

The Aerial View of Modern Britain: The Airplane as a Vehicle for Idealism and Satire

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IN HER RECENT NOVEL, *The Ice Age* (1977), the popular English writer, Margaret Drabble, employs "an aerial view, a helicopter view of this precious isle," to characterize the condition of contemporary Britain — although the character who has this vision in the novel is not actually in the air at all, let alone in a helicopter, but rather is sitting comfortably in a café, chatting with a group of friends about "the state of the nation."¹ The reason the novelist can employ the aerial view, when her hero is not actually airborne, is simply that the perspective of England from the air has become a conventional device in modern British literature. Consequently, the contemporary author can use the helicopter view as a purely fictional figure in full confidence that the educated reader can recognize the literary convention from which it derives. It is interesting to investigate the origin and development of the aerial view of England in modern British literature.

The aerial view of earth has been an important device for signifying perspective in literature from the time when the Devil took Christ up to a high mountain to show him "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them,"² to the point where Milton's Archangel took Adam up to the highest hill in Paradise, "from whose top / The hemisphere of Earth in clearest ken / Stretched out to the amplest reach of prospect lay."³ This lofty perspective can afford an appreciation of the glories of earth, as it does for the son of God, who is being tempted by them, and for the father of mankind, who has lost them. Or it can provide the very opposite — a perception of the vanity of earth in comparison with

heaven — as it does for Chaucer's Troilus, who looks down on earth from the seventh sphere:

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse
 This litel spot of erthe, that with the se
 Embraced is, and fully gan despise
 This wrecched world, and held al vanite
 To respect of the pleyn felicite
 That is in hevene above.⁴

In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer is echoing the conventional *contemptus mundi topos* of Mediaeval Christian literature which we find in Dante's *Paradiso*, when Beatrice takes the poet up to the heavens to view the "threshing-floor" of earth in perspective:

So with my vision I went traversing
 The seven planets till this globe I saw,
 Whereat I smiled, it seemed so poor a thing.

Highly I rate that judgement that doth low
 Esteem the world; him do I deem upright
 Whose thoughts are fixed on things of greater awe.⁵

We can see from these few familiar examples that the aerial view has been used traditionally in literature either as a device for idealizing earth's glory or as a vehicle for satirizing earthly vanity in comparison with heavenly virtue.

Balloons appealed to the human imagination, for they allowed man to imitate the mountaintop experience in achieving an unprecedented perspective on earth. The first balloon ascents in France in 1783 stimulated the imagination of artists, and many engravers were inspired by the first ascents of Jacques Charles and the Montgolfier brothers to envision future balloon flights to the moon.⁶ One of the first writers in English to respond to the new fancy for "Balloonism" was Horace Walpole, who wrote to a friend in 1783: "Do not wonder that we do not entirely attend to things of earth: Fashion has ascended to a higher element. All our views are directed to the air."⁷ Many a balloonist flew too high, like Icarus, and plummeted to death on earth. Such fatal accidents discouraged followers in flight, but the image of balloon ascent continued to appeal to the artistic imagination. The most familiar vision of the balloon in literature remains Jules Verne's

famous flight of fancy in *Round the World in Eighty Days* (1873).

Twentieth-century technology devised a distinctively modern vantage-point from which mankind could view the world. The invention of the airplane allowed man to climb higher than any mountain, to fly further than any falcon, to imitate the angels in approaching heaven. For the first time in the history of the human race the air became man's element. Aviation afforded an unprecedented freedom from the bonds of earth and a new detachment from the world. The height and distancing of flight provided a fresh perspective both on earth's glories and on its vanities. The aerial view inspired a new idealism in which earth was hung in the balance with heaven and found wanting. Looking down from his superior height, the airman despised the earthling's vanities.

