences, the apocalyptic sermonising.

Most of us, at any rate most of those of us who were Henry Gifford's immediate colleagues at Bristol, possess only a first language plus a modicum of a second one. We found ourselves chastened by his exemplary commitments, but also heartened since he was so good as never to let any of this become priggish or owlish. He was very good at offering advice in a way that made you wish to take it. There is about all his writing, as there was about all his conversation and dealings, a magnanimity, a self-abnegation, directly moving. He had, too, the sense of humour that is possible only to someone who has an exquisite sense of decorum and therefore of the apposite indecorum. He never made mischief but liked to be mischievous.

Born in London on 17 June 1913, he remembered the immediate aftermath of the Great War. (He half-believed that he remembered the downing of the Potters Bar Zeppelin in 1916; certainly he recalled hearing tell of it.) He was to serve in the Royal Armoured Corps during the Second World War, from 1940 to 1946, years in which his saddening separation from his family laid the unshakable foundations of the lifelong love that bound them all together, Henry and all who survived him: his much-loved wife for sixty-five years, Rosamond (whose humour and unsentimental courage matched his own), his son Nick and his daughter Anthea, and of late the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren whom every month his letters, so firm of hand, evoked so vivaciously. In his last years, years of oppressive ill-health but also of warm gratitude for all that life had brought him, he would read again, read anew, the letters that he and Rosamond had exchanged during the War.

Family feeling mattered most to him, and he valued its various realisations in the writers whom he loved, in Tolstoy and Dickens, in Mandelstam and Montale, and (with the utmost complication) in Hardy. That he was related to Hardy's first wife, Emma Gifford, meant much, but it had its cross-currents since he never ceased to marvel not only at Hardy's unforgettable poems about being unable to forget, but at how greatly blest he, Henry, was in comparison with Hardy when it came to marriage. His love for Rosamond, so much to him, both she and it, brings about (in a central way) that her death, a few years later at the age of 89, is truly part of his life and of his own memory. To speak here of her is one way not to scant him. The happiness with which she endowed herself and her family and her friends tempered extraordinarily the sadness of her

going, as it had done with his going. She was born in Mysore, south India, the child of Anglo-Dutch parents (her father was a taxidermist of vivid intransigence, who just about managed not to insult the Prince of Wales), and she came to England at fourteen with her mother. She fell in love with Henry at the right age, and stayed there for seventy years. She did not see eye to eye with the Raj, or with any church; instead, like Henry, she saw the truths within humanism, liberalism, and left-wing aspiration, and spoke of these truths—and for them—with a lifelong confidence, in accents that were never imperious, always firm, and (ever like him) delightfully unsolemn. During the war, while he served in the Middle East, she looked after Basque refugees at home.

It was a delight of a home, the Giffords' household, with the minabird contributing salutarily to the conversation. The humour was appropriately absurd, especially in the vicinity of fantastical impropriety. Would it, for instance, have been not more embarrassing but less, if instead of saying crudely—when there was a request for the salt—'It's under your nose, Lady Dugdale', one had slipped into 'It's under your dug, Lady Nosedale'? And what language might they speak on the Isle of Wight, a Channel Island in its way, Ile de Blanc? (Not so, man.)

The best line in his very early book of poems, *A Summer Mood* (Oxford, 1934), is a prophetic opening line to a matrimonial testimonial: 'Our honeymoon we'll manage in a loft.' The next best line is likewise an opening line: "Really you are the most unselfish being". In 'A Correction', this dramatic utterance is at once contested ('How dare she affirm that . . .'), as was perhaps true to the persona in the poem but would not have been true of Henry Gifford the person, who really was the most unselfish being.

To have known the Giffords, as I did for forty years, is to have enjoyed an unrivalled goodness of heart, of salted compassion and of acumen. Their children and grandchildren have lived in the same spirit, echoing the parental love, alive to many of the same convictions while acknowledging the due differences.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
 They faint on hill or field or river:
 Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
 And grow for ever and for ever.

With no need (so Henry and Rosamond Gifford believed) of any belief in the immortality of the soul.

