

Letter to Constance Webb
(1944)

C.L.R. James

One day I'll tell you how, after the French Revolution, the revolt against Hume lead to Kant, Fitch, Schelling, Hegel, Feuerbach, and Marx, step by step, with an inevitable logic culminating in the doctrine of the class struggle. It is a fierce doctrine, harsh and unforgiving. Chiefly, however, because the ruling class makes it so. What is most exciting is the sequence from Hume to Marx, which I have been studying for the last three years, and which has had an effect on my thinking and on my personal life beyond all explanation.

This I find repeated with an almost photographic exactitude to modern poetry. Yes, modern poetry. The sequence from T.S. Eliot to Auden, from Spender to Cecil Day-Lewis, is a repetition of a sequence from Hume to Marx. It is and must be so. For the human mind having said A must say B. I would never have looked at it at all, not unless I was ill, but for you. And the sequence I would never have discovered but for W.B. Yeats. For some years he wrote an essay which I read lately and have been reading steadily since. He knows poetry. That was his job. He analyzed it with the eye of a master, and as he traced stage by stage the development, there before me was the classic philosophical sequence. Hegel had traced it in ancient philosophy, had himself been the completion of the greatest example of it, and now here it is again.

The perfect exemplification which Yeats gives in his analysis was a great thrill for me. In fact, it is so far the best exemplification, and there, in the very heart of it, tangled up inextricably is yourself, living, warm, and lovely. Do you see why I call you my little miracle? One day we'll have a jam session, you and me, it will begin with philosophy, the method of thought, *i.e.* logic, the inevitable development of ideas, and will reach poetry by that road. Then we'll see as clear as day what the concept "class" means, and what the absence of it has meant to poetry.

Always remembering, however, that the poet reacts to life emotionally, and without that, though he were the wisest man in the world, he could not write a line of verse. But the more humanity develops, the more the emotional response depends upon a conception of the world which does not so much guide the poetry, but releases and expands the personality, integrates it, opens horizons, and thus gives the emotional responses a range and depth in power impossible otherwise. This, sweetheart, is to live.

When the disciples asked Christ about the world to come and the places they were to get in it, he told them, "The kingdom of Heaven is within you." They could not understand it. They just couldn't. The glory of life in our age is that this intense, individual, personal life can, in fact *must*, be lived in harmony with the great social forces that are now striving to carry humanity over the last barrier. When I say I love you, it comes from very, very far.