MASSES & MAINSTREAM

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Our Time

By SAMUEL SILLEN

Voices of Resistance

WITH the hard-earned wisdom of experience, Thomas Mann has often alerted American intellectuals to the tragic cost of tolerating an assault on freedom which justifies itself as a crusade against Communism. The novelist warned during the first Hollywood hearings:

"As an American citizen of German birth, I finally testify that I am painfully familiar with certain political trends. Spiritual intolerance, political inquisitions, and declining legal security, and all this in the name of an alleged 'state of emergency' . . . that is how it started in Germany. What followed was fascism and what followed fascism was war."

These words no doubt seemed alarmist to many people of good will in 1947. But much, terribly much, has happened since. We need not here review the disasters of intolerance and inquisition that have touched new depths under the war-minded Eisenhower Administration and 83rd Congress. Events have come to pass which may well have seemed incredible seven years ago—the "outlawing" of a political party, the "repeal" of the Fifth Amendment, the enforced licensing of trade unions and of printing presses.

It is no longer possible for thoughtful people to dismiss the menace of fascism. The facts of life are compelling more and more Americans to make their own agonizing reappraisals. There is a growing mood of resistance, and it is not wishful thinking to hold that this mood is bound to sharpen in the critical months ahead.

One symptom was afforded by last month's convention of the American Psychological Association. This academic gathering, ordinarily devoted to non-political concerns, was highlighted by a panel on "The Problem of Anti-Intellectualism," which heard a trenchant attack on McCarthy and McCarthyism delivered by Dr. G. M. Gilbert of Michigan State College. Dr. Gilbert's forthright rebuke to the forces that have "poisoned the atmosphere of free inquiry in the intellectual world of America" was several times interrupted by applause of the 800 delegates who heard him.

Added point to this attack on McCarthyism was given by the speaker's background—Dr. Gilbert was the prison psychologist at the Nuremberg war crimes trials in 1945-6. "Frankly," he declared, "when I returned from Nuremberg I had not expected that I would witness any of

this creeping thought control and bellicose demagoguery in America . . . but it *has* been happening here."

And Dr. Gilbert reminded his colleagues: "We bitterly reproached Germans for not standing up to their Nazi demagogues, at least in the early stages when only freedom of opinion was being threatened and opposition was not yet being stifled by torture and death in concentration camps." At Nuremberg he asked many German intellectuals about this. They told him it is hard to recognize creeping fascism until it is too late. But Dr. Gilbert sees no excuse for not recognizing it here—and in time. He insists that "we must regard the intellectuals' willingness to stand up to the threat of creeping thought control and super-patriotic intimidation as one of the tests of America's fitness to survive with its freedoms intact."

ANOTHER noteworthy symptom of this aroused conscience was the letter by Brooks Atkinson appearing in the New York *Times* a few weeks ago. Mr. Atkinson, the *Times'* theatre critic, took the somewhat unusual step of addressing a letter on government policy to his own paper because of his distress over the trend to a police state. Mr. Atkinson drew up a bill of particulars. He noted that the government

". . . Blocks the free exchange of ideas by denying visas to eminent European scientists and writers who have been invited by American citizens to attend professional conferences here.

"It maintains an organization of investigators who collect, among other items, facts concerning the newspaper reading habits of citizens and the mail that goes into their homes.

"It employs political informers.

"It blackmails citizens into informing on each other.

"It summons citizens before Government committees to answer for their personal ideas, associations, friends and their relatives.

"Government committees presume to give absolution to citizens who confess their political sins and promise not to violate the committees' party line in the future."

And Mr. Atkinson concludes: "I wonder if Americans really want it this way."

That they don't—not if they are truly patriotic—is underscored by a third example drawn from last month: the significant defeat of would-be bookburners in Marin County, California. The bigots of the community have been trying to set up a "screening system" for all books in the county schools. A fascist group sought to remove fifteen books from high school library shelves on the ground that they were "subversive" or "obscene."

Among the books tagged for burning were several dealing with the struggle for Negro rights: *The Walls Came Tumbling Down* by Mary White Ovington, *Thirteen Against the Odds* by Edwin Embree, *American Argument* by Pearl Buck and Eslanda Goode Robeson, *Brothers Under the Skin* by Carey McWilliams. Other titles included *My Wild Irish Rogues* by Mrs. Vincent Hallinan, *The People of the Soviet Union* by Corliss Lamont, and *A Russian Journey* by John Steinbeck (who, ironically, is preaching these days over "Radio Free Europe" on the felicities of free enterprise).

A committee of Marin clergymen, educators, Negro leaders led this struggle against thought control. It was a bitter battle. Finally, the board of trustees of Tamalpais Union High School held a public session at which several hundred people shouted their disapproval of fascist methods. The trustees voted to restore the books to the library (though two or three of them were placed on a "reserve" list —among them the book by the late Mary White Ovington, distinguished leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People).

The fight is not over. A recall movement against the board of trustees has been started by the bookhaters. The issue promises to be a keen one in the election campaign, with the Republican assemblyman attempting now to trim his sails to meet the storm of protest against his initial support of the censorship project.

Such examples can be multiplied. This is not to deny that there is much panic and confusion, just as there is much cowardice and treachery in the ranks of intellectuals. But one must be a determined pessimist, or a prey to the witchhunters' own estimate of their success, not to feel a rising wind of resistance.

SOME writers are trying to ridicule this growing anti-fascist awareness. Thus, David Riesman, author of *The Lonely Crowd,* wrote in a recent issue of *The American Scholar* that too many intellectuals are telling each other "atrocity stories" about America. He assures us that what we are witnessing in this country are only the usual "short-run rises or falls in temperature," and that "The very term *witch-hunt* is obscurantist "(Dr. Riesman doesn't bother to explain why). In fact, the intellectuals should draw comfort from the fascist attacks on them: "In a way, the attention that intellectuals are getting these days, although much of it is venomous and indecent, testifies to the great improvement in our status over that of an earlier day."

A great improvement: blacklists, bookburnings, jail sentences. But at least recognition, and what intellectual would not just die for that? Riesman himself has won recognition with his picture on the cover of *Time* magazine a couple of weeks ago.

His *American Scholar* article pooh-poohing the "atrocity stories" was an answer to Archibald MacLeish's article in the same magazine on "Loyalty and Freedom." In a reply, MacLeish wrote:

"Any man who mistakes for fear the indignation of those who detest

and mean to oppose the increasingly shameless attacks on the American tradition of individual liberty has a lower opinion of human nature and a feebler attachment to liberty than would seem justifiable. As for McCarthyism, the disease may be ineradicable [as Riesman had suggested. SS], but it is precisely in the continuing struggle against it, in all its forms and at all levels of the national conscience, that effective freedom consists. The open-mindedness for which Mr. Riesman pleads is noble enough, but there are some things in which an unwillingness or an inability to make up one's mind is not noble."

THIS resolve to defend the democratic traditions of our land was eloquently expressed by Mrs. Goldie Watson, schoolteacher for 22 years in Philadelphia, when she invoked the First Amendment before the Velde Committee. Mrs. Watson was hounded by the inquisitors. They pressed her to name people as Communists. They offered her promotions and dangled financial security. But Mrs. Watson could not be shaken by bribery or blackmail. The Negro schoolteacher, who made it clear she is not a Communist, told her schoolboard:

"All my life I have dedicated myself to Negro children. I have attempted to convince them that this was a country in which we could have ultimate freedom. I have held the Constitution very high. How could I, how could I down in Washington demonstrate that what I believed about the First Amendment only held for me when it was safe? If Goldie was going to be fired, if she was going to go through this kind of ordeal, then she would run to the cover of the committee. I couldn't do it. And it would have been the lowest type of moral cowardice and morals for me to have permitted myself to become a stool-pigeon and an informer because I had been informed on. I wouldn't do it. I could not have returned to my classroom under those circumstances.

"When I walked into that room I knew that no power, no power on God's earth, could make me become a part of something that I thought was wrong, could make me show my boys and girls that I held the Constitution in contempt. . . . And I say to you, gentlemen, that if the First Amendment no longer means anything, if my right to test this Amendment is a crime, we have reached a terrible state in America. Democracy is going down the drain. And Negro Americans will be able to achieve nothing in such an atmosphere."

I say that these words of Mrs. Goldie Watson, like the words of Dr. G. M. Gilbert, Brooks Atkinson, Archibald MacLeish, speak for what is in the hearts and minds of the great masses of Americans. They speak for the new strength, the new resolution that is developing as the crisis of democracy grows more grave. The Brownell-McCarthy club, aimed at knocking people senseless, is bringing people to their senses. It is awakening them to the fact that failure to speak out now, failure to unite now, is surrender of all that the American people have cherished most. The attack that disguised itself as an "anti-Communist" crusade to save America is being revealed more and more as a plot to enslave America.

And this illumination, painful as it may be to many, is developing the basis for a powerful anti-fascist movement.

Floodtide of Peace

By PAUL ROBESON

We are happy to present here a letter from Paul Robeson to the noted Soviet writer, Boris Polevoi, author of The Story of a Real Man *and other works. Mr. Polevoi is writing a book about leading fighters for peace in the Western countries, and the following letter was written in response to his request for a personal statement by Paul Robeson to be included in the chapter dealing with the great people's artist and champion of peace and freedom.*

DEAR Boris Polevoi:

It is late at night, but through the open window of this room comes the sound of people still moving about on the streets. Harlem—this vast Negro city-within-a-city—seems always astir. Like the crowded dwellings which can barely contain the mass of humanity that is hemmed into this neighborhood by the invisible walls of racism, the very hours of the day seem too cramped for the surging life of the people. Working people, most of them are—working hard to pay the landlord, for rents here are as high as the buildings are dilapidated; struggling to live another week, another month; struggling to attain some recognition of their human dignity that has been denied them so long in this land. And laughing, too—"laughing to keep from crying," as they say; and snatching moments of gaiety at a dance-hall, a movie, a street-corner tavern.

Here in this community my people come together in all of the many organizations they have formed to serve their common needs—mutual-aid societies, churches, trade unions, athletic teams, political and social clubs. Here are honest leaders working among the people; and here, too, are the misleaders who do the bidding of the rulers for paltry favors. Militant leaders are persecuted, and some of the best and bravest of them are jailed. I think of a man dear to me as a brother—Ben Davis, whom the people of Harlem twice elected to City Council and whom the warmongers imprisoned three years ago together with other leaders of the Communist Party.

I think, too, of another heroic Negro champion who is known to many in other lands—my old, dear friend, William Patterson, leader of the Civil Rights Congress, who sits tonight in a New York jail because he dares to defend the many, Negro and white, who are persecuted by the reactionaries.

Yes, this is the Harlem of Davis and Patterson, and all around are their people and mine. I, who have heard only a few miles away, at Peekskill, the baying of the lynch-mob, the cries for my life shrilled from hate-twisted mouths, feel in this neighborhood the caress of love. "Hello, Paul—it's good to see you!" the people say as I walk in their midst and as they take my hand in theirs.

Here for many years my brother, Rev. Benjamin C. Robeson, has served as pastor of one of the largest Negro churches. This church, Mother Zion, the mother church of the numerous African Methodist Episcopal Zion denomination, has a history that goes back to 1796, when it was founded by free Negroes who refused to be part of the church of the Christian slave-owners. Sojourner Truth, heroine of our liberation struggle, was an early member of Mother Zion; and Frederick Douglass, our greatest hero and teacher, and Harriet Tubman, our Moses of the Underground Railroad, also played their part in the freedom-striving tradition of this church.

FREQUENTLY I spend an evening with my devoted older brother, Rev. Robeson, a gentle, gray-haired man of quiet dignity. But tonight I am at my son's house; and there he is, hunched over a table on the other side of the room. The lamplight deepens the heavy frown on his youthful brow as he leans forward in his chair, chin on fist like Rodin's *The Thinker*. Indeed, it is a very serious problem my son must ponder about, for in front of him is a chessboard with the black and white pieces joined in crucial combat, and his opponent is—an international grandmaster!

His opponent—is it Smyslov?—or Bronstein, perhaps?—is not actually present, but Paul is replaying the moves from one of the games in the chess tournament recently held here in New York between the visiting Soviet masters and their American hosts. Was "White's" next move—pawn to King's Bishop 4—a fatal blunder? Paul is determined to find out. Of course, if he finds a better move it won't help "white" whose game was lost in a tournament that has ended; but the more Paul learns the more he can teach me when we play each other again.

The tournament score was 20 to 12 in favor of the Soviet chess team, but it seemed to me that the most meaningful score was posted before the first move was made in the opening round. I mean the victory scored by the American chess players whose federation insisted on bringing this match to our shores; and the loser was Dulles and his State Department who tried to block this gesture of friendship. What a pleasure it was for us to join in the hearty applause of the spectators when the spokesmen for each team expressed their firm desires for peace

and cultural exchange between our countries!

Yes, my friends, there truly is "another America"—the America of the common people who dread the thought of another war and yearn to live in a world at peace. Their voice is never heard on the official "Voice of America." The warmongering press and radio speak, as does Mr. Dulles, only for the handful of billionaires who dominate our country and who seek to dominate the world. Largely inarticulate, terrorized by fascists like Senator McCarthy, and often confused by the steady barrage of war propaganda which tells them that the world-cry for peace is a "communist plot," nevertheless the American people respond to the cause of peace and progress whenever that cause can get a hearing. Let me give you some examples of that truth from my own experiences during these difficult days.

ONLY recently I sang in a concert at the University of Chicago. The student organization which invited me was subjected to various pressures to get them to cancel the offer; local reactionary groups threatened violence against any who dared to attend; the newspapers fiercely denounced the concert as "un-American." But the students stood firm, and the result—a packed hall of 1,500 people, with hundreds more turned away for lack of room!

As always, I included on the program songs of other lands, and songs of the Russian people, like Moussorgsky's "After the Battle"; and the message of peace and democracy that I brought was warmly received. Incidentally, I met there the editor of the student newspaper who was one of the group of American college editors who visited the Soviet Union last year and learned about that all-important truth which is kept from the American people today—the fact that the Soviet people, far from being "aggressors," are passionately dedicated to the cause of peace.

Sometime soon I shall return to Chicago, for a concert on the South Side—the large Negro community of that city. Last summer such a concert was planned, and when no hall could be hired because of the terror, the gathering was held in Washington Park. Indeed, no hall in that neighborhood could have held the audience which thronged to the park that bright Sunday afternoon—ten thousand people, most of them Negro workers from the steel mills and meat-packing plants, and many of these workers were recent arrivals from the deep South, from the cotton plantations of Mississippi. A large number of the Negro middle-class also attended—doctors, lawyers, school-teachers; and one of the leading clergymen was there to give his blessing.

I'm sure there were many in that great crowd who never before had heard the truth about the Soviet Union. They listened intently as I told of my visits to the Land of Socialism: of how I had found there a society in which for the first time

in my life I, a Negro, son of a former chattel slave, had known what it feels like to be free and equal. I told them of how deeply I was moved when, on a later visit, I saw in the school books from which my son studied that the lessons of human brotherhood were being taught to the Soviet children. I told about the many nations and races that comprise the Soviet Union, and of how those peoples who had known colonial and racist oppression in the old days had achieved national liberation and were marching forward with giant strides, firmly united with, and equal among, their Russian brothers who had led the way.

Here was good news to cheer in Chicago's South Side; which then and today still witnesses the brutal attacks which the lynchers make on Negro families that move into homes outside the Negro ghetto. And afterward, as they crowded around the platform to grip my hand, my heart was filled by this demonstration of militant support that united me with these industrial workers in the North who are closely linked with the great mass of Negroes in the South, the toilers on the land who yearn to be free from three long centuries of cruel oppression.

Soon after that wonderful day, I found myself at another memorable outdoor-concert. Although I am not permitted to travel outside the United States, this concert was in fact a cultural exchange between nations. It was held at Peace Arch Park, on the U.S.-Canadian border between our state of Washington and the province of British Columbia. This concert, a mass demonstration for peace, was sponsored by the Vancouver (Canada) district of the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers Union.

