

MY EDUCATION, PART II*

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ART CRITICISM

My art criticism for A. R. Orage's *The New Age* reintroduced me to the world in which I had been brought up, and as a matter of course I had to attend most of the private views of pictures and sculpture in London. As a conscientious art critic, I had gradually come to feel the necessity of reaching definite conclusions concerning what I believed to be the essentials of quality in the graphic and plastic arts. Hating the anarchy that prevailed in this sphere, which ever since my school-days had struck me as not only bewildering but also and above all as discouraging to all young aspirants striving to attain to a high standard of performance in art, I had for many years tried to arrive at some sort of canon of taste, or at any rate at an approximation thereto. For I felt that even if such a personal canon could never give my judgments universal validity (an impossible ideal in matters of taste, as I well knew), it could at least serve to lend them consistency—i.e., make them conform to reasoned and well-defined principles which could be appealed to if they were challenged.

As I hope to show in the chapter dealing with my life work, I was from the start suspicious of the doctrines held by the art school led by Whistler, the methods of which were influenced by the plausible trumpery and fallacious views expressed in his famous *Ten O'Clock*¹ and especially in his letter to *The World*.²

For reasons which I have since made abundantly clear in my Introduction to *The Letters of a Post-Impressionist*,³ in the later chapters of my

* Selections from Anthony M. Ludovici, *Confessions of an Anti-Feminist: The Autobiography of Anthony M. Ludovici*, ed. John V. Day (Atlanta: Counter-Currents, forthcoming), ch. 4, "My Education, Part II." Unless otherwise indicated, all notes are by Ludovici. John V. Day's notes are marked JVD, and additional notes are marked TOQ. The section headings were added by TOQ.

¹ 1885.

² May 22, 1878.

³ *The Letters of a Post-Impressionist: Being the Familiar Correspondence of Vincent Van Gogh*, ed. and trans. Anthony M. Ludovici (London: Constable, 1912; Boston: Hough-

Personal Reminiscences of Auguste Rodin,⁴ and particularly in an article contributed to the *Contemporary Review*,⁵ I felt there was something radically specious and irrational in Whistler's reiterated claim that in art "the subject does not matter," and I foresaw with prophetic clarity all the mischief to which such a doctrine must inevitably lead. It seemed to me that any art movement animated by such a principle must culminate in abuses of all kinds and in the degradation of the graphic and plastic artist's role. From being by tradition the pictorial or sculptural perpetuation or enshrinement of an "état d'âme"⁶ inspired in a peculiarly sensitive and gifted observer by some aspect of life, an enshrinement supplying common men with an interpretation of life raised to a key unattainable by their own unaided contemplation and therefore a new revelation of beauty or grandeur, the work of artists who followed Whistler's shallow ruling and obsessive insistence on the supreme importance of "arrangement" and "composition" (*lisez*: "pattern") was, at a stroke, made to rank with that of a mosaicist, or a wallpaper- or carpet-designer. From being a means of exalting and intensifying his fellow-men's joy and exhilaration over some selected facet of the natural world, the so-called artist was demoted to a mere kaleidoscopist, a mere juxtapositor of varicolored patches. For whether or not we choose to warn our generation against the charlatanry, humbug, and fraud which such degraded art forms may promote among the less scrupulous art-aspirant of every generation, let alone the less highly endowed and less competent, the fact remains that no process of reasoning could justify us in setting the skill, gifts, and technical mastery necessary for the designer of a patchwork quilt on the same level with those of the artist who enshrines for us ordinary folk his exceptionally vital, penetrating, and tasteful interpretation of some aspect or feature of the world about us. When we appreciate the revelatory quality of such an artist's products and how they transcend our own impressions of the world about us, we immediately understand that no mere "arrangements" and "patterns" can compete with them for quality and enchantment.

On this account I could never see how anyone, after examining

ton Mifflin, 1913).

⁴ Anthony M. Ludovici, *Personal Reminiscences of Auguste Rodin* (London: John Murray, 1926; Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1926).

⁵ "Confusion in the arts," *The Contemporary Review* 192 (1957): 106-10—JVD.

⁶ Mood—JVD.

Whistler's shallow, tawdry, and heretical dicta on art, could fail to dread their inevitable and dangerous consequences. Nor at all events does their ultimate logical conclusion in the production of what the modern world now recognizes as "abstract art" do aught but confirm and justify the suspicion and fear with which they first inspired me.

Thus, very early in my work as an art critic I was aware of the dangers attending the adoption of Whistler's corrupt teaching, for, accepting as I did Goethe's view that the subjectivity which abounds in all spheres today is a sign of degeneracy, I deplored any aesthetic doctrine which was bound to foster subjective forms of artistic expression having little meaning except to the artist himself and bearing no relation to any objective reality.