Not that he altogether shared one's delight in the poetry of Tennyson. Perhaps the cadences had too much insinuated themselves into those undergraduate poems of his that he came (rightly) to repudiate along with the early misguided ambition to create literature, instead of creatively revealing—as teacher and critic, mediator in many modes—its existing and enduring resources. At all events, he was sufficiently aware of the need not to remain seduced by Georgian poeticalities as to be good-naturedly sceptical of a good many Victorian sound-effects. But, even while both modesty and good taste would have made him dissociate himself from much of the diction within *In Memoriam*, his memory does deserve the praise that Tennyson bestowed upon the concept of the gentleman and upon the realisation of such an ideal:

And thus he bore without abuse
 The grand old name of gentleman,
 Defam'd by every charlatan,
 And soil'd with all ignoble use.

Without abuse: this, as never being abused for being a gentleman (given how unassumingly he was one), and never himself abusing the privilege of being one.

Someone to whom Henry was dear sent word to me, at his death, of what many felt in his affectionate memory. That a quick wit is innate but needs cultivating. That a sunny disposition is easy to warm to without perhaps giving enough credit for what efforts may have gone towards it. That wide sympathies and undogmatic good sense (with anger reserved only for the really wicked, such as the BBC) are rarities, too.

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Educated at Harrow and then at Christ Church, Oxford, Henry Gifford gained his BA in 1936 (the customary MA had to wait until 1946), securing those foundations in Classics that were once held to be indispensable to all humane literary studies. He himself neither underrated nor over-rated what his classical training made possible. He never fell prey to the snobbery that can smutch or vitiate the classicist's pride in learning, however well-grounded. Mark Pattison may have believed that he was elevating *Paradise Lost* when he described the act of reading it as 'the last reward of consummated scholarship', but to a classicist of Gifford's disposition (paying dues, as is only right, to modesty as well as to awe),

Pattison's compliment would be far from complimentary in its reducing the profound satisfactions of a great poem to the shallow self-satisfaction of reward for scholarship.

Though Gifford changed his mind as to whether he was cut out to be a poet, he never dispensed with what underpinned his love of poetry, the trained analytical and synthesising powers that his study of classical literature had helped to establish within him. The texts lived within contexts. He was to write in 1995:

Like others who had profited from a good Classical Sixth Form, and then from Classical Honour Moderations at Oxford, I was accustomed to see English poetry in a wider context, which included familiarity with the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and most of Horace. During a long spell of inaction as a soldier in Palestine from 1942 to 1944, I had been learning Russian, with all the shortcomings of the self-taught.

In duly acquiring a wide range of languages, he strengthened not only his own creative and critical abilities but those of associates and friends.

He joined the University of Bristol as Assistant Lecturer in 1946, becoming Senior Lecturer in 1955, Professor of Modern Literature in 1963, Winterstoke Professor of English in 1967, and Professor of English and Comparative Literature in 1976. These were good decades for Bristol. (Which is not to say that subsequent decades have not been good there, too; among Gifford's successors were to be the medievalist John Burrow, the Augustan scholar Pat Rogers, and the Romanticist Timothy Webb.) Gifford enjoyed the company of his departmental colleague, Frank Kermodé, following upon L. C. Knights (most wittily lugubrious of ponderers), while the wider faculty, likewise as happy to cooperate with Gifford as he with them, included Derek Russell Davis in psychiatry, Kenneth Grayston in theology, Richard Gregory in most matters of the mind, Ronald Grimsley in French, Stephan Korner in philosophy, John Northam in Norwegian, Richard Peace in Russian, Hans Reiss in German, Niall Rudd in classics, John Vincent in history, and Glynne Wickham in drama. There was at Bristol no department of Comparative Literature, but something no less valuable—that is, the spontaneous well-informed comparing of literature with so much that is constitutive of literature, worlds-wide—was not only in the air but was everywhere to the point. And there were notable Joint Schools (English and philosophy, English and drama, English and history), which enabled the University of Bristol to offer then, to the gifted young, something not available at the time in Oxford or Cambridge for all their glory.