I might mention here that this union of metal-ore miners has a rich heritage of working-class struggle, for it grew out of the old Western Federation of Miners and the heroic strike struggles led by "Big Bill" Haywood, who, forced to flee from savage persecution after the first world war, lived out his last years in the Soviet Union and whose ashes were buried in the Kremlin wall. From the early struggles of this union came the martyred organizer, Joe Hill, killed by the copper trust in Utah—the same Joe Hill of whom I sing, and who himself was the foremost writer of songs for the American working people.

WELL, out there in the great Northwest, where this concert was held, the spirit of the working class—the spirit of democracy and internationalism — is rooted deep. People came from miles around, filling the roads like overflowing streams, and when they were all assembled in the park, there was an audience of 40,000 men, women and children! Never before in the history of that region, the police admitted, had there been so large a public gathering.

Peace—yes, here was the floodtide of the people's hopes! Here, at the border I am forbidden to cross, was

a demonstration of that force which no national boundaries can stop, a demonstration of that force which will surely *impose the peace,* as we all vowed at the World Peace Congress in Paris. Yes, here was a powerful expression of the peoples' will for a world of peaceful coexistence, of friendly relations and cultural exchange—a rally of working-class solidarity against the profiteers of war!

In a few days I am going back to the Canadian border for another such concert. In the year that has passed since that last great rally of Canadian and American workers, the peace forces of the world have grown stronger. The onrushing tide of the colonial liberation movement — in Asia, in Africa, in Latin America— brings vast new legions into the camp of peace and freedom. Dulles cries out for "united action," for war against the peoples, but those whom he counted on to be his allies have come to see that peaceful coexistence is infinitely better than atomic disaster.

Here in America the Big Lie is still official doctrine. Repression continues and sharpens against those who speak out for civil rights and peace. New inquisitions are started daily; new fascist-like laws are being passed in Congress; new victims are being framed-up and sentenced to prison. But though Senator McCarran embraces Franco, and Senator McCarthy invokes the ghost of Goebbels, the American people are not fascists. The democratic tradition of Jefferson and Lincoln and Douglass and Whitman still runs deep among the common people.

No one could miss the popular alarm and protest that flared up all over the country when Vice-President Nixon recently suggested that American soldiers be sent to fight the Vietnamese. And lately we have seen that the idea of peaceful coexistence, almost totally suppressed in recent years, has now become a matter of public discussion, with spokesmen for broad sections of public opinion openly advocating a change in official policy on this subject. This discussion in itself is a breakthrough for peace, and I am sure that the common sense of the American people, who only a decade ago supported President Roosevelt and recognized with him that American-Soviet friendship was indispensable for world peace, will bring them to see that truth again.

Then, instead of this miserable cold war, we will have the sunshine of a lasting peace; our artists, writers, scientists, workers, students and farmers will come to know each other; and in place of the Big Lie the great truth of human brotherhood shall prevail.

As a firm and devoted friend, I salute the great peoples of the Soviet Union, who have opened a new chapter in human history and are writing by their heroism the story of real men, of real women, and of their children who shall inherit the unlimited future.

—PAUL ROBESON

CHEKHOV'S DRAMA:
CHALLENGE TO PLAYWRIGHTS

By JOHN HOWARD LAWSON

CHEKHOV has exerted a considerable influence on theatre development in the United States. However, this influence has been based, in no small degree, on a one-sided and essentially false interpretation of Chekhov's art.

It is ironic that Chekhov, the prophet of a new era, has been eulogized as a prophet of doom! The man who hated pessimism, who mocked the inertia of the intellectuals and derided false sentiment, is called the father of the drama of decadent moods, pretentious intellectualism and false sentiment.

Many American critics have disputed this interpretation. H. W. L. Dana has analyzed Chekhov's social and political growth. John Gassner notes that "We have heard a great deal about the plotlessness and irresolution of Chekhov's work. But we have not heard enough about the secret strength and drive, the portentous hunger for life and positiveness of his plays."

In July's *Masses & Mainstream,* Dorothy Brewster writes: "The exact sense in which Chekhov was a master of life and art was usually blurred by the customary phrases about melancholy, the fragrance of human despair and aspiration, the veil of detachment, and the like." She quotes Arnaud d'Usseau's statement that the character in Chekhov is "always seen in social context; the personal and historical dilemma depicted as one."

D'Usseau's comment may serve as the text for the present essay. From an historical point of view, it is essential to place Chekhov's work in its proper perspective. It is also a labor of love, a tribute to a writer who has given so much to the world's drama. But the rediscovery of the real values in Chekhov is above all necessary *for ourselves*—so that these values may serve and enrich our contemporary American theatre.

Chekhov, son of a provincial merchant who had gone bankrupt, came to Moscow in 1879, at the age of nineteen, to begin his studies at the medical department of Moscow University. The first phase of his development as a dramatist covers approximately a decade, and is represented by three significant plays: *Fatherless,* completed at the age of twenty;* the one-act work, *On the High Road,*

* The manuscript, supposedly lost, was discovered in the Soviet Union in 1923. It was first printed in English in 1930, under the title, *That Worthless Fellow, Platonov.*

1885; *Ivanov,* produced in 1887.

All three deal with a middle-aged, intellectually mature man, who reaches the conclusion that society is hopelessly corrupt, and that there are no positive values to make life tolerable.

The protagonist of the first play is wholly amoral. He loves his wife, but has affairs with a number of other women. He says: "Evil seethes around me. . . . I see no prospect of change." At the end, Sofya, the young wife of his friend, suggests that they go away together to start life anew. He refuses; Sofya, seduced and abandoned and convinced that he is worthless, kills him.

Chekhov's youthful pessimism was in tune with the temper of the time. The great democratic, creative ferment of the middle nineteenth century began to lose its vigor in the seventies. The mid-century struggles, centering around abolition of serfdom and the demand for elementary democratic rights, forced the Tsarist government to grant reforms and prepared the way for the development of capitalism in Russia. This movement, taking place at a time when the working class was in its infancy, tended to strengthen the state and began its transformation into a centralized bourgeois monarchy.

The consolidation of the monarchy was implemented by harsh police measures and more intensive exploitation of workers. Pending the appearance of a more mature working class, there was no force capable of continuing the earlier mass struggles to meet the new conditions. The terrorist tactics of the Narodniks reflected their lack of mass support. The Narodnik assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881 led the government to take extreme action against democratic ideas and activities. Lenin described the following decade as a period of "unbridled, incredibly senseless and brutal reaction."

The "Dostoievskian" mood of *Fatherless* mirrors the pessimism that was the prevalent fashion when Chekhov entered the university. But the young student was also influenced by the affirmative humanist values which were his immediate cultural inheritance—the novels of Tolstoy, Gogol, Turgenev, the critical writings of Chernyshevsky, the plays of Ostrovsky, the music of Borodin and Moussorgsky. Chekhov's first play embodies the contradiction between his awareness of social reality and his inability to find any realistic solution. The play indicts a corrupt society, but the deepest corruption is subjective, the darkness in Platonov's soul.

Unable to resolve the contradiction, Chekhov was too creative to sink his art in the mire of subjectivism. He began to write mordantly realistic stories of bureaucracy and official stupidity. With each year, these tales show greater depth, tenderness, love of people.

IN 1885, Chekhov returned to the serious drama with a one-act play, *On the High Road,* based on his story, *In the Autumn.* The play is, in a sense, a re-statement of the problem posed five years earlier in *Fatherless.* Here again, the middle-class man faces the breakdown of all his values. However, the breakdown is no longer presented in subjective terms. Bortsov, a landowner who has become a drunken vagabond, enters an inn on a rainy night. The guests are poor pilgrims and peasants, a bank cashier, a factory worker. The realistic treatment suggests an affinity to Gorky.

The social setting reveals Chekhov's feeling that the deterioration of middle class values is related to the suffering and oppression of the lower classes. But he is unable to develop this concept. The guests at the inn are merely observers of a contrived plot: an expensively dressed woman arrives, and it turns out that she is Bortsov's former wife, who deserted him on their wedding day.

Thus the basic question of social corruption is avoided, and the man's downfall is blamed on a woman. It is curious that Chekhov, whose later plays show such deep understanding of woman's role in a society that prevents the development of her personality, should have been content, in 1885, with the shallow generalization that men are "victimized" by the selfishness and instability of women.

This false solution seems to have been forced on the author by his inability to cope with the issues he has called into being. In bringing his protagonist into the sordid inn, Chekhov attempts something which is beyond his power; he must take refuge in coincidence and melodrama, even going so far as to have the peasant, Merik, threaten to kill Bortsov's former wife, because the peasant has also been deceived by a woman.

There was enough social content in *On the High Road* to cause its suppression by the Tsarist censor, on the ground that it was "gloomy and filthy."

Two years later, Chekhov wrote his first full-length play to reach the stage. *Ivanov* presents a pattern of relationships strikingly similar to the pattern of *Fatherless*: the embittered middle-aged man, the unsatisfactory marriage, the affair with a younger woman. But there is a tremendous difference in the viewpoint of the two plays: while Platonov was devoid of moral scruples, Ivanov is tortured by his conscience. He is married to a Jewish woman who contracts tuberculosis. Bored by his wife's illness, Ivanov falls in love with Sasha, the young daughter of a friend.

After the wife's death, Dr. Lvov accuses Ivanov of having caused her death by his callousness. Like Sofya in *Fatherless,* Sasha suggests that they go away together and start life anew. But Ivanov cannot escape his conscience, and commits suicide.

Chekhov was feeling his way toward the analysis of the relationship between individual failure and social forces. But he still saw the problem chiefly in terms of personal guilt: the futility of the intellectual is an-

swered by the supreme futility of suicide.

Ivanov opened under the most trying circumstances. The play had been mangled by the censor, who eliminated about one-fourth of the lines spoken by the leading character. The performance was interrupted by angry controversy. Fights broke out in the pit and two persons were removed by the police.

At this time, Chekhov wrote a number of brilliant short plays, which he described as dramatic "jests:" *The Bear,* and *The Proposal,* in 1888; *An Unwilling Martyr* in 1889.

These plays show his increasing mastery of technique. But far more significant is a private "jest," not intended for publication or production. Chekhov's friend, Suvorin, wrote a drama, *Tatyana Repin,* produced early in 1889. It is the story of an actress who commits suicide when her lover marries another woman.

For the amusement of his friend, Chekhov sent Suvorin a brief sequel to the play, with a note saying it was written "in one sitting. . . . Don't show it to *anybody,* and when you have read it throw it in the fire." Fortunately, Suvorin did not follow these instructions: he printed two copies of the work, one for himself, one for the author.

Chekhov's *Tatyana Repin* takes place in a church. The lover of the actress who has recently killed herself is marrying the lady of his choice. The complicated Russian marriage ceremony is presented in mocking detail. A Lady in Black appears, and the bridegroom thinks it is the ghost of his dead sweetheart. He almost faints, but the ceremony is completed. After the guests leave, two priests discuss the substantial property settlement which the bridegroom has secured. The Woman in Black comes forward. She has just poisoned herself, because her brother, like the bridegroom, betrayed a woman and caused her death. Writhing in agony, the Woman exclaims:

> "I have taken poison! Out of hatred! . . . She is in her grave, and he . . . he . . . Through this wrong to woman God is profaned. A woman wasted. . . ."

The priest exclaims piously: "What blasphemy against religion! What blasphemy against life!"

In this hastily written fragment, Chekhov declares war on the false sentiment and religious "sanctity" that mask the sordid reality of bourgeois marriage. It marks a turning point in Chekhov's dramatic thought. In attacking the conventions of contemporary society, he also attacks the theatrical form in which these conventions are embalmed. Suvorin's play called upon the audience to weep for a woman scorned. In going beyond the woman's death, Chekhov went beyond the boundaries of the theatre of his time. He found the true tragedy in marriage based on property relationships, with the participants haunted by the knowledge that the contract is written in blood.

Chekhov's deeper understanding of woman's role in society is the key to

the second cycle of his dramatic development, extending over the ten-year period from 1889 to 1899, and including three plays: *The Wood Demon,* 1889; *The Seagull,* 1896; *Uncle Vanya,* which is a revision of *The Wood Demon,* 1899.

THESE ten years witnessed far-reaching changes in the political and cultural life of Russia. Chekhov was profoundly affected by these changes. In 1890, his desire for broader experience led him to undertake a journey across Siberia to Sakhalin Island, where convict laborers and exiles lived under intolerable conditions.

Chekhov told of what he saw on Sakhalin Island in a book which became a powerful weapon in the struggle against Tsarist tyranny. He provided another effective weapon in *Ward No. 6:* the stark description of the horrors of a mental hospital was a thinly veiled attack on the inhuman cruelty and official blindness of which the asylum was a symbol.

The awakening of Chekhov's social consciousness was part of an historical process that was transforming the consciousness of the Russian people. The growth of industry brought the emergence of an industrial proletariat. Lenin, twenty-three years old and already steeled in working class activity, came to St. Petersburg in 1893 and undertook the organization of study circles among factory workers. In 1895, twenty of these groups united to form the League of Struggle for the Emancipation of the Working Class, which became a leading force in crucial strike struggles. Lenin was arrested in December, 1895. Even from prison, he influenced the strike of 30,000 St. Petersburg weavers during the coronation of Nicholas II in 1896. In January, 1897, Lenin was sentenced to three years exile in Siberia.

The Seagull was produced at the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg in October, 1896, a few months after the great textile strike and a few months before Lenin's trial and conviction. Russian writers and artists lived the more or less insulated professional existence which obstructs the full development of creative talent in a class society. But the rising tide of working class protest affected the whole structure of Russian life. The literary and theatrical circles in which Chekhov moved were stirred by new currents of thought, aroused by new possibilities of social change.

Since *The Seagull* is the first mature expression of the change in Chekhov's dramatic thought, we shall examine it before considering the two versions of the work which appeared in preliminary form as *The Wood Demon* and evolved into *Uncle Vanya* ten years later.

In *The Seagull,* Chekhov realistically dissects the intellectual life of which he himself is a part. As in his earlier plays, he deals with the search for a creative and useful life. But the search is no longer seen in terms of psychological "frustration."

Trigorin is related to the leading figures of earlier plays, "that worth-

less fellow, Platonov," and Ivanov.

The web of relationship is similar to the earlier pattern. Instead of the unsuccessful marriage, there is the long-standing affair between Madame Arkhadin and Trigorin. There is the ardent young woman who falls in love with the cynical intellectual and offers him the chance of "renewing his youth."

In *The Seagull,* these relationships are transformed and illuminated. The dramatic interest does not center on Trigorin, but on Nina and the results of her passion for the middle-aged writer. When Nina returns to the country estate, after her child by Trigorin has died and after he has left her to go back to the comfortable affair with Madame Arkhadin, she reminds Treplev of the incident of the seagull that took place two years before. The poet had shot a seagull and thrown the dead bird at her feet, saying, "Soon I shall kill myself in the same way."

Nina sees the seagull as an unclear symbol of her fate:

> "Why do you say that you kissed the earth on which I walked? I deserve to be killed . . . I am tired! . . . I'm a seagull . . . not that, I'm an actress. . . . Do you remember, you shot a seagull? A man came by chance, saw it, and just to pass the time destroyed it. . . . A subject for a short story. . . . No, not that. . . . (She rubs her forehead) What was I saying? I was speaking of the stage. . . . I'm no longer what I was. I am now a real actress. . . . I do know now, I understand, Kostya, that in our work, in acting and writing, the chief thing is not fame, nor glory, nor what I dreamed of, but the capacity for taking pains . . . to bear one's cross and have faith. I have faith, and it does not pain me so much, and when I think of my vocation, I am not afraid of life."

Nina's long, confused, fragmentary speech expresses her troubled state of mind. But the emotional complexity and nuances of meaning in her words, and in the whole scene with Treplev, reflect the troubled and transitional character of Chekhov's thought.