Meanwhile, I read a great number of treatises, both on aesthetics and the history of art, and thus became acquainted with the views of many of the leading art historians and philosophers (including Hegel) who had helped to mould European standards of taste. But although these studies brought me no nearer to a valid aesthetic canon, they widened my view of the problems and introduced me to the more important key thinkers on the subject of art. Through them, for instance, I came across the essential contributions made to my subject by Ananda Coomaraswamy and had the advantage of meeting this gifted Oriental aesthete and of discussing with him some of the most burning questions relating to art and art criticism.

THE ENGLISH MISTERY

The years immediately preceding World War I therefore covered a period of social contacts which, apart from those made through the English Mistery after 1930, were perhaps wider and more varied than I was ever to enjoy again, for, besides the Nietzsche group to which I belonged, I was more or less prominently associated with the *New Age* clique, and thanks to my articles and public lectures I had become acquainted with a number of societies and movements, among whose members I found many supporters. Of the various circles in question, I might mention above all the Sesame Club, many of whose members remained my friends until their death. I refer to such people as the Waggets, the Hunts, and the Cosways.

In this traffic with my fellow-men I gradually learnt, albeit imperfectly, the art, if not the science, of human intercourse. That is to say, I learnt above all the importance of treading cautiously, of acquiring the

behavior which makes for a good mixer—a role for which I was from the start miserably endowed—and of avoiding the dire perils of too hasty speech. For, as Fontenelle so aptly remarked, “Il y a peu de choses aussi difficiles et aussi dangereuses que le commerce des hommes.”⁷ Not that I always succeeded! On the contrary, I can think of many a contretemps and setback in my life which I owed to words imprudently uttered and, as I imagined at the time, spoken safely and in confidence to a trusted relative or friend.

Much later on, when through the small stir caused in political circles by my *Defence of Aristocracy*, *A Defence of Conservatism*, and *The False Assumptions of ‘Democracy’* I became enrolled as a leading member of the English Mistry, a political organization of the extreme Right, I came into almost daily contact with an even wider circle of men of all classes, among whom were numbered Conservative peers and Members of Parliament, lawyers, and even scholars. At our dinners we often had foreign ambassadors, diplomats, and sometimes even members of the Royal Family as guests, and as the speeches made on these occasions were never reported—the press being rigorously excluded from all our meetings—and as in other respects a certain air of mystery hung over both our aims and our proceedings, our group contrived during the period of its existence in full strength (i.e., from 1930 to about 1937) to attract a good deal of notice and to provoke considerable curiosity and interest. Nor was this confined to England, for our fame spread abroad, particularly to Germany and Italy, and with consequences which, as far at least as I was concerned, proved of the utmost educative value.

Nevertheless, my position as one of the foremost members of this political society was by no means an easy one, and it was as a Mistry man that I learnt the hardest lessons of my life concerning the “*commerce des hommes*,” an art for which I had few natural gifts and which in the Mistry was rendered all the more difficult because of the position of relative authority which I held by tacit consent under the executive of the organization.

But in any case, whether my political philosophy and my claims to some authority in this field were justified or not, it can never be easy, especially in political circles where the struggle for power is prose-

⁷ “There are few things as difficult but also as dangerous as dealing with men” — JVD.

cuted more nakedly than in any other department of social life, to live in harmony, friendship, and loyalty with a large body of one's fellows; and when, as in modern England, there is in any event a certain tendency to negativism among middle-class people in particular, one has only to be prominent in any group in order to be the target against which most of the criticism and latent misanthropy are directed. And I believe this to be especially true of England, because of the fundamental particularism of the Anglo-Saxon character which, from the moment any party is formed and attracts recruits, gives rise among its members to centrifugal forces that tend to destroy every impulse of solidarity and loyalty. The result is that, instead of presenting with their fellow-members a united front against a common enemy outside, the men composing the average political group concentrate all their energies, not to mention their venom, on discovering reasons and weapons with which to fight and rout one, two, or more of the members of their own group. Indeed, it makes one wonder how a leading politician is ever able to hold any body of supporters together long enough to exert effective power in Parliament.

