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A.J. CRONIN.

A DOCTOR INTO LIFELONG WRITER

Fusco A.

Reality and fiction might be strictly coexistent in the narrative world. The author of this article, after a deep reading of A.J. Cronin's novels, has tried to find out the right key to penetrate into the novelist's intricate world. After many interrogatives on A.J. Cronin both as a man and writer, the author, finally, has been able to grasp from the pages of the novelist, the suffering of a man who has made of his romance the history of his own life.

Keywords: A.J. Cronin, dream, reality, conflict, truth, guilt, ambiguity, confession, freedom, self-consciousness.

А.ДЖ. КРОНИН.

ДОКТОР И В ТЕЧЕНИЕ ВСЕЙ ЖИЗНИ ПИСАТЕЛЬ

Фуско А.

Реальность и вымысел могут тесно сосуществовать в мире произведений. После глубокого прочтения романов Арчибальда Дж. Кронина автор статьи пытается найти верный ключ к запутанному миру, созданному писателем. После длительного исследования Арчибальда Дж. Кронина как человека и как писателя, автор статьи, в конце концов, сумел уловить на страницах произведений писателя образ человека, страдающего и создающего из романа историю своей собственной жизни.

Ключевые слова: А.Дж. Кронин, места, реальность, конфликт, правда, вина, двусмысленность, исповедь, свобода, само-сознание.

Cronin's life and novels are characterized by deep existential *doubts*. The first great question is "Doctor or writer?" He himself gives an answer in an article entitled "Doctor into writer" [q.v.: 1].

“*Hatter Castle*” was his first novel, set up in the 19th century Dumburton, close to his birthplace Cardross. In only four months, he wrote his masterpiece, the concrete realization of a dream lasted for years. The narrow window from his studio with the natural beautiful scene and the support of his family were the ideal place to let him follow his natural inspiration.

“It was a pleasant view through that narrow window. A long green field ran down to a bay of the loch. There was movement . Six cows, couched in the shadow of a hawthorn hedge ruminated; an old goat with an arresting beard tinkled his bell in search, I thought, of dandelions; a yellow butterfly hovered indecisively above a scarlet spurt of fuchsia; some white hens pattered about, liable to sudden flusters and retreats, some more majestic fowls strutted in sudden excitements and pursuits” [2, p. 251].

Such romantic source of inspiration was present in a turbulent spirit wrapped by his *doubts*, his “lack of confidence” in himself as a writer. Nevertheless, he got on with his work with such *vehemence*, that he felt a certain “relief”, “freedom” to enjoy life when he achieved his target. He wrote in the same article:

“I had done it; in three months I had written a novel and so a sense of achievement... with a glorious feeling of freedom, I began to row, to fish, to climb the mountains...”

In another article entitled “*The stars look down*” [7], Cronin talked about a “force”, a “despairing pressure of dire necessity” that accompanied him as a novelist. He even defined his *adventure as a writer* a “tribulation”. He enjoyed following his creative genius and “the fury of his masterpiece”, sitting “on easy chair before the fire”, but he was in trouble and desperate in transferring what was in his mind on the paper. He called his desk “infernal”. He was well aware that he was “a very difficult person to live with” because he was an intolerant and impatient person when he was writing. Once again, he expressed “his sense of liberation” when he reached the end of the story. Cronin used *his pen* as an instrument to get rid of all his anxieties, fears, dissatisfactions doubts. Writing a novel was for him “exhausting” but the only way to

find himself and be free to enjoy life. He concluded the article above reporting his emotions after a long “exhausting” work:

“The time was about 1 a.m. It was still and dewy night. I went upon the terrace and stood, rather dizzily, gazing upwards. The sky was a great soft velvet canopy, milky with myriads of stars. To my slightly, feverish fancy the stars seemed like little shining eyes ... The stars look down... I must take this the title of the book”.

The metaphor above colored by the beauty of natural elements and appropriate adjectives, illustrate the sublime status of equilibrium reached by such a turbulent spirit through his writings. The narrative world he created was the result of a hard process of suffering and despair towards a peaceful final purification. His heroes are the personification of himself from his hard childhood to young Archibald grown up as a doctor and writer with all his ideals and interrogatives of maturity age. His heroes are men who have to struggle to achieve their goals and the author’s interest is particularly focused in reporting their crucial moments of their battle between *good* and *evil*, *their ego* and *alter ego*, the tragic duality of personality.

Never give up: the key words

Mary in “*Hatter’s Castle*” is the symbol of freedom against tyranny and social injustice. She is really a heroine, who never renounces to her ideals, her *motto* is: “Mary never knows defeat” [4, p. 89]. She will go on in her fight at all cost. She will be desperately alone and homeless but proud of her freedom.

David, in “*The stars look Down*”, represents the hero who wants to save the world from social injustices. He will not succeed in his social project and will go back working in a mine, but he will never lose his faith in a better future:

“Courage came to him from the thought. Perhaps one day would rise from the pit, one day, perhaps, help plodding army towards a new freedom. Instinctively he lifted his head” [7, p. 506].