The search for deeper artistic truth is related to the autobiographical aspects of the character of Trigorin. Publication in the Soviet Union a few years ago of Lydia Avilov's reminiscences shows that even the reference to a page and line of a story engraved on the medallion given by Nina to Trigorin was based on an actual incident.*

While the use of a personal experience is intriguing, the essential thing is that Chekhov, in seeing himself as Trigorin, rejected a part of his own past as a successful writer. He shows Trigorin as a man whose lazy intellectuality and selfishness lead to moral irresponsibility. The problem of creativity is transferred from the writer to Nina. Her beautiful talent and capacity for real emotion are wasted by Trigorin's casual affair with her. But she is not destroyed. Her frightening contact with reality gives her a new faith in her work and herself. But the sense of life which she has achieved is shadowed by pain. *The Seagull* is like a symphony built on the angry cry at the end of *Tatyana Repin*: "Through this wrong to woman God is profaned . . . a woman wasted. . . ."

The end is like an unfinished note of music. Nina's departure, followed by Treplev's suicide, leaves the theme unresolved. It is this lack of precise definition, embodied in the haunting symbol of the seagull, that gives the play its charm and its intensity—and makes its interpretation on the stage extremely difficult.

The form and content of *The Seagull* were so alien to contemporary theatre conventions that it could not be effectively performed under the prevailing conditions. Chekhov wrote after the opening: "There was an oppressive strained feeling of disgrace and bewilderment in the theatre. . . . The moral of it is that one ought not to write plays."

But the healthy realism that Chekhov brought to the drama was also a sustaining factor in his personal life. A short time later, he wrote: "When I got home, I took a dose of castor oil and had a cold bath, and now I am ready to write another play."

CHEKHOV'S determination to continue dramatic writing was related to the increasingly hopeful and militant feeling among Russian intellectuals, whose changing viewpoint reflected the changing balance of social forces. In 1897, another textile strike forced the government to pass a law limiting the working day to eleven and a half hours. In the same year, Chekhov attended a meeting at which the actor, Stanislavsky, and the critic and playwright, Nemirovitch-Danchenko, outlined plans for a People's Theatre. The name was abandoned, because it revealed too clearly to the authorities the aim of the founders to create a more democratic theatre art.

From September, 1897 to May, 1898, Chekhov travelled in France. During the first months of the trip, his diary shows the usual preoccupations of the foreign traveller—"Moulin Rouge, danse du ventre. . . . Monte Carlo, I saw how a croupier stole a louis d'or." But early in 1898, Chekhov was profoundly impressed by Zola's defense of Dreyfus. He wrote that "a new, better Zola had arisen. There is a purity and moral elevation that was not suspected in him."

A few months after Chekhov's return, the Moscow Art Theatre opened. Its third production, in December, 1898, was a revival of *The Seagull.* It was a tremendous success and assured the continuance of the new dramatic organization. The seagull became the emblem of the Art Theatre, represented on its curtain, on its programs and correspondence.

In a sense, the Art Theatre's use of the symbol suggests contradictions which are rooted in the play and in Chekhov's relationship with Stanislavsky and his associates. The theatre discovered beauties and values in the work which had been wholly ob-

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* Lydia Avilov, *Chekhov in My Life,* translated with introduction by David Magarshack, New York, 1950.

scured in the St. Petersburg performance. But Chekhov was bitterly dissatisfied, with the interpretation and especially with the portrayal of Trigorin. Underlying his objections was his feeling that dramatic realism—the realism for which he was searching with such intensity in *The Seagull*—demanded a more complete break with the false emotionalism and "psychology" of the contemporary stage.

The two versions of the play produced as *The Wood Demon* in 1889 and as *Uncle Vanya* ten years later, show Chekhov's growth over the decade. Comparison of the two works affords an invaluable insight into Chekhov's search for deeper realism, and its relationship to the technical form of his plays and their social content.

Man's use of his own and nature's resources is the theme of *The Wood Demon.* The first act is discursive: the conversation in the garden of a country estate is designed to give us the sense of a complex social situation. The elderly and distinguished professor, Serebryskov is married to a young wife, Elena, who is twenty-seven. Sonya, his daughter by a previous marriage, is twenty. The estate is managed by the brother of the first wife, George Voynitsky.

Krouschov, a neighboring doctor in his early thirties, is known as "the wood demon," because he feels so strongly about the conservation of forests. Sonya is drawn to Krouschov, forests.

He says:

"Every Russian forest is cracking under the axe, millions of trees are perishing, the abodes of beasts and birds are being ravaged, rivers are becoming shallow and drying up, wonderful landscapes are disappearing without leaving a trace. . . . Understanding and creative power have been given to man to multiply what has been given him, but hitherto he has not created but only destroyed."

The words seem to foreshadow the Shostakovitch cantata, *Song of the Forest,* which was to celebrate the same theme some sixty years later, in a land which had realized Krouschov's dream.

To the Russian gentry in 1889, Krouschov is a harmless fanatic. Elena, embittered by her own experience, grasps the meaning of his words. She tells the mocking guests: "You nonsensically destroy forests. . . . Just so nonsensically do you all destroy man. . . ."

Serebryskov is coldly selfish. He is described as a man who "for twenty-five years has been chewing other men's ideas on realism, tendencies and various other nonsense . . . for twenty-five years he has been pouring water into a sieve. And along with that—what success! What popularity!"

There are two parallel love stories: Sonya and Krouschov are drawn to one another and Voynetksy tries in vain to tell Elena of his passion.

In the third act, the professor announces that he has decided to sell the estate. Voynitsky, feeling that he has been cast aside, kills himself.

Elena cries out in anguish: "Take me away from here! Throw me into a deep pit, kill me, but I can't remain here any longer."

In the last act, Elena has taken refuge in a mill owned by an elderly neighbor. The people assemble here for a picnic. Elena reveals herself and decides that she will return to her husband. A forest fire reddens the sky. Krouschov and Sonya are united as they go to fight the fire. Krouschov exclaims: "I may not be a hero, but I will become one! Let forests burn—I will plant new ones!"

The weakness of the play is evident in the ineffective climax. Elena's defiance of her husband has led to nothing. The forest fire has no connection with the action. Krouschov's determination to become a hero is merely rhetoric. The happy ending does not grow out of any change in the lovers; there is no reason to suppose that their marriage will make any fundamental change in them or their environment.

TEN years later, Chekhov stripped the play of its facile idealism, and abandoned the contrived situations which offer an abstract solution of a social problem. The revision illustrates the unity of form and content. The structure of the revised play demonstrates the author's clearer grasp of the structure of these lives.

The change in title indicates a shift in emphasis, from the Wood Demon's theories of forest conservation to the man whose problem is much more personal and immediate —Uncle Vanya (the Voynitsky of the earlier version), who finds himself dismissed after managing the estate for twenty-five years.

The first act of *Uncle Vanya* abandons the discursive exposition of *The Wood Demon.* We come directly to the basic situation. Dr. Krouschov, the idealistic physician, reappears as Dr. Astrov. He has the same feeling about the waste of forests, but he is no longer a starry-eyed enthusiast. He is tired, cynical, overworked, a little too fond of vodka.

Elena's relationship to her elderly husband and her rejection of Uncle Vanya are treated exactly as in the earlier version. But the love story between the doctor and Sonya (the most conventional element in *The Wood Demon*) is eliminated. Sonya adores Astrov, but he is totally indifferent to her.

This change leads to a new situation: Elena undertakes to speak to the doctor on Sonya's behalf. Astrov responds by making love to Elena, and both are almost swept off their feet by a passion which both know to be false and "episodic." Uncle Vanya enters and sees the two embracing. This scene gives an entirely different emotional tone to the scene that follows it—the professor's announcement that he will sell the estate. From an acting point of view, the difference is striking: Elena and Uncle Vanya are both in a state of extreme tension, which counterpoints the professor's talk of property and income. This added tension is not achieved artificially. It crystallizes the

sterility of their lives and the impossibility of a "romantic" escape. Instead of committing suicide, Uncle Vanya makes a ridiculous attempt to kill the professor. He fires twice and misses.

Under these circumstances, Elena's flight (which follows the uncle's suicide in *The Wood Demon*) would be even more of an empty gesture than it was in the earlier play. The forest fire is omitted from the last act. Elena and her husband simply leave the estate. But there is a clear statement that class and property relations are responsible for the waste of human resources. Astrov tells Elena:

> "You came here with your husband, and all of us who were at work, toiling and creating something, had to fling aside our work and attend to nothing all summer but your husband's gout and you. . . . I was attracted by you and have done nothing for a whole month, and meanwhile people have been ill, and the peasants have pastured their cattle in my woods of young, half-grown trees. . . . And so, where you and your husband go, you bring destruction everywhere."

At the end, Sonya and Uncle Vanya are left alone. Sonya speaks of the life-time of humble toil that lies before them: "There is nothing for it, we must go on living!" She says she has faith, "fervent, passionate faith." But it is faith in life "beyond the grave"; then, she says, "we shall see a life that is bright, lovely, beautiful."

The other-worldliness of this passage is in a sense symbolical. But it shows that Chekhov's faith in humanity, which shines like a cloudy radiance over the last scene of *Uncle Vanya,* has not as yet crystallized into definite assurance that man can transform his environment. Chekhov sees middle class people like Sonya and Uncle Vanya and the doctor as having a wonderful capacity for honest emotion and creative labor. He sees that these resources cannot be utilized within the existent social framework.

IN THE last years of his life, from 1900 to 1904, Chekhov became conscious of the forces that were moving toward the transformation of Russian society, and hoped that he might see the day of liberation.

The change in Chekhov's viewpoint at the dawn of the new century coincided with a change in the direction of the Moscow Art Theatre's work. The seeds of the change were present at the time the theatre was founded. In attempting to reflect life, these artists found that life was richer and more dynamic than they had ever dreamed.

The flowering of a new viewpoint may be dated from Gorky's visit to the players, assembled at Chekhov's villa near Yalta overlooking the Black Sea, in May, 1900. They had come to give a special performance of *Uncle Vanya,* since the author's failing health prevented his attending the *premiere* in Moscow.

Chekhov invited Gorky to meet the dramatic artists. Olga Knipper, the leading actress who was soon to become Chekhov's wife, and who was later to become one of the great and honored figures in the Soviet theatre, wrote that Gorky "shot like a rocket into our quiet intelligentsia life and startled us with accounts of a world unknown to us."

Gorky, whose young manhood had been spent as a shoemaker's apprentice, tailor, bakeshop worker, stevedore on the Volga, brought news of the unknown world of the working class. It was news that stirred and inspired Chekhov and his friends: it gave them a deeper insight into the reality to which their work was dedicated. They had felt stirrings of discontent. They knew, in intellectual terms, of the anger and suffering of the masses. But now they began to feel that their art must encompass this anger and suffering, that it was related to their own lives, to their country's cultural backwardness and future possibilities.

Gorky's visit resulted in his agreement to write for the Art Theatre. His first play, *The Smug Citizen,* was produced early in 1902, and *The Lower Depths* followed later in the same year.

CHEKHOV'S last plays, *The Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard,* have a relationship to Gorky's dramas. Each writer drew upon his own experience. Chekhov continued to write of the people he knew, the intelligentsia and the landed gentry. But he shared Gorky's affirmative faith, expressed by Satin in *The Lower Depths*: ". . . Man is the truth! . . . All is in Man, all is for Man! . . . Man is born to conceive a better man!" Both writers recognized that man's emotional life, his psychological attitudes, are determined by his social being, by the class society in which he lives.

This is the basis for the advance toward a new dramatic realism which is Chekhov's outstanding contribution to the history of the theatre.

In *The Three Sisters* in 1901, Chekhov returns to the theme of *The Seagull*—the role of women in middle class society. In *The Cherry Orchard,* in 1904, he deals with the rise of capitalism and its effect on the Russian countryside. The scope and imaginative sweep of both plays reflect Chekhov's heightened sensitivity to political and social realities. According to his friend, Elpavievski:

> "The waves of the Russian storm raised and carried Chekhov— He, who had turned his back on politics, was now in politics up to his neck. . . . He began to believe not that life could be beautiful in two hundred years . . . but that this beautiful life was approaching in Russia."

The three sisters are caught in the web of provincial dullness and mediocrity. They dream of "escape" to the more exciting life of Moscow. But there is no escape, either through travel or through romantic "love."

In 1879, Ibsen had shown the bourgeois woman slamming the door on the doll's house in which she is imprisoned. In 1901, Chekhov showed that the woman could find no real freedom until the prison is torn down. The three sisters cannot break their bondage until there is a change in the social order. But their courage and unbroken will give

promise of a time when men and women will work together freely as equals.

Olga, the oldest sister, is a hard-working school-teacher who has no romantic attachments. Masha, the second, is unhappily married to a dull husband and falls in love with a man who is more nearly her intellectual equal, Lieutenant-Colonel Vershinin. Irina, the youngest, is searching for something that will give her life meaning and direction. She says: "My soul is like a wonderful piano, only the key with which to unlock it has been lost."

In *The Three Sisters,* Chekhov has perfected his method of presenting emotional scenes as explosive, and only superficially sincere, attempts to solve problems which are rooted in the social setting, and which are therefore insoluble in purely personal and sentimental terms.

Irina becomes engaged to a lieutenant, Baron Tusenbach, not because she loves him, but because it seems to offer an "escape." On the eve of their marriage, the regiment is ordered to leave, and Masha faces the unbearable prospect of separation from Vershinin.

The climax exhibits Chekhov's technical mastery. The baron goes to fight a duel, over a trifling quarrel. He remarks to Irina as he leaves: "I didn't have any coffee this morning. Ask them to make me some." Masha says goodby to Vershinin in a brief, emotionally repressed scene. Her husband finds them together, and tries to reassure her: "I'm not complaining. I don't say a word of blame. . . . I won't say one word, not a hint." Masha, sobbing, repeats the lines of poetry she has quoted several times:

"By the sea-strand an oak-tree. . . . Upon that oak a chain of gold." The news comes that the Baron has been killed in the duel. We hear the military band as the regiment marches away. The three sisters stand with their arms about one another.

Chekhov handles this rapid movement of events with extraordinary economy. The secret of his ability to compress the maximum emotional impact in a few lines of dialogue lies in his understanding of the social conditions which give the action its scope and meaning. The essence of the situation does not lie in the lovers' parting or the husband's forgiveness or the Baron's death. It lies in the women themselves.

As the military music swells, Irina says: "It is autumn now; winter will be here soon; it will cover everything with snow—but I'll go on working—I'll go on working." And Olga says: "The music sounds so gay, so brave, and one wants so much to live . . . happiness and peace will come upon earth, and men will say a kind word for those who are living now, and will bless them."

The sense of impending change is even stronger in *The Cherry Orchard.* The immediate change in the life of the country estate is the sale of the orchard to be cut up into building lots. But this necessary historical advance is depicted as part of a larger process, a step on the road to a better future.

Chekhov portrays Lopahin, the son of a serf who has become a capitalist, as a man who has both the virtues and the vices of the rising class. Chekhov wrote to Stanislavsky:

> "Lopahin is a very decent person in every sense. He must behave with perfect decorum, like an educated man with no petty ways or tricks of any sort, and it seems to me this part, the central one of the play, would come out brilliantly in your hands."

Stanislavsky did not play the part, and Chekhov's instructions have often been disregarded by actors. The tendency to make Lopahin a clown is related to the treatment of the loss of the orchard as a personal tragedy for Madame Ranevskaya. Actually, her tragedy is a comparatively minor one. She weeps a little and leaves for Paris. More serious is the plight of her adopted daughter, Varya, who has taken care of the estate and is now left without an occupation.

In the last act, Madame Ranevskaya tells Lopahin that it has always been assumed that he will marry Varya. He seems to have no objection, and they are left together. The brief scene is another of Chekhov's masterpieces of emotional compression. Varya waits for the proposal. But Lopahin cannot say the words, because she has nothing that he really values to offer him. They have nothing but idle sentiment to give each other, and Lopahin has no time for sentiment. The capitalist replaces the old gentry—but both are under the spell of the cash nexus. Both are incapable, under these conditions, of personal growth and emotional fulfillment.

The larger reasons for these individual "frustrations" are expressed by the young student, Trofimov: "Your orchard is a fearful thing . . . from every cherry in the orchard, from every leaf, from every trunk there are human creatures looking at you." He cries out: "All Russia is our orchard. The earth is great and beautiful—there are many beautiful places in it."

