in my heart I suspect Schiller is probably right. When one considers the swollen ranks of middle-class socialists and Gucci liberals, then maybe there's nothing so remarkable about working-class or bourgeois Tories. And turnout is fair play, after all. Pass the Stroh's, Rabbi.

Youth's Labors Lost

David Holbrook: A Play of Passion; W. H. Allen; London.

by Gordon Pradl

Has there ever been an adult who at first blush did not wax nostalgic over adolescence? We seem to have an endless capacity for such idealized retrospection. Yet when these reflections are challenged, we readily admit to the pain and suffering, the clumsy and awkward moments, that actually characterized the series of passages preceding adulthood. Indeed, it would be hard to disagree with the extreme position Shakespeare expresses in A Winter's Tale, “I would there were no age between ten and three and twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest. For there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting.” Although youth might well have been a time of boundless possibility before our categories froze and “shades of the prison-house began to close upon the growing boy,” essentially it was a time of things only half-known, the “blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realized.”

The trials that an adolescent faces involve seeking answers to what it means to be an adult, to what makes for life and what works against it. For this quest to be successful, for the agony of youth not to be offered up in vain, adolescents need an image of a coherent adult world they can eventually merge with. They need a facilitating environment, one which fosters integrative social values, as they struggle to infuse meaning into their probing relationships with the opposite sex, into their search for a fulfilling vocation, and into their desire for a creative interplay between self and community. Such are the major themes the British poet and novelist, David Holbrook, takes up in his latest novel, A Play of Passion, which chronicles the transitional seventeenth year in the life of Paul Grimmer whom we first met as a young tank officer in Flesh Wounds, (1965) Holbrook's powerful and graphic recreation of events surrounding the D-Day invasion of Normandy.

In A Play of Passion the time is 1940, the place Norwich, an east coastal town particularly susceptible to the hostilities that have already broken out. Thus the disintegrating social values which concern Holbrook have their concrete analogue in the missiles which nightly threaten the well-being of the city. Paul Grimmer is completing his final year of school before going up to Cambridge, but his benevolent and progressive headmaster has decided that at this particular juncture additional book-learning would not benefit him, so he has arranged for Paul to work part-time at the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich. This opportunity places Paul in the larger world of art and imagination, while providing him with new bearings as he begins shaping his identity, independent of his parents and free of the materialism which clashes so with his youthful idealism.

Paul’s idealism grows out of his inner feelings of communion with the ebb and flow of the natural world, an at-oneness Holbrook evokes for us early in the novel as Paul is slowly gliding down a river in a small rowboat.

“As he watched a shoal of very small fish all lying in the same direction, and then suddenly all turning at once, to face another direction, translucent yellow, with a similar but distinct masking pattern on each back—he knew that he existed in a meaningful world. He could not formulate any meaning in relation to it; nor did he strive to... all belonged to a world that went on, under the sun, flowing and leaping and breathing, a slow unfolding and sweeping through the current, which had its own rhythm and purpose. And he belonged to it.”

Yet from this calm center Paul goes on to experience a range of conflicting emotions. And it is Holbrook's particular strength as a novelist to be able to faithfully render the complex relationships that Paul must sort through during this troubled time. His parents, for instance, fail to understand his fears and ambitions and violent disagreements ensue, but their basic concern is revealed when they support him against a new martinet headmaster who is threatening to revoke Paul's association with the Maddermarket. Another relationship which confuses Paul is with Annie, his first girl. Although Annie awakens feelings of warmth and tenderness in Paul, she is unable to share his newly discovered intellectual and cultural interests, and thus at the end Paul is torn between jealousy and relief when she goes off to marry another.

Yet such struggles seem the normal fare of adolescence and should pose no special difficulties for the novel's protagonist. Holbrook, however, has a more pernicious drama in mind, namely that the adult landscape, increasingly dominated by the vacuous and trendy world of nihilistic culture and ideas, is failing to offer youth viable role models. It is this state of affairs which threatens to seduce Paul into false solutions to the problem of living, threatens to leave him in a void even as he works through

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the relationships with his parents and with Annie. This antihuman position Holbrook is attacking is embodied in Roy Short, an older school-friend of Paul's who is already up at Cambridge spouting all the “correct” left-wing slogans.