I suggest that this happens chiefly in England owing to the inveterate particularism of the Anglo-Saxon character. But apparently the French cannot be far behind us in this respect—a fact which may explain the deplorable tendency of French political parties to break up into numerous hostile schisms. At all events, this tendency appears to have been already familiar to de Retz in the seventeenth century, for we find him saying: "On a plus de peine, dans les partis, à vivre avec ceux qui en sont qu'à agir contre ceux qui y sont opposés."⁸

This is certainly true of most political groups in England, and very early in my membership of the English Mistery I began to notice this splitting up of our society into small cliques composed of men who, on the score of some paltry difference, thought it worthwhile to break loose from the main body and thus to weaken and ultimately to destroy it. Invariably, too, this process of disruption was preceded and accompanied by whispering campaigns directed against some other section of the party or one of its members. Meanwhile, of course, the common enemy outside remained not only immune, but usually also utterly forgotten. No wonder an experienced politician like de Retz

⁸ *Mémoires*, 1935 edition, preface. "In political parties, living with those who belong to them is more difficult than taking action against those who oppose them"—JVD.

felt able to say: "Je suis persuadé qu'il faut plus de grandes qualités pour former un bon chef de parti que pour faire un bon empereur de l'univers."⁹

It was certainly this sort of internal canker, coupled with many dubious procedures on the part of the Party's executive, that ultimately brought about the complete dissolution of the English Mystery, and although I retained until the end the support and loyalty of a few members, some of whom are still my friends, I had long been aware of the denigration of both my person and my doctrines which seemed to constitute the favorite pastime of the congenital secessionists in our midst. In fact, so deeply rooted is this habit of disparagement in our Western society that it makes one wonder whether the proverbial love of animals, in England at least, may not be due to the knowledge that dumb animals are incapable of it.

But this unhappy experience was but a grandiose repetition of many such already undergone by me, although on a smaller scale. For among both the early Nietzscheans and the members of the *New Age* group the same inveterate schismatic tendencies prevailed, and my discovery that these tendencies were apparently endemic in England constituted one of the hardest parts of my education in the ways of the world.

CONFLICTS WITH ORAGE

In this respect, one of the bitterest jars I ever had was that which I suffered whilst writing for *The New Age*. I was of course well aware of the existence of factions in the group around A. R. Orage, but it never once occurred to me that my chief himself would ever be capable of siding with any of them against me, one of his own contributors. Yet this is what actually came to pass. But to make the whole incident clear, I must first explain how I innocently provided my enemies with the opportunity of injuring me. Above all, I must in brief outline describe my relationship to Orage.

The letters Orage wrote to me from time to time, many of which may still be found among my papers, in which he makes clear the price he set by some of my contributions, suffice to testify to our cordial relations. This did not, however, mean that we were unaware of fundamental differences of opinion on many matters. For instance, I

⁹ *Op. cit.*, Part I, p. 25. "I believe that it needs greater qualities to make a good party leader than a good emperor of the universe" —JVD.

feel sure that I disappointed Orage by showing insufficient interest in C. H. Douglas's monetary-reform doctrines. Nor did I ever doubt that my pronounced leanings to the Right in politics made it difficult for me to see eye to eye with him on matters of social reform. I never could believe, as many Fabians, including above all Shaw, maintained, that poverty was the major cause of both social discontent and crime. This, a favorite tenet of Marx, always struck me as shallow and heretical. The very fact that both adult and juvenile delinquency has increased rather than diminished under the benevolent institutions of the welfare state has surely confirmed rather than invalidated my point of view. I was therefore never one of the devoted and intimate coterie that used to foregather round Orage's table in the tea-shop opposite Cursitor Street, where policies and programs were hatched. I went there but rarely—certainly not often enough to please our editor—although, of course, he never so much as hinted that my aloofness offended him.

Foremost among the reasons preventing me from wholly sympathizing with his views was my dislike of his boundless catholicity. He seemed to me to throw his editorial net too wide and to be almost dissolute in the diversity and even the incompatibility of the doctrines and policies to which he granted the hospitality of his columns. Nor is it unlikely that I must often have voiced this objection to men who were in a position to repeat it to him. Yet I doubt whether any impartial judge could, after examining the various issues of the *New Age*, help concurring with this criticism. I respected his intellect, but, just as he doubtless deplored my "narrow-mindedness," so I regretted his sprawling sympathies.

GURDJIEFF AND OUSPENSKY

Much later on a serious clash occurred over the Ouspensky-Gurdjieff teaching, for I was quite unable to accept his belief in its indispensability for life mastery, and, strange as it may seem, it was his fanatical faith in these two men that marked not only the end of the *New Age* period but also, as I half-suspected at the time, sowed the seeds of his own premature death. Because, if he had not joined Ouspensky in France at a time of life when the rigorous disciplines Gurdjieff imposed on his disciples constituted a grave danger, it is unlikely that he would have died when and how he did.