The foreword to *Pasternak: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, 1975) may alert us in general, and must alert me in particular (as someone who is limited to an English department), to Gifford's being so much more than a scholar of literature in English:

For the last thirty years I have spent more hours on the study of Russian literature than may seem legitimate for a full-time member of an English Department. In this I was encouraged by C. L. Wrenn, once my tutor in Old and Middle English, whose Ilchester lecture at Oxford in 1951 is among the earlier appreciations of Pasternak in this country. I should also like to acknowledge the benevolent complicity of L. C. Knights, for twelve years head of my department.

He was to return in 1985 to such acknowledgement and such scruple in the foreword to *Poetry in a Divided World* (Cambridge, 1985):

The Clark Lectures are supposed to deal with 'some portion of English literature', and it may be objected that I have complied with this requirement in a very oblique, not to say cavalier, fashion. The reader will, I trust, recognise that the very heart of my concern is the needs and prospects of our own poetry in a time of exceptional strain and confusion. It would be rash to maintain that the morale of English poetry at the present hour is high, or that its practitioners face the future with the confidence in their art shown by that wonderfully inventive generation throughout Europe and the Americas who dominated the early and middle years of this century. We are living now in the aftermath of a great poetic era, to which the specifically English contribution was on the whole unremarkable. Nor can one disguise the act that in the last few years many ominous signs have appeared, chief among them the rise of the so-called 'media personality'. The politics of literature and the literature of politics threaten to tear apart the fibres of a tradition sustained for more than a thousand years, and to debase one of the world's richest and most sensitive languages.

Retirement brought Gifford to an even more sombre sense of those threats, losses, and encroachments, but also brought him twenty-five years of substantial reading, of substantiated writing, and of further notable contributions to the world of scholarship that was being realised by others and by himself. Of signal importance and worth, while underwriting so much of his critical writing, was Gifford's creative collaboration with his greatly valued colleague at Bristol, the poet Charles Tomlinson. Two especially fine collections were the felicitous result: *Versions from Fyodor Tyutchev 1903–1873* (London, 1960), and *Castilian Ilexes: Versions from Antonio Machado 1875–1939* (London, 1963), the best translation of Machado that exists (in the judgement of Eric Southworth, *Times Literary Supplement*, 4 Aug. 2006). Tomlinson's collaborations with Gifford, together with translations from Vladislav Khodasévich and

from César Vallejo, were all warmly acknowledged by the poet, whose introduction to his exemplary volume *Translations* (Oxford, 1983) pays tribute to Gifford in a way that should earn, in its turn, a tribute from us to them both:

I have been translating poems for more than twenty years and what follows represents a substantial selection from the total number. The first attempt was out of a language I did not know—Russian—and at the instigation of Henry Gifford who provided me with what he called transparencies. These consisted of the original texts, together with a literal interlinear translation and notes on usages and individual words. Poring over these thorough and sensitive aids, I had the illusion that I understood—if not Russian—the Russian of Tyutchev.

It was Henry Gifford who, as we proceeded with our work together, formulated a notion of poetic translation that arose from the immediate job in hand. This formulation has always stayed at the back of my mind in all subsequent undertakings. ‘The aim of these translations’, Gifford wrote, ‘has been to preserve not the metre, but the movement of each poem: its flight, or track through the mind. Every real poem starts from a given ground and carries the reader to an unforeseen vantage-point, whence he views differently the landscape over which he has passed. What the translator must do is to recognize these two terminal points, and to connect them by a coherent flight. This will not be exactly the flight of his original, but no essential reach of the journey will have been left out . . . Translation is resurrection, but not of the body.’