At the final curtain, the old peasant, Firce, is left alone, locked by mistake in the empty house. He lies down, his strength exhausted. From the distance comes the sound from the sky, the sound of uncompleted music, of a string breaking. And we hear the sound of labor, of axes against trees.

Chekhov died before he could hear more distinctly the music of the future.

IN THE foregoing analysis, I have indicated the elements of Chekhov's art which constitute an advance toward a new dramatic realism. A brief, and necessarily somewhat schematic summary of these elements may help further to define the lessons for today's theatre workers in the study of Chekhov's work.

The root of Chekhov's dramatic thought is his belief that the desire for socially useful work is a fundamental trait of human nature, valid for all stages of human development,

and for all classes. He is optimistic about the future, because the human need for creative activity will eventually create a society that encourages the flowering of the human personality. In a class society, class relationships determine, and to a large extent distort or frustrate, the individual's personal growth. Therefore, the human personality can be most subtly and sensitively explored if it is portrayed in the web of class relationships that constitute the social milieu.

Chekhov rejected the concept that men and women are driven by "passions," "affections," "impulses," chiefly of a sexual character. He treated love with the greatest understanding, but he never viewed love as a thing-in-itself. Love and comradeship can be fully realized only when people are engaged in socially useful labor.

These ideas marked a complete break with the dramatic thought of the time. Chekhov rejected the conventional form of the nineteenth century play, centering around an emotional situation, generally a love-triangle.

There has been a good deal of critical discussion of Chekhov's insistence that his plays are comedies.* His disputes with the Moscow Art Theatre can be understood if we examine Chekhov's plays as a new form of realistic theatre, which could not be interpreted in terms of the conventional, and to a considerable extent artificial, forms of the nineteenth century stage. Chekhov was especially opposed to the tragic emotionalism of the serious drama. He was also influenced by the traditional Russian use of comedy as a vehicle of social criticism, and he felt that this tradition formed a basis for the development of a style which would bring out the healthy humanism and probing of social actualities which he struggled to achieve in his work.

Study of Chekhov's plays shows that the form of stage comedy that is in vogue in the United States today could not possibly be imposed on this dramatic content. The suicide of Treplev cannot be treated as an occasion for laughter, nor can the tragic embrace of the three sisters as the regiment departs. Chekhov objected to the false emotional emphasis in the first presentation of *The Cherry Orchard,* because it failed to underline the relationship of the people to the historical situation, thus rendering them pathetic as individuals, instead of projecting the interplay of people and their environment, the subtle light and shade of human existence, which is *both* comic and tragic because it is life itself, translating absurdities of speech and action into moments that stir the heart.

The clearest expression of Chekhov's realism lies in his rejection of love and sex as mainsprings of dramatic action. In *The Seagull,* the failure of "love," embodied both in Nina's recognition of reality and in Treplev's suicide, is the central theme. But this is no longer true of the later plays, in which the central conflict is between the individual and society, between the individual's desire for personal fulfillment and the class forces that prevent personal development. This struggle does not lack concreteness or theatrical vitality. It achieves such unforgettable moments as the parting of Treplev and Nina at the end of *The Seagull;* the piling up of emotional situations suddenly dissolving to leave the three women in their brave embrace at the end of *The Three Sisters;* the subtle conflict in the quiet dialogue between Lopahin and Varya in the last act of *The Cherry Orchard.*

The climactic moments are achieved by building a complex movement of conflicting feelings and wills to a peak of almost unbearable recognition of what is involved—not a "situation" in the old theatrical sense, but the lives of these people, their fate and the fate of their class.

The same technique is employed by Gorky in dealing with an entirely different milieu in *The Lower Depths.* It is also the method of Gorky's later plays, such as *Yegor Bulychov and Others.*

DETAILED discussion of the way in which the so-called "Chekhov influence" has affected the American theatre would carry us far beyond the purview of the present essay, and would involve many controversial questions. It is hard to define the extent to which any specific play or production is affected, directly or indirectly, by an interpretation, or misinterpretation, of Chekhov's method. Many critics have said that Odets' plays immediately following *Waiting for Lefty,* and especially *Awake and Sing* and *Paradise Lost,* are strongly influenced by Chekhov. It has been noted that S. N. Behrman's *End of Summer* follows the pattern of *The Cherry Orchard* in order to mock the leftward trend of the thirties. But the suggestion that there may be a similar influence in Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke* might occasion a good deal of argument, in which the author himself might have something to say.

However, it is safe to assert that the way in which Chekhov's method is commonly interpreted in the United States contradicts everything that has been here said about his social viewpoint and technique. His so-called "method" has been associated with emphasis on Freudian "frustration," despair, denial of human values. While Chekhov rejected the idea that romantic sentiment or sex offers an "escape," his "imitators" treat sex as the source of all unhappiness and the sole means of release from the horrors of daily existence. While Chekhov affirmed his belief in rational progress, his "imitators" treat the human personality as a bundle of irrational impulses.

This distortion of Chekhov's meaning, by critics and artists alike, is incomprehensible if it is regarded as an "accidental" error. People of the theatre tend to look at Chekhov through the prism of their own ideas and illusions. The drama of the past three decades has been heavily influ-

* See David Magarshack, *Chekhov the Dramatist,* New York, 1952.

enced by dismal "psychological" and "sociological" doctrines, of which the cult of Freud is an example. These theories reflect the general crisis of capitalism. The subjective fears with which intellectuals view the crisis are translated into supposedly "objective" justification of pessimism and inaction, leading to defense of imperialism as the only barrier to the threatened "disintegration" of civilization through Man's innate "corruption."

The theory that human nature is corrupt spreads its fumes like smog over Broadway. But there are theatre artists who recognize that intellectual smog is as poisonous as the kind that comes from factories and chemical plants—and that it originates from the same source, the power of Big Business.

It is encouraging to hear these words from one of our most distinguished playwrights, Arthur Miller:

"Since 1920, American drama has been a steady, year-by-year documentation of the frustration of man. I do not believe in this. . . . That is not our fate. . . . In our drama the man with convictions in the past has been a comic figure. I believe he fits in our drama now, though, and I am trying to find a way, a form, a method of depicting people who think."

We have much to learn from the real Chekhov, the Chekhov whose work is blurred and distorted by the bourgeois ideology which he hated and fought with the weapon of his art. At a time when the commercial stage honors such insults to the human spirit as *Picnic* or *The Caine Mutiny,* we can find renewed confidence in Chekhov's sure faith that man is a doer and a builder, and that his future is in his own hands.

In 1917, the Moscow Art Theatre presented *The Cherry Orchard* to an audience which was engaged in fulfilling the prophecy of Trofimov in the play: "The human race progresses, perfecting its powers. Everything that is unattainable now will some day be near and intelligible. But we must work. We must help with all our energy those who seek to know the truth."

When the curtain fell, the actors were greeted by an ovation such as they had never known, an ovation that thundered around them like the many-voiced echo of Chekhov's prophecy.

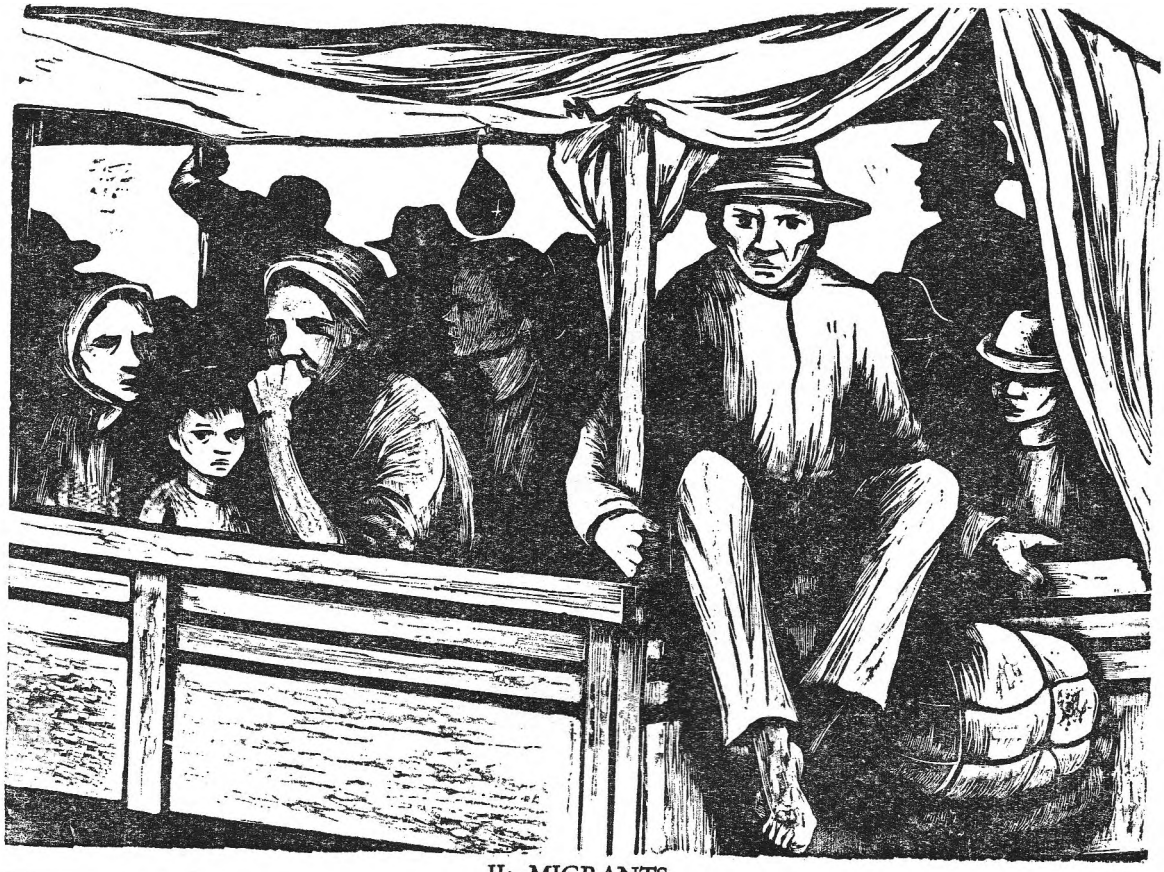
Chekhov and the Moscow Art Theatre had found a home. There is a home for them wherever people proclaim their love of humanity, their belief in art as an instrument of progress.

FOUR BRAZILIAN DRAWINGS

By REGINA KATZ

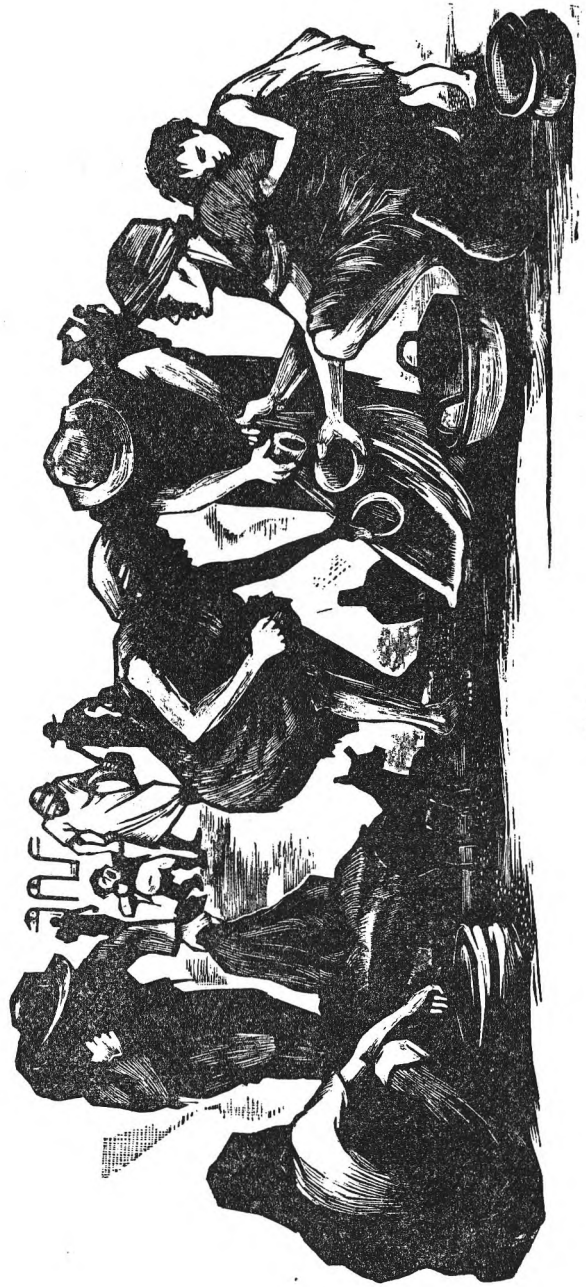
I: STOPOVER

Regina Katz is an outstanding Brazilian artist. The engravings reproduced here are from a series entitled: "Landless Farmers—Drought Refugees." They describe the tremendous mass migration of Brazilian peasants driven from their land by drought and the harsh oppression of the plantation system.



II: MIGRANTS

III: EXODUS



IV: HANDOUT

BACK HOME

By LUIS CARDOZA Y ARAGON

I came back home among my deep and disturbed villagers
blind in their torment, my beloved people.
Is this their tragic stone, their rockbottom destiny
to plough just above the sea and let its light mourn them?
My body's anguish knows what it is to feel you throb
like a murmur in my heart
between the sureness and the doubt of your true tomorrows.
I am my people blind with their eyes awake,
my lightning people breaking the bars of old shadows—
the truth and the dream, the root and the light,
the guitar that strums its wheatfields in the dawn.
Both the bullet and the wound hurt me.
Your day lifts its high white towers
gleaming with crystals, oh my strong people
your long night has enough ruined pyramids.
Now I am the guitar that sings with the neighbors
breathing their soil, my voice their voice.

—Adapted from the Spanish by Walter Lowenfels

(Luis Cardoza Y Aragon is a leading poet and statesman of Guatemala.—Ed.)

I GOT MY STORY

By JOSEPH NORTH

The following selection, dealing with an early episode in his richly varied experience as a newspaperman, is excerpted from a forthcoming book by Joseph North.

ONE day the editor looked up at me, under his green eyeshade: "We got a story we'd like you to cover," he said.

Two highwaymen in our town had waylaid a respectable citizen on a dark street some months before. Their victim had disobeyed their command to keep his hands high and struck at one of the thugs who pulled the trigger. The respectable citizen died clutching his wallet and the bandits were to die in the electric chair. The killer was nineteen, the son of a weaver in the textile mill. "I hadn't meant to shoot, but he scared me when he jumped," he confessed. His companion was a man of thirty, a veteran who had been wounded at Chateau Thierry and who pleaded at the trial that he had been shellshocked and could find no work on his return from war. "It was starve or else," he told newspapermen. They were to be executed in the state penitentiary, about a hundred miles from our town.

"You go along with them and do a last-mile story," Hickey said.

Something went rumbling in my stomach: I had no wish to see a man die and certainly not to see a man killed. But I would go. Of course. It was in the game. A newspaperman gets his assignment and carries on, come hell or high-water. My pride then was that I was a good newspaperman. I had taken every assignment and come back with the bacon. I had gone down into the river in a diver's suit and waded about in the gloom and mud: it was a good story. I had climbed like a fly to the top of a high church steeple that had been cracked by vibrations of the big bronze bells. "Music is stronger than granite," I had written. It was a good story. I had pestered a stunt flier, a local man, to take me up when he had flown home, one day, to visit his sweetheart. He had glanced at me impatiently, for he wanted the time for his girl, but the lure of publicity mastered him and he took me up. He made me pay for my temerity, all right, had barrel-rolled, swooped down and curved up, fallen to one side and then another, had looped-the-loop a dozen times and put me through the traces until I did not know if I was upside down or right side up. I came out of the plane, staggering, but triumphant: I had a good story. I had gone into the ring

with George Godfrey, the great Negro prize-fighter who trained at Leiperville, nearby: he had toyed with me and then, when I muttered that he get serious, he had clipped me on the ear and I thought the world had collapsed, but as I went down I rejoiced: I had a good story. Everything was grist to my mill, everything of life belonged to me, no matter how silly or how grand, I turned in the story. I had mingled with gangsters and pluguglies of every variety until they came to look on me, in a way, as theirs, and I had come back with the story (although I never broke my word, my understanding, with them). Yes, I would cover the killing of men: it was a good story.