The first writers to describe the metaphysical experience of flight were the flyers themselves, and the first form that flying took in literature was the prose documents of pilots. The French aviator Antoine de Saint Exupéry was the first to attract literary notice in his remarkable book, *Vol de Nuit* or *Night Flight* (1931). Even on the ground the airman feels he is "a man apart," the only man on earth who speaks the language of the stars. And in the air he is as a god, an inhabitant of heaven:

Fabien was drifting now in the vast splendour of a sea of clouds, but under him there lay eternity. Among the constellations still he had his being, their only denizen. For yet a while he held the universe in his hand, weighed it at his breast.⁸

Coming back down to earth, the airman pities the benighted earthling:

All that endeared his life to man was looming up to meet him; men's houses, friendly little cafés, trees under which they walk. He was like some conqueror who, in the aftermath of victory, bends down upon his territories and now perceives the humble happiness of men. (pp. 5-6)

Fabien's freedom from earthly life gradually merges into an attraction to death. As he rises above the eye of the violent storm, Fabien is drawn deeper and deeper into the warm embrace of night, until he loses himself in the stars:

Little by little he spiraled up, out of the dark pit which closed again beneath him. . . . the instant he had risen clear, the pilot found a peace that passed his understanding. . . . at last a myriad dark arms had let him go; those bonds of his were loosed, as of a prisoner whom they let walk a while in liberty amongst the flowers. . . . Amid the far-flung treasure of the stars he roved, in a world where no life was, no faintest breath of life, save his and his companion's. Like plunderers of fabled cities they seemed, immured in treasure-vaults whence there is no escape. Amongst these frozen jewels they were wandering, rich beyond all dreams, but doomed. (pp. 149-51)

Artists who were not airmen immediately perceived the epic appeal and poetic potential of such aerial experience. Fellow French writer André Gide voices in his 1932 Preface to *Night Flight* his appreciation of the idealism inherent in the aviator's account:

Aviation, like the exploration of uncharted lands, has its early heroic age, and "Night Flight," which describes the tragic adventures of one of these pioneers of the air, sounds, naturally enough, the authentic epic note. . . . The hero of "Night Flight," though completely human, rises to superhuman heights of valor. The quality which I think delights one most of all in this stirring narrative is its nobility.⁹

It was not only Exupéry's fellow French writers who appreciated his aerial accounts, however. British writer Wyndham Lewis was also inspired by Exupéry's flights. In *Filibusters in Barbary* (1932), Lewis is quick to praise *Night Flight*:

For the first time in the earth's history we have to take into count a new territory — the upper atmosphere. . . . now, higher even than the mountains, we have to take into our conspectus that new, very solitary, not by any means numerous, people, who for all practical purposes live in these superior altitudes. . . . De Saint Exupéry has expressed this *air-status*, as it may be called, with great effectiveness — in his extraordinary book, *Vol de Nuit*. . . . Nothing but the loftiest of principles finds a place in this nobly conceived and admirably written air epic. . . . I have read no book that imposed the same conviction of the high values involved in the psychology of human flight — in its first and epical period. . . . A consciousness on the part of these here written about, that on account of the intensity of their experience, they are marked off from other men, is stressed throughout. If all airmen felt like this . . . we should speedily have an Aristocracy of the Air.¹⁰

British aviators also extolled the romance of flight and the mystique of the airman in prose documents like Exupéry's *Night Flight*. The most interesting of these aerial accounts were written by British fighter pilots during the war years. The use of the airplane in World War I was limited, but significant. In *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), Paul Fussell shows how trench warfare provided literature with a new way of seeing reality and a new way of writing about humanity, but, curiously enough, he does not even mention the airplane.¹¹ However, if the trenches provided a worm's-eye view of earth, the airplane provided a bird's-eye view of the world. If the trenches provided a new realism for literature, the airplane provided a new idealism. It was during World War II, however, that the airplane's potential was fulfilled. England owed its freedom in the Battle of Britain to the airplane. As a result of its crucial role in the defence of the nation, the airplane became identified with a new spirit of British nationalism and patriotism.