He represents the hope for the future generation, the light that shines in the darkness of life.

Father Francesco, in “*The Keys of Kingdom*”, struggles to build a world where brotherhood triumphs instead of cruelty and hate. He will never give up in front of

obstacles or difficulties: “*I’ll never give up*” is the spirit that will guide his humanitarian mission forever:

“...I have no wish to retire” [6, p. 10].

He will devote all his life to God who is not far away from the Earth:

“Don’t think heaven is in the sky...it’s in the hallow of your hand...it’s everywhere and anywhere” [6, p. 10].

Francesco expresses the author’s faith in a God who lives in our world “The image of God is in all mankind” [2, p. 286].

Mary, David, Father Francesco are the personification of Cronin’s belief in a possible human regeneration in spite of all *evils* that triumph in the world.

“Despite the cruelty which men inflict upon each other, despite the indifference and confusion, the threats of war and open hostility, the destroying and dispersing which afflict the nations, I have an inextinguishable hope in the moral regeneration of the people of the earth” [2, p. 286].

“Never give up” were the *key words* that resounded as a message of hopes for the readers of an Age that had lost its faith in Science and Marxism to build a better world, after the deep crisis of the two world wars.

Cronin’s novels can be read by the new generation with the same confident spirit in a possible better world.

The Judas tree (1961): a human tragedy

Cronin was a great interpreter not only of social conflicts but also of “inner conflicts” that interest human beings as individuals. “*The Judas tree*” can be considered his masterpiece as a psychological novel created after a long process of maturity both as a man and as writer.

David Moray’s existence is marked by a hard childhood, loss of his parents and all his sacrifices to get his medical degree. His run towards “his career” and “success”, only “objectives” [5, p. 44] of his life, brings him to torture himself in the meanders of his conscience. Four women are on the way of a persistent *dual life* that accompany his life. Mary, his first love opens the way to a suffered debate between

his *scruples* and his wish for money together with his *desire* for another woman Doris.

His second love represents a menace to his integrity. Doris will break the “romance” between Doctor Moray and his beloved Mary. After many years he would have realized that he had failed: he was not happy, even though “he was rich, far richer” [5, p. 12] than he had wished.

So, at the age of 55, he retires in Switzerland, a natural paradise, to rebuild his life. Once again, David is assaulted by his *existential* doubts and thinks he can find the solution to his inner conflicts *outside*, exactly going back to Mary, his first love. Unfortunately, he will find out that a “romantic recreation of the past” was not possible. Unwrapped in a status of great desperation, David finds another woman who would give a sense to his desperate life: Kathy.

She will be the instrument of his “soul’s regeneration”. She is a “liberation”, she represents the way towards “conversion” [5, p. 169]. Nevertheless, she is an *object of desire* and fulfills his need of a sexual relationship but with no sinful implication since David is confident that God would not punish their “pure, unprofaned sex” [5, p. 172]. Once again, the illusion to rebuild his inner *equilibrium* is broken and David is assaulted by doubts. Another woman brings him in the meanders of his tormented conscience: Frida. She had entered into his life after his marriage with Doris, which had been a catastrophic failure. She had become a good friend for a lonely man. Frida’s voice is his own alter ego that brings him in a state of dualism and puts his equilibrium in serious danger.

David is “overpowered”, “dominated” “possessed” [5, p. 205] by a force represented by the woman. She has got the key to solve his doubts. He feels apparently released from a “dark future” [5, p. 205] with Kathy in the prospective of a dangerous mission in Africa, accepting Frida as a wife. Later, David will feel absolutely trapped in a status of “self-disgust” and frustration to be even induced in a condition of “depressing impotence” [5, p. 217] Nevertheless, he will try to come out of his dark tunnel, figuring a romantic end but his childish dream will vanish. He will

see in Kathy's dead eyes the truth: his own image through the mirror of his conscience.

“The instant of illumination when he stared into dead eyes had shattered his self-constructed image. The hollow shell had broken, there was nothing left... nothing. In destroying her, he had destroyed himself” [5, p. 172]. The human drama culminates in a tragedy but the author with his creative genius transfers it in a poetical atmosphere.

“He spent the last night of his life enjoying the natural view of “a faint air stirring, the moon, alive again, drifting from the clouds, a soft mist rising from the lake...” [5, p. 223]. David is wrapped by an “extraordinary calm...the most marvelous sensation he had ever experienced” [5, p. 223].

The sublime status of a joyful tragedy is the final status after a process of self-absolution, the last monologue in his life:

“And now he was talking to himself, in a quiet confidential manner, carefully forming the words: restitution, complete vindication, the court of last appeal-absolving all guilt, restoring his ideal self” [5, p. 223].