The snow fell silently, the city was in a blanket of white, Christmas trees sparkled on the lawns in the suburbs as the sheriff's procession began its journey to the death house. I was in the car with the younger of the two men, who was shackled to two husky deputies reeking of whiskey. I sat in the front with the sheriff bundled up in a heavy overcoat, ear muffs, heavy boots but who still complained of the cold and I knew that it was an inner chill. I attributed the cause to the same reason that was nearly freezing my marrow. "I want my Bible," the condemned youngster whispered piteously, when we entered the car, and one of the deputies glanced back at the sheriff who nodded and the Bible was brought. It was a big, thick volume which the youth held on his lap like a warming blanket the entire way.

But he did not talk of the Scriptures, neither of Job or Jesus nor Heaven or Hell: he wrapped himself in a cover o fsilence and his thin, peaked face was a death mask: his deep-sunk eyes looked straight ahead, turning occasionally to stare blindly at electric lights that said, "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men."

IN the mountains near Altoona we stopped at a crowded inn for some coffee. The waitress, all smiles, carrying a big tray, stopped, her face froze as she asked me what's up, why are these men shackled. A deputy grunted a few words in explanation and she dropped the tray. A hush came over the inn that was crowded with joymakers celebrating the Christmas season. I heard the older of the two condemned men whisper to the younger as they stood side by side at the counter: "Keep a stiff upper lip, kid, don't let 'em get you."

The older of the two, a thick-shouldered, flaxen-haired man, with a pair of blue eyes that flickered hungrily to the right and left, taking everything in, as though he realized he had not much time to see what there was of life, carried on with a pathetic swagger. "Merry Chistmas, everybody," he shouted suddenly and the diners who had been staring at him spilled their drinks and looked down at their plates. The Sheriff frowned and muttered "Quiet," and hurried everybody back to the cars. The older man laughed as we reentered the autos. "What's the mat-

ter, sheriff," he asked, "ain't you got the Christmas spirit?"

The gates of the penitentiary opened wide and the cars passed into the prison yard moving slowly to the cell block for the condemned. They led the two men away and I took a long look at the narrow, bowed shoulders of the youngster. He was still carrying his Bible.

I checked in for a room at a nearby inn, an old Pennsylvania Dutch tavern filled with local residents who were singing Christmas carols. It was warm and cozy at the bar, but I was shivering, thinking of the two. As I ordered a rye a man beside me said: "There's Elliott, Jesus Christ, the executioner. He's got business at the penitentiary." I turned to see a tall, spare man in a gray hat and long overcoat who walked to a table, his eyes straight ahead. I studied his face: it was an ordinary face, but it was aged and wrinkled. He had a long, lean head and a thatch of neatly-combed, iron-gray hair. I don't know what I expected, a diabolic face with long fangs for teeth? Why, the man looked like a clergyman, there was nothing of his profession in his face. Why, this man could have been the pastor at the First Methodist Church, or a citizen who ran a haberdashery on Market Street.

The last thing in the world I wanted to do was to talk to him, but the story, a good story, was in it and I walked over fast and introduced myself. He looked up politely. "Glad to meet you," he said with a trace of formality, and he extended his long bony hand. I felt a qualm as I shook it and he asked me to sit down, have a drink. "I like to talk to you newspaper fellows," he said, "I like to be of help." He lifted his drink, I noticed, with a steady hand. He had just come in from Massachusetts, he said, where he had been busy on another case. He referred to his executions as cases, like a doctor or a lawyer, a man with a profession. He excused himself after a few moments, said he needed his rest, he had to go to work early in the morning and he wanted to leave early "to get home in time for Christmas. The family's waiting."

MIDNIGHT I lay in my bed under a high ceiling of heavy rafters and listened to the dirge of a mountain stream that ran outside the inn. I lay with all my clothes on thinking of the two in the death cell. I had a copy of Mencken's green-backed *Mercury* in my hands but the words on the pages were blurs: was the young fellow bending over his Bible now searching for words that would give him heart? What could he be thinking now, as the silent blanket of snow lay over the beautiful Pennsylvania mountains? I kept all the lights on in the room and suddenly I heard a faint knock at the door which opened slightly, and the wrinkled face of the executioner peered at me. Wouldn't I come to his room for a quick drink, he whispered, crooking a finger, "for Christmas," and I rose and followed him, persuading myself that this was not a nightmare. He preceded me tiptoeing to his room at the far end of the thick, red-carpeted hallway that was dimly lit. I was startled when we entered his brightly-lit room to find two men and two young women inside drinking whiskey from large tumblers. The executioner introduced me as a friend of his, a newspaperman, and we all shook hands. One man, burly and rosy-faced with the look of a courtroom hanger-on, was the official witness at executions, the other, a portly, jovial man of fifty, with a quick, toothy smile, was the undertaker appointed to return the bodies to the city. The two women were prostitutes they had picked up in Altoona to while the hours away before they went to work. It was a ritual, I learned, they always had a hot time the night before an execution. One of the women was a peroxide blonde of thirty or so, with a hard, pretty face and a low-cut shirtwaist that revealed her heavy breasts; the other was about seventeen, a frail frightened child with great staring eyes. The executioner motioned me to a corner of the big room lit up by a big chandelier and we sat down by a wide mahogany bureau on which half a dozen bottles of whiskey stood. He poured me a drink, with the steady hand I noticed, and took a stiff one himself. The undertaker and the official witness were busy with their ladies and after a while they disappeared from the room. I caught a glimpse of them as they went out the door. The younger woman looked back with a strange, despairing look, I thought.

The executioner drank tumbler after tumbler of whiskey but remained as sober after a quart as though it were water he drank. I did not try to keep pace with him for I was still a novice at the stuff but I had enough to feel reckless and about one in the morning I asked him why he followed this . . . this (stumbling for the right word) this profession. He looked me full in the face, his old tired eyes unblinking, and he repied slowly, thoughtfully, "You're the first one, son, the first who ever asked me that. It's a question I'd like to answer."

Slowly, deliberately, as he pulled the cork from a bottle of Scotch and poured another glassful, he told me his life story. "I was a poor boy," he began. His folks migrated from Scotland to settle in the Bronx. He had learned the electrician's trade and one winter's day, when he was out of work, he saw an ad in the *Tribune*. It said there was a job down at the Tombs, in Manhattan. Electrician's helper. "I took the first subway down and I got the job." Not a bad job, tending the lights and the heating system. After a couple of years the warden had come to him and asked if he wanted to earn $250 in one evening.

"When he said that, I knew, I knew all right. The official electrocutioner had gone to the hospital, sick. In that day they had an electric chair down at the Tombs. Well, what could I do? I needed the money.

Bad. The wife was sick, going to have a baby too, we were neck deep in debt. I figured, what the hell, if not me, somebody else would do it, wouldn't they? Two hundred and fifty for the night's work, could I say no? Could anybody? I took the job. I didn't tell the wife, not then, not till after the baby." He inherited the job after the executioner died and there he was. And that was all there was to it. We sat silent a while as he poured another drink which he gulped down. I could hear the drink gurgle down his long wrinkled throat and I looked away, thinking —and how do you feel when you pull the switch; how does a man feel when he sends his fellowman to perdition? And suddenly, the words were coming out of my mouth.

He stared at me—his face was close suddenly—and I backed off involuntarily. "Nobody ever asked me that before," he said, "but I'll tell you. But don't you write it, understand? This is not for publication. I'm telling you because you asked it and because sometimes a man has to explain. I'll say this: I got nothing to be ashamed of. Understand? Nothing: I do my duty, that's all. I figure it this way: I am the right hand of the law, the thirteenth man on the jury." He spoke rapidly, the words flying through his lips as though he had rehearsed this speech many a time and now he had the stage. "The judge pronounces the sentence of society. The sentence must be carried out, doesn't it? It must. Or else where would society be? *Somebody* has to do it. I do it. It's society's decision, not mine. I'm only society's hand, in a way of speaking. I'm the hand of society. That's all."

The hand of society was steady as it tilted the bottle again, and down it went, as though he were drinking water. "Yes," he mumbled, "I am the right hand of the judge, the thirteenth man on the jury."

Outside I heard the mountain brook again and a night bird cried in the distance. The executioner turned his long, lean head to listen. "Owls," he said, "owls in the mountains."

THEN his voice droned on, in the same somber monotone, without heat, passionless, as though it were all a long rehearsed tale told without conviction or certainty. Society was not grateful to its faithful servant. People shunned him for doing the job that had to be done, that *somebody* had to do. Instead of scorn, shouldn't there be gratitude. But no. His was the hardest job any man has or ever had because he did it knowing there would be no thanks, no gratitude, and he knew he would never have a friend again. He had had friends once, but now he had no friends. His wife was his only friend, even his three children kept mum about their father's profession. His only fun was his Ford. He had juiced it up so it could go eighty miles an hour and he and his wife would head out to the boulevards toward Connecticut and he would step on the gas and it felt good going eighty miles an hour. The cops knew him by now; they had pulled him in for speeding, he showed them his credentials and they promptly let him go. "They give me the right of way," he said.

Three in the morning he mentioned his last case, maybe his hardest case. Two Italians up in Massachusetts had killed a paymaster. In Braintree. "A couple of Eyetaliens named Sacco and Vanzetti. A funny pair. This fellow Vanzetti, I think it was, the other was Sacco, yes, one was Vanzetti, he had a big mustache, and there was a lot about him in the papers. The papers said they were anarchists, wanted to overthrow the government, you know, you read about them. Well, this fellow with the mustache was crazy. Look, he walked to the chair and he started to make a speech. A speech, mind you, and from the chair! Ever hear of that before? Sometimes a man says, God have mercy on my soul. Something from the Bible. Well, you understand that. He's going to his Maker and that's all right. That's different. But this fellow wants to make a speech like a politician. How can you do your duty when a man's making a speech? You stand there by the switch and you have to wait till he's through talking. It makes you nervous. The waiting. Usually everything goes through ship-shape, 1-2-3. You know what you got to do and you go ahead and you do it. But this Eyetalian." He took another drink and for the first time I noticed that society's hand was not steady.

I sobered up, I had read enough about the anarchists to know the furore that had risen. I knew many said they were innocent. "What did this fellow Vanzetti say?" The executioner shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't listen. After all, the chair isn't a soapbox."

I rose, sick by now. "Don't go," he said quickly, "do me a favor, please, don't go." I was suddenly scared and said I was dog-tired, I had to go.

I tiptoed back to my room, unsteady, and I flung myself on the top of the bed, my head rumbling . . . the thirteenth man on the jury, the Eyetalian made a speech from the chair . . . the juiced-up Ford whizzing eighty miles an hour. I thought suddenly again of the two men in the death cell a few minutes away. I lay in the bright glare of all the lights in my room as heartsick a young man of twenty-two as you could find in America. At dawn I rose, still sick, and groped my way down the steps.

The executioner was downstairs already, sipping a cup of coffee. He glanced up at me and nodded, his wrinkled face a mask of propriety. The official now, sitting at the breakfast table, with all the gravity of government and what had happened last night had nothing to do with him, the right hand of the judge. "We got to be there by 6:30," he said, shooting a quick glance at me and then looking away. "Get some coffee and we'll be going."

AT seven exactly, two sober-faced guards in blue uniforms, their eyes bleary, as though they too had been up all night on a carouse, led

the younger bandit into the death chamber, a great gray cell of a room that had no windows. I stood with a half dozen newspapermen, pad in one hand and a shaking pencil in the other. The condemned youngster looked about the room with eyes that saw nothing. He still clutched the Bible desperately, like a man grasping a raft in a boundless sea. The executioner moved soundlessly around the room, sure and deft, the professional now, as sure of the switch as the surgeon of his scalpel. There was intentness in his face, a hypnotic look, the face of a man devoted to his task so that nothing else on earth mattered.

He slipped the leather mask over the youngster's face, glanced again at the electrode fastened to the condemned man's calf which showed through his trousers, split for the occasion, and the executioner moved toward the open door behind which the switch hung. The leather mask was like an eclipse of the sun: the condemned man's voice came from the bottom of hell. "May God the Lord have mercy on my soul." At that moment I heard the familiar cry of a cock, from far off, penetrating the walls, cock-a-doodle-do, cock-a-doodle-do, and the image of a barnyard, a shingle house and whitewashed fence, a cow, a horse, flashed across my mind, a moment before the sudden explosive whirr. The body leaped against the leather thongs, straining against the thongs as though the force of his life would burst his bonds. The whirr went on, filling the room, louder and louder until I felt that it would tear the brain from my head. And then there was silence. The young body fell back against the uprights of the chair and lay slack now, a bag of flesh from which a faint bluish curl of smoke rose to the ceiling. The two guards loosened the thongs, lifted the corpse briskly, the legs and hands flopping like the sleeves of a scarecrow. A few moments afterward they led the older man in, the veteran. His face had the same mysterious smile, the upper lip lifted in a snarl, and seeing us at the far end of the chamber, he said in a resounding voice, "Gentlemen of the press. Put this down. You are killing an innocent man. I never had the gun and I never meant to kill. If I'd had a job. Put this in too, and don't forget: you'll be going where I'm going and I'll be there with a pitchfork for you, you lousy sons-of-bitches." He sat back, stretched his arms on the armrests, his lips curled in a triumphant smile. He tilted his head forward—almost eagerly—to receive the leather mask.

I went down to the town's telegraph office and wired my story. A good story, a good story, a good story. You got your story, brother, you *got* it.

On the train home I sat shivering in the smoker, lighting cigarette after cigarette, looking out at the mountains and the tall white firs that seemed idiotic now, meaningless, after that big cement room which alone had meaning in the world, and I looked up to see the executioner enter the car smoking a long thin cigar. He saw me and he stopped, hesitant, at my side. And stood. I could not look at him and he knew it, for he did not sit down. He leaned toward me, a grave look of official dignity on his wrinkled face, his gray felt hat careful on his head, his white collar clean and starched and he said in a low tone, "I know. It's like that the first time. I want to ask you a favor. Leave my name out, son, when you write this case up. Will you? It doesn't do my kids any good."

He stood a moment searching my face and as I stayed silent, he passed on, a dignified figure, erect, smoking his long black cigar.

What's New in Women's Magazines

By HELEN LAZARUS

I USED to pick them up only at the beauty parlor or at the dentist's, but nowadays I make it a point to read the women's magazines. The women I work with in PTA and community organizations read them and to a large extent—as the *Ladies' Home Journal* claims—believe in them. Every month a minimum of 21 million women read the big five—*Ladies' Home Journal, Women's Home Companion, McCall's, Woman's Day* and *Good Housekeeping* (in order of their circulation). Multiple use of the magazines in families makes the actual reading audience considerably larger.

These magazines not only entertain millions of women, they help form their opinions and provide a sounding board for government policies. They are carriers of ruling class ideology and help form standards in taste, morals and ethics.

But they are also Big Business. More than 40 per cent of their pages are taken up with advertisements. Their function is to sell—therefore they have to arouse and hold the "buyer's" interest and in order to do so they have to keep in mind the viewpoint of their readers, at least to a limited extent. This fact alone makes the magazines worth reading and analyzing.

IT IS possible to speak of the women's magazines as a group because their similarities are much more pronounced than their distinctions. Among the big five, only *Woman's Day* is very different from any of the others. Published by A&P chain stores, sold only at these stores for 7c (the other magazines cost 25c to 35c), *Woman's Day* is practical and down-to-earth. Perhaps because its readership is predetermined, its approach is mainly to working class and lower middle class housewives. Therefore its recipes are low cost, its fashions are "most for your money" and its monthly "Do It Yourself" feature has provided many a low-income home with useful and well-designed furnishings. Its fiction and articles are also consistently better and more realistic than those of the other magazines.