In *The Last Enemy* (1942), Spitfire pilot Richard Hillary explains that he and his fellow flyers believed that they were fighting a modern crusade in the Battle of Britain against the last enemy, Death itself. He attempts to explain the superior insight that the airman enjoys, compared to the earth-bound brothers he is responsible for protecting:

The pilot is of a race of men who since time immemorial have been inarticulate; who, through their daily contact with death, have realized, often enough unconsciously, certain fundamental things. It is only in the air that the pilot can grasp that feeling, that flash of knowledge, of insight, that matures him beyond his years; only in the air that he knows suddenly he is a man in a world of men. 'Coming back to earth' has for him a double significance. He finds it difficult to orient himself in a world that is so worldly, amongst a people whose conversation seems to him brilliant, minds agile, and knowledge complete — yet a people somehow blind.¹²

Another young World War II pilot named Rollo Woolley describes in a short story of 1942, entitled "The Pupil," the exhilaration of the airman's emancipation from earth, which the novice flyer expresses in exuberant aerobatics:

The pupil sang as he climbed. He felt himself the only thing moving in this empty bowl of sky, the only being living in its blue clarity. This sense of freedom is so exhilarating that the pilot feels he must turn and dive and spin to accompany his singing and so assert that he is above it, for all who love flying seek to achieve freedom from its shapes and shadows, escaping the rigidity and the permanence of the land.¹³

But gradually the airman's emancipation from life on earth gives way to a desire for death, as he flies further and further into the night and finally loses himself in the darkness of death:

Suddenly the night lay over and under the plane. It floated in a sparkling ocean of stars, free again in a land of frozen beauty. He switched off and turned off the petrol, but for ages the engine continued to fire and splutter. Then the movement of the propeller became slower; it swung itself jerkily, painfully round until it stopped, hanging there like a dead thing, and there was no sound. Only the rushing, whistling air singing in the rigging wires. This was how he wanted it. This was how it should have been in his dream. The pupil unfastened the straps of the safety harness which secures the pilot in the cockpit. Then very slowly, very carefully, he rolled the plane over on to its back until he no longer felt anything firm or solid beneath him, and he was falling, falling, into an icy space, like a sleeper into the deepest of sleep. (p. 95)

Like Fabien's night flight, the pupil's first solo flight ends fatally. As it turned out, both Hillary and Woolley were killed in action shortly after the publication of these accounts. "He is the dead now — you are the living. His was the sky — yours is the earth because of him." So wrote H. E. Bates in his *Stories of Flying Officer 'X'* (1942), tales of the Royal Air Force during World War II.¹⁴

The idealism inherent in the aerial view of earth appealed immediately to artists who were not aviators. The prose documents of pilots quickly became the raw material for poets who translated the aviator's actual accounts into flights of fancy. The modern air machine became the poet's Pegasus, fulfilling the artist's ancient ambition of taking wing like Icarus. The airplane allowed man to transcend the sublunary world of earthly vanity and view the human globe with divine distance.

No poet expressed the metaphysical experience of flight as well as William Butler Yeats. "An Irish Airman Foresees His

Death" was published in 1919 in memory of Yeats's friend, Major Robert Gregory, an aviator killed in flight during World War I. More than any other poem, it captures perfectly the God-like detachment of the airman.

I know that I shall meet my fate
 Somewhere among the clouds above:
 Those that I fight I do not hate,
 Those that I guard I do not love. . . .
 Nor Law, nor duty bade me fight,
 Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
 A lonely impulse of delight
 Drove to this tumult in the clouds.
 I balanced all, brought all to mind,
 The years to come seemed waste of breath,
 A waste of breath the years behind
 In balance with this life, this death.¹⁵

The Irish Airman's "lonely impulse of delight" merges into a desire for death, like the night flight of Fabien and the solo flight of the Pupil. In this poem, Yeats uses flight as a metaphor for death, as the flyer's emancipation from earth inspires him to hide his face amid a crowd of stars. "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" was the first memorable poem about the mystical experience of flight in modern British literature, and the greatest poem about aviation to emerge from World War I.

Aeronautics captured the artistic imagination of novelists as well as poets. Some years after Yeats, Virginia Woolf also employed the aerial view of earth in her essay, "Flying Over London." She describes the sensation of ascending in an airplane, as the Moth rose "like a spirit shaking contamination from its wings, shaking gasometers and factories and football fields from its feet." For Woolf, as for Yeats, the mystical experience of flight provided a perfect metaphor for freedom from life on earth:

It was a moment of renunciation. We prefer the other, we seemed to say. Wraiths and sand dunes and mist; imagination; this we prefer to the mutton and entrails. It was the idea of death that now suggested itself . . . not immortality, but extinction.¹⁶

In Woolf's imagination, the pilot becomes a Charon ferrying his passengers across the River Styx from the land of the living to the realm of the dead, as the Moth "swept on now up to death."