Gifford’s personal modesty was entirely continuous with his professional modesty, his precision and scruple. His reciprocated honouring of Charles Tomlinson (‘The poet as translator’, *Agenda*, Summer 1995) began reminiscentially with what is often the best evidence, anecdotal evidence, and then moved promptly to something wider. Grateful to L. C. Knights for passing on the words of Donald Davie’s recommendation of Tomlinson (‘a singularly pure poet’), Tomlinson then being about to become a colleague at Bristol in 1956, Gifford at once read *The Necklace*. ‘Tomlinson’s was evidently a poetic mind such as in daily living I had never encountered before, and this made me look forward to his arrival.’ The arrival was to be of more than a departmental presence alone. Tomlinson: ‘I am passionately interested in my craft.’ Gifford: ‘I could scarcely have foreseen that before very long I should witness that craft in operation, as, to a limited extent, an actual participant myself. The first results of this were to be seen in *Versions from Fyodor Tyutchev* (1960).’ Such collaboration with one of England’s most gifted poet-translators may be thought of as a mature consummation of what the young Henry Gifford had once devoutly wished, at the time of his youthful translation of Catullus in *A Summer Mood* back in 1934.

The humanely ranging comprehension of Russian literature in Gifford's book *The Hero of His Time: A Theme in Russian Literature* (London, 1950) was something better than an attention to a theme, rather a devotion to a series of astonishing achievements: Griboyedov's *The Mischief of Being Clever*, Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, Herzen's *Who is to Blame?*, Goncharov's *Oblomov*, Turgenev's *Fathers and Children*, Chernyshevsky's *What is to be Done?*, and Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Gifford's own achievement was then deepened and widened in his scrupulously substantiated and informative study of *The Novel in Russia from Pushkin to Pasternak* (London, 1964). Henry James may have overdone it in speaking of Russian novels as loose baggy monsters (though one knows what he means), but Gifford's ways with them were never loose or baggy or monstrous. *The Novel in Russia* was acutely praised by the *Times Literary Supplement* in terms that were very apposite to Gifford's interdependence of literary worlds, as 'something which is familiar enough in modern English literary criticism, but not Russian: the close study of a nation's sensibility as revealed by its novelists and by the "great tradition" which they created for themselves'. The reviewer's introduction there of the phrase made famous, titularly, by F. R. Leavis, author of *The Great Tradition*, was pertinent and provocative, in that Leavis's own sense of tradition was something from which Gifford learnt a great deal, while Gifford never found in repudiation the grim pleasure that Leavis enjoyed in it. If one responsibility of the critic is to do his or her best neither to use the good as the enemy of the best nor the best as the enemy of the good, Gifford—though choosing to be seldom as trenchant a critic as Leavis—was the more responsible when it came to keeping the scales of the mind even.

After bringing together a well-judged critical anthology on Tolstoy (Harmondsworth, 1971), he moved in 1982 to a full-length study (*Tolstoy*; Oxford, 1982), profoundly sane, of Tolstoy's troubled genius, with which Leavis, too, unexpectedly engaged late in life. But it is *Pasternak: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, 1977) that most manifests the imaginative centrality of Gifford's work as critic and literary historian. Strong-minded and fair-minded, it is a work of staying-power that demonstrates the hiding places of Pasternak's staying-power.

There followed in 1985 the publication of the Clark Lectures, *Poetry in a Divided World*, alive with political consciousness and conscience, and elegiac in its praise of heroism, and of the heroic bravery shown by such as Anna Akhmatova—but then there are, as Gifford makes clear, no

‘such-as-Anna-Akhamatova’, only (fortunately) others who were no less brave. The very last thing that Henry Gifford would have wanted to do would have been to claim any such courage for himself, but he was attuned to the courage of those who suffered under oppression, and he demonstrated courage both professionally and personally. His achievements were recognised and happily honoured when he was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1983, twenty years before he died on 23 November 2003.

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The twenty-five pages of his introduction to Mandelstam’s *Journey to Armenia* (San Francisco, 1979, the translation being by Sidney Monas) are Henry Gifford at his best: breadth never becoming shallow, depth never murky, ease never facile, learning never ostentatious, good manners never mannered, and convictions never becoming the pleased convicting of others.