I can vividly recall the urgent summons he sent to me in the first

days of March 1922. I was to come to see him in Cursitor Street immediately as he had something of the utmost importance to tell me. This must have been on Wednesday, March the 1st. He said: "Ludovici, drop everything you happen to be doing and join us in the Ouspensky group! You will find it abundantly worth while to give all your time to the study of the way of life Ouspensky undertakes to teach us" — or words to that effect. I pointed out that it would be extremely difficult for me to do what he proposed. I was a married man and had not the means to abandon my work. Although I was prepared to attend Ouspensky's lectures, for I was always anxious to learn, and felt sure Orage was too intelligent and well-informed to be hoaxed by a charlatan, I made it clear that I could not possibly enroll myself as one of Gurdjieff's whole-time *chelas*.¹⁰

As early as March 3rd, 1922 I accordingly went to hear Ouspensky, who was addressing a small and select circle in a private house either in Kensington or Chelsea. I confess I understood very little of what he said and often failed to appreciate the relevance of many of his illustrations. But I could not help admiring his technique as a lecturer. The way he handled his audience and dealt with the ubiquitous and benighted interrupters, who at all such gatherings betray their inattention and stupidity by the futility of their questions, seemed to me, who had so often suffered at the hands of such people, exceedingly impressive. Anybody who by his, or particularly by her, misunderstandings revealed that further attendance on their part would be quite useless was unmercifully snubbed and humiliated, and if such a person protested, as one or two outraged listeners, unused to such rough handling, sometimes did, he or she was invited to withdraw altogether. Indeed, the very first time I heard Ouspensky lecture a female listener was thus summarily fired. This I found most exhilarating.

On March 7th I attended a second lecture and on that occasion actually saw Gurdjieff, who, opulently attired in a magnificent astrakhan overcoat, made his way straight to the front row of the audience and sat down immediately opposite me. (I should explain that presumably, as a friend of Orage and recommended by him, I had been allowed a seat on the platform.)

I cannot say I was favorably impressed by either the person or manner of Ouspensky's master and guru. Rightly or wrongly, I felt

¹⁰ An Anglo-Indian term for a disciple or novice — JVD.

repelled rather than attracted. His air of truculent self-complacency, his unfortunate resemblance to one's image of the typical impresario, and the palpable obviousness, not to say shallowness, of some of his remarks on bodily control and economy of effort destroyed all hope of any rapport between us from the start.

When I now read accounts of him, and see the eminence and achievements of some of the men who took his teaching seriously (Dr. Kenneth Walker, for instance), I appreciate that a sweeping dismissal of him would probably be unjust. But such pronounced initial feelings of antipathy as he inspired in me are difficult to overcome, and as I had meanwhile come to the conclusion that there was no chance of my being able to devote enough time to the teaching in order to benefit from it, I decided to inform Ouspensky and Orage that, to my profound regret, I could not possibly undertake to join them.

Orage was greatly shocked and, like many another whose advice has been rejected, he most probably felt slighted. But I have never for one moment regretted this resolute act of defection. I never pretended to be a dedicated *chela*, or to lead either Ouspensky or Orage to suspect that I was withdrawing from their group because I thought little of the teaching. Indeed, had I done anything of the sort I should have been insincere, because I never professed a proper understanding of Gurdjieff's aims or how he expected to achieve them. Only long afterwards, when I was in a position to judge some of the unmistakable results of the Gurdjieff regime, did I feel entitled knowledgeably to question its value.

Thus, when after his spell at Fontainebleau and the frantic agitation raised by his friends to rescue him from the labors of the life there, and when after the conclusion of his activities in America, he at last returned to London and started the *New English Weekly*, I was among those who were invited to meet him and to learn about his future plans. I decided to go and thus had the opportunity of observing the marked changes that had come over his appearance since I had last seen him. The deterioration in his physical condition seemed to me conspicuous, and I felt I had every reason to congratulate myself on having escaped the rigors of Gurdjieff's training camp. What made me all the more confident of the justice of this conclusion was the fact that meanwhile—i.e., during the years of Orage's absence from England—I also had undergone a thorough course of physical rehabilitation, or rather normalization, which had not only greatly improved my condition but had also

supplied me with valuable criteria for knowledgeably assessing the physical status of my fellow-men. Instead of my judgments in this sphere being, as they had been in the past, chiefly guesswork and matters of opinion, I was now equipped to give at least valid reasons for classing a fellow-being as either able or unable to maintain his sound condition if he enjoyed such a blessing, or to improve his condition if it was faulty. This was not an assessment in the medical sense, which of course I was quite unqualified to attempt, but rather an estimate of a man's chances of keeping sound if soundness and health were already present. And I owed the knowledge for such judgments to the thorough schooling in the correct use of the body which I had undergone at F. M. Alexander's teaching centre in Westminster. Indeed, I may truthfully claim that this course of training in conscious control proved to be the principal turning-point in my life and, above all, in my education. Nor do I believe that anyone who has had the good fortune to leave Alexander's hands fully conditioned, as I ultimately became, to apply his methods in every kind of bodily activity, throughout every day of the year, would charge me with exaggeration or overstatement in making the claim I have made about his teaching. From the year 1925, when I first became his pupil, to the present day, I have not ceased to rejoice in the good fortune which led me to him. It resulted in my being as it were "born again" and, what is more, enriched me with an armory of new standards by means of which, henceforth, I could with substantial authority assess the psychophysical condition of my fellows, together with their chances of preserving any health they happened to enjoy.