A poetical end for a real human tragedy: final punishment or triumph of an ideal self? The author said in his article titled “the stars look down” that the function of the novelist is to tell the truth, but the artist often achieves reality through facts which are incongruous and contradictory [q.v.: 7].

Cronin was a lifelong writer who was always present with his interrogatives, doubts, hopes in his novels, but in “*Desmonde*” [3] he revealed openly himself both as a doctor and writer, that is why “*Desmonde*” can be considered “*The final confession of Doctor Cronin*”.

“Desmonde” (1975): the final confession of Doctor Cronin

Cronin considered all his success as a novelist “the miracle” [3, p. 258] of his life. He had become a lifelong writer and he never practiced again as a doctor, but he never separated from Doctor Cronin. “*Doctor Cronin himself*” became even a character of his novel “*Desmonde*”.

In his old age the young doctor had become not only a successful writer whose popularity had reached Hollywood, but also a man thankful to God for “having a home and sons who loved him” [3, p. 295].

The author opens the door to the readers to let them enter into his own house. Mary, a student of medicine he had met at University, had become a doctor and his wife, a good companion of a life full of troubles and joys. She remained his great love until the final chapter of her dramatic illness. He addresses to her with all his passionate love “You are a daring, darling. And I love you with all my heart...Her lips were soft, passive, tender as a child’s” [3, p. 279]. What tenderness comes from the poetical picture of a *harmless* old woman still beloved by her man! He continues saying, “Before I reached the door she had closed her eyes” [3, p. 279]. Unfortunately, the tragedy was going to get to the crucial point and she would have never greeted him at the door of their house. He would remain in a little house with his old friend-secretary Nan while his “poor” Mary would be kept in a clinic. Cronin, the author of passionate *romances* and *tragedies*, as a man was living his own drama. Doctor Cronin *confesses* his love for Nan openly:

“We looked at one another. I knew that I loved her and she loved me. I had the overwhelming desire to take her in my arms...she smiled faintly. She had seen love in my eyes”.

“Goodbye, dear darling Nan. I touched her cheek lightly with my lips. Then I went upstairs to my room” [3, p. 280].

In a few lines, the author reveals his secret, pure, silent love. In “*The Judas tree*” Willie, a missionary, tells David: “Human beings should not judge one another” [3, p. 174]. In “*Desmonde*” Cronin *wrote* his confession and did not care about hiding *his truth* and being object of human gossip. He wrote in an article at the beginning of his career as a writer: “The function of the novelist is to tell the truth, to represent life *honestly*, not as it should be but as it is” [q.v.: 7].

Certainly, doctor’s Cronin last chapter of his life is buried with himself but, as the heroes of his novels, he had to struggle hardly between his love for two women and his religious faith. He had to repress his “overwhelming” desire for the other

woman who “respects” his love [3, p. 280]. Anyway, he was able to contain his *duality* and find the right equilibrium to escape from a collapse, which would have brought him to the break of his ego as it happens in “*The Judas tree*”. At the end of the novel, Father Seeber gives his blessing to the *new* couple saying:

“Be good, dear girl, and you will both continue to be happy” [3, p. 340]. The Father whispers those words to Nan. It is the feeble voice of Cronin’s conscience, the answer to a lot of interrogatives, doubts, and the happy end after a long troubled research for the truth.

When Father Seeber asks Doctor Cronin “you’ve seen to church...” the answer is “Naturally, Father.” [3, p. 333]. The Father gets to the conclusion “So, you are still keeping faith. The castle is not fallen” [3, p. 333]. A tragedy is avoided in the life of a man thanks to his great faith. Mr. Davies, author of A.J. Cronin’s biography, reports that Cronin confided his thoughts on faith and religion to his son Andrew, as follows:

“I don’t know if it’s true. I just like to believe what I believe” [8, p. 251].

The debate on God’s existence proof has interested philosophers, writers and generally men of great culture but if Becket got to the conclusion that it is impossible to answer the question “Is there a God?”, Cronin has the answer in a faith with no evidence.

In “*Adventures in Two worlds*” he writes: “Even at the Crucifixion it was the Savior’s purpose to leave us in such balanced uncertainty that belief in His divinity still required an effort of faith.” [2, p. 318].

He defines “sublime” the final status in search of God: “It is this voluntary act of recognition which makes faith sublime” [2, p. 319].

He is “convinced” that the only way “to save humanity” is to follow “the teaching of Him who bore to Golgota the burden of all mankind” [2, p. 319].

On the author’s headstone, in the cemetery of La Tour-de-Peliz in Montreaux, there is a simple inscription: “Author of the keys of the kingdom” [8, p. 251].

The best words to honor the memory of a man and writer who transmitted his belief in a universal faith with no creed distinctions:

“Creed is such an accident of birth, of race and antecedents, even of latitude and longitude, that it cannot, surely, be the exclusive determination of our salvation. I, at least, have confidence that any man of goodwill, whether he be Catholic or Calvinist, has full and undiminished opportunity of winning his eternal reward” [2, p. 319].

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