It is an aspect of the self-knowledge in Gifford that is so at one with his understanding of what it is for a scholar-critic to be realistic (that is, modest in the face of genius and its accomplishments), that he is always aware of both of the dangers that may attend upon a literary journey: that of never raising one’s eyes from the path that one is treading, and that of always haring-off towards some beckoning pleasance. The end of the introduction to *Journey to Armenia*, as often with Gifford’s enterprises, is happy to look towards that which it knows itself unable, here and now, in the circumstances, to journey towards. He is not, for instance, turning away from Mandelstam when he turns to look towards Anna Akhamatova, en route to the very last words that will be first Mandelstam’s and then his own:

It surprised Akhamatova that the censor had let through Mandelstam’s ‘imitation of the old Armenian’ in his last chapter. (She herself wrote an effective poem of protest that was disguised by the title ‘An Imitation of the Armenian.’) Arshak represents the past that enables a ‘clairvoyant,’ well versed in the Psalms and in kindred writings of the ancient world, to contemplate the future. Of Mandelstam too it could have been said only a short while before: ‘His ears have grown dull with silence, but once they listened to Greek music.’ The voice that breaks out with the exclamation in the seventh verse, ‘The Assyrian grips my heart,’ could be his. And on his behalf too Darmastat, ‘the most gracious and best-educated of the enunchs,’ makes the plea:

I would like Arshak to spend one additional day, full of hearing, taste, and smell, as it was before, when he amused himself at the hunt or busied himself with the planting of trees.

But those are not the final words of the book. Mandelstam has been describing a journey, and the journey continues, in the last paragraph, when sleep comes in the nomad camp. 'Last thought: have to ride around some ridge.' Like Dante in the *Divine Comedy*, Mandelstam was perpetually on the road.

As so often, Gifford takes pleasure in—and finds wisdom in—the panoptic. He always admired, loved, and relished Samuel Johnson (as well as annotating the poems, with classical illumination), and the pleasure that Gifford took, and gave, in comparative literature was for him a practical as well as a principled realisation of the aspiration, not itself a vanity of a human wish, that opens *The Vanity of Human Wishes*:

Let Observation with extensive View,
Survey Mankind, from *China* to *Peru*;
Remark each anxious Toil, each eager Strife,
And watch the busy Scenes of crouded Life;
Then say how Hope and Fear, Desire and Hate,
O'erspread with Snares the clouded Maze of Fate,
Where wav'ring Man, betray'd by vent'rous Pride,
To tread the dreary Paths without a guide,
As treach'rous Phantoms in the Mist delude,
Shuns fancied Ills, or chases airy Good.

Nothing human may be alien to such a humanist as Gifford was, but a great many things were alienating: tyranny, oppression, injustice, cruelty, and all the forms that hope and fear, desire and hate, were hideously taking in the twentieth century and not then alone. The anxiety of toil, the eagerness of strife, the treacherous phantoms that may have begun as airy good but soon degenerated into bloody ill: these were the objects of Gifford's compassionate surprise and undespairing dismay. He had to bring himself—for this was not where his gentle disposition, or his character, was naturally at home—to contemplate the ravages and the rapine upon which some great European writers had turned their unwincing scrutiny. 'My generation, which grew up (to put it charitably) in the nineteen thirties, was plunged immediately into the divided and perplexed era that has continued to this day,' Gifford said in the opening paragraph of the Clark Lectures that he delivered in 1985. 'We could recognise and abhor fascism, the undisputed evil at the heart of Europe. What too many of us would not concede was that the Soviet Union showed more than a few hideous parallels with Nazi Germany.' In times of war and warfare,

his own peace of mind remained remarkably, invaluable, itself, altogether sane even while not averting its eyes from the insanities of totalitarianism—and of much else. Honouring Goethe and honouring Arnold, and a fortiori honouring Arnold's gratitude to Goethe, Gifford had an especial respect for the great moment, more than moment, in the best book ever written about translation, *On Translating Homer*:

'From Homer and Polygnotus I every day learn more clearly,' says Goethe, 'that in our life here above ground we have, properly speaking to enact Hell:'—if the student must absolutely have a keynote to the *Iliad*, let him take this of Goethe, and see what he can do with it; it will not, at any rate, like the tender pantheism of Mr. Ruskin, falsify for him the whole strain of Homer.