Now, it was when I was thus equipped that I renewed my acquaintance with Orage, and I confess that I was genuinely shocked by the changes I noted in his appearance. These changes were probably also observed by others, but are unlikely to have been given the significance which I felt justified in giving them. For one thing, I could not help noticing how conspicuously he had begun to stoop and how rounded his back had become, and, remembering Alexander's shrewd adage that "it is the stoop that brings on the infirmities of old age, and not vice versa," I naturally felt alarmed at his appearance. His bodily coordination also struck me as in every respect what Alexander called "villainous," and I did not need more to convince me that, no matter what its other merits may have been, Gurdjieff's regimen could hardly have included conscious control, in Alexander's sense, as one of its disciplines. When, therefore, not long after the inauguration of *The*

New English Weekly, Orage was reported to have died suddenly of a heart attack, I was not in the least surprised. His death at the comparatively early age of sixty-one occurred, I believe, on the night of November 3–4, 1934, when by a strange coincidence he and I both made our first BBC broadcast, and it was on returning home in the evening of the 3rd that he retired to bed, never to rise again.

THE GREAT WAR

My next and perhaps most profitable discoveries about the nature and ways of men, and the school in which, I may say, I almost finished my education (for I had yet another rich crop of lessons to learn after World War II), were both the gift of that admirable monarch, Kaiser Wilhelm II, to whom I now belatedly tender my most grateful thanks. Because all the novel and immensely valuable experiences I had as an army officer from October 1914 to the autumn of 1919, including the priceless privilege of being able to witness at first-hand at least one infinitely minute facet of the prodigious world-tragedy that was to cut European history in two, were due entirely to this gifted and picturesque ruler—that is, of course, if his responsibility for World War I was as great as many Allied statesmen, above all Lloyd George, believed.

Nor can I now dare to think what would have been my loss, both in the knowledge of military life, the understanding of men, the experience of actual warfare, and insight into at least the gunner's side of World War I, had I, owing to a more rational and less childish handling of the world crisis of July 1914 by Western statesmen, been deprived of my five years in uniform.

Even in my wildest dreams I had never imagined myself a soldier; nor, except for my passion for Napoleon, had I ever been much interested in the military life. Whenever, in my life at home, I had displayed a fastidiousness and fussy concern about the cleanliness of table implements and utensils which struck my family as obsessive, my mother had always exclaimed: "Dieu sait mon pauvre ami ce que tu aurais fait si tu avais été soldat!"¹¹ But I accepted the rebuke with complete equanimity, feeling certain that the chances of my squeamishness ever being put to a military test were too remote to cause me any concern. When, therefore, war broke out in August 1914, and I found myself seriously

¹¹ "God knows what you would do, my dear friend, if you'd been a soldier!" — JVD.

thinking of offering my services to the nation, it was in complete ignorance of what I was letting myself in for, and without any vainglorious hopes of distinguishing myself as a warrior or hero. Had my motives been narrowly scrutinized, they would have revealed that what chiefly actuated me when I went to Whitehall on September 7th, 1914 to offer myself to the military authorities was in the first place sheer curiosity, and secondly a feeling of utter despair and despondency.

Curiosity was certainly a paramount factor. Distrusting, as I had learnt to do, the testimony of others, especially about any complex problem or event, I did not expect to obtain any trustworthy information about World War I, or about warfare in general, unless I witnessed both at first-hand. As, therefore, the circumstances presented me with a unique chance of doing this, it seemed to me foolish not to take it. Secondly, I say, I was at the time feeling deeply depressed and listless. My mother had died in the previous May, and I really did not much care what happened to me. What aggravated my feelings of despair was that they were accompanied by a persistent sense of guilt. Try as I might, I could not cease from rehearsing with harrowing detail the many scenes in which, during the thirty-two years of our life together, I had behaved unkindly or disrespectfully. The many services I had performed for her, and the precious memories of innumerable happy experiences in which I had played no shameful role, seemed forgotten beyond recall. It may be that such self-reproaches invariably torment the survivor of a couple that has long been deeply attached, but this does not make them more easy to bear.