But by and large the magazines cater to the middle class woman, the Anglo-Saxon middle class woman at that. Their advertisements woo the buyer with some cash to spare for luxuries, their fiction deals almost exclusively with her problems and concerns. And yet the "forgotten woman," the working-class woman, the farm wife, the Negro and foreign born, is offered a sop, a little corner in each issue. The articles are the most interesting part of the magazines. Far more than the fiction, they reflect life and deal with serious issues.

There has been a noticeable increase in articles dealing with brotherhood and "living democracy" themes. This undoubtedly reflects the greater awareness and higher level of activity among women on this question. On the other hand there is often reactionary content and much catering to snob appeal. Articles about royalty and glamorous personalities of stage and screen, written with a reverence worthy of a better cause, are to be found every month.

The women's magazines have tended to avoid the more obvious splash of government propaganda in the manner of *Collier's, Life* or the *Saturday Evening Post.* Rather, they have always approached these matters obliquely, with an article here and there, or a personal story (for several months there have been biographical closeups of the Eisenhower brothers, Mamie's love and marriage, etc.). Last year there were many "inspired" articles and confession stories by under-cover agents, anti-Communist "fugitives," stoolpigeons, informers. At one time every women's magazine on the stand would have some such article, but in September 1954 (the period covered by this inquiry) no such story or article could be found. Similarly, in past years and months there had been considerable heating up of the cold war in the pages of the women's magazines, most notorious of which was an article entitled: "Raise Your Boy to Be a Soldier." Today such articles are noticeable by their absence.

Exactly how much this is due to readers' resistance I am not able to judge. But it seems to me significant that at a time when UMT is being readied all over again for the next session of Congress the magazines are letting the question rest—instead they are discussing such topics as "Why Don't They Like Us Abroad?" and the crisis in education.

The bulk of each copy is taken up with service features: food, fashions, needlework, decorating, home workshop, children, beauty, health and medicine. In addition there are the monthly columns on film, radio, TV, music, teen-agers, gossip, etc. These service features offer much that is valuable, teach labor- and time-saving household methods and help housewives to get more value for their dollars. The remaining space accommodates articles, marriage and happiness advice, and fiction. The space allotted to fiction has been getting smaller over the years.

Among the September articles the

following were of interest:

"We Adopted Twelve Children Nobody Wanted," by Helen Doss (*McCall's*). This is a first-person narrative of a Methodist minister and his wife who adopted twelve children of racially mixed background because they found these were considered "undesirable" by adoption agencies and prospective parents. A striking example of brotherhood in action, the family's struggle against poverty, prejudice and all kinds of odds makes exciting reading. The fact that it is the feature article of the month seems significant.

In the *Women's Home Companion* an article by Eleanor Pollock, "The Children Who Can't Stay Home," deals sharply and directly with the very real plight of working mothers and the inadequacy of child care facilities throughout the nation. Offering not only a collection of useful facts but also a feasible plan for community action, it shows the link between inadequate child care facilities and increasing "juvenile delinquency." This is the kind of article that will be the basis for much organizational activity among women's clubs and serve a valuable function.

Similar helpful practical articles on worthwhile community projects are to be found in *Woman's Day*. One deals with a community project to foster skill and higher safety standards for bicycling youngsters; another is a challenge to women to get into politics by NYC's Robert Moses. A plain-talking appeal, designed to offset the "politics-is-dirty-business" cynicism, this piece can accomplish much good despite some questionable limitations in Mr. Moses' interpretation of the electoral process.

In the *Ladies' Home Journal* there is a strong and well-thought out condemnation of comic books and horror comics by Dorothy Thompson, "A Child Went Forth." Arguing that "The issue is not the right of free speech, but the right to peddle mental marijuana for money," the author urges legal control and calls on parents and teachers to foster the reading of good books in children.

IN the same magazine there is a symposium entitled "Why Don't They Like Us Abroad?" Participants are Mrs. John McCloy, Chester Bowles, Harold Stassen and Bruce Gould (*Journal* editor), Margaret Hickey, Alfred Max (French magazine editor and head of the French Gallup poll) and Walter Elliot (British MP and wartime cabinet member). The questions asked by *Journal* editors of their panel were: "Is distrust for America increasing? Why do we receive so little gratitude—and so much criticism—for the dollars and industrial know-how we send round the world? We see ourselves as the major pleader for world peace, yet other countries fear that we may involve them in war. Why?" The very posing of such questions is significant of wide interest among American women in world affairs and of a deep-going concern with the effects of cold war foreign policy.

The editors summarize: People of other countries like us because they think we are not class-conscious; are honest and direct; have "go-ahead"; want to learn about the rest of the world; give every man a chance. They dislike us because they think we are "overgrown children," noisy, braggart; are hypnotized by fear of communism; treat them as "poor relations"; are against wrong rather than for right; draw the color line; may drag them into war.

The French participant tells the *Ladies' Home Journal* readers: ". . . the French live with 25 per cent of their fellow citizens Communists and every Frenchman knows several Communists and often he knows them very well. Therefore he cannot accept at its face value the idea that everybody who is a Communist is evil or must be done away with . . ." Other French complaints listed by Mr. Max: "McCarthy; the death sentence given the Rosenbergs; the case of the UNESCO employee whose passport was taken away because he didn't want to come home to a hearing—these are things that are widely misinterpreted in France, and perhaps if they were better explained to us it would help. . . ." Other participants mention as reasons for "anti-Americanism": discrimination in America, non-recognition of China, censorship of U.S. libraries abroad. The British participant concludes: " . . . we are afraid of being drawn into war by America not because America is intent upon war as a policy, but because the drive of her policies might lead her into war."

SO MUCH for the articles of general interest. The "Marriage and Happiness" articles, interviews and discussions follow a monotous pattern of male superiority ideas. A typical example is an article in *Woman's Home Companion* by Edith Stern, "Every Woman Has Five Lives." This is a composite of five articles by experts, reducing women's problems to questions of "Adjustment," marital happiness, sexual fulfillment, child rearing and hormones. It is the *Kinder, Kirche, Kueche* theory of woman's place brought up to date with the help of psychoanalysis and household gadgets. A woman's life is determined by her sexual cycle, there is place only for marriage and childraising, with one tiny corner of later-year life reserved for "community service"—meaning, of course, unpaid volunteer work. The possibility that women may want to work and develop their talents and gifts outside of the home is dismissed with a sneer as "feminist." This, with slight variations, is the essence of all the pseudo-psychological advice dished out month after month for all the complex problems woman face.

The theme is reiterated *ad nauseam* in the magazine fiction, and it leads inevitably to formula stories, trite and undistinguished writing. There is the career-versus-happiness formula, oft repeated; the gay and meaningless "teen-age romance" story; the stories dealing with "marriage and adultery in the suburbs," some fairly well written, but all shallow in their treatment.

The "Society-type" story combines snob appeal with the passions of the heart. It concerns the problems of society women in regard to each other, their husbands and their servants. A sad but typical example is "The Woman Named Ruby," a novel by Christy Munro in *McCall's*:

Into the household of wealthy Attorney Alexander Heath III enters the woman named Ruby. Engaged as a nurse for seriously injured son Billy she soon conspires to usurp the place of mistress of the house, turning everyone against the lawful wife and finally attempting to murder the boy in an attack of madness. There is no motivation for Ruby's actions except that she is evil. The author is careful to show that Ruby is neither a nurse as she had claimed (this might have proved offensive to R.N. readers) nor the widow of a soldier fallen in Korea. As frequently happens in this type of story the villain is the only working woman in the story except for the stereotype loyal servant.

WHEN one comes across a well-written, well-characterized piece like Helen Eustis' "Backstairs" (*Good Housekeeping*) it is a pleasant change. This childhood reminiscence concerning the "backstairs" life of a well-to-do home deals with the relationship of children to servants and servants to each other. While extremely limited in its social implications and slight criticism of the very rich, it has a fresh and real quality and makes the domestic workers come true as people in their own right.

Two more stories in *Woman's Day* are well written and tightly constructed. "Ride For Your Money" by H. P. Koenig deals interestingly with a race track background; "Diplomat's Lady" by Lyn Arnold is an unusual and witty story of an old lady's reminiscences of her chorus girl youth. "Class of '54" by Mel Heimer in *Good Housekeeping* deals with the first day's impression of a smalltown girl in New York. This ends the list of stories which might be classed as good entertainment.

What happens to a powerful novel condensed in the magazines is demonstrated in the *Companion's* condensation of Morton's Thompson's *Not As a Stranger.*

This large and searching novel of medical life and practice is dished up for *Companion* readers as "the intimate story of a nurse who loved a student and married him, knowing that he needed her only to get through medical school." *Not As a* Stranger, which has been a best seller list for over eight months, deals seriously and critically with a major phase of American life. It is mainly a devastating indictment of medical practice in this country, with sharp and moving scenes focused on many familiar evils. The love story is the weakest part of the book and is altogether understandable only in the context of the hero's passion for medicine. Typically, all ideas and social implications are expunged from the condensation. What remains is a rather shoddy story of a marriage of convenience which magically turns into a marriage of love when the wife succeeds in tricking the husband into having a child. In the full novel the wife's character is somewhat balanced by a detailed account of her valuable accomplishments as a highly competent operating-room nurse and the esteem with which she is held in the community. Leaving all this out and recounting only the "womanly trick" used by Kristina, the heroine becomes merely a stereotype foil for the thesis, so beloved by the magazines, that woman must submit to man in order to find true happiness.

Over and over again the magazines speak of woman's role as primarily a reproductive one, devoted to the service of husband and home. But already society itself has moved far beyond this ideology. Increasing millions of women work for a living, most of them in support of their families and children. Most working-class housewives are held back from working—at least part-time—only by the lack of child care facilities, the low pay in unskilled jobs and often by their husbands' male supremacist prejudices. Even middle class women turn increasingly to professional training in the later years in an effort to escape the boredom of idleness.

The rewarding and creative process of doing socially useful work, of having a skill and being paid for one's labor is something most women look for at one or another period of their lives. An ideology bidding women to concern themselves merely with their small circle of family responsibilities is becoming totally inadequate and unreal in the age of the H-bomb. Women are taking an increasing interest in the world around them, they are making enormous contributions to the industrial, the cultural and the organizational life of their country. For them the ideology of the magazines is intended to act as a brake, a safety-valve. It is designed to lead their energies into reactionary channels politically, sidetrack their demands for better schools and homes, by-pass their concern over the war danger and keep them "hacking away at the branches of evil instead of chopping at the roots."

Like all mass media the magazines do not reflect the lives and problems of American women with any real degree of accuracy and truth. But they are not all bad, not beyond being influenced by their readers.

They must be understood as instruments having a vast influence on great masses of people and reflecting the level of thinking in the mass organizations of women. To those of us struggling with our neighbors and fellow-workers for a democratic future for our children, for living brotherhood and peace, the big magazines offer many valuable facts, much fuel for discussion, many projects for constructive action.

New Currents in
FRENCH WRITING

By ROGER GARAUDY

RECENT developments in the work of a number of French writers who may now be considered as belonging to the progressive camp have been of so marked a character that the time has come to analyze them from a literary as well as a political point of view.

If we examine the political statements made during the last two years by Sartre, Vercors, Robert Merle, Maurice Druon and Pierre Gascar—to name only the most prominent among many who have taken the same path—and at the same time consider what they have written during this period, we obtain a picture of a single trend.

The two-year period is not chosen arbitrarily. It was in May, 1952, that General Ridgway's arrival in Paris touched off popular demonstrations in which the French people expressed their anger, and their will for national independence and peace—demonstrations that the government of the day made every effort to suppress.

The trend that is common to all these writers may be defined as the beginning of a new realism which owes its appearance to a new reality.

Three stages are distinguishable in the recent evolution of these writers: first, they have grasped the meaning of a number of political facts. This new reality affects them as citizens before influencing them as writers. At this first stage these writers have generally confined themselves to bearing witness, supporting their testimonies by isolated facts. The examples of Sartre and Vercors are typical in this respect.

Second, these writers have endeavored to seek an explanation of the political facts. Having borne witness the writer finds himself obliged to define the position he has taken, if only because of the reaction and polemic that his testimony has provoked. Henceforth his writings and reflections are colored by his sense of responsibility towards the reality that he has denounced and towards those whose struggle he has joined. He thus moves from the position where he is simply portraying reality, to one in which he is seeing reality in historical perspective. What originally he had defined as "evil" in the abstract becomes an "historical evil," and though he does not immediately grasp that this "historical evil" is class oppression, he does, more or less vaguely, see that it has a social origin. This process is clearly seen at work in the books of Robert Merle, Druon and Gascar.

The third stage occurs when the writer's work is penetrated and enriched by the new reality and by the struggle in which he is engaged. With the writers under examination here that stage only now begins.

In this new attempt to understand the workings of a law of a historical and social phenomenon, to understand the situation "as it really is," that is to say, in its development and its life, there appears an attempt to grasp reality in all its depth—in its tendencies and its typical features.

This effort takes the form a) of the discovery of new aspects of present reality: this, for example, was the case of Sartre when in his latest book he discovered in Henri Martin* his first "positive" hero, and b) of the recognition of the affinity of the nascent realism of today with the French tradition of the realistic novel, with Balzac, Stendhal, Zola.

It is no mere chance, for example, that Robert Merle seriously considers himself to be a disciple of Stendhal, while recognizing that a realism which stops with Stendhal is inadequate for our times.

COGENT examples of testimonies based upon political facts that have been fully grasped are provided by two articles by Sartre published in *Temps Modernes* (July, August, 1952), entitled "Communists and Peace" and "Reply to Albert Camus"; and in the "Open Letter to the Minister of Justice" published by Vercors in March 1953.

The occasion for the stand that these two writers took was the events of May 28, 1952—the arrival of Ridgway in Paris, the mass demonstration. The events of May 28 and the chain of circumstances that followed them were for thousands of Frenchmen a "revelation." Never has a clearer example been provided of the intimate connection that exists between the defense of national independence and the defense of peace, between the policy of war and the suppression of democratic liberties.

The actions of the French authorities outraged the patriotic sentiments of thousands of Frenchmen, as well as their desire for peace and their adherence to democratic principles. To many it revealed anti-Communism for the first time in its true colors—as a pretext for trampling on all they cherish.

Hence the questions that those who had hitherto dreamed of a "third way" asked themselves, questions which Sartre and Vercors were to pose publicly. Both these writers had long been in search of a "third way"; Vercors in his book *L'heure du Choix,* Sartre in his attempt to organize the Democratic Revolutionary Union and in his peace "counter-congress" in 1949 which ended in a fiasco.

In 1952 it became clear for such

* A French naval officer who criticized the government's war in Indo-China and was sentenced to three years in jail. A tremendous amnesty movement was developed in his behalf.

writers that there was no midway position between war and peace, between fascism and the defense of democracy, between patriotism and treason, and that anti-Communism was but a means for the supporters of treason, fascism and war to conceal their real intentions.

Sartre unmasked in turn each of the false claims of anti-Communism, though he had previously systematically exploited them himself in *Les Mains Sales.**

First, the charge that Communists are foreign agents, that the French Communist worker is a puppet of Moscow. To this Sartre replies sarcastically: "Of course he is! Was it not Moscow that hurled the mob into the storming of the Bastille in 1789, Moscow that financed the Conspiracy of the Four Sergeants at la Rochelle, the events of June 1848, the countless strikes at the end of the 19th century and, finally, the 1917 mutinies?"

The Communists are the enemies of peace, shriek the men of war. To which Sartre replies: "I look for your olive branches and I see only bombs . . . the Americans are here in France, the Russians are in the Soviet Union."

Those who are responsible for the development of fascism in France never grow tired of repeating that they are the defenders of freedom. The real meaning of this "freedom" which has become the catchword of all the lackeys of fascism, was seen on the morrow of May 28 when in an attempt to divert attention from its policy of surrendering national sovereignty—a policy of treason, servility and war—the French government staged the Communist "plot," alleging that this justified the arrest of Jacques Duclos and André Stil.

