

HUGH WALPOLE: AN APPRECIATION

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Hugh Walpole: an appreciation by Joseph Hergesheimer

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JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

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NOVELS

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MR. FERRIN AND MR. TRAILL
THE GREEN MIRROR
THE DARK FOREST
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ROMANCES

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FORTITUDE
THE DUCHESS OF WREXHE
MARADICK AT FORTY

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THE GOLDEN SCARECROW
JEREMY

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JOSEPH CONRAD: A CRITICAL STUDY

no vital
Aristocrat



HUGH WALPOLE

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by

JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

Author of "Three Black Pennys"

"Java Head", etc.

*Together with Notes
and Comments on the Novels of
Hugh Walpole*

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HUGH WALPOLE

An Appreciation

JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER

I

IT is with an uncommon feeling of gratification that I am able to begin a paper on Hugh Walpole with the words, in their completest sense, an appreciation. But this rises from no greater fact than a personal difficulty in agreeing with the world at large about the most desirable elements for a novel. Here it is possible to say that Mr. Walpole possesses almost entirely the qualities which seem to me the base, the absolute foundation, of a beauty without which creative writing is empty. In him, to become as specific as possible, there is splendidly joined the consciousness of both the inner and outer worlds.

And, for a particular purpose, I shall put my conviction about his novels into an arbitrary arrangement with no reference to the actual order of appearance of his dignified row of volumes. Such a choice opens with a consideration of what is purely a story

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of inner pressures, it continues to embrace books devoted principally to the visible world, to London, and ends with a mingling of the seen and unseen in Russia.

Yet, to deny at once all pedantic pretense, it must be made clear that my real concern is with the pleasure, the glow and sense of recognition, to be had from his pages. The evoked emotions, which belong to the heart rather than the head, are the great, the final, mark of the true novelist. And they may be, perhaps, expressed in the single word, magic. Anyone who is susceptible to this quality needs no explanation of its power and importance, while it is almost impossible of description to those upon whom it has no effect. It is quite enough to repeat it . . . magic. At once a train of images, of memories of fine books, will be set in motion. Among them the father of Peter Westcott will appear—a grim evil in a decaying house heavy with the odor of rotten apples; and, accompanying them, the mind will be flooded with the charmed moments of Mr. Walpole's descriptions: Russian nights with frozen stars, rooms swimming placid and strange in old mirrors, golden ballrooms and

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London dusks, the pale quiver of spring, of vernal fragrance, under the high sooty glass dome of a railroad station.

In this, at once, the remarkable delicacy of his perceptions is made apparent: it is impossible, in thinking of these books, to separate what occurs in the sphere of reality from the vivid pressures, the dim forces, that, lying back of conscious existence, are always gathering like portentous storms behind Mr. Walpole's stories. To have stated so calmly his passionate belief in just these influences was, at the time most of his books were written, an act of that courage he has so persistently extolled. Yet the details of his fortitude belong properly to the examination of individual novels.

Time, however, has altogether justified his spiritual preoccupations: the literature of the surface of things, the sting of onions in a glittering tin bowl, æsthetic boys—still the wistful ghost of Wilde, the flaneur—dragged through the pages of Freud, unlimited sentences in sociology hardly humanized by a tagging of proper names and mechanical desires, have been swept into the dust-bin for temporary reactions and fevers. Nothing