Ultimately, however, gravity is reasserted, and descent is inevitable. Flying over London, Woolf notices a woman watching the plane. Perhaps the woman is Mrs Dalloway, and the Moth is the airplane that she sees overhead in Woolf's 1925 novel. The airplane symbolizes Clarissa Dalloway's love of life, as she realizes that "the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June."¹⁷ She watches with fascination as the airplane fulfils every writer's fantasy of writing on the sky. Woolf's Moth cannot be Mrs Dalloway's skywriter, however, for Woolf reveals at the end of her essay that the airplane has developed mechanical problems and cannot take off after all. "Flying Over London" has been a flight of the imagination only.

The airplane provided the perfect vehicle for signifying an idealistic perspective on contemporary society. It did not develop into a popular literary device, however, until the thirties. By that time, the Great Depression had had its wicked way with Britain and left it in a Slump and on the Dole. The British patriotism of the war had turned by 1930 to criticism of British capitalism. The noble values of the pre-war era had become debased, and many moralists mocked the crass conduct of the Bright Young Things of the post-war period. The passionate religion of the thirties was not Christianity, but Marxism. Poets envisioned not a Christian afterlife in heaven, but a communist paradise on earth.

Satire became the distinctive mode of the thirties. It was the automatic counter to the idealism of World War I, which many moralists believed had been betrayed. Idealism is Janus-headed, and after the war, it turned its other cheek. By 1930 idealism faced the world as satire. Poets were politicized in this period, and in the hands of the "Auden group" the pen became a double-edged sword, simultaneously idealizing communism and satirizing capitalism. In the hand of W. H. Auden in particular, satire became a scalpel for cutting the cancer out of a sick society.

The airplane was the ideal vehicle for satire. It allowed the poet to look down on society from an Olympian height. More than a bird's-eye view of earth, the airplane afforded a God's-eye view of the world. In the cockpit of an airplane, the poet became a *Deus in Machina*, the God *in* the machine. The flying machine

provided the ideal perspective for satirizing society. For leftwing poets in particular, flight afforded the perfect metaphor.

The aerial view appealed especially to Auden, who always liked to address his audience *de haut en bas*, so to speak. The airplane, with its superior moral position, was Auden's ideal platform. Moreover, the aerial view allowed him to see just how petty the bourgeois could be. In Auden's poem "Consider" from *Poems* (1930), we see the first use of the airplane in modern British literature as a mere metaphor, a purely poetic device. In this poem Auden uses the perspective of a pilot to introduce a vision of contemporary Britain. The aerial view allows the poet to pierce the cloud of unknowing and diagnose society's sickness:

Consider this and in our time
 As the hawk sees it or the helmeted airman:
 The clouds rift suddenly — look there
 At cigarette-end smouldering on a border
 At the first garden party of the year.
 Pass on, admire the view of the massif
 Through plate-glass windows of the Sport Hotel;
 Join there the insufficient units
 Dangerous, easy, in furs, in uniform,
 And constellated at reserved tables,
 Supplied with feelings by an efficient band,
 Relayed elsewhere to farmers and their dogs
 Sitting in kitchens in the stormy fens.¹⁸

The perspective of the "helmeted airman" introduces an aerial view of a society which is terminally ill. It heralds Auden's sinister prognosis of a "polar peril" at the hands of the "supreme Antagonist." The hawklike eye of Auden is so piercing in this poem that it perceives even the glowing cigarette-tip at a fashionable garden party and penetrates the plate-glass windows of a posh hotel. The superior stance of the pilot of poetry affords a panoramic view of social topography, from the brilliant constellations of the urban rich to the scattered glimmers of the rural poor. Auden was quick to claim honorary membership in the new "Aristocracy of the Air," for the airplane clearly provided the ideal vehicle for his leftwing social satire.

