In the three novellas the emphasis is on the foolhardiness of all human endeavor rather than on the perversity of man in the face of a political amelioration of his lot. They are love stories, although progressively less so. While the first, "What the Nightingale Sang," takes a wry look at the transitoriness of a deep, abiding love and the second, "The Lilacs Are Blooming," has already subordinated an account of its hero's love affairs to a history of his chequered career, the last novella, "Michel Sinyagin" (cf. the titles), considers the entire span of a man's life, in which love and marriage play an important but not climactic part. Michel is a would-be poet who never becomes one because the time is out of joint and, in the fashion of Hamlet, he lacks the ambition to set it right, or, in the fashion of E. T. A. Hoffmann (one of Zoshchenko's forebears), he adapts to the busyness of modern life by assuming the schizophrenic role of the outsider. As a matter of fact, *Before Sunrise,* Zoshchenko's venture into the field of autobiography, tells a similar tale of a split personality, half an eager participant in fashioning the turmoil of a changing society, half a melancholy recluse. Zoshchenko's exploration of the dark side of his personality which takes him from the events of his early maturity back to those of his adolescence and finally to those of his childhood and infancy leads him to a conclusion, which, as the critic Edward J. Brown indicates in his summarization of it, is simplistic: melancholy is a general human condition.

The shorter pieces (most of them three or four pages in length) provide Zoshchenko with just enough room to make this kind of wry comment effectively; they do not permit belaboring the point or embellishing it with whimsy. They are proper satires of life in Russia, then escaping from the tyranny of power into the tyranny of the dispersal of power: the wife-swapping which ensues when marriage and divorce become *pro forma;* the mismanagement which ensues when every man is a manager; the chicanery which ensues when the destruction of a sense of duty and obligation in favor of party affiliation leaves a void. Basic in Zoshchenko's documentation of human fallibility in a socialist Eden is the humor without which satire is flawed. Zoshchenko's sketches evoke real laughter and sentences such as this almost adulation: "We're so overcrowded [in this hospital] that we haven't got time to release any patients" (p. 261).

The fact that the translation reads well and does not dilute the effectiveness of the satire establishes the talent of the translators Maria Gordon and Hugh McLean, who also has provided a brief but trenchant introduction. The translators were, however, faced with a problem to which there is no solution, the duplication of slang. Although Zoshchenko's claim that he is unique in Soviet literature in employing everyday Russian in his work has been proven false by a close linguistic analysis of his style, his work has a Damon Runyanesque quality which is an insurmountable obstacle for the translator. The appearance of "noggin," "bean," "mug," "the old geezer," "his missus," etc., does not produce the desired effect of modernity and immediacy, but rather one of quaintness. In spite of such encumbrances, *Nervous People and Other Stories* draws the reader into an obscure realm of recent history, which it illuminates with the probing but never destructive light of satire.

Kurt J. Fickert

THOMAS WISEMAN
The Quick and the Dead
London: Jonathan Cape, 1968.
Pp. 443.

The Quick and the Dead, Thomas Wiseman's third novel (*Czar,* 1966; *Journey of a Man,* 1967), a tale of the ironic relationships, psychological, aesthetic, and political, between a narcissistic Viennese Nazi and an intellectual Viennese Jew, has much to offer the mind. It leads the reader beyond Erich Fromm's pleas for sanity in *Escape from Freedom* into a world of profoundly equivocal meditations, suggesting Marlow's Buddha-like disinterestedness in *Heart of Darkness* or Arthur Koestler's moral indignation, expressed in *Arrow in the Blue* as a reduction to absurdity of Freud's analysis of the Nazi mind: *tout comprendre, c'est tout comprendre*. Like Wiseman's protagonist, Stefan Kazakh, the reader experiences past and present as one, "dreaming of God and the Devil" (p. 18), and discovering that in this world the two are indivisible.

"In art everything must contain its otherness" (p. 148), the painter Maz Engert reveals to his pupil, Leonie. This principle is formulated earlier in the novel by Staszek, the narrating persona's father: ". . . beauty is the feeling created by the successful resolution of conflicting forces" (p. 37). Stefan Kazakh's *psychomachia*, waged against his double, Wirthof, a posturing Nazi who makes a virtue of unreason, is projected in this work of art, in its own words, a "conundrum about mirrors within mirrors and their multiplying images" (p. 216). This novel is also, by analogy, a bridge incorporating the reconciliation of conflicting stresses, making articulate "the silent struggle of opposing forces going on inside [it]" (p. 13); there, as in the sewers built by Kazakh's father, a builder of bridges with no bridges to build, and one sensitive to the beauty of man's intestines, "the bowels perceived what the mind did not grasp" (p. 296).

The image of the bridge pervades the narrator's mind, and is central to the novel, for, like truth and beauty, it is ironic: it is a two-way connection. The ostensibly logical Kazakh is periodically chided by Wirthof, who judges "ideas by their sound" (p. 119), for relying on rational "quickness." But Kazakh himself indulges in prolonged introspection (he gazes into the mirror of a novel/diary, as it were), during which he meditates on Kierkegaard's ironic cycle of despair arising from an absence of despair (pp. 247 ff). Immersing himself in the memory of Wirthof, who was not "quick" enough to escape disillusionment and subsequent destruction, Kazakh reveals himself as similarly narcissistic, posturing and playing before the image of Wirthof in his own mind, a reflection of himself. In the novel's final paragraph, we are told that the doppelgänger has not been completely exorcised: "Wirthof still glitters in me" (p. 443), Kazakh confesses. Wirthof's Promethean "reaching into the infinity of possibility" (p. 245), a microcosmic reflection of the Third Reich (often in the form of acts of sexual "passive aggression"), terminates in despair, an analogue in reverse of Kazakh's limiting himself to the finiteness of probability. This is another manifestation of despair coinciding with the absence of conscious despair. Significantly, both Kazakh and Wirthof are presented at one point as horsemen on a carousel: their journey in time is governed by a roundabout logic. Reflected in the "eyes of Thanatos," like the Quixotic revolutionaries led by Kazakh's father, they are "berserk skaters," whose "quickness" results in either death or survival. But, in the end, like hope and despair, both are facets of each other.

The novel suggests at once both an endeavour at exorcism and an act of enlightenment. Like his "dreamer," the novelist appears to seek refuge in words, which belong, as Conrad has Marlow note in *Lord Jim*, to "the sheltering conception of light and order." Wiseman, like his persona, plots "the mesh in which memory is caught" (p. 249) in an endeavour "to control the actual outcome of his dream" (p. 225). The novelist amply reveals his "quickness" in its multiple meanings. This "mesh" is impressive in its imaginative coherence and density: echoes of Goethe, Baudelaire, Wilde, and Conrad, among others, suggest a comprehensive imagination integrating the manifold facets of the author's vision. Working within an intellectual tradition which may readily be traced from Nicholas of Cusa, Wiseman "applies" the principle of the *coincidentia oppositorum* (with considerably artistic effect) to a major twentieth-century theme. It is perhaps unkind here to note that Wiseman's style in *The Quick and the Dead*, competent though it is, does not always match the brilliance of its imaginative conception.

The novelist leaves us with the question: where is the Jew to find a saving illusion? Kazakh's "I shiver—therefore I am" (p. 441), offers *an* answer: the essential business of art, as of life, is authenticity, not social justice. Yet, one might reply with Gabriel Marcel in *Homo Viator* that the only authentic utterances are "unspeakable." The novelist, of course, has the last word: ". . . this particular train of thought goes nowhere at all . . . it has no terminal, but just goes round and round . . ." (p. 83).

Camille R. LaBossière