Be this as it may, it was certainly with no patriotic ardor or public-spirited zeal that on September 7th I visited the Recruiting Office in Whitehall, and on September 9th, after being stripped, sounded, and generally overhauled, I was, at 12 pm precisely, pronounced "medically fit." From there I was driven with six other fellows to the Civil Service Examination Centre at Burlington House, where at 1 pm an official informed us that, as the examiner could see only two of us before lunch, he would like us to toss for admission. I was one of the two to win and, as I had every reason to expect, passed the French examination without a hitch. In the examination for German, I soon became aware of the fact that my examiner knew less German than I did, and to my astonishment I actually had to suggest a few of his participles to him when at the end of a sentence he hesitated and fumbled for a word. Incidentally, this was the first jolt my illusions about British army efficiency re-

ceived. It was soon to be followed by many more serious ones.

Having passed the German examination, I was told that I should now require for my commission the recommendation of three men of substance who would vouch for my trustworthiness, and that I must return on the following morning with their testimonials.

Mr. Bowlby, an old friend in Erlanger's Bank; our family GP, Dr. James Bryce; and Mr. Baker, an accountant in the Duke of Portland's estate office, supplied me with the letters of recommendation I required. But it was only by chance that I found them accessible, for the afternoon of September 9th was all the time I had to collect the vouchers I needed, and as I rushed round London I not unnaturally found many friends out. I duly submitted the letters to the authorities next day, but there still appeared to be much hesitation about enrolling me in the Interpreter Corps—the unit I chose, not only because I possessed the necessary qualifications for it, but also because it was the surest means of being sent overseas without delay. Apparently, they did not like the sound of Nietzsche's name and still less my connection with him. Not that they knew anything about him, but they could not believe that anyone with such a name, and anyone who had translated his works, could possibly be up to any good. However, they very soon overcame their scruples, and I subsequently learnt that they were more or less compelled to do so, as their attempt to recruit interpreters exclusively from university undergraduates had, owing to these young men's deplorable ignorance of the languages they professed to understand, made it necessary to turn to less academic strata of the population. This, however, did not by any means signify that all the men they ultimately recruited were competent linguists, for, as I soon found out when the batch to which I belonged reached the Continent, only a very few had what I should have regarded as a good knowledge of French, still fewer knew enough German to be of use, and, out of the score or so which formed our batch, only two—myself and another fellow—were able without difficulty to make themselves understood by, and to understand, the French telephone operators at St. Omer when transmitting messages from the General or Field Officers to whom they had been attached. This surprised me very much, for accustomed though I was in private life to preposterously bogus claims to proficiency in some foreign language, I hardly expected to meet with them in members of a unit specially selected and tested for the job of interpreting. It occurred to me at the time that what the War

Office examiners should have done was to converse with the examinees on the telephone — a most drastic test! — and as a matter of fact, as I discovered on the outbreak of World War II, this was the practice ultimately adopted.

When, early in October, our batch embarked at Folkestone for Ostend, each of us was first allotted a batman, and we gathered that we should not be attached to any unit before we reached the Continent. We stayed in Ostend about ten days, and those of us who were not allotted to any cavalry or infantry formation on its way to the Front were attached to some old “dug-out” who was performing an administrative function in the port. I, for instance, became the assistant to the Military Landing Officer, a charming old Scots major called Ayrton, whose business it was to see to the landing of the 7th Division. As, however, I have in *The Nineteenth Century* magazine described all the essentials of my association with this excellent officer, together with the details concerning my first impressions of the old army veteran and the hair-raising experiences I had of hardly credible mismanagement on the part of the departments in Whitehall responsible for the landing of the 7th Division on the Continent, I need not expatiate at any length on these matters.¹² The lack of foresight in providing for the disembarkation of the cavalry, for instance, greatly shocked my chief, Major Ayrton, and it was in hastily improvising the means of making good such errors on the part of the General Staff that I was able, as my *Nineteenth Century* article shows, to be of particular help to him.

Only when Ostend was ultimately evacuated, and we all drifted along the coast to le Havre, was I given a permanent billet. But, to my regret, this did not mean that I was attached to any unit moving up to the Front, but only my appointment as third officer in charge of prisoners of war. I owed this job to my knowledge of German, but it proved much more interesting and pleasant than I expected. My chief, Colonel Cooper, CMG, was a charming old “dug-out” and his second-in-command, Captain W. C. Hunter, son of Sir William Hunter of the *Gazetteer of India*, remained a close friend of mine until his death shortly before the outbreak of World War II. They were both delightful people to get on with. Colonel Cooper, however, soon left us, and Captain Hunter became CO. We had charge of everything connected with

¹² “The Return of the Veteran,” *The Nineteenth Century and After* 91 (1922): 349–64—JVD.

prisoners of war—censoring their letters home, extracting any useful information contained in their letters from home, meeting batches of them arriving from the Front, sorting and checking the personal effects of German dead and wounded, and wherever possible identifying the owners of the articles so as to restore them to the relatives concerned. We also had to superintend the camps in which POWs were temporarily accommodated before being dispatched to England or allotted as working parties to various sectors of the Front.