This aerial view also united perfectly with another penchant of the thirties poets — the moralized landscape allegory, which

we see in Auden's villanelle, "Paysage Moralisé." The height and distance of the airplane's perspective threw the contours of the land into high relief. "The Landscape near an Aerodrome" (1933), by Auden's poetic cohort, Stephen Spender, is a good example of the union of the aerial view with a moralized landscape:

More beautiful and soft than any moth
 With burring furred antennae feeling its huge path
 Through dusk, the air-liner with shut-off engines
 Glides over suburbs and the sleeves set trailing tall
 To point the wind. Gently, broadly, she falls,
 Scarcely disturbing charted currents of air.

Lulled by descent, the travellers across sea
 And across feminine land indulging its easy limbs
 In miles of softness, now let their eyes trained by watching
 Penetrate through dusk the outskirts of this town
 Here where industry shows a fraying edge.
 Here they may see what is being done.

What better perspective from which to view that fraying edge of sprawling industry, those hateful arterial roads, and those straggling suburbs than the cockpit of an airplane?

Then, as they land, they hear the tolling bell
 Reaching across the landscape of hysteria,
 To where larger than all the charcoaled batteries
 And imaged towers against that dying sky,
 Religion stands, the church blocking the sun.¹⁹

The airplane is the appropriate vehicle for this Marxist satire on Christian society, as it glides "in the last sweep of love" over "the landscape of hysteria."

During World War II, a decade later, soldier-poet Keith Douglas employs the same aerial view of a landscape to introduce a war protest poem. The airplane is the suitable vehicle for satire on war in his "Landscape with Figures" (1944). The pilot's perspective proves the perfect position for painting the grim picture of a grisly battleground:

Perched on a great fall of air
 a pilot or angel looking down
 on some eccentric chart, a plain

dotted with useless furniture,
discerns dying on the sand vehicles
squashed dead or still entire, stunned
like beetles: scattered wingcases and
legs, heads, appear when the dust settles.²⁰

From the vantage-point of the airman or angel, in which people resemble insects, the poet can portray the "eccentric chart" of the battlefield, with its scattered members, in a perspective which allows him to satirize the gruesome reality from the lofty standpoint of idealism.

As modern writers began to adopt poetic techniques and adapt them to fiction, novelists like Evelyn Waugh also found the airplane a useful vehicle for satire. In his first travel book, *Labels, or A Bachelor Abroad* (1930), Waugh describes the experience of looping the loop in an early aircraft:

In "looping," the aeroplane shoots steeply upwards until the sensation becomes unendurable and one knows that in another moment it will turn completely over. Then it keeps on shooting up and does turn completely over. One looks down into an unfathomable abyss of sky, while over one's head a great umbrella of fields and houses has suddenly opened.²¹

This indelible vision of heaven and earth turned topsy-turvy inspired Waugh's companion to convert to Roman Catholicism just two days after the flight, as Waugh himself did the following year.

In his 1938 satire, *Scoop*, Waugh ridicules the idealism inherent in the aerial view by means of his simpleton hero, William Boot of Boot Magna. Boot anticipates his first flight in an imagined vision which parodies eulogies of the airborne perspective:

High over the chimneys and the giant monkey-puzzle, high among the clouds and rainbows and clear blue spaces, whose alternations figured so largely and poetically in *Lush Places*, high above the most ecstatic skylark, above earth-bound badger and great crested grebe, away from people and cities to a region of light and void and silence — that was where William was going in the Air Line omnibus.²²

But Waugh himself actually believed that "The airplane belittles all it discloses."²³ Consequently, the airplane provided an

ideal vehicle for his social satire. Waugh found, however, that the aerial view was most effective as a satirical device when it was combined with an ideal standard of comparison. Such an ideal standard was provided by John of Gaunt's famous eulogy on the golden age of England in Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Gaunt takes an aerial view of Britain in his patriotic rhapsody, picturing it from above, in order to see it in the perspective of idealism. The view of the British isle as a "precious stone set in a silver sea," is perfectly suited to the dying Duke of Lancaster's purposes, for the aerial perspective idealizes England's Edenic past, the better to satirize its evil present.²⁴