'To tread the dreary Paths without a Guide'? But Gifford in 1993 began his notable (and noble) essay 'On recognition and renewal' (*Comparative Criticism*, 15, 1993) with a telling proposition:

In all the moral confusion of Europe in the twentieth century its greatest poets may turn out to have been the surest guides. This might seem a singularly old-fashioned statement. Matthew Arnold believed that poetry would become for humanity 'an ever surer and surer stay', and the idea evokes a now faded image—the high-minded reader subjecting to intelligent perusal the works of the poet-sages ancient and modern.

Seemingly old-fashioned: that is as may be. But Gifford was confident that there were guides: Johnson himself, for more than one, and Goethe, and Arnold . . .

Turning immediately in this essay to Cavafy and then to Seferis, Gifford shows us a vista:

Eliot wrote in 1951: 'We are all, so far as we inherit the civilisation of Europe, still citizens of the Roman empire . . .' This view was rightly challenged by Seferis. Nonetheless, from Eliot he learned to appreciate Dante as 'a teacher, a master of the craft' who remained that for him throughout his life.

For perhaps the most tireless or inescapable of guides (there being aspects of this particular guide from which Gifford judged it necessary to escape) was T. S. Eliot, a master of the craft who remained with Gifford throughout his life and whom, duly, he too 'rightly challenged'. Most of Gifford's best thinking and writing—whether as critic and literary historian or in translation—can be thought of as a diverse and versatile engagement with the greatest poet-critic of the twentieth century. About Eliot, Gifford had not only reservations but, more precisely and usefully, caveats. Yet the warnings about Eliot's limitations were never to weigh as much as the counter-warning: not to limit oneself by underrating, slighting, or

misrepresenting what Eliot had achieved on everyone's behalf. Including some of the most challenging praise that was granted in the twentieth century to the poetry of Samuel Johnson:

Those who demand of poetry a day dream, or a metamorphosis of their own feeble desires and lusts, or what they believe to be 'intensity' of passion, will not find much in Johnson. He is like Pope and Dryden, Crabbe and Landor, a poet for those who want poetry and not something else, some stay for their own vanity. I sometimes think that our own time, with its elaborate equipment of science and psychological analysis, is even less fitted than the Victorian age to appreciate poetry as poetry. But if lines 189–220 of *The Vanity of Human Wishes* are not poetry, I do not know what is. (T. S. Eliot)

The turn of phrase that Eliot borrowed from A. E. Housman, 'the mind of Europe', returns as that which most prompted Gifford's powers of mind and of heart. He himself had called upon the deep resources of the phrase in his introduction to *Journey to Armenia*:

Mandelstam's idea of Western culture corresponds to what Eliot means by 'the mind of Europe.' It is a culture formed by the merging of four streams—the Hebraic, the Christian, the Hellenic and the Latin. Within this tradition developed the distinct but intercommunicating literatures of the modern world, its art and its music. Mandelstam's conception of the European mind is more hospitable than Eliot's with his predominantly Latin (and Catholic) bias, for it includes Goethe (tardily accepted by Eliot) and the German poets, and also, of course, his own literature, which in his view had the task of realising a 'domestic Hellenism.'

In 1950, the first words of *The Hero of His Time* had spoken of what is at issue when we consider the relations of literature to hearts and souls and history:

Russian literature, in the nineteenth century, was the one outlet for an oppressed people's dreams and aspirations. It was a school and a laboratory. A literature of this sort commands, at least among the educated men of its own time, almost a universal public. It is not a plaything; not shallow or ephemeral; but endowed with that perennial vitality which is given only to works that belong heart and soul to their own day. 'Our literature is our pride,' Gorky once wrote, 'the best thing that we have created as a nation.' The foreigner who enters that literature, reading it in its own language, comes slowly to unlearn his prejudices, and to think and feel like the people about whom he is reading. He begins at the same time to look on his own world from a distance. What has the West really given humanity?