In March 1953, Vercors wrote in his "Open Letter to the Minister of Justice":

> ". . . It is what is happening before my eyes here in France that I need to understand, and I shall go on asking questions about everything that has a bearing on our liberties, until either I receive a reply or am forced to keep silent. It does not cause me the least concern that I am being reproached for playing into the hands of the Communists; I am growing used to hearing that said. At present in France the Communists happen to be the first victims; they are in the vanguard of the persecuted. Should they one day become the persecutors, we shall see whether I go on 'playing into their hands.' I leave the theory that the hypothetical persecutors of the future should be subjected to preventive persecution today to the conscience of those who invented it. Today it is myself that I am defending. It is about my own fate that I claim to be enlightened. Am I still a free citizen? That is to say, a citizen whose liberties are protected by the law? Or am I really a 'suspect' over whose head hangs a warrant which needs only the addition of a signature? Is my freedom absolute or conditional?"

This realization of the meaning of certain basic political facts and the stand taken by Sartre and Vercors are the expression of a deep current of opinion among the French people. Clearly, such statements could not remain mere literary gestures; they constituted political acts which were to assume a wider significance in the historical movement which evoked them.

* This play was produced on Broadway under the title of *Red Gloves*. Last month Surtre took action against a Viennese producer who sought to put the play on against the author's wishes. (Ed.)

WE HAVE now reached the second step to which the writer is brought by his act of recognition and the stand he has taken: his "testimony" cannot remain isolated, it must be woven into the texture of history

Sartre, for example, finds himself obliged to reply to his one-time ally Camus and to break sharply with him. The terms in which Sartre announced this break are significant: Sartre sends Camus into his wilderness and shows the necessity of forming what he describes well as a "union to break the prison bars."

And in spite of the confusion that reigns in his mind, of the distorted picture he gives of Soviet reality, of a mistaken view of the French worker, of his rejection of dialectical materialism as a scientific method of knowing and transforming the world, Sartre is quite clear about what he means with this "union to break the prison bars." For him, it means entering the struggle side-by-side with the Soviet Union and the French working class and its Party to protect national independence, peace and democratic freedom.

In other words, for Sartre the French Government's policy has very quickly ceased to be simply a historical accident deserving moral, metaphysical condemnation; it has been placed in a historical perspective; as soon as that policy is seen as class policy the struggle against it can be effective only side by side with another class.

Another example of a writer taking his stand in a historical perspective—which can only be a class perspective—is provided by the attitude of Maurice Druon.

Maurice Druon is the author of the trilogy *La Fin des Hommes,* the first book of which, *Les Grandes Familles* won the Prix Goncourt in 1948. Recently the third volume, *Le Rendez-vous aux Enfers,* was banned in West Germany by order of the state prosecutor of Cologne, a certain Schilling, under the pretext that it was pornographic.

Maurice Druon, who with Joseph Kessel wrote *Le Chant des Partisans* during the Resistance, reacted in a characteristic way. In *Lettres Françaises* he explained the changes that his ideas had undergone both on political questions and in the literary field.

> "I have no intention of making a political affair of the matter," he wrote, "but even if I confine myself to the literary side, I find it hard not to recall that the friends of state prosecutor Schilling, who, I have been informed, was once a Sturmfuehrer in the S.A. and a political prosecutor under Hitler, paid us a fairly recent visit to teach us some lessons in morality in our own country and to place their bans on a certain number of French literary works. There are some

things that we are best not reminded of. . . .

"There is a tradition which is known as the naturalistic tradition," continues Maurice Druon, "the tradition of Balzac, of Zola, of two-thirds of French novels. I consider myself to belong to this tradition. I mean that in my novels I try to bear witness to the facts of real life. In *Les Grandes Familles* and the other two books in my trilogy, I undertook the description of a society in its death agony and, at the same time, of the way individuals in that society end their existence. It is intended to be a novel about the senescence of man and the institutions of bourgeois society."

What is to be noted is that at this stage the writer should take as his starting-point the sense of responsibility he feels for the historical movement in which he has taken his place.

In the appeal that he and Julien Benda addressed to their fellow-writers immediately after the arrest of Jacques Duclos in June 1952, Vercors, after recalling "the experience of the occupation" and the conditions in which arbitrary and illegal rule was established, added:

"Anyone who knowing all that still remains silent when faced with arbitrary actions, illegality and injustice is deliberately making himself the accomplice of the crimes to come." In so many words Sartre, too, wrote in the closing chapter of his book on Henri Martin: "Now is the time to choose. Either to denounce arbitrariness publicly or to become its accomplice."

Here we see history imposing an obligation on man—a decisive stage in the development of the writer.

We have already seen how reality demands of the writer first that he bear witness to reality, then that he become its historian; soon the writer is expressing reality in his novels or plays. We see this process at work in the evolution of many of our writers.

Roger Vailland, who joined the French Communist Party immediately after the events of May 28, shows in his book *Expérience du Drame* how closely drama depends on life, expressing its profound laws, its trends and its typical features.

The demands of reality have made themselves felt in the work by one of our young writers, Pierre Gascar, who was recently awarded the Prix Goncourt for his *Le Temps des Morts,* a novel about life in the Rawa Ruska concentration camp during the last war.

Writing of the meaning of this book from the point of view of testimany, historical document and novel, Gascar gave an excellent definition of the new literature in France, and described features that we can now see to be common to it:

"I am of the opinion that reality takes form only when the artist transforms it. Then it appears stripped and integral."

Here we are touching on the third aspect of the question under examination: the enrichment of these writers' works by the new qualities that reality and its exigencies bring to their artistic creation.

THE most obvious symptom of the changes that are taking place is in the choice of subject-matter. And here it must be said that Communist writers have provided proof not only of a theoretical or critical nature but by the example of a considerable number of important books that the presentation of reality in its present form and in movement, far from causing the writer's gifts to dry up, acts as a most fruitful stimulus.

When Eluard passed "from the horizon of one man to the horizon of all," as he admirably put it, he began to write with increasing power, while Claudel, on the other hand, after becoming the court jester at Vichy, never wrote another line of verse. Malraux has not produced a single novel since he took over the propaganda department of the R.P.F.; Mauriac has not written a novel since he began to write his tearful articles in *Figaro,* and this at a time when France is facing a new reality and when the dawning future has already given a splendid crop of new works and new authors.

The denunciation of the *"drôle de guerre"* enabled Aragon to reveal a new side to his gifts as a novelist by writing *Les Communistes.*

Participation in the Resistance movement and imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps made Jean Laffitte and Pierre Daix turn to novel writing. The struggle against the war in Indo-China has given us three books in rapid succession—*La Dernière Cartouche* by Jean-Pierre Chabrol, *Les Baguettes de Jade* by Madeleine Riffaud and *La Rivière Noire* by Pierre Courtade. The struggle against the Korean war gave us the play *Le Colonel Foster Plaidera Coupable* by Roger Vailland; the struggle against the atomic war, Elsa Triolet's fantasy-novel *Le Cheval Roux.* To the struggle against the American occupation of France we owe André Stil's books *Le Premier Choc, Le Coup du Canon* and *Paris Avec Nous.*

Anger against American insolence inspired Pozner to write *Qui a Tué Burel?* and Pierre Courtade's *Jimmy;* the campaign for the release of Henri Martin gave us a fine book by Hélène Parmelin, and the campaign against the government's conspiracy, Aragon's *Le Neveu de M. Duval.*

We are now interested only in the subject-matter of these books, or, rather, in the theme that inspired them. Without going into detail we may underline two points:

First, thanks to these writers we now see that the introduction of the most topical reality into a work of art is a highly fruitful element for artistic creation.

Second, the example of the Communist writers which has the effect of introducing realism into art has exercised a great influence on many other writers who had comprehended reality on the political level without letting it penetrate their work as writers.

The fact is that reality could penetrate their work as writers and exercise a fruitful influence on them only in so far as it was grasped in

its movement, in its historical perspective; when the writer acknowledges his solidarity with the emerging future, with all that is in a state of becoming; when he feels himself to be responsible for the victory of the new over the old.

Here we are already going beyond the question of subject-matter alone, we are touching on the question of *how* the writer approaches reality and reveals its tendencies and its typical features.

We have already seen this desire to extract the essence of reality in the work of Pierre Gascar. Here a decisive role is played by action taken by the writer after a recognition of reality. The example of Sartre is especially striking in this respect. Sartre participated very actively in the campaign for the release of Henri Martin; he had the idea of publishing a collection of Henri Martin's letters and articles by various writers. At first, Sartre's share of the work was confined to assembling the material and then adding a commentary to link them together. However, he became so engrossed in the subject that his own contribution grew to a size that caused what was originally intended to be a brochure to expand into a long essay.

And so he took the path that leads from bearing witness to the role of historian: the need to unmask how the lie in the Henri Martin case was fabricated led him to disclose the real social forces that lay behind the legal window-dressing, in a word, to place his testimony regarding Henri Martin in the perspective of a struggle which involves not only individuals but social forces.

But Sartre went still further: he set out on the path that leads from historical documentation to the novel.

It is true that he was still applying the principles of existentialism when he placed his hero, as he writes, "in position," in order to explain how the formation of Henri Martin's character, his political orientation and moral code were results of the influence of the environment in which he spent his youth.

But that is not the main thing. Sartre the novelist, the psychologist, the dramatist has tried to reconstitute the inner life of a character of whom he knew but the outward appearance and acts. It is notable that when Henri Martin was asked for his opinion on this psychological analysis of his character he stated that he agreed with Sartre's reading of his emotions and reactions.

The main thing, in my opinion, is that Sartre, the author of *Nausée* and *Les Mains Sales,* found in Henry Martin his first "positive" hero. He met Henri Martin in life and it was not possible for him to elude him in his work as a writer. Further, he analyzed the "negative" hero Heimburger in a new spirit, in a spirit of generous humanity, showing what social forces brought him to misfortune.

And Sartre also shows us the reasons for the lucidity and courage of Henri Martin. He invokes the "influence of Communist culture" and writes: "the books he had read in the past and the talks he had provided him with the key to interpret and develop his experience."

And now, after the development of events had brought the writer from a recognition of reality to literary creation, there took place a movement in the opposite direction: Sartri's literary hero returns the author to the real world and makes him act to transform it.

This recognition of the new demands raised by realism, this connection between the realistic expression of reality and action to transform this reality is found not only with Sartre: it is typical of the recent evolution of many of our writers.

IN THIS respect the development of Robert Merle's writing deserves our examination. In one of his early works, *Flaminéo,* Robert Merle makes use of an Italian Renaissance chronicle to pose the question: How can a man become a monster, a murderer? He provided a purely psychological answer to this question: he showed the baneful effect of all morality based on fear, especially Catholicism with its fear of hell.

Robert Merle sprang into the limelight when, in 1949, he was awarded the Prix Goncourt for his novel *Weekend à Zuydcote,* in which he described the military disaster of Dunkirk in 1940. The dominant theme in this novel is still that of the killer, but the problem is still posed in an abstract and metaphysical manner: Has a man the right to kill, for any reason whatsoever?

Merle's reply was to present war as a tissue of absurdities which he described in a purely naturalist way.

But in recent months there have been three decisive facts in the evolution of this writer, which serve as a good illustration of the new literary trends we are concerned with here: the new meaning that he himself gives to his earlier works; the new character of his latest novel; and the new way in which he sees his actions as a citizen to be a continuation of his work as a writer.

It would be an exaggeration to say that Merle has succeeded in placing his problem of the monster in historical perspective and that henceforth he is going to make a clear understanding of class relations the decisive factor in a solution of "his" problem; it is nonetheless true, however, that he sees his monster to be the product of a certain historical period, whose acts cannot be detached from the society that has given birth to him.

Precision has now been given to these views by Robert Merle's latest novel, published at the end of 1953: *La Mort Est Mon Métier.*

This book describes the life of Rudolf Lang, a German, between 1913 and 1945. It provides the answer to the question asked by *Flaminéo*: How does a man become a killer? And this time the answer is not based exclusively on a psychological explanation but on a historical development.

Rudolf Lang tells his story in the first person and all the events are described from his point of view.

Rudolf, the son of a Bavarian shopkeeper, refused to fall in with his father's plan that he should enter the church. He is called up in 1914 and serves as a dragoon in the German army in Turkey. He is unable to find work after the war and he joins the Freikorps volunteers; by 1923, already a Nazi, he is sentenced to ten years imprisonment for a political murder in the French-occupied Ruhr. On his release he is employed by a rich Pomeranian farmer, later becomes an organizer of S.S. raids, and is then put in charge of the Dachau concentration camp from where, in 1941, he is transferred to Auschwitz. From 1942 to 1945 Rudolf Lang was camp commandant at this notorious death camp. There he experiments in methods of wholesale extermination and executes people by the hundreds of thousands. Everything is told by Lang himself and from his point of view. Here, for example, is an episode from his trial in Warsaw. It is Rudolf who is speaking:

"At one moment the prosecutor said: 'You have killed three and a half million people!' I asked to be allowed to speak and said: 'Excuse me, I killed only two and a half million.'

"There was a disturbance in the courtroom at that, and the prosecutor told me that I ought to be ashamed of my cynicism. Yet all I had done was to correct an inaccurate figure."

Here we no longer have a simple description of absurdity as in *Weekend à Zuydcote* or of a metaphysical problem as in *Flaminéo*: the monster is the product of a regime, of a system, and the fact that the book appears just at a time when there is a clear threat of a restoration of militarism and fascism in a specifically Nazi form shows how much the writer's adopting of a stand in relation to events has enabled him to discover the historical perspective in which his problems can be resolved.

Thus, for a number of our writers —and not the least gifted—the recognition of the political facts is the starting point for a profound transformation in their artistic work as in their civic attitude; and this link between artistic creation and political activity gives a special character to this new realism that is being born: the consciousness of the historical perspective and of the writer's responsibility in the development of history is an integral part of this realism.

LET us sum up the features common to the recent works of these French writers we are examining.

Ater the Vienna Peace Congress, Sartre, in describing his meeting with the Soviet writer Korneichuk, wrote: "The conception was suggested of a literature that 'addressed a greeting to mankind,' giving man not only reasons for hope but making him fully conscious of the possibilities he possesses of achieving his aims. I replied that that was one of the tasks of literature. . . ."

These words show how full of promise is the stage now being reached by these French writers whose work hitherto could hardly be said to "address a greeting to mankind."

I have dwelt only on the positive aspects of this evolution the better to underline the importance of its progress, but it would be vain to pretend that the whole ground has been covered; there is still a vast gap between the recognition of a political truth and political reality itself, and a still wider gap between the recognition of a political truth and the embodiment of reality in artistic form.

Our writers are faced with new political realities. For many of them escapism has ceased to be the prerequisite of artistic creation. It has become obvious that these realities can be fairly expressed in a work of art only if the artist feels himself responsible for the victory or defeat of certain historical forces. The naturalistic conception of the writer who holds up a mirror to life as he moves indifferently along his road has collapsed. The writer himself makes his choice as to which sector of reality he will reflect. And, moreover, chooses the angle from which to view it.

We are now in a position to see the shortcomings of the old realism: the attitude of Balzac whose political convictions had no relation with his artistic realism is no longer possible for the writer of today. The intensity of the class struggle no longer permits ambiguity: a lack of political consciousness in art corresponds to a period that has passed. This is no longer a matter of theory: the example of the writers whom I have quoted shows forcibly that it is from the recognition of fundamental political facts that the writer begins to advance artistically towards the new realism—a realism that is not yet Socialist realism but which marks a stage of critical realism corresponding to the present degree of maturity of our national struggle.

The recent evolution of these writers permits us if not to resolve then at least to raise the problems of Socialist realism, and this opens before our French literature new perspectives by signifying the end of a detached aestheticism.

It is both a literary and a national event that our writers should be attempting to describe France "as she really is," in the sense that authentic realism gives to that phrase; not by making a dead photograph of the scum that floats temporarily on the surface, but an image of the reality of France with all its depth, its movement, its living processes—a picture of all that is developing and growing in France; and that is for us the guarantee that a picture worthy of France will be given and that we shall be armed with the understanding to make France "what she really is."