In *Vile Bodies* (1930), his scathing satire on the Bright Young Things of the post-war period, Evelyn Waugh makes most effective use of Gaunt's patriotic speech to imply an infinite contrast between the ideal and the real, between the glorious golden age of England and the contemptible contemporary. In quoting Shakespeare's eulogy, Waugh not only holds up an ideal picture of Britain, but he also alludes to Gaunt's own satire on the actual evils of England. In this scene, Waugh's characters recite Shakespeare's rhapsody, while viewing contemporary Britain from the cockpit of an airplane:

Ginger looked out of the aeroplane: "I say, Nina," he shouted, "when you were young did you ever have to learn a thing out of a poetry book about: '*This scepter'd isle, this earth of majesty, this something or other Eden*'? D'you know what I mean? '*this happy breed of men, this little world, this precious stone set in the silver sea* . . ."

"'*This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings
Feared by their breed and famous by their birth* . . .'

"I forget how it goes on. Something about a stubborn Jew. . . ."

"Well, I mean to say, don't you feel somehow, up in the air like this and looking down and seeing everything underneath. I mean, don't you have a sort of feeling rather like that, if you see what I mean?"

Nina looked down and saw inclined at an odd angle a horizon of straggling red suburb; arterial roads dotted with little cars; factories, some of them working, others empty and decaying; a disused canal; some distant hills sown with bungalows; wireless masts and overhead power cables; men and women were indis-

cernible except as tiny spots; they were marrying and shopping and making money and having children. The scene lurched and tilted again as the aeroplane struck a current of air.

"I think I'm going to be sick," said Nina.²⁵

The aerial view of all those vile bodies, belittled by the pilot's perspective to the size of insects, is literally sickening, in Waugh's opinion. The portrait of the "precious stone set in a silver sea" provides the author's personal signature in the midst of this satirical swirl of bourgeois Britain buying and breeding. For Waugh, just as for Shakespeare, this central passage represents the genuine gem in a sea of cynicism, the ideal standard by which the social satire is to be judged.

If the airplane provided the ideal vehicle for satire on British society during the Great Depression of the thirties, it is no less appropriate during Britain's recent recession. In *The Ice Age*, Margaret Drabble takes the temperature of the times, as she shows how Britain's golden age has been frozen over by a second age of ice. In the central passage of the novel, the hero has a vision of Britain's future. The author envisions ideal England in an aerial view in order to satirize the earthly reality more sharply:

An aerial view, a helicopter view of this precious isle came into his head, and he saw the seas washing forever, or more or less forever, round the white and yellow and pink and grey sands and pebbles of the beaches, this semi-precious stone set in a leaden sea, our heritage. (p. 224)

For Drabble, just as for Waugh, Shakespeare's vision of England as a "precious stone set in a silver sea" serves as a touchstone for judging the real in the light of the ideal. By employing the aerial view, Drabble provides a perspective which reveals that the genuine gem that was Britain is now just a semi-precious stone in a setting of base metal. For Drabble, like Waugh, is aware that the more crass the actual, the more crucial the ideal. So while the social realist holds the mirror up to contemporary society, the idealist paints a vision of an ideal standard to judge it by.²⁶

The point at which Drabble's use of the aerial view diverges from Waugh's, however, is the fact that her hero is not actually airborne at all, but rather has his feet planted firmly on the ground. So the difference between the contemporary writer and

the satirists of the thirties lies in the fact that the aerial view is now used as a purely literary convention — a figurative device, rather than a literal one. It is entirely because the aerial view became so distinctive a device for satirizing society during the thirties that the contemporary writer can employ it in a purely metaphorical manner.

The perspective of time proves that the aerial view of earth from the cockpit of an airplane is a device which belongs to a period which is now past. It is a distinctively "modern" figure — that is, one which pertains particularly to the first half of the twentieth century, especially to that future-oriented, technology-attracted era between the two World Wars. The aerial view as a symbol of idealism appealed to the imagination of artists following World War I. And the airplane as a vehicle for satire reached its peak in the thirties, since it provided the Auden generation with an ideal device for satirizing society. After the heroic part played by airmen in the defence of the nation during the Battle of Britain, however, it was no longer decorous to use the airplane as a vehicle for satirizing British society.