This is written in the spirit of Eliot, alive with the conviction that nothing was more misleading than the contrasting of literature to life. In 1923,

Eliot had looked back upon the first year of his own imaginative exercise in comparative literature, his journal *The Criterion*:

In the common mind all interests are confused, and each degraded by the confusion. And where they are confused, they cannot be related; in the common mind any specialised activity is conceived as something isolated from life, an odious task or a pastime of mandarins. To maintain the autonomy, and the disinterestedness, of every human activity, and to perceive it in relation to every other, require a considerable discipline. It is the function of a literary review to maintain the autonomy and disinterestedness of literature, and at the same time to exhibit the relations of literature—not to ‘life,’ as something contrasted to literature, but to all the other activities, which, together with literature, are the components of life.

Gifford would have disowned the easy repeated deploring of ‘the common mind’ there, but he owned the inspired accuracy of Eliot’s handling of the perennial difficulty as to how to describe the relations of literature to all else.

It is Eliot who recurrently (not repetitively) animates the thinking and feeling in Gifford’s *Pasternak*; the index has more than a dozen references, one to page 1. On the relation of poetry, or rather of certain kinds of poetry, to philosophical thinking (Dante and Eliot, Pasternak and Valéry); on the interlocking of words and images (Eliot and Tynanov’s account of Pasternak in 1924); on surprise, shock, and the limitations of novelty (Eliot, Lorca and Pasternak); on development in middle age or in late life (Pasternak and Eliot’s saying that ‘a man who is capable of experience finds himself in a different world in every decade of his life’); on the devotional and the meditative (Pasternak and *Ash-Wednesday* and *Four Quartets*); on faith and privacy, the mysteriously personal image (‘Journey of the Magi’ and Pasternak’s ‘The Twelve’); on what it was, for Pasternak, that Dante and Shakespeare (in Eliot’s terms) divide the modern world: on all these matters and many more, Gifford’s thinking is appreciative not only of Pasternak but of the invaluable aid that Eliot, as poet and as critic, can bring to the criticism of any poet of greatness.

To this dividing of the modern world, Gifford often recurred, but never with the entire concurrence that would be not so much self-abnegation as abdication. In his essay (*Stanford Slavic Studies*, 4, 1992) on Mandelstam’s *Conversation about Dante*, he writes: ‘the famous declaration by Eliot, “Dante and Shakespeare divide the modern world between them; there is no third,” calls for a rider: the impact of Dante upon Eliot’s own generation has been much the more significant’.

Mandelstam had no knowledge of this booklet [Eliot's *Dante*, 1929] (whereas Seferis must have read it, when, already translating *The Waste Land*, he too in the mid-1930s found Dante, from whom thenceforth he would never be separated). Eliot, for the benefit of those prepared like himself to attempt the *Commedia* with a prose version facing the Italian text, is much nearer to an academic as is Seferis in his exposition of Dante. An academic, it should at once be added, with flashes of uncommon intuition and the note of authority warranted by his own performance as a practitioner. He also concerns himself very much with Dante as a Christian poet, and with the problem of many readers today, who can respond to the *Commedia* while admitting skepticism or even dismay when they consider his dogmas. For Eliot, the final canto of the *Paradiso* represented the very summit of poetic endeavour. Seferis too finds in this canto the culmination of the *Commedia*.

Gifford had accrued a wealth of poetry, in many languages, his life-long savings and salvations. His allusions to Seferis and Cavafy, to Dante and Pasternak were not—in the sardonic phrase that Leavis bent upon the diction within poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti—large drafts on a merely nominal account. And one of the allegiances that gave coherence to Gifford's thinking and appreciation was to Eliot's sense of where coherence lay. Hence it is that Gifford's mind moves naturally to Eliot when it comes to understanding the poetry of, for instance, Montale. This, as fully as is possible for a native English speaker (a speaker who does not lose only from this fact, for the understanding, albeit less intimate, may be able to glimpse certain things from this very angle). Of Montale's self-description, Gifford says in an address of his, 'An Invitation to Hope' (*Grand Street*, Autumn 1983):