Is Freedom an Illusion?

By HERBERT APTHEKER

A RECENT *New Yorker* cartoon showed a well-set-up lady suburbanite in a bookshop asking the clerk desperately: "Don't you have any wholesome books by healthy authors?" Clearly, *that* bookshop did not.

The cartoon expressed the sense of impatience and distaste that besets many everyday people in the face of the vulgar and foul cultural fare set all about them. It is part of a deeper feeling of discontent, of frantic uncertainty, of irksome impotence before what appear to be overwhelming forces concerning which one knows nothing except that somehow they are evil.

Joseph Wood Krutch's new volume, *Measure of Man** is, in part, a reflection of all this and, also, an effort to come to grips with it. He, too, is distraught by the "unhappy, desperate, defeatist" literature coming from "most modern writers"—by which he means most modern American bourgeois writers. He is repelled by the characteristic comment of Andre Gide, mentor of so many of those modern writers: "I prefer that you should look upon health as a deficiency of disease."

His work also expresses disagreement with those who would resolve the question of good and bad by equating mores with morals, by viewing the good simply as the prevalent —by, in fact, denying the existence of the question. This places Krutch in opposition to the view that conformity is ideal behavior, and that value judgments are harmful or, at least, irrelevant to scientific inquiry.

Krutch is opposed to the idea that man is a helpless creature of natural and historical circumstances, a prisoner of forces beyond his control, and that therefore freedom itself is an illusory and self-deluding concept. He does not completely deny—as increasing numbers of bourgeois thinkers do—the validity of scientific laws, of the concept of causation, but he pleads for a residuum—if it be only ever so minute—of what he calls free will. He asks no more than, as one chapter is entitled, "The Minimal Man"—"sometimes and to some degree capable of independent choices."

Mr. Krutch's volume, then, attempts to offer an alternative to the two views prevalent in American bourgeois ideology today: man as an automaton in a mechanically predestined world, or—and this is presently dominant—man as an accident in a chaotic world. Both of these, of course, make mankind inconsequential, if not contemptible. The mounting menace of fascism accounts for their prevalence at the same time as they themselves serve to prepare the way for and to justify fascism.

Insofar as Krutch's volume does represent an alternative, it reflects the humanism—restricted though it was—of classical liberalism. But insofar as Krutch makes concessions to one or the other of the alternatives (and we shall examine these weaknesses) he reflects the decline of liberalism with the change in that bourgeoisie which created it from a competitive, releasing, progressive class to a monopolistic, confining, reactionary one. Mr. Krutch's cry for "the minimal man" who is "sometimes and to some degree capable of independent choices" is the cry of the petty-bourgeois feeling himself caught between decaying imperialism and rising socialism, and seeking somehow to retain his own self-respect while basically tied in his patterns of thought to the dying system.

KRUTCH'S book is idealist and non-dialectical, so that in it he is constantly postulating ideas that are not derived from reality and juxtaposing alternatives which are really parts of an interpenetrating process. He conjures up, as one example, an "autonomous individual," though there never has been in all recorded history and there is not now such a person. And he believes that human conduct may be "determined either by society or the autonomous individual," when, in fact, not only is the autonomous individual his own figment, but his posing *either* society *or* the individual tears each away from the other. This falsifies both, since any real individual exists within society and any real society is made up of individuals who have definite relationships one to the other and to their social order.

All of this fuzziness and unreality appear early in the volume when the author poses its central problem:

> "We have engineered ourselves into a position where, for the first time in history, it has become possible for man to destroy his whole species. May we not at the same time have philosophized ourselves into a position where we are no longer able to manage successfully our mental and spiritual lives?"

But who are "we"? Surely, "we" did not will anything like that; and surely "we" do not desire to destroy mankind. Well, though "we" did not desire anything like destruction, yet it seems to impend. Surely, then, "we" can do nothing about all this.

There is, however, a "we" and a "they." There are capitalists and workers, exploiter and exploited, despite the fact that they nowhere appear in Mr. Krutch's volume. The labors of creative humanity have multiplied mankind's power a billion-fold, but the exploiters of man-

* Joseph Wood Krutch, *The Measure of Man,* Bobbs-Merrill, $3.50.

kind—"they"—will not release this power and it is they who, rather than release their grip upon it, would "destroy the whole species."

Knowing this, one does not stand impotent before Krutch's "we." Then one sees that while "it has become possible for man to destroy his whole species," it has also, for the first time in history, become possible for man to liberate his whole species and, so liberated and so empowered, to create a universal social order worthy of humanity. Then one makes a choice —and the greater the knowledge, the more meaningful, the more free, and the more necessary is the choice. Then one has a program of action and participates in it, consciously and willingly and therefore freely, not "sometimes and to some degree" but all the time and to the utmost degree.

THE major part of Krutch's polemics is directed against those who conceive of man as a robot caught in an inflexible web of omnipotent "circumstances." To bolster his opposition to this view he turns to the writings of certain leading bourgeois physical scientists who "warn the philosopher that no *intelligible* interpretation of the workings of nature is to be expected" (Jeans); or that "we should no longer talk of understanding the secrets of the universe" (Bushkovitch); or that "we have reached the limit of the vision of the great pioneers of science, the vision, namely, that we live in a sympathetic world, in that it is comprehensible to our minds" (Bridgman).

From this Krutch triumphantly concludes:

> "The unpredictable and the indeterminate are part of ultimate reality. . . . The ultimate fact about the universe is not that everything in it obeys a law but that the random, or at least the unpredictable, is always present and effective."

First, it is to be remarked that the conclusions quoted by Krutch are not —as he would lead the reader to believe — uncontradicted. The whole fraternity of scientists in the socialist part of the world, now containing a billion people (perhaps a number large enough not to be ignored?) denies the views Krutch accepts.* It is, moreover, true that in the capitalist world, Einstein (of some consequence, perhaps, when discussing recent developments in the natural sciences?) does not hold with the conclusions of Bridgman, and that increasing numbers of younger scientists give evidences of rebelling against such stultifying concepts.**

But, for our purposes, it is more important to observe what use Krutch makes of the views of Bridgman, *et al.* He makes the unpredictable and the random the key to restoring freedom. Here, he finds, is the robot's liberation, at any rate "sometimes and to some degree."

The random, however, is the mystical, not the free. This is why, as Krutch himself states, this "new view" of Messrs. Bridgman, Jeans, *et al.* "turns out to be, in at least one respect, more like the medieval than it is like that which immediately preceded it." So: "The whole universe has again become a paradox"; "We have become mystagogues again"; "Demons of one kind or another have again become, as in the Middle Ages they were, indispensable in all kinds of science."

And all in the name of freedom!

Demons will not free us, and mystagogues are not free. An ideological alliance with medievalism accompanies monopoly capitalism's political alliance with feudal forces in many parts of the world.

The unpredictable, the random, the indeterminate are the negation of science, and mean fear and impotence, not freedom and competence. The latter result is seen by the very scientists Krutch brings forward. Thus, he quoted Bridgman, as we have seen, saying that "we have reached the limit of the vision of the great pioneers of science," but he did not quote Bridgman's conclusion from this observation.

Bridgman, in his address on the "Philosophical Implications of Physics," from whence the quoted words came, had drawn these "implications":*

> "The world fades out and eludes us because it becomes meaningless. We cannot even express this in the way we would like. We cannot say that there exists a world beyond any knowledge possible to us because of the nature of knowledge. The very concept of existence becomes meaningless. It is literally true that the only way of reacting to this is to shut up."

Surely, this is not freedom, and it is not science. It is what follows from dependence upon demons.

IT IS noteworthy that Mr. Krutch quotes extensively from all the protagonists of the ideas he is combatting with the exception of one—dialectical materialism. No Marxist is quoted though Marxism is excoriated—or better, caricatured, and the caricature denounced.

He says that Marxists insist that one must "sacrifice anachronistic scruples concerning individual rights, the sense of fair play and the essential evil of violence"; that Marxists "do not believe that freedom is real"; that to them "free discussion, the secret ballot, etc., are mere fetishes." He writes of the "helpless creature implied by Marx"; that to Marxists "resolutions and efforts are mere illusions" precisely because, in Marxism, man is a "helpless creature."

It must be said for Mr. Krutch that, unlike many present-day "experts" on Marxism (both policemen and civilians), he does not mis-quote nor does he tear quotations from their context. He simply makes no attempt to quote; he asserts.

But surely there is a Marxist literature; and a system which sacrifices scruples, denies freedom, finds mankind helpless, etc., would somewhere

* See: "Philosophical Problems of Quantum Physics," by A. Suddaby and M. Cornforth, in *The Marxist Quarterly* (London), July, 1954.

** For example, see: "Totalitarian and Fragmentarian: A. Rejoinder," by Hans Freistadt, in *Bulletin of the American Assn. of University Professors,* Summer, 1953.

* Published in: *Bulletin, American Academy of Arts and Sciences,* February, 1950.

express these ideas and then these expressions might be quoted!

The fact is that Marxism answers the questions raised by Mr. Krutch. Marxism stands fast to science and to reason and to freedom; it denies that existence is meaningless, and that man is powerless. Marxism affirms the reality of natural and social laws.

And it is Marxism which was born in the call to struggle and which has developed in the midst of practice and effort. "Philosophers," wrote Marx, in 1845, "have interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it."

To change it means to understand it, and to understand it to the point of accurate prediction—ultimate triumph of science. To understand it means to want to and to know how to change it. Free will does not need and does not depend upon chance or accident or the unpredictable. On the contrary, wrote Engels, freedom of the will "means nothing but the capacity to make decisions with real knowledge of the subject." It is clear, therefore, that "the *freer* a man's judgment is in relation to a definite question, with so much the greater *necessity* is the content of this judgment determined."

It is exactly the mechanical features of vulgar materialism, especially its denial of the impact of human activity upon history, against which Marx and Engels particularly argued. This doctrine "forgets," Marx wrote, in his *Theses on Feuerbach,* "that circumstances are changed precisely by men and that the educator must himself be educated." It was the dialectical concept that explained this inter-related process: "The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can only be conceived and rationally understood as revolutionizing practice."

"The emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves," said the rules of the First International, written by Marx—to whom, states Krutch, man was a "helpless creature."

And this emancipation, this Socialism, this iron regime peopled by helpless creatures devoid of scruples and without freedom, how is it depicted by Engels?

> "The whole sphere of the conditions of life which environ man, and which hitherto have ruled man, now come under the dominion and control of man, who for the first time becomes the real, conscious lord of nature, because he has now become master of his own social organization."

There is the heart of it. "Confidence in the creative capacities of the masses," wrote Stalin, "is the peculiar feature of Lenin's work." It is not for promulgating ideas of men as helpless creatures, it is not for denying freedom, that Fuchik and Thaelmann and Peri were executed; it is not for denying freedom that Dennis is imprisoned. It is because Marxism knows that humanity can be really free, exploitation can be eliminated, oppression can be abolished, and because it creates a program of day-to-day action leading to this consummation, that it has been banned repeatedly and damned incessantly. But it has not been refuted and will not be denied.

As I have tried to show, portions of Mr. Krutch's book reflect a healthy unease in the face of the mounting repression and deepening decay. But uneasiness with these aspects of the present is self-defeating if it leads to a retreat to the past, to mystagoguery and demons and the inexplicable—to the middle ages. It was then, as Thomas Paine wrote in his *Rights of Man,* that, "Reason was considered as rebellion; and the slavery of fear had made men afraid to think." Those who ruled then with demon and club were routed; they will be routed again, and this time forever, by the courage, persistence, unity of those who defend reason.

Lincoln's Assassins

By ELIZABETH LAWSON

FOR ninety years the assassination of Abraham Lincoln* has embarrassed neo-Confederate historians. They have been able, however, to brush aside the stubborn fact, partly because neglect and distortion of Negro history have veiled the brutal truth about the nature of the American slavocracy.

Further, the circumstance that for most of the intervening years the trial record has been out of print has enormously facilitated the neo-Confederates' task. Therefore a service has been rendered with the publication of this book, the record of the trial of Booth's co-conspirators.

Seven men and one woman went on trial in 1865 as accomplices of John Wilkes Booth, killed during his flight to the Confederacy. They were indicted for conspiracy in the murder of Lincoln and in the attempted murder of Secretary of State Seward; and with conspiring to murder Vice-President Johnson and Lieutenant-General Grant. The government charged that the conspirators had combined with Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, and with his agents in Canada. After trial by a Military Commission, four of the accused, including Mary Surratt, were hanged; the other four went to prison.

With the Confederacy facing defeat, the plotters hoped that political assassination would leave the Union and the Army without leadership, and that in the resulting confusion the Confederacy might again marshal its forces.

Every detail of the scheme had been carefully matured. Booth, according to the testimony of many witnesses, visited members of the "Little Confederate Cabinet" in Canada, as did two co-conspirators. Assassination was only one of a number of plans of Confederate agents—plans which included burning cities and robbing banks; destroying, or, alternatively, poisoning water supplies; introducing pestilence by the sale of infected clothing; and leading armed uprisings of Copperheads. Some of these schemes were, in part, successful.

With each witness who mounts the stand, proof grows that here was no mere sudden, passionate impulse of an egotistical actor with an unhinged mind. Here is the last act in an enormous conspiracy of the slaveholders to fasten human bondage upon the Western hemisphere. Decade after decade, by legislation, bribery, terrorism, and war, the slaveholders moved steadily to achieve their aim, and when their hope seemed doomed, they turned in the end to assassination.

It was clearer in that day than in this—for most of our historians have been apologists for slavery—that assassination was the logical, virtually inevitable outcome of Civil War. "The rebellion," said United States counsel at the trial, "was itself simply a criminal conspiracy and gigantic assassination." And Karl Marx saw the thing for what it was when he drafted for the First International a letter to President Johnson which cried out: "The demon of the 'peculiar institution' for the supremacy of which the South rose in arms, would not allow his worshippers to honorably succumb on the open field. What he had begun in treason, he must needs end in infamy. As Philip II's war for the Inquisition bred a Gerard, thus Jefferson Davis's pro-slavery war a Booth."

Strangely, it was the attorney for the defense of Seward's attacker who most ably pointed the link between slaveholding and assassination:

"It was a custom for masters to whip slaves, to sell them, kill them. Under slavery murder of a companion with a bowie-knife or in a duel was an index of spirit; torture of Negroes evidence of a commanding nature.

"Now let me ask whether in the world there is another school in which the prisoner could so well have been trained for assassination? (He had) the cheap regard for life which comes from trading in and killing slaves. We now know that this is the spirit of slavery, stripped of its disguise. In arson of cities we see again the faggot and the stake; in Libby and Andersonville (Confederate prisons) we see again the slave-pen; in assassination the social bowie-knife and pistol; and in this prisoner the legitimate moral offspring of slavery."

It is well for our generation, which has heard little of the Confederacy save exculpation, to be reminded of the truth. The shot fired at Ford's theater was the almost certain sequel to the shot fired on Fort Sumter. This was no maniacal aberration from the pattern of Confederate conduct; it was in the mainstream of Confederate tactics and a development of the policy of kidnapping, branding, and lynching human beings; of force and violence, treason, armed counter-revolution; of arson, sabotage, terror, and disregard of the rules of warfare. Although the Confederacy burned documents bearing on its Copperhead agents, the political inspiration of Booth's act is clear—and the clearer now that the trial record is once

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THE ASSASSINATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE TRIAL OF THE CONSPIRATORS. The Courtroom Testimony as Originally Compiled by Benn Pitman. With an Introduction by Philip Van Doren Stern. Facsimile Edition. *Funk & Wagnalls, New York,* 1954. $7.50.

more easily available.

The introduction by Philip Van Doren Stern is disappointing. In accordance with dominant historical writing, it attempts to deny the weight of evidence in this very book, dismissing any connection between the assassination and the Confederacy. Nevertheless, the publication of this volume is a major contribution toward an understanding of the Civil War. The importance of such understanding has grown enormously since May 17, when the successful legal culmination of a fight against segregation gave new impetus to the struggle to complete once and for all what the nation undertook so long ago.