"Short seized the opportunity to persuade Paul towards nihilism. A new orthodoxy took over now his belief had failed—the metaphysics of chemical and physical laws, and the Final Cause of Ultimate Entropy, of every-thing seeking equilibrium in death. He forgot himself... He forgot that all living creatures strive, and suc-
cceed or fail; by contrast with physical phenomena even thunderstorms, which do not strive, do not try to use their world, and cannot be said to suc-
cceed or fail. And he forgot man's moral dimension, even the dimension of being."

It is Roy’s voice that serves to entangle Paul in various misadventures and almost brings about his downfall at the end of the novel.

Mediating this tug-of-war for Paul’s loyalties are the good offices of Nugent Monck, the aging director of the Mad-dermarket, who stands for the translu-
cent world of literature and art.

"[Paul] had felt swamped, suffocated at home and didn’t know why. With Monck, every moment was taken up with an energetic attention to the na-
ture of the world, what it could teach one, how one could interact with it and change it."

The modern betrayal is the nihilistic commercialism which Holbrook is seek-
ing to expose because it renders us passive in the face of our true human passions and desires.

Through Monck’s eyes Paul begins to realize how the wholeness of the imagination and the redeeming qualities of love serve to overcome man’s existential anxieties. But poetry alone will save no man, and so Monck’s mediating presence is imperfect at best. The “larg-
erthanlife” depersonalized world, which fans our hatred and aggression and denies our vulnerability, continues to pervade Paul’s thought. Yet in realis-
tically portraying Paul’s struggles, Holbrook has given us a picture of how it is possible for a youth to enter the adult world with resources deeper than the plastic facade of commercial culture which paralyzes so many other adoles-
cents before they have the chance of knowing the wider realms of experience in love and relationship.

To explore as Holbrook has the deli-
crate moral relationship between social institutions and the inner life of the personality is to risk a narrowing of vision because many “anti-life” forces are too easily dismissed. This in turn leaves the author with a limited scope of effective persuasion, and we should not forget that the primary task of such a moral examination is to convince one’s readers that the credo one assumes in daily living will result naturally in a true and meaningful identity, that the world transformed into art corresponds to our real human experiences. What is needed to persuade, of course, is the enactment of real dramatic situations—the “showing” dimension of litera-
ture. When Holbrook’s fictional voice falters, as it does on occasion, it is in part because he slips into the “telling” strategy of the self-assured Upstage sermon and thus interrupts his corre-
spondence of faith with the reader. Salvation after all must be earned, not merely asserted. These are minor an-
noyances, however, for in using fiction to explore problems of personal expe-
rience and development, Holbrook has undertaken a significant journey of self-definition, and like the work of all serious artists, A Play of Passion widens the reader’s vision of the human potential, reinfuses the world with inten-
tionalty.

Holbrook’s courage, in making his novel face up to the questions of value in modern society, will impress many as old-fashioned; he will gain little pop-
ularity by advocating an end to commer-
cialism and a return to the culture of personal relationships. But to have ac-
complished the fine achievement of A Play of Passion is to have vindicated the essence of his undertaking—the continual search for viable responses to contemporary life—and in the process helped sketch out a reality in which youth’s labor will not be lost.

In The Rockford Papers, February 1979, Vol. 4, No. 1, Pawel Mayewski on "THE USES AND MISUSES OF POWER (Notes on Foreign Policy)"

It is assumed that "the nuclear rationale" places upon the world leadership, in totalitarian states as well as in the democracies, something like an obligation to proceed with caution, because rash action automatically opens up the risk of catastrophe for all. In a reality where practical solutions are constantly sought, this nuclear imperative demands that we constantly keep in mind the need to compromise. We have thus will-

In the context of the Second World War. Any sane person would admit that at least in that context, compromise, any compromise, was bound to lead to disaster, as it in effect did, whereas firm insistence on what was right could have prevented it. The alternative to being firm when one is right is giving up at least part of one’s “rightness”—with all the conse-
quences that must follow.