His diction was 'dry' in the sense of being restrained and very accurate; 'deformed' only in the eyes of contemporary readers who were shocked by his literalness—how could he end the poem 'Delta,' so full of passionate longing, with 'the whistle of a tug,' or write of little boys looking out for a stray eel in half-dried-up puddles? When *Ossia di seppia* came out, Croce's famous distinction between 'poetry' and 'non-poetry' made the understanding of Montale's purpose difficult. Yeats complained of T. S. Eliot that 'in describing this life that has lost heart his own art seems grey, cold, dry.' It seems more than the coincidence it must be that Eliot in his 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' should have given prominence to an image recalling Montale's definition of his own style:

The memory throws up high and dry
A crowd of twisted things;
A twisted branch upon the beach . . .

Neither Eliot nor Montale was satisfied to wander perpetually in the desert. Their 'stony' despair was impatient for affirmation; and when such moments became possible—'the infirm glory of the positive hour'—the poetic cripple

(as Montale pretends to define himself) would throw away his crutches and stride into a new and legitimate eloquence.

This of Gifford's has its own new and legitimate eloquence.

Poetry and 'non-poetry': with particular discernment (given that Eliot's relations to the non-poetry that is the novel have often been misrepresented, by me for one), Gifford seized an unexpected pertinence in his discussion of Tolstoy's standing and of what—at a particular historical moment—it may have been up against:

Eliot thought very highly of *Ulysses* which, although obsessively Irish, proclaims by its title that it descends from that main European tradition, grounded in Latinity, which Eliot so greatly esteemed. When he wrote on 'The Unity of European Culture' it did not occur to him that Russia had also its part in a wider European achievement. Eliot's was not the only influential voice in criticism before the Second World War, but he principally formed the critical response of a generation. And that generation, whatever it may have felt about Dostoyevsky, did not seem to regard Tolstoy as having a claim on its attention equal, say, to that of Donne.

* * *

To conclude this tribute, I should like to return to that early book of poems that Henry Gifford came to judge justly albeit severely, *A Summer Mood* (1934): 'For the title the reader is referred to Wordsworth's *Resolution and Independence*, stanza 6.' It will be remembered that stanza 5 ends:

But there may come another day to me—
Solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty.

Stanza 6 continues Wordsworth's thinking about feeling:

My whole life I have lived in pleasant thought,
As if life's business were a summer mood;
As if all needful things would come unsought
To genial faith, still rich in genial good;
But how can he expect that others should
Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all?

Henry Gifford, much-loved, always took heed less for himself than for others, for a family world but then for a further wide world of others, other people, other peoples, other literatures. 'As if life's business were a summer mood'? But the historical horrors that followed upon 1934, and

that ushered in the 1940s and every decade of devastation since then, made it impossible to believe that life's business could be a summer mood. Wordsworth did not become disillusioned, he became unillusioned, and the same is true of the young aspirer who borrowed a phrase from Wordsworth.

It has not, blessedly, proved impossible to *hope* (as against fantasising) that life's business might be a summer's mood, but even the hope will have to reconcile itself to being a distant one. Such a hope, a Hope against Hope (Henry Gifford had the greatest respect for, and gratitude to, Nadezhda Mandelstam's great memoir), is alive and well in the eloquent closing words—the more eloquent because of their personal modesty—of *Poetry in a Divided World*:

A real comfort can be derived from the fact that in the twentieth century its greatest poets have not failed in courage or conviction. The harshness of the times has concentrated their minds on far more than a personal predicament. They have been able to prove to themselves and to their audience that the tradition of poetry is indestructible. Through its peculiar concern with the interrelation of words, it has been able to explore ambiguities so as not to frustrate but to deepen communication. It has kept alive in extremity the individual conscience, the notion of freedom in play, and, more strangely perhaps, the persistence of joy.

Only when one reads, for example, how the friends of Mandelstam and Akhmatova risked their own lives to take custody of a few scraps of verse, is it possible to realise fully what poetry can mean. If the poetic word were to be silenced, despotism and emptiness would rule everywhere. The experience of more than one generation shows it will not be silenced.

The rest is not silence.

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