

Dear Editor

Letters from Readers

Uncritical Approach To Left Writers

Dear Editor:

Mike Gold's recent lavish and uncritical praise of Alvah Bessie's new book, 'The Un-Americans,' coupled with his blithe dismissal of Faulkner, Sandburg, Frost, Hemingway, etc., (to say nothing of his distasteful sniping at Howard Fast) reflect the kind of narrow sectarian outlook which has so crippled the left-wing movement in the past.

I hope that every reader of The Worker will read Alvah Bessie's novel, because I think that both the political ideas and artistic merit of The Un-Americans should be the subject of widespread discussion. One of the great faults of our literary criticism over the years has been our tendency to ignore, excuse, or rationalize artistic weaknesses because of our agreement with the political ideas set forth in a particular work.

And so with Bessie's book we cannot allow any sympathy with the political ideas being expressed to blind us to the serious shortcomings in character development, the stretches of artificial dialogue, or the ineptitude of the long, almost wearisome, political debates which mark almost every page.

Mike Gold takes Faulkner and the others to task for not writing about the cold war, and asks, "How can any writer live through a plague and never mention its effect on him or the character in his fiction?" But Mike does not ask how Alvah Bessie can write a novel about the Communist movement in a crucial era without revealing any familiarity with the Khrushchev report or the many fantastic and horrifying revelations accompanying it. And this is exactly what Bessie has done.

Mike Gold makes his praise for Bessie suspect when he contrasts The Un-Americans with the novels of Howard Fast who, Mike tells us, "has just been converted back to New York Times democracy." The recently-discovered flaws in Fast's novels entitle one to be somewhat suspicious of the political motives behind the analysis.

JACK STYLES.

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"Peyton Place" and "Deer Park"

QUEENS, N.Y.

Dear Editor:

I just finished reading B.A.S.'s comments on B.G.'s review of "Peyton Place." Frankly, I was at first dumbstruck, but slowly unwound.

The tons of "legal" pornography which is forced down the throat of the American reading public each year by publishing companies has a definite purpose — to brutalize the human mind against anything normal and natural (certainly sex) in the relationship of people.

Can we possibly forget the



DREISER

age of "insanity" in which we live? In which the hands of publishing houses join together with Hollywood film owners, comic book publishers, TV and any other medium to capture the minds of our people for slaughter and A-bombings?

This has been no accident, for some of our contemporary authors who kept faith with the people on great subjects of our times have had to publish privately or with small Left publishing houses—the big companies rejecting their works.

On the subject of sex in literature, as B.A.S. indicates, all enduring writers have treated the subject. But certainly not per se. Balzac, Shakespeare, Voltaire and Bocaccio depicted the debauchery and degradation of the ruling classes in their day.

I feel strongly that socialist literary criticism of contemporary books should be published on even a larger scale than I have found in The Worker. And I hail the review of "Peyton Place."

B.A.S. mentions Steinbeck and Dreiser in her list of contemporary writers who treat the subject of sex. Dreiser to his last breath poignantly depicted the suffering and sorrows of the poor as his main theme—and Steinbeck was his greatest when he did the same. Can we possibly compare "Peyton Place" to the best of these authors?

I just finished reading Norman Mailer's "Deer Park"—this truly is a companion piece for "Peyton Place." As a writer he wallows in word, situation, point of view and story of Hollywood—to the tune of 139 pages and tons of ink. He made me feel as a reader that he had a fascination for this swill.

Well, this is the barbarism of our times. But I feel that a change is bound to come. For the cold war is "less cold" today and prison doors in America giving some of the best minds in America their freedom. And now that McCarthy is dead, may the "ism" he created be interred with him so that literature in America can find a rebirth.

B.P.B.