I was often much impressed by the honesty shown by the front-line men responsible for collecting and forwarding the belongings of German dead and wounded. It was not uncommon to find as much as ten pounds in gold (in German currency) among the articles sent to us, not to mention banknotes, watches, and other valuables. Evidently the work of collecting these belongings must have been done under the supervision of officers or senior NCOs. When, however, in 1916 I was transferred to a combatant unit, and my battery was close enough to the front line for me to observe what often happened there, I certainly saw another side of the picture. For, although the practice was quite rightly forbidden and severely frowned upon by the high command, there is no doubt that a good deal of rifling of German dead bodies by our troops occurred with the object of securing what were euphemistically called "war souvenirs." One may be sure that these illicit practices took place on the German side as well, and after the war, in thousands of homes in both England and Germany, there must have been many valuable articles which were thus illegitimately obtained.

I was then approaching the end of my most inadequate training as a gunner—at least, according to one of our favorite instructors, Lieutenant W. Kennard (a promoted NCO of the regular army), I understood it to be so, for he was always telling us that he could not answer for what we Kitchener gunners would be up to when once the war of position became a war of movement. Be this as it may, in a week or two I found that I was one of a batch to be sent overseas, and there followed all the adventures and vicissitudes which in my novel, *The Taming of Don Juan*,¹³ are related of the hero, Gilbert Milburn. As there can be no point in burdening these pages with details already recorded in Chapters 12, 13, and 14 of the novel in question, the reader who wishes to know something of my life at the Front, and about the First World War as I

¹³ Anthony M. Ludovici, *The Taming of Don Juan* (London: Hutchinson, 1924).

saw it, need but refer to what is recorded of these matters in the book I have mentioned. A small contribution to the subject will also be found in *The Nineteenth Century* magazine for April 1921, in the article entitled "The British War-Horse on the Somme."¹⁴ In both of these sources, however, the reader may rest assured that all I have related about Gilbert Milburn's war career, as also about the horse in war—i.e., from the rifling of Gilbert's kit by the rascally camp orderlies of le Havre, down to the monstrous conduct of certain hospital nurses in charge of gas-gangrene cases, and the sharp rebuke Gilbert administered to a proudly bereaved father on a train from Harwich to London—is all based upon actual facts drawn from my own experiences during the period 1914 to 1916.

Looking back on the five years I spent as a junior officer in the British army, I think I can truly say that on the whole it was, in addition to its educational value, an edifying and enjoyable experience. It is easy to disparage the military man, as de Quincey does, for instance, and during the First World War it was customary to speak slightly of the old brigadiers, colonels, and majors whom everybody knew as "dug-outs." But I must confess that my close association with scores of these old officers, and with the younger men of the regular army, convinced me that in no other class of specialists in our modern world could one ever hope to meet with such a high percentage of men of good breeding, decent, chivalrous, and honorable. Most of them impressed me with the soberness of their judgments, the general modesty of their pretensions, and the marked self-discipline of their demeanor and carriage. They seemed to me to display much more composure and less awkwardness and self-consciousness than their contemporaries in other callings, and I often wondered whether perhaps their often irresistible charm and natural dignity—both of which qualities distinguished them sharply from the rest of the population, high and low—were not probably due chiefly to the years of unremitting discipline to which they had been subjected. In a world from which discipline has almost entirely vanished, it was exhilarating to become associated with a class of men habituated to self-control and whose whole life and temperament had undergone the salutary influence of constant discipline.

¹⁴ Anthony M. Ludovici, "The British War-Horse on the Somme," *The Nineteenth Century and After* 89 (1921): 727-39—TOQ.

Ruskin evidently felt much the same as I do about this matter, for, referring to his association at Woolwich with a certain Major Matson, he says: "Such calm type of truth, gentleness, and simplicity, as I have myself found in soldiers and sailors only, and so admirable to me that I have never been able since these Woolwich times, to gather myself up against the national guilt of war, seeing that such men were made by the discipline of it."¹⁵

Thus, even in his day, over a century ago, a shrewd observer of mankind was able to discern the charm and dignity of a class of men in England who, by virtue of their disciplined characters, stood prominently and advantageously to the fore, against the background of the more or less undisciplined multitude, high and low, composing the bulk of the population. What would he feel about the matter now?