The aerial view also became less popular as a literary convention following World War II because during the fifties air travel became pedestrian. In the period between the wars, the airplane was a glamorous new invention, the airman a romantic figure, and the air an unexplored territory. As a result of mass air travel after World War II, however, the privilege of the few became the property of the many. The airplane has since become outmoded as a vehicle for viewing society. Air travel has now transcended the level at which it provided a perspective on humanity, for jet liners today fly too high to afford a clear view of earth. It is no coincidence that Drabble substitutes a helicopter for the conventional airplane, for nowadays only in a helicopter could one capture the aerial view which the writers of the thirties used to satirize society. In the popular imagination of today, the airman has given way to the astronaut, the aircraft to the space ship, and earth's atmosphere to the stratosphere. But we can be sure that astronautics will generate a vision of our universe which will prove equally valuable for the artist of the future.

NOTES

- 1 Margaret Drabble, *The Ice Age* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), p. 224. Subsequent references to this edition will be documented within the text.
- 2 *Matthew* 4:8.
- 3 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, XI, 378-80.
- 4 Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, V, 1814-19.
- 5 Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, XXII, 133-38, *The Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, translated by Dorothy L. Sayers (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1949).
- 6 I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p. 6.
- 7 Horace Walpole, in a letter to Sir Horace Mann from Berkeley Square, dated December 2, 1783, *Selected Letters*, edited by William Hadley (London: Everyman's Library, 1926), p. 528.
- 8 Antoine de Saint Exupéry, *Night Flight*, translated by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Triangle Books, 1932), pp. 160-61. Subsequent references to this edition will be documented within the text.
- 9 André Gide, "Preface," *Night Flight*, translated by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Triangle Books, 1932), pp. v-vi.
- 10 Wyndham Lewis, *Filibusters in Barbary* (New York: McBride, 1932), pp. 270-73. I wish to thank Professor Rowland Smith of Dalhousie University for calling my attention to this work.
- 11 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975).
- 12 Richard Hillary, *The Last Enemy* (London: Macmillan, 1942), pp. 46-47.
- 13 Rollo Woolley, "The Pupil," *Horizon*, 5 (1942), 93. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the text.
- 14 H. E. Bates, *Stories of Flying Officer "X"* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1942), p. 72.
- 15 William Butler Yeats, "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death," *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1933), p. 152. John Unterecker, *A Reader's Guide to William Butler Yeats* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1959), p. 133, writes: "Lady Gregory's gifted, brilliant son Robert who had enlisted in the war as an aviator was killed in action over Italy." He died in 1917.
- 16 Virginia Woolf, "Flying Over London," *Collected Essays, Volume 4* (London: Hogarth Press, 1967), p. 168.
- 17 Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (New York, Harcourt, Brace & World, 1925), p. 5.
- 18 W. H. Auden, "Consider," *Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1930).
- 19 Stephen Spender, "The Landscape near an Aerodrome," *Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1930), pp. 55-56.
- 20 Keith Douglas, "Landscape with Figures," *Complete Poems*, edited by Desmond Graham (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), p. 127.
- 21 Evelyn Waugh, *Labels: A Mediterranean Journal* (London: Duckworth, 1930), p. 12.

- ²² Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1938), p. 58.
- ²³ Evelyn Waugh, *A Tourist in Africa* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1960), p. 154.
- ²⁴ William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, II, i, 46.
- ²⁵ Evelyn Waugh, *Vile Bodies* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1930), p. 192.
- ²⁶ Margaret Drabble also employs an aerial view to signify an idealistic perspective on contemporary British society in her subsequent novel, *The Middle Ground* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980), p. 218. At the turning-point of the novel, the protagonist looks down on London from the top of a tall hospital building and perceives the design underlying the dither of detail:

there it lay, its old intensity restored, shining with invitation, all its shabby grime lost in perspective, imperceptible from this dizzy height, its connections clear, its pathways revealed. The city, the kingdom. The aerial view. . . . The aerial view of human love, where all connections are made known, where all roads connect.