One other question connected with the soldier's duties and character occurs to me as I write, and it relates to the precise value we are to attach to the virtue known as bravery. It is easy to be cynical about this and, by pointing to the prevalence of this virtue among the lower animals and even among farmyard hens, to show what a primitive commonplace quality it is. De Quincey, for instance, speaking of Henri Quatre, says: "He had that sort of military courage which was and is more common than weeds."¹⁶

Or, again, it is easy to recognize the prominent role vanity plays in making even a poltroon simulate courage, and to ascribe all bravery to this source. Thus Rousseau says of bravery: "C'est la seule vanité qui nous rend téméraires; on ne l'est point quand on est vu de personne."¹⁷ Whilst Voltaire, in his *Siècle de Louis XIV*, says: "Quiconque a beaucoup de témoins de sa mort meurt toujours avec courage."¹⁸

I'm afraid I must confess that the part I had to play as a gunner officer in World War I taught me that my courage is precisely of this kind—a fact disclosed to me during the Somme offensive of 1916. Among the duties of an artillery subaltern on a static front, such as ours was for weeks at a time, was that of going forward to the front-

¹⁵ *Praeterita*, 1885–1889, Volume II, Chapter 8. For a further eulogy of the soldier by Ruskin, see *Unto this Last*, 1862, Essay I.

¹⁶ *Posthumous Works*, XVI: *Suspira Profundis*.

¹⁷ *Émile*, Book II. "Foolhardiness is the result of vanity; we are not rash when no one is looking" –JVD.

¹⁸ Chapter 27. "Whoever has many witnesses of his death always dies with courage" –JVD.

line trenches accompanied by two signalers and, with the help of either a periscope or field glasses, to direct the fire from his battery in the rear upon targets which his proximity to the enemy lines enabled him to pick out. The routine orders prescribed the use of the periscope for this work, for, although we all wore steel helmets, the accuracy of the German sharpshooters in the opposite trenches was so good that to expose one's head above the front-line trench often meant instant death.

All of us were well aware of this. Yet it was customary, if not *de rigueur*, at least in my brigade, to scorn the use of the periscope and to scan the German Front with field glasses. When, therefore, at intervals of a few days it came to my turn to perform this duty, I found myself standing on the duckboards of the front-line trench with my signalers crouching safely beside me, watching me closely so as to pick up quickly and transmit any message I might give them. But although on these occasions I was always stiff with fear, I found it impossible to prevail upon myself to use the periscope. Like my brother-officers, I invariably looked across at the enemy trenches through the battery field glasses. I longed to do otherwise, but with those four eyes observing me I couldn't. I was luckier than most, for I ultimately survived the war. Yet I was never for a moment deceived about the motives prompting me to behave in this apparently courageous manner. I knew it was due to pure vanity. I could not let my signalers think me less careless of my life than the subalterns they accompanied on other occasions.

As far as I was concerned, Rousseau and Voltaire were right, and when during World War II, I read Captain Liddell Hart's *Thoughts on War*,¹⁹ I thought both Frenchmen abundantly confirmed, for in that book Liddell Hart, a recognized authority on military life and the science of warfare, says: "Man does not dare to show himself a coward under the eyes of the comrades with whom he shares his duty and his recreation. . . . It is a constant admission from the lips of brave soldiers that they were urged on by the fear of showing fear, of being thought afraid."

Nevertheless, my knowledge of a number of regular army men I came across during World War I has convinced me that the statements

¹⁹ Liddell Hart, *Thoughts on War* (London: Faber & Faber, 1944), especially 86 and 87.

I have quoted from Rousseau, Voltaire, and Liddell Hart do not contain the whole truth. The men I am thinking of possessed a kind of bravery completely divorced from all motives of vanity. They were congenitally fearless. Whether or not they were being observed, the thought of the dangers they were running never entered into their calculations. I am far from suggesting that this kind of lion-hearted courage is more common than that which is prompted by self-esteem alone. But I am satisfied that martial valor is by no means always the contemptible, secondary, and reactive virtue that Rousseau, Voltaire, de Quincey, and Captain Liddell Hart declare it to be.

*Anthony Mario Ludovici (1882–1971) authored nearly forty books, including eight novels, and hundreds of articles, essays, and reviews setting forth his views on metaphysics, religion, ethics, politics, economics, the sexes, health, eugenics, art, modern culture, and current events. An excellent sampling of his writings is **The Lost Philosopher: The Best of Anthony M. Ludovici**, ed. John V. Day (Berkeley, Cal.: Educational Translation & Scholarship Foundation, 2003). See also Day's online archive of Ludovici's writings: www.anthonymyludovici.com.*